THE

ENTIRE WORKS

OF THE

REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M.A.

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PREPARED BY THE REV.

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OR

DISCOURSES

DIGESTED INTO ONE CONTINUED SERIES,

AND FORMING A COMMENTARY,

UPON EVERY BOOK OF

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT;

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED

AN IMPROVED EDITION OF A TRANSLATION OF

CLAUDE'S ESSAY ON THE COMPOSITION OF A SERMON.

BY THE

REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M.A.,

SENIOR FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

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CONTENTS TO VOL. X.

Discourse.	Text	Subject.	Page
	HOSEA		
1142.	ii. 6, 7.	*God corrects and reclaims his People* .	1
1143.	ii. 14, 15.	*God's Dealings with Penitents* . .	5
1144.	ii. 19, 20.	*God betrothing us to Himself* . . .	14
1145.	iii. 5.	*The Restoration of the Jews* . . .	17
1146.	iv. 6.	*Ignorance destructive*	21
1147.	iv. 16.	*The Evil and Danger of Backsliding* .	25
1148.	iv. 17.	*The Danger of spiritual Idolatry* . .	29
1149.	v. 4.	*Extent and Causes of Men's Supineness*	31
1150.	v. 5.	*The Danger of Pride*	35
1151.	v. 13.	*The Folly of Creature-confidence* . .	39
1152.	v. 15.	*Spiritual Desertion*	41
1153.	vi. 1.	*Characteristic Marks of true Penitence*	49
1154.	vi. 3.	*The Effects of Diligence in Religion* .	53
1155.	vi. 4.	*Man's Instability & God's Forbearance*	58
1156.	vi. 6.	*Mercy before Sacrifice*	61
1157.	vi. 7.	*Our Transgressions of the Covenant* .	66
1158.	vii. 2.	*The Folly of Inconsideration* . . .	70
1159.	vii. 8, 9.	*Causes of spiritual Decay*	76
1160.	vii. 13.	*Danger of an Unconverted State* . .	80
1161.	vii. 14.	*Prayers of unregenerate Men considered*	88
1162.	viii. 2, 3.	*The Danger of false Confidence* . .	92
1163.	viii. 5.	*Extent of Christian Innocence* . . .	97
1164.	viii. 7.	*The Consequences of Sin*	100
1165.	viii. 12.	*Men's Disregard of the Gospel* . .	103
1166.	ix. 12.	*Misery of a deserted People* . . .	107
1167.	x. 1.	*Bringing forth Fruit to ourselves* . .	110
1168.	x. 12.	*The Duty of seeking God*	113
1169.	xi. 1.	*Christ called out of Egypt*	116
1170.	xi. 4.	*Manner in which God draws his People*	120
1171.	xi. 7—9.	*God's Compassion*	124
1172.	xii. 3, 4, 6.	*Jacob wrestling with the Angel* . .	127

Discourse.	Text.	Subject.	Page.
	HOSEA		
1173.	xiii. 4.	*Jehovah alone deserving of Confidence*	130
1174.	xiii. 9.	*Help in Christ for self-destroyed Sinners*	134
1175.	xiv. 1—3.	*Directions for an Approach to God* .	138
1176.	xiv. 4.	*Blessings that Penitents may expect* .	141
1177.	xiv. 5—7.	*The Fruits of God's Favour* . . .	149
1178.	xiv. 8.	*God's Notice of Penitents*	151
1179.	xiv. 9.	*Spiritual Knowledge of God's People*	159
	JOEL		
1180.	ii. 12—14.	*Repentance urged*	168
1181.	ii. 26.	*Removal of Judgments a Ground of Praise*	173
1182.	ii. 28—32.	*Signs of the Messiah's Advent* . .	176
1183.	iii. 13.	*The final Judgment represented* . .	180
1184.	iii. 18.	*The Millennium*	183
	AMOS		
1185.	ii. 13.	*God's Complaint against us* . . .	189
1186.	iii. 3.	*Requisites for Friendship with God* .	195
1187.	iii. 6.	*God the Source and Cause of all Things*	200
1188.	iii. 8.	*God's Voice to Sinners*	206
1189.	iv. 11, 12.	*Incorrigibleness reproved*	209
1190.	v. 8, 9.	*God's Condescension and Grace* . .	213
1191.	v. 12.	*God knows our Sins*	218
1192.	vi. 1.	*Carnal Ease and Security reproved* .	223
1193.	vii. 2, 3.	*God's Condescension to Prayer* . .	229
1194.	ix. 9.	*The Security of all God's People* . .	235
1195.	ix. 11, 12.	*Conversion of the Jews and Gentiles* .	238
1196.	ix. 13.	*The Millennial State*	241
	OBADIAH		
1197.	17.	*Gospel Effects in the latter Days* . .	246
	JONAH		
1198.	i. 6.	*Jonah reproved by the Mariners* . .	252
1199.	ii. 6.	*Jonah restored from the Belly of a Fish*	257
1200.	ii. 7—9.	*Jonah's Reflections in the Whale's Belly*	261
1201.	iii. 8—10.	*Repentance of the Ninevites* . . .	265
1202.	iv. 2.	*The Mercy of God*	269
1203.	iv. 5—9.	*Jonah's Gourd*	274
	MICAH		
1204.	ii. 7.	*Benefits arising from the Word of God*	280
1205.	iii. 8.	*Ministerial Fidelity*	286

Discourse.	Text.	Subject.	Page
	MICAH		
1206.	iv. 1—4.	*Universal Establishment of Christianity*	288
1207.	iv. 5.	*The World's and the Christian's God*	294
1208.	v. 2.	*The Messiah to be born at Bethlehem*	296
1209.	v. 4.	*Stability of Christ's Kingdom* . . .	303
1210.	v. 5.	*Christ our Peace in Trouble* . .	305
1211.	v. 7.	*The Jews a Blessing to the World* . .	309
1212.	vi. 2, 3.	*God's Controversy with his People* .	316
1213.	vi. 6—8.	*The Sum of Practical Religion* . .	322
1214.	vii. 7.	*Prayer our great Preservative* . . .	327
1215.	vii. 8—10.	*Address of the Jewish Church* . . .	332
1216.	vii. 18—20.	*The Mercy of God*	337
1217.	vii. 18—20.	*God's Mercy, as reserved for the Jews*	339
	NAHUM		
1218.	i. 2, 6.	*God a Revenger of Sin*	348
1219.	i. 7.	*God a Refuge in Time of Trouble* .	352
1220.	i. 15.	*Improvement of God's Mercies* . .	356
	HABAKKUK		
1221.	i. 13.	*The Holiness of God*	360
1222.	ii. 3.	*Our Duty in reference to the Promises*	364
1223.	ii. 4.	*Faith and Unbelief contrasted* . . .	368
1224.	ii. 20.	*God greatly to be feared*	373
1225.	iii. 2.	*A Revival desired*	378
1226.	iii. 17, 18.	*The Christian's Boast*	382
	ZEPHANIAH		
1227.	i. 12.	*The Secure and Atheistical condemned*	385
1228.	ii. 1—3.	*Repentance urged*	390
1229.	iii. 7, 8.	*Recompence for our neglect of God* .	393
1230.	iii. 12.	*The Poor living by Faith*	397
1231.	iii. 14, 15.	*Thankfulness for God's Mercies* . .	402
1232.	iii. 17.	*God's Delight in saving Sinners* . .	408
	HAGGAI		
1233.	i. 2—5, 12.	*Consideration of our Ways enforced* .	412
1234.	ii. 7.	*Christ the Desire of all Nations* . .	417
1235.	ii. 11—14.	*Integrity of the Soul enjoined* . . .	420
1236.	ii. 19.	*God recompenses our Works* . . .	424
	ZECHARIAH		
1237.	i. 3—6.	*An Exhortation to turn to God* . .	428
1238.	i. 5.	*God the Avenger of Sin*	433
1239.	i. 12, 13.	*Christ's Intercession for Jerusalem* .	438

Discourse.	Text.	Subject.	Page
	ZECHARIAH		
1240.	ii. 5.	*God the Protection of his People* . .	442
1241.	ii. 8.	*God's Sympathy with his People* . .	446
1242.	iii. 1—5.	*The Restoration of the Jewish Church*	451
1243.	iv. 6.	*All is of God*	456
1244.	iv. 7.	*Zerubbabel a Type of Christ* . . .	461
1245.	iv. 10.	*The Day of small Things*	463
1246.	iv. 11—14.	*The Vision of the Olive Trees* . . .	467
1247.	vi. 12, 13.	*Christ saving by his united Offices* .	473
1248.	vii. 4—7.	*Outward Services vain*	477
1249.	viii. 3—8.	*The Restoration of the Jews* . . .	481
1250.	viii. 20—23.	*The Conversion of the Gentiles* . .	484
1251.	viii. 20—23.	*Conversion of the Jews and Gentiles* .	488
1252.	ix. 9.	*The Advent of Jesus a ground of Joy*	495
1253.	ix. 12.	*Christ a Strong Hold*	499
1254.	ix. 17.	*The Glory of Christ*	502
1255.	x. 12.	*Christ the Strength of his People* . .	506
1256.	xi. 8.	*Abhorrence between God and Sinners*	511
1257.	xi. 12, 13.	*The Contempt poured on Christ* . .	514
1258.	xii. 10.	*The Means of evangelical Repentance*	521
1259.	xiii. 1.	*Christ, the Fountain opened* . . .	524
1260.	xiii. 7.	*Christ smitten for our Sins*	527
1261.	xiii. 9.	*God's Dealings with his People* . .	533
1262.	xiv. 7.	*The Conversion of the Jews* . . .	537
1263.	xiv. 9.	*Christ's Reign on Earth*	557
1264.	xiv. 16—19.	*The Feast of Tabernacles*	561
1265.	xiv. 20, 21.	*The Millennial Glory*	567
	MALACHI		
1266.	i. 2, 3.	*The Sovereignty of God's Grace* . .	571
1267.	i. 6.	*Relative Duties to God and Man* . .	576
1268.	i. 8.	*God's Appeal to Self-justifying Sinners*	585
1269.	i. 11.	*The Calling of the Gentiles* . . .	592
1270.	ii. 2.	*Repentance glorifying God* . . .	596
1271.	ii. 5—7.	*The Ministerial Office*	599
1272.	iii. 1—3.	*The Effects of Christ's Advent* . .	604
1273.	iii. 6.	*The Immutability of God*	609
1274.	iii. 8.	*Sin a Robbery of God*	613
1275.	iii. 16, 17.	*Christian Fellowship approved of God*	618
1276.	iv. 1, 2.	*The Sun of Righteousness arising* .	623
1277.	iv. 5, 6.	*Elijah to precede our Lord*	626

HOSEA.

MCXLII.

GOD CORRECTS AND RECLAIMS HIS PEOPLE.

Hos. ii. 6, 7. *Behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them; then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now.*

THE generality of mankind are very incompetent judges of the dispensations of Providence. Indeed, for the most part, they quite mistake their nature and tendency; and draw conclusions from them which the Scripture will by no means justify. They suppose that prosperity is a token of Divine love and approbation; and that affliction, on the contrary, is a mark of God's displeasure. But an inspired writer assures us, that "we cannot know good or evil by all that is before us." Considering, however, that we are prone to forget God in our abundance, and that the rod of correction is the means whereby thousands are turned to God, we have reason rather to esteem affliction, at least as the more needful, if not the richer, blessing of the two. Certain it is that there are multitudes now in heaven, who owed their first serious impressions to some heavy chastisement; and who must for ever say with the Psalmist, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Nor can we doubt but that the good of mankind is one principal end for which God puts the cup of sorrow into their hands.

A remarkable proof of this we have in the passage before us. The Jews were continually provoking God to jealousy, by depending on alliances with heathens, and worshipping their idols. God, ever slow to anger, and delighting in mercy, used all possible methods to reclaim them. He had tried what kindness would effect, and had found no success. He now determined to take the rod; and sent them word by the prophet, that he would punish them for their offences; but that the end of their punishment should be to reduce them to a happier and better state: "Therefore," says he, (because you are so bent to follow your own evil ways) "behold, I will hedge up," &c.

In these words we see,

I. What means God uses to reclaim his people—

Though God could effect his purposes instantly, by a mere act of his will, yet he is pleased in general to accomplish them by means suited to the end. In reclaiming his people,

1. He obstructs their ways—

[In their unregenerate state they run on, like others, in the ways of sin. But when *his* time is come, he instructs them either *by temporal calamities* or *by spiritual convictions*.

In the common course of events he deprives them of health, fortune, friends; or perhaps by their own imprudence brings disorders or distress upon them.

These trials, however, of themselves have only a momentary effect; and therefore he accompanies them with the secret energy of his Spirit, convincing them of their guilt and danger, and making them tremble through fear of his eternal judgments. He "meets them as an armed man," so that they dare no longer to "rush on upon the thick bosses of his buckler."

Thus he "hedges up their way with thorns," and makes their progress in sin very difficult and painful.]

2. He disappoints their endeavours—

[God saw the Jews bent on forming alliances with Egypt and Assyria notwithstanding all his warnings to renounce them. He therefore sent them into captivity in Babylon, where they could have no communications with Egypt or Assyria; and thus "built up a wall, that they could not find their former lovers."

Thus *we have our idols* which we are prone to follow, notwithstanding all the troubles or convictions that are sent to wean us from them. Perhaps *the world* is the object of our affections; and we weary ourselves in the pursuit of its honours or emoluments. God therefore secretly blasts our endeavours, as he did those of his people of old[a]; and thus shuts us up as it were, unto himself, that we may seek him as our portion. Perhaps our great idol is *self-righteousness:* we desire to "establish a righteousness of our own," instead of relying simply on the righteousness of Christ. God therefore leaves us to our own feeble efforts, that, by our repeated violations of our own vows and covenants, we may be constrained to look *from* ourselves *unto* the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, if we persist in breaking through "*the hedge*," he will interpose "*a wall;*" that "when we follow after our lovers, we may not overtake them, and when we seek them, we may not be able to find them." If smaller difficulties will not answer his end, he will send greater, till he has accomplished his whole will concerning us.]

These interpositions, however, operate in a rational way; as will be seen by considering,

II. What effects he produces on their minds—

Where calamities are sent without grace to sanctify them, they only harden those whom they ought to reclaim. But when the grace of God co-operates with his providence, it works in his people,

1. A sense of their *guilt* in having departed from him—

[They could once sin without any fear or remorse: at most, they only viewed sin as an opposition to God's will: but, when the Spirit of God has opened their eyes, they see it as an act of spiritual adultery; and they begin to feel as a woman would, who, after having departed from a kind and loving "husband," was just returning to a sense of her duty. How would she blush at the remembrance of her conduct! how would she be ready to doubt whether her husband would ever receive her again, and whether it were possible for her ever again to be the object of his affections! Thus a soul rendered truly sensible of its obligations to God the "husband" of his people, feels a proportionate degree of shame in having departed from him, of shame mixed with self-lothing and self-abhorrence[b].]

2. A consciousness of their *folly* in having lost his favour—

[a] Hag. i. 6, 9. [b] Jer. iii. 25.

[It once appeared folly to serve God: but now this sentiment is reversed. Even in the days of their unregeneracy they had a secret thought, that the godly, whom they despised, were happier than themselves. But, when divinely instructed, they see that they have been "feeding upon ashes, and that a deceived heart has turned them aside[c]. If ever they have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," they cannot fail of looking back with grief on the blessedness they have lost[d]. They confess that "once it was better with them than now;" that, in departing from God, they "forsook the fountain of living waters;" and that, in seeking happiness in the creature, they "hewed out to themselves broken cisterns that could hold no water[e]."]

3. A determination of heart to return to him—

[They no longer say, "We will follow after other lovers[f];" but, "We will return to our first husband." They view God as their rightful Lord, to whom they are bound by every tie; and, with indignation against themselves for their past conduct, they say, "Other lords besides thee have had dominion over us; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name[g]."]

The whole of this effect is strongly exemplified in the prodigal son—

[The prodigal departed from his father, and spent his substance in riotous living. God, intending to reclaim him, sent a famine into the country where he had taken up his residence. (However casual this might appear, it was ordained of God for his good.) He would not regard this "hedge," or return to his father while he could get any other support. He therefore hired himself to a citizen of that place to feed his swine; and when almost famished, preferred the husks which the swine ate of, to the bread he might obtain by returning home. God seeing this obstinate reluctance in him, so ordered it, that, notwithstanding he had spent all his fortune there, no man should have pity enough to relieve his wants. At last, constrained by necessity, and stopped as by "a wall," the prodigal is induced to return to his father's house, where he finds a reception beyond all expectation kind and gracious. Thus misfortune upon misfortune, or conviction upon conviction, are sent to us, till, distressed on every side, and disappointed in every attempt to extricate ourselves, we are "made willing" to return to God.]

We may LEARN from this subject,

[c] Isai. xliv. 20. [d] Gal. iv. 15. [e] Jer. ii. 13.
[f] ver. 5. [g] Isai. xxvi. 13.

1. The depravity of man—

[We never seek God, till we are constrained by his providence and grace to do so: and, to the latest hour of our lives, we need hedges and walls to keep us in the way of duty. What an astonishing proof is this of our utter alienation from God, yea, of our enmity against him! Let us blush and be confounded before him.]

2. The end of trials—

[They "spring not from the dust," but are sent for our good. They are like the angel that met Balaam[h]: and our obstinacy in breaking through these obstructions would have repeatedly subjected us to the sword of vengeance, if our God had not still exercised mercy and forbearance towards us. Let us then "hear the rod, and him that hath appointed it[i]."]

3. The happiness of a religious life—

[No one ever gave himself up truly to God without finding that "*his* ways were ways of pleasantness and peace." No one ever declined from him, that did not suffer loss in respect of *present* happiness, as well as of his future reward. Let all professors then "be sober and watch unto prayer;" that instead of saying, "It was once better with me than now," they may "make their profiting to appear unto all," and be enabled to say on every succeeding day, "It never was so well with me as at this present time."]

[h] Numb. xxii. 22—33. [i] Mic. vi. 9.

MCXLIII.

GOD'S DEALINGS WITH PENITENTS.

Hos. ii. 14, 15. *Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her: and I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope.*

WHOEVER is at all conversant with the holy Scriptures, must know, that they are, in many parts, highly figurative. If we examine many of our Lord's expressions, and indeed some whole discourses, we shall see, that they were unintelligible to those who interpreted them only according to their literal meaning; because they were intended to be understood in a mystical and spiritual sense: hence our Lord

took occasion to inform them, that the words which he spake unto them were "spirit and life." This is yet still more observable in the prophetic writings, which almost always must be taken in a mystical, as well as literal sense; and indeed in many places, as Bishop Lowth has well observed, the spiritual meaning is more true, and more immediately intended, than the literal. This, I apprehend, is the case in the passage before us. God has been declaring, what he would do in order to reclaim the ten tribes from their idolatries; that he would "hedge up their way with thorns, and make a wall, so that they should not be able to find their former ways," i. e. (as it is more fully set forth in the ninth and following verses) that he would deprive them of all their national blessings, and deliver them into the hand of their Assyrian enemies: then, in my text, he adds, "Therefore (it should rather be translated, '*nevertheless*') I will allure her," and so on. He had, in ver. 7, mentioned, that in consequence of the obstructions which he would put in their way, they should be brought to see their sin and folly, and to say, "I will return unto my first husband:" and now he proceeds to declare, how he would deal with them, when they should be brought to that frame of mind; that he would allure her, and give her the Valley of Achor for a door of hope." Now this has never been *literally* accomplished: for, if we except about twelve thousand Israelites, who accompanied the tribes of Judah and Benjamin in their return from the Babylonish captivity, none of the ten tribes have ever yet returned to their native country. We must therefore look for a spiritual sense to this passage: and here we have the authority of an inspired writer to interpret it, as relating to the conversion of the Gentile world, and the deliverance of God's chosen people from a state of bondage to sin and Satan. St. Paul, in Rom. ix. 25, speaking expressly on the call of the Gentiles, quotes the last verse of this chapter in Hosea, and declares that this prophecy then received its completion. We may therefore without hesitation

consider the passage as declaring the manner in which God deals with his penitent and contrite people, when once the Church, or any individual in it, is so wrought upon by temporal calamities or spiritual convictions, as to say, "I will go and return unto my first, my rightful husband." God says, as in my text, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to her; and I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope." In declaring from hence how God will deal with his returning people, we may observe, that he will encourage them,

I. With *present comforts*—

[The readiness of God to receive sinners is not discovered in any thing more than in his mode of dealing with them in their return to him: if there be only "*some good* in them," he is sure to notice it with some testimony of his approbation: in proportion as they advance towards him, he makes greater advances towards a reconciliation with them: and when he sees that they begin in earnest to seek his face, he will cause them to abound in consolations. "He will allure them:" we must not suppose that God will really deceive any one; but yet there is a sense wherein he may be said to "allure" men: he will conceal from the view of penitents such things as might alarm and terrify them: he will feed them, while they are yet babes, with milk; and will withhold the stronger meat, which they are not yet able to digest. There are many things which he will say to them at a future period; but from which he diverts their attention at present, as from things which they cannot receive: and thus he leads them gently, as their strength will bear. He now also in a peculiar manner reveals himself to the soul, and fills it with heavenly delight. The sinner coming first to a sense of God's favour, is borne up, as it were, on eagles' wings: he seems to be breathing a purer air; I had almost said, to be living in a new world. His sensations are so entirely changed, that one may, almost without an hyperbole, call him "a new creature:" from being dead as to all spiritual things, he begins to enjoy a spiritual life: from being in total darkness, he is "brought forth into marvellous light:" from dreading God's displeasure, he feels "his love shed abroad in his heart." Now therefore he supposes he never can lose the savour of these things: "Am I a dog," thinks he, that I should ever more offend this gracious Being, who has thus freely forgiven all my trespasses? Alas! little

knowing what depravity and deceitfulness there is in the human heart, he concludes that he shall now bear down all before him: the corruptions of his own heart seem to be so mortified, as to be almost extinct: the world now is as nothing in his eyes: and Satan himself, formidable as he is, now appears to be "bruised under his feet." Perhaps he has learned, as it were by wrote, to acknowledge himself weak, frail, and inwardly depraved; but the frame of his mind is like David's, when he said, "My mountain is so strong, I shall never be moved." Thus does God *allure* penitents: nor is this any more than what is necessary at the first; for their habits of sin are deeply rooted; their attachment to the things of time and sense is very strong; and the opposition they will afterwards meet with from the world, the flesh, and the devil, is so powerful, that they need all possible encouragement; they need time to get strength; they need to taste the sweetness of religion now, in order that when they come to endure the cross, they may be able to testify, from their own experience, that religion, with all its difficulties, is an incomparably better portion than the world. This was remarkably exemplified at the first publication of the Gospel: the three thousand converts "continued daily with one accord in the temple, and ate their bread with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and *having favour with all the people*." The favour of man they had very little reason to expect: but God saw fit to keep his infant Church for a little time from persecution, in order that their happiness might have no alloy, and that they might grow in strength, and be able to endure it afterwards, when it should come upon them: and thus he allured them, as it were, to a steady and resolute adherence to his cause.

Further, God says, "I will bring her into the wilderness." Many able and judicious Commentators translate these words somewhat differently, "I will allure her *after I have brought* her into the wilderness:" and this I should suppose to be the more proper rendering of the words, because the sense is then clear; viz. "After having afflicted her for her sins, I will comfort her on her return to me." But, if we retain the present version, we must understand the 'wilderness' to mean, not a state of affliction, but a state of solitude and retirement: and this makes very good sense, and exactly agrees with the experience of young Christians. When God allures them in the manner we have before represented, they immediately forsake the company of the world, and seek their God in retirement: they now love solitude; they now never feel themselves less alone than when alone: nor would they forego their secret intercourse with God for all the world. There are many seasons when they would account the presence of their very

dearest friend to be a grievous interruption. But, however true the words are in this sense, I apprehend the other to be the better version of them; and therefore passing by this, we observe further, That God will speak comfortably to those whom he thus allures. He makes his word now to be exceeding precious to their souls: he opens their understandings to understand it; and they begin to hear God speaking in and by it: and O! how delightful are the promises! With what eagerness do they embrace the promises! With what unspeakable pleasure do they now apply them to themselves! Under a sense of guilt, they now see that they may have pardon for sins of the deepest dye: under a consciousness of their own insufficiency for any thing that is good, they see here in the sacred records an inexhaustible treasure of grace and strength. In every situation and circumstance of life they find, that there is a word suited to their condition: they hear the voice of God in the promises; and by these he speaks indeed most comfortably to them. There is somewhat peculiar in the original words; literally translated, they mean, "I will speak *to her heart*:" and this is very properly rendered, "I will speak *comfortably* to her;" for God speaks to the outward ears of thousands to very little purpose: he invites, but they are not entreated; he promises, but they are not comforted: but, when once he speaks to *the heart*, then comfort flows in apace, and "they rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified."]

Thus we see how God, alluring the sinner, and speaking comfortably to him, leads him on by present comforts. We proceed to shew, how he encourages him,

II. With *future prospects*—

[He that is born of God, is indeed born to a great inheritance: nor is he in danger of expecting too much at the hands of God; for, as he has said in general, "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it," so he says in the passage before us, "I will give her vineyards from hence, and the valley of Achor, for a door of hope." You will call to mind what was observed in the beginning of this discourse, that this passage was never literally fulfilled, and that St. Paul has explained it in a spiritual and mystical sense: and this we now repeat, lest our construction, or rather our application of it should appear fanciful or forced. Vineyards were a very important part of the produce of the land of Canaan; insomuch, that when the spies went to search out the land, they brought back a cluster of grapes upon the shoulders of two men, as the best proof of the fertility of the soil. When the Lord therefore promises to give his people "vineyards from thence," he

means by it a supply of every temporal blessing, which he will bestow upon them from the very instant that they thus return unto him. If therefore we apply this *spiritually*, we may understand by it a supply of all spiritual blessings, which God will vouchsafe to his people from the time that they come to him with real penitence and contrition. Just as when our Lord says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; and out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water:" (by which he meant all the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit:) so, I apprehend, when God says in my text, "I will give her vineyards," he means every kind of temporal and spiritual blessing. It is added further, "I will give her the valley of Achor for a door of hope." Achor was a very rich valley, so called from the circumstance of Achan being stoned there. It was the first portion of the promised land that came into the possession of the Israelites: and this was to them a door of hope; it was a ground of assurance, that they should in due time possess the whole land: it was, as it were, an earnest, whereby they were taught to expect the fulfilment of all the promises. Here then we see the meaning of the passage before us, according to the spiritual interpretation of it: God promises to his people the richest spiritual blessings; and teaches them to consider all which they here possess, as an earnest only of what they shall hereafter inherit. Now it is by this prospect of receiving all *spiritual* and *eternal* blessings, that the young Christian is encouraged to proceed.

First, *He has a prospect of all spiritual blessings.* The believer soon finds, that, if he will be faithful to his God, he must forego some worldly advantages; and sacrifice every interest that stands in competition with his duty. Now this to our earthly hearts is no little trial: those who are insincere cannot stand this test: like the young man in the Gospel, they may wish for an interest in Christ; but, if they must sell all in order to obtain it, they will rather part with Christ and his benefits: yea, if for a season they make a profession of godliness, they will at last, like Demas, prove by their conduct that they are "lovers of this present evil world." But, as an antidote against this poison, God promises that he will give better riches, even "durable riches and righteousness;" and, that the blessings which he will bestow, shall far more than counterbalance any thing which can be lost for him: and thus he inclines the soul to suffer temporal loss, in expectation of greater spiritual advantage; and (as did the saints of old,) to "take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they have in heaven a better and an enduring substance." The Christian also, after a little time, begins to find that he has many sore conflicts to maintain; that he has enemies on every side; that he has temptations without number; and that he has

in himself no strength, either to withstand one temptation, or to overcome one enemy. Under such circumstances, he would soon faint and be weary, but that God has engaged to support him in every trial, and make him conqueror over every enemy. But when he knows, that "his strength shall be according to his day;" that there shall be "no temptation without a way to escape;" and that every conflict shall produce an abundant increase of grace and peace; he is willing to engage his enemies, under a full assurance, that, while God is for him, he need not regard any that are against him. He has already found the blessedness of serving God: he knows, by his own experience, that God "never is a wilderness unto his people;" that he is a gracious master, who richly repays them for whatever they may do or suffer in his cause. Having therefore experienced this, he looks forward with confidence: having obtained grace in past trials, he expects assuredly, that it shall be given him in future difficulties: having tasted how gracious the Lord is, he expects to receive yet richer communications of peace and joy: he looks upon every thing he receives as an earnest of something future.

In addition to spiritual blessings which he hopes to receive in this life, he has *A prospect of eternal blessings in the life to come:* his increasing conformity to the Divine image is a door of hope, that he shall one day be "holy as God is holy:" his increasing happiness gives him a lively assurance, that he shall ere long be free from every care, and be happy as the angels that are around the throne: so also the sweet communion which he enjoys with God in secret, those discoveries of his glory, and those communications of his love, are as earnests, that he shall one day see God face to face, and "drink of the rivers of pleasure which are at his right hand, for evermore." Now this contains somewhat of the Christian's experience, when first he comes to God through Christ: he is led on at first by present comforts; and, as he proceeds, his prospects open; so that in an assured expectation of grace sufficient for him, and of a crown of glory at the end, he "goes on, conquering and to conquer."]

We will now conclude with an ADDRESS—

1. To those who may now be enjoying their first love—

[The prophet observes, that the time of espousals is a time of love[a]: and in the letter to the Church of Ephesus, mention is made of a first love; by which is meant, that peculiar earnestness and delight in Divine things which are often to be observed in young converts. Now it may be, that some of you

[a] Jer. ii. 2.

who are here present have just begun to taste the joys of religion: you have peace with God in your consciences; and can scarcely think of any thing but the goodness of God to your souls. I would to God this might always remain; or rather, that it might increase more and more; and that you might so learn divine lessons in prosperity, as not to need to learn them in a more humiliating way! But this is very rarely the case: the deep things of God are scarcely ever learned in this way: in general, God, after a season, leaves the soul to discern its own depravity, and to feel its utter helplessness: and, in order to humble it in the dust, he suffers the latent corruptions of the heart to spring up, and thus to harass and defile the soul. Not that God acts thus from any pleasure which he takes in mortifying the soul: I am persuaded he would rather overcome us by love, because "he delights in the prosperity of his people:" but this is the way in which he punishes our past sins, and our present neglects; he suffers those very sins, which most dishonoured and provoked him in our unregenerate state, most to grieve and perplex us after our conversion: and every secret backsliding he punishes, by withdrawing in a measure his restraining grace; so that, as the prophet says, "Our own wickedness corrects us, and our backslidings reprove us." You must not wonder, therefore, if this should be your own experience: and this I say, not to damp your joy, so much as to keep you from abusing it. Strange as it may appear, our hearts will sometimes take occasion, even from religious joys, to puff us up with pride, or to lull us into security: and wherever pride or security is, no doubt there will ere long be a fall. Remember then, that these comforts which God vouchsafes you, are to be an occasion of gratitude, but not of pride; "a door of hope," but not of presumption. When once you begin to presume upon your attainments, and to think that less diligence, less watchfulness, and less fervour will suffice, be assured, that the blessings you so abuse will be withdrawn: you will find, that your gifts, your graces, and your comforts, will decline. Be on your guard then against "leaving your first love:" be sober, and watch unto prayer: and, if you find but the first beginnings of decay, O! flee to the Saviour; flee to him as for your lives: if you feel yourselves sinking, cry to him, "Save, Lord, or I perish!" and endeavour, "as ye have received the Lord Jesus Christ, so to walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."]

2. Those who have "left their first love"

[Perhaps you will ask, "Who are they? and how shall I know whether I be of the number?" Beloved, this is no

hard thing to know. It is true, there may have been some abatement with respect to rapturous or ecstatic feelings, while yet your love remains as firm as ever: but yet all who are really walking nigh to God, find the text realized in their own experience. God allures them by the consolations of his Spirit; he seals his promises on their hearts: he enriches them with gifts and graces; and he opens glorious prospects to their view. If therefore, instead of being thus allured, your spirit is become dull; if, instead of finding the promises precious to your soul, they scarcely ever dwell upon your mind, or administer any solid comfort; if your gifts or graces, instead of increasing, decline; and if, instead of looking for, and longing after, and hasting to, your heavenly inheritance, you are becoming more forgetful of it, and ready, as it were, to take up your rest in earthly things, Thou art the man: whoever thou art, "I have somewhat against thee;" "Thou hast left thy first love." O! "turn and repent, and do thy first works." See what has caused this declension in thy soul: see what there is that troubles the camp: and O! put away the accursed thing: if thou hast given way to a worldly spirit, watch and pray against it: if pride have defiled thy soul, humble thyself for it before God, and beg for grace, that thou mayest "be clothed with humility:" if passion be thy besetting sin, pray that thou mayest "put on meekness as the elect of God," and be adorned with that "meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God of great price." If sloth be the enemy that hath cut thy locks, and shorn thy strength, up, up, and be doing: in short, whatever it be that has caused thy declension, sacrifice it, though it be "precious as a right eye, and necessary as a right hand." "Cease to do evil, and learn to do well: put away the evil of your doings." I know indeed, that you cannot put it away of yourselves; but I know at the same time, that, till after it be put away, God will not shed abroad his love in your heart, nor can you look up with comfort and confidence to him. "Turn ye then unto your God, from whom you have deeply revolted;" and know, that he is a God ready to pardon: "he will heal your backslidings, and love you freely:" he will give you the earnest of his Spirit in your hearts, and fill you with joy in expectation of the full inheritance. O beloved! say with the Church of old, "I will go and return unto my first Husband; for then it was better with me than now:" and you will find, that, as "he hateth putting away," so "he will cast out none that come unto him."]

MCXLIV.

GOD BETROTHING US TO HIMSELF.

Hos. ii. 19. 20. *I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord.*

THERE are various figures used in Scripture to represent the care which God will take of his people: but that which is the most endearing, the most honourable, and, perhaps I might add, the most frequent, of any, is a marriage covenant. The Old Testament abounds with expressions to this effect. Jeremiah has whole chapters addressed to the Church as an adulterous wife, and inviting her to be reconciled to her divine Husband. Hosea not only delivers messages in similar terms, but was actually commanded to take an adulteress (*i. e.* either one who had been so, and was now penitent, or one who, though chaste at the time of his union with her, afterwards proved abandoned) to be his wife, in order that he might be a visible sign unto the Jewish nation. By this, Jehovah, having for a season put away his people for their unfaithfulness, here makes known to them his purpose to restore them yet again to his favour. Let us notice,

I. How God contemplates the restoration of his ancient people—

He considers himself as standing in the relation of a husband to them—

[He had chosen them, and set them apart for that end[a] ——— He acknowledges himself as still bearing that relation to them[b]. And complains of their unfaithfulness to him in terms peculiar to that relation[c] ——— And urges their return to him by the consideration of their duty to him under that relation[d].

Amongst men, such a restoration of the offending party would be inexpedient[e]: but God both can and will do it in

[a] Ezek. xvi. 8. [b] Isai. liv. 5. [c] ver. 2—5.
[d] Jer. iii. 14. [e] Jer. iii. 1.

perfect consistency with his own honour. He tells us, He will do it "in righteousness," having accepted the sacrifice of his only dear Son in their behalf[f]. He will do it "in judgment," having from all eternity determined so to act towards them[g]. He will do it "in loving-kindness," having "loved them with an everlasting love[h]. He will do it "in mercies," having freely forgiven them all their trespasses[i]. He will do it "in faithfulness," seeing that "his gifts and calling are without repentance[k]. And, that he is determined to do it, he makes clear by a threefold repetition of his purpose, "I will betroth thee, I will, I will:" and, because it seems a stretch of mercy beyond all reasonable hope, he says," I will *even* betroth thee in faithfulness."]

He further declares that in this his renewed connexion with them he will far exceed all his former mercies—

[His former espousal of them issued in their being repudiated: but this shall be "for ever[l]." And, whereas their former knowledge of his character was very imperfect, they shall now have such discoveries of him as they had no conception of before; they shall behold all his perfections as harmonizing in this stupendous act of mercy[m], and all "his glory as shining in the face of Jesus Christ[n]."]

But "is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:" and to them also does my text refer: so that, to enter fully into it, we must further notice,

II. What glad tidings are here announced to the Gentile Church—

To the Christian Church does St. Paul expressly apply this prophecy, saying, "God saith in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God[o]."

Now, in fact, Christ stands in the same relation to us as Jehovah did to the Jews—

[f] Rom. iii. 21, 22. [g] Eph. i. 8—11. [h] Jer. xxxi. 3.
[i] Rom. xi. 27. [k] Rom. xi. 29. [l] Jer. xxxi. 31—33.
[m] Isai. xlv. 21. [n] 2 Cor. iv. 6. [o] Rom. ix. 24—26.

He is the Bridegroom of his Church[p]; and every true Christian, as well as the whole body of his Church, is presented to him under the character of his spouse[q]. True, we have departed grievously from him, and may justly be put away by him for ever. But he authorizes his ministers to bring us back to him, and engages not to cast off so much as one who shall return to him in penitence and faith[r]. His language to us is "Turn ye, turn ye; why will you die[s]?" And so has he prepared the way for our return, that the perfections of God shall not only not be dishonoured, but shall be greatly glorified, in that event. St. Paul takes great pains to shew, that the righteousness of God will be displayed in it no less than his mercy[t]: so that in it "shall mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other[u]."

By entering into this relation to Christ, our happiness will be immeasurably and eternally enhanced—

[Other unions are but for a time: but this shall be for ever. "He will not cast off his people, when once he has been pleased to make us his people[x]." And he wishes us to know this for our joy. The covenant he makes with us is different from that which he made with the Jews. His covenant with them was to depend on their stability; and therefore it was dissolved: but that which he makes with us, provides for our stability itself, and therefore shall never be dissolved to all eternity[y].

And who can conceive what discoveries of his glory shall be vouchsafed to us through eternal ages? We cannot really know God now, unless we are united to him in Christ Jesus: but, when that union takes place, we, like Moses in the cleft of the rock, have all his perfections proclaimed to us, and all his goodness made to pass, as it were, before our eyes[z]. Increasing experience of his love will give us increasing discoveries of his love. Yet to the last we shall only behold, as it were, his back parts, and see him as in a glass darkly: but when once the soul is liberated from the body, "we shall see him as we are seen, and know him as we are known[a]."]

ADDRESS—

1. Be like-minded with God in reference to the Jews—

[You see with what delight he views their restoration to him: and will you be indifferent about that great event? Far be it from you. The whole creation will take a deep interest

[p] Matt. ix. 15. [q] 2 Cor. xi. 2. [r] John vi. 37.
[s] Ezek. xxxiii. 11. [t] Rom. iii. 25, 26. [u] Ps. lxxxv. 10.
[x] 1 Sam. xii. 22. [y] Heb. vi. 17, 18.
[z] Exod. xxxiii. 19, 23. [a] 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

in it, and express, every thing according to its ability, its desire to contribute to their happiness[b] ——— Do ye also look forward to the event with ardent desire, and exert yourselves in every possible way to promote its speedy consummation.]

2. Accept with gratitude the overtures now made in reference to yourselves—

[In the name of Jehovah I would now espouse you to the Lord Jesus Christ[c]: and for your encouragement I would say, that there is not one perfection of the Deity, not even justice itself, that will not be glorified in your acceptance of his proffered mercy[d]. O, think what it will be to stand in that near relation to the Deity, and what blessedness you will obtain both in time and in eternity by means of it! Methinks all heaven will rejoice when the time shall have arrived for the marriage of the Lamb to be consummated[e]. May all of you now daily have your meetness for that blessed event increased, and in due season have your joy perfected in the full fruition of your Saviour and your God.]

[b] ver. 21—23.
[c] 2 Cor. xi. 2.
[d] 1 John i. 9.
[e] Rev. xix. 7.

MCXLV.

THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWS.

Hos. iii. 5. *Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days.*

KNOWN unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world; and whatever he has predetermined in his eternal counsels shall surely be fulfilled. Often indeed is the execution of his purposes delayed till unbelievers begin to think that his word has failed of its accomplishment: but "in the evening time it shall be light:" and when the obstacles to his will seem almost insurmountable, he will glorify himself in fulfilling it beyond all human expectation. Thus he acted, when, according to his promise, he brought the Israelites out of Egypt. He suffered them to be detained till the very last day that they could be detained consistently with the truth

of his promise; and then, when the Israelites themselves were almost reduced to despair, he brought them out with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm. Thus also will he act yet once more towards that chosen people. They are now dispersed almost beyond the hope of conversion to God. But there is a period when they shall as universally, and perhaps too as suddenly, commit themselves to the government of Christ, as ever they did to the direction of Moses; nor is it improbable that they will yet again inhabit that very land, from which they have been driven for their iniquities.

To elucidate this subject we shall consider,

I. The event foretold in this prophecy—

The whole of the Gospel dispensation is often called "the latter days:" but here the expression refers to what is called by many, the Millennium, or the time when all the kingdoms of the world shall be converted to Christ. In that day,

The Jews shall universally return to God through Christ—

[When the ten tribes revolted from the house of David under Jeroboam, they established idolatry in opposition to the worship of the true God, and set up kings of their own in opposition to those who sat on the throne of David. But in about two hundred and fifty years they were carried captive to Assyria; and from that time to the present hour they have had no king or governor of their own; and have been deprived of all opportunities of worshipping God, either according to the Mosaic ritual, or according to their own idolatrous superstitions[a]. However they are not wholly and finally abandoned of their God: for, when his Spirit shall be poured out upon all flesh, they shall take the lead in turning unto God[b], and shall voluntarily appoint the Lord Jesus Christ as their head[c]. This blessed truth is abundantly confirmed in Scripture[d]: and the accomplishment of it will display in a most stupendous manner the unsearchable riches of God's wisdom and goodness[e].]

[a] ver. 4. The "Teraphim" seem to have been images to which they resorted for the purposes of divination.

[b] Zech. viii. 23. [c] Hos. i. 11.

[d] Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. and xxxvii. 21, 22, 24.

[e] Rom. xi. 33.

In turning to God, they shall be peculiarly influenced by the Divine goodness—

[The sanctions of the Jewish law were principally of a penal nature, and calculated to beget a servile spirit. Even Moses himself at the giving of the law exceedingly trembled and quaked[f]. But, as formerly they feared the Lord and his *judgments*, so in the latter day they will "fear the Lord and his *goodness*[g]:" they will marvel at his kindness in choosing their nation in the days of old; and at his patience in bearing with them during their long departure from him; and, above all, at his mercy and faithfulness in bringing them back into his Church, and manifesting to them again the tokens of his love. With these considerations they will be overwhelmed; and, constrained by his love, will become patterns of all righteousness[h].]

While we contemplate this stupendous event, let us improve it by considering,

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

Very appropriate instruction may be gathered from it,

1. By the unbelieving world—

[There are infidels who deny the inspiration of Scripture: and, even amongst those who profess to believe the Scriptures, there are not a few, who look upon the future restoration of the Jews to God as a cunningly-devised fable. But let both the one and the other of these persons look at this prophecy, and see how unreasonable their doubts are. Who that was not inspired of God, would have ventured to predict such events as are here referred to, namely, The continuance of the Jews as a distinct people all over the world, yet without any king or governor of their own, and without any priest or sacrifice, or opportunity to worship the true God according to their law, and equally without practising the idolatrous superstitions to which in every period of their history they were prone? Who, I say, would have ventured to predict such a state of things as this, if he was not inspired of God so to do? And who would go on to foretell their future restoration to God, and their entire consecration to him as his willing and obedient servants? Yet has the former part of this prediction been unquestionably fulfilled. We see them preserved a distinct people to this hour; the ten tribes, from the time of their captivity in Assyria, and the other two tribes, from the time of their dispersion by the Romans. Every where are they

[f] Heb. xii. 21. [g] Rom. xi. 4. [h] Jer. xxxiii. 9.

distinguished by these two great peculiarities,—an incapacity to worship their own God according to his appointment, and an aversion to idolatry, to which their whole nation were so long and so obstinately addicted. This then is to the whole world *an evidence*, that the Scriptures are divinely inspired, and *a pledge*, that the event predicted shall in due time be fulfilled.]

2. By those who are inquiring after God—

[Every awakened soul desires to know how it may find acceptance with God. And here the way of access to God, and of acceptance with him, is plainly declared. The Jews in due season will return to God through Christ, and will devote themselves to his service with filial gratitude and love. And it is in this way that every sinner must return to God. There is no other Mediator through whom any sinner in the universe can come to God: nor will any man be accepted of him, unless he surrender up himself to God in a way of holy obedience. On the other hand, no one who approaches God under a grateful sense of redeeming love, and with a desire to fulfil his will, shall ever be cast out. In fact, it is for this very end, even to produce this change in the hearts and lives of men, that God's perfections are manifested[i], or his promises revealed[k], or his blessings given[l]. Let every one of you then return to God in this way: for there is not one who has not departed from him, even as the Jews themselves, or who does not need the same penitence and faith as they: and I can venture to assure every penitent and believing soul, that whosoever cherishes this holy fear, shall have the light of God's reconciled countenance lifted up upon him, and experience to his joy the same blessed liberty and the same divine enlargement, as they[m].]

3. By those who are giving way to desponding fears—

[Many, when first seeking after God, are ready to ask, Can it be that one so vile as I should ever obtain favour with God, or one so obdurate be ever penetrated with the feelings of penitence and love? Now I say, Look at the Jews; their wickedness, even from their first coming out of Egypt to their final expulsion from their own land, was most atrocious, even beyond that of the nations whom they were sent to extirpate. And now for the space of eighteen hundred years they have been as impenitent and obdurate as men could be. Yet behold, God has still designs of love towards them, and will ere long restore the whole nation to his favour. To all their other sins

[i] See the blessed effect on Moses, Exod. xxxiv. 6, 8.
[k] 2 Cor. vii. 1. [l] Heb. xii. 28. [m] Isai. vi. 1, 5.

they added that of crucifying the Lord of glory: and yet are they not utterly and eternally cast off. Nay, when once the Spirit of God shall be poured out upon them, they shall, *contrary to the course of nature*, be like a majestic river "flowing *up* to the mountain of the Lord's house, itself established on the top of other mountains;" so wonderful shall be the operation of divine grace upon them[n]. Who then should despair? Who should limit the exercise either of the power, or of the grace, of God? Dear brethren, let none despair either of themselves or others; for God's mercy is open to all, and shall be effectual for all who seek it in his appointed way. I say not but that a man's day of grace *may* be passed even whilst he is alive in this world: but I do say, that no man who desires mercy, *can* be in that deplorable condition, because he would have been already given up by God to utter insensibility and obduracy. Only let a man come to God through Christ, and he shall find that with God there is mercy, yea, and plenteous redemption. Let any man whatever be moved by a sense of God's unbounded goodness to him, and be led by that goodness to fear and serve the Lord, and he shall never perish; but shall be made a monument of that very grace, which shall be so wonderfully displayed in the latter days, in the restoration of God's ancient people, and the consequent salvation of the heathen world.]

[n] Isai. ii. 2.

MCXLVI.

IGNORANCE DESTRUCTIVE.

Hos. iv. 6. *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*

IGNORANCE, as it respects the things of this world, is attended with many evils. It disqualifies a man for those situations in life that require the exercise of wisdom and discretion; it degrades him in society below the rank of those who would otherwise be deemed his equals or inferiors: and it not unfrequently leads to idleness, dissipation, and vice. But ignorance of religion is of infinitely worse consequence; because it ensures the everlasting destruction of the soul. To this effect God speaks in the words before us; from which we shall be led to shew,

I. The ignorance of the Christian world—

The Jews, as well those of the ten tribes as those who worshipped at Jerusalem, were called "the people of God," because they had received the seal of his covenant in their infancy, and professed to acknowledge him as their God. In like manner *we*, having in our infancy been baptized into the faith of Christ, may, in a lax and general sense, be called his followers, and his people. But among nominal Christians there is an awful lack of knowledge; an ignorance,

1. Of themselves—

[How little do they know of their *blindness!* They suppose themselves as competent to judge of spiritual as they are of carnal things; though God tells them, that they cannot comprehend the things of the Spirit for want of a spiritual discernment[a].

How little do they know of their *guilt!* Do they really feel themselves deserving of God's eternal wrath and indignation? They cannot cordially acquiesce in that idea, notwithstanding they are expressly said to be under the curse and condemnation of the law[b].

How little do they know of their *depravity!* They will acknowledge, that they have this or that particular infirmity: but they have no just conception of the total depravity of their hearts; or of the truth of God's testimony respecting them, that "every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts is evil, only evil, continually[c]."

How little do they know of their utter *helplessness!* They imagine that they can exercise repentance and faith just when they please, though they are declared by God himself to be incapable of themselves to do any thing[d], even so much as to think a good thought[e].]

2. Of God—

[They may have some general notions of his power and goodness: but what know they of his *holiness?* Do they suppose that sin is so hateful in his eyes as he represents it to be[f]?

What know they of his *justice?* Are they persuaded that, as the Moral Governor of the universe, he must enforce the sanctions of his own law; and that, however merciful he may be, he neither will nor can clear the guilty[g]?

[a] 1 Cor. ii. 11, 14.
[b] Gal. iii. 10.
[c] Ps. xiv. 2, 3. Gen. vi. 5.
[d] John xv. 5.
[e] 2 Cor. iii. 5.
[f] Hab. i. 13.
[g] Exod. xxxiv. 7.

What know they of his *truth?* They read many threatenings in his word; but they do not believe that he will execute them[h].]

3. Of Christ—

[They confess perhaps his Godhead, and acknowledge him as a Saviour. But what know they of him *as he is in himself?* Do they discern his beauty, his excellency, his glory? Is He in their eyes "chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely[i]?"

What know they of him *as he is to us?* Do they comprehend any thing of the breadth and length, the depth and height of his unsearchable love[k]? Have they any adequate idea of his tender sympathy and compassion[l]? Have they been filled with an admiration of his fulness, his suitableness, his sufficiency[m]?

If more were necessary to confirm this melancholy truth, we would appeal to God's own assertion respecting us, that our stupidity and ignorance are more than brutish[n].]

Lest such ignorance should be thought venial, we proceed to notice,

II. The fatal consequences of it—

Doubtless the degrees of criminality attached to ignorance must vary according to the opportunities which men have enjoyed of obtaining knowledge. But in all men who have the light of the Gospel set before them, a lack of spiritual knowledge,

1. *Tends to* their destruction—

[Every sin is destructive, but more especially impenitence and unbelief. And what is the occasion of these? Must they not be traced to ignorance as their true and proper source? If men knew what ignorant, guilty, depraved, and helpless creatures they are, could they refrain from sorrow and contrition? — — — If they knew what a holy, just, and immutable God they have to do with, could they do otherwise than tremble before him? — — — If they knew what a merciful, loving, and adorable Saviour there is, whose bowels are yearning over them, who is ever following them with invitations and entreaties, and who longs for nothing so much as to save their souls, could they turn their backs upon him? Could they help crying to him for mercy, and desiring an interest in his

h Luke xvi. 17. i Cant. v. 10, 16. k Eph. iii. 18, 19.
l Heb. ii. 18. and iv. 15. m 1 Cor. i. 30
n Isai. i. 2, 3.

salvation? ——— If a man, feeling himself in imminent danger of perishing in the sea, cannot but avail himself of the assistance offered him for the preservation of his life, so neither can a man who feels his danger of everlasting destruction neglect and despise the salvation offered him in the Gospel.]

2. *Will issue in* their destruction—

[God himself best knows what he has ordained and decreed: and as the fates of men will be determined by him at last, to him, and to his word, we make our appeal.

We want to ascertain the states of those who are ignorant of the Gospel: God tells us plainly, "They are lost[o]."

We want to be informed whether their ignorance will not be considered as a sufficient plea for their rejection of the Gospel? God assures us, that instead of operating in that view, and to that extent, it shall itself be the ground of their condemnation[p].

We would fain hope that the Lord Jesus Christ would interpose for them at the last day, to avert or mitigate their sentence. But we are told, on the contrary, that he himself will come to judgment, for the express purpose of taking vengeance on them[q].

Here we leave the matter. If ye will not believe such plain and positive declarations of God, we shall in vain hope to make any impression on your minds by any feeble arguments of our own.]

INFER—

1. How carefully should we improve the means of grace!

[The ordinances are appointed of God for our instruction in spiritual knowledge. Should we then absent ourselves from them on slight occasions? or should we be content with a formal attendance on them, while yet we derive no solid benefit to our souls? O let us remember that our *all* is at stake: and whether we hear, or read, or pray, let us do it as for eternity.]

2. How earnestly should we pray for the teachings of God's Spirit!

[Whether we be learned or unlearned, we can know nothing but as we are taught of God. In respect of spiritual knowledge, the rich have no advantage above the poor: yea, the poor have rather the advantage of the rich, inasmuch as they have more docility of mind; and God has promised to reveal to babes the things which are hid from the wise and

[o] 2 Cor. iv. 3. [p] Isai. xxvii. 11. [q] 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

prudent[r]. Let us then beg that our eyes may be opened, and that through the influences of the Spirit we may know the things which are freely given to us of God[s].]

3. How thankful should we be for any measure of divine knowledge!

[To be wise unto salvation is to be wise indeed. All other knowledge is as nothing in comparison of this. Blessed then are they who can say, "This I know, that, whereas I was blind, I now see[t]." Yes, Believers, "blessed are your eyes, which now see:" for if ignorance is destructive to the soul, knowledge, on the other hand, provided it be spiritual and practical, will surely save it[u].]

[r] Jam. ii. 5. Matt. xi. 25.
[s] 1 Cor. ii. 11. Eph. i. 18.
[t] John ix. 25. Matt. xiii. 16.
[u] Isai. liii. 11. John xvii. 3. with 1 John ii. 3, 4.

MCXLVII.

THE EVIL AND DANGER OF BACKSLIDING.

Hos. iv. 16. *Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer.*

SUCH is the influence of bad example, that it is extremely difficult to withstand its attractions, even at the time that we behold its fatal effects. Israel, or the ten tribes, from their first apostasy under Jeroboam, were irreclaimably addicted to idolatry. The prophet, finding his efforts vain with respect to them, turns to Judah, and entreats that they would not tread in the steps of Israel[a], who, like an untamed and refractory bullock, had entirely cast off the yoke, and refused all subjection to Jehovah.

Humiliating as this account of Israel is, it is but too just a representation of the Christian world, whose conduct is utterly unworthy of the name they bear, and from whose ways we cannot stand at too great a distance.

To impress this awful truth upon your minds, we propose to shew,

[a] ver. 15. At Gilgal and at Bethel, where God had formerly been worshipped, idols were now set up. The prophet, exhorting Judah not to go to those places, calls Beth-el (the house of God) Beth-aven (the house of vanity).

I. When we may be said to resemble a backsliding heifer—

We owe submission to our heavenly Master; but give too much reason for the comparison in the text. This resemblance may be seen in us,

1. When we will not draw in God's yoke at all—

[Unconverted men in every age and place are rebels against God[b]: and, though all are not equally profligate in their manners, all are equally averse to spiritual employments: the law of God is considered as imposing on them an intolerable yoke, to which they will not, they cannot submit[c]. They are indeed subjected to it against their will; but neither chastisements nor encouragements can prevail upon them to draw in it: on the contrary, like a ferocious bullock, they are insensible of favours, and they fret at rebukes[d].]

2. When we draw in it only by fits and starts—

[Many appear willing to obey God in a time of sickness[e], or after some signal deliverance[f], or under an impressive sermon[g], or during a season of peace and tranquillity[h]: but, as soon as ever the particular occasion that called forth their pious resolutions has ceased, or they find that they must suffer for Christ's sake, they forget the vows that are upon them, and return to their former state of carelessness and indifference[i]. They renew their resolutions perhaps at certain seasons; but "their goodness is as the morning dew, or as the early cloud that passeth away." Thus, like a heifer that will draw for one moment and will not the next, they are, in the strongest sense of the words, unprofitable servants.]

3. When we grow weary of the yoke—

[It is not uncommon for persons to go on well for a season, and yet draw back at last. They grow weary of *performing their duties*, of *exercising their graces*, of *mortifying their lusts*. If they maintain an observance of public duties, they become remiss in those of the family and the closet: their delight in the Scriptures languishes; their meditations are cold; their devotions formal. Their faith, their hope, their love operate with less vital energy: and their besetting sins, whatever they were, regain their strength, and resume their ascendancy. These are like a horse or bullock, which, after having yielded

[b] Exod. v. 2. Ps. xii. 4. Jer. ii. 31. and vii. 24. [c] Rom. viii. 7.
[d] Jer. xxxi. 18. [e] Isai. xxvi. 16.
[f] Ps. cvi. 12, 13. [g] Exod. xxiv. 3, 7. Jam. . 24.
[h] Matt. xiii. 21. [i] Ps. lxxviii. 34—37.

to the yoke for a season, becomes restive and ungovernable, and disappoints thereby the expectations of its owner.]

Lest the frequency of these characters should tempt us to think favourably of them, we proceed to shew,

II. The evil and danger of such a state—

We shall notice,

1. The evil of it—

[A backslidden state, in whomsoever it is found, is exceeding sinful: but in those who have made some profession of religion, it is attended with peculiar aggravations.

It is a contemning of God; of his Majesty, which demands our subjection, and of his mercy, which would accept and reward our poor services. And it is in this light that God himself frequently complains of it[k].

It is a justifying of the wicked; for it says to them, in fact, "I was once as you are, and thought I should become happier by serving God: but I find by experience that there is no profit in serving him; and therefore I am returning to your state, which is, on the whole, the happier and more desirable."

It is a discouraging of the weak. Little do false professors think how much evil they do in this way[l]. Many are induced to follow their example in some things, under the idea that they are innocent; and are thus drawn from one sin to another, till they make shipwreck of a good conscience, and utterly turn away from the faith.

And need we multiply words any further to shew the evil of backsliding from God? Well does God himself call it "a wonderful and horrible thing[m]."]

2. The danger of it—

[*This is an iniquity which God marks* with peculiar indignation[n]; and never fails to visit it, sooner or later, with some awful token of his displeasure.

The first symptoms of declension lead, if not speedily mourned over and resisted, *to utter apostasy*[o]. The disposition to backslide will soon increase, till it become inveterate, and, unless by a marvellous interposition of God himself, incurable.

The misery that will be incurred by means of it will far exceed all that would have been endured, if no profession of religion had ever been made. "If any man draw back," says God, "my soul shall have no pleasure in him:" he "draws back

[k] Numb. xi. 20. 1 Sam. ii. 30. and 2 Sam. xii. 10. Ps. x. 13.
[l] Mal. ii. 8. [m] Jer. v. 30. [n] Jer. ii. 19, 21, 22.
[o] Prov. xiv. 14.

to certain and everlasting perdition[p]:" and "it would have been better for him never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn back from it[q]."

Let these consequences be duly weighed, and nothing need be added to shew us the importance of "holding fast our profession without wavering."]

To IMPROVE this subject, we shall,

1. Assist you in ascertaining your state before God—

[Since all are "bent to backslide" more or less, it is of great importance to inquire of what kind our backslidings are, and to see whether they are merely the infirmities of an upright soul, or the revolt of an apostate. It is indeed difficult to determine this with precision; yet something may be said to aid you in this inquiry.

Examine diligently the *cause*, the *duration*, and the *effects* of your backslidings. Those of the sincere arise from the weakness of their flesh, while yet their spirit is as willing as ever: but those of the hypocrite proceed from a radical disaffection to the ways of God. Those of the sincere continue but a little time, and are an occasion of greater diligence: those of the hypocrite remain, and become the habit of his soul. Those of the sincere humble him in the dust: those of the hypocrite produce a blindness of mind, a searedness of conscience, and a hardness of heart.

But though we thus discriminate for the information of your judgment, we recommend all to stand fast in the Lord, and to guard against the first risings of spiritual decay[r].]

2. Give a word of counsel to those in different states—

[*Are you altogether backslidden from God?* O return to him, and take upon you his "light and easy yoke!" He invites you with all the tenderness of a father[s]; he declares himself exceedingly averse to punish you according to your desert[t]; and he promises to "heal your backslidings, and love you freely[u]."

Are you drawing in his yoke? Bless and adore your God, who has inclined and enabled you to do so. It is his power, and his power alone, that has kept you hitherto[x]; and therefore he must have all the praise. And in order to your continued steadfastness, reflect often on the evil and danger of backsliding; I may add too, on the comfort and benefit of

p Heb. x. 38, 39.
q Matt. xii. 45. 2 Pet. ii. 21.
r Gal. vi. 9.
s Jer. iii. 12, 14, 22.
t Hos. xi. 7, 8.
u Hos. xiv. 4.
x 1 Pet. i. 5.

serving God. Surely He is a good Master. Let but your hearts be right with him, and "none of his commandments will appear grievous to you[y]:" on the contrary, you will find that "*in* keeping his commandments there is great reward[z]," and that your labour shall not be in vain with respect to the eternal world. "Be ye faithful unto death, and he will give you a crown of life[a]."]

[y] 1 John v. 3. [z] Ps. xix. 11. [a] Rev. ii. 10.

MCXLVIII.

THE DANGER OF SPIRITUAL IDOLATRY.

Hos. iv. 17. *Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone.*

THERE is a day of grace, wherein God strives with men by his Spirit: this past, he abandons them to impenitence and obduracy[a]. The precise period of its termination is, in mercy, concealed from us; but we are all concerned to deprecate the judgment denounced against Ephraim in the text:

I. The sin of Ephraim—

Ephraim, to which Jeroboam belonged, comprehends all the ten tribes. These were devoted to the worship of the idols that were in Dan and Bethel. Nor could they be drawn from it by any of the means which God used—

Though we do not imitate them in this, we are not free from *spiritual* idolatry—

[Idolatry is described to be a loving and serving of the creature more than the Creator[b]. Hence covetousness and sensuality are spoken of under that term[c]. Now who has not yielded that love, fear, and confidence to the creature, which are due to God alone? "Who can say, I am pure from this sin?" — — —]

We have, in truth, been "joined" to idols—

[Many are the means which God has used to bring us to himself. Yet we have not been wrought upon effectually by any of them. Neither mercies vouchsafed, nor judgments threatened, have been able to prevail. We rather have

[a] Luke xix. 42. [b] Rom. i. 25.
[c] Col. iii. 5. Phil. iii. 19.

"held fast deceit, and refused to return to the Lord our God[d]" — — —]

But this sin must of necessity provoke God to anger.

II. Their punishment—

The text may be understood as an advice to Judah, not to hold intercourse with the idolatrous Israelites. Our Lord gives a similar direction to his followers[e]—

But it rather imports a judicial sentence of final dereliction—

[This is a just punishment for turning away from God. Nor can there be a more awful punishment inflicted even by God himself. It is worse than the severest afflictions which can come upon us in this life. For *they* may lead to the salvation of the soul[f]; whereas *this* must terminate in our condemnation. It is worse than even immediate death and immediate damnation. For the greater our load of sin, the greater will be our treasure of wrath[g].]

And there is reason to fear that God may inflict this punishment upon *us*—

[In this way he punished the Gentiles who sinned against their light[h]. In this way he visited also his once-favoured people the Jews[i]. Why then should we hope for an exemption, if we imitate their conduct? God has repeatedly warned us that impenitent sinners shall have this doom[k].]

INFER—

1. What reason have we to admire the patience and forbearance of God!

[He has seen us cleaving to idols from the earliest period of our lives[l]; and though we have changed *them*, we have never turned unto *him*. In the mean time we have been deaf to all his expostulations and entreaties. What a mercy is it that he has never yet said, "Let him alone!" Yea, he has even restrained us from perpetrating all that was in our hearts[m]. How gracious is he in yet striving with us by his Spirit! Let then his goodness, patience and forbearance, lead us to

[d] Jer. viii. 5. and xliv. 16, 17. [e] Matt. xv. 14.
[f] 1 Cor. xi. 32. and v. 5. [g] Rom. ii. 5.
[h] Thrice mentioned, Rom. i. 24, 26, 28.
[i] Ps. lxxxi. 12. Matt. xxiii. 32—35.
[k] Prov. i. 30, 31. and v. 22. 2 Thess. ii. 10—12.
[l] Ezek. xiv. 3. [m] Gen. xx. 6. and xxxi. 29. 1 Sam. xxv. 34

repentance[n]; and let us say, like Ephraim, in his repenting state[o]—]

2. How evidently is salvation entirely of grace!

[If left to ourselves we never should renounce our idols[p]. We should act rather like that obstinate and rebellious people[q]. The case of Judas may shew us what we *may* do, when once abandoned by God. God must give us a will, as well as an ability, to turn to him[r]. Let us then entreat him never to leave us to ourselves. Let us be thankful if, in any way, he rend our idols from us. If we have never yet resembled the Thessalonian converts[s], let us now cry unto him[t]. If we have, let us bear in mind that affectionate exhortation[u]—.]

[n] Rom. ii. 4. [o] Hos. xiv. 8. [p] Jer. xiii. 23.
[q] Zech. vii. 11, 12. [r] Phil. ii. 13. [s] 1 Thess. i. 9.
[t] Jer. xxxi. 18. Hos. xiv. 2, 3. [u] 1 John v. 21.

MCXLIX.

THE EXTENT AND CAUSES OF MEN'S SUPINENESS.

Hos. v. 4. *They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord.*

WHEN we exhort men to duty, they plead their inability to perform it; but their inability is, in fact, a want of inclination to serve God. Many things there are which they do not, though confessedly within their power. Of this the prophet complains in the words of our text, and traces it up to its true and proper source.

His words lead us to consider,

I. The extent of men's supineness—

Little need be said to shew that the generality do not "turn to God." They are scarcely sensible of their apostasy from him. They regard serious and vital religion as over-righteous preciseness. They do not so much as "frame their doings to turn unto him"—

They do not consider their ways—

[This seems a reasonable duty, and within the reach of any man: every prudent man does it with respect to his temporal affairs; nor can there be any excuse for neglecting it in

more important concerns. Indeed it is not possible to turn *unto* God aright, unless we have first discovered wherein we have turned *from* him. But men do not choose to search the records of their own conscience; they find it more pleasant to rest in the presumption that all is well. To this effect God himself testifies respecting them[a]—.]

They do not abstain from open violations of God's law—

[This is undoubtedly a step, which, every one that turns to God will take; nor, though this is more difficult, is it beyond the power of an unregenerate man: though he cannot refrain from the *love* of sin, he may from the *commission* of it. Many actually do deny their appetites, from prudential motives; yet few, if any, will impose the same restraints from a regard to God, or manifest the disposition recommended to them by Elihu[b]—.]

They do not avoid the means and occasions of sin—

[They have found the company of ungodly men to be a snare to their souls[c], yet will they not withdraw themselves from their society. From many other things have they experienced a most baneful influence, yet will they gratify themselves in all their wonted indulgences. In temporal matters they see the wisdom of fleeing from temptation[d], yet they account it needless to shun the means of spiritual defilement; but if they desired really to turn to God, could they evade the force of that question[e]—?]

They do not use the means of obtaining true conversion—

[They cannot but know the necessity of meditation and prayer: they are well assured that an attention to God's word and ordinances is a principal mean of spiritual advancement, yet any book is more pleasing to them than the Bible, and any employment than prayer: in seeking worldly advancement they will use the means with diligence, but all labour is deemed superfluous in the concerns of the soul.]

They not only *do* not thus frame their doings, but they *will* not—

[Not all the promises of God can allure, or threatenings alarm them: they are deaf to the voice of conscience, and the

[a] Jer. ii. 36. [b] Job xxxiv. 32.
[c] Exod. xxxiv. 12. Prov. xxii. 25.
[d] From the course, or the gaming table. [e] Prov. vi. 27.

dictates of God's Spirit. The language of their hearts is like that of the Jews of old[f]—.]

They, on the contrary frame their doings to turn as far as possible *from* God—

[Would consideration help them? They banish it, with all books or conversation that might lead them to it. Would the turning from known sin? They indulge in it. Would the avoiding of the means of sin? They will rush into temptation. Would the using of the means of grace? They account them a servile drudgery. If they wished to injure their spiritual interests as much as possible, consistently with a good name among men, they could not adopt a surer method: the whole of their conduct unequivocally declares the language of their hearts[g]—.]

To account for this supineness, let us trace it up to,

II. The causes of it—

Persons, when convicted of evil doings, will yet affirm their hearts to be good. But can a tree be good whose fruits are uniformly bad?

The causes of this evil are justly described by the prophet:

1. They love sin—

["Whoredom" is frequently (and by Hosea in particular) used for sin in general. A "spirit of whoredom" imports an attachment to sin, and delight in it[h]. Now this justly characterizes the state of fallen man. It accords with other descriptions given of him in Scripture[i]; and is the fundamental cause of the supineness visible in the world. In following evil ways we glide easily down the stream: but in renouncing them we stem the tide of our corrupt nature. Hence even the first steps of turning to God are irksome and difficult; and we lay the rein on the neck of our appetites for want of resolution to restrain them. In this very manner does God himself trace up our transgressions to a deceived heart[k]—.]

2. They are ignorant of God—

[Never accustomed to reflect on God, they know nothing of him: the ideas they do form of him are grossly erroneous[l].

[f] Jer. xliv. 16, 17.
[g] Job xxi. 14, 15.
[h] In a similar sense *a spirit of slumber* is used, Rom. xi. 8.
[i] Eph. iv. 22. and Rom. viii. 7.
[k] Isai. xliv. 20.
[l] Ps. xcvii. 7.

In their hearts they "imagine him to be even such an one as themselves." This is another, and a very fruitful source of their supineness. To this St. Paul ascribes the evil of their hearts and lives[m]. If they knew his *power and majesty*, could they dare thus to provoke him? If they beheld his *holiness*, could they account sin so venial an evil? If they were apprised of his *justice*, would they indulge hopes of impunity? If they believed his *veracity*, would they so disregard his threatenings? Above all, if they knew his *mercy* to us in Christ Jesus, could they so trample on the blood that was shed for them? It would not be possible for them to withstand such views of his perfections. Such a discovery would produce on them the effect experienced by St. Paul[n]—.]

INFER—

1. They who shall perish at the last day must ascribe their condemnation to themselves—

[It is certainly true that man is not able of himself to do all that is required of him. But it is no less true that he is able to do many things which he neglects. Nor can it be doubted but that, if he cried to God for help, he might obtain it. If he use not therefore the power that he has, and the appointed means of obtaining more, he can blame none but himself. In this view our Lord expressly declares that the fault is in our own perverse will[o]. And God expostulates with us on the folly of our conduct[p]. Is the husbandman justified in omitting to plough and sow his ground because he cannot ensure a crop? How much less then shall we be, in neglecting the means to which God has promised success? Let us not then deceive ourselves by offering vain excuses; but turn unto our God, and plead the mercy which he has promised to us[q].]

2. If we would fully turn unto our God, we must have our hearts renewed, and our minds enlightened with the knowledge of Christ—

[Would we heal the streams? we must cast the salt into the fountain head[r]. Instead of being actuated by the spirit of whoredoms, we must pray to be "led by the Spirit of God." Instead of "abiding in darkness," we must seek to have "Christ revealed in us." Thus shall "old things pass away, and all things become new." We shall sweetly yield ourselves to the constraining influence of Christ's love; and not only turn, but "cleave, unto him with full purpose of heart,"]

[m] Eph. iv. 18. [n] Acts ix. 6. [o] John v. 40.
[p] Ezek. xxxiii. 11. [q] Jer. iii. 12. [r] 2 Kings ii. 21, 22.

MCL.

THE DANGER OF PRIDE.

Hos. v. 5. *The pride of Israel doth testify to his face: therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity; Judah also shall fall with them.*

ALL profess to hate pride; yet all are more or less infected with it. The very best of men are not wholly free from its influence. But, in the unregenerate, it is the governing principle of all their actions. It was one of the most distinguishing features in the character of Sodom[a]. The professing people of God also were led captive by it. And were brought thereby under his just and heavy displeasure. We shall make some observations upon,

I. The prevalence of this sin—

The state of Israel was not peculiar to that nation. Human nature is in all ages the same. Nor does pride manifest itself more strongly any where than amongst ourselves,

1. Nationally—

[There is no nation that boasts more of its privileges, or that acknowledges less the hand of God in them, than Britain. If judgments come, we impute them to the misconduct of our government; and if success be vouchsafed to us, we ascribe it to our own skill in arts, or prowess in arms. And though confessedly our sins are manifold, no one thinks of national humiliation: so truly may it be said of us, as it was of Israel, "Our pride testifies to our face; and we do not return to the Lord our God, nor seek him for all this[b]."]

2. Personally—

[Behold *the careless sinner*. What determined opposition is there in the hearts of many to the authority of God! They will not submit to his light and easy yoke. If required to obey, they object to the command itself as severe and impracticable. If warned of the consequences of their disobedience, they make light of all God's threatenings. If urged to receive the Gospel salvation, they deride it as foolishness[c]. The language of their heart is, Who is Lord over us? We know not

[a] Ezek. xvi. 49. [b] Hos. vii. 10. [c] 1 Cor. ii. 14.

the Lord; neither will we obey his voice[d]. That this proceeds from pride, there can be no doubt. God himself traces such conduct to *this*, as its proper source and principle[e]. And doth not this "testify to the face" of many amongst us? Is not this the conduct which almost universally obtains? Yea, are not *we* sensible that it too justly describes, if not our present, yet certainly our former, state?

Behold also *the self-righteous formalist*. Persons of this description have kept themselves free from gross enormities, or perhaps have reformed their conduct after having given the rein to all their appetites; but their pride rises in proportion to their fancied attainments. They look with contempt on others who are openly immoral[f], and bless themselves that they are not as other men[g]: meanwhile "they feel not the plague of their own heart." They deny the representation which the Scripture gives of their fallen state[h]. They cannot endure to think themselves deserving of God's wrath, nor will they submit to be saved by the righteousness of God[i]: and whence does all this originate? Surely pride and self-exaltation are properly pointed out as the spring from whence it flows[k]: yet doth not this disposition also lamentably prevail? Doth it not "testify to the face" of some whom we are now addressing? Are there not some amongst ourselves who trust in their own wisdom, strength, and righteousness, instead of fleeing to Christ as blind, helpless, hopeless creatures? some also, who are too proud to accept salvation on the footing of publicans and harlots? yea, and some too, who will rather perish in their sins, than seek to have them purged away in the Redeemer's blood?

I am grieved to add, Behold also *many religious professors*. None are more puffed up with pride than some who would be thought followers of the lowly Jesus. They are conceited of their knowledge, and will bear with none who do not pronounce their shibboleth. They profess indeed to believe that their hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked; yet they will never listen to instruction or reproof: nor can they be persuaded to deny their own will in any thing for the good of others. None are more ready than these to set up themselves in opposition to all constituted authorities. St. Jude speaks of them as "murmurers and complainers," as "despising dominion and speaking evil of dignities[l]." Nor are there any people under heaven to whom Solomon's description of the proud man may be more fitly applied[m]—. Alas! does not this spirit also "testify to the face" of many? Perhaps there scarce ever was a period or a nation where such spurious

[d] Ps. xii. 4. Exod. v. 2. [e] Ps. x. 4, 5. [f] Isai. lxv. 5.
[g] Luke xviii. 9, 11. [h] Rev. iii. 17. [i] Rom. x. 3.
[k] Luke xviii. 14. [l] Jude, ver. 8, 16. [m] Prov. xxx. 12, 13.

religion prevailed in so great a degree. Surely it may well be numbered among the most heinous sins of this favoured land.]

Having followed the sin of Israel, what can we expect but to participate in,

II. The judgment denounced against it—

To "fall" must certainly import some heavy judgment. This threatening was not fully accomplished but in the utter destruction of the Jewish nation. Nor can we hope to escape the displeasure of God while we harbour in our hearts an evil that is so offensive to him—

This must be said of us as a nation—

[We see at this moment the judgments executing upon other nations (France, Belgium, Poland, Russia) and can we hope that the cup shall not be put into our hands? Who can tell what a storm is gathering over us, or what ruin may ensue from the acts of our Government this very week[n]? Yet how few are crying to God as the occasion requires!]

But whatever occurs to us as a nation, the proud individually shall surely be dealt with according to their deserts—

[They will most generally fall *in this world.* In their own conceit their mountain stands so strong as to bid defiance to every assault. They think that they shall never be moved[o]. But how irresistibly have the haughtiest monarchs been hurled from their throne[p]! How speedily have even the most powerful empires been brought to desolation[q]! How instantaneously have God's judgments often marked the heinousness of this sin[r]! If they be exalted for a time they are almost invariably brought low at last[s].

At all events they are absolutely certain to fall *in the eternal world.* If indeed they repented of their sin, they would find mercy with God. A broken and contrite heart he will never despise[t]. Though he will resist the proud, yet he will give grace unto the humble. He will look on *him* with pleasure and complacency[u]: but nothing can ever reconcile him to "a man that walketh in pride." He will surely abase the proud[x]. He has irreversibly decreed their utter destruction[y]. Nor

[n] June 19, 1831. [o] Ps. xxx. 6, 7. [p] Dan. v. 20, 23.
[q] Ezek. xxviii. 2, 6, 8. Isai. xiv. 12—15.
[r] 2 Chron. xxxii. 25. Acts xii. 23.
[s] Ps. lxxiii. 6, 9, 18, 20. [t] Ps. li. 17.
[u] Isai. lvii. 15. [x] Dan. iv. 37. [y] Mal. iv. 1.

shall the whole universe combined prevent the execution of his vengeance on one single individual amongst them[z].]

The observance of ceremonial duties will never compensate for the want of true humility—

[Judah retained the forms of religion which Israel and Ephraim had cast away. Yet because Judah resembled Israel in their sin, they were to be involved in Israel's calamity[a]. Thus must all, however zealous and exemplary in other respects, be brought down and confounded before God[b]. Even a preacher of righteousness, if lifted up with pride, shall fall into the condemnation of the devil[c]. The rule laid down by God himself shall surely be observed to all eternity[d]—.]

INFER—

1. How excellent is the Gospel of Christ!

[Nothing but the Gospel ever did, or ever can, humble the soul. The law may terrify; but it is the Gospel alone that melts us into contrition. That no sooner reaches the heart, than it brings down our high looks. It turned, in an instant, thousands of blood-thirsty murderers, into meek, loving, and obedient followers of the Lamb[e]. And thus does it still operate on all who receive it in sincerity[f]. Let us then listen to it with delight. Let us pray, that a sight of the crucified Saviour may produce its due effect upon us[g]. And let us lothe ourselves the more in proportion as we are persuaded that God is pacified towards us[h].]

2. What need have we all to watch and pray!

[There are none who are out of the reach of this malignant principle. St. Paul, after having been caught up to the third heavens, was in danger of being overwhelmed by it[i]. And who amongst us does not find that it is ready to puff us upon every occasion? Let us remember that this ruined the very angels in heaven. And that it must be mortified in us, if ever we would obtain mercy in the last day. Let us guard against the first risings of it in the heart; and, whenever it "testifies to our face," let us implore mercy of the Lord, that the thought of our hearts may be forgiven us[k]. In this way we shall be preserved, though in the midst of danger; and be exalted in due time to glory, and honour, and immortality.]

[z] Prov. xvi. 5. [a] The text. [b] Isai. ii. 11, 12.
[c] 1 Tim. iii. 6. [d] Luke xviii. 14. [e] Acts ii. 37, 41, 42.
[f] Acts ix. 6. and xvi. 29, 33. [g] Zech. xii. 10.
[h] Ezek. xvi. 63. [i] 2 Cor. xii. 7. [k] Acts viii. 22.

MCLI.

THE FOLLY OF CREATURE-CONFIDENCE.

Hos. v. 13. *When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound.*

MEN continually provoke God to chastise them, but rarely make a due improvement of his chastisements. Instead of turning to God, they dishonour him still more by applying to the creature under their distress rather than to him. The ten tribes, when punished for their willing compliance with Jeroboam's edicts[a], sought repeatedly to the Assyrians for help, instead of humbling themselves before God: but they found, as "Judah" also did on similar occasions, that their confidence in the creature served only to involve them in shame and disappointment.

Taking the text simply as an historical fact, we deduce from it two observations, which deserve our consideration.

I. Men, in times of trouble, are prone to look to the creature for help, rather than to God—

This was one of the most common and heinous sins of the Jewish nation[b]: and it is universal also amongst ourselves,

1. In troubles of a temporal nature—

[In *sickness of body*, we lean, like Asa[c], on the physician. In *distress of mind*, we complain and murmur; but forget to pray[d]. In *straitened circumstances*, we expect relief from

[a] ver. 11, 12. God consumed them as the moth consumes a garment, or as rottenness the bones, secretly, slowly, gradually, effectually.

[b] Sometimes they relied on Egypt, Isai. xxx. 1—3. and xxxi. 1. Sometimes on Assyria (as Manahem did on Pul, 2 Kings xv. 19. and Ahaz did on Tiglath-pileser, 2 Kings xvi. 7.) and sometimes on themselves, Isai. xxii. 8—11. "Jareb" here certainly means the king of Assyria: but whether it was his proper name, or a name given him by the prophet, is uncertain. It means *Defender*, and might be applied to him in a taunting manner. In this view it would be a very severe sarcasm. See 2 Chron. xxviii. 20.

[c] 2 Chron. xvi. 12. [d] Gen. iv. 13, 14.

friends, or our own exertions. God is invariably our *last* refuge.]

2. In spiritual troubles—

[Under *conviction of sin*, we betake ourselves to the observance of duties, and make resolutions to amend our lives, instead of fleeing to Christ as the refuge of lost sinners[e]. In *seasons* also *of temptation*, or *desertion*, we adopt a thousand expedients to remove our burthens, but will not cast them on the Lord[f]. Though foiled ten thousand times, we cannot bring ourselves to lie as clay in the potter's hands; but will rest in *the means*, instead of looking simply *to God* in the use of means.]

But the longer we persist in it the more we shall find, that,

II. The creature cannot afford us any effectual succour—

There are circumstances indeed wherein friends may be instrumental to our relief: but they can do,

1. Nothing *effectual*—

[The consolations which are administered by man, or by the vanities of this world, are poor, empty, transient[g]. Not the whole universe combined can ever bring a man to "glory in tribulations[h]," and to say with Paul, "I take pleasure in them for the sake of Christ[i]:" as soon might they enable him to stop the sun in its course, as to reduce to experience the paradoxes of that holy apostle[k]—.]

2. Nothing *of themselves*—

[It is not a little humiliating to see how weak are man's endeavours to heal either the disorders of the body, or the troubles of the soul, when God is pleased to withhold his blessing. The best prescriptions, or the wisest counsels, are even lighter than vanity itself. Reasonings, however just and scriptural, have no weight: advice, however sweetened with love and sympathy, is rejected: the very grounds of consolation are turned into occasions of despair[l]. When God says, "Let there be light," there is light: but till then, the soul is shut up in impenetrable darkness[m].]

ADDRESS—

1. Let us guard against this sinful propensity, both in our national and personal concerns—

[e] Isai. lv. 2. [f] 1 Sam. xvi. 14—16. [g] Jer. ii. 13.
[h] Rom. v. 3. [i] 2 Cor. xii. 10. [k] 2 Cor. vi. 10.
[l] Ps. lxxvii. 2, 3. [m] Job xxxiv. 29.

[We cannot but see how prone we are, as a nation, to rest on human alliances, and human efforts. Would to God we could correct this fatal error, and trust more entirely in the great disposer of all events!

As individuals at least, we may, and must, correct it. If we would have the blessing of God, and not his curse, we must renounce all creature-confidence, and trust in him alone[n]. If we would do this, our happiness would be complete[o]———]

2. Let us especially rely on Christ as the healer of our souls—

[He is "the healer of the nations[p]," "Jehovah, who healeth us[q]:" there is no physician besides him; nor any balm, but his blood. We may use whatever means we will, either to pacify the conscience, or to purify the heart; but we shall find that they can "not heal us, nor cure us of our wound." But Christ is all-sufficient: he can in one moment purge us by his blood, and renovate us by his Spirit. To him then let us look with humble, uniform, unshaken affiance.]

[n] Jer. xvii. 5—8. See David's example, Ps. lx. 11. and cxxi. 1, 2.
[o] Ps. xci. 1—7, 9, 10. [p] Rev. xxii. 2. [q] Exod. xv. 26.

MCLII.

SPIRITUAL DESERTION.

Hos. v. 15. *I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.*

MEN, when they become Christians, do not lose any of their natural feelings, but they experience many sensations both of pleasure and pain, which are altogether new, and peculiar to themselves: when God lifts up the light of his countenance upon them, they possess the sublimest happiness of which our nature is capable, "a joy with which the stranger intermeddleth not:" so also, when God withdraws the light of his countenance from them, they are made to feel the most exquisite sorrow, with which no temporal affliction, no bodily anguish, can be compared. This is the sorest chastisement which can be inflicted on a godly and ingenuous soul: yet sore as it is, the wickedness of our hearts too often makes

it necessary for us; for this will often avail to humble the soul, when every thing else has been tried in vain. Hence it is generally God's last resource: he uses various other methods first, to make his people holy, and to keep them vigilant: but when they are still remiss and negligent, he departs from them, and says, "I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end shall be; for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith" or dependence. Thus he dealt with his people of old: he had told them, in verse 12, that he would be to them as a moth, or as rottenness, to consume them: then, because they went to the Assyrian rather than to him for help, he told them, in the verse before my text, that "he would tear them, as a young lion teareth his prey:" and then he adds, as the sorest calamity of all, and as the only one which would produce the desired effect, that he would forsake them; "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early."

From these words we will endeavour to shew you,

I. The nature of spiritual desertion—

[They who view God's dealings with the Jews merely as a history, will lose the most important benefits which the relation of them is intended to convey. There is a striking similarity and agreement between the dispensations of Providence and the dispensations of grace; so that there can be no doubt but that the former were intended typically to represent the latter. And, in order to understand the Scriptures aright, we must interpret them according to this canon. The most sober and candid expositors have agreed in this. The desertion spoken of in my text literally refers to the abandoning of the Jews to the power of the Assyrians and Chaldeans, till they should be brought to repent of their sins: and the return which is there foretold as the effect of this desertion, had its accomplishment in part under Ezra and Nehemiah; partly also on the day of Pentecost; but principally, we expect it to be fulfilled at a future period, when the whole nation shall "look on Him whom they pierced, and mourn." But we may with the utmost propriety take occasion from it to speak of spiritual desertion, which all the Israel of God in a greater or less degree experience. In my text, God says, "I will go and

return unto my place:" this is a good description of that which we call spiritual desertion. God, properly speaking, is in every place; "he filleth all in all:" but yet, as to the manifestation of his presence, he is more particularly in heaven: "He is the High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; and he dwells in the high and holy place." "Heaven is his throne; and he humbleth himself when he beholdeth the things that are on earth." It is "the habitation of his holiness;" so that if, either for purposes of judgment or of mercy, he vouchsafe to visit the earth, he leaves, as it were, his proper place, and comes down to us. When he noticed the iniquity of Sodom and Gomorrah, he said, "I will go down now and see whether they have done according to the cry which is come up unto me:" and, when he was about to punish the Jews, the prophet said, "Behold, the Lord *cometh out of his place*, to punish the inhabitants of the land[a]." So when the Church prayed to him for the manifestations of his power, they said, "O that thou wouldest rend the heavens, and come down[b]!" Thus, in the New Testament, he is frequently said to come and dwell in his people. Thus, when he visits us, he comes out of his place; and, when he withdraws those visits, he "goes, and returns to his place." Not that he is really capable of moving from one place to another, because he is alike in every place; but, with respect to the manifestations of his presence, the communications of his grace, the supports of his arm, and the consolations of his Spirit, he may be truly said to move: for neither the presence nor removal of any thing can be more perceptible to the body, than the loss or acquisition of these things is to the soul. The way in which God withdraws himself from the soul, may be very fitly illustrated by the manner in which he forsook the Jews of old. The Shechinah, or bright cloud, was the symbol of the Divine presence; and *that* rested upon the ark between the cherubims. But when God was incensed against his people for their abominations, he gave them various warnings of his determination to forsake them, unless they should repent: he made his prophet therefore to see in a vision, what indeed all Israel, in the time of Moses, had seen with their bodily eyes,—his gradual departure. We have the account in the 9th, 10th, and 11th chapters of Ezekiel, to some verses of which we will refer you. In ix. 3, God is represented as taking his first step towards his departure; "And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub whereupon he was, to the *threshold* of the house:" in x. 18, he removed still farther; "Then the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims," which were at that time,

[a] Isai. xxvi. 21. [b] Isai. lxiv. 1.

as we are told in ver. 3, and 4, standing in *the court*: in ver. 19, he went yet farther; "And the cherubims lifted up their wiings and mounted up from the earth, in my sight; and every one stood at the door of *the east gate* of the Lord's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above." In xi. 23, God goes to a yet greater distance; "And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon *the mountain*, which is the east side of the city." See here, how many different removes there were, before God would utterly forsake them; first from the ark to the threshold; then to the court; then to the gate; and then to the mountain; and even there he stood, if that by any means they might humble themselves, and prevent his final departure. Now thus it is in his departure from the soul: when he sits enthroned, as it were, in the soul, all is well: the person thus highly honoured, is happy beyond description: his views of divine truth are clear, his apprehensions of it lively, and his enjoyment of it is unspeakably sweet and precious: having the light of God's countenance, and a sense of his favour, he has all that man can desire in this mortal state. But, when he becomes proud, or negligent, or worldly, when by any misconduct he begins to grieve the Holy Spirit, he soon perceives symptoms of the Divine displeasure: the effusions of Divine love in his soul are less abundant; his discoveries of the Deity are less glorious; his views and apprehensions are darker; his communion with God is less frequent, and less ardent; and his holy intimacy with the Deity is sensibly diminished. If he do not instantly take the alarm, and humble himself before God, and implore his pardon, he finds gradually a veil drawn between his God and him: he cannot have that access to God that he was wont to enjoy: he loses that enlargement of heart which he used to experience; his joys are in a great measure withdrawn: instead of abounding in praises, he finds it hard even to pray: it is comparatively seldom that he can break forth into songs of praise and adoration; and, if now and then he feel some elevation of soul, he cannot adore God for what he is in himself, but only for what he has done for us. Thus, ere he is aware, his God has withdrawn himself; and, if now he do not call him back by earnest supplication, and by renewed faith in Christ as his Mediator and Advocate, he will find every thing decay: the beauty of the summer will fade away, the autumnal gloom will soon succeed, and every thing will quickly wear a wintry aspect: all the graces of the soul will languish, and the corruptions of the heart regain their former ascendancy. The departing sun does not more surely change the face of nature, than the departure of God from the soul will leave it destitute and forlorn: so truly is it said, "Woe unto them, when I depart from them!" But these are, as it were, the steps by which God departs from

the soul; and by these marks we may judge of his increasing nearness or removal.]

We see, then, what is meant by spiritual desertion—

Let us now consider,

II. The end and intent of it—

[God intends our good in all his dispensations, unless indeed we have provoked him utterly to abandon us; and then he may justly cause such events as shall open a way for the exercise of our corruptions, and for the consequent hardening of our hearts: but, till he has thus given us up, he designs all his dispensations for our good. Especially, in withdrawing from the souls of his people, he has a regard to their best interests: two principal ends which he would accomplish, are, to humble, and to quicken them.—First, *to humble them*; "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence." The confession of our sins is indispensably necessary, as well for our good, as for God's glory: however God may desire to pardon, he cannot do it, unless we be first disposed to confess: it would be unworthy of his majesty, and directly contrary to his word. He has said, that "he who covereth his sins shall not prosper;" and that he only "who confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy:" and his own honour is so interwoven with the abasement of the sinner, that, when Joshua exhorted Achan to confess his sin, he could use no terms more proper than these; "My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him." Indeed the good of man is no less concerned in the humiliation of his soul before God; for, till he be brought to a sense of his iniquities, he has no disposition to accept of mercy: he disdains to become a suppliant for it: he denies that he stands in need of it: he thinks himself affronted by the offer of it, because the offer necessarily implies, what he is utterly averse to acknowledge, namely, that he deserves punishment. This same pride remains, in a measure, in God's people after their conversion; and though they hate it and lothe themselves for it, yet, upon every fresh sin which they commit, they are but too apt to indulge it: they still feel an unaccountable backwardness to confess their sins, even though they know that God is privy to all, and needs not any information from them. When therefore God sees his people harbouring this pride in any degree, he withdraws himself from them: the more they indulge this vile principle, the more he testifies his displeasure, to shew them, that he will

ever "resist the proud, and give grace only to the humble." He is determined "to abase those who walk in pride;" and therefore he never vouchsafes the former tokens of his love, till he has brought the soul to an open and ingenuous confession. We have a remarkable instance of this in David: he had grievously offended God in the matter of Uriah; but his proud heart would not humble itself before God. What was the consequence? God forsook him; and instead of speaking pardon and peace to him, he left his soul to be incessantly harassed with fruitless remorse and anguish; nor ever restored peace to his conscience, till he had humbled himself for his iniquity: thus David says, in Psalm xxxii. 3, 4. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long; for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture was turned into the drought of summer." This was his state while he persisted in impenitence: but as soon as he made confession, behold the change! "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid: I said, I will confess my transgression to the Lord, and *so thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin:*" and he who began the psalm with such a deplorable account of his experience, concludes it with saying, "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart."

A further end which God has in view is, *to stir up the soul.* His people are but too apt to grow remiss; and sometimes, when they profess to be seeking God with their whole hearts, they are secretly inclining to some earthly vanity. This, if suffered to prevail, would effectually alienate them from the life of God; they would soon be entangled again in the corruptions of the world; and "their last end would become worse than their beginning:" and therefore God in mercy withdraws himself from them; and hides his face, till they seek after him again with their wonted ardour. In this he acts, if you will permit me for once to use a very familiar illustration, as earthly parents do: the little child perhaps is loitering behind, and amusing himself with some trifling vanity: the parent calls and commands in vain: at last the parent, wearied with fruitless calls, conceals himself; and then the child is filled with anxiety, seeks his parent with tears, and is more solicitous to keep close to him in future. This is an humble illustration, I readily acknowledge: but it is a natural one; and our Lord himself did not disdain the use of such, for the confirmation of his doctrine: if it convey to you the idea more clearly than a plain statement would, my end is answered: let it shew you, what we are at present concerned to declare, the real end for which God hides his face from his children. We may however confirm this statement from the

express testimony of God himself: "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart; and I will be found of you[c]."]

We come now to shew,

III. The effect it will produce—

[Would to God that the effect were the same on all! but, alas! there are many who are hardened by it more and more, till God "swears in his wrath, that they shall never enter into his rest:" nevertheless, where the proper effect is produced upon the soul, it is that which is mentioned in my text; "In their affliction they will seek me early." This part of our subject is in a measure anticipated by what has gone before: nevertheless, it is of such importance as to deserve further and more distinct consideration. Prosperity does but ill suit with our fallen nature. Not only temporal ease, but in some sense even spiritual pleasure, becomes a source of evil: not that it is so in itself; "the joy of the Lord is our strength;" but our corruption takes occasion from it to unfold itself. Sometimes a long season of spiritual delight, and peculiar manifestations of God's love, shall foster pride. Even Paul himself, from the abundance of revelations which were made to him, was in danger of "being exalted above measure," and needed "a thorn in his flesh" to keep him humble. So peculiar sensations of joy are sometimes the means of begetting security. We see daily that professors of religion are apt to look back upon former experiences, and to conclude that all *is* well, because it once *appeared* to be well: therefore God counteracts this propensity, and consults the good of his people, in withdrawing his sensible presence from them: he stirs them up to a holy vigilance against their spiritual enemies, and to a diligence and circumspection in his ways. See what was the effect produced upon the Spouse in the 5th chapter of the Song of Solomon: in the 2d verse, Christ, the Husband of the Church, is calling to her for admission; saying, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew, my locks with the drops of the night." She, not being disposed for heavenly communion with him, makes frivolous excuses: "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" Thus she provoked him to depart. Presently, however, she rose to let him in; but behold, he was gone: in ver. 5, 6. "I rose up to open to my Beloved: I opened to my Beloved, but my Beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone." And now observe the effect of this desertion; "My soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him,

[c] Jer. xxix. 13, 14.

but he gave me no answer." She then went about the city, and inquired of all the watchmen respecting him: and failing of success here, she says, in verse 8, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my Beloved, tell ye him that I am sick of love." This is a striking comment on the last words of my text, "In their affliction they will seek me early:" and it exactly agrees with the experience of God's people in all ages: when they, who have been favoured with the light of God's countenance, are for a season deprived of it, they put away their foolish and vain excuses; they see that they must at all events get nigh to their Beloved; they will spare no pains; they will rather rise at midnight, than not seek him at all: they will attend the ordinances with redoubled diligence: they will inquire of the ministers, the watchmen, how they may find him: they request the intercession of the saints: in short, they will never rest, till they have regained the sensible enjoyment of the Divine presence.]

Let us now come to a short APPLICATION of the subject.

1. To the careless world—

[My Brethren, many of you must be sensible that you never seek after God: if you pray at any time, you rest satisfied with having performed a duty, and are not at all solicitous to obtain any manifestations of the Divine presence: yea, because you have never experienced any peculiar sensations of God's favour, you are ready to think, that all hopes of such experience are groundless, and that all must be either hypocrites or enthusiasts who pretend to such things. But surely, your own want of experience in these matters is no more a ground for denying the truth of what others feel, than your ignorance of the concerns of others is a ground for denying what others know. Would to God that you would seek the Lord for yourselves! you should soon find that it is not in vain to call upon him. If you would humble yourselves, confessing your sins, and crying for mercy through the blood of Jesus, you should soon find that God is "gracious, and full of compassion, and rich in mercy unto all that call upon him:" he would be "a Father unto you; he would come unto you, and dwell with you;" he would "manifest himself unto you as he does not unto the world;" he would "shed abroad his love in your hearts;" and he would "make you glad with the light of his countenance." O, then, "seek the Lord, seek his face evermore!" Remember, it will be an awful matter to be banished for ever from his presence; to hear him say, "Depart, accursed—" how dreadful! On the contrary, how delightful to hear him say, "Come, ye blessed!" O "seek ye the Lord whilst he *may* be found; call ye upon him whilst he is near."]

2. To the professors of religion—

[How apt are you to draw back from God, instead of pressing forward as you ought to do! How do you compel him to hide his face, when he would gladly be comforting you with his presence! Ah, Brethren, know where the fault is: "He delighteth in the prosperity of his people:" it is wholly owing to yourselves, if ye do not "rejoice in the Lord all the day long." Do not then oblige him to withdraw himself; do not bring on yourselves so heavy an affliction: search, and see, what there is that has displeased him: see if the world has drawn you aside; see if pride has grieved his Spirit; see if negligence in secret duties has caused him to hide his face: and, whatever it be, confess it to the Lord; mourn over it; renew your application to the blood of Jesus; and press forward with greater diligence: so shall you "walk in the light, as He is in the light;" you shall have abiding and increasing fellowship both with the Father and the Son; and soon you shall be admitted into his immediate presence, where you shall never have one cloud to intercept your view of him to all eternity.]

MCLIII.

THE CHARACTERISTIC MARKS OF TRUE PENITENCE.

Hos. vi. 1. *Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.*

THE spiritual dereliction which the people of God have at times experienced, has ever been considered as the most afflictive of all chastisements: but it has also been the most salutary, and most effectual. The benefits arising from it were strongly exemplified in the Israelites, who after having long withstood the united efforts of all the prophets, were on a sudden constrained by it to turn to God with unfeigned contrition.

The words before us are the expressions of that repentance which was excited in the Israelites by God's departure from them, and by his grace that accompanied the affliction[a]: and they suggest to us a proper occasion to consider,

[a] Hos. v. 15.

I. The characteristic marks of true penitence—

It will always be attended with,

1. A sense of our departure from God—

[Unregenerate men live "without God in the world;" and yet the thought of their being at a distance from God never enters into their minds. But as soon as the grace of repentance is given to them, they see that they "have been like sheep going astray, every one to his own way," and that they can never find happiness but in "returning to the shepherd and bishop of their souls."]

2. An acknowledgment of affliction as a just chastisement for sin—

[The impenitent heart murmurs and rebels under the Divine chastisements: the penitent "hears the rod and him that appointed it." He blesses God for the troubles that have brought him to reflection[b]; and while he smarts under the wounds that have been inflicted on him, he regards them as the merciful tokens of parental love[c].]

3. A determination to return to God—

[When a man is once thoroughly awakened to a sense of his lost condition, he can no longer be contented with a formal round of duties. He reads, hears, prays in a very different way from that in which he was wont to do. "What shall I do to be saved?" is the one thought that occupies his mind; and he is resolved through grace to sacrifice every thing that would obstruct the salvation of his soul. To hear of Christ, to seek him, to believe on him, and to receive out of his fulness, these are from henceforth his chief desire, his supreme delight[d].]

4. A desire that others should return to him also—

[As all the other marks, so this especially was manifested by the repenting Israelites. This is peculiarly insisted on as characteristic of the great work that shall be accomplished in the latter day[e]. This has distinguished the Church of God in all ages[f]. The penitent knows how awful the state of all around him is, and how much he has contributed by his influence and example to destroy them; and therefore, though he expects nothing but "hatred for his good-will," he feels it incumbent on him to labour for their salvation; and, if it were possible, he would instruct, convert, and save the whole world[g].]

[b] Ps. xvi. 7. and cxix. 67.
[c] Ps. cxix. 75.
[d] Cant. v. 6, 8.
[e] Isai. ii. 3
[f] Cant. i. 4. Draw *me*, and *we*, &c.
[g] Zech. viii. 21. John i. 41, 45.

To promote an increase of such repentance amongst us, we shall proceed to state,

II. The grounds on which a penitent may take encouragement to return to God—

Whatever grounds of despondency we may feel within ourselves, we may take encouragement,

1. From a general view of God's readiness to heal us—

[God has not left himself without witness even among the heathen world; but has shewn, by his goodness to the evil and unthankful, that he is ever ready to exercise mercy. But to us who have his revealed will, he has left no possibility of doubt: for "if he spared not his own Son, but delivered *him* up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The invitations and promises with which his word is filled, are a further evidence to us, that he is willing to receive every returning prodigal, and that he will in no wise cast out any who come unto him. On this ground the whole world may adopt the words of the text, and say, "Come, let us return unto the Lord."]

2. From that particular discovery of it which we have in the wounds he has inflicted on us—

[The Israelites seemed to lay a peculiar stress on this, and to infer, from the very strokes of his rod, his willingness to "heal and bind them up." They even felt an assurance that his return to them would be both speedy and effectual[h]. Thus as soon as any person is brought to acknowledge the hand of God in his afflictions, he will improve them in this very way. Whether his troubles be of a temporal or spiritual nature, he will adore God for not leaving him in a secure and thoughtless state, and for awakening him by any means to a sense of his guilt and danger. He will begin immediately to argue as Manoah's wife; "Would the Lord have shewn me this mercy, if he had intended to destroy me[i]?" Does a father correct his child because he has *no* love to him? Are not the very expressions of his anger to be viewed as tokens of his love[k], and as *an earnest* of his returning favour to me as soon as I shall have implored his forgiveness?

Let those then who feel the burthen of their sins, remember, that it is God who has given them to see their iniquities; and that the heavier their burthen is, the more abundant encouragement they have to cast it on the Lord[l].]

[h] The text, with ver. 2.
[i] Judg. xiii. 23.
[k] Heb. xii. 6.
[l] Matt. xi. 28.

APPLICATION—

1. To those who have deserted God—

[Let us only reflect on the months and years that we have past without any affectionate remembrance of God, or any earnest application to Christ as our Mediator and Advocate; and we shall not need many words to convince us, that we are included in this number. But let us consider whom "we have forsaken; even God, the fountain of living waters;" and, with all our labour in pursuit of happiness, we have only "hewed out for ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water[m]." Let our past experience suffice to shew us the vanity and folly of our ways: and let us "return unto him from whom we have deeply revolted." But let us beware lest we "heal our wounds slightly." Christ is the brazen Serpent to which all must look: He is the good Samaritan who alone can help us, and who has submitted to be himself "wounded for our transgressions," that he might "heal us by his stripes."]

2. To those who are deserted by God—

[God does find it necessary sometimes to withdraw the light of his countenance from his people. But, whatever he may have done on some particular occasions, we are sure that in general he does not forsake us till after we have forsaken him. Hence, when the Israelites were deserted by him, they did not say, Let us pray that he will return to us; but, Let us return unto him: for they were well assured that, as the alienation had begun on their part, so it would be terminated as soon as ever they should humble themselves in a becoming manner. Let those then who are under the hidings of God's face, inquire, what has occasioned his departure from them: and let them put away "the accursed thing," and turn to him with their whole hearts. Let them rest assured, that "there is balm in Gilead;" and that, if they come to God in the name of Christ, their "backslidings shall be healed," and "their happiness restored[n]."[o]]

[m] Jer. ii. 13.

[n] Hos. xiv. 4. Lam. iii. 31, 32. Ps. xcvii. 11. and cxlvii. 3.

[o] If this were the subject of a *Fast Sermon*, the APPLICATION might be comprised in the following observations: 1. The calamities of the nation are manifest tokens of God's displeasure, and calls to repentance.—2. All the efforts of our rulers to heal our wounds will be in vain, if we do not repent.—3. A general turning unto God would bring us speedy and effectual relief.

MCLIV.

THE EFFECTS OF DILIGENCE IN RELIGION.

Hos. vi. 3. *Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.*

THEY, who are strongly attached to human systems, are apt to set divine truths at variance with each other, and to wrest some from their plain and obvious meaning, in order to reconcile them with others more agreeable to their sentiments. But they, who receive the word of God as little children, will find a harmony in passages, which at first sight appear contradictory, and will derive equal benefit from the contemplation of them all. Some imagine, that, if our salvation depend wholly on the free and sovereign grace of God, there can be no need for exertion on our part. Others, on the contrary, argue, that if our salvation be to be effected by means of our own endeavours, it cannot be dependent on Divine grace. But these apparently opposite assertions are not made only in different and detached passages, but oftentimes in the very same passage. Our Lord, for instance, exhorts us to labour for the meat that endureth unto eternal life, at the same time that he says, the Son of man will give it us. And St. Paul bids us work out our salvation with fear and trembling, and yet assures us in the very same sentence, that it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do. Thus the prophet represents those who are returning to God, as encouraging themselves with the thought, that though they could no more accomplish their end by their own exertions than they could command the sun to shine, or the clouds to pour down their waters, yet, if they persevered in the use of God's appointed means, they could not but succeed.

The effects of diligence in religion are here,

I. Plainly stated—

The great object of our attention should be, to gain the knowledge of Christ—

[Many see no occasion at all for diligence in the pursuit of heavenly things. Others, who confess the need of constant exertion on our part, yet propose to themselves a wrong end in their labours; having no higher view than to establish a righteousness of their own. But to know Christ and him crucified, is the one mean of eternal life, in comparison of which every thing else is as dung and dross[a]. It is not however a mere speculative knowledge of him that is thus excellent, (for we may possess that, and have the heart as unsanctified as ever) but an experimental knowledge of him, that brings the soul into a close union and abiding fellowship with him, and a transforming knowledge, that changes us into his blessed image in righteousness and true holiness[b].]

This should be sought with unremitting diligence—

[It cannot be attained without frequent and serious meditation. It does not indeed, like other studies, require intenseness of application, scope of thought, and strength of intellect: it requires only that we enter into our own bosom, that we consult the records of conscience, that we apply to our souls the threatenings and promises of the Scripture, and that we live in the daily exercise of faith and prayer. This is easily compatible with any lawful pursuit; and so far from distracting the mind, and incapacitating it for action, it will give direction and energy to all our faculties. We must not however imagine that it is the work of a day, a month, or a year; it is the work of our whole lives. If at any time we think we have attained, and are already perfect, we may be well assured that we have hitherto studied to little purpose. St. Paul, after preaching the Gospel above twenty years, still desired to know Christ more fully[c]: and so infinitely does that of which we are ignorant, exceed that which any man can know in this life, that he says, "If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know[d]." We must therefore "follow on" in the use of God's appointed means, nor ever relax our diligence, till we see him as we are seen, and know him as we are known.]

Nor shall such means be used in vain—

[It will be invariably found, that, while "the idle soul suffers hunger, the diligent soul shall be made fat." No person shall be disappointed for want of talents; for men shall make a proficiency, not in proportion to their abilities, but in

[a] Compare John xvii. 3. 1 Cor. ii. 2. Phil. iii. 8.
[b] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [c] Phil. iii. 10, 12. [d] 1 Cor. viii. 2.

proportion to their willingness to learn of God, and to practise what they already know[e]. God, who alone can instruct us in this knowledge, will "reveal even to babes and sucklings the things that are hid from the wise and prudent." "The meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way." "If only we cry after knowledge, and lift up our voice for understanding, if we seek it as silver, and search for it as for hid treasures," we need not fear on account of any imagined incapacity; for God has said, "Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God; for the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding[f]."]

This encouraging truth is yet further,

II. Beautifully illustrated—

There is a beauty peculiar to the Hebrew poetry, and very frequently occurring in the prophetic writings, that important truths are amplified with figurative illustrations, and that sublime metaphors are explained by simple declarations. In the passage before us, that which is first proposed in plain language, is afterwards confirmed in two most instructive similes, each of them affording a more precise view of the manner in which the promise itself shall be fulfilled.

The simile taken from the return of day, intimates, that our success shall be *certain* and *gradual*—

[Nothing but the utter dissolution of the universe shall ever stop the succession of day and night; so that the stated returns of light may be considered as a fit emblem of *certainty*. Indeed, God himself sets forth the immutability of his covenant by this very figure; "If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season, then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant[g]." Thus certainly shall light arise upon our benighted souls, provided we really desire to behold it[h]. In a time of darkness we may cry, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me;" but, as the sun, even at midnight, is hastening towards us, though unseen, so are "the goings forth of our God *prepared*," decreed, and ready to appear. Let us but "wait, as those who watch for the morning;" and our gloom shall soon be

[e] Phil. iii. 13, 14.
[f] Prov. ii. 6.
[g] Jer. xxxiii. 20, 21.
[h] Isai. lviii. 8, 10.

dispelled; and "the Sun of righteousness shall arise upon us with healing in his wings."

Nevertheless we must not expect that we should discern every thing at once: our progress will be *gradual.* The sun does not arise in an instant: there is first a little glimmering dawn; then the gilded clouds begin to wear a brighter aspect; and at last they are dissipated by the rising sun: the sun itself also rises higher, and shines brighter in the heavens, till it arrives at its meridian. Thus it is with the knowledge of Christ in the soul: the first views which the inquiring soul obtains are faint and confused; yea, perhaps, as in the early dawn, things may assume a monstrous and distorted shape: we may "behold men, as trees, walking." But gradually the mists shall be dispelled from our eyes; our organs of vision shall be purged from their film; and the glorious object, whom we desire to behold, shall be revealed to our view. But, while we are here below, we shall "see him only, as in a mirror, darkly:" we must wait till we arrive above, before we can fully "see him as he is."]

The simile taken from the return of showers after drought, intimates that our knowledge shall be *refreshing* and *fructifying*—

[What can be more *refreshing* than rain to the parched ground? How does the face of nature soon testify its gladness by an universal smile! Yet is this but a very faint resemblance of that joy and gladness, which the soul experiences through seasonable communications of Divine knowledge. Let us figure to ourselves a prodigal reduced to the lowest ebb of misery, and doubting whether so vile a wretch shall ever find acceptance with his offended Father; and, while trembling with a dread of his displeasure, surprised with the tenderest expressions of his love: will not this be a season of refreshing to his soul? Will he not instantly "put off his sackcloth, and gird him with gladness?" Will it not be to him "as rivers of water in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land?" Thus shall it be with all who follow on to know the Lord; they shall have "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

Nor shall the knowledge acquired be *unproductive of* solid *fruits.* As "the former rain" prepared the ground for the seed, and caused the seed that was cast in, to vegetate; and "the latter rain" ripened and matured the grain, and made it fit for the sickle (both being essentially necessary, and abundantly productive;) so shall the knowledge of Christ be to the soul; it shall come "like rain upon the mown grass, and as

showers that water the earth[i]." After long drought, the clouds may, almost without a metaphor, be said to "drop fatness;" and the knowledge of Christ, long and eagerly desired, shall make "the desert to blossom as the rose;" yea, "it shall make the wilderness like Eden, and the desert as the garden of the Lord." "Instead of the brier shall grow up the fir-tree, and instead of the thorny bush shall grow up the myrtle-tree[k];" and the once-barren soul shall be "fruitful in all the fruits of righteousness to God's praise and glory."]

We may SEE from hence,

1. Whence it is that mankind in general are so ignorant of Christ—

[The record of God concerning Christ is this; "He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life." This is plain, express, and immutable. Yet, alas! the generality, instead of labouring above all things to attain the knowledge of Christ, will bestow no pains whatever upon it. There is no other knowledge that they profess to have without study: but *this* they think they possess almost by intuition. Hence, notwithstanding it is infinitely more important than any other, they continue wholly ignorant of it: they are satisfied with giving a general assent to Christianity as true, while they discern nothing of its beauty, and taste nothing of its excellence. If this knowledge were unattainable, then men would have some excuse, seeing that they would labour in vain, and spend their strength for nought. But God has promised success to persevering diligence; "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord." Let us not then give way to pride or indolence: but let us search the Scriptures with an humble, teachable spirit, and beg of God to enlighten the eyes of our understanding: so shall we be "guided into all truth," and be made "wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus."]

2. Whence it is that they, who have attained some knowledge of Christ, are not made more holy, and more happy by it—

[To maintain a steady uniform course is no easy matter. To follow on, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth unto that which is before, requires more humility and zeal than the greater part even of real Christians possess. Hence their attainments in joy and holiness are small, in comparison of what they might possess. Instead of minding uniformly the one thing needful, they suffer themselves to be distracted with

[i] Ps. lxxii. 6. [k] Isai. lv. 10—14.

worldly cares and pleasures. Instead of resisting their adversary, they yield to him; and give way to desponding thoughts, when they should renew their exertions with more abundant diligence. If they followed on as they ought, not only would their success be certain and gradual, but it would be accompanied with a proportionate increase of joy and holiness. Let us not then turn aside to earthly vanities, or waste our time in fruitless lamentations and complaints; but let us "be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises;" that so our "path may be as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."]

MCLV.

MAN'S INSTABILITY AND GOD'S FORBEARANCE.

Hos. vi. 4. *O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.*

WHEREVER the Gospel is faithfully preached, some are savingly converted by it. But of those who "run well for a season, many are hindered" in their course, and many turn back again to the world. Such were they to whom God spake in the words before us[a]. The word had produced some good effect among them; but their penitence was of very short duration. God therefore took up this pathetic lamentation over them; which leads us to notice,

I. The instability of man—

Man in his best estate is a weak and frail creature. But "Ephraim," (who had cast off the worship of God) and "Judah" (who retained the form but without the power of godliness) may properly be considered as characterizing two different descriptions of persons, namely, mere nominal Christians, and those

[a] We may indeed interpret the three first verses of this chapter as descriptive of what shall take place in the latter day; and so consider the words of the text as a continuation of the complaints uttered against the Jews in the preceding chapter. But we know that there were some partial reformations, as under Hezekiah and Josiah; and therefore we may well explain the passage as belonging to the people of that generation.

who make some profession of religion. We shall therefore notice the instability,

1. Of merely nominal Christians—

[However men may have shaken off all regard for God, there have been times when they entertained some good desires, and some purposes of amendment. They did not always sin with the same ease that they now do. We may appeal to all, whether there has not been some period of their life when their mind was comparatively tender, and when they felt, in some little measure, the importance of preparing for death and judgment?

But these seasons have passed away without any permanent effect; and the appearances of good have altogether vanished. Fitly therefore are they compared to a morning cloud, and to the early dew: for, as in a season of drought the morning clouds, which seemed to portend rain, are soon scattered; and the dew, which seemed a welcome substitute for rain, is exhaled, before it has penetrated to the roots, and thereby the expectations of the husbandman are disappointed; so it is with *them;* their vows are forgotten, their consciences are become callous, and all prospect of their conversion is annihilated[b].]

2. Of many who make a profession of religion—

[Many, like those addressed in the text, have at some time appeared penitent, and have excited, both in themselves and others, a hope, that they would one day be faithful followers of the Lamb. But they have "left off to behave themselves wisely." "The cares of this world, or the deceitfulness of riches, or the lust of other things," have turned them aside; so that they are as barren and unfruitful as if they had never professed themselves the Lord's people.

How many have there been in every age who have thus "made shipwreck of their faith!" And how many amongst ourselves, perhaps, have declined from the ways of God, and given reason to fear that "their last end will be worse than their beginning!"

These are yet more strictly conformed to the images in the text, inasmuch as the hopes and prospects they afforded were more flattering, and the state in which they are left, is more desperate and afflictive[c].]

[b] See this exemplified in Pharaoh, Exod. x. 16, 28; in the Israelites, Exod. xxxiii. 4. with Ps. lxxviii. 34—37; in Felix, Acts xxiv. 25, 27.

[c] See instances of this also in Demas. Compare Philem. ver. 24. with 2 Tim. iv. 10. See also 1 Tim. i. 19. and iii. 6. and v. 12, 15. and 2 Tim. ii. 18. and iv. 4.

No subject whatever reflects more light than this upon,

II. The forbearance of God—

We must not suppose that God is really at a loss what to do, since both his wisdom and power are infinite. But the expressions of the text import,

1. That he is extremely averse to punish us as we deserve—

[Our provocations against him have been such as nothing but infinite patience could have endured. He *complains* of us, that "we have wearied him," and that "he is pressed under us as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves[d]." He *appeals* to us that he has omitted nothing on his part that could tend to our good[e]: and *expostulates* with us respecting our obstinacy in destroying ourselves[f]. When there seems scarcely any hope left, he *declares that he cannot endure the thought* of giving us up[g]: and, in the words before us, *intimates the perplexity of his mind* halting between his duty as a lawgiver, and his inclinations as a parent. Well may it be said of him, that "judgment is his strange work[h];" for his whole conduct towards us shews, that he is "slow to anger and rich in mercy[i]."]

2. That there is nothing he can do consistently with his own honour which he is not ready to do for our salvation—

[He cannot save us in an impenitent state: *that* would be a violation of his justice, his holiness, and his truth. But if we would repent, he would forgive us for his dear Son's sake ——— If we would pray to him for his Holy Spirit, he would renew us, sanctify us, establish us. Whatever his wisdom could devise for our good, or his power execute, he would be ready to effect, if only we would "cleave to him with full purpose of heart."

How strongly is this intimated in the tender manner of his address, "O Ephraim, O Judah," as though he spoke to every one of us severally by name; and by the repetition of that question, "What shall I do unto thee?" Let a reciprocal tenderness be excited in our hearts towards him; and both the grounds of his anger, yea, and the consequences of it also, shall soon be removed.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those whose goodness has altogether vanished—

[d] Mal. ii. 17. Amos ii. 13.
[e] Mic. vi. 3. Jer. ii. 5. Isai. v. 4.
[f] Ezek. xxxiii. 11.
[g] Hos. xi. 7, 8.
[h] Isai. xxviii. 21.
[i] Neh. ix. 17.

[How many have reason to look back with shame, and to say, "O that it were with me as in months past[k]!" Once you felt *some* concern about your soul; but now you are regardless of your eternal interests: once you had *some* prospect of heaven; but now you have none at all. Consider what a melancholy state this is; and that, if you continue in it till you go to the bar of judgment, your condition will be most desperate for ever. Be assured that God will be at no loss how to deal with you then: there will be no longer any conflict in his mind between wrath and pity: abused patience will demand your punishment; and *that punishment shall correspond with your iniquity*[l]. O that you were wise, and would consider your latter end!]

2. Those who are yet in a hopeful way—

[Some there are, we trust, over whom the clouds are yet suspended, and the dew is yet lying with prolific virtue. O beg of God, that no wind of temptation may dispel the one, no sun of persecution exhale the other. "Remember Lot's wife:" and watch against every thing that may impede your progress, or shake your constancy. Be much in prayer, that God would "carry on his good work within you, and perform it to the day of Christ." Guard as much against self-dependence as against the grossest of sins: for "God is a jealous God," and will leave you to learn by bitter experience what is in your heart, if you trust in an arm of flesh[m]. "Trust in him only, and with your whole heart;" and he will "perfect that which concerneth you," and "preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom."]

[k] Job xxix. 2. [l] N. B. Compare Hos. xiii. 3. with the text.
[m] 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

MCLVI.

MERCY BEFORE SACRIFICE.

Hos. vi. 6. *I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*

THERE is a disposition in every man to substitute external observances for the devotion of the heart; and to rest satisfied with rendering to God some easy services, while they are utterly averse to those duties which are more difficult and self-denying. But God cannot be deceived, nor will he be mocked. He will look at the heart, and not at the outward

appearance only; and will mark with indignation the partial obedience of the hypocrite, no less than the open disobedience of the profane. It was thus that he dealt with his people of old, "hewing them by his prophets, and slaying them by the words of his mouth," because they rested in their sacrifices and burnt-offerings, when he desired the more acceptable services of faith and love.

In this view the prophet intimates in the text,

I. The use of instituted ordinances—

The words of the text are not to be considered as importing that God did not require sacrifices at all, but as declaring his decided preference for spiritual obedience; just as our Lord's injunction, "not to labour for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto eternal life[a]," was not intended to prohibit the pursuit of earthly things, but only to enjoin a superior regard for the concerns of eternity.

God approves and loves the observance of his appointed ordinances—

[God appointed a great variety of ordinances to be observed: but the most important among them were "sacrifices and burnt-offerings." These he honoured with many signal tokens of his approbation. It is not improbable, that his acceptance of Abel's offering was marked by the descent of fire from heaven to consume it[b]. Certain it is, that on many other occasions God vouchsafed to men this testimony of his regard[c]: and in unnumbered instances he imparted grace and peace to the souls of his people, while they presented their sacrifices before him.

Under the Gospel dispensation he has enjoined the public administration of his word and sacraments; and has crowned the observance of these ordinances with the brightest displays of his glory, and the richest communications of his love. He has promised his presence in them to the end of the world[d]; and *that* too in a manner and degree that we are not generally to expect it on other occasions.

Thus, both under the law and under the Gospel, God has

[a] John vi. 27. [b] Gen. iv. 4.

[c] To Moses; Lev. ix. 24. Manoah, Judg. xiii. 19, 20. Solomon; 2 Chron. vii. 1. and Elijah, 1 Kings xviii. 38.

[d] Matt. xxviii. 20.

abundantly manifested his regard for the ordinances of His own institution.]

But the acceptableness of such services depends on the manner in which they are performed—

[God looks rather to the disposition of the worshipper than the matter of his offering; and, if a contrite spirit be wanting, he values nothing that such a worshipper can present. This is repeatedly and strongly declared[e]; and is as true under the Gospel as under the Law[f].

To this all the Scriptures bear witness. Balaam's answer to Balak[g], and Samuel's to Saul[h], and the discreet scribe's to Christ[i], all concur in establishing this point beyond a doubt.]

These considerations may well prepare us to acknowledge,

II. The superior excellence of vital godliness—

The view here given of vital godliness deserves attention—

[True religion, as it is experienced in the heart, consists in faith and love, or in such a "knowledge of God" as produces "mercy" both to the bodies and the souls of men. Our blessed Lord *twice* quotes the words of our text, and explains them in this very manner. He was vindicating on one occasion the conduct of his disciples, for plucking some ears of corn on the Sabbath-day. What they had done was certainly allowable on any other day, but probably not on the Sabbath without some urgent necessity. Such a necessity existed in the present case: and as that plea was sufficient to vindicate David in a far more exceptionable violation of the law, and as it was acknowledged to be a full justification of the priests whose labours on the Sabbath were very great, so it was a sufficient excuse for the disciples, as their accusers would have known, if they had understood the meaning of the declaration in the text[k]."]

Such religion as is here described is far more excellent than any outward observances whatever—

1. This is valuable in itself; whereas they are valuable only in relation to the ends for which they were instituted—

[e] Isai. i. 11—14. and lxvi. 3. [f] Ps. li. 16, 17. Matt. xv. 8, 9.
[g] Mic. vi. 6—8. [h] 1 Sam. xv. 22.
[i] Mark xii. 33.
[k] Matt. xii. 1—7. See also Matt. ix. 10—13. where our Lord adduced the same passage, in vindication of his own conduct in associating with sinners.

[A "knowledge of God," and a delight in the exercise of "mercy" to the bodies and the souls of men, renders us conformable to the image of Christ: it constitutes our meetness for heaven, where both our knowledge and our love will be perfected. But the performance of ceremonies, as has already been shewn, is worthless, if it be not instrumental to the production of humiliation and affiance, of purity and zeal. Duties which do not bring us to God, and God to us, are good for nothing.]

2. This argues real conversion; whereas they will consist with the most ungodly state—

[No man can know God as reconciled to him in Christ Jesus, or love his fellow-creatures for Christ's sake, unless he be renewed in the spirit of his mind. He may possess carnal wisdom, together with humanity and compassion, while he is yet unregenerate: but, if he have that faith and that love which are the essential constituents of vital godliness, he must have been born again; because he could not have these things, if they had not been given him from above. But any man may be observant of ceremonies; as the Pharisees themselves were, at the very same time that they were slaves of pride, of covetousness, and of hypocrisy.]

3. This invariably honours God; whereas they are often the means of greatly dishonouring him—

[The exercises of faith and love are but very partially seen by mortal eyes: their sublimer operations are known only to Him who beholds the secret desires of the soul. But that which is seen, compels men to acknowledge the excellence of true religion. Even the enemies of God are constrained to reverence the godly, and to admire the grace of God in them. But an attendance on ordinances is often substituted for the whole of religion; as though God were no better than an idol, either not discerning, or at least not regarding, the dispositions of the heart. Can a greater insult than this be offered to Jehovah? or can any thing reflect more dishonour upon him in the world[1]?

Let vital godliness be thus contrasted with outward observances, and the text will be seen in its full import.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are regardless of even the forms of religion—

[It is grievous to see how the Sabbaths are profaned, and the ordinances of the Gospel neglected. But consider,

[1] Ps. l. 13, 14.

Brethren, what must be the consequence of defying God in this daring and contemptuous manner? O, that you would lay it to heart, before it be too late!]

2. Those who are attentive to the form, but regardless of the power, of religion—

[To those of your description, our Lord said, "Go, and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice:" and we repeat his words, "Go, and learn this." A clear view of this passage will undeceive you. While you are destitute of faith and love, or not living in the daily exercise of them, you differ but little from those whom we have before addressed. They are open sepulchres, that pour forth their nauseous vapours before all: and you are "whited sepulchres," that, with a fair outside, retain all that is filthy and abominable within. It is with such persons that God himself classes you now[m]; with such, if you repent not, you will be numbered to all eternity.]

3. Those who possess vital religion in their hearts—

[While the generality act as if form were *all*, you are too apt to act as if form were *nothing*. There is in this respect a great fault amongst the professors of the present day: they are too apt to come late to the house of God; and to be irreverent in their postures while the different parts of divine worship are performed; sitting at their ease, when they should be either devoutly kneeling in their supplications, or standing up to sing the praises of Jehovah. This gives occasion to the world to say of you, "*They mind the sermon, but care not at all about the prayers.*" Beloved Brethren, let there be no occasion for such a censure amongst us. It is dishonourable to our profession; it casts a stumbling-block in the way of the ungodly; and it is highly displeasing to our God. Where real necessity prevents an early attendance on God's worship, or infirmity of body requires an easy posture, the text applies in full force: but where these things do not exist, we must reverence the institutions of God and man: and the more humility we have, the more shall we manifest it in the whole of our deportment.]

[m] 2 Tim. iii. 1—5.

MCLVII.

OUR TRANSGRESSIONS OF THE COVENANT.

Hos. vi. 7. *But they, like men, have transgressed the covenant.*

THE merciful nature of God's dispensations greatly aggravates our guilt in violating his commandments. The law indeed which he imposed upon the Jews was in some respects an intolerable burthen; but in other points of view it was replete with love and mercy: for though its requirements were many, yet its provisions for the unintentional violation of its precepts were also numerous, and peculiarly suited to the character and condition of his people. He required of them sacrifices and burnt offerings; but that which he principally desired, was the exercise of holy affections towards himself, and towards each other: and while they were observant of their duties, he pledged himself to watch over them, to protect them, to bless them. But they were by no means sensible of their privileges, or duly affected with his love: on the contrary, "they, like men, transgressed the covenant."

In the margin of our Bibles, the text is translated, "They, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant:" and this seems the more proper translation. The words which are translated, "like men," occur only in two other passages of the Bible: in one of which it is actually translated, "like Adam[a];" and in the other, that sense is evidently most agreeable to the context[b]. Thus in the text also it were far better to render the words, "They, *like Adam*, have transgressed the covenant." It is in this sense we propose to interpret them; and in this sense they are well applicable to ourselves. We shall take occasion from them to shew,

I. What covenant we have transgressed—

[a] Job xxxi. 33.

[b] Ps. lxxxii. 7. "Ye shall die like *Adam*, whose honours were once so great, but were quickly ruined."

The peculiar covenant under which the Jews were, is altogether abrogated: and, as we have never been under *it*, we, of course, have never transgressed it. But we have transgressed,

1. The covenant of works—

[Under this covenant all are by nature: we are born under it: and it is as much in force against us at this time, as it ever was against those to whom it was first given. It requires perfect and perpetual obedience to the two tables of the moral law: and it denounces an everlasting curse against every the smallest violation of God's commandments[c]. It is needless to shew that we have transgressed this covenant; for there has not been one day of our lives, wherein we have not transgressed it in ten thousand instances.]

2. The covenant of grace—

[This is the new covenant which God has made with us, to remedy our breaches of the former covenant. The old covenant said, "Do this, and live;" but the new covenant says, "Believe, and be saved." It proposes to us a Saviour, who has made atonement for our sins, and wrought out a righteousness for us by his own obedience unto death. In, and through, Him reconciliation is offered to us; and God engages to restore to everlasting happiness and glory all who will come to him in the name of Christ.

Now one would imagine that all should eagerly embrace this covenant, and hold it fast, with a determination never to lose the benefits it so freely offers. But the fact is, that men are even more averse to this covenant than to the covenant of works. They cannot endure to depend so entirely on another for their acceptance with God. They think they can make some compensation for their violations of the former covenant, and in some way or other fulfil its conditions so as to secure its rewards. They perhaps will borrow somewhat from the new covenant, just to supply their deficiencies; but they cannot be prevailed upon to renounce the old covenant altogether, and to accept salvation by faith alone.

Let every one look back upon his past experience; and see whether he himself has not been leaning thus to something which he either has done, or has purposed to do, instead of prostrating himself at the Saviour's feet, and imploring mercy *solely* through his blood and righteousness? Yes; whatever we may imagine, this has really been the experience of every living man; such transgressors have we been against the new covenant itself, and against Christ the Mediator of it.]

[c] Gal. iii. 10.

3. The special covenants which we ourselves have individually made with God—

[In our baptism we entered into covenant with God; and engaged to "renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh." At other times also, either at our confirmation by the bishop, or at the Lord's supper, or in a time of sickness, or under conviction of sin, we have resolved that we would repent, and turn unto God in newness of heart and life. But have not the practices of every day contradicted these professions? Have we not broken all our vows and resolutions? And have not the world, the flesh, and the devil, yet too great an ascendency over our hearts? Behold then, "*We* are transgressors of the covenant;" and we have been "transgressors even from the womb."]

To discover more fully the guilt of violating the covenant, let us consider,

II. With what aggravations we have transgressed it—

The having "sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" greatly enhances our guilt; since, in so doing, we have sinned,

1. Against the greatest obligations to obedience—

[The obligations which had been conferred on Adam in Paradise, ought to have kept him steadfast in his obedience. He was endued with faculties superior to any other being upon earth. He was made capable of knowing, loving, and enjoying God; yea, was admitted to the most familiar converse with the Deity. But notwithstanding all these favours, he transgressed. Thus have we also done. Indeed the obligations conferred on us have been infinitely greater than any which Adam enjoyed, even in his state of innocence: for God has given us his only-begotten Son, to take upon him our nature, and to expiate our guilt by his own blood. Who can ever appreciate this favour, or compute its value? The tongue of an archangel cannot fully declare it; nor can any finite mind fully comprehend it. Yet, notwithstanding this obligation, we have sinned: yes; we have transgressed against a redeeming God; and have trampled on that very blood which he shed for our redemption. O what a fearful aggravation is this of all the guilt we have contracted!]

2. Against the strongest motives to obedience—

[Adam had not only his own salvation, but also the salvation of all his posterity, involved in his obedience. According

to the covenant made with him, all his seed, to the very end of time, were to live in him, or in him to die. In this view it must be confessed, that his motives to steadfastness were more powerful than any which can operate on us; unless indeed we balance a regard for the Saviour's glory against his concern for his children's welfare. But, however this may be, our motives to obedience are unspeakably great: the everlasting happiness or misery of our souls is now at stake: heaven with all its glory, or hell with all its torments, must be our portion: and upon our present conduct our eternal state depends. Now can any one reflect a moment on these considerations, and not stand amazed that ever he should be induced to violate the covenant of his God? Is it not astonishing that any thing in the whole universe should prevail upon us to transgress under such circumstances, and to withstand such motives as these?]

3. Under the slightest possible temptations to disobedience—

[There was nothing wanting to Adam in Paradise that could at all conduce to his happiness. Nothing was denied him, but the fruit of one single tree, as a test of his obedience. And what temptation was this to him, who already possessed all that he could reasonably desire? But, slight as the temptation was, he yielded to it. And let us inquire, what our temptations are? A little money, a breath of honour, a momentary gratification, *this* is all that we can promise ourselves by transgressing the covenant: and what is this when set against eternity? What are we the happier at this moment for all our past transgressions? What is left to us from them all, but shame and remorse? And have we any reason to expect that the gratifications of sin in future will be more solid and permanent than those which we have enjoyed in times past? Behold then, this is the price for which we forego the hopes of heaven, and entail upon ourselves the miseries of hell! What desperate, what incredible infatuation!]

INFER—

1. How striking a contrast is there between God and us!

[We violate our covenant continually upon the most trifling temptations, and that too in spite of the strongest motives and obligations to the contrary. But does God ever violate his covenant? He has engaged to receive every returning prodigal, that comes to him in the name of Jesus: and did we ever hear of so much as one whom he spurned from his footstool? He has engaged also to "keep the feet of his saints," and to "perfect that which concerneth them." And

can we adduce one single instance of a *real* saint whom he has finally, and for ever, forsaken? No: he may have left hypocrites, to shew all that was in their hearts; and may have punished his own people with a temporary suspension of his favours; but "he has sworn once by his holiness that he will not lie unto David," or "cast off his people for ever:" and this covenant he never has broken, nor ever will. Yet what motives has he had, or what obligations have been laid upon him, to keep covenant and mercy with us? Truly none. But has he not had temptations enough to abandon us? Yes; such temptations as none but a God of infinite perfections could have withstood. Every day, every hour, every moment, we have been provoking him to anger; but he is the unchangeable Jehovah, and therefore it is that we are not consumed.

O admire then the faithfulness of your God; and abase yourselves before him, as vile, faithless, and rebellious creatures!]

2. How thankful should we be for the covenant of grace!

[The covenant of works made no provision for one single breach of its commands: it instantly, and irreversibly, doomed the transgressor to destruction. But the covenant of grace makes provision for all the offences that ever were committed, provided we seek an interest in it. Here at this moment we may obtain all that we stand in need of. Here is pardon for all our sins; strength against all our temptations; peace to comfort us in all trials: in short, here is grace and glory, and whatever we can desire for body or for soul, for time or for eternity: and all is offered to us freely in the name of Jesus: we have only to believe in Jesus, and all is ours. O Brethren, be thankful for this "covenant, which is ordered in all things and sure;" and embrace it with your whole hearts. Then, notwithstanding your past transgressions of it have been more numerous than the sands upon the sea-shore, they shall all be forgiven; and you shall "stand before God without spot or blemish."]

MCLVIII.

THE FOLLY OF INCONSIDERATION.

Hos. vii. 2. *They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness.*

IT is certain that many who have the Gospel dispensed to them continue ignorant of its very first principles, and "perish at last for lack of knowledge."

But there are still more who destroy their own souls through inconsideration. They will not attend to the things they do know, or suffer the principles they have received to have any influence upon their minds. Thus it was with Israel of old: they committed all manner of abominations[a], and, when God was desirous to "heal them," were bent as much as ever on the prosecution of their own evil ways[b]: and the reason of this is assigned by God himself in the words of our text: it is justly traced to their inconsideration; the *prevalence* and *folly* of which we propose to set before you.

I. The prevalence of inconsideration—

We propose not to speak of inconsideration at large, but only as it respects God's omniscience, and our accountableness to him.

It is an undoubted truth, that God "remembers all our wickedness"—

[*Reason* alone were sufficient to determine this point: for if God do not remember all the transactions of men, how can he judge the world?

If we would ascertain the point from *matter of fact*, we may notice the injunction given to Israel to extirpate the Amalekites, above three hundred years after they had committed the sin for which this judgment was to be inflicted on them[c]. And at the close of David's reign, a famine of three years was sent as a punishment of Saul's treachery in seeking to destroy the Gibeonites; nor was the punishment removed, till exemplary vengeance had been taken on the family of the departed monarch[d].

In *Scripture* there is, as we might well expect, abundant proof of this fundamental axiom. God *declares* it, as in many other places[e], so in the very verse from whence our text is taken[f]. In matters of more than ordinary importance, God often *appeals* to men respecting the truth of his own assertions. Accordingly this is made a subject of appeal; "Is not the wickedness of men sealed up as in a bag, and deposited among my treasures," to be brought forth against them at the day of judgment[g]? Further, because he would have this truth

[a] Hos. vi. 7, 9, 10. [b] ver. 1. [c] 1 Sam. xv. 2.
[d] 2 Sam. xxi. 1—9. [e] Hos. viii. 13. and ix. 9.
[f] "They are before my face."
[g] Deut. xxxii. 34, 35. with Job xiv. 17.

impressed on the minds of all, he even *swears* in confirmation of it; "The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works[h]."]

But plain and important as this truth is, men do not consider it—

[No man is so ignorant as not to be acquainted with this truth. There are many indeed who will put forth atheistical sentiments for the sake of vindicating their own conduct, and silencing the accusations of conscience: they will say, like those of old, "Tush, God shall not see; neither will the Almighty regard it[i]:" but in their sober hours they will not hesitate to confess, that God both sees all their wickedness, and will remember it in order to a future retribution.

But the evil is, that, though men confess this truth, they "do not consider it:" they do not like to give it a place in their minds: they cannot bear to have it suggested to them. If the thought of it arise in their minds, they rush into business, or into company and dissipation, to get rid of it. That they do not consider it, is manifest: for could they sin with so much ease, if they did; or could they maintain such tranquillity of mind after having committed sin? Would not the thought of God's eye being upon them, cast some damp upon their pleasure; and the expectation of a future recompence occasion some disquietude? We are sure that many of those evils which are committed under the cover of the night, would not be committed, if only the presence of a superior should be seasonably interposed. How then must the presence of Almighty God awe us, if we would but duly consider it! Suppose a poisonous draught were put into our hands, and we were informed, that, within a few hours after we had drank it, we should be racked with inexpressible agony, and in the space of one day should die through the excess of torment; should we not reflect a moment before we ventured to drink it? And supposing us infatuated enough to sacrifice our lives for a momentary gratification, should we not put the cup to our lips with a trembling hand? and after we had swallowed the contents, should we not feel some concern, some regret, some sense of our folly? Could we go away and laugh at what we had done, and boast of it, and encourage our friends to do the same? If we could not, the reason is obvious. Much more therefore should we be affected with a dread of future sin, and a sorrow for the past, if we considered who is privy to our actions, and how certainly he will remember them to our everlasting confusion.]

[h] Amos viii. 7. [i] Ps. xciv. 7.

To counteract this prevailing thoughtlessness, we will endeavour to expose,

II. The folly of it—

Such inconsideration can be productive of no good, and must be attended with incalculable mischief to the soul—

1. It will not induce forgetfulness in God—

[Amongst our fellow-creatures our conduct may have considerable effect: and others may be lulled asleep by means of our security. But God is occupied in his work, whether we be in ours or not. He wakes, though we sleep: he sees, though we think ourselves hid from his sight: he marks, though we are regardless of him: nor does he ever feel more indignation, than when we feel ourselves most secure and composed. We may "think wickedly that he is even such an one as ourselves; but he will reprove us for what we have done amiss, and will set it in order before our eyes[k]." Nor is it the *act* only of murder or adultery that he will remember, but the *look*, the *desire*, the *thought*, yea "*all*" our wickedness, of whatever kind or whatever degree.]

2. It will rob us of all the benefits we might receive by reflection—

[If we did but consider that God has noted down all our wickedness, the next thought would be, How shall we get it blotted out of his book? This would lead us to see the inefficacy of our tears to wash away our guilt; and would stimulate us to inquire after that Saviour, whose "blood cleanses from all sin." Thus we might obtain the remission of our sins, and be restored to the favour of our offended God. But inconsideration robs us of all this. We shall never repent of our evil ways, till we have "considered" them. We shall never seek for mercy, till we have "considered" our guilt and danger. We shall never flee to Christ, till we have "considered" our need of him. "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Can a thoughtless sinner take this view of the subject, and not confess his folly?]

3. It will lead us only to multiply our offences against God—

[The necessary consequence of inconsideration is, that we continue to live each succeeding day and year in the same manner as we did in time past; and, in many cases, harden ourselves more and more in wickedness. If we would at the

[k] Ps. l. 21.

close of every day call ourselves to an account how the day had been spent, and what God had recorded concerning us in the book of his remembrance, we should certainly abstain from many sins, which we now commit without thought or remorse. *Even if the Sabbath alone were spent in this holy exercise, we should be kept from rushing into perdition as the horse into the battle.* But we are like a spendthrift, who, never considering how great his debts are, or how he shall discharge them, runs on from one extravagance to another, till he has accumulated a debt which involves him in disgrace and misery. Yea, we resemble a man on the eve of bankruptcy, who, knowing that his affairs are ruined, cannot endure to examine his accounts, but proceeds in the best way he can, till the fatal hour arrives, and his insolvency is declared. But, oh! what madness is it thus to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath!"]

4. It will certainly issue in long and painful reflection—

[We may shake off reflection here; but the time is coming when we must and shall consider. God has said, "In the latter day ye shall consider it perfectly[l]. Yes, as soon as we come into the eternal world, we shall have a perfect view of all our past wickedness: we shall see it, not as we do now, through the medium of prejudice and self-love, but as God sees it, in all its enormity and with all its aggravations. The sins of thought as well as of act, the sins of omission as well as of commission, will all be open to our view; and there will be no possibility of diverting our attention from them. God bids us now consider; and we will not: but what shall we do in that day when he shall answer our cries with this severe rebuke, "Son, REMEMBER[m]?" 'Remember the sins committed; remember the warnings neglected; remember the mercies abused; remember the opportunities lost.' O sad remembrance! O dreary prospect of unalterable irremediable misery! Were it not then better to consider in time, when the most painful reflections will be salutary, than to protract the period of consideration till it shall be ten thousand times more painful, and altogether unavailing?]

ADVICE—

1. Call your past ways to remembrance—

[However long since any sins may have been committed, they are as fresh in God's memory, and as hateful in his sight, as if they had been committed this very hour. Endeavour then to get the same view of them as he has. Collect them all together: and what a dreadful mass will they appear! If

[l] Jer. xxiii. 20. [m] Luke xvi. 25.

you could suppose them all to have been crowded into the space of one day, and yesterday to have been the day in which they were all committed, what a monster would you appear in your own eyes! Yet, admitting the enormity of each sin to have been precisely such as it was at the moment of its commission, and such as it exists at present, such is the light in which you are viewed by God. Turn not away your eyes from this painful sight: you must behold it sooner or later: if you delay to look at it, the black catalogue of crimes will still increase, and the sight of them be yet more terrible. In the name of God then, I entreat you all, "CONSIDER YOUR WAYS[n]."]

2. Seek to have your sins blotted out from the book of God's remembrance—

[It has already been observed, that this may be done. Though you neither have, nor can have, any thing to merit such a favour, God is willing to bestow it for his own name's sake: his word to you is, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins[o]. He even promises to "cast them into the very depths of the sea[p]," from whence they shall never be brought against you: yea, he "covenants" to efface them, as it were from his own memory; and says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will *remember* their sin *no more*[q]." And will you not seek this mercy? Is it too soon yet awhile for you to enjoy it? Will you not be happier in the possession of it, than in the continuance of your sins? Think how such a proposal would be received by those who are now reflecting upon their ways in hell: would they need to be urged a second time to ask for mercy? O seek it instantly; seek it with all importunity; seek it in the adorable name of Jesus; seek it after the example of the saints of old[r]: and then, "though your sins have been as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they have been red like crimson, they shall be white as wool."]

3. Endeavour to walk as in the presence of God—

[A sense of the Divine presence will be an excellent preservative from sin. We know how careful we are of our conduct in the presence of any one whose good opinion we value: let us "set the Lord always before us[s]," in order that our circumspection may be increased, and that we may be kept as much from secret as from open sin, from sin in the heart as well as sin in the life. Let us "commune much with our own hearts

[n] Hagg. i. 5, 7. [o] Isai. xliii. 25. [p] Mic. vii. 19.
[q] Jer. xxxi. 34. [r] Ps. xxv. 7. and lxxix. 8.
[s] Ps. xvi. 8, 9. and li. 1, 2, 7.

in our chamber, and be still[t]." Let us strive to keep a conscience void of offence, and to approve ourselves in all things to "Him, who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins." Let it be our ambition, that on every day more and more acts of piety may be recorded in the book of God's remembrance; that so he may "remember us for good[u]" while we are here on earth, and welcome us as "good and faithful servants" when we enter into the eternal world.]

[t] Ps. iv. 4. [u] See Neh. xiii. 14, 22, 31. and Ps. cvi. 4, 5.

MCLIX.

CAUSES AND SYMPTOMS OF SPIRITUAL DECAY.

Hos. vii. 8, 9. *Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people: Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not.*

IF the body be oppressed with sickness, we inquire into the symptoms of the disorder, and trace it, if possible, to its proper cause. The same course is proper in reference to the soul, and indeed to the state of nations as well as of individuals. The prophet is representing the declining, and almost desolate, condition of the ten tribes: and, in the words before us, he marks the particular sins which had provoked God to forsake them; and the fearful consequences of their transgressions. The Israelites had, in direct opposition to God's command, united themselves with the heathen, and incorporated many of their idolatrous rites with the worship of the true God. They were even "mad upon their idols," while they were very cold and indifferent in what related to Jehovah. In consequence of this, God gave them up into the hands of their enemies. Pul, king of Assyria, exhausted their treasures by the tribute he imposed[a]: and the king of Syria reduced their armies to a mere shadow, "making them even as the dust by threshing[b]." Proofs and evidences of decay were visible in every department of the state, and such as indicated approaching dissolution: yet

[a] 2 Kings xv. 19. [b] 2 Kings xiii. 7.

such was the infatuation of the people, that they were as unconcerned and secure as if they had been in the most safe and flourishing condition.

It is not however our intention to enter any further into the history of the ten tribes. We shall rather draw your attention to our own personal concerns, of which theirs was a type and shadow: and we shall proceed to point out the causes and symptoms of spiritual decay.

I. The causes—

The two things mentioned in the text will be found among the most fruitful sources of declension in the divine life:

1. An undue connexion with the world—

[A certain degree of intercourse with mankind is necessary, in order to a due discharge of our civil and social duties. But if we mix with the world by choice, we shall go contrary to the commands of God, and suffer loss in our souls. We are enjoined to "come out from among them, and be separate[c]." God even appeals to us respecting the impossibility of maintaining with propriety any intimate communion with them[d]: and our Lord characterizes his followers as being no more of the world than he himself was[e]. But some professors of religion connect themselves more closely, and involve themselves more deeply, with the world *in business*, than they need to do: others associate with them *as companions*: and others are so blinded by their passions, as to unite themselves with them *in marriage*. What must we expect to be the result of such conduct? Must it not expose us to many temptations? Are we not, when so circumstanced, likely to drink into the spirit of the world, and to be drawn into a conformity to their ways? Surely the falls and apostasies of many must be traced to this source: and it will be well if this evil do not become fatal to some of *us*.]

2. A partial regard to God—

[A "cake" baked upon the coals and "not turned," would be burned up on one side, while it was altogether doughy on the other. This fitly represents the state of those who are cold and indifferent in things relating to religion, but excessively ardent in their pursuit of other objects. Yet what is more common than such a state? Some professors are so

[c] Rom. xii. 2. Ps. xlv. 10, 11. [d] 2 Cor. vi. 14—17.
[e] John xvii. 14.

intent on their *worldly business*, and have their hearts so engaged in it, as scarcely to have any zeal left for better things. Some are occupied with this or that *favourite study*, in comparison of which the Bible, and prayer, and communion with God, have no charms for them. Some are inflamed by *politics*, and are never happy but when they are declaiming upon the affairs of state. Some are so intent upon *the circumstantials of religion*, such as Baptism or Church-government, that they seem to think an agreement with them in their opinions on those subjects as essential to salvation as even piety itself. Some again are heated by *controversy about certain doctrines*, while, alas! they pay but little attention to their duties, especially the duties of humility and love. What wonder if the soul languish, when its eternal interests are thus postponed to matters of inferior importance? If we would adorn our holy profession, we must be *penetrated throughout* with a fervent regard to God; and all other things must be subordinated to the one thing needful.]

Having traced the causes of spiritual decay, let us notice,

II. The symptoms—

Agreeably to what has been observed in relation to the Israelites, we shall mention three marks, which, in the progressive stages of decay, will shew themselves in a declining soul:

1. Inward weakness—

[The exercises of religion require our utmost efforts: without a fixedness of purpose, an intenseness of thought, an ardour of desire, and a resoluteness of conduct, we cannot get forward in our Christian course. But when we have declined from God, all these are proportionably relaxed. The bow is unstrung, and cannot send the arrow to the mark[f]. We take up the Bible; but it is a sealed book: we address ourselves to prayer; but our mouths are shut, and we cannot utter a word before God. The duties which once were easy, are become arduous and irksome. The temptations which once had lost all their force, now obstruct our way, and entangle our feet. The cross, which was once an object of holy glorying, and served only to animate us to fresh exertions, now becomes an object of terror; and instead of taking it up with cheerfulness, we study as much as possible to avoid it.

Let us look and see, whether "strangers have not devoured our strength," and whether "the things which remain in us be not ready to die[g]."]

[f] Hos. vii. 16. [g] Rev. iii. 2.

2. Outward proofs of that weakness—

["Grey hairs" are indications of declining strength. They are first thinly interspersed; and afterwards diffused over the whole head. Thus are the symptoms of decline small at first, and scarcely visible, except upon close inspection. They will however appear, when the inward weakness has commenced. There will be a visible alteration *in the temper:* a proud imperious spirit will be more ready to shew itself: fretfulness and impatience will more easily arise. A change will be found *in our dealings with the world.* We shall be less open, less generous, less scrupulous about adhering to truth, or practising the tricks of trade. *In our families* also will a deterioration of our state be manifest. There will be less attention paid to their spiritual interests. The word of God will not be read to them with such practical and interesting remarks: nor will the devotions be conducted with life; but will degenerate into a mere form. *In the closet,* more especially, the symptoms of our decay will be seen. Prayer will probably be a mere lip-service, and not unfrequently be entirely omitted. The sacred volume will either be glanced over in haste, or lie wholly neglected. In short, there will be no delight in God, no peaceful serenity of mind, no joyful hope of immortality. These things will be exchanged for gloom and melancholy, for sighs and sorrows, for an accusing conscience, and a dread of death.]

3. Insensibility under that weakness—

[Things have proceeded far when this mark appears. But it is the natural effect of sin to blind the eyes, and harden the heart, and sear the conscience[h]. *Twice* is it said of the Israelites in the text, "They knew it not:" they had contracted a stupid indifference, bordering on judicial blindness and infatuation. And this is the state to which many professors of religion are reduced. Others see their grey hairs, but they see them not: they have ceased to look into the glass of God's law, or to examine themselves: they have quieted their minds by some carnal expedient of business, or company, or by comparing themselves with others. Deplorable indeed is their condition! and if they be not soon roused from their lethargy, they will have reason to wish they had never been born, or never seen the light of Gospel truth[i].]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are resting in a formal religion—

[Religion is a state of holy active exertion in the things pertaining to God. God says to us, "My son, give me thy

[h] 1 John ii. 11. Heb. iii. 13. 1 Tim. iv. 2. [i] 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

heart[k]." Without this, our services are of no value. Look to it then, my Brethren, that ye get your hearts quickened by the Spirit of God. You must not be satisfied with seeking: "you must strive to enter in at the strait gate[l]." You must "take the kingdom of heaven by violence[m]." Beg then that you may be "renewed by the Spirit in your inward man," and be enabled, so to fight as to conquer, so to run as to win the prize[n].]

2. Those who profess to experience "the power of godliness"—

[Astonishing is the deceitfulness of the human heart. We all see in others defects, of which they themselves are not conscious. And can we suppose that we ourselves also are not blind to our own defects? Yes: and perhaps the very locks which we think our greatest ornaments, are full of grey hairs. Our graces perhaps are rather the resemblance, than the reality, of virtue: our humility may be affectation, our zeal pride, our confidence presumption. Let us "be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy[o]." Let us search and try ourselves[p]; and beg of God also to search and try us[q]. Let us be careful that we set out well, and then labour to "go on from strength to strength, till we appear before God in Zion[r]."]

[k] Prov. xxiii. 26. [l] Luke xiii. 24. [m] Matt. xi. 12.
[n] 1 Cor. ix. 24, 26. [o] 2 Cor. xi. 2. [p] Lam. iii. 40.
[q] Ps. cxxxix. 23. [r] Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

MCLX.

GUILT AND DANGER OF AN UNCONVERTED STATE.

Hos. vii. 13. *Woe unto them! for they have fled from me: destruction unto them! because they have transgressed against me: though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me.*

SUCH is the infatuation of unregenerate men, that they always promise themselves security in the ways of sin: but it is certain that they are never more in danger than when they fancy themselves most secure: they may be well compared to a bird that is allured to a net: it hears the notes that call and invite it to the society of some kindred bird: fearless of danger, it obeys the summons: it hastens to the place from whence the sound issues, little thinking that, instead of a companion, it shall find a

foe. The fowler, however, who has spread the net, sees that the unsuspecting bird is quickly to resign its liberty, and perhaps its life. Thus it is with those who listen to the enchanting voice of sin: they follow it, but know not that it is for their life[a]: The word of Jehovah is gone forth, nor can it ever be reversed: it says, "Woe unto the wicked, it shall go ill with him;" and, "when he saith, Peace and safety, then shall sudden destruction come upon him as travail upon a woman with child, and he shall not escape." To this purpose God speaks to the Israelites in the passage before us: he says, "Ephraim is like a silly dove, without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria: but when they go, I will spread my net upon them; I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven." Having thus represented their danger in figurative expressions, he declares it plainly in the most awful terms: "Woe unto them, for they have fled from me! destruction unto them, because they have transgressed against me! though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me." From these words, we will endeavour to set before you,

I. The state of men in general—

[To those who can see nothing but the outward conduct, there may appear to be a very considerable difference between the states of different men: the moral and decent may be esteemed exceeding righteous and good, while the openly vicious and profane are execrated as exceeding vile. And it must be acknowledged, that, as far as the conduct of these different persons respects society, there is a great difference between them; but God, who looks at the heart, and estimates every thing by the respect it has to him, sees that all men are very nearly, if not altogether, upon a level; all men appear to him as "sepulchres, full of all uncleanness:" some indeed appear whited and outwardly adorned, while others are open, and discover all their deformity. Still, however, inwardly they are all the same.

In the first place, all "*flee from him.*" Adam had no sooner sinned, than he lost his delight in God, and fled from the presence of his Maker. From that time, all his descendants have felt the same aversion to intercourse with

[a] Prov. vii. 23.

the Deity: they love not the ordinances where God reveals himself to men: when God calls them, "they all begin with one consent to make excuse:" some plead their social engagements; others the pressure of worldly business; all have some plea to make; all say, in effect, I *can* not, or, I *will* not, come. In dangers or in troubles, they will rather go to the creature than to God: even under a sense of sin, they will rather flee to their own resolutions, and trust in their own endeavours, than they will rely upon the strength and righteousness of the Lord Jesus. When God calls, they turn a deaf ear to his invitations. When he follows them, as it were, by the convictions of his Spirit, they actually "*flee from him:*" they shake off the thoughts that trouble them; they endeavour to drown reflection in business or pleasure; and the whole language of their hearts and actions is, like theirs in Job, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways[b]."

But the aversion to God which carnal men feel, is carried much further: they not only flee from him, as finding no pleasure, no satisfaction in his presence, but they also "*transgress against him.*" The law is yet in a measure written on their hearts, but they will not comply with its dictates: they see clearly, in many things, that such or such a course of action must be displeasing to God, and "that they who do such things are worthy of death; yet they both do these things themselves, and have pleasure in those that do them;" choosing them for their companions, and countenancing them in their actions: nor is this occasionally only, and through temptation or inadvertence: no; it is the settled course and tenour of their lives. The commands or prohibitions of God have no weight with them: whatever is reputable in the world, or agreeable to themselves, *that* they do; whenever their sensual inclinations or worldly interests strongly bias them to any line of conduct, it soon appears that they have cast off the yoke of God, and that they feel no restraint whatever, except that which arises from temporal considerations.

Nor is this all: they "*speak lies against God:*" they declare, in the face of the whole world, that the service of sin and Satan is to be preferred before the service of God. In every transgression they commit, they *virtually* speak to this effect; 'This is happiness: as for obedience to God, that would be an insupportable restraint: true happiness consists in renouncing all allegiance to God, and in following our own will.' Moreover they say, like those of old, "The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil[c];" *i. e.* 'if we serve him, we shall have no profit; nor shall we sustain any loss if we

[b] Job xxi. 14. [c] Zeph. i. 12.

serve him not.' We must remember, that God interprets our actions; and considers men as speaking those things which their conduct shews to be the secret language of their hearts. And indeed this is strictly just; for all must allow, that actions speak more forcibly, and more truly, than words. But will not the Lord do good or evil? Will he not reward those that diligently seek him? Will he clear the guilty, and suffer them to pass unpunished? No, assuredly; "he will put a difference between the righteous and the wicked; between those who serve him, and those who serve him not[d]." Yet such are the lies which ungodly men are speaking against him.

Let any one say, whether this be not really the state of carnal unregenerate men? Do they not thus flee from God's presence, transgress against his laws, and, in their conduct at least, misrepresent him to the world? Let us look round the world, and see whether this be not a true picture of mankind? Let us look into our own bosoms, and see whether it do not exactly represent ourselves? It may be, that we have not been so openly immoral as others: but yet, if we will examine our own hearts, we shall see that we have been as far from any real delight in secret communion with God as the most profligate man on earth. We have been as far from sacrificing all our own interests and inclinations to the will and law of God as the most flagrant rebel in the world: nor have we, in our actions, been living witnesses for the truth of God, any more than those who have denied every word of the Bible. This then is clearly the state of all unregenerate men.]

We come now to shew you,

II. The peculiar sinfulness of their state—

[If, without attending to any collateral circumstances, we were simply to point out the evil which is contained in the foregoing conduct, methinks the state of such men would appear beyond measure sinful: but the sinfulness of it is greatly aggravated by the consideration in my text; "Though I have *redeemed* them, yet have they spoken lies against me."

If we call to mind the mercies which had been vouchsafed to the Israelites, we shall perceive that the malignity of their sins was exceedingly enhanced by the obligations which had been conferred upon them: they had been delivered from their bondage in Egypt, and brought to a land flowing with milk and honey. Such an interposition as this never had been known from the beginning of the world: that God should go and take an oppressed nation out of the midst of another nation; that he should reign over them as their king; that he

[d] Mal. iii. 18.

should destroy seven nations greater and mightier than they, and establish them in the possession of their land; that he should, in ten thousand instances, step forth as their protector and deliverer, when they were reduced to the lowest state of wretchedness and misery; that he should vouchsafe them, not one redemption only, but many; this, I say, required the most ample returns of gratitude and obedience: the ingratitude therefore which they manifested, stamped a tenfold malignity on every sin they committed. But we have an infinitely better redemption vouchsafed to us: a Redemption of which theirs was but a type and shadow. We have been redeemed from *a far sorer bondage*, even from bondage to sin and Satan; from all the curses of the broken law; from all the miseries of death and hell. We have also been *brought into a better land;* not to the possession of mere temporal comforts, but to spiritual and eternal happiness; to the society of glorified saints and angels; to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and never-fading; in short, to all the glory of heaven. This has been accomplished also for us by *far more wonderful and endearing means:* God has sent his own Son into our guilty world; sent him to become a man, and to stand in our stead; sent him to give his own life a ransom for us; sent him to pay down the price of our redemption; and has appointed him to bring forth every one of his redeemed; to support and guide them through this dreary wilderness, and to conduct them, with a mighty hand and an out-stretched arm, to the full possession of their inheritance. O, what a Redemption is this! What obligations does this lay upon us to be faithful and obedient! And what a fearful aggravation must this be of all our disobedience! Yet, behold, we are the persons whose transgressions are so multiplied: we are they whom Christ came from heaven to seek and save: and yet we flee from his presence: we are they, for whose sakes "he gave himself, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works;" and yet we are continually transgressing against him: we are they towards whom he has shewn such astonishing love and mercy; and yet we are saying, that he regards us not, and that it will be in vain to serve him. Ah, Brethren, is there no guilt in such a state? and shall not God be avenged of such a people as this? Do not look at your sins merely as they affect society; *that* is no just criterion; *that* is no proper test. Estimating your conduct merely in *that* view, you will be ready to applaud yourselves as righteous, if you should happen to have escaped the grosser pollutions of the world: but view your sins as contrasted with the love of Christ; see him dying to bring you nigh to God, and yet yourselves "fleeing from God;" see him shedding his blood to cleanse you from sin, and yet yourselves continuing to "trans-

gress;" see him faithfully executing every thing he had undertaken for you, and yet yourselves "lying against him." *This* is the light wherein to view your conduct. Draw nigh, then, and see it; ponder it in your hearts; consider it well. What offence can a servant commit against his master, or a child against his parent, or a man against his benefactor, that can bear any proportion to the smallest offence that you have committed against Christ? and yet you have offended times without number, and that too without any remorse; as though men were bound to requite your kindnesses, but you were at liberty to trample upon the most sacred obligations that God is able to confer upon you. Ah, Beloved! know every one of you, that "God seeth not as man seeth;" he considers things not according to man's estimation, but as they really are: and when he shall call you to an account, you will see every sin aggravated by redeeming love: you will see that, in fact, you "crucify Christ afresh, you trample under foot his blood, you put him to an open shame." And "shall not God visit for these things?" Yes, assuredly.]

I will proceed therefore to set before you,

III. The danger of such a state—

[You can bear me witness, my Brethren, that I delight not in setting forth the terrors of the Lord. I find it far more pleasant to be publishing the glad tidings, and to be expatiating on the fulness and freeness of the Gospel salvation: but I must not conceal from you what God speaks concerning you. Were I to be unfaithful to you in this respect, I should but betray your souls to ruin; and "your blood would be required at my hands." Attend therefore to the solemn denunciations of God's wrath against you: hear, I say, and tremble: hear, and lift up your hearts to God for mercy and deliverance: "Woe unto them, for they have fled from me! Destruction unto them, because they have transgressed against me!" Woe and destruction comprehend both present and eternal misery. There is much woe, even in this life, as the consequence of sin. Who can tell the alarms which haunt the wicked in their secret retirements? Who can tell the apprehensions they feel at the approach of death? I know that they may "sear their consciences," so far as to become "past feeling:" and they may delude themselves with ungrounded hopes, so far as even to attain a confidence of their safety: but notwithstanding this, it is certain that "there is no peace to the wicked:" wherever they go, and whatever they do, they have no solid peace: they are either harassed with tumultuous passions, or terrified with misgiving fears. God has said repeatedly, that "there is no peace to the wicked." But let us suppose that they pass through

life with tolerable serenity; what will they do at the instant of their departure from the body? Then they will begin to understand the meaning of the word "destruction:" *now* perhaps they listen to it with indifference; but *then* they cannot remain insensible to it. What terror must seize them when they behold the face of incensed Majesty! when they see that God, whose laws they have trampled on, and that Saviour whose redemption they have slighted! What agony must pierce their souls, when they hear him say, "Depart, accursed, into everlasting fire!" And, when they are hurled headlong into the bottomless abyss, when they are lying down in flames of fire, and know that they must "dwell with everlasting burnings," how will they gnash their teeth with anguish! how will they curse the day that they were born! how will they curse themselves for their own folly in neglecting redeeming love! But can it be, that they who live in the state before described, are exposed to all this misery? Yes, "Woe unto them! Destruction unto them!" saith Jehovah. And the apostle says, "that they who know not God and obey not his Gospel," or, in other words, they who flee from God and trample on redeeming love, "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power[e]." The whole sacred volume attests and confirms this awful truth: every part of it speaks to the same effect as David, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God[f]."

Now, my Brethren, deceive not your own souls. To what purpose will it be, to be speaking peace to yourselves, when God is denouncing "woe and destruction" unto you? If you say that you are not the worst of sinners, what will that avail you? If you say that you are honest, and just, and sober, what is all that to the purpose? This, and more than this, the Pharisee could say for himself; yet was he not hereby justified. The only question is, Do you answer to the character drawn in my text? Have you not "fled from God?" have you not "transgressed against him?" have you not "spoken lies against him?" If you are disposed to deny any of these charges, consider with yourselves, Have you sought your happiness in communion with God? and, when he has said, "Seek ye my face," has your heart always answered, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek?" Are you not also transgressors against his law? Have you not been just now acknowledging upon your knees, that "you have done those things which you ought not to have done, and left undone those things which you ought to have done?" And can you affirm that the constant course and tenour of your life has proclaimed to all around you, that

[e] 2 Thess. i. 8, 9. [f] Ps. ix. 17.

"to fear God and keep his commandments was the whole end and happiness of man?" No; "every mouth must be shut; and not you only, but the whole world, must become guilty before God." Know then that you, and that every man, while in an unregenerate state, is exposed to the wrath of God; and that that wrath will come upon you to the uttermost, if you "flee not for refuge to the Hope set before you."]

We will now CONCLUDE, with two inferences from the whole:

1. What suitable provision is made for us in the Gospel!

[You have seen the awful state of unregenerate men, and will be ready to doubt whether there can be any help or hope for persons so circumstanced. But thanks be to our God and Father, that he has not left us to perish in our sins! on the contrary, he has pitied us, and sent us his only dear Son to deliver us from our lost estate. Numberless as our iniquities have been, they were all laid upon the head of Jesus, our great Sacrifice: all were expiated by his blood; so that God can be "just, and yet the justifier of those who repent and believe" the Gospel. O Brethren, be thankful for this provision: be thankful that you are not only permitted, but commanded, to come to Christ for a free and full remission of all your sins. Have you "fled from" your God and Father? Behold! Jesus, his beloved Son, is come to seek and save you. Have you "transgressed against" him times without number? The blood of Jesus is shed to cleanse you from all sin. Have you in the whole course of your life "spoken nothing but lies" against your adorable Redeemer? That very Redeemer will make you to experience his inviolable truth, in receiving you to mercy, and in rejecting none that come unto him. Surely, if bread be suited to the hungry, or water to the thirsty, then is the provision set before us in the Gospel exactly suited to the wants and necessities of all who feel their need of mercy.]

2. How happy are they who have cordially embraced the Gospel!

[In two respects have they experienced a most blessed change; namely, in their character and condition. You have heard that the natural and unconverted man flees from God, transgresses against him, and speaks lies against him. Not so the man that is converted: he flees to God; he seeks the Divine presence; he desires the favour of God more than life, and esteems "his loving-kindness better than life itself." If any ask him, "Who will shew us any good?" his answer is, like David's, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance

upon us." He now also desires to serve and obey God: it is his grief and burthen that he cannot get rid of sin; he longs for holiness; he desires to be changed into the Divine image; he wishes to be in heaven, not merely because he shall there be free from trouble, but because he shall be free from sin. And now, too, he is a living witness for the truth of God: he "sets to his seal that God is true:" he is not afraid to testify before the whole world, that God's service is perfect freedom, and that "*in* keeping his commandments there is great reward:" his whole life proclaims to those around him, that God is a mighty God, and greatly to be feared; yet that he is also a loving, merciful, and faithful God, and therefore worthy to be loved and trusted with the whole heart. You have heard also that woe and destruction are denounced against the unconverted; but there is no woe, no destruction, to the converted soul: no; "his sins are put away from him, as far as the east is from the west:" while the iniquities of the ungodly are (as we are told) "sealed up in a bag," to be brought forth against them in the day of judgment, the iniquities that have been committed by a converted soul, are, from the first moment of his conversion, "cast into the depths of the sea[g];" not into the shallows, from whence they might be recovered, but into the depths, never more to be brought to remembrance. Whoever then ye be, who have embraced the Gospel, rejoice, and leap for joy, on account of the blessed change that you have experienced. If your consciences testify, that you are really seeking after God, that you desire to be delivered from all sin, and that you are endeavouring to be witnesses for God in the world, rejoice; "for it becometh well your souls to be thankful." You have been redeemed; rejoice therefore in the redemption vouchsafed unto you: "you are bought with a price; therefore glorify God with your bodies and your spirits, which are God's."]

[g] Mic. vii. 19.

MCLXI.

THE PRAYERS OF UNREGENERATE MEN CONSIDERED.

Hos. vii. 14. *They have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds.*

IT is not without reason that prayer has been called by some, the pulse of the soul: for by *that* more than by any thing else may be discerned the increase or declension of our spiritual health. Somewhat like prayer may be offered by the most ungodly in

seasons of deep distress: but their supplications differ widely from those which proceed from a penitent and contrite heart. The ten tribes, who, in despite of all the warnings given them, would go to Egypt and Assyria, rather than to God, for help, found themselves taken in the net which God had spread for them. *Then* they began to call upon God for help: but, the heart-searching God testifies respecting them, that they cried not unto him with their heart when they howled upon their beds.

To shew how common and awful this state is, we shall,

I. Consider the prayers of unregenerate men—

It is confessed such persons often "howl upon their beds"—

[In these words two things are to be noticed, namely, the *time*, and the *manner* of their prayers. With respect to the *time*, it is too generally found, that they who are not in earnest about their salvation, defer their prayers till bed-time: instead of transacting their business with God whilst their faculties are alive, they stay till exhausted nature is become incapable of any energetic exertion; and then hurry over some form of prayer, as a school-boy does his task, without feeling one word they utter. Even this is too favourable a representation of the prayers of many; who stay till they have lain down "*upon* their bed," and then fall asleep in the midst of their devotions. As for praying in the morning, they have no time for that: the concerns of the past, or of the present day have pre-occupied their minds; and if they offer two or three cold petitions while they are dressing, it is quite as much as their necessities require, or as God deserves. As to the *manner*, we may interpret the prophet's expression as importing in general, that their prayers are altogether *irrational*, and *forced*: and indeed, if we take into the account the state of the suppliants as guilty and condemned sinners, and the majesty of him whom they profess to address, their prayers are a most horrid mockery, yea, as unsuitable to the occasion as the "howling" of a dog would be. But the expression may be taken more strictly and literally: for these persons will not pray with any degree of fervour, except in seasons of great affliction. Perhaps they have suffered some heavy loss, or are in embarrassed circumstances, or have some peculiar guilt upon their conscience, that greatly disturbs them; but even then they have no disposition to spread their case before God; and so they lie down upon

their beds as miserable as they can be, "howling" and whining like dogs, and perhaps wishing that they were dogs, or any thing, rather than rational and accountable beings[a].]

But, whatever their prayers be, "they cry not unto God with their heart"—

[View them in their *public* devotions; they will confess themselves "miserable sinners," and implore mercy for Christ's sake at the hands of God, and desire grace from him "that they may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of his holy name:" but if they were afterwards told by their minister, that they were miserable and hell-deserving sinners; that nothing but an application of the blood of Christ to their souls could ever save them; and that, to evince the sincerity of their repentance, they must devote themselves unreservedly to God; they would shew by their answers, that they neither believed, nor desired, any one of the things, which they had uttered before God.

Inquire, further, into their *private* prayers, and it will be found that they are not sincere in any petition that they offer. If, for instance, they were to pray that they might become true and faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus; and Jesus were to tell them, as he did the Rich Youth in the Gospel, that they must first give up all that they possess in this world, before they can be brought to love him supremely and to serve him acceptably; would they reply to him, "Thy will be done?" Would they not rather plead for this or that possession, "O, spare it; is it not a little one?" and, when they found that the terms could not be lowered, would they not pray back again their prayers with ten-fold more earnestness than they at first uttered them; yea, and forego all their hope in Christ, rather than sacrifice their worldly interests?

Such are the prayers of the unregenerate, *if they pray at all:* but the greater part of them, except on very particular occasions, do not so much as preserve even an appearance of devotion[b].]

We shall have a little clearer view of the worthlessness of such prayers, if we,

II. Contrast them with those of the regenerate—

In every thing that is essential to prayer, the difference may be seen. Particularly they differ in respect of,

[a] See this exemplified in David, Ps. xxxii. 3, 4.

[b] Mark x. 21, 22. This shews with what lamentable propriety they speak of "*saying* their prayers."

1. Voluntariness—

[The wicked will pray only under some heavy calamity, or in the near prospect of death and judgment[c]: all their petitions are extorted by anguish or by terror. The regenerate, on the contrary, go to God willingly and cheerfully as to their father and their friend. We do not mean to say, that the godly never feel backwardness to this duty (for, alas! they too often do) but they do not indulge it; they do not rest satisfied in such a state; they condemn themselves for it as much as an unregenerate person would condemn himself for the grossest sins: and when they are enabled, in any measure, to realize their principles, they account it their sweetest privilege to draw nigh to God, and to pour out their souls before him: they even pant for God as the hart after the water brooks, and "go to him as to their exceeding joy[d]."]

2. Constancy—

[When the distresses or terrors, that instigated the ungodly to prayer, are removed, there is an end of the importunity which was occasioned by them[e]. The persons who for a while seemed melted in the furnace, are no sooner taken out of it, than they return to their wonted coldness and obduracy. But a regenerate person can say, "My heart is fixed, O Lord, my heart is fixed:" "at evening, and at morning, and at noon-day will I pray, and that instantly[f]." There are seasons indeed, when he may, through the corruptions of his heart, be led to relax his diligence: but he can never give over prayer: whether he be in prosperity or adversity, he feels that he is altogether dependent upon God, both for his present and eternal happiness; and therefore he returns again and again to God, in order to maintain fellowship with him, and to receive at his hands the blessings he stands in need of.]

3. Humility—

[Persons may use very strong language and express a kind of indignation against themselves in reference to their inward corruptions, while yet they are not truly humbled before God: but true humility consists, not in vehement expressions, but in a tenderness of spirit mixed with self-lothing and self-abhorrence[g]. Of *this*, an unregenerate man has no conception: yet it is this that constitutes the chief excellence of prayer; and without it our prayers can find no more acceptance with God, than the howling of a dog[h]. In this view,

[c] Jer. ii. 27. Ps. lxxviii. 34. Isai. xxvi. 16.
[d] Ps. xlii. 1, 2. and xliii. 4.
[e] Job xxvii. 10.
[f] Ps. lvii. 7. and lv. 17.
[g] Job xlii. 6. Ezek. xx. 43.
[h] Matt. xv. 8, 9.

God himself calls the services of the temple a hateful "noise[i];" and declares that the offering of a lamb with an unhumbled spirit, is as odious in his sight, as the offering of swine's blood, or "the cutting off a dog's neck[k]."]

INFER—

1. How little dependence can be placed on a death-bed repentance!

[Far be it from us to discourage repentance at the last hour. On the contrary, if we behold symptoms of it, we would in the judgment of charity conclude well respecting its issue. But it is God alone who can perfectly distinguish between the feigned humiliation of Ahab, and the sincere contrition of Peter: and perhaps, where we think we hear the supplications of a Christian, God may hear nothing but the howling of a dog. Repentance, like every Christian grace, must be judged of by its fruits: and if we would have in ourselves, or leave in the mind of surviving friends, an unquestionable evidence of our sincerity, let us repent without delay, and "bring forth fruits meet for repentance."]

2. What encouragement have all real penitents to call upon God!

[As God can distinguish hypocrites in the midst of their most specious services, so can he discern the upright in the midst of all their infirmities. The sigh, the groan, the tear, the broken accents of contrition, are more pleasing to him than the most fluent petitions that are destitute of a divine unction[l]. Let none then be discouraged because they do not find a ready utterance in prayer; but let them be chiefly solicitous to "cry to God with their hearts." Then they will have nothing to fear; for God "will hear them, yea, and answer too, while they are yet speaking to him[m]," and "will do for them abundantly above all that they can ask or think[n]."]

[i] Amos v. 21—23. [k] Isai. lxvi. 3.

[l] Ps. vi. 8. and xxxviii. 9. and lxxix. 11. and especially Lam. iii. 56.

[m] Isai. lxv. 24. [n] Eph. iii. 20.

MCLXII.

THE DANGER OF FALSE CONFIDENCE.

Hos. viii. 2, 3. *Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee. Israel hath cast off the thing that is good: the enemy shall pursue him.*

THERE is not a more intimate connexion between any two things than between sin and misery. However specious an appearance any hypocrite may make in the world, God, who sees his heart, will sooner or later expose and punish his hypocrisy. The Israelites on different occasions professed to repent, and to return to God: but they were "as a deceitful bow," that effected not the purpose for which it seemed to be bent: on which account God commanded the prophet to "set the trumpet to his mouth," and to proclaim their *speedy* destruction. The prophet's testimony is then confirmed by God himself in the words before us: in which we may see,

I. The vain confidence of the ungodly—

All men have, to a certain extent, the very confidence expressed in my text. As amongst the Jews, so amongst ourselves, the *grounds* of that confidence are diverse, whilst the confidence itself is the same.

[*Some found it on their bearing of the Christian name.* They have been born of Christian parents, and educated in a Christian country, and therefore they account themselves children of the Most High; exactly as the Jews claimed to be the children of God, because they were descended from the stock of Abraham, and had been admitted into covenant with God by circumcision. Hence we find them confidently asserting that "God was their Father[a]."

Others found it on their belonging to a peculiar Church. As the Jews said of themselves, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these[b]," so persons belonging to the Church of England esteem themselves especially favoured of the Lord on that account, whilst all the various classes of dissenters arrogate to themselves the same high privilege, as arising out of their separation from the Established Church, and the imagined superiority of their respective advantages for spiritual instruction.

Others found their confidence on their moral conduct, and their regular observance of all the external duties of religion. But like the Pharisees of old, whilst their regular deportment makes them objects of admiration to those around them, they shew by their whole conduct that they have only "the form of godliness without any of its power." Yet do they value themselves as standing high in the favour of God, and would

[a] John viii. 33, 39, 40, 41. [b] Jer. vii. 4.

be filled with indignation if their acceptance with him were questioned, or their state before him made even for a moment a subject of doubt.

Others again found their confidence on their having embraced the principles of the Gospel, and professed themselves in a more peculiar manner the followers of Christ. These are apt to consider themselves as lights shining in a dark world[c] ——— and, with more than ordinary boldness, will adopt as their own appropriate and distinctive privilege that assertion of the ancient Church, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his."

Now I am far from saying that none are entitled to express this confidence; for I know that it is the Christian's privilege to possess it, and to "hold it fast even to the end." But it is far too easily adopted, and too generally entertained. For thousands who "call God their Rock, and the Most High God their Redeemer, do, in fact, only flatter him with their mouths, and lie unto him with their tongues[d]:" and many of the most confident among them will meet with that repulse in the last day, "Depart from me; I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity[e]."]

Seeing, then, that there are so many who indulge a vain confidence before God, let me declare to you,

II. The disappointment that awaits them—

Whatever have been the erroneous standards which men have adopted for themselves, there is one, and one only, by which they shall be tried in the last day; and that is, the word of God.

Accordingly God casts in the teeth of self-deceivers their violations of his word—

[The Jews, as Jews, were bound to walk according to God's law. But they had "cast off their allegiance to God, transgressing his covenant, and setting at nought his commandments[f]." And this is the very state of us Christians. What a covenant has God made with us in Christ Jesus, "a covenant ordered in all things and sure," and comprehending our every want, both in time and eternity! In this covenant we have the remission of all our sins accorded to us freely for Christ's sake, and all needful supplies of the Holy Spirit, for the sanctification of our souls, yea, and eternal glory also vouchsafed to us as the purchase of the Redeemer's blood. But how little have we regarded this covenant, or sought an interest in it! In fact, "we have rather trodden under foot

[c] Ps. lxxviii. 34—37.
[d] Matt. vii. 21—23.
[e] See Isai. lviii. 2.
[f] ver. 1.

the Son of God by our continuance in sin, and counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and have done despite to the Spirit of his grace[g]." And, as for the laws either of the first or second table, we have never made them the rule of our conduct, or even desired to conform to them any further than suited our own interest or convenience. In our baptism indeed we engaged to walk according to the revealed will of God; but in our whole lives we have rebelled against him, and "cast off the thing that was good."]

What then can we expect at God's hands?

[He told the hypocritical Jews that "their Assyrian enemies should pursue them." True, the Assyrians thought only of gratifying their own ambition; but they were a sword in God's hand to "avenge the quarrel of his covenant:" and they did fearfully execute on these transgressors the Divine judgments.

And has not God instruments at hand to inflict punishment on *us?* See the perturbed state of Europe at this moment[h]," and see how we ourselves are approximating towards it. The outrages and conflagrations which have recently pervaded our land will have been as nothing in comparison of what we may soon behold, if God give us up to that anarchical spirit which now threatens to bear down all before it — — — Truly the occasional prayers which have for some time been in use amongst us by the appointment of our ecclesiastical superiors, may yet well be continued amongst us, for the averting of those judgments which we have so justly merited.

Amongst the professors of religion, too, there is a spirit not unlike to that which prevails in the ungodly world, a spirit of unhumbled inquiry, and of dogmatical assertion, tending only to divide the Church of God, and to diffuse uncharitable feelings amongst those who ought to "love one another with a pure heart fervently." To what *that* also may grow, God alone knows. But it is a sad scandal to the Church of God, and can be pleasing to none but Satan, the author and abettor of all evil.

But there are other enemies that may pursue both the world and the Church of God: for most assuredly the wrath of God shall follow and overtake sin, whether it be found in the openly profane, or in the professors of the Gospel of Christ. "The sin of every man," whoever he may be, shall assuredly, in due season "find him out." A man's profession may have raised the admiration of all around him: but if it

[g] Heb. x. 29.
[h] Of France and Belgium more particularly, May 1831.

prove at last unsound, he shall sink the deeper into irremediable shame and misery[i]———]

APPLICATION—

1. Let us examine well the grounds of our confidence—

[I would by no means be understood to condemn all confidence, but only to recommend a careful examination of the grounds on which our confidence is built. We may, if we will attentively discriminate between things which differ, find a very broad distinction between the confidence which is delusive, and that which is truly scriptural. As a general observation, we may say, that that alone is scriptural which is attended with holy fear and jealousy: for even St. Paul himself laboured incessantly to "bring all his bodily appetites into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should become a cast-away." That which stands on a presumptuous *conceit about God's decrees*, and is sanctioned only by an appeal to *past* experience, may well be questioned: but that which is founded rather on *the general promises of the Gospel*, and is borne out and warranted by an appeal to the *present* experience of the soul, may safely be treasured up as an invaluable blessing. And if this latter appear more fluctuating than the other, let not that render it less estimable in your minds: for it is far the more scriptural and safe. In fact, Satan exerts himself to the uttermost to strengthen the confidence which is erroneous, that so his vassals may not suspect the delusion under which they labour; whilst, on the other hand, he infuses doubts into the minds of the upright, that they may not reap the full benefit of their confidence in God. Only let your confidence be humble, and its habitual effect be practical, and then you may say boldly, "O God, thou art my God!" and may hold fast your confidence, and the rejoicing of your hope firm unto the end.]

2. Let us endeavour to maintain a close walk with God—

[Whilst *this*, as I have already shewn, is the proper *test* of our confidence, it is also *the means* whereby our confidence is to be made more and more assured. "If we abide with God, he will abide with us: but if we forsake him, he also will forsake us[k]." Here we see, that, if the text is true, so will the converse of it be found true also. Only let us "*hold fast* that which is good," and no enemy whatsoever shall prevail against us. You all know how the Apostle sets all *his* enemies at defiance[l]——— And thus may *we* also do: for,

[i] Job xx. 4—7. [k] 2 Chron. xv. 2. [l] Rom. viii. 33—39.

"if God be with us, who can be against us?" Our office is, to serve the Lord. His office, if I may so speak, is to save us. Only then let us attend to our part, and we may with safety leave to our heavenly Father the execution of his.]

MCLXIII.

THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF CHRISTIAN INNOCENCE.

Hos. viii. 5. *How long will it be ere they attain to innocency?*

IT is impossible to read the history of God's ancient people, or to survey the world around us, without being filled with wonder at the patience and forbearance of God. In vain were all his mercies to the Jews in delivering them from their bondage in Egypt, and in giving them possession of the promised land: no manifestations of his power and grace were sufficient to convince them of his exclusive right to their service, or to knit them to him as their only Lord and Saviour. They would make to themselves idols of wood and stone, and transfer to them the allegiance which they owed to God alone. Yet, instead of breaking forth against them in wrathful indignation to destroy them, he bore with them, and, with tender anxiety for their welfare, said, "How long will it be ere they attain to innocency?" Precisely thus does he wait for us also, who, notwithstanding all that he has done for the redemption of our souls, are ever prone to depart from him, and to fix on the creature that regard which is due to him only. Yet he is waiting to be gracious to us also, and longing for the return of our souls to him as their proper rest.

In illustration of this pathetic complaint, I shall consider,

I. What is the attainment here specified—

Perfect innocency is utterly unattainable in this life—

[Once we possessed it in our first parents: but since the Fall, we all have inherited a corrupt nature; since "it was impossible to bring a clean thing out of an unclean." Nor can

we by any means wash away so much as one sin that we have ever committed. Rivers of tears would be insufficient for that. Sinners therefore we must be even to the end.]

Yet is there *in a scriptural sense* an innocency to be attained—

[Our Lord said of his disciples, "Now ye are clean through the word that I have spoken unto you[a]." And we too may be clean, yea so clean as to be "without spot or blemish," if only we use the means which God himself has appointed[b]. There is "a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness[c];" even the Redeemer's blood, which is able to "cleanse us from all sin[d]" ———The Holy Spirit also will renew our souls, and make us "partakers of a divine nature[e]," and "sanctify us throughout in body, soul, and spirit[f]," ——— and enable us, in the whole of our life and conversation, to approve ourselves "Israelites indeed in whom there is no guile" ———

This is scriptural innocency: and *this* every sinner in the universe may attain. It is freely offered to all[g] ——— and has actually been vouchsafed to the most abandoned of mankind[h] ——— Nor shall it be withheld from any one that will seek it at the hands of God[i] ——— God himself pants, if I may so say, to give it us: "Wilt thou not be made clean? When shall it once be[k]?" Those to whom it was offered in my text were wicked idolaters[l]: and therefore we cannot doubt but that it will be granted to us also.]

II. The expostulation respecting it—

Long has God borne with us, even as he did with his people of old—

[Who amongst you has not harboured idols in his heart? ——— and whom has not God followed with warnings, exhortations, and entreaties, even to the present hour? ———]

And how much longer must he bear with us?

[Have we not already provoked him long enough? ——— Or do we hope ever to enjoy his favour if we attain not to innocency? ——— O! delay not to seek this inestimable gift. Is it so small a matter to possess the forgiveness of your sins through Jesu's blood, and the renovation of your souls by the influence of the Holy Spirit, and the entire conformity of your lives to the mind and will of God, that you will not set yourselves to seek them in the exercise of faith and prayer? ———

[a] John xv. 3. [b] Eph. v. 26, 27. [c] Zech. xii. 1.
[d] 1 John i. 7. [e] 2 Pet. i. 4. [f] 1 Thess. v. 23.
[g] Isai. lv. 1. [h] 1 Cor. vi. 11. [i] John vi. 37.
[k] Jer. xiii. 27. [l] ver. 4.

How long shall it be ere you begin to seek these blessed attainments? Will you wait till *old age*, and give to God only the dregs of your life? Or will you put off this necessary work to *a dying hour?* Believe me, *that* is by no means a fit season for so important a work as this: and who can tell whether time for it shall be allowed you then, or grace be given you for the execution of it? The attainment is difficult in proportion as it is delayed: and what bitter regret will you feel to all eternity, if the season afforded you for the attainment of this blessing pass away unimproved, and you be called with all your sins upon you into the eternal world! I would address you all in the very spirit of my text, and say to every one among you, "Seek the Lord whilst he may be found: call upon him whilst he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and unto our God, for he will abundantly pardon[m]."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who think this blessing unattainable—

[Were this innocency really unattainable, God would never have so pathetically expressed his concern respecting it. But perhaps you think that the infirmities which of necessity cleave to our fallen nature are inconsistent with it. This however is by no means the case. If the heart be upright before God, then shall we be accepted of him in Christ Jesus, and "be presented before him faultless with exceeding joy."]

2. Those who desire to attain it—

[Be sure you seek it in the appointed way. Seek not forgiveness only, nor renovation only, nor holiness only; but seek them all in their proper order, and in harmonious operation. First, your sins must be blotted out through faith in the Redeemer's blood: next, must your soul be renewed after the Divine image by the power of the Holy Ghost: and lastly, must these blessings manifest themselves in holiness of heart and life. No one of these can be spared. And though we have placed them in the order in which they must be sought, yet will they all be vouchsafed to every one, who believes in Christ: His sins will all be cast into the depths of the sea, and the moral change also be begun, which shall issue in everlasting happiness and glory.]

3. Those who through mercy have attained it—

[Is it true that any one in this life is authorized to conceive of himself as "innocent" before God? Yes surely; else our Saviour would never have declared his own Apostles

[m] Isai. lv. 6, 7.

"clean." Not that any attainment, however great, will supersede the necessity of continued watchfulness: for St. Paul himself felt the need of "keeping under his body, and bringing it into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should become a cast-away:" and the proper use of all the promises is, "to cleanse yourselves by means of them from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God."]

MCLXIV.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN.

Hos. viii. 7. *They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.*

MISERY is attached to sin as its inevitable consequence. This connexion does not always appear to a superficial observer. On the contrary, transgression often seems productive of happiness; and obedience, to be a source of much affliction and trouble: but, whatever conclusions we may be led to draw from present appearances, we are sure that the wicked are not happy; nor have they any reasonable expectation of happiness in the eternal world. The Israelites had forsaken the true God for idols, and God warned them of the judgments which would ere long come upon them: but the declaration in the text may be understood as a general position. We shall take occasion from it to shew,

I. Who may be said to sow the wind—

To "sow the wind" is a proverbial expression for labouring in vain. It is applied to idolaters, because the silver and gold lavished on idols was unprofitably spent, and it may well be applied to all who seek happiness in a way of sin:

1. To sensualists—

[They expect to find much comfort in the indulgence of their lusts. Hence they yield themselves up to all the gratifications of sense. But they find that such pursuits can afford them no real happiness. While they forsake the Fountain of living waters, they hew out to themselves only broken cisterns that

can hold no water[a]. Solomon, with the amplest means of enjoyment, confessed this[b]. And we may address that appeal to all the votaries of pleasure[c]—.]

2. To worldlings—

[The lovers of this present world seem to follow something substantial. They hope to obtain, not a momentary gratification, but solid and lasting benefits. They promise to themselves the acquisition of ease, and affluence, and respect. But riches are justly, and on many accounts, termed "uncertain[d]." No dependence can be placed on their continuance with us[e]. Our cares are also generally multiplied by means of them; but if they were more conducive to happiness now, what shall they profit in the day of wrath[f]? What advantage has he now, who once took such delight in his stores[g]? or he, who placed his happiness in sumptuous fare, and magnificent apparel[h]? Surely all such persons will find ere long, that they "sowed the wind."]

3. To formalists—

[The performance of religious duties seems more calculated to make us happy. It is certain that no one can be happy who disregards them. But a mere round of services can never satisfy the conscience. "The form of godliness without the power" will avail little. It will leave the soul in a poor, empty, destitute condition. Some indeed delude themselves with an idea that it will secure the Divine favour; and, under that delusion, they may be filled with self-complacency[i]. But if God send a ray of light into the mind, these comforts vanish. A sight of sin will speedily dissipate these self-righteous hopes[k]. Nor will any thing satisfy an enlightened conscience but that which satisfies God. There was but one remedy for the wounded Israelites in the wilderness[l]. Nor can a wounded spirit ever be healed but by a sight of Christ.]

4. To false professors—

[Many wish to be thought religious, when they are destitute of spiritual life. They perhaps are zealous for the doctrines of the Gospel, and for their own particular form of Church government. But they are not solicitous to live nigh to God in holy duties; nor do they manifest the efficacy of religion in their spirit and conduct. Yet, because of their professing godliness, they think themselves possessed of it, and buoy up themselves with expectations of happiness in the

[a] Jer. ii. 13. [b] Eccl. ii. 1, 10, 11. [c] Rom. vi. 21.
[d] 1 Tim. vi. 17. [e] Prov. xxiii. 5. [f] Prov. xi. 4.
[g] Luke xii. 19. [h] Luke xvi. 19, 23, 24.
[i] Luke xviii. 11, 12. [k] Rom. vii. 9. [l] John iii. 14, 15.

world to come. Alas! what disappointment will they one day experience[m]! What will it avail them to "have had a name to live, while they were really dead?" or to have "cried, Lord, Lord! while they departed not from iniquity?" The pains they have taken to keep up a profession will all be lost. Nothing will remain to them but shame and confusion of face.]

From the seed which they sow, we may easily perceive,

II. What they may expect to reap—

"A whirlwind" is a figure used to represent extraordinary calamities.[n] And such is the harvest which they will reap in due season. Their calamities will be,

1. Sudden—

[The corn ripens gradually for the sickle, and its fate is foreseen; but the destruction of the ungodly cometh suddenly and at an instant. They indeed have many warnings from all which they see around them; but they put the evil day far from them, and think it will never come[o]. Thus it was with the whole world before the Deluge. Though Noah preached to them for many years, they would not regard him; and were taken by surprise at last, as much as if no notice had been given them.[p] Thus also it will be with all who reject the Gospel salvation. Solomon has expressly declared it in reference to those who sow discord[q]. And St. Paul has asserted it respecting all that live in a neglect of God[r].]

2. Irresistible—

[Sinners of every description can withstand the word spoken by their fellow-creatures[s]; but they will not be able to resist God when he shall call them into judgment. Then, if the whole universe should enter into a confederacy to protect one sinner, they would fail in their attempt[t]. There is not any thing more irresistible to man, in some climates, than a whirlwind. Yet far less power shall the ungodly have to avert the wrath of God. They will be carried to destruction as the chaff before the wind[u]; and call in vain to the rocks to fall upon them, or the hills to cover them[x].]

3. Tremendous—

[Nothing can be conceived more dreadful than the desolation made by whirlwinds. Yet this suggests a very

m Matt. xxv. 11, 12. n Prov. i. 27. o 2 Pet. iii. 4.
p Matt. xxiv. 38, 39. q Prov. vi. 14, 15. r 1 Thess. v. 2, 3.
s Ezek. xx. 49. t Prov. xi. 21. u Ps. i. 4, 5.
x Rev. vi. 15—17.

inadequate idea of the ruin that will come on the ungodly. The raining of fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrha must have been exceedingly terrible. But even that was light, when compared with the vials of God's wrath which will be poured out upon the ungodly world. Who can comprehend the full import of that threatening in the Psalms[y]? Who can form a just idea of the judgment denounced by Isaiah[z]—? May we never experience such dreadful calamities! May we tremble at the apprehension of them, and seek shelter in Christ[a]!]

INFER—

1. How earnest should we be in redeeming time!

[The present hours are given us that we may sow for eternity. Every action, word and thought is as seed that will spring up hereafter. According to what we sow now, we shall reap at the last day[b]. Every moment increases our "treasure of wrath," or our "weight of glory." How should we be affected with this consideration! Let us lay it to heart, and "walk, not as fools, but as wise men[c]." And let that just expostulation shame us to a sense of duty[d]—.]

2. How blessed are they who are living to God!

[There is not a work which they perform for him that will not be rewarded. God would esteem himself unjust, if he made them no recompence[e]. However small and insignificant the service be, it shall not be forgotten[f]. Some perhaps may complain, that they cannot do any thing for God, and, that they can only weep for their unprofitableness. But the sighs and tears of the contrite are "precious seed." They will spring up to a glorious and abundant harvest[g]. Let the humble then go on "sowing in tears till they reap in joy." Let them persist in their labour, assured that it shall not be in vain[h].]

[y] Ps. xi. 6.
[z] Isai. v. 24.
[a] Isai. xxxii. 2.
[b] Gal. vi. 7, 8.
[c] Eph. v. 15, 16.
[d] Isai. lv. 2.
[e] Heb. vi. 10.
[f] Matt. x. 42.
[g] Ps. cxxvi. 6.
[h] 1 Cor. xv. 58.

MCLXV.

MEN'S DISREGARD OF THE GOSPEL.

Hos. viii. 12. *I have written to him the great things of my Law, but they were counted as a strange thing.*

GOD, in estimating the sins of men, takes into his consideration all the aggravations with which they

are committed. For instance; the warnings which have been given us against sin, the judgments with which we have been visited on account of it, the mercies that have been vouchsafed to us in the midst of it, are all regarded by him as enhancing our guilt in the commission of it. Hence, in criminating his people, whom now he was about to punish, he particularly charges home upon them their contempt of his word, which he had sent to guide them in the paths of righteousness, and to encourage them in a faithful discharge of their duty towards him. In this view *our* sins are peculiarly aggravated, inasmuch as we have been favoured with a more perfect revelation of God's mind and will. And to evince this, I will shew,

I. What great things God has written to us in his law—

By God's "law," we are to understand his word in general; and by "the great things of it," are meant its fundamental truths.

Let us take a view of them, as recorded in God's blessed word—

[Our fall in Adam, our recovery by Christ, and our restoration to the Divine image by the Holy Spirit, these are plainly written in every part of the inspired volume. They were made known in the Old Testament, so far as was necessary for the instruction of men under that dark and temporary dispensation. The rite of circumcision marked, that we brought into the world a corrupt nature; and the appointment of sacrifices, whilst it shewed to all their desert of death, evinced to them the necessity of looking forward to that great sacrifice which should in due time be offered for the sins of men. The various lustrations also that were enjoined, gave a striking intimation of what should in due season be effected on the souls of men, through the operation of the Spirit of God. In the writings of David and the prophets, a further light is thrown upon these things: man is declared to be shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin[a]: and his guilt is said to be removed only through the vicarious sufferings of the Son of God, "on whom the iniquities of all mankind are laid[b]." And for the renewal of our nature, we are taught to look to that Divine Agent, who is sent from heaven on purpose to impart it[c].

[a] Ps. li. 5. [b] Isai. liii. 5, 6. [c] Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

In the New Testament, these points are more fully opened: and every thing relating to them is developed with all the clearness and certainty that the most scrupulous mind can desire.

Who can doubt the corruption of our nature, when we are told that "we are by nature children of wrath[d]?" What stronger proof can we have of the necessity of believing in Christ, than the assurance that there is salvation in no other, and "no other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved[e]?" As to the Spirit's operations upon the soul, we are expressly told, that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."]

And are not these things justly called "great"?

[Verily, in whatever light we view them, they are "great." Contemplate the *mysteriousness* of them. How do they, in every part of them, surpass all human conception! What shall we say to our fall in Adam, and the consequent condemnation of all the human race? What shall we think of the incarnation of God's only dear Son, for the purpose of satisfying Divine justice in our behalf, and working out a righteousness wherein we guilty creatures may stand before God without spot or blemish? What shall we say of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, making our polluted souls his temples, for the purpose of renewing our fallen natures, and rendering us meet for glory? Well may the Apostle say, "Great is the mystery of godliness[f]!" and well may every one, in the contemplation of it, exclaim, "O the depth[g]"—]

But consider also the *importance* of these things. There is not any child of man, to whom the tidings of them are made known, that can be saved without an experimental acquaintance with them, and a suitable operation of them upon his soul. Under a sense of our fallen condition, we must lie low before God, in dust and ashes: under a conviction that there is no salvation for us but in Christ Jesus, we must cleave unto him with full purpose of heart: and, under a consciousness of our incapacity to do any thing for ourselves, we must commit ourselves altogether to the care of God's Holy Spirit, that he may "work all our works in us," and "perfect that which concerneth us."

Say, then, whether things *so deeply mysterious* and *so infinitely important* be not great. Truly there is nothing in the whole universe that deserves a thought in comparison of these stupendous truths.]

But it is humiliating to observe,

II. How they are regarded by an ungodly world—

[d] Eph. ii. 3.
[e] Acts iv. 12.
[f] 1 Tim. iii. 16.
[g] Rom. xi. 33.

"They are counted as a strange thing:"

1. They are neglected as unimportant—

[One would imagine that the book which reveals these great truths should be universally sought after with insatiable avidity; and be studied day and night, in order to the obtaining of a perfect knowledge of its contents. But how is this book treated? It is thought a proper book for children, that they may be made acquainted with its truths so far as their slender capacities can comprehend them: but for persons of adult age it is supposed to contain nothing that is interesting; and it is laid aside by them, as undeserving any serious attention. *Angels in heaven* are searching into its unfathomable mysteries with an anxiety worthy of the occasion; but *men*, who are far more deeply interested in them, suffer them to remain without any serious inquiry. In fact, there is no other book so generally slighted as the inspired volume; not a novel or a newspaper but is preferred before it; so little is the excellence of its mysteries contemplated, and so little the importance of its truths considered.]

2. They are ridiculed as absurd—

[Universally is the corruption of our fallen nature regarded as a subject calculated only to inspire gloom, and therefore injurious to the happiness of man. The salvation which Christ has wrought out for us, and freely offers to the believing soul, is reprobated as a licentious doctrine, subversive of morality. The sanctifying influences of the Spirit, also, are held in contempt, as the dreams of a heated imagination, or the pretences of a hypocritical profession. Sin itself, unless in its most hideous forms, is not so universally despised and hated as are the truths of our most holy religion. They were so when proclaimed by prophets, and Apostles, and by our blessed Lord himself. "Ah, Lord God, doth he not speak parables[h]?" is the slightest expression of contempt that any preacher of them can expect. In truth, no man can preach them with success, without being accused as "deceiving the people," and "turning the world upside down."]

APPLICATION—

1. How great is the blindness of the natural man!

[The depths of philosophy may be successfully explored by men of studious habits and of intellectual attainments. But who, by any powers of his own, can comprehend the great things of God's law? Verily, they are "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness;" and the most learned man on earth, no less than the most illiterate, must say,

[h] Ezek. xx. 49.

"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law[i]."]

2. How inestimable are the privileges of God's people!

["They have been brought out of darkness into marvellous light;" and the "things which God has hid from the wise and prudent, he has revealed unto them" — — — Still, however, there remains a veil upon their hearts, which yet they need to have removed. "They still see only as in a glass darkly;" and must wait for a full vision, till they come to the regions of the blest above.]

[i] Ps. cxix. 18.

MCLXVI.

MISERY OF A DESERTED PEOPLE.

Hos. ix. 12. *Woe also to them when I depart from them!*

THERE is nothing so essential to our happiness as the Divine presence. With that, we may smile at all earthly trials: without it, not all the universe can satisfy the soul. This is promised to us as the greatest good that can be vouchsafed to us in this world: and the withdrawment of it is threatened as the greatest of all evils[a].

In the words before us, God, having denounced this judgment against his rebellious people, gives an awful intimation of the greatness of the calamity; "Woe unto them, when I depart from them!"

We propose to shew,

I. How great a calamity is the withdrawment of God's presence—

As God is pleased to distinguish both individuals and collective bodies with his favour, so under great provocations he departs from them: and this is a very dreadful calamity, by whomsoever it may be experienced: it is so,

1. To nations—

[These, as we see in the Jewish history, prosper beyond the common course of events, when God takes them under his

[a] Jer. xxiii. 33.

special protection. On the other hand, they are destroyed with equal rapidity when he sets his face against them. War, famine, and pestilence are his ministers: the stars in their courses fight against his enemies: the elements enlist themselves under his banners. Universal nature rises up to avenge the quarrel of his covenant. Wretched indeed is that nation which he has abandoned to ruin! The destruction of the Jewish nation is an awful specimen and pledge of the vengeance which he will execute on those who have filled up the measure of their iniquities.]

2. To Churches—

[The Christian Church, when in its infancy, was honoured with very peculiar tokens of the Divine presence, and, in consequence thereof, "grew and multiplied" to a surprising extent. But when the life and power of godliness had declined among the Churches of Asia, and he had often warned them to no purpose, he "took away the candlestick from them;" so that in the cities where Christ was once worshipped and glorified, his name is scarcely known. Nor need we go back to the early ages of the Church; for in many places in our own land where Christ was once preached, nothing is now heard but Socinian heresy or heathen morality. The ignorance of the preachers, the blindness of the hearers, and the unprofitableness of the ordinances, concur in establishing the melancholy truth affirmed in our text[b].]

3. To individuals—

[If we admit, as we must, that "God will not forsake his people[c]," still we have no evidence that we are his, any longer than we obey his commandments. If we go out from his people, it is rather a proof that we never truly belonged to them[d]. But lamentable is the state of him who provokes God to leave him: for as soon as ever God deserts him, an evil spirit will enter into him[e]; yea, perhaps seven spirits, worse than ever before inhabited his soul, may take possession of him, and reduce him to a more awful state of bondage than he ever before experienced[f]. Hardness of heart, searedness of conscience, and probably an abandonment of all religious profession, with painful apprehensions of death and judgment, will be the bitter fruits of such a dereliction, which at last will issue in an aggravated and eternal condemnation.]

Let us then attentively consider,

II. How we may avert it from ourselves—

[b] Compare Micah iii. 6, 7. Isai. vi. 9, 10. Amos viii. 11—13.
[c] 1 Sam. xii. 22.
[d] 1 John ii. 19.
[e] 1 Sam. xvi. 14.
[f] Luke xi. 24—26.

We cannot pretend to specify all the means which are to be used; but we will notice some of the most important:

1. Let us abstain from that which will drive God from us—

[Sin is "that abominable thing which his soul hates;" and, if we wilfully indulge it, he will shew his abhorrence of it, by hiding his face from us, and withdrawing from us his blessing. He has said, that his "Spirit shall not alway strive with man." And it is certain, that we may "grieve his Spirit," till we altogether "quench" his sacred motions. Let us then turn, not only from open, but from secret sin. Let us "purge out that leaven, that we may be a new lump." For though God will "not be extreme to mark the unallowed infirmities" of our nature, he will shew his indignation against hypocrisy, however refined it may be in its nature, or specious in its appearance[g].]

2. Let us notice the very first intimations of his displeasure—

[God does not utterly forsake the soul at once: he testifies his displeasure in a variety of ways, before he finally forsakes us. As, in withdrawing from his temple of old, he descended from the mercy-seat to the threshold; and then went from the threshold to the court; then from the court to the door of the east gate; and, lastly, from the gate to the mountain[h]: so, in his departures from Churches or individuals, he gives notice of his intention, that we may repent us of our evil ways. He ceases to manifest himself to us; he gives us up to the dominion of our former lusts; he embitters our state by forebodings of our future doom; and, when he cannot prevail, he "gives us over to a reprobate mind[i]," and leaves us to fill up the measure of our iniquities. Let us "turn then at his first reproof," that, instead of "taking his Holy Spirit from us," he may "pour it out upon us" in richer abundance[k].]

3. Let us guard against secret departures from him—

[It is rarely, if ever, that God leaves us, unless we first leave him. He has laid down this as the rule of his conduct; "I am with you, while ye be with me: if ye be with me, I will be with you; but if ye forsake me, I will forsake you[l]." If we trace all our darkness and distresses to their proper source, we shall find that they originate in our own unfaithfulness. Let

g Job xx. 4—7. h Ezek. ix. 3. and x. 18, 19. and xi. 23.
i Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12. k Prov. i. 23. l 2 Chron. xv. 2.

us then watch against a neglect of secret duties, or deadness in them. Let us "give ourselves to the word of God and prayer." Let us "stir up ourselves, to lay hold on God[m];" and, with a holy boldness, say, like Jacob, "I will not let thee go[n]." In this way we may detain him, and secure his continued presence: or if, "in a little wrath, he hide his face from us for a moment, with everlasting kindness will he have mercy upon us[o]."]

[m] Isai. lxiv. 7. [n] Gen. xxxii. 26. [o] Isai. liv. 8.

MCLXVII.

BRINGING FORTH FRUIT TO OURSELVES.

Hos. x. 1. *Israel is an empty vine; he bringeth forth fruit unto himself.*

IN order to judge aright of our actions, we must examine the principles from whence they proceed. Ignorant as we are of men's real motives, we invariably endeavour to discover them even in courts of judicature; and pass sentence, not so much upon their actions, as on their intentions. Nor does any one disapprove of this method of estimating men's conduct, provided only there be sufficient ground for discovering the real sentiments and wishes of their hearts. Now, if this be a proper mode of judging with respect to each other, we should certainly try our own actions by the same rule; since they will most assuredly be estimated according to this rule in the day when we shall stand before the tribunal of God.

In the words before us, God passes sentence, as it were, on the Israelites, not so much for the form and matter of their services, as for the dispositions they exercised in the performance of them. And, as he does the same with respect to us, it is of importance to ascertain,

I. When we may be said to bring forth fruit to ourselves—

By the law of our creation we should regard nothing but the glory and authority of God. But, through the corruption of our nature, we have cast off God,

and exalted *self* into his throne. We manifest that we do this,

1. When self is *the principle* of our actions—

[It is but too evident that unregenerate men act in an entire conformity to their own will, without ever considering the will of God. If in any thing they seem to oppose their own will, they do so, not from a regard to his authority, but from some selfish principle of carnal hope or fear. If we would persuade them to any course of conduct, we find that the simple declaration of God's mind and will has no effect on them whatever; and that we must have recourse to carnal and temporal considerations, if we would succeed with them. Moreover they wish that others also should consult *their* will, rather than the will of God: and thus they shew not only that they are a god unto themselves, but that they would gladly be a god also to their fellow-creatures; and have their will more respected than the will of God. What can be a proof of bringing forth fruit to themselves, if this be not[a]?]

2. When self is *the measure* of our actions—

[Many are willing to be almost Christians; but few wish to be altogether so. Herod would part with many things; but not with his Herodias. The Young Man would follow Christ at all events, as he thought; but could not be prevailed upon to sell his estate, and give it to the poor[b]. Thus, if the attending at the house and table of the Lord, if the abstaining from gross sins, and the exercising of benevolence to the poor will suffice, many will be content to pay the price: but, the renouncing of all sin, and the walking in the narrow path of holiness and self-denial, are too irksome a task: and if they cannot maintain an interest in Christ on lower terms, they determine to part with him. Now what is this, but to make their own ease the measure of their obedience, when they ought to have no other measure than the word of God? whereas the true Christian wishes to "stand perfect and complete in *all* the will of God."]

3. When self is *the end* of our actions—

[God's command is, that "whatever we do, we should do all to the glory of God[c]." But what if we be studying how to advance our own reputation or interest in the world? What if, like Jehu, we be actuated by pride, when we profess to be doing the Lord's work[d]? What if, even in religious duties also, we be seeking to establish our own righteousness, or to gratify only some selfish principle[e]? In all these cases we

[a] Col. ii. 23. [b] Matt. xix. 21, 22. [c] 1 Cor. x. 31.
[d] Compare 2 Kings x. 30. with Hos. i. 4. [e] Zech. vii. 5, 6.

are justly involved in that censure, "All men seek their own, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's[f]."]

To shew the evil of such conduct we shall proceed to point out,

II. In what respects, they who do so resemble an empty vine—

The similes of Scripture, if strained and perverted, are made disgusting; but, if soberly and judiciously illustrated, they are replete with useful instruction. Now, without fear of straining this simile, we may observe, that they, who bring forth fruit to themselves, resemble an empty vine,

1. In its nature—

[A vine is a proper emblem of fruitfulness; but an empty vine, in a country so famous for its vineyards as Palestine, gives one a very strong idea of barrenness. Hence, when God was complaining of his people's unfruitfulness, he compared them to a vineyard, which, after the greatest pains and cost bestowed on its culture, brought forth nothing but wild grapes[g]. In this view, an empty vine marks the depraved nature of those, who, notwithstanding all the labour with which they have been cultivated, remain "barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord:" who, instead of being "filled with the fruits of righteousness to God's praise and glory," can rise no higher than self, nor do one single act that is pleasing and acceptable to God.]

2. In its use—

[A barren vine is the most worthless of all things: other trees may be made useful in some way; but neither root nor branch, nor even the trunk, of a barren vine is good for any thing[h]. Such worthless creatures are they who bring forth no fruit to God. They may indeed be good members of the community; but, as to all the great ends of their creation, they are of no use whatever: they bring no glory to God; they advance not the spiritual welfare of those around them; they attain not to any measure of the Divine image. There is not any thing in the whole creation that does not answer the ends of its formation better than they. Well does our Lord compare them to "salt, which, when it has lost its savour, is unfit even for the dunghill[i]."]

3. In its end—

[f] Phil. ii. 21.
[g] Isai. v. 4.
[h] Ezek. xv. 2—5.
[i] Luke xiv. 35.

[Our Lord has told us what will be the end of a barren vine[k]. And shall not such also be the end of those who live to themselves rather than to God? Let our Lord determine this point also[l]: and let "the unprofitable servant" not think himself secure on account of his freedom from gross sins; but remember that the best actions are to no purpose, if not wrought from a principle of love to God[m].]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who resemble an empty vine—

[The culture bestowed on you is worse than in vain, since it greatly aggravates your guilt. Guard then against self-deceit; and devote yourselves in body, soul, and spirit, unto God. Above all, seek to be united unto Christ by faith: for it is only by virtue derived from Christ, that you can ever bring forth fruit unto God[n].]

2. Those who may rather be compared to fruitful vines—

[Occasional mixtures of *self* are no just ground to question our state before God: for there is much remaining weakness in the best. Nevertheless you must watch and pray against that base principle, and judge of your attainments by the degree in which self is mortified, and God exalted in your hearts.]

[k] John xv. 6. [l] Matt. xxv. 30.
[m] 1 Cor. xiii. 1. [n] Rom. vii. 4. John xv. 4.

MCLXVIII.

THE DUTY OF SEEKING GOD.

Hos. x. 12. *Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.*

THE figurative language of Scripture may in some cases obscure its import: but, when it is explained, it exhibits the plainest truths in a rich variety of forms, and tends to fix them on our minds by its attractive influence. We pray God that this observation may be verified, while we open the passage now before us, and consider,

I. The duty enjoined—

The three first expressions are explained by the

prophet himself as collectively importing, that we should "seek the Lord:" but, separately taken, they point out the particular manner in which we should seek him:

1. In the performance of his will—

[Though no man ever hopes to reap wheat, where he has sowed only tares, almost all expect to obtain heaven, notwithstanding they have never made it the one object of their pursuit. But the Apostle guards us against this fatal error, and assures us, that we shall reap according to what we have sowed[a]. Would we then have a joyful harvest in the day of judgment, let us not be provoking God by a life of sin; but turn to him in the way of righteousness; nor let us regard the duties of the first or second table only; but labour to fulfil all his will uniformly and without reserve.]

2. In a dependence on his mercy—

[As there are many who hope to find acceptance with God, notwithstanding they seek him not at all, so are there many, who think they make God their debtor by the works they perform; and that they can earn heaven, as it were, by their own righteousness. But, however we may "sow in righteousness," we must "reap in mercy." Death is the *wages* of sin: but life is not the *wages* of righteousness; all our righteousnesses are imperfect[b]: our best deeds are mixed with sin: and therefore we must be contented to accept heaven as the unmerited *gift* of God through Jesus Christ[c].]

3. In a due preparation of heart to receive his blessings—

[It would be in vain for a man to sow his seed on fallow ground. The very rains, which God might send down upon it, would be of no service, if the ground were not purged of its weeds, and the seed buried in the bosom of the earth. Thus neither can the soul make a just improvement of spiritual blessings, unless it be broken up, as it were, by the divine law. Till this be done, the true way of salvation will appear foolishness. To be diligent in working righteousness, and, after all, to depend on mere mercy, will be thought paradoxical and absurd. But, when once the law is brought home to the conscience in its spirituality and extent, the soul is made willing to submit to the righteousness of God; and yet is induced to purify itself even as God is pure. It was by this means that St. Paul was brought to a right mind[d]; nor is there any

[a] Gal. vi. 7, 8.
[b] Isai. lxiv. 6.
[c] Rom. vi. 23. Phil. iii. 9.
[d] Rom. vii. 9.

other way of combining diligence in exertion with an humble dependence on the Divine favour[e].]

For the impressing of this duty on our minds, let us consider,

II. The arguments with which it is enforced—

Confining ourselves to the hints suggested in the text, we shall pass by many obvious and important arguments, and fix our attention upon,

1. The urgency of this duty—

[At the proper seasons the husbandman goes forth to plough or sow his ground, knowing that, if his work be neglected till the time for performing it be past, he shall have reason to repent of his neglect in the day of harvest. Let it be remembered then, that this is the "time to seek the Lord." Are we *advanced in years?* Surely we have no time to lose. Are we *in the early part of life?* What time so fit as that of youth, before our habits be fixed, or our consciences seared, or our minds distracted by worldly cares? As for aged persons, their lives must be drawing to a speedy close; or, if protracted for a while, a want of mental energy will unfit their souls for spiritual exertions. And, with respect to those who are in the midst of youth, for aught they know, there may be "but a step between them and death." If any *feel a disposition to serve the Lord,* this is in a peculiar manner the time for them to seek his face. The very desire they feel, is an evidence that God himself is working in them[f], and ready to reveal himself to them: whereas, if they stifle the motions of his Spirit, they know not that the grace they so despise shall be ever offered them again[g]. Let us then "redeem the time" that is so precious[h], and improve the season which God has afforded us for this important work.]

2. The certainty of success in it—

[The husbandman knows, that if his seed be not watered by seasonable rains, his labour will be wholly lost: yet, notwithstanding he cannot command the showers, he performs his labour, in hope that God will graciously send the former and the latter rain. But we have an absolute promise, that God will prosper our endeavours, and that, "to him who soweth righteousness shall be a *sure* reward[i]." Do we want a righteousness to justify us before God? He will clothe us in the unspotted robe of the Redeemer's righteousness[k]. Do we want an inward righteousness to qualify us for the enjoyment

[e] Gal. ii. 19. Rom. vii. 4. [f] Phil. ii. 13. [g] Gen. vi. 3.
[h] Eph. v. 16. [i] Prov. xi. 18. [k] Isai. lxi. 10.

of his presence? He will work it in us by his good Spirit, and transform us into his own blessed image[l]. Yea, he will "rain down righteousness upon us," giving us "abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness[m]." Let this then encourage us; for "none ever sought his face in vain[n]."]

APPLICATION—

[Let us begin the first great work, the ploughing up of our fallow ground. We need not be told either the necessity or the reasonableness of this work in husbandry: and a very small acquaintance with the corruption and obduracy of an unrenewed heart, will supersede any attempts to evince the same in the cultivation of the soul. Only let it be remembered, that nothing but the law, opened in all its spirituality, and applied in its awful sanctions, can ever effect this work. Let us study it more and more. Let us try ourselves by it. Let us bring our actions, words, and thoughts to it as to a touch-stone. Let us use it for the rooting out of all false principles, and base affections. Thus shall our seed be sown to more advantage[o]; and a glorious harvest await us in the day of the Lord Jesus[p].]

[l] Ezek. xxxvi. 26. [m] Rom. v. 17. [n] Isai. xlv. 19.
[o] Jer. iv. 3. [p] Jam. iv. 9, 10.

MCLXIX.

CHRIST CALLED OUT OF EGYPT.

Hos. xi. 1. *When Israel was a child, then I loved him; and called my Son out of Egypt.*

WITHOUT supposing a primary and secondary sense of Scripture, it is impossible to interpret the prophetic writings, so as to make them accord with the construction put upon them in the New Testament. Indeed, on many occasions, we are necessitated to apply them also in a spiritual or mystical sense, so as to bring out from them that full instruction which they are intended to convey. Not that we are at liberty to indulge our own conceits in explaining God's blessed word, or to put upon it any sense which a fanciful imagination may suggest; but if we follow the inspired writers of the New Testament, we are safe. The passage before us has doubtless an historical import, in relation to the ten tribes of

Israel: nor can we doubt but that it has a prophetical meaning in reference to our blessed Lord. And I think the whole analogy of Scripture justifies us in affixing to it also a mystical meaning, in reference to the Church of God in all ages.

In accordance with this view, let us consider,

I. Its historical import, as relating to the Jewish people—

The prophet is reproving the ten tribes for their ingratitude to God; and in the words before us he shews them what signal mercies God had vouchsafed to them, from the earliest period of their existence.

"He had loved Israel when a child"—

[When Israel were yet but few in number, God had loved them; yea, when their great ancestor was yet in the womb, God had shewn to him his distinguishing grace and mercy; choosing him, whilst Esau, the elder brother, was rejected[a]. If they looked for the true cause of this, they would find it in God, and in God alone; who had chosen them of his own sovereign will and pleasure, and "had loved them purely and solely because he would love them[b]." Nothing could exceed their weakness or unworthiness, at the instant when God brought them into covenant with himself[c]: and therefore they were bound to bear this in remembrance, and to requite this love with a total surrender of themselves to God.]

He had brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand—

[God had set them apart as a peculiar people for himself. And, in demanding their liberation from Pharaoh, he honoured them with the name of "his son, his first-born[d]." And vain was Pharaoh's opposition to his will. By ten successive plagues, God subdued that proud monarch; and on the very day that had been foretold four hundred and thirty years before, brought them forth with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm: not so much as one was left behind: and this has been referred to, by all the inspired writers, as the most wonderful display of power and grace that ever was vouchsafed to any creatures since the foundation of the world.]

But let us view,

II. Its prophetical import, as relating to our blessed Lord—

[a] Mal. i. 2, 3.
[b] Deut. vii. 7, 8.
[c] Ezek. xvi. 6.
[d] Exod. iv. 22, 23.

It had been ordained of God, that every possible evidence should concur to establish beyond a doubt the Messiahship of Jesus—

[Nothing could be conceived more unlikely than that Jesus the Messiah should be brought forth out of Egypt. He was to be born at Bethlehem[e], and to be educated at Nazareth[f]. How, then, should it be possible for him to be brought out of Egypt? Behold, the rage and envy of Herod shall stimulate him to seek his utter destruction; and to secure it, by the destruction of all the infants from two years old and under, in all the vicinity of the place where Jesus was born. But, to defeat this murderous plot, an angel shall instruct Joseph to take the infant and its mother by night into Egypt; and there shall they be preserved in safety, till Herod himself is dead: and thus, without any design on the part of man, yea, through the murderous rage alone of this jealous prince, is the prophecy fulfilled; and the most convincing evidence is given, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Saviour of the world.

In this view, as confirming the faith of all Believers to the very end of the world, is this prophecy pre-eminently important; since it was beyond the power of man ever to imagine such an incident; and since it took place only through the cruelty of him who sought to destroy Christ as soon as he was come into the world.]

Let us further consider,

III. Its mystical import, as applicable to the Israel of God in all ages—

It is well known that the whole deliverance of Israel from Egypt was a type of the deliverance of God's Israel from sin and Satan, death and hell. Taking, then, the passage in that view, we see in it,

1. The sovereignty of his grace—

[There is not a child of God, at whatever period he was converted to the faith of Christ, but was loved of God before the foundation of the world. Of every one of them it may be said, "God hath loved us with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness hath he drawn us[g]." To this all the Scriptures bear witness[h] ——— And therefore, if we be God's children, we must bear in mind to whose sovereign grace alone we owe it: "We have not chosen him; but he has chosen us[i]."]

2. The work which he has ordained to accomplish in all his people—

[e] Matt. ii. 5, 6. [f] Matt. ii. 22, 23. [g] Jer. xxxi. 3.
[h] Eph. i. 4, 5. 2 Tim. i. 9. [i] John xv. 16.

[Every one of them does he bring out of Egypt. However long we may have been in bondage there, he looses our bonds, and "brings us into the glorious liberty of his children." See what he did for his people of old, and then you will see what he will do for us: did he cause them to go from their bondage, and to commit themselves altogether to the guidance and protection of their God? That is what he will do for us: neither sin nor Satan shall detain us any longer under their dominion; but we shall devote ourselves altogether to the Lord, to be to him a holy and a peculiar people — — —]

3. The efficacy of his grace in their behalf—

[Not one was left behind: "not one feeble person was found," at that juncture, amidst all the tribes of Israel. And shall there be one amongst all his people, whom he has redeemed, unable to withstand his spiritual enemies? No, not one: "It is not the will of our Father that one of his little ones should perish." There may be a diversity in the *mode* of their preservation, as at the shipwreck of St. Paul: but not one shall be lost; nor shall a hair fall from the head of any one amongst them[k].]

ADDRESS—

1. Have any of you been called to God as from early childhood?

[O, "bless God for this unspeakable gift." How much have you avoided, which might have ensnared and destroyed your souls! Verily, to be called to the knowledge of the truth in early life, is a far richer blessing than to have been called to the possession of crowns and kingdoms.]

2. Are any of you brought into a state of deep affliction?

[This is no proof that God does not "love you," or deal with you as "his children." Israel of old were scarcely escaped from Egypt, before they were menaced with destruction at the Red Sea. And our blessed Lord was scarcely born into the world, before it was necessary that he should be carried to Egypt, to avoid the sword of the destroyer. Indeed, you will find that God in general calls his people to trials. "John the Baptist must be in the deserts, till the time of his shewing unto Israel[l]:" our blessed Lord must be "forty days tempted of the devil in the wilderness," before he shall enter on the office to which he had been baptized[m]: St. Paul shall be three days and three nights without sight; and even then

[k] Acts xxvii. 34, 44. [l] Luke i. 80.
[m] Matt. iv. 1. Mark i. 9—13.

shall go into Arabia before he enters fully on his apostolic office[n]. Thus does God generally cause his people's faith to be tried[o]; and "allures them into the wilderness, before he speaks comfortably to them[p]." If, then, your faith be tried, know that it is needful for your best interests[q], and that it is by your tribulations that he will further in you the work of "patience and experience and hope[r]."]

3. Are there amongst you those who have never yet come out of Egypt?

[Be sure, that if you fancy yourselves children of God, whilst yet you have no desire to relinquish this vain world, you do but deceive your own souls. Your "faith," if it be genuine, "will overcome the world[s];" and "the cross of Christ," if ever its saving power be felt, will cause you "to be crucified to the world, and the world to be as a crucified object unto you[t]." They who are the Lord's people indeed, "are not of the world, even as he was not of the world[u]." I call you, therefore, to shew "whose you are, and whom you serve:" as for "serving God and Mammon too, it is impossible[x];" and to attempt it, is an act of treason against God[y]. Come out, then, from Egypt and its pollutions, as God has commanded you: and then "he will be a Father unto you; and ye shall be his sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty[z]."]

[n] Acts ix. 9. and Gal. i. 17. [o] Heb. xii. 8. [p] Hos. ii. 14, 15.
[q] 1 Pet. i. 6, 7. [r] Rom. v. 3—5. [s] 1 John v. 4.
[t] Gal. vi. 14. [u] John xvii. 14, 16.
[x] Matt. vi. 24. [y] Jam. iv. 4. the Greek.
[z] 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

MCLXX.

THE MANNER IN WHICH GOD DRAWS HIS PEOPLE.

Hos. xi. 4. *I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.*

THE doctrine of Divine influences is generally considered as enthusiastic and absurd. But though we grant that there is much in it which is above our comprehension, there is nothing in it that is contrary to reason. We know not how mind operates upon matter, when we move any of the members of our body: but does any one, on this account, question the influence of volition upon our motions? So, though there be much in Divine influences that is

inexplicable, we affirm, that to them must be ascribed all the good which we do. In fact, we have, in the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, a very striking illustration of the way in which the Spirit of God operates upon the souls of men. In reference to that event God says, "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love[a]:" and the same may be said of all who are delivered from the infinitely sorer bondage of sin and Satan.

Let us then consider,

I. How God drew his people out of Egypt—

They were not of themselves seeking deliverance. On the contrary, when Moses interposed for them by slaying one of their oppressors, and proceeded to encourage in them a hope of yet further deliverance, "they thrust him from them, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" But when God's time was fully come, "he drew them," as we are told, "by the cords of a man, and by bands of love"—

[He made them to feel their sore bondage, and to cry so bitterly by reason of it, that God himself was afflicted by their afflictions. He then sent them a Saviour, even Moses, whom he commissioned and qualified to effect their deliverance. By him he displayed his almighty power; and in ten successive plagues inflicted upon Egypt, (from all of which they were exempt,) he shewed them, that, under the guidance of Moses, they might safely go forth from Egypt, and cast off the yoke of their oppressors. Thus he drew them by such considerations as are proper to influence a rational being: for it is impossible for a man under the pressure of grievous affliction not to desire relief, and gladly to avail himself of such aid as promises to be effectual: He drew them, I say, "with cords of a man."

Further, God put himself at the head of them, and undertook to be their guide: and, when their danger became so imminent, that they were reduced to utter despair, he opened the sea before them, and led them through on dry ground, and overwhelmed all their enemies in the waves, which had just before been a wall for the protection of his chosen people. Here "he drew them with the bands of love," as he did afterwards in all their journeys, supplying by miracle their every want, and manifesting his glory to them, and giving them a

[a] Compare ver. 1. with the text.

written revelation of his will, and taking them for his own peculiar people above all the people upon the face of the whole earth. To them also he held forth the prospect of an inheritance, even of a land flowing with milk and honey, where they should enjoy such peace, and plenty, and happiness, as were unknown to the whole world besides.

Now these distinguishing favours were well calculated to bind them to him in such love and gratitude, that nothing should ever be able to draw them from him, or to damp their ardour in his service.

True indeed these means did not produce their full effect upon that generation, all of whom perished in the wilderness, excepting two. What addresses itself to our senses only, is but transient in its operation on the mind; whereas the things which are seen by *faith* are always present, and abidingly influential and uniformly effectual. In this respect, therefore, the parallel between God's dealings with the Jews and with us will not hold good. But still the manner in which God drew them serves as "a shadow of good things to come," and affords to us a striking illustration of the way in which he will draw his people to himself under the better dispensation which we are privileged to enjoy.]

To elucidate this, I will shew,

II. How he will draw us at this day—

We need his influences as much as ever his ancient people did—

[No man ever comes to God by any power of his own. Our blessed Lord expressly says, "No man cometh unto me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him[b]." In fact, we have not in ourselves a power to do a good act[c], or speak a good word[d], or think a good thought[e]. "Our sufficiency for every thing is of God alone;" "nor without him can we either will or do any one thing that is pleasing in his sight[f]. If any man could have exerted such a power, it would have been the Apostle Paul. But he confesses, "By the grace of God I am what I am;" and, when constrained to speak of his labours, he recalls, as it were, his words, and, with holy jealousy for God's honour, adds, "yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me[g]." If any man think he can renew and sanctify his own soul, let him make the effort; and his own *experience* shall attest all that *the Scriptures* have spoken.]

And how is it that God will work in us?—

[b] John vi. 44. [c] John xv. 5. [d] Matt. xii. 34.
[e] 2 Cor. iii. 5. [f] Phil. ii. 13. [g] 1 Cor. xv. 10.

[He will draw us, even as he did them, *by rational considerations*, and *by gracious influences*, or, as my text expresses it, "by the cords of a man, and by the bands of love."

When first God begins a work of grace upon the soul, he shews to a man his fallen state, and his utter incapacity to save himself. Then He makes known to him the Lord Jesus, who has died for the redemption of a ruined world, and shews to him, that through that adorable Saviour he may obtain a deliverance from all guilt and misery, and be made a partaker of everlasting happiness and glory. Now the question necessarily arises in his mind, 'Shall I persist in my wickedness? Shall I pour contempt upon these offers of mercy? Shall I plunge my soul into irremediable and endless perdition? No: This were to act more stupidly than the beasts, and to forfeit all title to the rationality of man.' Thus is he drawn in the first instance by "the cords of a man." But in his further progress he experiences the still more influential drawings of God's love, which, as "bands," constrain him to surrender up himself a willing captive to his God. The Holy Spirit, whose office it is to "glorify Christ, takes of the things that are Christ's, and shews them to the believing soul[h]," and thus makes "Christ more precious to him" than ten thousand worlds[i]. In time he enables the soul to "comprehend the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of that love of Christ which passeth knowledge[k];" and by witnessing with the soul that it is an object of God's love, he enables it with boldness and with confidence to address him by the endearing name of Father[l], and to assure itself of an everlasting participation of his kingdom and glory. With such bands cast around him, the Believer is drawn to God in a way of holy obedience, and can "defy all the hosts of hell itself ever to separate him from his love[m]." The abiding feeling of his heart from henceforth is, "The love of Christ constraineth me, because I 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 unto him who died for them and rose again[n]."]

OBSERVE from hence,

1. What reason unconverted men have to blush and be ashamed—

[They will take occasion from the doctrine of Divine influences to justify themselves, saying, 'If God do not draw me, how can I go to him?' But I ask, Have not the cords of a man been spread around you, yea, and the bands of redeeming

[h] John xvi. 14. [i] 1 Pet. ii. 7. [k] Eph. iii. 18.
[l] Rom. viii. 15, 16. [m] Rom. viii. 35—39. [n] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

love also, and you have burst all these bands asunder, and cast all these cords from you? Do you not know that heaven and hell are before you? and are you acting the part of rational beings, whilst you take no care to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life? And have you never heard of what Christ has done and suffered for you, and felt too the influences of his Holy Spirit calling you to repentance? Yet have you not ungratefully slighted all the love of Christ, and wickedly resisted the Holy Ghost? Tell me, then, whether such conduct do not call for the deepest humiliation before God? Verily, you may vindicate yourselves, as you will, now; but you shall stand self-condemned at the judgment-seat of Christ.]

2. What reason believers have to bless and adore their God—

[Though the unbeliever must ascribe to himself alone the misery to which he is hastening, you owe to God and to his sovereign grace all the blessedness which you enjoy. Had not God of his infinite mercy drawn you, you had no more turned to him, than Satan himself has done[o]. In the view of all the good that you either possess or hope for, you must say, "He that hath wrought us to the self-same thing is God[p]." Give him then the glory due unto his name — — — and look to him for a continuance of his grace, that his work may be carried on and perfected in your souls. Beg of him to fasten his bands yet more firmly about you, that nothing either within or without may break them. And endeavour at all times to yield to his attractive influences, and to comply with the first intimations of his will. And, if you be treated with contempt for this by an ungodly world, comfort yourselves with the reflection, that you are acting the part of *rational beings;* and that the more closely you are drawn to God in this world, the more intimately you will enjoy him to all eternity in the world to come.]

[o] John vi. 44. [p] 2 Cor. v. 5.

MCLXXI.

GOD'S COMPASSION.

Hos. xi. 7—9. *My people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him:* [yet] *how shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together: I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger.*

THE riches of divine grace are manifest in all the promises; but they are more eminently displayed in the manner in which the promises are given. God often introduces them after an enumeration of his people's sins. The passage before us well exemplifies this remark[a]. God has been contrasting his kindness to Israel, and their ingratitude towards him; in the text he sets forth their wickedness with all its aggravations: yet all this is preparatory, not to a heavy denunciation of his wrath, but to the tenderest expressions of paternal love—

I. The conduct of men towards God—

The ten tribes, since their separation from Judah, had become idolaters: yet God calls them his people because they had been admitted into covenant with him, and still professed to be his. Thus all who call themselves Christians are "God's people."

But they "are bent to backsliding from him"—

[The ungodly are justly compared to an unruly heifer: they will not submit to the yoke of God's laws: their whole spirit and temper is like that of Pharaoh[b]; the "bent" and inclination of their hearts is wholly towards sin. An outward conformity to God's will they may approve, but they have a rooted aversion to spiritual obedience.]

Nor can they by any means be prevailed on to "exalt and honour him"—

[They are "called" frequently by God's ministers; they are exhorted and entreated to return to the Most High; but neither promises can allure nor threatenings alarm them: they turn a deaf ear to all admonitions; they will not "exalt" God in their hearts and lives.]

This is almost universally the conduct of mankind—

[There are a few indeed who desire and delight to serve God; they wish him to be the sole Lord and Governor of their hearts; it is their study to exalt him both in their words and actions: but these are few in every age and place; so few, that, in comparison of the rebellious, they may be said to be "none at all."]

[a] See similar instances, Isai. xliii. 22—25. and lvii. 17, 18.
[b] Exod. v. 2.

What might such persons expect at the hand of God?

II. God's conduct towards them—

How different are God's ways from the ways of man! Instead of executing vengeance in a moment,

He deliberates—

[Admah and Zeboim were cities destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah; and such monuments of wrath do the unregenerate deserve to be; but God knows not, as it were, how to inflict the deserved punishment: he calls to mind that they are *his* people[c]; he hesitates, like a parent that is about to disinherit his son; thus is he distracted between his affection for them, and his regard for his own honour[d].]

He relents—

[To accommodate himself to our weak apprehensions, he speaks of himself after the manner of men: he cannot endure the thought of making men the objects of his everlasting displeasure. Thus did Jesus weep over the murderous Jerusalem[e]; and thus do the bowels of our Father yearn over us[f].]

He resolves—

[Often has "the fierce anger" of the Lord been kindled against us; yet many times has he turned away from his wrathful indignation[g]: often, when his bow was bent, has he forborne to strike[h]: he waits, if peradventure we may yet return to him. His language to his rebellious creatures is the same as ever[i]—.]

INFER—

1. How precious in the sight of God are the souls of men!

[When it was necessary for man's salvation, God gave his Son: nor did he then *deliberate*, "how shall I do this[k]?" neither did he *relent*, when he laid our iniquities on him[l]; yea, he was even *pleased* in bruising his own Son for us[m]. But when a sinner seems irreclaimable, every tender emotion is excited; God sustains a conflict in his mind, and cannot give him up. O that men would duly estimate the worth of their own souls!]

[c] The repetition of their names, "*thee*, Ephraim, and *thee*, Israel," seems to import tenderness and affection towards them.

[d] Thus also in Hos. vi. 4. [e] Luke xix. 41. [f] Jer. xxxi. 20.
[g] Ps. lxxviii. 38. [h] Ps. vii. 11, 12. [i] Jer. iii. 12, 13.
[k] Rom. viii. 32. [l] Mark xiv. 35, 36.
[m] This is the proper sense of Isai. liii. 10.

2. How just will be the condemnation of the impenitent!

[This compassion of God greatly aggravates their backslidings; and at last it will give way to wrath and indignation[n]. Soon God will not deliberate, but decide; not relent, but laugh at their calamity; not resolve to pardon, but swear they shall not enter into his rest. Then how just will their condemnation appear! May this goodness of God now lead us to repentance!]

3. How certainly shall the returning sinner find mercy!

[If God feel thus for the rebellious, how much more for the penitent! Let all then seek him with humble confidence in his mercy. Let them offer their supplications like those of old[o]—; so shall that song of praise succeed their present disquietude[p]—]

[n] Gen. vi. 3. [o] Isai. lxiii. 15. [p] Isai. xii. 1.

MCLXXII.

JACOB WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL.

Hos. xii. 3, 4, 6. *By his strength he had power with God: yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept and made supplication unto him . . . . Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually.*

THE historical parts of Scripture, if duly improved, will be found no less useful than any other. The Apostles often refer to them, and declare, that the things which had occurred to their ancestors, had "happened to them for ensamples," and that they were recorded "for our admonition." The Prophet Hosea was reproving both Ephraim (or the ten tribes) and Judah (the two remaining tribes) for their respective sins. But having called the latter by the name of "Jacob," he thought it proper to guard them against the delusion of imagining themselves accepted of God because of their descent from Jacob, when their conduct was in direct opposition to that which he maintained. He then brings to their remembrance a very striking instance of Jacob's communion with

God; and takes occasion from it to urge them to an imitation of his example.

We shall consider,

I. Jacob's victory—

In a season of great distress he betook himself to prayer—

[Jacob was greatly alarmed at the tidings that his brother Esau was coming against him with four hundred men to destroy him. He therefore used all the most prudential means to pacify his brother, or at least to prevent the total destruction of himself and his family. But he did not trust in the means he had devised. He determined to seek protection from God, well knowing that no means whatever could succeed without him, and that his favour would be a sure defence.

When Jacob staid behind in order to call upon his God, God instantly came forth to meet him. The person who is said to have wrestled with him is sometimes called a man, sometimes an angel, and sometimes God[a]. It was none other than the Son of God, "the Angel of the Covenant," who assumed on this occasion, as he did on many other occasions, a human shape: and by his condescending to come to Jacob in this manner, he shewed, both to him and us, that none should ever seek his face in vain.

As for Jacob's wrestling with the angel, the prophet explains the import of that phrase, by saying, that Jacob "wept and made supplication unto him." He "stirred up himself, as it were, to lay hold on God;" and pleaded his cause before him with boldness and confidence. Assured of a successful issue, he persevered in the conflict till break of day; and when solicited by his apparent adversary to terminate his exertions, he replied, "I will not let thee go until thou bless me." Yet we are particularly informed, that with this boldness there was a mixture of the deepest humility; for he urged his petitions as our Lord himself did in his incarnate state[b], with strong crying and tears.

Thus did Jacob shew us to whom we should go in an hour of trouble, and in what manner we should endeavour to interest him in our behalf.]

By this means he obtained the desired relief—

[We are told twice in the text, that "he had power, and prevailed." He prevailed with God; and by God's assistance prevailed over man. The great object of his suit was to defeat the malice, and assuage the wrath, of his brother Esau. But

[a] Compare Gen. xxxii. 24, 28, 30. with ver. 4, 5.

[b] Heb. v. 7.

how should he effect this? Conciliating as his measures and his conduct were, he could not ensure success: and therefore he went to God, who has all hearts in his hand, and turneth them whithersoever he will. He well knew, that, if once he could get God on his side, he was safe; for that "none could be against him, if God were for him." To God therefore he presented his supplication; and behold the instantaneous effect! The enraged persecutor meets him with fraternal affection, and the only strife between them was, who should manifest the greatest love.]

In the exhortation grounded on this fact, we see,

II. The improvement we should make of it—

The intermediate words, omitted in the text, are merely a repetition of the same idea, that the person who had met with Jacob in Bethel, was "the Lord God of Hosts;" and that, in thus conversing with Jacob, he had, in fact, conversed with the Jewish nation, and had evinced his readiness to hear the supplications of all that call upon him. Then follows the prophet's exhortation, which it will be proper to enforce;

1. "Turn thou unto thy God"—

[He that was Jacob's God will also be ours: he is ours by external profession, and will be ours by the special communication of his grace, if we seek him with our whole heart.

To those who are in trouble, God is the only refuge[c]. We may go to the creature, and obtain no benefit: but, if we make our application to him, he will hear and help us. In him we shall be as in an impregnable fortress; and if the whole human race were combined for our destruction, not a hair of our head should perish. Let every one of us then turn unto God; and we shall find him a very present help in trouble.]

2. "Keep mercy and judgment"—

[We may be ready to think, that as Jacob, notwithstanding his perfidious conduct, found acceptance with God, we may also live in the violation of our duty, and transgress the plainest principles of love and equity, and yet have God for our protector and friend. But Jacob's treachery was a source of innumerable troubles to him through life, and especially of those very fears that harassed him on this occasion. And we shall find, that, sooner or later, deceit will bring its own punishment

[c] Nahum i. 7.

along with it. Doubtless when Jacob "wept," he did so from a recollection that he had brought all these evils on himself, and had altogether forfeited the Divine favour. And to those in hell, it will be no inconsiderable augmentation of their misery to reflect, that they brought it on themselves.

Let us then determine, through grace, that we will give no just occasion to the enemies of our religion to blaspheme, but that we will in every thing keep a conscience void of offence towards both God and man.]

3. "Wait on thy God continually"—

[Whether we be reduced to such manifest straits as Jacob was, or not, we equally need the superintending care of God's Providence. We have spiritual enemies, incomparably more numerous, powerful, and inveterate than Esau's band; nor can any human means effectually defeat their malice.

Let us then not merely call on God occasionally, under the pressure of some heavy trial, or in the near prospect of death; but let us maintain fellowship with him continually, and by fervent supplication prevail with him to preserve us from all evil, and to bless us with all spiritual blessings. Let us remember, that he is *our* God in Christ Jesus, and that, through the aid of our incarnate God, we shall be more than conquerors over every enemy[d].]

[d] If this were the subject of a *Fast Sermon*, it might be IMPROVED, 1. in reference to *the subject*; 2. in reference to *the occasion*. The former of these heads might be treated as above; and under the latter it might be shewn from a variety of instances (*e. g.* 2 Sam. xv. 31. and xvii. 14. 2 Chron. xx. 5, 23. Isai. xxxvii. 15, 36.), that humble and importunate prayer is the most effectual method of defeating the rage or devices of our enemies.

MCLXXIII.

JEHOVAH ALONE DESERVING OF OUR FEAR OR CONFIDENCE.

Hos. xiii. 4. *Thou shalt know no God but me: for there is no Saviour beside me.*

IN the Holy Scriptures, every kind of argument is urged that is proper to influence the minds of men: sometimes we are persuaded by the terrors of the Lord, and sometimes are allured by his exceeding great and precious promises. A difference is observed towards men differently disposed, and differently circumstanced: "towards some, compassion is exercised"

in all its gentlest forms; whilst others are "saved with fear, and snatched out of the fire" with a kind of compulsive violence. But it not unfrequently happens, that where the obstinacy of men is such as almost to preclude a hope of prevailing with them, both the kinds of argument are combined, in order, if possible, by either, or by both, to overcome the obdurate soul. Thus, in the passage before us, the prophet, having represented the ten tribes as increasingly shameless in their idolatries, declares from God, that they shall pass away like the morning cloud, or early dew, and that, like chaff from a threshing-floor, or smoke from a chimney, they shall be scattered as with a whirlwind over the face of the whole earth[a]. But still, as though God repented of denouncing so heavy a judgment against them, he addresses them with tender pity; "Yet I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt; and thou shalt know no god before me; for there is no Saviour beside me:" that is, "I can never forget the relation which I bear towards thee; and I am as willing as ever to bestow on thee all the blessings of salvation, if only thou wilt banish from thee those rivals which have provoked me to jealousy."

In these words there are two things to be noticed;

I. The command—

In its primary and literal sense, it refers to the putting away of their molten images which they had made to worship. But the terms used are nearly the same as those by which the first commandment in the Decalogue is expressed; and therefore we must consider them as extending also to the idolatry of the heart. Indeed, idolatry is, as St. Paul expresses it, "a worshipping and serving of the creature more than the Creator, who is God over all, blessed for ever[b]:" and consequently, we are here forbidden to pay to any creature that regard which is due to God alone, or to make it the chief object of,

1. Our love—

[a] ver. 2, 3. [b] Rom. i. 25.

[In a subordinate way we may love the creature, but not so as to put it in competition with God. There is nothing in the whole universe which we should desire, or seek, in comparison of Him; nor any thing which we should not willingly part with, rather than offend him — — — The state of our minds towards God should be like that of David, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee[c]." To make pleasure, or riches, or honour, or any thing but God, our chief good, is idolatry[d].]

2. Our fear—

[Scarcely do any begin to fear God, but their acknowledgment of him is retarded by the fear of man. Those who were never ashamed of sin, and who were wont to commit all manner of iniquity with greediness, are filled with apprehensions lest their change of sentiment should be discovered, and they should be called to suffer reproach or persecution for the Lord's sake. But all such fear argues a forgetfulness of God[e], who alone is worthy to be feared[f] — — — If we regard God as we ought to do, our answer to every cowardly thought will be, "The Lord is my strength and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid[g]?"]

3. Our confidence—

[When trials of any kind arise, we almost universally turn our eyes to the creature, rather than to God: either we look to our own wisdom and energy to deliver us, or to the favour and exertion of our fellow-creatures: we can scarcely ever realize the thought of a superintending Providence, who is able and willing to interpose for us: we are apt rather to imagine, that it would be an insult to the Most High to suppose that he will trouble himself about such trifling concerns as ours. In like manner, if our trials be of a spiritual nature, we look to our own wisdom to guide us, our own righteousness to justify us, and our own strength to obtain for us the victory over all our spiritual enemies. But in all this, we greatly dishonour God, in whom should be all our trust for body and for soul, for time and for eternity[h] — — — In all such creature-confidence we manifest an entire departure of heart from God, and subject ourselves to his just and heavy displeasure[i].]

The equity of this command is strongly marked in,

[c] Ps. lxxiii. 25.

[d] Phil. iii. 19. "Whose *god* is their belly." Col. iii. 5. "Covetousness, which is idolatry."

[e] Isai. li. 12, 13. [f] Luke xii. 4, 5. Isai. viii. 12, 13.

[g] Ps. xxvii. 1. [h] Ps. xi. 1, 4. [i] Jer. xvii. 5, 6.

II. The reason with which it is enforced—

Though God might well require obedience on the sole ground of his own authority, yet he is graciously pleased to assign a reason for this command; a reason, which, whilst it evinces the equity of the command, shews how deeply we are interested in obeying it. There is nothing besides God that can save us,

1. In this world—

[Suppose that all the wealth and honour that ever were possessed by man were centred in one person, would they ward off the incursions of disease, or repel the assaults of death? Would they even secure their own continuance, so that they should not speedily give way to poverty and disgrace? In the event of any great reverse of circumstances, will those perishing vanities assuage the anguish of a broken bone, or calm the tempest of a troubled spirit? Will a guilty conscience be quieted by them, or death be divested of its sting? Disease and death have no respect of persons; nor will peace of mind be procured by high-sounding titles, or great possessions. It is God alone that can avert trouble, or sanctify it to our good. He can keep us unhurt, when thousands are falling on our right hand, and on our left: or, if he see fit to send us tribulation, he can enable us to rejoice and glory in it: and as for death, he has numbered it among the treasures of his people, whom he enables to long for it, that they may be with Christ, in complete and everlasting felicity — — — If then we look only to our happiness in this present life, who can bear a comparison with Jehovah, as the source of it to those who trust in him?]

2. In the world to come—

[If the vanities of time and sense can do nothing for us in this present life, how much less can they in the life to come! There they cannot so much as purchase for us a drop of water to cool our tongue. But O! what a Saviour will Jehovah be! yea, what crowns and kingdoms will he bestow on his believing and obedient people! — — — Behold the Rich Man stripped of all his transient joys, and plunged into that abyss of misery which once he despised! Behold, on the other hand, the once destitute and neglected Lazarus in the bosom of his God! Which of the two had chosen the better part; he who had walked in the ways of this world, and made Mammon his god; or he who had sought Jehovah as his God and portion? Truly, one glance of the celestial world is quite sufficient to evince the reasonableness of the injunction given us in our text — — —]

This subject may be IMPROVED,

1. For our conviction—

[It is an awful truth, that instead of preferring God before every thing, we have preferred every thing before him. Only let us compare the anxiety we have felt about created objects, with that which we have felt in reference to God, and we shall need no further evidence of our being idolaters in the sight of God. What then have we reason to expect at his hands, in the day when he shall judge the world? Let us not judge of ourselves by some of the grosser sins which are injurious to society, but by those which strike at the honour and authority of God. Then we shall see, that, instead of being a Saviour to us, we have reason to fear lest he arise and plead his own cause, and become an avenger of his own insulted Majesty.]

2. For our consolation—

[If we take Jehovah for our God, there is not any good thing which we may not expect at his hands. The declaration that there is no Saviour beside him, is, in fact, an assurance, that he will be a Saviour to us, and do for us more than the whole universe can do. We may view salvation in all its bearings, and in its utmost extent; and then say "All this will my God *be to* me; all this he will *do for* me." We cannot possibly raise our expectations too high; for "he will do exceeding abundantly for us above all that we can ask or think:" nor need it be any grief to us that there is no Saviour besides him; for we shall want no other: He is almighty, and will be all-sufficient — — —]

MCLXXIV.

HELP IN CHRIST FOR SELF-DESTROYED SINNERS.

Hos. xiii. 9. *O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.*

THE great mass of nominal Christians need to be informed respecting their state by nature, and the means by which they are to be delivered from it; and they who have a theoretical acquaintance with these things, yet need to be put frequently in remembrance of them, in order that they may be more abidingly influenced by the consideration of them. In the words of our text, all mistakes on these points are clearly rectified; and we are told on the authority of God himself, that,

I. Man's destruction is of himself—

Whatever we may imagine to the contrary, there are multitudes of the human race eternally destroyed[a]. Their destruction too is altogether of themselves: for,

1. They will walk in the way that leads to it—

[God has told them plainly that eternal misery must be the fruit of sin and impenitence[b]. Yet men will continue to disregard the warnings of God, and to practise the things which are displeasing to him! What then must become of them, if there be any truth in the word of God? Or whom must they blame, when they feel the judgments which they would not fear? The man, who by a poisonous draught, or by any other means, puts a period to his life, is not more the author of his own death, than these are of their own destruction.]

2. They will not use the means which God has prescribed for their escape—

[God has graciously opened a way for the salvation of a ruined world: he has sent his only dear Son to die for sinners, and his good Spirit to instruct and sanctify them. But men will not seek to be washed in the Redeemer's blood: they will not pray for the influences of the Holy Spirit: they will not cordially accept the salvation offered them. They are so intent on their worldly business or pleasure, that they will not afford time for spiritual employments. Is it not then utterly their own fault if they perish? A man, who having taken a poisonous draught, whether intentionally or not, would be justly considered as the author of his own death, if he obstinately refused an antidote that was tendered to him: and so must they be considered as destroying themselves who neglect the means which God has provided for their escape.]

3. They make use of every thing ultimately to ensure their own destruction—

[Whether they look *upwards to God*, or *around them to the world*, or *within them to their own experience*, they turn every thing into an occasion of fostering their own delusions, and of lulling themselves asleep in a fatal security[c] — — —]

[a] Matt. vii. 13, 14. [b] 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. Luke xiii. 3.

[c] This truth will be seen in the most striking point of view, by the following concise statement. Men take this occasion,

1. From God himself—

From his *perfections*—

From his sovereignty; "If he will not give me his grace, how can I help myself?"

From his mercy; "God is too merciful to condemn any man."

But though man's destruction is of himself, we must not suppose that his salvation also is of himself: no;

II. His salvation is of God alone—

If we inquire who it is, that thus arrogates to himself the exclusive power of saving sinners, we shall find that it is the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone is "King" in Sion[d], "besides whom there is no Saviour[e]," and who invariably claims this as his unalienable prerogative[f].

1. There is help for us in no other—

[Who besides him could possibly *make atonement for our sins?* Man himself could never satisfy Divine Justice ——— Nor could all the angels in heaven offer unto God a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of men?——— None but He who was "Jehovah's Fellow" was equal to the task of expiating

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From his *providence*—
If it be indulgent; "These blessings are proofs of his love."
If it be afflictive; "I have my sufferings in this life."
From his *grace*—
"He gave his Son to die for me; therefore I have nothing to fear."

2. From the world around them—

From the godly—
If they are consistent; "They are unreasonably precise."
If they are inconsistent; "They are hypocrites; they are all alike; I am as good as they; only I make less talk about religion."
From the ungodly—
"I can never think that so many are wrong, and so few right."

3. From their own experience—

If they have been corrupt; "Why did God give me these passions?"
If they have been moral; "I thank thee that I am not as other men are."
If they are learned; "Cannot I understand my Bible without Divine illumination?"
If they are unlearned; "My ignorance is excusable; I am no scholar."
If they have been neglectful of religious duties; "I have done no one any harm."
If they have been observant of religious duties; they put their formal services in the place of Christ, and consider them as decisive evidences of their conversion.

Thus instead of arguing from these topics so as to stimulate their exertions, they derive encouragement from them all to continue in their sins.

[d] ver. 10. with Matt. xxi. 5. and Acts v. 31. [e] ver. 4.
[f] Isai. xlv. 22. with Matt. xi. 28. and John vii. 37.

transgression, and effecting a reconciliation between God and man[g] — — —

Who besides him could *rescue us out of the hands of our spiritual enemies?* He is that stronger man, who alone can vanquish our mighty adversary, and deliver us from our sore bondage[h] — — —

Who besides him can *teach us the way of salvation*[i]*?* or *incline us to seek after it*[k]*?* or *render our endeavours effectual*[l]*?*

We may truly say then, that as there is no other foundation on which to build our hopes[m], so neither is there any other name or power whereby we can be saved[n]? "Christ is ALL, AND IN ALL[o]."]

2. In him there is help sufficient—

[There is nothing wanting in sinful man, which is not abundantly supplied in Jesus Christ. In him there is wisdom to direct the most ignorant[p],—merit to justify the most guilty[q],—grace to sanctify the most polluted[r],—and strength to render even the weakest of the human race a conqueror, yea, "more than conqueror," over all his enemies[s]. He is furnished of God for this very end[t], and appointed of him to this very office[u], and is in every respect "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him[x]."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are ignorant of their real state—

[Too many, alas! are altogether ignorant of their undone state, and still more so of the guilt attaching to them as the authors of their own misery. But whether we know these things or not, it is an indisputable fact that we have destroyed ourselves, and that there is no possibility of recovery for us but in and through Christ. Let us then seek instruction on these infinitely important subjects, lest we "perish for ever for lack of knowledge[y]." And let us not for one moment look for acceptance in any other way than through the Lord Jesus Christ, as though we were not self-destroyed, or there remained in us any sufficiency to help ourselves. For so destitute are we of all help in ourselves, that, if a good thought would cancel all our past iniquities, and open the kingdom of heaven to us, we could not supply it[z]. If ever we would partake of the

g Ps. lxxxix. 19. with Heb. x. 4—10.
h Luke xi. 21, 22.
i Matt. xi. 27.
k Phil. ii. 13.
l John xv. 5.
m 1 Cor. iii. 11.
n Acts iv. 12.
o Col. iii. 11.
p Matt. xi. 29.
q Acts xiii. 39.
r 1 Cor. vi. 11.
s 2 Cor. xii. 9. Phil. iv. 13.
t Isai. lxi. 1.
u 1 Cor. i. 30.
x Heb. vii. 25.
y Hos. iv. 6.
z 2 Cor. iii. 5.

felicity of heaven, we must renounce all self-dependence, and look for our help in Christ alone[a].]

2. Those who are desponding on account of it—

[When men begin to see their perishing condition, and to feel a consciousness that they have been the authors of their own ruin, they often distress themselves with apprehensions that their state is irremediable. Now the text affords a complete antidote to all desponding fears: in it God addresses himself immediately to the self-ruined sinner, and says to him, "I am THY help." Whatever guilt therefore any one may have contracted, and whatever cause he may have to reproach himself, let him only consider who it is that says to him, "In ME is thy help," and he may instantly dismiss his fears. Let him "be strong in faith, giving glory to God;" and he shall find that, "before Zerubbabel the mountains will become a plain[b]."]

[a] Rom. ix. 30—33. [b] Isai. xl. 27—31. Zech. iv. 7.

MCLXXV.

DIRECTIONS FOR AN ACCEPTABLE APPROACH TO GOD.

Hos. xiv. 1—3. *O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us: we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our Gods: for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy.*

FOR the encouragement of all who feel the burthen of their sins, God has declared, yea has sworn, that "he has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live:" and the whole Scriptures bear testimony to that blessed truth. But, lest any should be discouraged by the idea that they know not how to approach him acceptably, it has pleased God to prescribe the very "words" whereby he would have them address him. And assuredly, if he had consulted all the weary and heavy-laden sinners in the universe, and had permitted them, or any individual among them, to dictate to him what expressions he should prescribe, the whole world could never have

suggested any that were more suited to the necessities of men, or more satisfactory to their minds, than those recorded in our text.

In the words before us, we see, not merely our general warrant for returning to the Lord, but more particularly,

I. What petitions to offer—

[What would any one who felt the burthen of sin, and a restoration to the Divine favour, desire? What but a *full* remission of all his sins, and a *free* communication of all spiritual and eternal blessings? He would wish for pardon to be *complete;* because if so much as one sin were left upon his soul, it would inevitably plunge him into everlasting perdition ——— He would also wish for his reception to be perfectly *gratuitous*, because he can never do any thing to merit it at the hands of God ——— Behold then, it is precisely in this way that we are directed to pray; "Take away *all* iniquity, and receive us *graciously*." And let it be remembered, that this address is not put into the mouths of those only who have contracted a less measure of guilt than others, but of all, to whatever extent "their iniquities" may have abounded, and to whatever depth they may have "fallen" by them. If only we have a desire to "return to the Lord our God," we are the persons invited and commanded to return *in this way*.]

In our text, we are further told,

II. What promises to make—

We must not imagine that we can make to God any adequate *return* for his mercies towards us; nor must we presume to offer any thing to him as an *inducement* to exercise mercy towards us: nor in any point of view whatever must we promise any thing in our own strength. But his mercies undoubtedly call for the best return that we can make; and they lay us under an obligation to do our utmost to please and serve him. Whatever tribute we can render to him, we should: and he here tells us what he will accept at our hands, namely, the tribute of,

1. A grateful heart—

[The blood of bulls or "*calves*" is no longer required of us: there are other and better *sacrifices* which he expects us to offer, namely, "the calves of our lips," or the sacrifices of

praise and thanksgiving[a]. And these are the offerings which all who are looking to him for mercy desire to offer. In fact, the more any persons are bowed down with a sense of sin, the more they are ready to say, 'How shall I praise God, if ever I should obtain mercy at his hands! If ever God should admit me to a participation of his kingdom and glory, there will not be one in heaven that will shout the praises of redeeming love so loud as *I*.' This tribute therefore the pardoned sinner will delight to pay — — —]

2. A devoted life—

[To turn from sin, and especially from our besetting sins, is indispensably required of all who seek for mercy at God's hands[b] — — — The besetting sins of Israel were, creature-confidence, and idolatry: they were always looking to Egypt or Assyria for help, rather than to God; and giving to dumb idols the worship that was due to him alone. These evils therefore they were to renounce; and an engagement to renounce them was required of all who desired the remission of their former sins. Thus, in approaching the Most High God, and supplicating mercy from him, we should determine, with God's help, never more to provoke the Lord to jealousy by a renewal of those sins of which we profess to have repented. Our besetting sins in particular must be searched out: and whatever they may have been, whether of a spiritual or carnal nature, we must engage, through grace, to mortify and subdue them — — — We must engage, in dependence upon God, to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."]

As great earnestness is required in our prayers, we are taught,

III. What pleas to urge—

[God indeed is not, nor can be, wrought upon by any considerations that we can propose: but for the stirring up of our own souls it is proper and necessary that we should enforce our petitions with becoming pleas. But where shall we find any consideration fit to be presented to the Deity? No where, but in his own perfections, or in his gracious promises. Here however we are at no loss: the compassions of our God are infinite; and may well be pleaded by those who feel their need of mercy. "In him the fatherless findeth mercy:" in him, too, the guilty, as well as the destitute, find mercy. Search the records of his word; and this truth will be seen written as with a sun-beam. Mark that stupendous effort of mercy, the gift of his only dear Son to the accursed death of the cross! Mark

[a] Ps. l. 13, 14, 23. [b] Heb. xii. 1.

the invitations, the promises, the expostulations, the complaints; "Wilt thou not be made clean? O! when shall it once be?" Mark these, I say; and they form such a plea, as must satisfy the most doubting mind, and turn to transports of joy the apprehensions of every desponding soul — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who refuse to turn to God—

[Alas! how many turn a deaf ear to the solicitations of heaven! "How often would the Saviour gather us under his wings, and we will not?" But, if you will not turn at God's reproof, what will ye answer him in the day when he shall judge the world? Low as "ye are fallen," he now is willing to raise you up: but all possibility of recovery will then be past; and you will sink yet lower still, even into the bottomless abyss of misery. "O consider this, ye that forget God; lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you."]

2. To those who are beginning to return—

[Mind that you return in his appointed way. Seek not merely a deliverance from wrath, but a restoration to the state from whence ye are fallen. Look back on man in his primeval state, and see how Adam walked with God in Paradise: *that* is the pattern that you should endeavour to follow, and the standard to which you should aspire. Or, if he be too far removed from your apprehensions, look at the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, and see how he walked in the midst of this ungodly world: and endeavour to "walk as he walked." For the remission of your sins, and your restoration to the Divine favour, let the mercy of God in Christ Jesus be your only plea, your only hope: and, for the honouring of your reconciled God, let the sacrifice of praise be continually offered to him on the altar of your hearts, and every defilement be banished without hesitation or reserve. Thus coming to him, you shall never be cast out; but shall surely be received to a participation of his favour, and to a possession of his glory.]

MCLXXVI.

THE BLESSINGS THAT PENITENTS MAY EXPECT.

Hos. xiv. 4. *I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.*

MEN who have never seen the evil of sin are ready to imagine that God will not punish: under the idea of advancing the attribute of mercy, they

deprive the Deity of all justice, holiness, and truth. On the other hand, when they are awakened to a due sight and sense of sin, they suppose that God can never forgive such vile and guilty creatures as themselves: they are now as prone to limit his mercy, as before they were to extend it beyond all bounds of truth and soberness. Nor is this disposition found only in one or two instances: hard thoughts of God, and desponding thoughts of their own state, are very common amongst those who begin to repent; and therefore God is particularly solicitous to impress us with a confidence in his mercy. When he proclaimed his name to Moses, there were a great many expressions declarative of his mercy, while there was only one that described his justice. So we shall find, that there is scarcely one threatening in all the book of God, which is not followed by some free and gracious promise. In the passage before us, he has been exhorting the ten tribes to return unto him: he has put words into their mouths, and taught them how to approach him acceptably: and for their further encouragement, he promises to vouchsafe them the richest of all mercies; "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him."

From these words we shall take occasion to shew,

I. What blessings penitents may expect—

[We cannot easily conceive any description of sinners to be worse than those to whom the prophet was writing: this whole prophecy is filled with the most grievous accusations against them: yet God encourages them to repent; and, on the first appearance of penitence and contrition, he sends them this heart-reviving message, "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely."

The first blessing then that every penitent may expect is, that God will heal his backslidings. Sin of every kind, but more especially backsliding, makes a grievous wound in the soul. What pain and anguish did Peter feel, when he went out and wept bitterly! How deeply was David stricken, when he "roared for the disquietness of his heart!" He compares his misery to that occasioned by broken bones; and prays, that God would "make the bones which He had broken to rejoice."

Yet grievous as these wounds are, God will heal them, if we be truly penitent. There are two ways in which he will heal sin: its *guilt* he will heal, by the blood of his Son; its *power and pollution*, by the influences of his Spirit.

He will heal its *guilt, by the blood of his Son:* there is no other balm than this: this alone can avail for the remission of sin: nothing but that which satisfied God will ever satisfy us: nothing but that blood which made an atonement for sin, can ever wash away its stain from our guilty consciences. *That* however will cleanse from all sin: God once opened on the cross a fountain for sin and uncleanness; nor has it lost any of its cleansing efficacy: the deepest wound may be healed in a moment, if it be only sprinkled with this precious blood: nor will God ever fail to impart this balm to any soul that makes application for it: "though their sins may have been as scarlet, they shall be made white as wool; and though they may have been red as crimson, they shall become white as snow."

But God will *destroy the power*, as well as cleanse the guilt of our backsliding: and this he will do *by the influences of his Spirit.* It would be to little purpose that he forgave the guilt, if he did not also subdue the power, of our corruptions: for, however frequently they might be forgiven, they would still rage with unabated fury; the wounds healed for an instant would still be breaking out afresh; nor would our souls attain to any abiding purity or peace. God therefore will cast salt into the bitter fountain of our hearts: he will "put his Spirit within us, and cause us to walk in his statutes:" he will give us "grace sufficient for us:" he will strengthen us to resist temptation, and to fulfil our duties: and though we cannot expect to arrive at sinless perfection whilst we are in this world, yet shall we be so far healed, that "no sin whatever shall have allowed dominion over us."

This then is the first blessing which every penitent may expect; the guilt and power of his sins, yea, even of his most grievous backsliding, shall be healed; and, whereas there was "no soundness in him, but (as the prophet says) wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores," "his health shall spring forth speedily," "the lame man shall leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing."

But is this all that the penitent may expect? No; God has in store for him a higher and richer blessing: it is great indeed to have one's backslidings healed; but it is greater still to enjoy the light of God's countenance, and to have his love shed abroad in one's heart: yet this also shall be vouchsafed to every repenting sinner: God says in my text, "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely." God will feel a joy and a delight over the returning Prodigal; "To this man," says he, "will I *look*, that is of an humble and contrite spirit:"

I will fix my eyes upon him for good; I will look upon him with complacency; though burning seraphs surround my throne, and myriads of angels brighter than the sun encompass me around, I will look through all their shining ranks, nor shall all of them together divert my attention from the contrite sinner: "To this man will I *look*:" from whomsoever I hide my eyes, I will be sure to look on him with pleasure and complacency: "I will rejoice over him with joy; I will rest in my love; I will joy over him with singing." What an unspeakable blessing is this! To have God himself delighting in us, and shedding abroad his love in our hearts, this is inestimable indeed! He adds moreover, "I will love them *freely;*" i. e. *without any desert in them, without any reluctance in himself.* Were he to wait till they had something in themselves worthy to attract his notice, they could have no hope: to all eternity they must remain poor, helpless, miserable, undone creatures: they could never of themselves entertain so much as one good thought; much less could they do any thing to merit God's esteem: God therefore will not wait for any thing in them to attract his regard: if only they be sorry for their sins, and bewail them before him in secret, he will love them *freely;* not for their sakes, but for his own; not because they are good, but because he will shew forth the freeness of his grace. And, as he will love them without any desert in them, so will he love them without any reluctance in himself: he delights in the exercise of mercy: it is the very joy of his heart to manifest his mercy to all that call upon him in truth. When our iniquities compel him to give us up, then he is all backwardness and reluctance; "How shall I give thee up? my bowels are troubled for thee." But when we desire to return to him, he never deliberates; he never says, "How shall I receive such a sinner as thou art?" We may see in the parable of the Prodigal Son what is his conduct towards every repenting sinner: instead of hesitating whether he should receive the Prodigal, he ran to meet him; instead of upbraiding him, he interrupts him in his confession, and seals up his lips with kisses; instead of granting his request and making him the lowest of his servants, he treats him as his best-beloved son, clothes him in the richest garments, and kills the fatted calf for him. Thus does God towards every penitent; and were every soul as much disposed to receive mercy as God is to shew mercy, there would never so much as one perish, even to the end of the world.

These blessings then may every penitent expect: God has here, as also in many other passages, expressly bound himself by his own voluntary promise; so that every penitent may expect these blessings upon the ground of God's truth and faithfulness.]

But there is another ground mentioned in our text: we proceed therefore to notice,

II. On what ground they may expect them—

[This part of our subject will require peculiar care and attention, lest we be misunderstood.

Observe the manner in which the last words of our text are introduced: God says, "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely: *for* mine anger *is* turned away from him:" he is here endeavouring to encourage penitents; and therefore he tells them that he will do great things for them, *because* his anger *is already* turned away from them. After much and careful examination of the words, we are persuaded that this is the true sense and meaning of them; and that they are intended to convey one of the most encouraging truths that can be found in all the book of God, namely, that our repentance is a proof of God's anger being turned away from us, and that the removal of his anger from us is a pledge of greater blessings; or, in other words, that *our having the grace of repentance is a ground whereon we may expect the richest blessings.*

But we will explain ourselves more fully.

Repentance has not in itself any thing meritorious; nor can the mere work of repentance ever afford a ground of hope towards God: to suppose that our repentance can merit any thing at God's hands, or bear any part in our justification before God, would be to subvert the whole Gospel, and to render Christ's death of none effect. Satan cannot take any more effectual method to bring souls to perdition, than to make them trust in their own repentance. Let us not then be understood as though we would lead any man to trust in his repentance; for we say again, that it is impossible to take a surer road to destruction, than he does, who trusts in any repentance or righteousness of his own. But, in another sense, repentance may encourage us to hope; for repentance is a sign and evidence of grace; and grace given, warrants us to expect more grace: and therefore we say, repentance is in some sense a ground of hope: and this, we doubt not, is the meaning of the prophet, in our text. The latter part of our text is a reason for the former part of it: God says in the former part, "I will do so and so;" and then, in the latter, he tells them why they may expect him to do so and so, namely, "because mine anger is turned away from them:" he does not say, "shall be turned away," but *is* already turned away. Their being penitent was a proof that they had grace; their having grace was a proof that God's anger was turned away from them; and the removal of his anger from them was a ground whereon they might expect further blessings from him. To make this matter more clear, let us substantiate two things: First, *Repentance*

is an evidence of grace: no one can doubt *that*, unless he supposes, that he can repent without the grace of God: but a man must be ignorant indeed to frame any such conception as that: if we believe any thing of the Scriptures, or know any thing of our own hearts, we must know, that "Christ is ascended up on high, to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins;" and that we must acknowledge our repentance, as well as "every other good and perfect gift, to be from above, even from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning." It being therefore past a doubt that repentance is an evidence of grace, let us prove next, that *Grace given, warrants us to expect more grace.* The Scriptures plainly assert this; for, on what ground was Paul so confident that God would carry on the good work in the hearts of his Philippian converts, and perform it until the day of Christ? On this ground, namely, "that he had begun a good work in them:" so that, to say the least, grace bestowed is a ground of encouragement whereon we may hope to obtain more grace.

The clear indisputable conclusion from hence is, that if any man has grace to repent, he may take encouragement from it to hope that God will give him more grace: if he has so good an evidence that God's anger is already turned away from him, he has good reason to hope, that God will do more for him, that he will heal his backslidings, and love him freely.

By way of confirming this blessed truth, we will refer you to those memorable words of David[a]; where you will see, that he draws the very same conclusion from the very same premises; and that too in such a way as evidently supposes his argument to be incontrovertible: "Thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living?"]

Let us now conclude, with an INFERENCE or two from what has been said:

1. What astonishing consolation is here for all that desire to turn unto God!

[A person may, from a discovery of his sins, be led to say, "There is no hope:" more especially those who have once "tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come," if they have lost their good impressions, and turned back to the world, are tempted to despair: Satan would suggest to them, that, because they have sinned against light and knowledge, they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost. But observe what care God takes to dispel our fears, and to

[a] Ps. lvi. 13.

encourage our return: he does not merely say, "I will heal their *sins*, but I will heal their *backsliding*;" thereby obviating at once all their objections. He knows how Satan will take advantage of them; that he will suggest desponding thoughts, and make them believe their sins are too great to be forgiven; and therefore God specifies the greatest of all sins, "I will heal their *backsliding*," their sins committed against all their own vows and resolutions, their sins committed after the greatest mercies had been vouchsafed to them; yes, even those, says God, will I heal: I will wash them away in the blood of my dear Son, and blot them out as a thick cloud: I will cast them behind my back, and remember them no more; I will pour the balm of Gilead into your wounded spirits, and speak peace to your afflicted consciences. Still Satan suggests, "But you will fall again, and then your last end shall be worse than the beginning." 'No' says God, 'it shall not be so; only come to me, and I will keep you from falling; trust in me, and "you shall never fall; but an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the kingdom of your Lord and Saviour:" I will heal you, not only by my pardoning, but also by my renewing, grace: and so effectually will I heal your wounds, that I will even renew you after mine own image, in righteousness and true holiness.' Perhaps Satan will still urge, 'But you are not worthy;' and thus prevent your trusting in God; 'But,' says God, 'I do not look for worthiness in the creature: I will love them *freely*; without the smallest regard to any thing in them: I will love them for mine own name sake, and "have mercy merely because I will have mercy."' But yet Satan suggests, 'This is not for *you*: God is your enemy, and you have nothing to do with these promises:' but to this also God has given you a certain answer; Are you truly desirous to have your backslidings healed, and to live in the enjoyment of God's free love and favour? 'Then, says God, "mine anger is turned away from you:" it not only shall be, but *is*; that very desire is a fruit of my love; that little repentance which you exercise, is the gift of my grace; and you are to take it as a pledge and earnest of richer blessings; you are to take encouragement from what I have given, to expect from me all that I can give: only follow the direction I have given you, "Take with you words, and say unto me, Take away all iniquity, and receive me graciously," and I will answer the very desires of your heart; for "I will heal your backslidings, which are the greatest of all sins, and will love you freely; and, lest you should doubt this, I tell you, that, if such be the desires of your heart, mine anger is turned away from you"'———

See now, my Brethren, what rich consolation here is for every drooping and desponding soul! O cease to listen to the

suggestions of Satan; cease to entertain hard thoughts of God! Only come to Jesus, and see what a gracious Saviour he is; how freely he will love, how effectually he will heal. Bring all your unworthiness along with you; bring all your sins, and all your backslidings; and if only ye desire to have them all healed, surely ye shall soon feel the cleansing efficacy of his blood, and the renewing influence of his Spirit: and when he *thus* loveth you, he will "love you to the end" — — —]

2. What cause of fear is here to those who are living in wilful sin!

[If you be not seeking deliverance from sin, even from your darling and besetting sin, surely your case is awful indeed: the anger of God is not turned away from you. No: if there be any truth in the Divine record, "the wrath of God abideth on you." If you seek not to have your backslidings healed, how is it possible that God should love you? It is said, "He hateth all the workers of iniquity," and, "He is angry with the wicked every day." Deceive not therefore your own souls: ye backsliders in particular, who have fallen from your first love, deceive not yourselves; for, except ye repent, God shall remove your candlestick, and your lamp shall go out for ever. Examine well your own souls; see whether the world have not crept in; whether some accursed weeds and thorns have not choked the seed, so that you bring no fruit to perfection? If you can be easy in such a state, there is reason to fear that you are given up by God to judicial hardness: but perhaps you are not easy, yet your uneasiness does not stir you up to repent: you do not unfeignedly seek grace and mercy from the Saviour's hands; you do not plead with him in earnest; you do not go with strong crying and tears to implore deliverance: what then can you expect, but to perish by the wounds which your backslidings have made? Still, however, there is mercy in store for you: God desires not your death, but rather that you turn from your wickedness and live. O then, "turn, and live ye!" Be importunate at the throne of grace; plead with Him that died for sinners: remember, He is the Sun of Righteousness, whose beams are healing; and "the tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations." He is called, in Exodus xv. 26, "The Lord who healeth thee;" and he says to every convinced sinner, "If thou wilt return, return unto me, O Israel!" "Whosoever cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out" — — —]

MCLXXVII.

THE FRUITS OF GOD'S FAVOUR.

Hos. xiv. 5—7. *I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine; the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.*

THERE are instances of beautiful imagery in the Scriptures equal to any that can be found in the works of the most renowned authors; they are enhanced too by the importance of the subjects they contain. In both respects the passage before us deserves peculiar attention. Imagination cannot conceive a richer display of divine blessings than God here vouchsafes to his church and people.

I. The favour which God will shew his people—

The metaphor of "dew" is at once simple and sublime—

[The benefits of tne dew are but little known in this climate; but in Judæa the metaphor would appear very significant[a]. For some time after the creation, dew supplied the place of rain[b]; and, after rain was given, it still remained of great use. The Scriptures speak of it as an important blessing[c]: they represent the withholding of it as a calamity and a curse[d].]

The communications of God to his people are fitly compared to it—

[It distils silently and almost imperceptibly on the ground; yet it insinuates itself into the plants on which it falls, and thus maintains their vegetative powers. In the same manner God's visits to his people are secret[e]; but he gains access to their inmost souls[f]. He cheers and revives their fainting spirits, and thus he fulfils to them his own most gracious promise[g]—.]

[a] Where the rains are periodical, and the climate hot, the dews are more abundant.

[b] Gen. ii. 6. [c] See Gen. xxvii. 28, 39. and Deut. xxxiii. 13.

[d] 2 Sam. i. 21.

[e] He comes not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, but in the small still voice. 1 Kings xix. 11, 12.

[f] 2 Cor. vi. 16. [g] Isai. lviii. 11

Were his communications refreshing only, and not influential on the conduct, we might be afraid of enthusiasm; but his favour invariably discovers itself by—

II. Its fruits and effects—

The effects of the dew are seen by the progress of vegetation: the descent of God's Spirit on the soul also produces growth, beauty, fragrancy, fertility.

1. Growth—

[The "lily" springs up speedily, but is of short duration. The cedars of "Lebanon cast forth their roots" to a great extent. Thus the soul that is refreshed with divine communications. The quickness of its growth often excites admiration. Its stability defies the assaults of earth and hell, while it "spreads its branches," and displays its vigour in every good word and work.]

2. Beauty—

[There is peculiar grace and "beauty in the olive-tree," and such is there in the soul that communes much with God. What a lustre was there on the face of Moses, when he came down from the mount[h]! And how is the lively Christian "beautified with salvation!" His outward conduct is rendered amiable in every part. His inward dispositions of humility and love are ornaments which even God himself admires[i]. He is transformed into the very image of his God[k]; nor shall his beauty be ever suffered to decay[l].]

3. Fragrancy[m]—

[Lebanon was no less famous for its odoriferous vines than for its lofty cedars: and does not the Christian diffuse a savour all around him[n]? How animated his discourse when God is with him! How refreshing and delightful to those who enjoy his conversation[o]! How pleasing is it also to his God and

[h] Exod. xxxiv. 30. [i] 1 Pet. iii. 4. [k] Eph. iv. 23, 24.

[l] The olive, as an evergreen, retains its beauty; and in this respect also is a fit emblem of the true Christian. Ps. i. 3.

[m] This is twice mentioned in the text, and therefore deserves peculiar notice.

[n] 2 Cor. ii. 14.

[o] See him before the sun has exhaled the dew, or the world abated the fervour of his affections; and how does he verify that saying! Prov. xvi. 24.

Saviour[p]! In proportion as he lives near to God, he fulfils that duty[q]—.]

4. Fertility—

[The "corn and the vine" are just emblems of a Christian's fruitfulness. They often wear the most unpromising appearance; yet are they "revived" by the genial influences of the sun and rain. Thus the Christian may be reduced to a drooping or desponding state; but the renewed influences of God's Spirit will revive him. They make him "fruitful in all the fruits of righteousness." They too, who "dwell under *his* shadow," and are most nearly connected with him, will participate his blessings[r].]

INFER—

1. How honourable and blessed is the Christian's state!

[Often is he favoured with visits from above[s], and glorious are the effects produced by God upon him. The whole creation scarcely affords images whereby his blessedness may be adequately represented. Who then is so honourable? who so happy? Let all endeavour to maintain a sense of their high privileges, and to "walk worthy of the calling wherewith they are called."]

2. How hopeful is the state of those who wait on God!

[The promises in the text were given as an answer to prayer[t]: and they are made to all, who, "like Israel," plead with God. If the dew be withheld from others, it shall descend on them[u]. Its descent shall accomplish the utmost wishes of their souls. They shall soon experience the fulfilment of that word[x]—.]

[p] Mal. iii. 16. Cant. iv. 16. [q] Col. iv. 6.

[r] If he be a master, a parent, and especially a minister, the benefit of *his* revivals will extend to many.

[s] John. xiv. 23. [t] ver. 2. [u] Judg. vi. 37, 38.

[x] Isai. xl. 31.

MCLXXVIII.

GOD'S NOTICE OF PENITENTS.

Hos. xiv. 8. *Ephraim* shall say, *What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard* him, *and observed him: I* am *like a green fir-tree: from me* is *thy fruit found.*

THE conversion of a sinner is a work of infinite difficulty; no efforts of the creature can accomplish

it: none but He who spake the universe into existence, can renew the soul: but when his time is come, the work is done both easily and effectually. As a ship, forsaken by the ebbing tide, can never be dragged along, but is easily put in motion when borne up by the returning waters, so the sinner is immoveable in his iniquities, till the Spirit of God flows in upon him: and then "old things quickly pass away, and, behold, all things become new." This observation is verified continually before our eyes: persons who have been warned and entreated for many years, and have not only withstood all the most awful and endearing considerations, but have been more and more hardened by the means used to convert them, have at last been turned to God through a secret and invisible influence upon their souls, and have become burning and shining lights in their day and generation. Such were the effects produced on the day of Pentecost, when thousands to whom our blessed Lord had preached in vain, and on whom the most stupendous miracles had wrought no change, were constrained to renounce all their former habits and opinions, and to embrace a new, a spiritual, a despised, and persecuted religion. A similar instance we have in the passage before us. If we look to the account given us of Ephraim in chap. iv. 17, we shall find, that he was "*joined* to idols," yea, so glued to them, that neither warnings from man, nor judgments from God, could separate him from them; and therefore God said respecting him, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone;" it is to no purpose to use any further means for his recovery; he is incorrigible, and irreclaimable. But, behold the change, when once God is pleased to put forth his power! When once HE says, "I will heal their backsliding, I will be as the dew to Israel," "I will manifest my grace and mercy to his soul," the obdurate heart relents; the abandoned sinner turns from his iniquities, and even with indignation and abhorrence renounces his most beloved lusts; "Ephraim saith, What have I to do any more with idols?" If God therefore have such

pity on an impenitent transgressor, we shall not wonder at the gracious declaration which he makes for the comfort of this penitent and returning sinner; "I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir-tree: from me is thy fruit found."

In discoursing on these words, we shall be naturally led to shew you,

I. The disposition of the true penitent—

[The unconverted man, though he may never have bowed down to stocks and stones, is an idolater: he "loves and serves the creature more than the Creator." All indeed do not worship the same idol: one gives his heart to riches, another to honour, another to pleasure; and though all these find a higher place in our affections than we allow to God, yet each person has his favourite idol, to which he is in a more especial manner devoted: but when grace has renewed the heart, then the penitent says with Ephraim of old, "What have I to do any more with idols?" His disposition is, To renounce all sins in general,—his besetting sin in particular;—and this too with indignation and abhorrence.

He renounces *all sins in general*.—A person who is not truly penitent may exchange one sin for another; he may exchange lewdness and intemperance for the love of honour and ambition: he may turn from prodigality to avarice; or from indifference and profaneness to Pharisaism and hypocrisy. But he never remits one sin without taking some other in its stead; yea, he frequently puts more into the scale of pride and conceit, than ever he took out of that of sensuality or profaneness. But it is not thus with the true penitent: he has commenced a war against sin in general; he endeavours to attack it in all quarters; he knows that sin is idolatry, in that it is a preference given to the creature above God himself; and therefore, without making any reserves, he determines to extirpate sin, root and branch, if possible, and says, "What have I to do any more with idols?"

But he more particularly devotes to destruction *his besetting sin*.—The besetting sin of the ten tribes was idolatry: and therefore when Ephraim is brought to repentance, he is represented as fixing his eyes more particularly on that sin. Indeed this was remarkably exemplified in the Jews, after their return from the Babylonish captivity: for though, before their captivity, they could never be kept long together from idolatry, they could not after their return be drawn to it; insomuch, that when it was proposed to set up a statue of Augustus in the Temple, the Jews determined to perish rather than submit to it. Now every man has some sin which more easily besets

him: and it is oftentimes a very difficult matter to find it out, by reason of the various shapes which it assumes, and the deep recesses in which it lurks. But it is a distinguishing mark of the true penitent, that, whatever he imagines to be his besetting sin, he will be more particularly solicitous to mortify and subue it. The hypocrite and self-deceiver will plead for his darling lust; he will make excuses for it; he will cast the blame on his constitution, or his situation in life; he will palliate his guilt, and not endure to be admonished respecting it: but the truly upright soul will be exceeding glad to discover his secret enemy, and will by prayer and all other means labour to bring it into subjection.

Nor is this all: he will prosecute his lurking foe with vigilance, and cast him out *with indignation and abhorrence*. This is strongly intimated in the text: Ephraim does not merely resolve that he will not have any more to do with idols; but with an holy indignation against them, and an everlasting abhorrence of them, he says, "What have I to do any more with idols?" He determines never to join himself to them again: the folly and wickedness of such conduct appear to him now in such glaring colours, that he cannot endure the thought of ever relapsing into it any more. Thus it is with the true penitent: O! how does he lothe the sins that have led him captive, and the secret sins that have so defiled his conscience! How does he determine, if possible, to withstand the baneful influence of his in-dwelling corruption, and to watch and pray against it! How does he aggravate the guilt of his besetting lust, till he sees it in all its vileness and deformity! How unreasonable does it appear to him to harbour such an enemy in his bosom! How does he mourn because he cannot get rid of it! How desirable does the furnace itself appear, if it may but purify and refine his soul!

Say, Believer, are not these the thoughts of thy heart? Say, thou that weepest, like Mary, at thy Saviour's feet, dost thou not hate thy sins, and thyself on account of them? Couldst thou but bring forth the lurking foe, and slay him utterly, wouldst thou not rejoice? Is it not thy grief that thou canst not get more complete victory over him? Is it not thy shame that thou art at any time deceived by him? Does it not make thee lothe thyself, to think how ready thou art to favour this enemy, and to be enticed by him before thou art aware? Art thou not often filled with indignation against thyself, to think that thou shouldst ever offend thy God through the solicitations of some base lust or evil principle within thee? Yea, I go further, and ask, Dost thou not hate thyself because thou canst not hate thyself more? I know thy heart vibrates; I know it is in unison; I know there is no discordant string; I know that these must be thy feelings, if thou be upright before God.]

It is with pleasure therefore that I proceed to set before you,

II. The notice which God takes of this disposition—

[It is impossible that there should be the smallest good in our hearts, and God not observe it: there was but "some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel" in the heart of young Abijah, and the Lord noticed it, and remembered him on account of it. The Prophet Jeremiah sets this in a striking point of view: he represents Ephraim[a] as mourning over his sins in secret, and God as listening to him, and at last as breaking out into this soliloquy; "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus:" then, after repeating the substance of Ephraim's complaint, he adds, "Is not Ephraim my dear son? is he not a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; yea, my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy on him[b]." Exactly thus, in my text, God hears Ephraim saying, "What have I to do any more with idols?" and he adds immediately, "I have heard and observed him;" I have had my eye fixed upon him, though he did not know it; I have attended to every word he has been saying; he has not uttered a sigh, but it has entered my ears; he has not poured forth a groan, but it has pierced my heart; he has not shed a tear, but I have treasured it up in my vial: he thinks I will not regard him, but I have heard and observed him all the while: there is not a thought of his heart that has escaped my notice; and what is more, I now say respecting him, and respecting all that shall resemble him even to the end of the world, "I am, and will be, to him as a green fir-tree; and of me shall his fruit be found."

I must here just observe, that the words of my text which are printed in different characters are not in the original, but are supplied by the translators; and that therefore the verse may be read, and I think should be read, thus; "Ephraim *saith*, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him and observed him: I *will be* like a green fir-tree: of me *shall* thy fruit *be* found." The sense is the same indeed either way; only in the latter it is more clear: and according to it we have two blessed promises of God to the penitent and contrite soul, namely, that he will *afford him protection*, and *engage for his perseverance*.

First, he promises protection to the repenting sinner, "I will be as a green fir-tree." The fir-tree affords a remarkably thick shade, which cannot be penetrated either by sun or rain; so that it afforded a safe retreat, either from the rays of the meridian sun, or from the violence of the impending tempest. Conceive

[a] Chap. xxxi. 18. [b] Chap. xxxi. 20.

then a burthened sinner travelling towards Zion: see him either trembling from an apprehension of Divine judgments, even of that "fire and brimstone, storm and tempest, which God will rain upon the ungodly;" or fainting through the heat of temptation and persecution. What a reviving cordial to his soul is here! Let him come to me, says God; "I will be as a green fir-tree to him;" I will shelter him from the curses of my broken law; I will guard him from the fiery darts of Satan; I will hide him from the assaults of all his enemies; none shall hurt him: I will hide him in the secret of my tabernacle, even in my pavilion, where he shall have not only safety, but all manner of refreshing *viands:* "he shall sit under my shadow with great delight." Hear this, ye who desire to renounce your idols; ye who long to be delivered from the attacks of your great adversary, and to find a place of rest unto your souls: to you God says, "Surely I will deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence: I will cover thee with my feathers, and under my wings shalt thou trust: my truth shall be thy shield and buckler[c]." You know how our blessed Saviour complains of the Jews, that when he would often have gathered them, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, they would not. O! let him not utter the same complaint against you. *They* indeed would not flee to him, because they would not believe their danger; but *you* are in danger of keeping from him through a doubt of his ability or willingness to protect you. But, O! flee to him: he is a sure Refuge: only rest under his shadow, and you need not fear: none can ever hurt you, if you be found under the shadow of his wings: he promises that he will be as a green fir-tree to you; and he will fulfil his word unto all that put their trust in him.

The other promise which God here makes to the repenting sinner is, that he himself will engage for his perseverance in the ways of holiness; "Of me shall thy fruit be found." The penitent no sooner determines to cast his idols to the moles and to the bats, than fears arise in his mind, and he says, "But how shall I do this? Who is sufficient for these things?" To silence therefore all such doubts as these, God himself undertakes the work; "Be not afraid, sinner;" I will take that work upon myself; "my grace shall be sufficient for thee;" I will furnish thee with strength according to thy day of trial; "Of ME shall thy fruit be found:" "I will make thee fruitful in all the fruits of righteousness: the things thou desirest are the fruits of my Spirit; and my Spirit shall produce them in thee."

Can we conceive a more comforting declaration than this?

[c] Ps. xci. 3, 4.

If the drooping sinner were permitted to dictate what God should say to him, could he devise any thing more calculated to comfort and refresh the soul? My dear brethren, behold your God undertaking for you, not merely to bring you to heaven, (for that would be a small matter, if you were not made holy,) but to deliver you from all your sins. Hear his gracious words, as they are recorded by Ezekiel; "From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you: a new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will cause you to keep my statutes and my judgments to do them." Hear again what he says to the same purpose by Jeremiah; "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not depart from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me: yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul." Is it possible for God to express more earnestness in your cause, or a more full determination to preserve you in spite of all your in-dwelling corruptions; or rather, I should say, to deliver you from them? O! lift up your heads, ye drooping penitents, for your redemption draweth nigh: only commit yourselves into the hands of a faithful God and a loving Saviour: there is a fulness of all that you can want treasured up in Jesus; and out of his fulness ye may all receive, grace for grace. He is the Vine, from whom you must receive sap and nourishment continually; "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in him: separate from him ye can do nothing: but if ye abide in him, ye shall bring forth much fruit;" yea, ye may "do all things, through Christ strengthening you." However inveterate therefore your corruptions be, fear not, but look unto Christ: instead of being terrified, as though they were invincible, let the sight of them remind you what great things the Saviour has undertaken for you: instead of despairing on account of your own weakness, rather learn to glory in it, as the means of displaying your Saviour's strength. Do not misunderstand me, as though I would have you glory in sin: God forbid! sin is, and ought to be, your shame and aversion: but I say again, your inability to any thing that is good ought not to discourage you, because the Apostle says, "When you are weak, then are you strong:" and therefore, while you lament your sins, you may at the same time "glory in your weakness, that the power of Christ may rest upon you." Your extremity shall assuredly be the season of God's interposition: "In the mount of difficulty the Lord shall be seen;" according as it is written in Deut. xxxii. 36. "The Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left."]

Here let us close, with one obvious REFLECTION—

Do ye not see from hence how excellent repentance is?

[Whether it be viewed in *its nature* or *its consequences*, surely it is a most inestimable blessing. What can be more desirable than to be delivered from those base lusts and idolatrous affections, which rob *us* of our happiness, and *God* of his glory? If we had discarded all our idols, and were determined to have nothing more to do with them, we should have a very heaven upon earth; especially if we found the grace of Christ sufficient for us; as we certainly should do, if we sought it humbly, and depended on it simply. God will never disappoint our expectations which are founded on his promises. If indeed we presume to limit him with respect to the time and manner in which he shall deliver us, we may be disappointed; but if we commit ourselves to him, to carry on his work in the time and manner that he sees fit, we shall never be disappointed: he will assuredly cover our defenceless heads, and make fruitful our withered branches: he will perfect that which concerns us, and fulfil in us all the good pleasure of his goodness; nor will he ever leave us till he has accomplished all the good things which he has spoken concerning us. And is *this* the nature, is *this* the consequence, of repentance? Shall every contrite soul have an experience of these things? O that God may grant us all, "repentance unto life, even that repentance which is not to be repented of!" May we thus experience the power and grace of Christ, and find everlasting rest unto our souls!

But let not those whose hearts are yet cleaving to their idols conclude themselves penitent. What repentance has the *worldling*, who is minding nothing but his earthly business? Surely Mammon is his God; and, till this idol be put away, there is no repentance, no salvation to his soul. Nor has the *proud, passionate, carnal, worldly-minded professor* any pretensions to repentance; for what repentance has he, when he is yet harbouring idols in his heart? No, professor, thou must be delivered from thine idols; thy besetting sin in particular must be lamented, lothed, and mortified: nor, till this be thine experience, wilt thou have any defence against the impending wrath of God: thou mayest talk of Christ, and have a clear head-knowledge of the truth; but knowledge will not serve instead of repentance: thou must be divorced from thy lusts, thine evil tempers, and every thing else to which thou hast been glued. Christ gave himself to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works; and therefore, if thou wouldst ever dwell under the shadow of God in heaven, see that this fruit be found on thee

on earth. God is willing to produce it in you: look therefore to Him; and he will be as the dew unto you; he will heal your backslidings, and love you freely — — —]

MCLXXIX.

SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE PECULIAR TO GOD'S PEOPLE.

Hos. xiv. 9. *Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.*

TO guide mankind into the way of peace, and to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation to their souls, is certainly the most pleasant and honourable employment in the world: but it is an employment accompanied, for the most part, with heavy discouragements, and those peculiar to itself. If we labour to convey instruction in any branch of science, we find our labours attended with some degree of success to all: for though all make not the same proficiency, yet all reap some advantage. This however is very far from being the case when we would impart spiritual knowledge: some, blessed be God! receive benefit; but the generality of our hearers continue as ignorant and blind as ever. Many indeed get somewhat of head-knowledge; but as to any saving experience of the things we teach (and that alone is worthy the name of knowledge), few, very few, attain to it. Nor is this unteachableness peculiar to the present age: it is frequently represented in the Scriptures as a subject of lamentation, not only to the prophets, but even to God himself. How often does God call his people foolish and unwise; and, with a mixture of tenderness and disappointment, say, "O that they were wise, and that they understood these things[a]!" Hence the inspired writers, as though they had no expectation that *all* should profit from their instructions, express themselves as looking for success only among those who were endued with heavenly wisdom. Thus the Psalmist, after expatiating

[a] Deut. xxxii. 6, 29.

largely upon the goodness of God, both in his works of providence and grace, concludes the psalm[b] with saying, "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." And in nearly the same terms the Prophet Hosea, having preached no less than seventy years with very little effect, and having comprised the principal and most important parts of the Divine messages in a book, concludes the whole with these most affecting words; "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right; and the just shall walk in them; but the transgressors shall fall therein."

From these words we shall take occasion to shew,

I. Who they are that will understand divine things—

[The things which the prophet is speaking of in the former part of our text, are the same which he afterwards calls "the ways of the Lord." Now we might be led to suppose that he refers to the sins against which he had guarded them, the duties he had inculcated, the punishments he had denounced, and the blessings which he had promised them in the name of God; seeing that these things are the general scope of the whole book: but he limits his own words to one particular sense, and teaches us to understand him as speaking, not so much of those ways wherein God had walked towards them, as of the ways wherein they were to walk before him: and therefore the things which the wise only can understand, are the things which pertain to vital experimental religion: and indeed this best agrees with the preceding context; for through the whole chapter, God delineates the experience of true penitents, and shews, that when he shall come down as the dew upon their souls, they shall resemble the olive in their beauty, the lily in their growth, the cedar in their stability, the wines of Lebanon in their fragrancy, and the corn itself, or vine, in their fruitfulness. These things, it must be confessed, surpass the comprehension of the natural man; and therefore the prophet adds, "Who is *wise*, and *he* shall understand these things; *prudent*, and *he* shall know them."

But here we must attentively consider whom the prophet intends under the description of the "wise and prudent?" Is it worldly wisdom and worldly prudence of which he speaks in such high terms? Are these the great requisites for the right

[b] Ps. cvii.

understanding of spiritual matters? Surely not; this cannot be the meaning of the prophet; for then he would directly oppose the whole tenour of the sacred writings. Carnal wisdom and prudence are universally represented in the Scriptures as most adverse to divine truth, and as the greatest obstacles to the attainment of spiritual knowledge. Hear how St. Paul speaks of the wisdom and prudence of this world, in I Cor. i. 18, and following verses; "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us who are saved, it is the power of God; for it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the *wise*, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the *prudent*. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? for, after that, in the wisdom of God, *the world by wisdom knew not God*, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Then, in ver. 26, he appeals to their own experience and observation; "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, that no flesh should glory in his presence." If any additional testimony were needed, we might take that of our Lord himself, who not only affirmed the same truth, but was exhilarated and comforted by the consideration of it, and made it the subject of his devoutest thanksgiving: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the *wise and prudent*, and hast revealed them unto babes." God indeed has been pleased in all ages to enlighten and convert some who were reputed wise; because he would shew to all the world, that his truths, however despised, were consistent with the profoundest wisdom, and capable of enlarging the most refined understanding: nevertheless, the wise and prudent of this world have always been the foremost to reject the truth of God. None cavilled more at our Lord's discourses than the Scribes and Pharisees; nor were any more contemptuous in their treatment of Paul than the philosophers at Athens. We may be sure, therefore, that such are not the persons intended by the prophet in my text?

Who then are the wise? who are the prudent? First, they are *those whose understandings have been enlightened by the Holy Ghost.* True "wisdom is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." We have not the smallest spark of it by nature: on the contrary, we are blind; and folly is bound up in our hearts: nor unless He, who first commanded light to shine out of darkness, shine into our hearts, can we ever see one ray of that divine glory which shines in the person of Jesus Christ. Hence they who are truly wise have learned

that most humiliating lesson, to "become fools, that they may be wise:" they have been deeply convinced that they needed a divine illumination, and have obtained it in answer to their prayers: to them has been fulfilled that blessed promise, "All thy children shall be taught of God." This therefore is the first part of the wise man's character, that he has been taught by the Holy Ghost. But a further mark whereby the wise and prudent are to be distinguished is, that *they view things in their proper colours;* they no longer "call good evil, and evil good; they no longer put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter;" but they see things in the light of God's word, and estimate every thing, in a measure, according to the judgment of God respecting it: the body appears to them of small value, when set in competition with the soul; nor do the enjoyments or sufferings of this present world appear worthy to be compared with the glory that shall ere long be revealed in them. Sin is now considered by them as a most tremendous evil, more to be shunned than death itself: and a life of holiness appears to be the perfection and happiness of man. But most of all, true wisdom and prudence discover themselves in this, that they unite their influence to govern our whole lives: "I Wisdom dwell with prudence," says Solomon. They who are truly enlightened do not rest satisfied with clear notions, but desire to have their practice conformable to the convictions of their minds: they therefore take the word of God as a light to their feet and a lantern to their paths: they strive to walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long: this, I say, is the best evidence of their wisdom; for indeed it is the very beginning of wisdom; as Solomon has observed, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" and as Job also says, "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding[c]."

We see then who are the wise and prudent. Not they who boast of their intellectual powers, and abound with human learning, but those who are taught of God to judge and act agreeably to the sacred oracles.

Now these persons shall have a true knowledge and understanding of divine things: the ways of the Lord shall be clear to them from their own experience: they shall know how delightful it is to live a life of faith on the Son of God: they shall understand what it is to have fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ: they shall enjoy that sweet security which they possess, who are instructed in the Covenant of Grace, and who know the faithfulness of a promise-keeping God. These indeed are secrets hid from the natural man; but we are assured, that they are, and shall be, revealed unto

[c] Chap. xxviii. 28.

those who are spiritual: David says, (and he himself had experienced the truth of it,) "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant."]

But this knowledge is peculiar to the persons above described; and this leads me to shew you,

II. Why this knowledge is peculiar to them—

[Two reasons the prophet assigns: *one* taken *from the peculiar excellence of the things known*, and *the other* from *the use which different persons* make of them.

The first reason is taken from the excellence of the things known—"Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? *for the ways of the Lord are right.*" There is a rectitude in a life of godliness; there is something in it which is *fit and proper in itself;* something which is *agreeable to the mind and will of God;* something which is *calculated to promote the perfection and happiness of man.* The most refined reason cannot conceive any thing *more fit and becoming*, than that He, whose loveliness and loving-kindness are infinite, should be the supreme object of our affections; or that He who is omnipotent, immutable, and eternal, should be honoured, trusted, and obeyed with our whole hearts. To a carnal eye, that views only the Majesty of God, it might appear *unsuitable, that the Deity* should condescend to commune with such sinful worms: but his condescension and grace reflect a lustre on all his other attributes, and overwhelm us with wonder and astonishment. As for the *pleasantness* and peace which are found *in the ways of* religion, or the effect of it on our hearts and lives, we have the united testimony of all who ever devoted themselves to it, that "in keeping of God's commandments there is great reward." Indeed it is this very excellency which helps the godly to know and understand the things themselves; at least it helps to enlarge and perfect their knowledge of them. The Holy Spirit first leads them to a life of godliness, and then discovers to them how fit in itself, how honourable to God, and beneficial to man, such a life is: and then this discovery confirms them in their ways: confirms them, I say, beyond every thing in the world; so that though they began to walk in the Lord's ways from the fear of hell, and from a desire after heaven, they now walk in his ways because they are *right;* they now see, that to "yield themselves a living sacrifice to God is the most *reasonable* service" in the world: and so much is their knowledge and understanding confirmed by this discovery of the rectitude and excellency of God's ways, that they would wish to walk in them, even though there were no heaven to reward their obedience, nor any hell to punish their disobedience:

they can say with David, "I esteem thy commandments concerning all things to be RIGHT, and I hate every false way;" that is, "My soul approves the way of duty, therefore would I walk in it, and not for the sake of the reward: I hate sin, and therefore would I avoid it to the uttermost, and not merely because I am afraid of punishment: I would not be excused from my duty, if I might; nor would I practise sin, though I might do it with impunity." On the other hand, this very excellency is one reason why none but the wise and prudent can know these things. A weak and disordered eye cannot bear the light. This is true with respect to spiritual light, as well as to the light of the sun. Our Lord says, that the ungodly "hate the light, neither come to the light; they love darkness rather than light." If we draw a picture of morality, the amiableness of it will commend itself to them; but if we set before them a life of godliness, they are dazzled by it; they are hurt with it; its splendour, like that of the sun, overwhelms them: it is so high above them, that they cannot comprehend it: not having a spiritual discernment, they account it foolishness: it appears to them more like the ravings of enthusiasm, than the words of truth and soberness: they know not how to annex a proper meaning to our words: being low and carnal in their apprehensions, they cannot rise above a carnal sense of our expressions. We see therefore, that the very excellency of these things is one reason why the true knowledge of them is peculiar to the wise and prudent. Thus it was in our Lord's time: he told his hearers, that the reason they murmured at his words was, that their apprehensions were carnal, whereas his words were spiritual: "Doth this offend you? The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." At another time he said, "Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my words."

The other reason assigned by the prophet is taken from the use which different persons make of spiritual truths: "The just," he observes, "will walk in them, but the transgressors will fall therein."

Now the just and righteous, as far as they are acquainted with the ways of God, will endeavour to walk in them: they desire to reduce every truth to practice, and wish to have even "the thoughts of their hearts brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ:" and their knowledge is wonderfully furthered and advanced by this disposition: their apprehension is quickened by the previous disposition which they feel to embrace the truth; and their memory is strengthened by the love which they bear towards it, when once it is discovered. Hence unenlightened persons, who have studied the Scriptures critically for many years, are often not half so well acquainted

with them as others of very inferior abilities, who, under the influence of such a disposition, have studied them but a short time: to *the one*, the Bible is "a sealed book;" its contents are dark, intricate, and unintelligible: *to the other*, it is clear, perspicuous, and easy to be understood: the *one* meets with nothing but difficulties and stumbling-blocks; *the other* has a clew to every truth contained in it. And whence is it that the one knows the mysteries of the kingdom, while the other sees nothing but dark and obscure parables? Our Lord enables us to solve this difficulty; "If any man," says he, "will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God;" his disposition and desire to do my will shall operate in such a manner as greatly to facilitate the understanding of my word.

On the other hand, the indisposition which others feel towards the ways of God will prevent the introduction of Divine knowledge into the soul: "the transgressors will fall therein." The pillar and the cloud by which God led the Israelites, may serve to illustrate the operation of his word, by which he leads us: the cloud was a pillar of fire to give light to the Israelites by night, while it was a cloud of darkness towards the Egyptians, insomuch that they could not advance, but were obstructed in their march by means of it. Now so it is with the word of God: to God's people, it exhibits a bright and luminous appearance, so that they can walk in the light of it: but to transgressors, who do not desire above all things to be conformed to it, it is an offence: to the former it is "a savour of life unto life;" but unto the latter it is "a savour of death unto death:" yea, Christ himself, who is the sum and substance of the Bible, is to the former "a sanctuary;" but to the latter "a snare and a gin, and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence," by means of which "many are snared, and taken, and fall," to their more aggravated condemnation. Daily experience shews us that the strictness and purity of God's ways are an offence unto many: they take occasion from what they hear to shew their enmity against God, more than ever they would have done, if the light had not been thus set before them: Christ being set forth, they make him only "a sign to be spoken against; and thus the thoughts of their hearts are revealed." And that this vile and wicked disposition blinds them more than ever, we are sure from the testimony of our Lord: the Pharisees had shut their hearts against conviction, and then were incensed against our Lord for intimating that they were blind; "Are we blind also?" Upon which our Lord answers them, "If ye were blind, ye would have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." It is evident therefore, that the very opposite uses which different persons make of the ways of God, must necessarily, and of themselves, as well as by Divine appointment,

contribute greatly to enlighten the one, while the others are confirmed in ignorance and unbelief.]

Let us now conclude with an APPLICATION of the foregoing truths;

1. To those who are unacquainted with the truths and ways of God—

[Many, it is to be feared, there are among you, who are wise and prudent enough with respect to the things of this world, but yet are miserably ignorant of the nature and excellency of vital godliness. Your own consciences testify, that you know not what it is to have God come down as the dew upon your souls: you know not what is meant by that beauty, that growth, that stability, that fragrancy, and that fruitfulness, which characterize the true Christian. Nay, some perhaps, iustead of experiencing these things in their own souls, are hurt and offended by the very mention of them: instead of judging the ways of the Lord to be right, they are ready to condemn them as enthusiastic or righteous overmuch. To all such persons therefore, whether they be only ignorant of these things, or have taken offence at them, we must testify, that the ways of the Lord are *right:* whatever exception may be taken against them, they will assuredly prove right in the issue: "Wisdom will be justified of all her children." We may challenge all the world to shew, that there is any thing unreasonable in a life of devotedness to God, or that such a life is not calculated to make us happy. Let me therefore entreat you to seek the knowledge of these things: your not having the wisdom and learning of this world will be no obstacle to your proficiency in divine knowledge: it is spiritual wisdom that you want: seek wisdom therefore from Him who has promised to "give it liberally, and without upbraiding:" seek prudence also; for "a prudent man," says Solomon, "foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on and are punished." But if you will not be persuaded, remember what God has said, "My people perish for lack of knowledge;" and again, "They are a people of no understanding; therefore He that made them will not have mercy on them, and He that formed them will shew them no favour." Such declarations as these fully prove how awful it is to remain in ignorance: and therefore I entreat you all to improve your present opportunities. "Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom; and, with all your getting, get understanding."]

2. To those who know and walk in the ways of God—

[What do you owe to God, my Brethren, for the divine

wisdom and prudence which he has bestowed upon you! Surely you were once foolish and unwise, even as others; and perhaps were ready to say of those who felt what you now experience, "Thou art beside thyself: much attention to religion hath made thee mad." Well, bless God that your eyes are opened, and that, though ye were once blind, ye now see. Yet rest not in what ye have attained: you know but little yet in comparison of what remains to be known: there are heights and depths in divine things, which will be opened more and more to your view to all eternity; and the promise is, that "you shall know, if you follow on to know the Lord:" therefore seek to "grow in knowledge and in grace: while others stumble at the word, and make the ways of God an occasion of falling, do you be pressing forward; and let "your profiting appear unto all men." Pray more and more for "a spirit of wisdom and understanding;" and endeavour, with truly Christian prudence, to act up to the convictions of your conscience: so shall your knowledge and holiness advance each other, till you come to that blessed place, where faith shall be turned into sight, and hope be consummated in enjoyment.]

JOEL.

MCLXXX.

REPENTANCE URGED.

Joel ii. 12—14. *Now, saith the Lord, Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments; and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him, even a meat-offering and a drink-offering unto the Lord your God?*

THE season of Lent has, for many centuries, been set apart in the Church of Christ, for the purpose of promoting in the minds of Christians a deeper humiliation before God, and of preparing them for a more profitable celebration of those mysteries which we commemorate in the Passion-week. The utility of consecrating that season to the end proposed was felt by the fathers of our Church at the time of the Reformation; and they have enjoined on all the members of our community to employ it in a more than ordinary course of penitence and prayer. But, unhappily, the superstitions of the Church of Rome, from which we separated, have excited such disgust in the minds of the generality amongst us, that we have run to a contrary extreme, so that at this day we put scarcely any difference between this season and the other parts of the year. Our Church expresses a regret that she is not able to enforce the rites of penance on offenders, as the custom of earlier ages had sanctioned: and if, in the stead of *penance*, we put *penitence*, I can most cordially unite in that

sentiment. For, so entirely are the duties of this season neglected, that it will appear to many strange that we take such a subject as that before us, unless indeed on that day with which the season commences, and which is still observed amongst us as a public fast. But, in reality, the exhortation before us is suited to all seasons: and therefore, without apology, I will call your attention to it, and set before you,

I. Our duty—

All acknowledge, in general terms, the duty of repentance: and here we are led to contemplate it,

1. In its outward expressions—

["Fasting, and weeping, and mourning," are the proper expressions of penitence in the soul. But "fasting" is grievously neglected amongst us; and all are ready to excuse themselves from it, as unprofitable to their souls. But why should it not be as profitable to us as it was to the saints of old? Or why should our blessed Lord have given us directions for the performance of this duty, if it were a matter of indifference whether we performed it or not? The truth is, that we are as far from observing those other duties, of "weeping and mourning," as we are that of "fasting:" and hence it is that "fasting" is so little in request amongst us. Do but call to mind your state before God, my Brethren; and see how rarely, if ever, you have wept on account of your sins; and how rarely, if ever, you have so "looked on Him whom you have pierced by your sins, as to mourn and be in bitterness, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born[a]?" — — — Yet these, so to speak, are only the outward expressions of repentance. Let me call your attention to it,]

2. In the inward experience of the soul—

["To rend the garments," however passionately it were done, would be a small matter, if we did not at the same time "rend the heart." But O! what an idea does this convey! We can easily conceive, and see as it were before our eyes, a garment rent: but who can conceive of a heart torn, and rent as it were to pieces, by distress on account of sin? Yet *this* is the experience of one who is truly penitent and contrite: *this* is what God requires of us; and any thing short of *this* he will utterly despise[b].

Further than this, God says to us in my text, "Turn ye unto me with all your heart, even turn unto the Lord your

[a] Zech. xii. 10. [b] Ps. li. 17.

God." And how shall I represent to you this duty? Methinks it would occupy a long space of time to enter particularly into this part of my subject. But I will set it before you, so that you may comprehend it perfectly, and in an instant. Who amongst you has ever seen a river that is affected with the tide? At one time you have seen the waters flowing with majestic force towards the ocean; and a few hours afterwards you have seen them returning with equal copiousness towards their fountain-head. This shews how all the powers of the soul have been engaged in the service of the world; and how they are to be employed in the service of our God. It is no partial change that will suffice; it must be entire: and all our faculties, whether of body or soul, which have been used as instruments of sin, must become instruments of righteousness unto God[c]."

Now think of this, my Brethren: dismiss from your minds those partial views of repentance with which you have hitherto been satisfied; and address yourselves to this duty in its full extent.]

And that I may prevail with you, let me proceed to set before you,

II. Our encouragement—

This arises,

1. From the general character of God—

[See God *in his own essential perfections:* "he is merciful and gracious," and delights altogether in the exercise of mercy towards sinful men. See him also *in his dealings with us:* how "slow has he been to anger!" Against whom amongst us might he not have broken forth in anger a thousand times, just as he did against Korah and his company, or against Dathan and Abiram, or Ananias and Sapphira, whom he struck dead upon the spot? View him, also, *when ready to execute upon us his wrathful indignation:* how often has he, in his answer to the intercession of his dear Son, returned the sword to its scabbard, and "repented of the evil that he thought to do unto us!" And are these no encouragements to repentance? Can you willingly go on to insult so gracious a God, and to provoke him, till his anger break forth without a remedy, and "burn to the lowest hell?" I pray you, Brethren, "run not thus on the thick bosses of his buckler," and defy him not thus to his face; but fall before him with the deepest self-abasement, and "seek his face whilst yet he may be found[d]."]

2. From the hope which this character inspires—

[God, in the preceding context, has threatened to send an army that should lay waste the whole land of Israel; and so

[c] Rom. vi. 13. [d] Isai. lv. 6.

destroy it, that the very worship of God should be set aside for want of an offering to present to him. At this day, also, he often visits sin with temporal calamities, till he has reduced us to the greatest imaginable distress. And, in reference to these visitations, it is uncertain whether God will remove them from us on our repentance, or not. David, though pardoned as to his soul, was visited with severe trials in his family. And so may we be visited: nor can we be certain, that, "though God forgive us our sins," he will not "take vengeance of our inventions[e]." Yet may we hope for the removal even of these judgments: and "who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him," even such a blessing as shall bring you into a state of sweet communion with your God?

But if the question be put in reference to the remission of sins, and the ultimate enjoyment of heaven, I will undertake, with reverence and humility, to say, "*I know.*" Yes, the whole word of God declares that he will return in mercy to the contrite soul; and "blot out our iniquities as a morning cloud," and "remember them against us no more for ever." Even though he had given the command for our destruction, yet would he revoke it, even as he did in reference to Nineveh, if he saw us, in penitence and faith, returning to him: and though we had not an hour to live, he would hear our prayer, and take us, like the dying thief, to be with him in Paradise. This hope is founded on his perfections, as set forth in the Holy Scriptures, and on the word of promise which he has given to returning penitents. And therefore I cannot but urge and encourage every one of you to humble yourselves before him, and to "seek at his hands the blessings which he is so ready to bestow."]

And now let me ASK,

1. Is not this repentance necessary?

[Yes, for every one amongst you. I readily grant, that many of you are free from any thing that comes under the character of gross sin: but who amongst you has not grievously departed from God? Who has not shamefully slighted our blessed Saviour? Who has not resisted the motions of the Holy Spirit? Who has not lived for time, rather than for eternity; and to himself, rather than unto his God? Here, then, is reason enough for every one of you to weep and mourn, and to rend your very souls to pieces before God. I entreat, therefore, you who are young, and you also who are moral, to reflect on these things, and to turn to God without delay; yea, to turn unto him with your whole hearts.]

[e] Ps. xcix. 8.

2. Are not the considerations with which the duty is enforced sufficient encouragements to the performance of it?

[I might have enforced the duty with far different arguments, and "persuaded you rather by the terrors of the Lord" to turn unto him. But I greatly prefer the views of God, as he is exhibited in the text. It is in this light that he is revealed to us in the Gospel; even as coming down to this earth to seek and save us, and to reconcile us unto himself in the person of his dear Son. And these considerations have a far greater tendency to humble the soul; which, if terrified for a moment by the threatenings of the law, is ready, like fused metal, to return in a little time to its wonted hardness. "Let, then, the riches of his goodness and long-suffering and forbearance be duly regarded by you; and let the goodness of your God lead you to repentance[f]."]

3. Will not the mercies offered you amply compensate for all the efforts which you may make to obtain them?

[Truly, if there were but a "peradventure" that you should find mercy, it were worth all the labour of ten thousand years to obtain it. Think only what it must be, to be monuments of God's righteous indignation to all eternity; and what it must be, on the other hand, to be everlasting monuments of his grace and love. Can you contemplate this alternative, and duly estimate its importance? No: you must go down to hell, and taste the misery of the damned, and be exalted to heaven, to enjoy the blessedness of the saints in glory, before you can form any just idea of what is before you, either to be suffered or enjoyed, according as your state shall be found before God. I pray you not to trifle with your souls; but now, while the opportunity is afforded you, "flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on eternal life." Could you ask of Manasseh, or David, or Peter, or any of the saints, whether they wept too much; you can easily conceive the answer that would be returned you by them. To every one amongst you then, I say, "Begin, without delay, to sow in tears; and then expect, without a doubt, to reap in joy."]

[f] Hom. ii. 4.

MCLXXXI.

REMOVAL OF JUDGMENTS A GROUND OF PRAISE.

Joel ii. 26. *Ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.*

MOST encouraging is that appellation whereby David addresses the Most High God: "O Thou that hearest prayer!" It is this view of the Deity which alone keeps men from despair, and prevents this sinful world from becoming a counterpart of hell itself. God doth indeed hear the prayer of the poor destitute, and not despise their desire. Of this there is a striking illustration in the passage before us. A plague of locusts had been sent, like an immense army, to destroy the whole land of Israel. The desolation spread by them had reduced the people to the deepest distress. But God encouraged them to humble themselves before him, and assured them, that, on their so doing, he would "be jealous for the land, and pity his people." He even tells them what answer he would give to their petitions, even such an one as should secure to them the removal of all their troubles, and a complete restoration to his favour: instead of perishing by famine, they should "eat and be satisfied;" and instead of being put to confusion by him, they should "never more be ashamed" of their confidence in him.

The words thus explained, will lead us to consider in what light God would have us regard the removal of his judgments: it is to be regarded by us as a call,

I. To more fervent gratitude—

This it is, whether our trials have been,

1. Of a temporal nature—

[Temporal judgments, when heavy and of long continuance, are extremely afflictive[a] — — — And the removal of them, whether they have been public or private, social or personal, is

[a] Here the unprecedented distresses of the year (1816—1817) were spoken of: and any other calamities that may hereafter occur may be mentioned.

a just ground for joy and thanksgiving. In such a dispensation of mercy we may often behold "wonderful" efforts of Divine goodness: and our acknowledgments should be devout and fervent, in proportion to the occasion that calls them forth. As "the very land," and "the beasts of the field," no less than "the children of Zion[b]," were here called upon to rejoice in the mercies vouchsafed unto them, so should we call forth "all that is within us to bless God's holy name" for the blessings which we now commemorate ———]

2. Of a spiritual nature—

[Spiritual judgments, though less generally felt, are infinitely more grievous, than those which affect only our present interests. Say, ye who have been bowed down under a sense of guilt, and the fears of final dereliction, whether this be not a burthen too heavy for you to bear? How should you rejoice then, and bless your God, if he has removed it from you! Surely God "has dealt wondrously with you." In providing such means for your restoration to his favour; (the death of his own Son, and the influences of his Spirit;) and in overcoming the reluctance of your hearts, and inclining you to embrace his proffered mercy; say, is not this wonderful? May you not behold wonders in every step of your way? Truly then there should be no bounds to your gratitude and love. The frame of your mind should be like that of the pious Hezekiah, "The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the fathers to the children shall make known thy truth. The Lord was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments, all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord[c]."]

The removal of his judgments from us is also a call from God,

II. For more entire affiance—

Whilst we are under the pressure of our afflictions, we are ready to think that it is in vain to call upon God. But God assures us that it is not: he tells us that "his people," namely, "those who wait upon him," shall never be ashamed[d]. They may assuredly expect from him all that they stand in need of. They shall never want,

1. The gifts of his providence—

[This is abundantly declared in the Holy Scriptures. "They that fear the Lord shall want no manner of thing that

[b] ver. 21—23. [c] Isai. xxxviii. 19, 20.
[d] Compare Isai. xlix. 23. with the text.

is good." There may be want to the lions; but there shall be none to them[e]. "Those who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, shall have a due supply of all needful things added unto them."

The extent to which these promises are fulfilled is little understood by those who have much of this world's goods: but by the godly man who subsists by his daily labour, it is known and felt. He sees often in his small pittance such "wondrous dealings," as fill him with utter astonishment, and constrain him to cry out as Israel after the passage of the Red Sea, "Who is a God like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders[f]."]

2. The blessings of his grace—

[Where shall we find one contrite sinner whom God ever refused to hear? Never was there one, from the foundation of the world. "Never did God say to any, Seek ye my face in vain." Not even a Manasseh, who had filled the streets of Jerusalem with the blood of innocents, was rejected, when once he humbled himself before his God. And our blessed Lord has said without any exception whatever, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." "Where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound;" and it shall prove sufficient for our necessities, even though our trials and difficulties be multiplied above the sands upon the sea-shore. The Christian's hope is firm, and "shall never make him ashamed:" for God has said, that "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation: he shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end[g]." This is *repeated* with yet greater emphasis in the verse following my text, in that it is associated with an assurance that his people shall be made sensible of his presence with them, and his relation to them as their God for ever and ever. This is the heritage of all who believe in Christ[h], and make him the one foundation of all their hopes[i].]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are under any trouble—

[Whatever be your trouble, give not way to despondency; but betake yourselves to the remedy which God has prescribed, even that of "turning to him with weeping and with mourning and with fasting[k]." Were it a mere peradventure that God would hear you after a long trial of your faith and patience, it would be quite sufficient encouragement to call upon him[l]. But his return to you in a way of mercy is *sure*, if only you

[e] Ps. xxxiv. 9, 10. [f] Exod. xv. 11. [g] Isai. xlv. 17.
[h] Rom. ix. 33. and x. 11. [i] 1 Pet. ii. 6.
[k] ver. 12. [l] ver. 14.

seek him in a way of penitential sorrow: for he will be "the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel[m]." Only pour out your complaints into his bosom, and your prayer shall not go forth in vain. He will give you to eat of the bread of life and be satisfied, and turn all your sorrows into joy[n].]

2. To those who have experienced any great deliverance—

[Be not unmindful of your great Deliverer, but praise and magnify him with your whole hearts[o] — — — Learn also to confide in him. Fresh troubles may arise, even heavier than you have ever yet experienced: but there is the same gracious God for you to go unto; and he will hear and answer you, as in the days of old. Nor is it to this world only that he will confine the tokens of his love: he will bear you, as on eagles' wings, throughout all this dreary wilderness; and finally put you into the full and everlasting fruition of the promised land, where neither want nor pain shall be any more experienced to all eternity.]

[m] Joel iii. 16. [n] Isai. lxi. 3. [o] Isai. xii. 4—6.

MCLXXXII.

SIGNS OF THE MESSIAH'S ADVENT.

Joel ii. 28—32. *And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days, will I pour out my Spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens, and in the earth, blood and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered.*

IT is much to be regretted that the obscurities which occur in the prophetic writings (especially those of the lesser prophets) deter many from reading so large a portion of the inspired volume. If there are some parts hard to be understood, there are some parts plain and highly instructive: and the very figures, which from their boldness and sublimity appear intricate, will be found easy and intelligible,

through the light reflected on them in the New Testament. The passage before us would, on a cursory perusal, be deemed incapable of any sober construction, or, at least, of any proper application to ourselves: but it plainly declares to us,

I. The signs of the Messiah's advent—

Numberless were the signs by which the world were taught to know the true Messiah: we here notice only two:

1. The effusion of his Spirit for the conversion of his elect—

[The Spirit in preceding ages had been given to those of the Jewish nation only, and to but few even of those, and in a scanty measure; but was "afterward," that is, in the times of the Messiah, to be "poured out" abundantly, on Gentiles as well as Jews, and without any distinction of *age*, *sex*, or *quality*, the meanest as well as the greatest being chosen to participate this benefit. This was literally fulfilled, as St. Peter affirms, on the day of Pentecost[a]. We must not however limit the operations of the Spirit to the imparting of miraculous gifts: the terms used by the prophet import, that they who should receive the Spirit should be *so* instructed in the mind and will of God, as to be led to "call on" the Messiah, and enjoy "the deliverance" which he was coming to effect. Nor must the prophecy be confined to the apostolic age: for St. Peter also testifies that the promise is to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call[b].]

2. The execution of judgments for the punishment of his enemies—

[As an Apostle has explained the former part of the text, so has our Lord himself that which now presents itself to our view[c]. The immediate subject, to which these figurative expressions refer, is the destruction of Jerusalem: nor, whether we consider the prodigies that accompanied the siege[d], or the devastation and bloodshed occasioned by the Roman armies, are they too strong to represent the scenes which occurred in that devoted city. But those calamities were only shadows of infinitely heavier judgments that shall fall on the ungodly in the last day[e]. Then, while "the heavens pass away with a

[a] Acts ii. 16—21. [b] Acts ii. 39.
[c] Matt. xxiv. 7, 29. and Luke xxi. 11, 25.
[d] See Doddridge's note on Acts ii. 19.
[e] Our Lord so blends the two events together in Matt. xxiv. that

great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat, and the earth and the works also that are therein are burnt up," will all the contemners of the Messiah wail because of his wrath and fiery indignation[f]. It is indeed in the former sense only that this can be a sign to convince the world at present; but in the latter sense it will hereafter be a demonstration to the whole universe, that all which had been spoken of Christ was true.]

To encourage an earnest expectation of the Messiah, the prophet declares,

II. The blessedness of those that believe on him—

The subjects of the Messiah's kingdom are characterized as "calling upon his name"—

[To call upon Christ is, to give him all that honour and worship that are due to the Supreme Being. This was done by the first martyr, Stephen, and by all the Christian Church[g]. It was that which rendered them so odious to the Jews[h], and so distinguished among the Gentiles[i]. And, at this hour, it justly describes all those who are endued with the Spirit. All, without exception, regard Christ as the only source of life and salvation, and depend on him for daily supplies of grace and strength: "the life which they now live in the flesh, is altogether by faith in the Son of God."]

Nor shall any of that description ever experience the calamities that were foretold as coming on the ungodly world—

[The "deliverance" mentioned in the prophecy before us, doubtless referred primarily to the escape of the Christians from Jerusalem, while the Jews, hemmed in on every side, were reduced to the greatest miseries. But we must extend our views to a more important deliverance, even from sin and Satan, death and hell: it is from these that the sincere follower of Christ will be saved, while all who reject him will perish under the displeasure of an incensed God. In this view St. Paul quotes the very words before us, expressly applying them to Christ as the object of our worship, and confining the

it is not always easy to determine to which of the two his expressions are to be referred.

[f] 2 Pet. iii. 10. with Rev. i. 7.

[g] Acts vii. 59. and 1 Cor. i. 2. [h] Acts ix. 14, 21.

[i] Pliny, in his letter to the Emperor Trajan, stating for his information the conduct of Christians, says, "they met on certain days before it was light to sing a hymn to Christ as God."

blessings of salvation to those who call upon him[k]. At the same time we must observe that none who comply with this direction are excluded; "*Whosoever* shall call upon the name of the Lord," whatever he may have been, or whatever he may have done in times past, provided he call in sincerity and truth, shall find the Lord rich in mercy towards him.]

This subject will be found of USE,

1. To confirm our faith against the cavils of infidels—

[There have been in every age some, who have rejected Christianity as a cunningly devised fable. But we would ask, Was the effusion of the Spirit predicted? or could the accomplishment of that prediction be counterfeited? Was the destruction of Jerusalem foretold? Did Jesus apply the very words of our text to that event, and declare that they should be accomplished before that generation should pass away? And did this also happen within the time specified, attended with such prodigies as strictly corresponded with the terms of this prophecy? Then Christianity must be of divine original; Jesus must be the true Messiah; and salvation must be, as he has declared, through faith in him. Let us then "never be moved away from the hope of the Gospel," but "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering."]

2. To vindicate our experience against the calumnies of scoffers—

[St. Peter adduces this passage in vindication of those who had received the miraculous influences of the Spirit; and asserts that, what was profanely imputed to intoxication, was indeed a fulfilment of the words of Joel. Thus scoffers of the present day deride all pretensions to the enlightening and sanctifying influences of the Spirit, and, without any candid examination, impute them to folly or hypocrisy. Our professions of faith in Christ, our simple dependence on him, and assured hope of salvation by him, are also deemed enthusiasm. But if we can say, "This is that which was spoken by the Prophet Joel," or by Peter, or by any other inspired writer, we need not regard their calumnies. If it was said to the apostles, 'Ye are drunk,' we may be content to have it said of us, 'Ye are fools.' Let us then seek more and more earnestly the operations of the Spirit, and be daily calling on the Lord Jesus for grace and mercy: so shall our experience accord with the sacred oracles, and our deliverance be completed, when the sufferings of infidels and scoffers shall commence.]

[k] Rom. x. 12, 13.

MCLXXXIII.

THE FINAL JUDGMENT REPRESENTED BY THE HARVEST.

Joel iii. 13. *Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.*

THIS is a remarkable prophecy of the destruction of God's enemies. The prophet summons the executioners of vengeance to come up against them[a]. They are represented as a field of corn; the command is given to cut them down; and the prophet instantly sees them fall; "multitudes," &c. Our Lord delivers a parable resembling this in reference to the whole world. In a similar manner we shall improve the passage before us, by inquiring,

I. What it is that ripens men for the great harvest—

There is a ripeness to which every one must attain. The wicked have a measure of sin which they must fill up[b]; the righteous have degrees of holiness for which they are reserved[c]: there are growing in the great field of the world both tares and wheat; and both are ripening for their proper end.

Sin is ripening some for vengeance—

[It unfits the soul for the enjoyment of God. It renders a person meet for destruction[d]. It creates many horrors, which are foretastes of hell itself.]

Holiness, on the other hand, is ripening others for glory—

[a] The valley of Jehoshaphat, or of decision, to which they are summoned, ver. 12, 14. seems to be not any particular place: It may rather be considered as an allusion to the utter destruction which his enemies (the Syrians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Grecians, and Romans) should successively bring on each other. And it may have a further reference to the destruction of Antichrist, and of the wicked at the last day.

[b] Gen. xv. 16.

[c] Eph. iv. 7, 13. Not that there is any *general* standard either of sin or holiness to which all persons *must* attain: There is no degree of sin to which any shall be impelled against their will; nor of holiness, which any shall be prevented from surpassing. But some are kept from more sin, and others are excited to more holiness, by the preventing or assisting grace of God; for sinners would commit more sin unless prevented, and saints attain less holiness unless excited.

[d] As dry wood for the fire. See Luke xxiii. 31.

[It unfits the soul for the society of the wicked. It induces a "meetness for the heavenly inheritance." It is a source of joys which shall be consummated in glory.]

The Holy Scriptures enable us to discern,

II. What are the marks of our being ripe—

Nothing can be more awful than the thought that a sinner is ripe for everlasting misery. Yet it may be justly apprehended that he is so,

1. When he is given over to a total insensibility—

[Custom in sinning will harden the heart and sear the conscience. When a person is arrived at such a state, he is fitted for destruction. This is both figuratively[e] and plainly[f] declared in the Scriptures.]

2. When he continues wilfully in sin against conviction—

[There are some who determine to hold fast their sins. These have reason to think that God's Spirit will be taken from them[g]. They may expect to be utterly given up to their own lusts[h].]

Saints, on the other hand, may be judged ripe for glory,

1. When they simply rely on the Lord Jesus—

[We fix upon the lowest marks of true grace. Faith in Christ is exercised by the weakest saint: yet to that is eternal happiness annexed[i]. Of consequence, he who possesses it must be fit for glory.]

2. When they unfeignedly desire to be conformed to his image—

[There is a great difference in the attainments of different Christians, and much allowance must be made for a difference in their respective advantages; but all desire to be "holy as God is holy." "Vessels thus sanctified are meet for their Master's use[k].]

While space is yet allowed us, it becomes us to consider,

III. What shall be done when we are ripe—

[e] Heb. vi. 8. [f] Prov. xxix. 1. [g] Gen. vi. 3.
[h] Rom. i. 28. Ezek. xxiv. 13, 14. [i] John iii. 36.
[k] 2 Tim. ii. 21.

When the corn has attained maturity, the sickle is put to it; thus, when our measure of sin or holiness is complete, we shall be reaped down—

[Our existence in the world is entirely dependent upon God[l]." None can shorten or protract it beyond its appointed bounds[m].]

The saints will be "gathered into the garner of their Lord"—

[Saints, at their departure, ascend immediately to God[n]; but in the day of judgment their bodies also will rise. They shall then be carried to their eternal home.]

The wicked will be "bound in bundles, and cast into the fire"—

[They, who die in sin, immediately sustain their just punishment[o]; but at the last day their bodies also shall be restored to life. Then shall they too be collected by the ministry of angels, and receive their final doom in fire unquenchable.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are ripening for destruction—

[You may easily discern your real state, but who can express the misery of it? You ripen, however involuntarily, every day. Notwithstanding your security, you will quickly fall. The great husbandman will easily distinguish you from the saints; and he will most assuredly, yea, eternally, separate you from them. But, through the mercy of God, you may yet be changed. Though you be tares at present, God can make you wheat[p]. Seek then this divine change ere it be too late.]

2. Those who are ripening for glory—

[What thanks do you owe to God for his distinguishing grace! And how well may you be reconciled to the afflictions of life! There is no event which does not promote your maturity. Look forward then for the blessed period of the harvest. Reflect on the happiness of the state for which you are preparing[q]. Still seek the showers of the Spirit, and the influences of the Sun of Righteousness. Thus shall you, in due season, be transmitted to the mansions of eternal bliss.]

[l] Ps. xxxi. 15. [m] Job xiv. 5. [n] Luke xxiii. 43.
[o] Luke xvi. 23. [p] 2 Cor. v. 17.
[q] No wintry blasts, no scorching suns, no worm at the root, &c.

MCLXXXIV.

THE MILLENNIUM.

Joel iii. 18. *It shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the House of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim.*

THE return of the Jews to their own land at some future period seems to be predicted so plainly and so frequently, that no reasonable doubt can be entertained respecting it. As for their future conversion to the faith of Christ, that is absolutely certain. But previous to their final settlement in their own land, there will be a violent contest with them in Palestine: but their enemies will be defeated with great slaughter: and after that will the long-wished-for period arrive, when all, both Jews and Gentiles, shall turn unto the Lord, and all "become one fold, under one Shepherd."

Had the metaphorical expressions "of the mountains dropping with new wine, and the hills flowing with milk" been used alone, we might have supposed that the prediction related only to temporal prosperity, and the restoration of Canaan to that measure of fertility which it possessed in the days of old: but "the fountain coming forth from the House of the Lord" must have a spiritual import; and consequently the whole passage must be understood as designating and describing the Millennial period.

From this sublime passage we shall take occasion to consider,

I. The blessings of that day—

The terms under which these blessings are set forth, will lead us to notice,

1. Their richness and variety—

[There are no terms whatever that can give us a sublimer idea of the Gospel than these: its blessings are here represented as most reviving and comforting, most salubrious and nutritious, suited to every age, and every condition of the human race.

Let us contemplate them a moment. *Reconciliation with God* through the blood of the cross, is the first that obtrudes itself upon our notice: and O! who can tell how refreshing this is to a weary heavy-laden soul? With this, *peace* is introduced *into the conscience*, even that "peace of God which passeth all understanding." Friendship being thus cemented between God and man, the person who was till lately an enemy to his God, and an object of his everlasting indignation, is now adopted into his family, and enabled to look up with *a spirit of adoption*, crying Abba, Father! To the Lord Jesus *Christ* he now looks as his friend and *his beloved*; and to *the Father* he draws nigh with confidence, saying "O God, *thou art my God!*" Now he has *access to God* at all times, with a liberty to pour out his heart before him, and an assurance that "whatever he shall ask shall be done unto him." Now also he enjoys an *union with the Lord Jesus Christ*, even such an union as a branch has with the vine, or a member with the head: and, by means of that union, he receives constant communications from the fulness that has been treasured up for him in that living Fountain of all good. *The Holy Spirit* is now poured out upon him *as a Comforter*, and is imparted *in all his sanctifying operations*, to mortify all his corruptions, and to transform him into the Divine image. *Assured prospects of glory* are now opened to him, so that he has both the *earnest and foretaste of his heavenly inheritance*. But where shall we end, if we attempt to enumerate one hundredth part of the blessings which the Gospel makes over to us, and which are here characterized as "hills flowing with milk, and mountains dropping down new wine?" Suffice it to say, that all the blessings of the everlasting covenant, all that Christ has purchased by his blood, and all that are made over to us in the exceeding great and precious promises, all are ours, if we are Christ's[a]———But to declare fully their richness and variety exceeds the powers of any finite intelligence.]

2. Their universality and abundance—

[These blessings will not be so limited as they now are, either in the measure of their communication, or the objects on whom they are bestowed: they will "flow" in all the abundance of the most majestic "rivers," and that even "to the valley of Shittim;" which being situated on the borders of Moab, and the shores of the Dead Sea, may well be considered as characterizing the most distant and barren places of the earth. There shall not be a human being to whom its

[a] The blessings here enumerated should not be treated distinctly and separately, but *collectively*; and *at the close of them*, a few observations should be made on their richness and variety.

blessings do not extend: for "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." The high and the low, the rich and the poor, shall equally be partakers of them; for "all shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest." "Kings will be the nursing-fathers of the Church, and queens her nursing-mothers:" and with "the lofty firs and pines shall be united the humble box, to glorify the house of God's glory, and to make the place of his feet glorious[b]." So universal shall be the reign of Christ on earth, that "holiness to the Lord shall be written upon the bells of the horses" which the peasants use in agriculture: the smallest vessel in the sanctuary shall be as highly sanctified as the largest; and "there shall no more be the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of Hosts[c]." "All in that day will be righteous;" and so righteous as to need no addition to their happiness from any creature-comforts: "The sun shall be no more their light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto them; but the Lord shall be unto them an everlasting light, and their God their glory[d]." It is not in respect of universality only that "the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea," but of depth also; for "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound[e]."

O glorious period! "May the Lord hasten it, in His time!"]

Whilst we behold such a period predicted, it becomes us to consider,

II. Our duty in the prospect of it—

This is doubtless,

1. To help it forward by all possible means—

[God works by means: and, however fixed the times and the seasons may be in the Divine mind, it is by the use of means that he will accomplish these most glorious events. The first advent of Christ was proclaimed by his Forerunner, John the Baptist, who by his ministrations "made ready a people prepared for the Lord." And we in like manner are to act as heralds and harbingers of the Messiah's second advent. As pioneers, we are to prepare his way. By us must his path be levelled, to facilitate his march: we must go before him, to "prepare his way, to make strait in the desert a highway for our God." Through the instrumentality of men "shall every valley be exalted, and every mountain and hill be made low; and the crooked be made straight, and the rough places plain;

[b] Isai. lx. 13. [c] Zech. xiv. 20, 21.
[d] Isai. lx. 19—22. [e] Isai. xxx. 26.

and the glory of the Lord be revealed, and all flesh see it together:" yes, "by a voice crying in the wilderness shall all this be done: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it[f]."

Is it asked then, What shall we do to advance this glorious work? I answer, God has already gone out before us, and shewn us what to do. The Societies which, by his gracious providence, have already been established, shew in what line we may direct our efforts to the best advantage. The Bible is now translating into the different languages of men, and circulating to the ends of the earth: *that* is obviously the first and most important method of diffusing the knowledge of of salvation through the world. Mission Societies also are in full activity, sending forth pious men to preach the everlasting Gospel, and to explain to the benighted nations of the earth the glorious mysteries which are there revealed. At last, too, attention begins to be paid to that "people, wonderful from their beginning hitherto," the lost sheep of the House of Israel. They are the people spoken of more especially by the prophet, in the preceding context; and they are the people whom God will make use of for the bringing in the period described in our text: "the fulness of the Jews will be the riches of the world;" and "the receiving of the Jews will be to the whole world as life from the dead[g]." To aid these Societies, therefore, and to unite our efforts with them, and especially by prayer to bring down the Divine blessing upon them, is the most effectual way we can take to accelerate the arrival of that glorious day. And, if we should not live to see the temple raised ourselves, we shall at least have the satisfaction of having provided materials for it, and contributed towards it to the utmost of our power.]

2. To seek the foretaste of it in our own souls—

[All these blessings are to be enjoyed now, as well as at the period before referred to. They are all promised to us under the very same images: "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come to the *waters*, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy *wine* and *milk*, without money, and without price[h]!" This invitation is given to all without exception: "Whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely[i]." Nor is it in small measure only that these blessings may be now possessed: for our Divine Master says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; and out of his belly shall flow *rivers* of living water[k]." Let those who desire these blessings be in as unfavourable a state as "the vale of Shittim," they have no need to be discouraged on

[f] Isai. xl. 3—5. with lxii. 10—12. [g] Rom. xi. 12, 15.
[h] Isai. lv. 1. [i] Rev. xxii. 17. [k] John vii. 37, 38.

that account: for "God will open for them rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: he will make the wilderness a pool of water, and dry land springs of water[l]." What hinders then, but that we should partake of all those mercies ourselves? If we really believe, as all profess to do, that the enjoyment of them will exalt man so highly in the latter ages of the world, and bring down, as it were, a heaven upon earth, surely we should now aspire after a foretaste of that heavenly feast; and "not give rest unto our God[m]," till he "bring us to his banqueting-house, and till his banner over us be love[n]." To entertain an idea of the Millennium being a state of inconceivable felicity, and not to seek those graces and consolations which constitute its happiness, is a grievous inconsistency. Let all then be consistent: and now take their portion at that glorious feast which is spread for them in the Gospel, even "the feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined[o] — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who think of religion as a source of melancholy—

[Does it wear that aspect in the passage before us? or can language be found to depict it in more lovely colours? Verily, if the transformation of a wilderness into the garden of the Lord be a joyful change, then is religion a source of unmingled joy and blessedness. But it may be said, that repentance and mortification of sin are painful works. True; but whence do they proceed? not from religion, but from sin, which must be repented of, and must be mortified. We are diseased, and must be cured, before we can enjoy health in our souls. If we were diseased in body, and needed a painful course of medicine, or the amputation of a limb, would any one ascribe our pains to health? Health would supersede the necessity of such a process: and when the soul is brought to the enjoyment of God's presence, and the possession of his image, it shall "have beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" — — — Let this erroneous notion then be put away; and let religion be regarded in its true light, as an anticipation and foretaste of the heavenly bliss.]

2. To those who profess to regard religion as a source of joy—

[You are correct in your sentiments on this momentous subject; but you must remember, that religion is a source of

[l] Isai. xli. 17, 18. [m] Isai. lxii. 1, 7. [n] Cant. ii. 4.
[o] Isai. xxv. 6. The particulars of pardon, peace, &c. may be here again touched upon.

joy to those only who live nigh to God, and devote themselves unreservedly to his service. To those who give to God only a divided heart, it can administer no solid comfort. Indeed they are less happy than the ignorant ungodly world; for, whilst their profession keeps them from enjoying the vanities of the world, their distance from God prevents them from having any delight in him: so that there is nothing but an aching void, or a corroding anguish, in their hearts. O ye professors of godliness, either follow not the Lord at all, or "follow him fully." Live nigh to him, and walk with him, as Enoch did, and you shall never be disappointed of your hope: you shall never find that "he is a wilderness to you;" but you shall have the light of his countenance lifted up upon you, and "your mouth shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, whilst you are praising him with joyful lips."

But we trust that many do really experience all the blessedness of true piety: and *they* will need no exhortation to diffuse the blessings which they themselves enjoy. The wine and milk which they find so nutritious and comforting to their own souls, they will gladly impart to others. Combine then, brethren, your energies for that purpose. The whole world, except a small inclosure, is at this hour a wilderness. The Jewish people, with all their advantages, have reduced themselves almost to a level with the Gentile world: for whilst the Gentiles are "without God," the Jews are "without Christ, and therefore without hope" of ultimate acceptance before God. They believe not that Jesus is their Messiah; and therefore, as Jesus has said, "they die in their sins." O! rise ye as one man, and hold out to them the cup of salvation; and labour by all possible means to lead them to the "living Fountain of waters," that they may drink thereof, and live for ever.]

AMOS.

MCLXXXV.

GOD'S COMPLAINT AGAINST US.

Amos ii. 13. *Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves.*

THE effect of long-continued provocations is to weary out our patience. Some few occasional offences we can easily forgive: but when they are repeated from time to time, they gall the mind, and produce considerable irritation, and stir us up, either by word or deed, to avenge ourselves. Something of this kind is represented as passing in the mind of God. We must not indeed conceive of him as if he had the same passions with ourselves; but yet he will so suit his dispensations to our conduct, that they shall bear the stamp of retributive justice, and accord, in a measure, with what is produced in the world by human passions. Hence he speaks of himself after the manner of men, in order to accommodate himself to our weak and carnal apprehensions: and, having told his people how greatly their transgressions had been multiplied against him, he declares, as one whose patience was quite exhausted, that he was "pressed under them, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves."

Let us consider,

I. What reason God has for this complaint against us—

We need not enter minutely into the particular accusations brought against the Israelites of old: in

a general view, they may be reduced to three; which may with equal justice be laid to our charge:

1. Our disregard of his laws—

[God had given his people laws, which they violated without remorse[a]. And has he not prescribed the moral law as the rule of our conduct? and is it not in all respects "holy, and just, and good?" Yet how have we obeyed it? Have we studied it with a view to find out the will of God? Have we been restrained and regulated by it as far as we knew it? Have we not, on the contrary, transgressed it in ten thousand instances? Have we not been swayed by the considerations of our worldly honour and interest, more than by a regard to God's authority? Where our own will has stood in competition with God's, have we not been ready to say, like Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?"

Do we then suppose, that the Governor of the universe is indifferent about the observance of his laws? Or, if he be not, must he not be "fretted[b]," "grieved[c]," and "vexed[d]," with our rebellions, and even "broken with our whorish heart[e]?" Lot vexed his righteous soul from day to day, on account of what he saw and heard in Sodom[f]: and must not He who is infinitely holy, and who sees all the iniquity in the world at one view, be overwhelmed, as it were, with grief and vexation at our iniquities? Surely the comparison in the text rather falls short of, than exceeds, the truth: for we have "drawn out iniquity as a cart rope[g]," continually adding fresh materials, and protracting it, without intermission, to an unknown length; and therefore well may God complain, that "we have wearied him with our iniquities[h]," and that he is "pressed under us as an overloaded cart."]

2. Our mindfulness of his mercies—

[God particularly specifies the mercies he had vouchsafed to Israel, which had only served to aggravate their guilt[i]. And what innumerable mercies has he conferred on us! How has he formed us in the womb, and made us perfect in all our members; when we might have been hideous monsters, that could not endure the light of day! How has he furnished us with rational faculties, when many of our fellow-creatures are idiots, yea, less rational than the beasts! Above all, how has

[a] Compare ver. 6—8. with 2 Chron. xix. 6, 7. 1 Kings xxi. 3, 4. Lev. xviii. 8, 15. Exod. xxii. 26.
[b] Ezek. xvi. 43. [c] Ps. lxxviii. 40. [d] Isai. lxiii. 10.
[e] Ezek. vi. 9. [f] 2 Pet. ii. 8.
[g] Isai. v. 18. with Bishop Lowth's note upon it.
[h] Isai. xliii. 24. [i] ver. 9—11.

he endued us with an immortal soul, capable of knowing, serving, and enjoying God to all eternity! How has he kept us through the helpless years of infancy, and brought us in safety to the present hour; while thousands have never lived to receive instruction, or been cut off in the midst of their iniquities! Yet in what manner have we requited him for all his mercies? Have we blessed and adored and magnified him for all his love? Have we endeavoured to improve our time and faculties in his service? Have not rather the multitude and continuance of his gifts been the occasion of our entirely forgetting the Donor?

Make this your own case. If you had a servant whom you were daily loading with benefits, and yet could never prevail upon him to testify the smallest sense of his obligations to you, would you not be wearied at last, and think it right to discard such a worthless person from your service? And do you imagine that your heavenly Benefactor is not grieved at your ingratitude? Hear how he complains of it; and judge for yourselves: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me: the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know; my people do not consider[k]." "What could have been done more for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes[l]?" Do these complaints argue no weariness on the part of God? Do they not manifest that he is "pressed under us beyond measure," and scarcely able to sustain any farther load? May we not soon expect him to say, "I am grieved with that generation; and swear in my wrath, that they shall never enter into my rest[m]?"]

3. Our contempt of his blessed Gospel—

[The summit of Israel's wickedness was, that "they said to the prophets, Prophesy not[n]. Now God has sent his prophets to us, to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, and to declare that all who believed in that Saviour should receive the Holy Spirit, as their Teacher, their Sanctifier, their Comforter[o]. But how have we received their message? Have we cordially embraced the Saviour? Are we seeking yet daily and hourly the influences of the Holy Spirit? Are not many of us rather ready to despise the Gospel, and to dispute against its truths as over-righteous fancies and enthusiastic dreams? Do not even those who profess to embrace the Gospel, shew by their lives how little they regard it in their hearts? And do not the very services which

[k] Isai. i. 2, 3. [l] Isai. v. 4. [m] Ps. xcv. 10, 11.
[n] ver. 12. [o] Acts ii. 38, 39.

they present to God, provoke him to say, "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them[p]?" Is not such a contempt of his Gospel most painful to him, and most destructive to us[q]?

See then the grounds of complaint which God has against us; and say whether the assiduity of harvestmen in loading their carts with the sheaves does not too much resemble us, who are thus incessantly loading God with our iniquities, till he can bear no more? Yea, we help and encourage each other in the work, as if we were afraid that we could not otherwise heap up upon him a sufficient load.]

The manner in which this complaint is made, calls us especially to consider,

II. What reason we have to be deeply concerned about our state—

Wherever we see in Scripture the word, "Behold," we may be sure that there is something worthy of our most solemn attention. And well may that word be prefixed to the declaration in the text, since an accumulating of such a load of guilt is a "treasuring up of a proportionable weight of wrath[r]." Let three things then be considered by all who are thus offending God:

1. God is able to vindicate the honour of his injured majesty—

[Survey the universe, and ask, Whether he who formed it out of nothing, be not able to avenge himself on such worms as we are? If that be not sufficient, cast an eye into the bottomless abyss of hell, and ask, 'Who formed it? and, On what occasion? and, Who are the inhabitants of those dreary mansions?' Or, if you choose rather to see what notices of his power and wrath you can find on earth, ask of the antediluvians, and they shall tell thee; or of the cities of the plain, and they shall warn thee; or of the Jews, who are scattered over the face of the whole earth, as living monuments of his indignation. As God said to his people of old, "Go to my place, which was in Shiloh, and see what I did to it, for the wickedness of my people Israel[s];" so would I refer you to all these instances, that you may know what a God "you have to

[p] Isai. i. 14.
[q] Matt. xxi. 37—41. Heb. ii. 3. and x. 28, 29.
[r] Rom. ii. 5. [s] Jer. vii. 12.

do with;" and that "him who walketh in pride he is able to abase[t]." If any doubt yet remain upon your mind, go and provide an answer to that question which Job put to his contentious friends; "God is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; who hath hardened himself against him, and prospered[u]."]

2. As he is able, so is he determined, to avenge himself—

[God has warned us plainly, that "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God[x]." But this is not all. He is like a man bearing with indignities for a time, under a pleasing expectation, that the vengeance which he shall shortly execute upon his enemy shall be signal and complete. See with what firm determination he prepares himself for his vindictive work, "whetting his sword, bending his bow, and making ready the instruments of death[y];" and *swearing most solemnly by his own life and perfections*, that "as soon as he has whet his sword, he will render vengeance to his enemies, making his arrows drunk with their blood, and causing his sword to devour their flesh[z]." See with what pleasure he looks forward to that period, when, like a man who has thoroughly avenged himself, his wrath shall be pacified by the entire destruction of his foe! "I have set the point of my sword against them, that their heart may faint, and their ruins be multiplied: *Ah! it is made bright, it is wrapt up for the slaughter*[a]." "Mine anger shall soon be accomplished on them, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted[b]:" "So will I make my fury towards them to rest, and my jealousy shall depart from them, and I will be quiet, and be no more angry[c]." Farther, see what delight he expresses when the time for vengeance is arrived! "Ah! I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies[d]:" "I will see what their end shall be; for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith[e]."

Should not such declarations as these appal us? Should they not convince us what "a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God?"]

3. The time for retribution is fast approaching—

[When the cart is already overladen with corn, the heaping of sheaves upon it must quickly cease. And when our God is already "pressed under us," so that he can scarcely sustain

t Dan. iv. 37.
u Job ix. 4.
x Ps. ix. 17.
y Ps. vii. 11—13.
z Deut. xxxii. 40—42.
a Ezek. xxi. 15—17.
b Ezek. v. 13.
c Ezek. xvi. 42.
d Isai. i. 24.
e Deut. xxxii. 20.

any further weight, we may be sure that "the measure of our iniquities is nearly full," and that the hour of vengeance draws nigh. Methinks, God is at this moment saying, in reference to us, "My Spirit shall not strive with them any more[f]." "To me belongeth vengeance and recompence: their foot shall slide in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste[g]." What a mercy is it that there is yet an hour's respite allowed us! How should we redeem the time! How should we avail ourselves of the present moment, to flee from the wrath to come! How should we tremble, lest the order should be already given, not to take us to the granary of heaven, but to cast us into the flames of hell!

"Behold" then, brethren! "behold," what a God you are offending, and in what danger you stand! One more sheaf perhaps may complete the load: and will you proceed to lay it on? O cease from your fatal work, and cry to your long-suffering God for mercy ere it be too late!]

INFER—

1. What a burthen ought sin to be to us!

[You have heard what a burthen it is to God; that he even groans under it, and is weary to bear it. And ought it not to be a burthen to us who have committed it? Ought not we to be "weary and heavy-laden" with a sense of it[h]? Ought we not to feel it as an insupportable burthen; "to be troubled for it; to be bowed down greatly, and to roar for the disquietness of our hearts[i]?" Turn then to God, ye people; "be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy into heaviness: humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God[k];" "and put your mouths in the dust, if so be there may be hope[l]."]

2. What obligations do we owe to Jesus Christ!

[Jesus has borne the burthen of our sins, not only as our Creator and Governor, but as our Redeemer. Even in the former view, he has been "grieved at the hardness of our hearts[m]," and has groaned over us[n], and found his burthen almost insupportable[o]. But, in the latter view, O what has he sustained? the guilt of all the human race! the wrath of an avenging God! Go, listen to his cries and agonies in the garden of Gethsemane! See the blood issuing from every pore of his body! Trace him to Golgotha, and behold him expiring on the cross: Ask, What was the cause? and you will

[f] Gen. vi. 3. [g] Deut. xxxii. 35. [h] Matt. xi. 28.
[i] Ps. xxxviii. 4—8. [k] Jam. iv. 9, 10. [l] Lam. iii. 29.
[m] Mark iii. 5. [n] 1 John xi. 38. [o] Mark ix. 19.

find that he was sinking under the weight of your iniquities. and if *He* was thus overwhelmed with the load, what must become of *us*, if *we*, after all, should have to bear the curse due to our sins? Let every eye be fixed on him with humble, grateful adoration. Let every one look to his vicarious sacrifice for pardon and peace. And, as he has thus graciously "borne our sins in his own body on the tree," let us trust in him. Let us "go to him weary and heavy-laden, and we shall find eternal rest to our souls."]

MCLXXXVI.

REQUISITES FOR FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD.

Amos. iii. 3. *Can two walk together, except they be agreed?*

IT is not always safe to judge of God, and the things which relate to Him, by the things which take place in our intercourse with men: for the distance between God and man is such as precludes all parallel between them. Yet, in a way of illustration, it is often of great advantage to consider what occurs in common life; because, from observations of that kind, we are enabled to attain a correct judgment with more facility than we could by any laboured process of rational investigation. Hence this mode of illustration is frequently adopted by the inspired writers. In the passage before us, the Prophet Amos had delivered this message from God to all the children of Israel: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities[a]." *Then the prophet, anticipating an objection to this, proceeds to obviate it*[b]. He supposes an objector to say, 'Your alarm is groundless: for it never can be, that God should so act towards those whom he has chosen for his peculiar people.' To this he replies, 'There is good reason for you to be alarmed: for I appeal to you, Can there be any

[a] ver. 1, 2.

[b] The text, and following context, to ver. 8, are *the prophet's own words*, and not a continuation of his message. The not attending to this has perplexed many, and thrown an obscurity over what is very plain.

real friendship between persons (whether they be of the same family or not), if in their general views and habits there be no agreement? You may call yourselves the Lord's people, if you will; but, "if you walk contrary to him, he will walk contrary to you[c]:" and this he has both authorized and commanded me to declare. There is, therefore, abundant reason for you to fear and tremble. You well know, "that if a lion roar, or a young lion cry," there is a reason for it. If "a bird fall in a snare, or a snare be taken up by the owner," it is not without a reason: and "if the trumpet be blown in the city to sound an alarm," there is a reason for it. So then is there reason for you to fear and tremble: for God, who reveals his secrets to his prophets, has revealed to me his determination to punish you: and, as sure as effects, whether amongst the rational or irrational creation, result from causes, and may be traced to them; so surely shall your punishment follow from the indignation which you have excited in the bosom of your God: "The lion hath roared: who will not fear? the Lord God hath spoken: who can but prophesy?"

The prophet's appeal is indeed very convincing: for as a congeniality of mind is necessary to the existence of friendship among men, so is a conformity of mind to God's revealed will necessary to the maintenance of friendship with him;

I. In this world—

Without a correspondence of taste and sentiment, there can be no friendship amongst men—

[We may occasionally associate with persons, however widely they may differ from us: they may even be numbered amongst our most intimate *acquaintance*. But we cannot take them to our bosoms as endeared *friends*. In order to such communion as that, there must be some resemblance in our general habits, both of sentiment and pursuit; something whereon we can meet, as on common ground; something sufficiently important to us both, to form a bond of union betwixt us. Our favourite employment, whatever it be, will operate as an attraction to others similarly employed: but from

[c] Lev. xxvi. 23, 24.

persons who have no taste for these occupations we shall feel, comparatively, but little attraction. Those who are immersed in the study of arts and sciences will not very much affect the society of those who have no taste but for trifling amusements; nor will the votaries of pleasure desire an habitual intercourse with them. Still less will those in whom there is a great *moral* disparity affect the society of each other; the honourable with the base; the pious with the ungodly and profane. Each will form his connexions rather amongst those who are of a kindred spirit with himself, and walk most intimately with those who love to be found in his paths.]

Nor can friendship with God exist, where there is no conformity to his image—

[Enoch and Noah "walked with God:" and "Abraham was called the friend of God." But in them there was a love to his revealed will, and a desire to be conformed to it. The most difficult commands from God did not excite rebellion or murmuring in their hearts. They loved holiness; and were therefore prepared to move in sweet accord with him. But, had their minds been averse to his holy ways, they would rather have fled from him, like Cain, than have walked habitually as in his presence, and sought all their happiness in him. God has informed us how hateful sin is in his sight; and what is that way in which alone he will receive returning sinners; and what is that heavenly conversation which he expects from all who come to him by Christ. But, suppose a person to think lightly of sin, and to doubt whether it have really subjected him to God's everlasting displeasure: suppose him to disapprove of salvation by faith alone, and to prefer establishing, either in whole or in part, a righteousness by the law: suppose him, further, to complain of God's requirements as too strict, and to plead for indulgences which he forbids; can we suppose that God will come to him, and find pleasure in him; or that he can really delight himself in God? The point is clear: the diversity of their mind and will forms an insurmountable barrier to their union, and must of necessity produce an alienation of heart from each other; as God has said by the prophet, "My soul lothed them; and their soul abhorred me[d]." To the same effect he speaks also by the Apostle Paul: "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols[e]?"

[d] Zech. xi. 8.

[e] 2 Cor. vi. 14—16.

Here, then, the point is clear. The services of God and Mammon are incompatible with each other[f]. Whichever we most affect in our minds, his servants we are[g]: and friendship with either precludes a possibility of union with the other.]

Nor is a resemblance to God less necessary for an enjoyment of him,

II. In the world to come—

There cannot, even in heaven, be any union between God and an ungodly man—

["There is no repentance in the grave." What a man, in his decided character, is at the time of his death, *that* he will remain to all eternity: "As the tree falls, so it will lie[h]:" "He that is unjust, will be unjust still; and he that is filthy, will be filthy still[i]." Suppose a man to have had no love for holiness here, but rather to have felt an alienation of mind from holy men and holy exercises; how can he, all at once, feel delight in a holy God, and in the employment of the heavenly hosts? How can he, who has never for one single hour been filled with love and gratitude in this world for all the wonders of redeeming love, how can he, I say, join in the songs of the redeemed to all eternity? If there were nothing more than a consciousness of his own state to affect him, he would be glad to recede from a place where there was not a being like-minded with himself, or an occupation suited to his taste. He had a dislike to the exercises of devotion here; and he would dislike them there: he fled from God's presence here; and he would flee from it there. Like our first parents after their fall, they would endeavour to hide themselves from him, instead of going forth to meet him; and Paradise itself would be to them a place of torment.]

The manner in which the prophet declares this truth greatly augments its weight—

[He does not utter it in a way of simple affirmation; but he makes it the subject-matter of *an appeal*: "How can two walk together, except they be agreed?" He constitutes every man a judge in his own cause. We need not any of us be told, that to the existence of real friendship there must be a similarity of *taste*: those who are perfectly opposed to each other in the things that are most agreeable to themselves, can no more become united with each other, in the bonds of endeared friendship, than light and darkness can coalesce. Observation and experience prove this beyond a doubt; nor can any one be so ignorant as not to know it.]

[f] Matt. vi. 24.
[g] Rom. vi. 16.
[h] Eccl. xi. 3.
[i] Rev. xxii. 11.

Well then, may this TEACH us,

1. The necessity of true conversion—

["The carnal mind," says the Apostle, that is, the mind of every man by nature, "is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be[k]." "A new heart, therefore, must be given us, and a new spirit must be put within us[l]." We must become altogether "new creatures; old things passing away, and all things being made new[m]." This, as our Lord tells us, is so necessary, that "except it take place we can never enter into the kingdom, no, nor ever see it[n]." To speak of this as necessarily attendant on baptism, is contrary to fact; for there are thousands who are baptized, as there were thousands circumcised amongst the Jews, who have never experienced this change. But this change must be wrought in us, if ever we would behold the face of God in peace. "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit[o]." The former being altogether carnal, is incapable of enjoying a spiritual kingdom: it is the latter which alone can fit us for the exercises and enjoyments of the heavenly world. You well know, that if a man had no taste for music, he could not, for any length of time, feel pleasure in the melodies which, to a lover of music, afford the highest gratification. So neither can we, without a *taste* for the employments of heaven, or, in other words, without "a meetness for heaven," ever hope to participate in the blessedness of the just.]

2. The importance of separation from the world—

[The world wonder at the saints, for standing aloof from them; and often impute it to pride: as though the Lord's people said to them, "Stand off; I am holier than thou[p]." But the godly, in associating with the world, do not meet on equal terms. All the sacrifice must be on their part. The world will propose to them to join in every vanity: but if, in return, they were asked to join in reading the word of God and prayer, for the sake of spiritual edification and comfort, they would regard the proposal almost as a symptom of insanity. And, if you were to wait till such a proposal were made, or even approved, by them, you would wait till the sun had ceased to run its course. It is not for nought that the Apostle says, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate[q]." There is abundant occasion for it: for friendship with them is constructively nothing less than enmity itself against God[r]."

[k] Rom. viii. 7. [l] Ezek. xxxvi. 26. [m] 2 Cor. v. 17.
[n] John iii. 3, 5. [o] John iii. 6. [p] Isai. lxv. 5.
[q] 2 Cor. vi. 17. [r] Jam. iv. 4.

We must "not be conformed to this world, but be transformed in the renewing of our minds, if ever we would prove, to the satisfaction of our God, what is his good and acceptable and perfect will[s]."]

3. The happiness of real piety—

[Where the soul is really in accordance with the revealed will of God, there will God delight to "dwell, as in a temple[t]." To such persons "he will manifest himself as he does not unto the world[u];" "He will come unto them, and make his abode with them[x];" and "they shall walk in the light of his countenance[y]." O! who shall adequately declare the blessedness of friendship with God? — — — And if in this world the saints have such great advantage, what shall they have in the eternal world? Who shall declare their felicity, when they shall stand in his immediate presence, and behold the full brightness of his glory in the person of his dear Son? If it be so sweet *now* to have "the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost[z]," what shall it be to behold the Saviour "face to face[a]?" If a taste of the waters of life, though taken from polluted cisterns, be so sweet, what shall it be to drink of them at the fountain-head? Let those who walk with God in this world know, that they shall, ere long, "walk with him in white," where distance and parting shall be no more[b]."]

[s] Rom. xii. 2. [t] 2 Cor. vi. 16. [u] John xiv. 22.
[x] John xiv. 23. [y] Ps. lxxxix. 15. [z] Rom. v. 5.
[a] 1 Cor. xiii. 12. 1 John iii. 2. [b] Rev. iii. 4, 12.

MCLXXXVII.

GOD THE SOURCE AND CAUSE OF ALL THINGS.

Amos iii. 6. *Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?*

IT is a generally acknowledged truth, that every thing proceeds from God; and we have the authority of God himself for affirming it: "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things[a]." The same truth was put in a way of appeal even to the enemies of God; and *that*, too, at a time when he was denouncing against them the heaviest judgments. As surely as the roaring of a lion betokens that he has seized his

[a] Isai. xlv. 7.

prey; or the capture of a bird that the snare had been set for him; or the blowing of a trumpet the approach of danger; so surely should the evils coming on his disobedient people mark the indignation of God against them: "Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?"

But as, on the incursion of evil, we are apt to trace it almost exclusively to second causes, and to overlook the hand of God in it, I propose,

I. To confirm the truth which is here intimated—

There is a great variety of evil in the world: but God is the author of it all. From him proceeds all evil;

1. Moral—

[Of course, we are not to imagine that *moral* evil proceeds from him in a way of actual efficiency: for "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed[b]." But, as no man would be in a capacity to perpetrate evil, if God did not invest him with the power, and allow him the opportunity to commit it, the Scripture uniformly represents God as concurring in it, even where the agency of men or devils is most manifest in the production of it. For instance;

In *the selling of Joseph into Egypt*, the envy of his brethren was manifestly the first moving cause: yet, what did Joseph say concerning it? "Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for *God did send me before you* to preserve life. God sent me before you, to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now *it was not you that sent me hither, but God*[c]." "Ye indeed *thought evil against me;* but *God meant it unto good*[d]."

In *the hardening of Pharaoh's heart*, we must look further than to the innate depravity of that impious monarch; for God had raised him up to the possession of royal power, that so he might have full scope for the display of all that was in his heart: yes, and he gave him up, too, to the unrestrained exercise of all his evil dispositions; as he had before declared to Moses that he would do. And thus God himself is said, in a qualified sense, to have "hardened Pharaoh's heart," yea,

[b] Jam. i. 13, 14. [c] Acts vii. 9. with Gen. xlv. 5—8.
[d] Gen. l. 20.

and to harden in like manner the hearts of all whom he is pleased thus to give up to the unrestrained indulgence of their own lusts[e].

Above all, in *the crucifixion of our blessed Lord*, where shall we find human depravity so active and so combined as in that tremendous scene? And can we trace any part of *that* to Almighty God? Yes, the whole of it: for St. Peter says, that "Jesus was delivered up to his murderers by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God[f]; and that "Herod and Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel that were gathered together against him," in all that they perpetrated, "did only what God's hand and God's counsel had determined before to be done[g]."

What, then, must not be traced to God, if we are taught to refer to him such transactions as these?]

2. Political—

[By political evil, I mean such as arises, whether to nations or individuals, in the common course of human events.

The defection of the ten tribes from Rehoboam may well be considered as originating in the tyranny of that weak monarch, and in his following the infatuated counsels of the young men, rather than the judicious counsels of the old. But God himself declares, that it was altogether ordained of him, for the accomplishment of his own designs: "*The cause*, it is said, *was of God*, that the Lord might perform the word which he had spoken[h]." And when Rehoboam had raised an army of 180,000 men to reduce the ten tribes to subjection, one single word spoken by Shemaiah, a man of God, to Rehoboam and his army, saying, "Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren: return every man to his house: for *this thing is done of me*, saith the Lord," was sufficient for the satisfying and disbanding of the whole army: so universally was God's agency in human affairs acknowledged by them at that day[i].

The captivity of Israel by the Assyrians might well be traced to the pride and ambition of the Assyrian monarch; as *the captivity of Judah by the Chaldeans* might also to the resentment and cupidity of the Babylonish monarch: but both the one and the other are traced to God himself, as stirring up the enemies of his people to execute upon them his sovereign will. Respecting the former, it is said, "The God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, to carry them away[k]." And respecting the latter, it is said, "*The Lord sent* against Jehoiakim

[e] Exod. iv. 21. and vii. 13. and ix. 16. with Rom. ix. 17, 18.
[f] Acts ii. 23. [g] Acts iv. 27, 28. [h] 2 Chron. x. 15.
[i] 2 Chron. xi. 3, 4. [k] 1 Chron. v. 26.

bands of the Chaldeans, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and *sent them* against Judah to destroy it. Surely *at the commandment of the Lord* came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight[l]:" so entirely are men, even when following most freely the dictates of their own minds, unconscious agents of the Deity, to execute his will; "the sword in his hand, and the staff of his indignation[m]."]

3. Penal—

[Sometimes God is pleased to send trials *in a way of paternal chastisement*, as when he stirred up enemies to disturb the peace and quietness of Solomon's reign[n]. And he has told us, that he will deal thus with his children in every age, "visiting their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes, even when it is not his intention utterly to take away his loving-kindness from them[o]." But sometimes he executes his judgments upon men *in a way of righteous retribution*. Go to Sodom; and behold the cities of the plain; and tell me, whose hand was there? See Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with all their families, swallowed up in the earth at the word of Moses; and say by whom was that judgment wrought? Or tell me by whose hand Ananias and Sapphira fell, for lying to the Holy Ghost? Was there any one of these evils which the Lord did not inflict and execute?]

Methinks, I have spoken enough for the confirmation of this truth; and may proceed,

II. To shew how it is carried into effect—

God is pleased to work in a great variety of ways: for instance,

1. By a visible display of his own Almighty power—

[It was thus that he caused the sea to divide its waves, and to leave a dry path for the children of Israel; and presently afterwards to close again, and overwhelm every individual of the hostile army that pursued them. By a similar display of his power, he opened a passage also for his people through the river Jordan, at a time when it had overflowed its banks. Afterwards, in like manner, he caused the walls of Jericho to fall down, at the sound of rams' horns. In such instances as these, no means were used that had the slightest tendency to effect the end; that so his own interposition might be the more manifest, and that he might have all the glory.]

2. By the instrumentality of second causes—

[l] 2 Kings xxiv. 2, 3.
[m] Isai. x. 5—7.
[n] 1 Kings xi. 14, 23.
[o] Ps. lxxxix. 30—33. Heb. xii. 6.

[David was informed, that, notwithstanding his heinous sin was forgiven, it should yet be visited in this world with evils in his own family, which should embitter all his remaining days. In the conduct of Amnon and of Absalom, we see how God marked David's sin in its punishment. These sons only followed the dictates of their own corrupt hearts: but God wrought by them, and made them his instruments to punish their parent's crimes[p]. So, by the instrumentality of Jehu, he destroyed the whole house of Ahab, when Jehu himself desired nothing but to advance his own glory[q].]

3. By the most trivial, and, as we call them, accidental, occurrences—

[Who can read the Book of Esther, and not stand amazed at the trifling circumstances by which the destruction of Haman, and the consequent deliverance of all the Jewish people, were brought to pass? The Persian king cannot sleep—he calls for the records of the nation to be brought, in order to amuse him—a record of a conspiracy, that had long since been defeated, was read to him—he inquires whether the person who had discovered the conspiracy had been suitably rewarded—this, with a multitude of other unlooked-for circumstances, brought Haman to the gallows which he had erected for Mordecai, and were the means of delivering the whole Jewish people from the ruin that had been prepared for them[r]. No one can conceive how minute are the links in the chain of Providence, the failure of any one of which would have defeated the counsels of the Most High. But "his counsel shall stand; and he will do all his will[s]:" and it will be found, at last, that "no one thing has ever failed, of all that he, in his eternal counsels, has ordained[t]."]

4. In direct opposition to all the means that are used to obstruct his will—

[He will confound all the Jews by the resurrection of his dear Son. They, on the contrary, are determined to prove Jesus a deceiver. For this end, having put him to death, they roll a stone to the door of his sepulchre, and seal it with Pilate's signet, and set a watch to guard the place; that so it may be impossible, as they think, for Jesus to be taken away, or for the expectations of his followers to be realized. Had they succeeded in this effort, they had proved to demonstration, that Jesus was an impostor. But Jehovah "laughed them to scorn;" and, at the predicted time, restored the Lord Jesus to

[p] 2 Sam. xii. 10—14. and xiii. 14. and xvi. 22.
[q] 1 Kings xxi. 19—24. with 2 Kings x. 10, 11.
[r] Esth. vi. 1—3. and vii. 10. [s] Isai. xlvi. 10.
[t] Josh. xxi. 45.

life, and "proved him to be indeed the Son of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead[u]." This was in strict accordance with what David had foretold: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed; saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. But He that sitteth in heaven laughed; the Lord had them in derision[x]." In a word, "He doeth according to his will, in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; nor can any stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou[y]?"]

Has any kind of evil then occurred to *us?* Let us

LEARN,

1. Submission to God's will—

[God says to us, "Be still; and know that I am God[z]." And if once we learn to see the hand of God in every thing, what peace will it bring into the soul, even in the midst of the heaviest trials[a]! You will not find anywhere a greater sufferer than Job: men, devils, elements, all conspired against him. But in all his trials he saw the hand of a gracious God; and *that* composed his mind: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord! Shall we receive good at the Lord's hands, and shall we not receive evil[b]?" Let us then, in all our trials, the smaller which occur in social or domestic life, as well as in those of a more overwhelming nature, habituate ourselves to *see the Lord's hand:* and to say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good[c]." This would greatly tranquillize our minds; and take out the sting from ten thousand little occurrences, which wound our feelings, and often pain us far more than heavier afflictions. Let us reply to the revilings of a malignant enemy, "The Lord hath bidden him curse me[d];" and there will be an end of all the anguish that his hostility has for a moment occasioned us.]

2. Inquiry into the design of God in the trial sent us—

["Trouble springs not out of the dust[e]:" "nor does God afflict us without a cause[f]." "Every rod," which he sends, has a voice, which we ought most attentively to "hear[g]." Peradventure there is some sin which God designs to correct; some corruption to mortify; some grace to improve; or, at all events, some important lesson which he intends to teach us

[u] Rom. i. 4. [x] Ps. ii. 2—4. [y] Dan. iv. 35.
[z] Ps. xlvi. 10. [a] Ps. xxix. 8. [b] Job. i. 21. and ii. 10.
[c] 1 Sam. iii. 18. [d] 2 Sam. xvi. 10, 11. [e] Job v. 6.
[f] Lam. iii. 33. [g] Mic. vi. 9.

more perfectly. We should, therefore, go to God under our trials, and ask him "wherefore he contendeth with us[h]." "In the day of adversity we should consider[i];" and be more anxious to derive benefit from the affliction, than to obtain a premature deliverance from its pressure. If we may but be purged from our dross, and come out of the furnace purified as gold, it should be deemed an ample compensation for all our pains; and should make us thankfully to acknowledge, that "God in love and faithfulness has afflicted us[k]."]

3. Amendment of life—

[This should be our object, under all the diversified circumstances of our lives. Nothing should be of any importance to us in comparison of this: nor should any pain be deprecated, which may be sent to "purge away our iniquity[l], and which may render us, in a more perfect manner, "partakers of God's holiness[m]." If our "tribulation may but work patience, and experience, and a hope that shall not make us ashamed, and prove an occasion of the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts, we should even rejoice and glory in it[n]." Nor is it merely the mortification of any besetting sin that we should aim at, but an entire conformity of mind and will to God. We should desire to be "made perfect through our sufferings," even as the Lord Jesus Christ himself was[o]: and, whether our tribulation be more or less painful in this world, we should be contented to pass through it as "our appointed way to heaven[p];" and be well pleased to "suffer with Christ, that we may hereafter dwell with him, and be glorified together[q]."]

[h] Job x. 2. [i] Eccl. vii. 14. [k] Ps. cxix. 75.
[l] Isai. xxvii. 9. [m] Heb. xii. 10. [n] Rom. v. 3—5.
[o] Heb. ii. 10. [p] Acts xiv. 22. [q] Rom. viii. 17.

MCLXXXVIII.

GOD'S VOICE TO SINNERS.

Amos iii. 8. *The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?*

THERE is not any thing more strange and unreasonable than that utter disregard which is shewn to the word of God. If we see appearances in the sky, we can form some judgment of the weather: if we take notice of common occurrences in the world, we can draw plain and obvious conclusions from them. The prophet justly observes[a], that if a lion roar, we

[a] ver. 4—6.

conclude he has taken, or is about to seize, his prey: if a bird be caught in a snare, we take for granted that the snare was laid with that design: if an alarm be given in the city, we suppose that there is reason for that alarm: or if any disastrous event have taken place, we consider it as ordered by an overruling Providence. Yet when God speaks in his word, we imagine that there is no occasion for it, nor any need to regard it. But it becomes us to attend with reverence to all his messages, whether of wrath or mercy. Whatever he has revealed to us by his servants the prophets, he will surely do: and they are commanded to make known his determinations, "whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear." Hence the prophet Amos, desirous at once to expose the obstinacy of the unbelieving Jews, and to vindicate his own faithfulness towards them, addresses himself to their consciences in this animated expostulation, this convincing apology.

To bring home his words to our own hearts, we shall consider,

I. What God hath spoken to us—

[There is no description of persons whose character God has not delineated, and whose end he has not determined. And it would be a pleasing task to exemplify this remark in the Divine declarations concerning the righteous: but God's voice in the text is compared to the roaring of a lion: on which account we must confine ourselves rather to his denunciations of wrath and vengeance which he will execute on the ungodly.

What then hath he spoken to *profane sinners*[b]? Alas! how numerous their classes! how dangerous their self-deceptions! how awful their end[c]! And is not such a declaration more terrible than the roaring of a lion? Let us then hear and "fear[d]."

To *self-righteous Pharisees* his voice is not less tremendous. In the parable addressed to those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous," the preference given to the self-condemning sinner is strongly marked; and God's determination to "abase the self-exalting" is plainly declared[e]. Yes; before God, and angels, and men, shall such characters be abased in the day of judgment, when publicans and harlots

[b] 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.
[c] See also Eph. v. 3—6.
[d] Deut. xxxi. 12, 13.
[e] Luke xviii. 9—14.

shall be admitted into heaven before them[f]. Is not this a just ground of fear to those, whose hearts are not broken with a sense of sin?

But more dreadful still are the threatenings denounced against *hypocritical professors of religion.* Their doom is characterized as the most severe of any[g]: and the wrath which they heap up to themselves, while they hold the truth in unrighteousness, is beyond measure great[h]. Let the proud and passionate, the malicious and revengeful, the worldly and covetous, the impure and sensual professor, hear this: and let them know, that the Lamb of God will be a lion to them, if they walk not more worthy of their high calling[i].

There is however one description of persons, against whom God's threatenings are more awful still. He declares that *negligent and unfaithful ministers* shall perish under the accumulated guilt of destroying the souls committed to their charge. The blood of all whom they have neglected to warn shall be required at their hands[k]. Surely if the voice of God to others be as the roaring of a lion, to *these* it is rather as the voice of thunder. O, that it might be for ever sounding in the ears of all who are in the service of the sanctuary, till there should not be found one negligent or unfaithful minister in the Christian church!]

II. What effect it should have upon us—

[With respect to *ministers*, should they not fear? Does it become them, in the very face of such warnings, to indulge a slothful spirit, or to withhold the truth from their people through fear of offending them? Ought they, however their hearers may wish it, to speak smooth things to them, and to prophesy deceits[l]? Should they be intent on feeding themselves rather than the flock[m]; and be more studious to establish a reputation as preachers, than to save the souls committed to them? Surely, when it is considered whose ambassadors they are, and to whom they must give account, and what must be their doom if any perish through their neglect, they can never study too earnestly to approve themselves to God[n], that they may give up their account to him with joy, and not with grief[o].

With respect to *others, of whatever description they may be*, it becomes them well to fear, when "THE LORD GOD," the almighty and immutable Jehovah, speaks to them such momentous truths[p].

[f] Matt. xxi. 31. [g] Matt. xxiv. 51. [h] Job xxxvi. 13.
[i] Ps. l. 16—22. with Hos. xiii. 6—8. [k] Ezek. xxxiii. 6.
[l] Isai. xxx. 10, 11. [m] Ezek. xxxiv. 2, 3, 10.
[n] 2 Tim. ii. 15. Acts xx. 28. [o] Heb. xiii. 17.
[p] There is a peculiar emphasis in the name by which Jehovah is here called. See also Jer. v. 21, 22. and Rev. xv. 3, 4.

What is there that can justify any man in casting off the fear of God? Can we deny that he hath roared as a lion? or are we stronger than he, that we dare to provoke him to jealousy[q]? Or can we elude his search, when he shall summon us to his judgment-seat[r]? Or have we any reason to doubt whether he will execute his threatenings[s]?

Let every one rest assured, that it were far better that a roaring lion should rush out of a thicket to devour him, or that the artillery of a whole army should be pointed at him, than that one single threatening of Almighty God should be in force against him: for as his destruction is more certain, so will it be infinitely more tremendous.]

ADDRESS—

1. Be not averse to hear the terrors of God's law—

[Though, of themselves, the threatenings of God's word will never produce true contrition, yet it is necessary that all should know what the Lord God saith concerning them, in order that they may feel their need of a Saviour. In this respect, the law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ[t]: and if, by hearing of the wrath to come, we be induced to flee from it, we shall have reason to bless the watchman that sounded the alarm."]

2. Be thankful to God for the promises of the Gospel—

[Blessed be God, the Gospel is full of "exceeding great and precious promises:" and "*to him that trembleth at God's word*" these promises are made[u]. Let not then a slavish dread of God's wrath keep us from embracing the overtures of his mercy. Let us rather flee to Christ the more earnestly, in proportion as we see our guilt and danger. The Israelites were commended by God himself for making this improvement of his terrors[x]. And, if we have Christ as our mediator and advocate, we have nothing to fear from heaven, earth, or hell.]

[q] 1 Cor. x. 22.
[r] Jer. xxiii. 24. and Job xxxiv. 22. and Ps. cxxxix. 7—12.
[s] Ezek. xxiv. 14. [t] Gal. iii. 24. [u] Isai. lxvi. 2.
[x] Deut. v. 25, 26, 28.

MCLXXXIX.

INCORRIGIBLENESS REPROVED.

Amos iv. 11, 12. *Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.*

THE various dispensations of providence are intended to awaken our concern for our best interests, and to bring us back to God. But the generality of mankind, satisfied with tracing events to second causes, neglect to make the improvement of them which God designs. Judgments and mercies in constant succession pass unheeded; and, instead of promoting our spiritual welfare, too frequently enhance rather our eternal condemnation. It is certain that God notices the effects which his dealings produce upon us: and, if we continue incorrigible under all the means which he uses for our good, he will sooner or later call us to a severe account. To this effect he speaks in the passage before us; where, having recapitulated the various methods by which he had sought to reclaim his people, he complains, after each, that "they had not returned unto him;" and then he bids them prepare to answer for it at his tribunal.

We may with too much reason apply to ourselves the words originally addressed to Israel, and consider from them,

I. The complaint alleged against us—

God has used various means to bring us to repentance—

[In the context he specifies several judgments which he had inflicted on his people Israel, intimating, at the same time, that in the midst of judgment he had remembered mercy. His judgments had been successive, and partial, not universal, or combined. We too must confess that he has visited us with heavy calamities[a]——— But yet "he has staid his rough wind in the day of his east wind," insomuch that we have been like "a brand plucked out of the fire!" War, famine, and pestilence have raged in different parts of the continent; but we, though slightly affected by them all, have escaped without any material injury[b].

For a long time also has God spared us from that awful pestilence which has raged both in Asia and Europe: but now

[a] Here may be mentioned any that have recently happened, especially if among them can be enumerated scarcity, or drought, or mildew, or pestilence, or prejudicial lightnings.

[b] Written Feb. 1805.

has it reached our shores, and is spreading widely both in Britain and Ireland[c], and carrying off multitudes with fearful rapidity into the eternal world.]

But in the midst of all we have continued impenitent—

[We can see nothing of *national* reformation. Fasts indeed have been appointed from time to time during the late war, and even on the present occasion: but it will be well if these be not numbered amongst our greatest sins; seeing that they have been little else than an empty form, a hypocritical service, a solemn mockery. As for national repentance, what evidence can be adduced to warrant the hope that it has ever taken place? What national sin has been put away? Have we less pride and arrogance, when speaking of our fleets and armies? Have we ceased from traffic in human blood? Does not the land groan as much as ever under the load of sabbaths wasted, oaths violated, and sacraments profaned; or, if any slight alteration in relation to oaths and sacraments have taken place, has it not been through a political concession to popular clamour, rather than from any regard for the honour and authority of God?

Nor can we boast much more of *personal* improvement. Are not the young as gay and dissipated, as if they had no occasion for mourning and weeping? Are not the worldly as intent upon their gains as if this world were their all? Do not the formal still continue as regardless of the life and power of godliness, as if the service of the heart were not required? Is there any considerable change even in the people of God? Is there much of a spirit of prayer and intercession found among them? Are they pleading, like Abraham for Sodom, or like Moses for the worshippers of the golden calf? In truth, there are few, if any, who lay to heart the iniquities of the nation, or inquire, "What have *I* done" to increase the sum of our national guilt?]

Surely then, since we must plead guilty to the charge, we may fitly also apply to ourselves,

II. The admonition founded upon it—

God threatened the utter extinction of the Jewish nation[d]: and he bids *us* also to "prepare to meet him,"

1. In increased calamities—

[c] July, 1832.

[d] ver. 2, 3. It is in reference to this that God says in the text, "*Thus* will I do."

[What God has already inflicted on us, is nothing in comparison of what we may expect at his hands, if we continue to provoke him. "Go to Shiloh, and see what he did to it for the wickedness of his people Israel[e]." Look at the Jews at this day, whom he has dealt with "as a man who wipeth a dish, and turneth it upside down[f]." He hath only smitten us with rods at present; but, if we repent not, he will "chastise us with scorpions:" yea, he will continue to "punish us seven times more for our sins." O that we might cease from our wickedness, before we oblige him to "come forth against us as a man of war," and "his fury burn to the lowest hell." "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."]

2. In the day of future retribution—

[In this world God calls men into judgment in their national capacity. It is in the eternal world only that he will reward and punish the different individuals. Then all of us must appear before his judgment-seat. And if we die impenitent, every dispensation which God had appointed for our good, shall be brought forth to aggravate our guilt and condemnation. 'I sent you affliction; yet you returned not unto me: I sent you mercies; yet you returned not unto me: I gave you my Gospel to enlighten your mind, and my Spirit to affect your heart; yet you returned not unto me: I continued these mercies to you for so many years; yet you returned not unto me.' Alas! how unanswerable will be his accusations, how just his sentence, how terrible his award!

For this account we must prepare: we must be ready to meet him whensoever he shall summon us: and if he call us unprepared, it were better for us that we had never been born.]

There are yet two or three CONSIDERATIONS, which we would impress upon your minds, to strengthen those which have been already proposed:

1. If you return not to God, there is no hope for you—

[From one end of the Bible to the other we cannot find one word which countenances the idea of any person being saved, who dies impenitent. And should not this thought lead us to repentance? O let it have due influence on our minds! and let us be sufficiently on our guard against self-deception. Let us remember, that it is not a sigh, a tear, an acknowledgment, that will suffice: we must return unto God; we must return to him with our whole hearts: we must return in deep contrition, in lively faith, in unreserved obedience.]

[e] Jer. vii. 12. [f] 2 Kings xxi. 12, 13. with 1 Kings xiv. 10.

2. If you return to God, you will find him ever ready to receive you—

[As, on the one hand, no one ever found mercy without repentance, so neither, on the other hand, was any true penitent ever rejected. Search the Scriptures; not a syllable will be found to discourage a sinner's return to God. Nations have always found mercy when they sought it earnestly; and of individuals, not one was ever rejected who turned unto God in sincerity and truth. What greater encouragement then can any man desire? There is the word, yea the oath, of Jehovah pledged, that none shall seek his face in vain. Beloved brethren, only seek him with your whole hearts, and he will assuredly be found of you.]

3. Inconceivable will be the difference between those who are prepared to meet their God, and those who meet him unprepared—

[Think of an impenitent sinner, when summoned into the presence of his God: how glad would he be that the rocks should fall upon him, and the hills should cover him from his sight! But this cannot be. He must appear; he must answer for himself; he must receive his doom; he must take his portion "in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." View, on the contrary, the true penitent, the humble believer: behold him coming forth with joy to meet his reconciled God and Saviour: he stands before his tribunal with unshaken confidence: "he knows in whom he has believed." While the other anticipates in the frowns of his Judge the miseries of hell, *he* receives in Emmanuel's smiles an earnest and foretaste of the heavenly felicity. This alone is sufficient to shew the importance of being prepared. We need not follow them to their different abodes: their comparative happiness at the first meeting of their God is abundantly sufficient to enforce this exhortation upon all, "Return unto the Lord, from whom ye have deeply revolted!"]

MCXC.

GOD'S CONDESCENSION AND GRACE.

Amos v. 8, 9. *The Lord is his name; that strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress.*

IN our public addresses, we feel peculiar satisfaction in entering upon subjects which admit of no dispute, and on which all considerate persons are agreed.

That we ought to seek after God, is universally admitted: and as that is the one duty inculcated in the passage before us, the whole scope of our present discourse will be to recommend the performance of it. In the preceding context, Jehovah, speaking to the whole house of Israel says, "Seek ye me, and ye shall live." Immediately afterwards, the prophet himself enforces the exhortation, and adds, "Seek ye the Lord, and ye shall live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it. . . . . Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion . . . . . the Lord of Hosts is his name; that strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress:" that is, 'Seek Him, who, being the Creator and Governor of all things, possesseth all power to avenge himself upon you for your neglect of him, or to give success to your feeble endeavours.'

To enforce yet further the prophet's admonition, I will set before you,

I. The character of Jehovah, as here portrayed—

Let us notice,

1. His condescension—

[There is no person so low or so despised among men, but God will condescend to look upon him with tender compassion. Human beings can scarcely be conceived in a more degraded situation than the Hebrews in Egypt were: yet of them God says, "I have seen their affliction; I have heard their cry; I know their sorrows[a]." And at a subsequent period, when they were reduced to the utmost distress by the Ammonites, we are told, "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel[b]." The same compassion does he exercise towards his oppressed people in every age. So "afflicted is he in all their afflictions[c]," that "the touching of them is like touching the apple of his eye[d]; and he will interpose for them, however low they be: "he will raise up the poor out of the dust, and lift up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit a throne of glory[e]." Notwithstanding "he is the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity," and "humbleth himself when he beholds the things that are in heaven;" yet will he "look upon him that is poor

[a] Exod. iii. 7. [b] Judg. x. 16. [c] Isai. lxiii. 9.
[d] Zech ii. 8. [e] 1 Sam. ii. 8.

and of a contrite spirit[f]," yea, and "dwell with him too, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

But that which we are more particularly to notice, is,]

2. His power—

[As he is Almighty in himself, so is he "the strength of his people[g];" even "the saving strength of his anointed[h]." "He is a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall[i]:" nor does he ever interpose for his people with greater pleasure than when he sees them reduced to the lowest possible state of want and misery[k].

Perhaps the particular occurrence referred to by the prophet may be that of the victories granted to Joash over the triumphant and oppressive Syrians. Hazael, king of Syria had so reduced the power of Israel, that "he had left to king Jehoahaz only fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen." To Joash, the son and successor of Jehoahaz, God promised deliverance from Syria: and if Joash had expressed that zeal in his country's cause, and that confidence in God, which became him, his victories over Syria would have been complete. As it was, we are told that "he took out of the hand of Benhadad, the son of Hazael, the cities which Hazael had taken from Jehoahaz by war; that three times did he beat Benhadad, and recovered the cities of Israel[l]." To this event, I say, the prophet is supposed more particularly to allude. But, in the history of Israel, such instances were without number. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the destruction of Jericho by the sound of rams' horns, and of Midian by the lamps and pitchers of Gideon, clearly shew, that God can save equally by many or by few, and that those who trust in him shall never be confounded.

If, on the other hand, we suppose this exercise of God's power to be mentioned with a view to awe the Israelites into submission, it may well be interpreted in that view. The whole nation, both of Israel and Judah, placed an undue reliance on their relation to God, and could not conceive that their enemies should ever be suffered finally to prevail against them. A remarkable instance of this occurred in the days of Zedekiah, king of Judah. The Chaldeans besieged him in Jerusalem: but, on Pharaoh's coming from Egypt to succour him, the Chaldeans raised the siege. This departure of the

[f] Gen. xvii. 1. [g] Ps. xxix. 11. [h] Ps. xxviii. 8.
[i] Isai. xxv. 4. [k] Deut. xxxii. 36.
[l] 2 Kings xiii. 7, 17—19, 25.

Chaldean army raised the confidence of Zedekiah, that he had no just ground for fear. But Jeremiah was commanded to tell him, that the Egyptian army should soon return to their own land; that the Chaldeans should immediately resume the siege; and that, "though he had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans, so that there remained none but wounded men amongst them, yet should they, the wounded soldiers, rise up every man in his tent, and burn Jerusalem with fire[m]."

This latter interpretation of the words seems countenanced by the menace which has been before mentioned; where the prophet says, "Seek ye the Lord, lest he break forth like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Beth-el."]

According to this twofold view of the character of Jehovah, we must state,

II. The ends for which it is adduced—

And,

1. As a warning to those who seek him not—

[To every creature under heaven must we declare, that "God is very greatly to be feared:" "Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O Lord: thou art great, and thy name is great in might: who would not fear thee, O God of nations[n]?" If he is "able to save, he is able also to destroy." In whatever fortresses any be entrenched, "their refuges of lies shall be swept away, and the flood of Divine vengeanee shall overflow their hiding-place[o]." They may in their own conceit "make a covenant with death and hell;" but "their covenant with death shall be disannulled, and their agreement with hell shall not stand: when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, they shall be trodden down by it[p]." What is said in relation to Moab may be spoken in reference to all who cast off the fear of God; "they shall be trodden down by him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill: and he shall spread forth his hands, as he that swimmeth spreadeth forth his hands to swim; and he shall bring down their pride, together with the spoils of their hands: and the fortress of the high fort of thy walls shall he bring down, lay low, and bring to the ground, even to the dust[q]."

To those, then, who are living without God in the world, I would suggest this awful consideration: God is "of great

[m] Jer. xxxvii. 5—10.
[n] Jer. x. 6, 7.
[o] Isai. xxviii. 15, 17.
[p] Isai. xxviii. 18.
[q] The image of a swimmer advancing himself, whilst with his hands he irresistibly sweeps away the waters, beautifully illustrates God's advancing his own glory in the destruction of all his enemies.

power and of terrible majesty;" and when he riseth up, who then can resist him[r]? or who can stand in his sight when he is angry[s]? Verily, "He is a consuming fire[t]." Who then would set briers and thorns against him in battle? He would go through them, and burn them up together. "Seek ye, then, his face:" seek him as he is revealed to you in the Gospel of his Son: seek him as reconciled to you by the blood of the cross: seek him also speedily, and with your whole hearts: for I must declare to you, that "there is no escape to those who neglect his great salvation[u];" and that, "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished[x]."]

2. As an encouragement to those who desire his favour—

[Many are ready to despond on account of their own weakness, and of the power of their enemies. But if God be our strength and our salvation, whom need we fear? "If he be for us, who, with any prospect of success, can be against us?" Hear how he chides the indulgence of a desponding thought: "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of his understanding? He giveth power to *the faint;* and to *them that have no might* he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but 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[y]." Let not any one then shrink back from the contest, how weak soever he himself may be, or however potent his enemies. Aided by God, "a worm shall thresh the mountains[z]:" and the weakest creature in the universe may say with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me[a]." In truth, a sense of weakness, so far from being any ground of discouragement, is rather a ground of hope; because "God will perfect his own strength in our weakness." We are told that God bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he layeth it low; he layeth it low, even to the ground; he bringeth it even to the dust." But whom does he employ in this work? The strong and mighty? No: it is added, "The foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy[b]." Whoever then ye be,

[r] Job xxxi. 14. [s] Deut. iv. 24. [t] Ps. lxxvi. 7.
[u] Heb. ii. 3. [x] Prov. xi. 21. [y] Isai. xl. 27—31.
[z] Isa. xli. 14, 15. [a] Phil. iv. 13. [b] Isai. xxvi. 5, 6.

go forward. Though seas of difficulty be before you, I say to you, as God did to Moses, "Wherefore criest thou unto me? Say unto the children of Israel, that they go forward[c]." Do you doubt whether success shall attend your efforts? Look at the example of David: see his triumphs, and his acknowledgments[d] — — — and doubt not, but that if you seek God, and confide in him as David did, like him you shall be more than conquerors, through Him that loveth you.]

[c] Exod. xiv. 15.

[d] 2 Sam. xxii. 2—20. This whole passage should be cited. See also ver. 30—41.

MCXCI.

GOD KNOWS OUR SINS.

Amos v. 12. *I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins.*

MANY passages of Holy Writ appear to refer to a particular people only; whilst in reality, they are applicable to all mankind. Whoever shall consult the passages cited by St. Paul in the third chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, in confirmation of the total depravity of mankind, and compare them with the places from whence they are taken, will be particularly struck with the truth of this remark. The Prophets David and Isaiah speak of certain individuals whose iniquities were of a most enormous kind; but St. Paul proves from them the depravity of human-nature in general: and this he does with great propriety: for, though all persons do not run to the same extent of wickedness, all have the same propensities within them: and if persons enjoying all the advantages of revelation abandoned themselves to such wickedness, it must arise, not from the peculiarity of their trials, but from the inward depravity of their hearts. This observation was applicable to the passage before us. The prophet, or rather God by him, is addressing a people who violated all the duties of social and civil life; and is denouncing his judgments against them for the sins which they so openly committed: but the same address may be justly made to every

child of man: for all are corrupt and abominable in their doings; "all of which are naked and opened before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

Let us consider,

I. The information here given us—

Men conceive of God as not noticing their sins: "They say in their hearts, The thick clouds are a covering to him, that he cannot see." But he does see the sins of all mankind: he sees them,

1. In all their extent and variety—

[*From infancy to age* his eye is upon us. Scarcely do we draw our breath, before we begin to shew what fallen creatures we are; how irritable, how self-willed, how querulous, how addicted to every evil which we are capable of committing. As our powers of acting are enlarged, our habit of sinning is proportionably increased; every faculty displaying those corruptions which are most suited to its powers, and to the exercise of which it can most easily contribute. As reason expands, we might hope that it should assume the government of our lives: but it is soon overpowered by passion; and its voice, if heard at all, is lost amidst the pleasures and vanities of a tempting world. So universal is this, that all expect, as a matter of course, to behold increasing corruptions with increasing years; the exhibition of them varying with the successive periods of life: in the young, the passions pleading for indulgence; in maturer age, the desire of distinction urging and impelling us; and, in our latter years, the cares of this life, or the deceitfulness of riches, occupying all our time and thoughts. All this has God beheld; and not a disposition or desire has been hid from him.

The sins *of body and of mind* have been alike open to him. Each of these has its appropriate lusts: there is a "filthiness both of the flesh and of the spirit," from which we are alike concerned to "cleanse ourselves." Intemperance, lewdness, sloth, have, in different men, their sway, according as education or constitutional propensity incline them. And in the mind, what an inconceivable mass of iniquity resides, ever ready to start forth into action, as occasion may require! Oh the pride, the envy, the malice, the wrath, the revenge, the uncharitableness, which shew themselves in our daily life and conversation! Add to these the murmuring, and discontent, and covetousness; the self-confidence and self-dependence; and the entire devotion to self-gratification in the whole of our conduct. What an accumulation of wickedness must arise

from a life so spent, when, in fact, "every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts is evil, only evil, continually!"

Of ϙmission, too, as well as of commission, does he behold our sins. He tries us by the standard of his perfect law, which requires that we should love him with all our heart and mind and soul and strength; and that we should live in an entire dependence on his care, and for the purpose only of advancing his glory. But in our whole lives there has not been one single moment in which we have conformed to his law, or come near to the line which he has marked out for us. To his dear Son, also, what gratitude, what affiance, what devotion have we owed! Yet have we been almost strangers to these holy feelings; and, even at the present moment, possess them in no degree comparable to what his love to us requires. Nor have we obeyed the motions of his Holy Spirit, but rather have done despite to him every day we lived. What have the interests of our souls and of eternity demanded? Yet, in what way have we discharged the debt?

Surely, if we put together these things, we must confess that our "transgressions" have been "manifold;" yea, more in number than the hairs of our head, or "as the sands upon the sea-shore innumerable."]

2. In all their heinousness and aggravations—

[Our sins have been committed *against light and knowledge.* Though we have not known the extent of our duty to God, we have known far more of it than we have ever practised. No one of us has been so ignorant, as not to see the importance of eternal things, when compared with the things of time and sense; and, consequently, the duty of giving them a precedence, both in our estimation and pursuit. But have we felt the same ardour in relation to them that we have in prosecuting the vanities of this present world? Alas! If we had paid no more attention to our temporal concerns than we have to those which are spiritual and eternal, we should have had very little prosperity to boast of; or rather I should say, there would have been but one sentiment respecting us, among all who knew us.

Against vows and resolutions, too, we have proceeded in this mad career. I conceive there is not any one amongst us so obdurate, as not to have formed some purposes of amendment. At the death of a friend or relative, or in a time of sickness, when our own dissolution seemed to be drawing near, or perhaps after an awakening sermon, we have thought that to humble ourselves before God, and seek acceptance with him, was our duty: but the impression has soon worn away, and, like metal that has been fused, we have soon returned to our wonted hardness. Possibly we may have begun and made

some progress in religion, and given to our friends hopes that we would really turn unto our God: but we have been drawn aside by temptation, and have "turned back with the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

Above all, we have sinned *against all the mercies and the judgments of God.* We have seen his judgments upon others, yet have not returned unto him ourselves. We have perhaps felt them in some measure ourselves, yet have made no suitable improvement of them. As for mercies, they have followed us night and day, from our youth up: yet to how little effect, as it regards our souls! That greatest of all mercies, the gift of God's only-begotten Son to die for us, one would suppose that *that* should have altogether *constrained* us to live unto our God. But that stupendous mystery has appeared to us only as a cunningly-devised fable, which might amuse us awhile, but which merited no practical regard. Indeed, if Christianity had been altogether false, few of us would have materially differed from what we have been; for we have neither been allured by its promises, nor alarmed by its threats, so as to comply with its dictates in any essential point.

Is this matter over-stated? Do we not know it to be true? and has not God witnessed it in all its parts? Yes: as he has seen "our *manifold* transgressions," so has he also known "our *mighty* sins," and recorded every one of them in the book of his remembrance.]

Such is the information given us in our text: and it becomes us to consider,

II. The use we should make of it—

Certainly, in the first place,

1. We should beg of God to discover to us the real state of our souls—

[We know it not, though it is so plain and palpable. We are ready to account ourselves, if not positively good, yet far from bad. The sins of which we are conscious, appear only like the stars in a cloudy night, few in number, and at great intervals; whereas, if we saw ourselves as we really are, the whole extent of our lives would present to us but one continuous mass of sins, of a greater or lesser magnitude. But who can open our eyes? Who can shew us to ourselves? Who can bring us to a becoming sense of our extreme vileness? None but God. It is he alone who can open to our view "the chambers of imagery" which are in our hearts; and shew us, that instead of our being, as we vainly imagine, "rich, and increased with goods, and in need of nothing, we are indeed wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."]

2. We should entreat him to humble us in the dust before him—

[It is God alone who can "give repentance:" he alone can take away the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh. Who was it that made the difference between Lydia and the other hearers of St. Paul? It was "the Lord, who opened her heart to attend to the things that were spoken by him." And it is the same power alone that can turn *us* from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. And let us remember, that humiliation for sin is necessary: it is indispensably necessary for our acceptance with God. God himself has declared, that "whoso covereth his sins shall not prosper; and that he only who confesseth and forsaketh them, shall find mercy at his hands."]

3. We should look to our Lord Jesus Christ, as our only hope—

[If we conceive our sins to have been only light and venial, we shall easily persuade ourselves that we can make compensation for them by some works of our own. And it is owing to men's ignorance of their own hearts, that they so generally hope to establish a righteousness of their own by the works of the law. But that vain thought must be discarded with abhorrence. We must renounce all hope in ourselves; and "flee for refuge to that hope which is set before us, even to the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that he might atone for our sins, and effect a reconciliation for us with our offended God. Be assured, Brethren, that there is no other way unto the Father than by Christ. If you were to shed rivers of tears, you could never wash away one sin; nor, if you could walk ever so holily in future, could you ever atone for the smallest sin. How then can you hope to wash away or make atonement for all your *manifold* transgressions, and your *mighty* sins? Indeed, you must look to Christ as your only hope, and transfer to his sacred head the sins you have committed, exactly as Aaron transferred to the head of the scape-goat the sins of all Israel. It is in this way alone that they can ever be removed from your souls: and if not so removed, they will sink your souls into everlasting perdition.]

4. We should walk with all possible circumspection before God—

[Having so long exercised the patience of our God, we ought to determine, through grace, that we will offend him no more. However careful we may be, imperfection will pervade our very best services. But let it be imperfection only, and not wilful sin, that God shall see in us in future. Let there be no allowed guile in our hearts. Let us search out our duty

in its full extent, and endeavour to fulfil it; attending to it in all its parts, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Let it henceforth be the one labour of our lives to "keep a conscience void of offence before God," if by any means we may approve ourselves to him, and "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."]

MCXCII.

CARNAL EASE AND SECURITY REPROVED.

Amos vi. 1. *Woe to them that are at ease in Zion.*

ONE would scarcely conceive it possible, that the Jews, with so many instances of God's displeasure before their eyes, could indulge in security, whilst they were evidently, in the whole course of their lives, provoking him to anger. But the blindness both of Israel and Judah was almost incurable. The ten tribes having wholly addicted themselves to idolatry, were the first monuments of God's indignation. Yet on them the divine judgments fell at first but partially, in order that they might be stirred up to penitence, and avert, by timely reformation, their impending fate. But they continued obdurate, under all the chastisements that were inflicted on them: nor did Judah make any suitable improvement, either of the judgments inflicted on others, or of the forbearance that was exercised towards themselves. God, by the Prophet Jeremiah, complains of Judah thus: "I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also[a]." A similar complaint was made by the Prophet Amos in our text. God had "begun to cut Israel short;" but neither did they nor Judah lay it to heart, as they should have done: they saw what had been done to nations less guilty and more powerful than themselves; to Calneh, in Chaldea; to Hemath, in Syria; to Gath of the Philistines; and yet "they put away the evil

[a] Jer. iii. 8.

day" from themselves[b], as though the cup of bitterness should never be put into their hands. But the prophet denounces against them the heavy judgments of God: "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion!"

It is my intention from these words, to shew you,

I. The evil which is here reproved—

We are not to suppose that the mere circumstance of a person's being "*at ease*" is sinful: on the contrary, it is the privilege of God's people to enjoy that very state, and *that*, too, in relation both to their temporal and spiritual concerns. In reference to temporal matters, God has said, "Whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and be *quiet from fear of evil*[c]." And in the book of Job, Eliphaz states this point at large: "He shall deliver thee in six troubles; yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. In famine, he shall redeem thee from death; and in war; from the power of the sword. Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue; neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh. At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh; neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth: for thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field; and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee: and *thou shalt know that thy tabernacle shall be in peace*[d]." Nor is spiritual peace a whit less the portion of the godly: for it is expressly said, "What man is he that feareth the Lord? *His soul shall dwell at ease*[e]."

Yet, that there is a sinful kind of ease, is evident, from the woe denounced against it. The state, then, that is here condemned, is a state,

1. Of carnal confidence—

["Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and *trust in the mountain of Samaria!*" Both Judah and Israel were ready to place an undue confidence in the capitals of their respective countries, as being well fortified both by nature and art: and when they had been made to see how weak such fortresses were, when defended only by an arm of flesh, they would "say in the pride and stoutness of their hearts, The bricks are

[b] ver. 2, 3.
[c] Prov. i. 33.
[d] Job v. 19—24.
[e] Ps. xxv. 12, 13.

fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars[f]." In their outward relation to God, also, they trusted; as the reproof administered to them shews: "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we[g]." Because "they had Abraham to their father," they thought that no evil could befall them[h].

And is not this a common evil amongst ourselves? What is there in which we do not trust, rather than in God? In all our concerns, whether personal or public, we lean on an arm of flesh, and find it altogether foreign to our habits to "cast all our care on God." Even in relation to our eternal interests we find it exceeding difficult to realize our dependence on God. Our own wisdom and strength and righteousness are, for the most part, the objects of our reliance, and the grounds of our ease. But the whole of this is most displeasing to God; according as it is written, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is; but cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and that maketh flesh his arm[i]."]

2. Of sensual indulgence—

[To *possess* indulgences, or to *use* them, is no ground of offence; for "God has given us all things richly to enjoy[k]:" But to *place our happiness in them*, is to provoke God to jealousy; since HE ought to be to us the one only fountain and source of bliss. The Jews, whom the prophet reproves, were greatly guilty in this particular. When both the sins which they committed, and the judgments which they suffered, were rather "calling them to mourning and to fasting and to weeping[l]," they were living in all the indulgences of the most luxurious ease: as the prophet says: "They lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; they chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David; they drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointment[m]." Now this is the very state in which happiness is supposed to consist: it is universally spoken of as the very summit of human enjoyment; and is held forth as an object greatly to be envied and desired. But how different are these things in God's estimation! To all who spend their lives in such a way as this, our Lord, no less than the prophet, says, "Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall weep[n]."

[f] Isai. ix. 9, 10. [g] Jer. vii. 4. [h] Matt. iii. 9.
[i] Jer. xvii. 5, 7. [k] 1 Tim. vi. 17. [l] Isai. xxii. 12—14.
[m] ver. 4—6. [n] Luke vi. 25.

Let it not however be imagined that this woe attaches only to the opulent: for the lower classes of society are equally obnoxious to the same condemnation; whilst, with less refinement indeed, but not an atom less of sensuality, they gratify themselves with those indulgences which every public-house supplies. I forbear to specify their enjoyments with the same minuteness as the prophet does the gratifications of the rich: but your own minds will present you with a detail of the accompaniments of carousals amongst the poor, and of the gratifications wherein they consume their time, their property, their health, their souls.]

3. Of selfish apathy—

[Swallowed up with their vain amusements, the Jews "were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph[o]." They laid not to heart the miseries of others; nor considered either from whom the judgments had come, or for what cause they had been inflicted. "The harp and the viol, the tabret and the pipe, and wine, were in their feasts; but they regarded not the work of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands[p]." And this constitutes a very essential part of that wickedness, which a state of self-indulgent ease invariably brings with it. None feel so little for others, or for the Church of God, as those who are immersed in worldly pleasures. The chief butler, when restored to his office in Pharaoh's household, forgat the interests of the suffering Joseph; as all in prosperity are but too apt to do: so that it is well said by the apostle, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth[q]." In truth, such persons are dead to all holy feelings, whether towards God or man. But this is a state of grievous criminality. We ought all of us to consider ourselves as members of one body, and to have the same care one for another, every member participating in both the joys and sorrows of all the rest[r]. We should all be able to make to God the very same appeal as Job did: "Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? and was not my soul grieved for the poor[s]?" But in a more especial manner ought we to be concerned for the souls of men: and when we view the lamentable condition of Jews or Gentiles, or of the souls of nominal Christians, without pity and compassion, we may well tremble, as obnoxious to the displeasure of our God, as being most unreasonably and unmercifully "at ease in Zion." If we would have any evidence that we are right with God, we must be able, like St. Paul, to appeal to the all-seeing God, that for our perishing brethren,

[o] ver. 6. [p] Isai. v. 12.
[q] Gen. xl. 23. and Esth. iii. 13, 15. with 1 Tim. v. 6.
[r] 1 Cor. xii. 25, 26. [s] Job xxx. 25.

whoever they may be, "we have great heaviness and continual sorrow in our heart[t]."]

That we may not think lightly of this evil, I will proceed to shew,

II. The equity of the judgments denounced against it—

We are ready to think that nothing but gross and flagrant immorality deserves God's wrath. But the *habit of the mind* may be as offensive to God as any *overt act* whatever: and we hesitate not to say, that the evil which is here reproved, deserves the woes that are denounced against it.

The judgments which are threatened in the Old Testament are chiefly of a temporal nature. In truth, nations, *as nations*, are incapable of sustaining any other. But individuals, so far as they are implicated, will have to bear that wrath of God which, in the New Testament, is fully "revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men[u]."

That the evil which we have been considering deserves this, will be seen, if we reflect that it implies,

1. A total alienation of heart from God—

[How impossible would it be to conceive of an angel in heaven, or of Adam in Paradise, in such a state as our text imports! Not one of them could for a moment forget his dependence on God. However crowned with comforts suited to their nature, not one of them would rest in those things as his happiness, or cease to seek his happiness in God. And, if we suppose any part of the creation reduced to a state of suffering, not one of them would be indifferent to their welfare, or indisposed, if it were in his power, to promote it. It is in consequence of our departure from God, that all this evil is come upon us; and that we resemble rather the devil in pride, the beasts in sensuality, and the very stones in an insensibility to all around us. And let me ask, Does not such a state as this deserve the wrath of God? And is not a woe most justly denounced against it? Look at the Saviour; do you find any symptom of such a disposition in him? Was not the very reverse manifested by him, when for our sakes "he made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross?" If we are so far from his image, and so far

[t] Rom. ix. 1, 2. [u] Rom. i. 18.

from seeking his glory, as my text implies, it is in vain to hope that we shall have any part with him in the world above.]

2. An utter insensibility to all the wonders of Redemption—

[Among the ends for which our blessed Lord came into the world, one of prime importance was, "that we should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and rose again." But the sensual life, which we have before described, is altogether foreign from this, or, rather, directly opposed to it. Shall one then "in Zion" be thus at ease? It would be bad enough for those who have never heard of redeeming love to rest in such a state; but, for those who profess to have "come unto Mount Zion," and to belong to the Church of Christ, to be thus lost to all that is good, is an abomination that merits, and will assuredly be visited with, God's heavy displeasure. If we would dwell with Christ in a better world, we must "have the mind that was in him," and "walk as he walked"———]

3. An entire forgetfulness of the future judgment—

[Could any man living on the borders of eternity rest in such a state as is here described? What if we were to see a dying man immersed in carnal confidence, and sensual indulgence, and selfish apathy; should we think such dispositions suited to his state? Would not even an ungodly man judge it better for him to rise above the things of time and sense, and to have his mind occupied with the concerns and interests of eternity? Think, then, of an immortal being thus occupied; not knowing, but that, before another day shall arrive, he may be summoned to the judgment-seat of Christ, and receive his doom, either in heaven or in hell, for ever: is it not almost incredible that a human being of this description should be found? But so it is, even with the great mass of mankind: they "put far from them the evil day," and scarcely think of eternity till they are constrained to meet it with all its horrors. What, then, shall I say to such persons? What *can* I say, but "Woe unto them?" I am aware that it must appear harsh; and that it would be more pleasing to the generality, if we were to "prophesy unto them smooth things, and prophesy deceits." But we dare not do so. Our blessed Lord, when addressing such persons—even *persons in Zion*, who, whilst they "professed to know God, in works denied him"—repeated *no less than seven times, in one short chapter*, this solemn warning, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" and then closed his address with this terrible denunciation: "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how shall ye escape the damnation of hell[x]!" This, by the way, shews us what is

[x] Matt. xxiii. 13—33.

meant by the woe denounced in my text. Yes, it is nothing less than "the damnation of hell" that must be the portion of such self-deceiving professors. I pray you, Brethren, be not satisfied with having it supposed that ye belong to Zion, whilst ye really "belong to the synagogue of Satan." To "have a name to live," will be an awful state, if ye be found "dead" at last. Indeed, if you would obtain the prize, you must "run as in a race:" if you would gain the victory, you must "fight the good fight of faith:" if ever you would have eternal life, glory and honour and immortality must, to the latest hour of your lives, be the one object of your pursuit.]

MCXCIII.

GOD'S CONDESCENSION TO PRAYER.

Amos vii. 2, 3. *Then I said, O Lord God, forgive, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small. The Lord repented for this: It shall not be, saith the Lord.*

IT is very instructive to see, amongst all the servants of Jehovah, whether Prophets or Apostles, how love was blended with fidelity in the whole of their ministrations. They were constrained to declare all which "*God had shewed unto them*[a]." But did they "desire the woeful events" which they predicted? They could appeal to God that they did not[b]. The Prophet Amos had been commanded to foretell that the fruits of the earth, with the exception of those which had been gathered in, should be eaten up by grasshoppers[c]. But he immediately betook himself to prayer, and, by his importunity, prevailed on God to suspend the threatened judgment. He was directed afterwards to foretell the destruction of a part of the land by fire[d]: and again, in the same terms as before, he interceded for the land; and obtained for it a similar relaxation of the impending calamity. The judgments had been begun to be inflicted[e]; but at his request they were removed. It is probable that these judgments were also threatened in a *figurative* sense; and related to the invasions of Pul, king of Assyria, who contented himself with imposing a tribute of a

[a] ver. 1, 4, 7. [b] Jer. xvii. 16. [c] ver. 1, 2.
[d] ver. 4. [e] Amos iv. 9, 11.

thousand talents of silver; and that of Tiglath-pileser, who took several cities, and carried away the inhabitants captives to Assyria[f]. But, without entering into the history of these events, I wish to fix your attention on the repeated intercessions of the prophet, (for *the repetition of them in the same words*, and *the repeated answer* to them *in the same words*, render them peculiarly deserving of our attention;) and to shew you from them these blessed truths;

I. That the judgments we fear may be averted by prayer—

Judgments of the heaviest kind are denounced against *us*—

[Temporal judgments, such as those referred to in the passage before us, would be very terrible: yet are they nothing, in comparison of what *we* have cause to fear. "The wicked," says David, "shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God[g]." In another psalm he is more explicit still: "Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup[h]." Who amongst us has not forgotten God, days without number? and who, therefore, has not reason to tremble at these awful declarations?]

But they may all be removed by fervent and believing prayer—

[Look into the Scriptures, and see the wonderful efficacy of prayer! If ever there was a person that had reason to fear his prayers could not be heard, it was David: because he had long known the Lord; had received the most distinguished favours at his hands; and yet committed adultery and murder, and continued impenitent for a long period, till his sin was charged home upon him by the Prophet Nathan: yet, behold, he, the very instant he acknowledged his transgressions, was forgiven. "I have sinned against the Lord," says he: and instantly the prophet replies, "The Lord hath put away thy sin: thou shalt not die[i]." Hear the prayers which he offered on the occasion: "Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation[k]!" Hear with what confidence he prayed: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow[l]."

[f] 2 Kings xv. 19, 29. [g] Ps. ix. 17. [h] Ps. xi. 6.
[i] 2 Sam. xii. 13. [k] Ps. li. 2, 14. [l] Ps. li. 7.

What! *you* clean! *you* whiter than snow? Yes, *I*, even *I*. Hear how particularly he himself notices the speed with which his prayer was answered. "When I kept silence (and refrained from prayer), my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. But at last I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity I hid not: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and (instantly) thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin [m]."

We may notice, also, the instance of Manasseh, who was perhaps the most daring in his impieties of all the human race: "He built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; he reared up altars for Baal, and worshipped all the host of heaven; he built altars for them all, even in the house of the Lord itself, and set a graven image there; he made his son to pass through the fire; he caused his subjects to do more evil than had been committed by the nations whom God had driven out before them; and to all these impieties he added this, that he shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem with it from one end to the other [n]. Now can we suppose that such a monster of impiety as this could ever be forgiven? Yes: not even *his* prayer was shut out, when he besought the Lord. We are told, that "in his affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him; and He was entreated of him, and heard his supplication. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God [o]." Repeatedly is this noticed in the history respecting him; "his prayer unto his God, his prayer, and how God was entreated of him [p]:" and no doubt it is thus repeated in order to shew us, that, whatever be our demerits, we shall not be cast out, if, with humble, fervent, and believing supplications, we betake ourselves to the prayer-hearing and sin-pardoning God.

The whole people of Nineveh attest this blessed truth. There was no call to repentance suggested by the Prophet Jonah: the judgments denounced by him were altogether unqualified with the smallest hope of mercy: the Prophet himself seems scarcely to have contemplated a possibility of forgiveness to them; yet were they, even the whole population, spared at the voice of their cry [q].

I say then, without hesitation, to all the sinners of mankind, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord; and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly

[m] Ps. xxxii. 3—5.
[n] 2 Kings xxi. 3—16.
[o] 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13.
[p] 2 Chron. xxxiii. 18, 19.
[q] Jonah iii. 10.

pardon," and multiply his pardons above all the multitude of their sins[r].]

My text leads me to notice another most important truth; namely,

II. That the weakness we feel may be urged by us as a plea—

The state of Israel at that time seemed indeed to be very desperate: for "God had already begun to cut them short." But the prophet, instead of desponding, *twice* urged this very circumstance as a plea with God to grant him his request: "O Lord God, forgive, I beseech thee! by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small." And each time the success of his plea is mentioned, "The Lord repented for this: it shall not be, saith the Lord[s]."

Now such may be our plea before God—

[We are ready to make our weakness a ground of despondency before God: "How can I turn to him? How can I effect a reconciliation with him? How can I hope ever to emancipate myself from my cruel bondage?" "There is no hope:" 'I may as well continue as I am: I can but perish at last[t].' But all this is wrong: for God often delays his interpositions for this very end, that he may bring us to see how destitute we are of help or hope in ourselves: nor is he ever better pleased, than when, with a total dereliction of all hope in ourselves, we cast ourselves wholly and unreservedly on him. Let us once be brought to say with king Jehoshaphat, "We have no might; but our eyes are unto thee;" and we may be sure that our deliverance is nigh at hand[u]. The prophet succeeded thus.]

And such success shall we also obtain—

[I have said that God orders his dispensations, for the most part, so as to bring us to self-despair. Hear his own words: "The Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left[x]. If there were any power in ourselves, we should be ascribing our deliverance to our own arm: but when we see how destitute we are of all strength, then are we willing to give God the glory of all that he effects in our behalf. See this in the Apostle Paul. He was assaulted with some grievous temptation, which he calls "a thorn in his

[r] Isai. lv. 7. The margin. [s] Compare ver. 2, 3, and 5, 6.
[t] Jer. iii. 25. [u] 2 Chron. xx. 12. [x] Deut. xxxii. 36.

flesh." Thrice he cried to the Lord to remove it: and by his repeated entreaties he obtained this answer; "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." And what was the effect? His fears are dissipated; his sorrows are dispelled; and instantly he bursts forth into these triumphant exclamations: "Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me: for when I am weak, then am I strong[y]." Here is the great truth which I would impress upon your minds; "When I am weak, then am I strong." It is not possible to have too deep a sense of your own weakness." Perhaps in the whole world there does not exist another passage comparable to that in the Prophet Isaiah, where he represents whole mountains of difficulty to be encountered, and Israel, as a mere insignificant worm, groaning under them: "Fear not, *thou worm* Jacob: I will make *thee* a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth: *thou* shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff: *thou* shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel[z]." Endeavour to realize this idea. Place mountains before your eyes: then look down upon a poor helpless worm; and then see, through his exertions, the whole mountains beaten to dust and scattered as by a mighty whirlwind; and then you will have some faint conception of the truth inculcated in my text; sins, that reach unto the heavens, scattered to the winds; and judgments, deep as hell, removed for ever from your sight. Bring every threatening which the word of God contains: and to every one in succession I will say, "Respecting *this* the Lord hath repented: and *this* shall not be;" "neither shall *that* be."]

Let me now, in my APPLICATION of this subject, address,

1. Those who despise the judgments of the Lord—

[Many there are who look upon the threatenings of God with as little concern as if there were no truth in them; and who, like Amaziah in the chapter before us, condemn the preachers as exciting groundless fears; and say to them, "Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Israel[a]." But to all such persons I must say, that the word of God shall stand, and not one jot or tittle of it shall ever fall to the ground. Look back, and see, "Did not God's word take hold of" the disobedient Jews[b]? Go to Assyria, and see; or go to Babylon, and see; or look upon them in their

[y] 2 Cor. xii. 7—10.
[z] Isai. xli. 14—16.
[a] ver. 10, 16.
[b] Zech. i. 6.

present dispersion, and see. You may put far from you the evil day; but it will come at last; and with augmented terror, in proportion as it has been despised. I call upon you, then, yea, on every one amongst you, to turn unto the Lord, and to cry, "O Lord God, forgive, I beseech thee[c]!" For where is there one amongst you that does not need forgiveness? or who can obtain forgiveness, if he will not ask? But, "if ye will not turn to God, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because of the ruin that awaits you[d]."

If you would ask, "How shall I arise?" gladly do I declare, that there is One able to save, and as willing as He is able. "God has laid help for you on One that is mighty:" and you shall have no want of grace or strength if only you will flee to him for succour.

But this leads me to address,]

2. Those who are sinking under discouraging apprehensions—

[Beloved Brethren, what is that which you are saying? "How shall I arise? for I am small." Hear the answer which God gave to his Church of old. Zion of old laboured under your very infirmity: "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? Yes, saith the Lord; even the captives of the mighty *shall* be taken away, and the prey of the terrible *shall* be delivered: for *I* will contend with him that contendeth with thee; and *I* will save thy children[e]." You see how readily God interposed for Israel, at the cry of Amos; and *that* too for an obstinate and rebellious people: and will he not hear *your* cry, which is offered for *yourselves?* Moreover, you have a better intercessor than Amos: the Son of God himself "ever lives" in heaven, whither he is gone on purpose "to make intercession for you." Put your cause into his hands: commit yourselves entirely to him, and you have nothing to fear: for "HIM the Father heareth always." Say to him, as Hezekiah did under the most desponding apprehensions that could be conceived, "Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me[f]:" and be assured, that if, with a renunciation of all self-dependence, you cast your care on Him, he will speedily interpose for your relief: "he will, in love to your souls, deliver them from the pit of corruption, and cast all your sins behind his back[g]."]

[c] The Text.
[d] Jer. xiii. 17.
[e] Isai. xlix. 24, 25.
[f] Isai. xxxviii. 14.
[g] Isai. xxxviii. 17.

MCXCIV.

THE SECURITY OF ALL GOD'S PEOPLE.

Amos ix. 9. *Lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve; yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.*

THOUGH God does not see fit to preserve his people wholly from national calamities, yet he interposes, either to lighten their afflictions or to sanctify them to their good. Daniel and the Hebrew youths were carried captive with their nation; yet were they eminently protected by that God whom they served: and Jeremiah, though not raised to any exalted station, was on many occasions marked as an object of God's incessant care and attention. The Prophet Amos was commissioned to foretell the dispersion of Israel which began in the Assyrian captivity, and was completed at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans: but the God of Abraham promised by him, that he would be mindful of "his hidden ones," and deliver them from the evils to which the profligate and secure should surely be exposed.

There are now, as well as in former ages, sifting times, (if we may so speak,) both to the Church at large, and to the individual members of it: and the same distinguishing regard is still, though less visibly, manifested by God to his dear children; not the smallest of whom shall ever be overlooked. To illustrate this truth we shall shew,

I. By what methods God sifts his people—

God sees that a state of perfect ease would by no means conduce to his people's welfare; and therefore he suffers them sometimes to be agitated,

1. By outward afflictions—

[Persecution is the common lot of all who live godly in Christ Jesus: and this, together with other trials common to the world at large, is made use of to separate the godly from the ungodly, and to purify them from the corruptions that cleave to them in their present state. While the world smiles upon us we are too ready to seek its friendship by sinful compliances; and when we enjoy an entire freedom from troubles,

we are apt to grow careless, and to relax our diligence in seeking "the rest that remaineth for us." God therefore causes us to be "emptied from vessel to vessel, that we may not be settled on our lees[a]."]

2. By inward temptations—

[By far the sorest trials which Christians experience, are, for the most part, of an inward and spiritual nature: Satan wounds them with his fiery darts, and harasses them with many painful suggestions. That wicked fiend indeed desires to sift them as wheat, that he may prevail against them to their destruction; but God permits him to do it for a very different end, namely, that he may root out all their self-confidence, and stimulate them to greater exertions in their spiritual warfare. This was the effect which it produced on Peter[b]; and it is with the same benevolent intent that our Almighty friend gives licence to our adversary to make his assaults on us. Doubtless such "tossings to and fro" are very distressing to us at the time; but they are overruled for good, in that they separate us more effectually from an evil world, and render us more meet for the heavenly garner.]

Doubtless many who make a fair appearance, perish by these means: nevertheless we are assured of,

II. The security of all those that are truly upright—

There is an essential difference between the hypocrites and the sincere—

[As chaff and corn may to a superficial observer resemble each other, so may the real and merely nominal Christian. But as there is a solidity in the corn which is not to be found in the chaff, so the truly converted person has something, which clearly distinguishes him from the most refined hypocrite: he is not contented with an appearance of religion, but seeks to possess it in truth: nor can he rest in the performance of duties; but labours to have his heart engaged in them. To be high in the estimation of men is, in his eyes, a poor matter; he would approve himself to God in all he does: nor is there any measure of perfection with which he would be satisfied, while there remained a hope and prospect of attaining more.]

Moreover, God will infallibly distinguish the true professors from the false—

[Man may easily be mistaken in his estimate of characters: but God will form an unerring judgment: he discerns

[a] Job xxxvi. 8—10. with Jer. xlviii. 11.
[b] Luke xxii. 31. compared with 1 Pet. v. 8.

the thoughts and intents of the heart: he weighs the very spirits of men no less than their actions: "he needs not that any should testify of man, for he knows what is in man:" he will discover sincerity under the most unfavourable circumstances, and hypocrisy under the most artful disguise. Abijah alone of all the house of Jeroboam had *some good thing* in his heart towards the Lord God of Israel, and God did not fail to notice it with tokens of his approbation, while he poured out the vials of his wrath on all the family besides[c]. If we were less than the least of all saints, if we were only as "smoking flax," having but one spark of grace and a whole cloud of corruption, God would assuredly observe the latent principle, and discover the workings of his own Spirit amidst all the infirmities of our fallen nature.]

Nor will he ever suffer the weakest believer to perish—

[From the violence with which corn is agitated, an ignorant person would imagine that much of it must be lost with the chaff: in like manner many that are weak in faith may be ready to cry, "I shall one day perish[d]." But God pledges himself for the preservation of every the smallest grain. He represents himself under the image of a woman, who, having lost a small piece of silver, lights a candle, and sweeps diligently till she find it[e]; and he assures us, that "it is not his will, that any of his little ones should perish[f]. We have no reason then to fear: for whilst he continues possessed of omniscience to discern his people, and omnipotence to preserve them, we shall be as secure amidst all our agitations, as if we were already lodged in the granary of heaven.]

INFER—

1. How much are we concerned to be found sincere!

[There is a day quickly coming, when Christ, the Judge of quick and dead, shall sift and winnow us all. Nor will he merely cause a separation of the precious from the vile, but such a separation as shall be followed with endless happiness or misery[g]. Should we not then diligently inquire whether we be wheat or chaff? To what purpose is it that "the tares grow up with the wheat," and sometimes are mistaken for it, if, at the harvest, they must be separated for ever[h]? So it will be of little avail to have been reputed Christians, if, the very instant we die, we are to take our portion with hypocrites and unbelievers. Let us then turn to God now with our

[c] 1 Kings xiv. 13. [d] 1 Sam. xxvii. 1. [e] Luke xv. 8.
[f] Matt. xviii. 14. [g] Matt. iii. 12. [h] Matt. xiii. 29, 30.

whole hearts, that we may "have confidence before him at his coming."]

2. How may we welcome afflictions, provided we be truly upright!

[What are afflictions but the sieve in our Father's hand, whereby he takes us from among the ungodly, and "purifies us unto himself a peculiar people?" And shall we distrust his skill, or doubt his love? If the countryman, instructed by him, knows how to suit his threshing-instruments to the nature of his corn, shall God be at a loss how most effectually to produce his ends on us[i]? Let us then leave ourselves in his hands, and submit cheerfully to the means, that we may at last attain the end.]

3. How important a grace is faith!

[Under the various trials with which we are harassed, it is faith alone that can keep us steadfast, or afford us any solid comfort. If we be destitute of faith, we shall be tormented with ten thousand fears: but if we be strong in faith, we shall, under all circumstances, "stay ourselves on God, and be kept in perfect peace[k]." However sensible we be of our own weakness and unworthiness, we shall expect the accomplishment of God's promise, and shall dismiss our fears, "knowing that he is able to keep that which we have committed to him[l]." May we all be enabled in this manner to trust ourselves in his hands, and to wait quietly for that salvation which he has prepared for us!]

[i] Isai. xxviii. 26—28. [k] Isai. xxvi. 3. [l] 2 Tim. i. 12.

MCXCV.

CONVERSION OF THE JEWS AND GENTILES.

Amos ix. 11, 12. *In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doeth this.*

PROPHECIES are of necessity involved in some measure of obscurity; so that the full extent of their meaning cannot be seen at first, nor the precise period for their accomplishment ascertained. To many of them is affixed an apparently determinate,

but really indeterminate, date; "*In that day.*" The expression, "*In that day,*" always refers to some signally important time, but not always to the same time: it sometimes refers to one advent of our Lord, and sometimes to another; so that we cannot determine, except by the passage itself, whether it relate to his coming in the flesh, or his coming to destroy Jerusalem, or his coming to reign in the Millennium, or his coming to judge the world. The context however will generally enable us to fix the period intended, if it relate only to one; or to specify the different seasons, if its reference be more extensive. It is with these words that the prophecy before us is introduced: and in it the diversity of their meaning will appear.

Let us consider,

I. The import of the prophecy—

It evidently has different seasons of accomplishment. It speaks of,

1. The return of the Jews from Babylon—

[All the prophets who lived before that event spake of it; to some it afforded very ample scope for the minutest predictions. By their captivity in Babylon, the Jews were reduced to the lowest state of degradation: their polity, both civil and religious, was destroyed; and there were no remains of that grandeur to which they had been elevated in the days of David. But, on their return from Babylon, things were restored, *in a measure,* "as in the days of old;" and their inveterate enemies of Edom became subject to them[a]. This however is certainly only a subordinate sense of this prophecy; for it refers much more strongly to,]

2. The conversion of the Gentiles—

[When we speak of David's kingdom as typical of the Messiah's; and his enemies, of the Messiah's enemies; we perhaps may be thought to lean rather to the side of fancy than of judgment. But fancy should find no scope for exercise in interpreting the word of God: truth, and truth alone, should be the object of our research. The propriety of such representations is strongly marked by an inspired writer; who, *when determining a controversy of the utmost importance to the Jews,* adduces this very passage against them, to shew, that

[a] Obad. ver. 18—21.

God had, many ages before, decreed the reception of the Gentiles into his Church, without subjecting them to the rite of circumcision: and if that Apostle had imposed a sense upon the passage foreign to its real and received meaning, the Jews would doubtless have objected to his interpretation of it[b]. Here then we have one sense at least, (and *that* the most doubtful one,) of this important passage, fixed by undisputed and infallible authority. That in this sense it was accomplished, is too plain to stand in need either of proof or illustration: we ourselves, as of Gentile extraction, are living monuments of its truth.]

3. The future restoration of the Jews, and their union with the Gentiles in one universal Church—

[Though myriads of Gentiles have been converted to Christianity, we are far enough from having seen "*all* the heathen" subjected to the yoke of Christ; yet it is of *all* the remnant of the unconverted heathen that the prophet speaks. Nor have the Jews been so brought back to their own land as to be driven from it no more: yet it is to *such* a restoration of them that the prophet refers[c]. Both of these events will take place together, or in the nearest connexion with each other: "the fall of the Jews has been the riches of the Gentiles," and the fulness of the Gentiles will be as renewed life to the Jews[d]: then will both be united under one Head, the Lord Jesus Christ; and he, as the true David, will reign over them for ever[e]. All his enemies then, whether Jewish or heathen, will be put under his feet; and all the kingdoms of the world become his undisputed possession.]

Nor is this a speculative subject merely, but one replete with comfort: this will appear by considering,

II. The encouragements to be derived from it—

Every prophecy admits of practical improvement; and this especially. It affords us rich encouragement,

1. In relation to individuals—

[The state of multitudes is altogether as desperate as was that of the Jews in Babylon. What hope is there of the proud infidel—the abandoned sensualist—the cruel persecutor—the hardened backslider[f]?—We should be ready to say concerning them, "There is no hope:" but there is nothing impossible with God; and he who restored the Jews from Babylon, and converted so many Gentiles by the instrumentality of a few

[b] Acts xv. 13—17. [c] ver. 14, 15.
[d] Rom. xi. 12, 15, 31. [e] Jer. xxx. 9. Zech. xiv. 9.
[f] Shew in each of these states how desperate their condition is.

poor fishermen, can at any time reclaim the prodigal, convert a Saul, or restore a David — — — Let none then despair of themselves, as though they were beyond the reach of mercy; nor of others, as though God could not subdue them to the obedience of faith. Though they are "dry bones, very dry, the Spirit may yet enter into them, and they may live[g]."]

2. In relation to the world at large—

[Who that sees the state of the world at this moment, would conceive it possible that truth and righteousness should one day universally prevail? Yet God has ordained that the little grain of mustard seed which has sprung up, shall become a tree that shall extend its shadow over the whole earth — — — If we look at the work indeed, we shall sit down in despair: but if we recollect who it is that says, "I, I will do it," we shall see not only the possibility, but the certainty, of that event. Many, from not adverting to this, laugh at the idea of missions: and many whom God has fitted for missionary labours, are afraid to engage in them. But "is there any thing too hard for the Lord?" and has he not "ordained strength in the mouths of babes and sucklings?" Has he not said too, "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this?" Let us then look with pity both on Jews and heathens; and, in humble hope that the time of God's effectual interposition is fast approaching, let us labour, according to our ability, to extend the kingdom of our Lord, and to advance his glory.]

[g] Ezek. xxxvii. 1—14.

MCXCVI.

THE MILLENNIAL STATE.

Amos ix. 13. *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt.*

IT is gratifying to see what a harmony there is in all the prophets, in their descriptions of the glory of the latter day. The representations which heathen poets have given of what they call the golden age, are more than realized in their predictions. They appear indeed to speak of earthly things; but it is of heavenly things that they speak: and by earthly images they embody truth, and present it to our

minds with incomparably greater force than it could by any other means be conveyed. The idea of fertility, for instance, in all its richest luxuriance, is calculated to make a strong impression on the imagination: it is tangible, as it were; and we can apprehend it; and, when it is set before us in glowing language, we can with ease transfer to spiritual things our perceptions with all their clearness, and our impressions with all their force. Most striking is the picture drawn by the Prophet Hosea. He represents the people uttering their complaints to the corn and wine and oil; and they to the earth; and the earth to the heavens; and the heavens to Jehovah: and all of them in succession conceding to the other the blessings solicited at their hands; Jehovah granting clouds to the heavens; they pouring out their contents upon the earth; the earth yielding its juices to the corn and wine and oil; and they nourishing the famished people[a]. The Prophet Joel goes further, and describes the effects produced, the mountains dropping down new wine, and the hills flowing with milk[b]; whilst the Prophet Amos proceeds yet further, and represents the productions of the earth as so abundant, that there will scarcely be time to gather them in; "the plowman overtaking the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth the seed:" in other words, that the successive operations of husbandry will, by reason of the abundance, press so closely upon each other, as almost to interrupt the regular execution of them.

It is with the spiritual import of these images that we are more immediately concerned. It seems indeed highly probable, that agreeably to the promise given by Moses[c], there will be, as nearly as possible, a literal accomplishment of these things in Palestine, after that the Jews shall have been restored to their own land; (for that event shall certainly take place in the appointed time[d]:) but infinitely richer blessings

[a] Hos. ii. 21—23.
[b] Joel. iii. 18.
[c] Lev. xxvi. 5.
[d] ver. 14, 15.

await them in that day; for that period shall be distinguished by,

I. Frequent ordinances—

At the first establishment of the Christian Church, the people "continued daily in the temple with one accord, and brake bread together from house to house, eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." Thus also will it be in that blessed day, when apostolic piety shall again prevail throughout the Church: there will be no "famine of the word," but frequent ordinances in every place:

[*In public*, ministers will then "give themselves wholly to their work:" they will be "instant in season and out of season:" they will live only to fulfil their ministry, and will "count their lives dear to them" for no other end. The people too will be as eager to receive instruction, as the ministers to convey it. As many followed our blessed Lord for days together to hear his word, and forgot, as it were, the very wants of nature through the insatiableness of their appetites for spiritual food; so, methinks, in that day the people will, as it were, "*dwell* in the house of the Lord, that they may flourish in the courts of our God."

Then also will *social* ordinances abound. Friends, when they meet together, will then seek to edify each other in faith and love. In families, all will look for the returning seasons of divine worship, as much as for their regular meals. Parents will "command their children to fear the Lord;" and masters will universally adopt the resolution of Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

In private, too, men will delight in approaching to their God, and in pouring out their souls before the throne of grace. "At morning, and at evening, and at noon-day will they pray," as David did in the times of old; yea, they will be ready to say with him, "Seven times a day will I praise thee, because of thy righteous judgments."

Thus in the public, social, and private ordinances there will be such a rapid succession, that the "plowman will overtake the reaper; and he that treadeth out the grapes, the sower." Not that temporal things will be neglected: men will "not be the more slothful in business, because they are fervent in spirit;" but they will carry the fear and love of God into every thing, so that they will "be in the fear of the Lord all the day long." "The fire on their altar will never go out."]

From this state of things there will arise,

II. Numerous converts—

[*Now* ministers may fish all the day, and take scarcely any thing; but *then* the Lord will direct them where and how to cast their nets; which they shall scarcely be able to drag to land, by reason of the numbers that they shall catch. The days of Pentecost shall be revived. From a small handful of corn shall spring up a crop waving like the trees of Lebanon, and standing as close upon the ground as piles of grass upon the earth[e]. Fresh converts shall be continually hastening forward, as "doves flying to their windows;" yea rather, they shall be like a majestic river "flowing together to the goodness of the Lord," and that too, not as in an ordinary course, but *upward*, "even to the mountain of the Lord's house that shall be established on the top of the mountains[f]." The church itself shall be perfectly astonished at the increase; which will be so vast and so rapid, that places shall be wanting for their reception[g]. In a word, "the fields will be always white ready to the harvest;" and one crop will not be gathered in, before another is ripe for the sickle."]

Nor will Christianity be a mere profession then; for all who embrace it shall be distinguished for,

III. Exalted virtues—

[All will then "live, not unto themselves, but unto their God; even to Him who died for them, and rose again." The fruit which individuals will then bear will not be thirty or sixty-fold, but an hundred-fold. It will appear as if all the most eminent saints that have ever lived had risen again; on which account it is called, "The first resurrection[h]." So subdued will be all the evil passions of men in that day, that "instead of the thorn will grow up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier will grow up the myrtle-tree[i]:" "for brass there will be gold; for iron, silver; for wood, brass; and for stones, iron[k]." It will be truly the reign of Christ upon earth: nothing but his will will be done; and it will be done on earth, in good measure, as it is done in heaven. Godliness will then be, not an act, but a habit; so that one act of piety will be only as a prelude to another; "the very mountains dropping with sweet wine, and the hills melting" into rivers of wine.]

Resulting from this state of piety, there will be,

IV. Abundant consolations—

[This is doubtless intimated in our text, as in the parallel passage in the Prophet Joel[l]. Truly "God will then comfort

[e] Ps. lxxii. 16. [f] Isai. ii. 2. [g] Isai. xlix. 18—23.
[h] Rev. xx. 5, 6. [i] Isai. lv. 13. [k] Isai. lx. 17.
[l] Joel iii. 18.

Zion; he will comfort all her waste places; he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord: joy and gladness will be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody[m]." The world at this time is only a vale of tears: but then "there will be new heavens and a new earth: yea, God will make all things new[n]." What will be the state of men's minds at that time, may be gathered from the description given of it by the Prophet Isaiah[o] — — — Blessed and glorious state! "the peace of all will flow down as a river," and the joy of all be unspeakable and glorified[p] — — — "God will cause them universally and without ceasing to triumph in Christ[q];" and to live as on the very confines of heaven itself."]

IMPROVEMENT—

Let us inquire,

1. Whence it is that *we* are comparatively in so low a state?

[It is manifest that religion, though perhaps flourishing in comparison of what it was a century ago, is still but at a low ebb. If we look at the ordinances, public, private, and social, they are far from being attended with that life and power that they were in the apostolic age. And whence is this? Are we straitened in our God? No: "we are straitened in our own bowels;" we do not pant after the life and power of godliness, as the first converts did: and "we have not, because we ask not." O that we were more earnest and constant in prayer, forgetting all that we have received, and pressing forward for higher attainments! — — —]

2. How we may attain a greater measure of that prosperity which the saints will enjoy in the latter day?

[We must all begin with our own hearts. If all would labour for higher attainments in their own souls, the whole Church of God would revive and flourish — — — But an attention to others also is most desirable. The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt with incredible celerity, because all, women as well as men, "repaired before their own doors[r]:" and if we laboured, all of us in our own more immediate neighbourhood, what might we not effect! If only we "had a mind to the work," "the work of the Lord should prosper in our hands," and the kingdom of Christ "should come with power" in the midst of us.]

[m] Isai. li. 3. See also xxxv. 1, 2.
[n] Rev. xxi. 1, 5.
[o] Isai. xii. 3—6.
[p] Isai. xxxv. 6, 10.
[q] 2 Cor. ii. 14.
[r] Neh. iii. 10, 12, 23, 28, 29.

OBADIAH.

MCXCVII.

BLESSED EFFECTS OF THE GOSPEL IN THE LATTER DAYS.

Obad. 17. *Upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.*

IT is curious to observe throughout the prophetic writings, that the richest promises relating to the Christian Church follow, and, I had almost said, arise out of, denunciations of vengeance against the enemies of God: the design of God being to display thereby, in a more abundant measure, the riches of his grace towards his chosen people. The great scope of Obadiah's prophecy is to warn the Edomites of the destruction that awaited them. But, regarding them as representing all the Church's enemies, by whatever name they are designated, he proceeds to declare, that the Church shall triumph over them, and, through the power and grace of Christ, be established in the full enjoyment of all her privileges. The time to which he looks forward for the accomplishment of these things is the latter day, when the Jews shall be restored to their own land, and be, in their national capacity, an emblem of the success that shall be given to the Christian Church throughout the world.

In elucidation of the prophecy, we shall consider,

I. The deliverance here spoken of—

It certainly, in its primary and literal sense, refers to the contest which shall take place, between the Jews at the time of their restoration, and their enemies who will oppose their settlement in the land of

Canaan. But the spiritual sense is that which was most prominent in the writer's mind. The deliverance is certainly that which the Lord Jesus Christ had undertaken to accomplish for his Church and people[a].

This has already come to Zion—

[The Lord Jesus Christ has come according to all that was foretold concerning him; and has entered the lists against the enemies of his Church, and has triumphed over them. "By his death he overcame him who had the power of death, that is, the devil:" and having "spoiled principalities and powers, and triumphed over them openly upon the cross," he, in his ascension, "led captivity itself captive;" and has left his people to fight only with a vanquished enemy[b]. By his atoning blood he has delivered his people out of the hands of justice, which demanded the execution of the sentence denounced against them by the law. Having "found, and offered, a ransom for them," he has authoritatively said, "Deliver them from going down into the pit" of hell. By his all-powerful grace, too, he has communicated this deliverance to thousands and tens of thousands, whom he has turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. To millions of prisoners he has said, Go forth, and shew yourselves; and they have broken their bonds, and come forth to light and liberty.]

It is also experienced yet daily—

[How many witnesses are there in this place, and wherever the Gospel is preached with fidelity, who can set their seal to this blessed truth! Many can say, 'I was once a slave to sin, and led captive by the devil at his will: but now "the Son of God has made me free; and I am free indeed:" he has brought my soul out of prison, and set my feet at liberty. Nor am I any more "in bondage to the fear of death" and judgment; for "I know whom I have believed, and that He is able to keep that which I have committed to him"'———]

But it will be yet more largely experienced in the latter days—

[Zion shall then lengthen her cords and strengthen her stakes; and all the nations of the earth shall flow unto her, as the centre of their union, and the treasury of their bliss. Then shall "Satan indeed fall from heaven like lightning:"

[a] Compare Joel ii. 32. with Rom. x. 13. and xi. 26.
[b] John xvi. 11.

then shall "the prince of this world be utterly cast out." Then shall Dagon fall before the ark in every quarter of the universe: and all the slaves of sin and Satan be brought "into the glorious liberty of the sons of God." Then shall the jubilee trumpet sound in every place: "the preaching of deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound," will then be accompanied with such power from on high, that it shall be to all, what the trumpet of the archangel shall be in the day of judgment, an effectual call, "as life from the dead;" so that all flesh shall see the salvation of God."]

With this deliverance will be seen,

II. Its never-failing attendant—

In no place under heaven, but in Zion, is holiness found. The semblance of it may be seen in many places; its reality nowhere. Let us understand what holiness is—

[It is not a conformity to external rights, nor a practice of mere heathen virtues; but a real conformity of heart and life to the revealed will of God. It is the image of God upon the soul; and an exhibition of it in the whole of our spirit and conduct. It is "the mind that was in Christ Jesus," and a "walking in all things as he walked"———]

This, from the time that deliverance is vouchsafed to Zion, shall be found there—

[It was the great design of our Deliverer to produce it in his Church: he "gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity:" and "he is called Jesus," not so much because he saves his people from destruction, as "because he saves them from their sins." Holiness is the characteristic mark whereby the people whom he has delivered are to be distinguished: they are "purified unto Christ, a peculiar people zealous of good works." Whoever professes to have experienced his deliverance, without being truly and universally "righteous, even as Christ himself is righteous," is declared by God himself to be "a liar[c]." Believers are "his epistles" to the world, that they who will not look into the book of revelation, may see in them a living exhibition of his will. In every department of the divine life, the heavenliness of their minds, the sweetness of their spirit, and the blamelessness of their lives, they "shine as lights in a dark world:" the effulgence indeed is not equally bright in all: there are stars of a

[c] 1 John ii. 4. and iii. 3, 6—10.

greater, and of a lesser magnitude; but in all it is manifest, both from the uniformity and continuance of their splendour, that they are upheld in their orbits by the power of God, and irradiated with the beams of the Sun of Righteousness: in a word, holiness is an essential part of the deliverance itself; and therefore must exist in every member of the Church of Christ. Deliverance, in this view, is most desirable: yet is its value greatly enhanced by,]

III. Its ultimate effect—

Here the reference to the restoration of the Jews, especially as connected with the destruction of all their enemies, is more marked: "The House of Jacob shall possess their possessions;" every tribe having the portion peculiarly allotted to them[d]. That they will vanquish all who oppose them, and finally be established in the quiet possession of their own land, is so plain, that it cannot reasonably admit a doubt[e] ——— But there is yet a higher sense in which the prophecy shall be fulfilled. The land of Canaan was typical of a far nobler inheritance, which all the House of Jacob shall possess.

Believers "do now enter into rest"—

[Our blessed Lord promised rest unto all who should come to him weary and heavy-laden with their sins: and this rest he now bestows: and the Canaan which the Israelites entered into, is but a shadow of it. That "land indeed flowed with milk and honey:" but who can tell what delicious repasts are provided for the soul that believes in Christ? Who but He who possesses "the white stone, can tell the name that is written on it[f]?" Who can adequately inform us what the peace of God is, or what "the joy of faith?" The one, we are told, passeth understanding; and the other is altogether unutterable. These, with a multitude of other blessings, are even now the believer's portion; and he so enters into the possession of them, as to be able to defy all his enemies to rob him of the enjoyment of them?[g] It was not the power of their enemies, but the greatness of their sins, that expelled the Jewish people from their land: nor shall any enemy be able to prevail against us, if only we are faithful to ourselves. And, happily for us, that stability is ensured to us by God himself, who "will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able;

[d] ver. 18—20.
[e] See Jer. xxx. 3, 10, 18, 19. and xlvi. 27. Zech. xii. 6—9.
[f] Rev. ii. 17.
[g] Rom. viii. 35—39.

but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it."]

But the full possession of it is reserved for another world—

[There is an inheritance prepared for them from the foundation of the world: and in due time they shall enjoy it in all its fulness. The believer may now look forward to it with assured confidence. Here he is a minor only; and therefore, though the heir, he differs but little from a servant: he has so much of the inheritance as is suited to his condition, and sufficient for his necessities: but in the last day he will have the very same possession of his inheritance that Christ himself has: his vision of Jehovah will be most bright; his communion with him most intimate; his communications from him most abundant: and he will know that eternity itself will be the duration of his bliss. "He shall be a pillar in the temple of his God, and shall go no more out."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who oppose the Church of God—

[As in their journey to the land of Canaan, the Edomites and other nations opposed the progress of the Children of Israel; and as in the latter days there will be a confederacy of many people to prevent their re-establishment in their former inheritance; so now at this time, and indeed in every age, the men of this world "have evil will at Zion," and exert themselves in every way to obstruct the progress of all who are going thitherward. But what success had their enemies against Israel of old? or what shall they have in the day spoken of in our text? Verily the strongest of them will be only "like sheep before a lion, who will go through, and tread them down, and tear in pieces; and none shall deliver them[h]." Thus shall it be with those who now oppose and persecute the Church of God. We say not that the people of God will be the instruments of God's vengeance; for *that* they cannot be, seeing that "the weapons of their warfare are not carnal:" but this we say, that "no weapon formed against God's people shall prosper;" and that all who seek their ruin shall be put to shame: they "fight against God:" they "kick against the pricks:" and in due time a suitable recompence shall be given them. God, when denouncing his judgments against Edom, reminds them of particular evils, which, however gratifying they were to their malignant spirits at the time, they should not have committed: thus also will he bring to the remembrance of his enemies all the evils they have committed, and

[h] Mic. v. 8.

especially the treatment they have shewn to his Church and people: and then they will find, that it would have been "better to have had a millstone tied round about their necks, and to have been cast into the sea, than to have offended one of his little ones." The Lord grant, that men may no longer make Christ a stone of stumbling, lest "it fall upon them, and crush them to powder!"]

2. Those who are looking for redemption in Jerusalem—

[It may be that some are discouraged, because they have not yet experienced deliverance to the extent they wish: they seem to themselves as if their long and willing captivity to sin and Satan precluded them from the hope of mercy: and they are ready to say with Israel of old, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered?" But our answer is, like that of the prophet, "Yes; thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children[i]." Be not afraid: though you are but as "a worm, yet shall you thresh the mountains[k]:" and the weaker you feel yourselves to be, the stronger in reality you are, because God has pledged himself to "perfect his own strength in your weakness." Expect then deliverance, with all its attendant benefits: and rest assured, that none shall pluck you out of the hands of your great Deliverer. God has sworn, that "he will plant you in the heavenly land, assuredly with his whole heart, and with his whole soul:" and "what he hath promised, he is able also to perform." "Faithful is He that hath called you; who also will do it."]

[i] Isai. xlix. 25, 26. [k] Isai. xli. 14, 15.

JONAH.

MCXCVIII.

JONAH REPROVED BY THE MARINERS.

Jonah i. 6. *So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.*

PERHAPS in all the sacred records there is not to be found a more strange and inconsistent character than the Prophet Jonah. That he was *on the whole* a good man, we have every reason to believe: but his spirit was on many occasions so contrary to what we might have expected to find in a prophet of the Lord, that, if we did not know from our own hearts what is in man, we should not have conceived it possible that such contrarieties could be combined in the same character. The very first we hear of him is, that he so conducted himself as to bring upon himself a severe and just rebuke from a heathen mariner. Having received from God a commission to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, and there to proclaim the indignation of God against them for their impieties, he fled to Joppa, and from thence took ship for Tarshish, hoping that he should thus avoid the necessity that was laid upon him of delivering a message so replete with pain to them, and of danger to himself. But the Lord sent a storm to arrest him in his impious course: and so violent was the storm, that all hope of saving the ship by human efforts was taken away, and no resource remained to the mariners but prayer to God. Whilst all the crew were crying to the gods which they worshipped, Jonah was indifferent and unconcerned, and had fallen fast asleep in

the sides of the ship. In this situation he was when the shipmaster came to him, and administered the reproof which we have just heard.

Let us consider this reproof,

I. As addressed to Jonah—

The occasion of the reproof you have already heard in few words. But there are two things which call for more particular attention; namely,

1. The state of Jonah at that time—

[How can we account for his being so supine in the midst of such imminent danger? One would have supposed that he, a prophet of the Lord, would have improved that occasion for the benefit of the mariners, (as the Apostle Paul did afterwards, in similar circumstances,) and that he would have employed himself in directing the poor ignorant heathens to Jehovah, as the true and only source of all good: or if, from the low state of his piety at that time, we might conceive him to be indisposed for such an holy exercise; and that, when in an act of rebellion himself, he would be ill fitted for the office of calling others to repentance; we should at least expect him to be alarmed with a sense of his own guilt, and to be deprecating the Divine displeasure on his own soul. Yet, behold! of all the ship's company, he alone is unconcerned; and makes that, which was to all others a season of terror and dismay, an occasion for laying himself down quietly to sleep. That Peter was sleeping quietly on the night preceding his expected martyrdom, we do not wonder; because he was suffering for righteousness' sake, and knew that death would be to him the gate of heaven. But we wonder that Jonah was able to close his eyes in sleep, when death was apparently so near at hand; and he must know, that, if he died, he would be cut off in the very act of wilful transgression. But his insensibility at that time shews us, in a very striking manner, the true effect of sin; which hardens the heart, and stupefies the conscience; brutalizes the soul, and renders it indifferent to all that concerns its eternal welfare. St. Paul tells us this; "Take heed," says he, "lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin[a]." He speaks also of our "conscience being seared by it, as with a hot iron;" and of our being made "past feeling." Thus it was with Jonah at this time: and all who are acquainted with their own hearts, will see that this stupidity of his was the proper effect of his wilful transgression. Repentance takes away the heart of stone, and substitutes a heart of flesh: and sin, in proportion as it is indulged, re-converts the heart of flesh to stone.]

[a] Heb. iii. 13.

2. The sentiments contained in the reproof—

[We are amazed to hear such sentiments proceed from the mouth of a heathen mariner: but we are convinced, that there are much stronger notices of truth remaining in the heart of fallen man, than is commonly supposed. There was not indeed in these people any distinct knowledge of Jehovah: but there was a belief in a superintending Providence, who ordered every thing according to his own sovereign will, and was able to interpose effectually in behalf of those who sought him; yea, moreover, that even though we sought him only in our extremity, there still was reason to hope that he would hear our cry, and vouchsafe to us the desired deliverance. What god the ship-master had an eye to, we do not know: but supposing him, though under some mistaken name, to be looking to Jehovah, his views are precisely such as were avowed and inculcated by the Prophet Joel, when he said, "Rend your heart, and turn unto the Lord your God: for who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him[b]?"

This we consider as encouraging to those who go forth to convert the heathen: we consider it as shewing, that, however obscured by superstition, there are in the minds of the most ignorant heathen some notices of truth, which, if duly improved by an instructor, will greatly facilitate the admission of other truths, which can be known only through the medium of a special revelation. The existence and attributes of a Supreme Being are here acknowledged; and the duty of his intelligent creatures to call upon him is also declared: and whoever diligently improves these more obvious truths, will, we doubt not, be gradually guided into all truth. But when we behold a prophet of the Lord, who should have been a teacher of others, himself thus reproved by a heathen mariner, we blush for him; and blush also for ourselves, well knowing, how much we ourselves need to have these truths impressed more forcibly on our own minds, and how rarely they operate on us to the extent that they did on those uninstructed mariners.]

With these feelings it will be profitable to us to consider the reproof,

II. As applicable to ourselves—

We are not indeed altogether in the situation of Jonah; yet we approximate more nearly to it than may at first sight be imagined.

We are all in some degree sleeping in the midst of danger—

[b] Joel ii. 13, 14.

[God has given to us, as he did to Jonah, a work to do: and it is a work which we do not naturally affect: we are averse to engage in it: there are some considerations operating in our minds to deter us from it: we think it may expose us to difficulties, which we would gladly avoid; and subject us to troubles, which we care not to encounter. Hence we "flee from the presence of the Lord;" and are glad to go any where, and engage in any thing, that may afford us an excuse for our wilful neglect. In this state the curse of God follows us wherever we may go, his judgments hang over us, and "his wrath abides upon us." The children of disobedience, wherever they are, are objects of his heavy displeasure.

Yet, whilst under these circumstances, what is the state of our minds? Are we striving like the mariners, to obtain mercy at his hands? Are we not rather, for the most part, like Jonah, sunk down into a deep sleep? Yes; this is the case with *the generality* altogether; with *the better part* of us, in great measure; and with *the best amongst* us, in some degree.

Behold the generality, how careless are they and indifferent, though on the brink and precipice of eternity! — — — Even the more considerate part have no such activity and earnestness as the occasion calls for — — — And where is there one amongst us, who does not fluctuate in his zeal for God, and sometimes, like the wise virgins, give way to slumbering and sleeping, when we should be watching for the coming of our Lord? — — —]

To all then may the reproof in our text be well administered—

[What meanest thou, O sleeper, whoever thou art? *Art thou not in danger?* Search the sacred records; and see, whether the wrath of God be not revealed against all the children of disobedience? What if thou be insensible of this danger? art thou therefore the more safe? Was Jonah's life the less in jeopardy because he was unconscious of his peril? Neither then is thy ruin a whit the less certain, because thou art not conscious of thine exposure to it.

Is there any way for thine escape, but that of crying mightily to God for mercy? No other way is provided: all your own efforts will be as ineffectual as the mariner's labour was. Thou must betake thyself to prayer; for none but an omnipotent arm can save thee: there is no deliverance from thy guilt, but through the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, no acceptance with the Father, but through his beloved Son; no other name given under heaven whereby you can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ.

Once more—*Is there not abundant encouragement to pray?* Look at the promises contained in Holy Writ: see how

"exceeding great and precious they are;" and then say, whether thou hast any reason to despond. Hadst thou but a peradventure in thy favour; it were a sufficient reason for all possible earnestness and prayer. *That* was all the hope which these mariners had. But *you* have the strongest assurances, of a "God that cannot lie," that you "shall not seek his face in vain," but that "whatsoever you shall ask in his Son's name shall be done for you."

What meanest thou then, O sleeper? What excuse canst thou offer for thine unreasonable conduct? Art thou dreaming of future opportunities to call upon God, when, for ought thou knowest, the ship may sink with thee the next instant, and thy soul may be plunged into the depths of hell? "Arise," I say, "and call upon thy God," and lose not another moment in a concern of such infinite importance.

In the mean time, use all the means that thou canst for thyself. "Cast out all that thou hast" in the world, rather than suffer it to sink thee into perdition. If thou hadst all the wealth of the universe, it would but ill compensate for the loss of thy soul. Nor let it be thought that I speak to those only who are determined rebels against God: no: if there be a Jonah here; a professor of godliness, who is in a state of departure from his God, him I would more especially address. Know, thou unhappy fugitive, that God will not let thee pass unpunished: on the contrary, he will the rather follow thee with some tremendous storm, and send thee into the depths of hell (if I may so speak) in this world, to deliver thee from perdition in the world to come. "Awake then from thy slumber, that Christ may give thee light." Surely "it is high time for thee to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." Professors, "let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch, and be sober." With the exception of the terror with which they were agitated, the state of the heathen mariners should be ours; nor should we cease from our pleadings, till we are brought in safety to our desired haven. We must not give occasion for that sarcastic reflection, "In trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them:" no: we must pray without ceasing;" we must "pray and not faint:" and then we may be assured, that, whatever storms or difficulties we have to contend with, "our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord." Only let us think upon God, and God will most tenderly "think on us:" he will maintain towards us "thoughts of good, and not of evil, to give us an expected end."]

MCXCIX.

JONAH RESTORED FROM THE BELLY OF A FISH.

Jonah ii. 6. *Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God.*

IT is of the highest importance to have seasons of recollection for the more solemn investigation of the state of our souls. Not a day should be closed without serious reflections on our conduct through the day. On particular occasions it would be well to commit them to writing, with a view to our future humiliation or encouragement. Jonah's example in this respect is worthy of imitation. Having received from God a commission to denounce his judgments against Nineveh, and being afraid, that, after all, God would exercise mercy towards them, and make him appear a false prophet, he declined the office that had been assigned him, and endeavoured to "flee from the presence of the Lord." But a storm overtook him; and he was cast into the sea, and swallowed by a fish; and then, being preserved alive in that extraordinary situation, he thought on his ways, and cried unto his God for mercy. After his deliverance, he called to remembrance the exercises of his mind during his perilous confinement; and recorded them, for the benefit of the Church to the end of time. He tells us, that at first he began to despair; conceiving that "the Lord had cast him out of his sight." But, knowing that nothing was impossible with God, he directed his eyes towards heaven, and prayed. His prayer was heard, and the desired mercy was vouchsafed to him. This he acknowledges in the words before us: in which we have,

I. An instructive history—

Every part of this history is replete with instruction. Other parts of Holy Writ inform us of the frailties of God's people, and exhibit Noah, Lot, David, Peter, and others, in very humiliating conditions. But there is a peculiarity in the character of Jonah that distinguishes him from all others, and gives us a

deep insight into the human heart. We cannot however stop to enter minutely into his character, or into the diversified lessons which his history would teach us. We shall confine ourselves to two observations, which are of a general nature and of universal importance:

1. Rebellion against God will surely bring upon us his heavy displeasure—

[Jonah might think lightly perhaps of the sin he had committed, when refusing to execute the commission he had received: and he certainly was unmindful of the danger he had brought upon himself, even while all who sailed with him in the ship were in the utmost terror. But God was visiting him for his iniquity; and, in order to the discovery of it, suggested to the minds of the mariners to ascertain, by a lot, who the guilty person was, for whose sake the storm was raised. The lot fell on Jonah: and he, being impeached thus by God himself, confessed his crime; and prescribed, as the only means of pacifying the Deity, that he himself should be cast into the sea. Thus did vengeance overtake him. And shall *we* sin with impunity? What though we think light of our sins, and sleep in security when we should be praying to our God; does God estimate sin by our standard? or is danger at all more remote, because we do not see it? Of this we may be assured, that "evil will hunt the wicked man, to overthrow him;" and, however long we may elude its pursuit, it will seize upon us at last, as its legitimate prey. The declaration of God to every impenitent person is, "Be sure your sin will find you out."]

2. Whatever effects of his displeasure we may now feel, the prayer of penitence and faith will deliver us from them—

[A more desperate condition than that of Jonah cannot well be conceived[a]. Yet from thence was he brought by the efficacy of fervent prayer[b]. Be it so then; we have sinned against the Lord in a very grievous manner; and we are at this moment under his chastising hand; still "Has the Lord forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" No: the Lord is merciful and gracious: and, if only we have a heart to pray, we need not doubt but that he has an ear to hear. Were we at the bottom of the sea, yet if we were able to look unto his holy Temple, we should not look in vain. We might not be delivered with respect to the body; but the soul should find acceptance at God's hands, and be made a monument of his sparing mercy.]

[a] See his description of it, ver. 2, 3, 5. [b] ver. 2, 4, 7.

We dwell the less on the historical view of Jonah's deliverance, because we wish you to notice it more particularly as,

II. A glorious type—

We are always cautious of exceeding the bounds of truth and soberness in the explanation of types. On this account we altogether omit, what some have laid a stress upon, the idea of Christ's offering up himself a sacrifice to God for the purpose of averting his wrath from us. And we should be inclined to limit the typical import of this history to the resurrection of Christ, if he himself had not given us a more extended view of it. But, in the place where he speaks of Jonas as being "a sign" to the people, he calls him "*the Prophet* Jonas," and mentions the remarkable success of his ministrations[c]. We are induced therefore to consider the whole of this history as designating the ministry of Jesus;

1. In its temporary suspension—

The casting of Jonah into the sea, and his being swallowed by a fish, effectually, as it should seem, put an end to his mission. Whatever gracious intentions God had formed respecting the Ninevites, they were now, to all appearance, frustrated; so that, unless God should send to them by some other prophet, his judgments would come upon them without warning, and without a remedy.

Such was also the distressful, and apparently irremediable, state, to which the world was reduced by the death of Christ. His enemies triumphed when they saw him dead upon the cross, and committed to the silent tomb. His friends and followers then concluded, that they had been mistaken in their expectations, and that the redemption of Israel which they had looked for at his hands was a hopeless phantom[d]. To guard them against this erroneous conclusion, our blessed Lord expressly told his disciples, that "he should be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."]

2. Its speedy restoration—

[After three days, Jonah was, by God's overruling providence, disgorged in safety upon dry land; and his commission to preach unto the Ninevites was renewed.

[c] Matt. xii. 38—41. [d] Luke xxiv. 21.

Thus by the resurrection of Christ were the hopes of a ruined world revived. Not only was the ministry of our Lord himself renewed, but all his Apostles also received afresh their commission to preach the Gospel to every creature. Could the Ninevites have foreseen the effect of Jonah's deliverance, how would their hearts have leaped for joy! And well may all the nations of the earth rejoice in the tidings of a risen Saviour, through whom repentance and remission of sins are preached, and by whom the most abandoned of sinners may be brought to God.]

3. Its ultimate success—

[Wonderful indeed was the effect of Jonah's ministrations! and we may well suppose that the relation of his miraculous preservation and deliverance contributed in no small degree to the success of his mission. The people of Nineveh would necessarily conclude, that he was sent of God, and that the denunciations delivered by him would be fulfilled.

And was not this the effect of Christ's resurrection? The very point which all the Apostles most insisted on, was this: "they preached Jesus and the Resurrection:" they preached, "that he died according to the Scriptures, and *rose again the third day according to the Scriptures*." From hence the inference was clear that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world: and so rapidly did this truth prevail, that in one day there were converted to him three thousand souls; and, in a very short space of time, the whole Roman empire was filled with his acknowledged followers.]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. On what a firm basis our religion stands—

[The sign which above all others our blessed Lord laid the greatest stress upon, was his fulfilling of this type. Though he gave innumerable proofs of his divine mission, yet it was to this chiefly, yea, to this only, that he referred the confirmed sceptics. He said, *in fact*, "I shall die, and rise again the third day without seeing corruption, and shall live for evermore, to perfect the work assigned me. If I rise on the third day, then you will know that I am the Messiah: if I do not, I am contented that you shall account me an impostor." Now, brethren, you know the means which his enemies used to prevent any collusion among his disciples; yea, and how incredulous his disciples themselves were; and consequently, you are sure that he did indeed rise, and that all which God hath spoken by him, or of him, is true; it is true that the impenitent and unbelieving shall perish; but that "all who believe in him shall be justified from all things."]

2. What has been done for every believer—

[Though Jonah stands alone in his particular line of experience, there is not a believer whose soul has not been in as perilous a condition as Jonah himself was at the bottom of the sea; nor one who has not obtained deliverance by the very same means, humiliation and prayer. The experience of David was not unlike to Jonah's[e]; and that of the Church of old is painted in expressions precisely similar to those in the chapter before us[f]. Happy, happy they, who have obtained mercy of the Lord, and can thus attest the efficacy of believing prayer! Let not your feelings, brethren, be forgotten; but get them written in the tablet of your hearts; and let your acknowledgments be suited to the mercies vouchsafed unto you.]

3. What the Lord will do for all who call upon him—

[Our blessed Saviour, by dying for our offences and rising again for our justification, has procured for us whatever we stand in need of. Even in the denunciations of God's wrath there is an implied promise of mercy, if we repent and turn to God. However great therefore our guilt may be, or however imminent our danger, let us remember, that "with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption." Let us remember, that "Jesus is exalted to give repentance and remission of sins;" and that, though we were as much "in the belly of hell" as a *living* creature can be, our cry should come before him into his holy temple, and "he would bring up our souls out of the pit of corruption:" "after two days he would revive us; in the third day he would raise us up, and we should live in his sight[g]."]

[e] Ps. xl. 1—3. [f] Lam. iii. 54—58. [g] Hos. vi. 1, 2.

MCC.

JONAH'S REFLECTIONS IN THE WHALE'S BELLY.

Jonah ii. 7—9. *When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.*

TO take a retrospect of our feelings, under circumstances of peculiar trial, is exceedingly beneficial. There are times when we realize in our minds truths which at other seasons have had no weight, and

produced on us no effect. Thus Jonah, after his deliverance from the belly of the fish, called to mind, and transmitted for our good, the reflections which occupied his soul in that peculiarly awful situation, and in the near prospect of death. He here records,

I. The mercy vouchsafed—

This was such as never was vouchsafed to any other man, either before or since—

[The history you well know. But there are some points which we must particularly notice on this occasion. He was delivered, you know, from the belly of a fish. But mark the *time* when this mercy was vouchsafed to him: it was when he was in the very act of rebellion against God ——— Mark also the *means:* it was by a miraculous influence of God upon the fish, directing it to go to the sea-shore, and to vomit him forth upon the dry land. The *occasion* also must especially be noticed: it was in answer to a prayer offered from the bottom of the sea: "When Jonah's soul fainted within him, he remembered the Lord: and his prayer came in unto God, even into his holy temple."]

Though we have never been in a situation like his, have not we also wonderful mercies to recount?

[We have all of us, more or less, been in situations of danger, either by sickness or by accident, when we were in a state most unprepared to meet our God; and when, if we had been taken into the eternal world, we must have for ever perished in our sins. On some such occasion, perhaps, we have reflected on our state, and felt our need of mercy, and cried unto our God, and obtained mercy at his hands: and here we are living witnesses for God, that "he desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live" ———]

Let us pass on to consider,

II. The conviction wrought—

Jonah had known, before, the folly of idolatry, and the wisdom of relying wholly upon God. But now he felt this in a way that he had not done before. Now too he felt, that to flee from the presence of God, as he had done, and to decline the service of his God, and to seek happiness in a way of disobedience to God, was folly in the extreme; and that the only way to be truly happy, was to serve, and honour, and obey the Lord.

And were not such our convictions, also, in the prospect of death?

[None of us need be told that the creature is but a broken cistern; and that "to forsake the fountain of living waters for cisterns of our own formation, is a great evil[a]." But, whilst we acknowledge this as a speculative truth, who feels it practically, so as to act upon it, and to have his life regulated in accordance with it? In a time of health, we see perhaps what is right, but do it not; nor have in our souls any fixed purpose to carry into effect the dictates of our mind and judgment. But in the near approach of death these truths assume a reality and importance which we never discerned before. Once, perhaps, we could laugh at them, as the dreams of enthusiasm, and the peculiarities of a sect: but in that solemn hour when we are expecting to be summoned into the immediate presence of our God, we bitterly regret that we have given so little weight to these considerations; and we then are convinced, indeed, that "in observing and following lying vanities we have madly forsaken our own mercies." The convict that is about to perish by the hand of the public executioner, however obdurate he has been in times past, feels this; and the public feel it for him. Would to God that, in our time of health and prosperity, we all felt it for ourselves!]

The result of that conviction we shall see in,

III. The determination formed—

Now would the prophet henceforth praise his God: and, having made vows to God in the hour of his extremity, he would now pay them; and be a living witness for God, that "salvation is of the Lord" for every soul that will seek it, however deep his guilt, or however desperate his condition.

These are the determinations, Brethren, which I desire you, in dependence upon God's help, to form—

[Look to the mercies vouchsafed to you in the hour of your necessity, when you cried unto the Lord: look at your deliverance from death and hell: look at a resurrection vouchsafed to you, from death to life, from misery to peace, from hell to heaven; a resurrection like unto that of Jonah; or rather like to that which was typified by it, the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: and then tell me, whether you should not "sacrifice unto the Lord with the voice of thanksgiving," and your every word be praise——— Call to

[a] Jer. ii. 13.

mind, also, the vows which you made in the hour of trouble; how you would live henceforth, not unto yourselves, but to your God; and not for time only, but for eternity. Now, beware that you forget not the resolutions then formed. Beg of God that they may not, as is too generally the case, vanish as the early dew that passeth away. They are all recorded in the book of God's remembrance; and if violated by you, in return for all the mercies vouchsafed unto you, they will fearfully aggravate your eternal condemnation——Now, too, be living witnesses for God, for the encouragement of others. Shew to others what a salvation you have found, and found in your lowest extremity, in answer to the prayer of faith. Who can tell what a blessing you may be to those around you? Doubtless the mercy vouchsafed to Jonah was, under God, the salvation of all that great and populous city to which he preached. His miraculous deliverance gave, so to speak, an irresistible energy to his word; insomuch that all, from the king on the throne to the lowest of the populace, instantly turned in penitential sorrow to the Lord. So you, when you can say to others, "What my eyes have seen, and ears have heard, and hands have handled, of the word of life, the same declare I unto you," may be instrumental to the honouring of God your Saviour, and to the saving of many souls alive.]

On a review of this subject, SEE,

1. How wonderful are the ways of God!

[Who would have thought to what even the rebellion of Jonah should lead; and how the punishing of that should lead to the salvation of his soul, and of the souls of many others? Truly, "God's ways are in the great deep, and his footsteps are not known." But from all this we may learn never to despond; but rather, however desperate our condition may be, to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him"———]

2. How marvellous is the efficacy of converting grace!

[See what a change is wrought in Jonah; though, indeed, far less than might have been expected. But to change our rebellious hearts into a frame of obediential love and gratitude; and to renew us in our inner man, so as to make us as lights in a dark world; *this is*, and *must be*, the effect of true conversion. See then, brethren, that ye offer unto God the sacrifice of praise continually; and especially for your redemption from all the penal effects of sin, through the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. See, too, that you live to God as his redeemed people, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of your life; and that you labour, in every possible way, to commend to others the salvation which you yourselves have found———].

MCCI.

REPENTANCE OF THE NINEVITES [a].

Jonah iii. 8—10. *Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth; and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way: and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.*

MEN of profane minds pour contempt on national fasts, under an idea that they can be of no use for averting of national judgments. But in my text there is abundant proof that God will hear the prayers of the contrite, and be gracious to them at the voice of their cry.

Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, was an exceeding large city, so large, that it would occupy a man three days to walk round it and through its principal streets. The wickedness of it was great; and God, having determined that in the space of forty days he would involve it, with all its inhabitants, in destruction, he sent his servant Jonah to advertise them of their impending ruin. The prophet had proceeded but one day's journey into the city, and behold, all ranks of people, from the highest to the lowest, having heard his message, trembled at God's displeasure, and united in humbling themselves before him, if peradventure they might prevail upon him to "turn from his fierce anger." The success of their efforts leads me to set before you the conduct of the Ninevites,

I. As a record for our instruction—

[Though addressed by a perfect stranger who belonged to a despised nation, *the people believed* his testimony, delivered to them as it was in Jehovah's name; and, though they were heathens, unused to acknowledge the one true God, they set themselves to implore mercy at his hands, and to deprecate his threatened judgments. The king and his nobles *proclaimed a*

[a] A Fast Sermon.

fast; in the observance of which all his subjects cordially concurred: and so intent were they on a due observance of the day, that all put on sackcloth from the least of them to the greatest, and even the king himself "laid aside his royal robes, and clothed himself in sackcloth, and sat in ashes:" nor did any of them so much as "eat bread or drink water" the whole day. Even the herds and the flocks were kept without any species of food or refreshment, that by their privations they might participate in the general grief, and by their moanings produce on the minds of the penitents an increased effect.

To their fasting they added *prayer:* yea, "they cried mightily unto God." They were not content with formal unmeaning acknowledgments. They bewailed their guilt; they saw how deeply they had merited the Divine displeasure; and they strove by earnest supplications to ward off from themselves the judgments which the avenging Deity was about to inflict upon them. The sincerity of their repentance they manifested by an *instantaneous reformation* of their lives; all of them turning from their besetting sins, and engaging to consecrate themselves to Jehovah as a holy and obedient people. How many of them maintained their steadfastness we know not: but from the mercy vouchsafed to them in answer to their prayers, we are led to hope that many became true servants of the living God.

Thus, at all events, they sought for mercy; and thus they obtained the deliverance they implored.]

Now then let me call your attention to their conduct,

II. As a pattern for your imitation—

Sorry am I to say, that *there is occasion* for the same humiliation on your part, as you have seen in them—

[— — —[b] And *this* I am authorized to declare, that, whatever the *second* causes may have been, the evil itself is from the Lord: for, "Is there evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it[c]?" Yes, it is a chastisement from God on account of our sins: and I call upon you not only to "*believe*" this, but to "hear the rod, and him that has appointed it." If we will not view the hand of God in these dispensations, we can have no hope that they shall be exchanged for mercies: but to acknowledge *him* in them will be the best preparation for the reception of mercies from him, and the most certain prelude to his bestowment of them.]

[b] Here the particular occasion (war, pestilence, famine, or whatever it be) should be set forth.

[c] Amos iii. 6.

I must add, too, that your humiliation must resemble theirs—

[In a season of affliction *fasting* is highly proper. We see all the most eminent saints in Scripture having recourse to this under the pressure of any heavy calamity: and, in the history before us, we behold the king, and his nobles, together with all the inhabitants of a populous city, approaching the Divine Majesty with this expression of their grief and penitence. This is a fit pattern for us at this time.

But with fasting we must engage in fervent *prayer*. Lukewarm petitions will never find acceptance with God. We must "cry mightily unto the Lord, even with strong crying and tears," if we would obtain from him the deliverance which we so greatly need.

And, to prove the sincerity of our hearts, we must *turn*, every one of us, *from our besetting sins* to newness of life. No fasting will be of any avail without this; no, nor will prayer be heard without it. If our humiliation be not accompanied with this, God will say to us, as to his people of old, "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not *this* the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness[d]?" Search out then the peculiar evils which you are most accustomed to commit, and cast them off even though they be dear to you as a right hand or a right eye: and then may we hope that God will be gracious to us at the voice of our cry, and turn away from his fierce anger wherewith he has visited our guilty land.]

If you will not thus turn unto the Lord, your guilt will be greatly aggravated—

[Who were the people to whom this warning was delivered? HEATHENS. By whom were they addressed? A perfect *stranger*. *What hope was held out to them* of averting the threatened judgments? *None at all*. Not so much as a constructive promise was given them by any exhortation to repent. All the encouragement they felt was derived from *a mere surmise*: "WHO CAN TELL, *whether God will turn from his fierce anger, that we perish not?*" On the mere presumption that the exercise of mercy towards them was *possible*, they, *at the very first announcement of God's displeasure*, turned to him, as it were, with their whole hearts; and thus obtained mercy. But you, brethren, are *the professed servants of God*, and followers of Christ. And you have been *warned*

[d] Isai. lviii. 5, 6.

ten thousand times, and that too by those whom you yourselves acknowledge as *appointed of God, to watch for your souls.* You have had exceeding *great and precious promises also set before you*, with *most assured declarations from God*, that no one of you shall ever seek his face in vain. Say then, whether these Ninevites will not rise up in judgment to condemn you at the last day, if you dissemble with God on this occasion, as too many of us through the whole land, it is to be feared, are doing? Look at our king and his nobles, and at his subjects throughout the empire, and say, Whether there be any resemblance between our humiliation, and that which we have noticed in these penitent heathens? In them it was produced at the very first instant: but we have been warned ten thousand times in vain. Oh! could we but see any measure of the penitence amongst us that was evinced by them, I should have no fear but that the judgments under which we labour should be removed, or sanctified to our greater good.

In the case before us, God, in reversing the sentence denounced against that city, might appear weak, or mutable, or unworthy to be feared: and, at all events his prophet would appear to them as a deceiver. But He was more careful of their welfare than of his own honour, or of his servant's reputation: and having produced a change in the people, he instantly changed his dispensations towards them. Not that the change was in *him:* it was in *them* only: for the removal of his threatened judgments was rather an execution, than a reversal, of his own decrees, which from eternity have been to pardon the penitent, and to bless the contrite. But in your case there is no such obstacle in his way: for he has told you, that if you confess your sins, he will not only forgive them, but display and magnify his own faithfulness and justice in that very dispensation towards you[e].

To obtain *national* mercies, our repentance must be *national:* but if there be but one amongst us that truly turns to God, *he* shall surely obtain mercy for his own soul, and be a monument of God's pardoning love to all eternity.

Let me however hope, that this occasion shall not be lost upon the nation at large: but that our fasting shall be sincere, our prayers fervent, our reformation radical, and our success complete.]

[e] 1 John i. 9.

MCCII.

THE MERCY OF GOD.

Jonah iv. 2. *I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.*

IN the parable of the Prodigal Son, we read of as hateful a character as can well be imagined: it is that of the elder brother, who, instead of uniting with his family in rejoicing over the recovery of the younger brother from his evil ways, took occasion, from his father's parental tenderness, to reproach him for partiality and unkindness; since, having "never rewarded *his* obedience with so much as a kid, he had killed for his prodigal and licentious brother the fatted calf[a]." But a far worse character is portrayed in the history before us. Indeed, it is scarcely credible, that any person of common humanity, and still less that a good man, should be capable of acting as Jonah did; even reproaching God to his face for the exercise of his mercy towards a repenting people, and making his very anticipation of that mercy a ground and an excuse for his own wilful disobedience. But, beyond all doubt, the history of Jonah records a literal fact, without any exaggeration or poetical embellishment: he did, as he informs us, "know God to be a merciful God;" and he did make that very mercy a ground of wrathful indignation, and of acrimonious complaint.

The acknowledgment here made, will lead me to set before you the mercy of God,

I. As delineated by Jonah—

Jonah "*knew*" God to be a merciful God. He knew it,

1. From the description which God himself had given of his own character—

[In answer to the prayer of Moses, God had made his glory to pass before him; and had proclaimed his name, as "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-

[a] Luke xv. 29, 30.

suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty[b]." Here, for one single expression relating to his justice, there is a vast accumulation of rich and diversified terms to convey to our minds a just idea of his mercy; all shewing, that "judgment is a strange act," to which he is utterly averse; but that mercy is the attribute, in the exercise of which is all his delight[c].]

2. From the marvellous display which had been made of it, throughout the whole of his dealings with his people in all ages—

[Scarcely had the people been brought out of Egypt, before they made a golden calf, and worshipped it as the author of their deliverance. This greatly incensed God; and determined him to cut them off, and to raise up to himself another people from his servant Moses: but, at the intercession of Moses, he forgave them, and "repented of the evil which he had thought to do unto them[d]." So, throughout all their stay in the wilderness, and in all their rebellions after their establishment in Canaan, he manifested the same compassion towards them; as David informs us: "Many times did he deliver them: but they provoked him with their counsels, and were brought low for their iniquity. Nevertheless, he regarded their affliction when he heard their cry: and he remembered for them his covenant, and *repented according to the multitude of his tender mercies*[e]."

Well, therefore, might Jonah say, "He *knew* God to be a merciful God;" the very existence of his nation, after such long-continued and aggravated offences, being an ample proof of it.]

But my chief object is, to open to you the mercy of God,

II. As illustrated in the history before us—

View it,

1. In the preservation of Jonah himself—

[God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh, and to proclaim to them his determination to destroy the inhabitants thereof for their iniquities; and to inform them, at the same time, that the judgment should be executed within the short space of forty days. Jonah, averse to execute the commission, fled from the presence of the Lord, and took ship, in order to

[b] Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.
[c] Isai. xxviii. 21. Mic. vii. 18.
[d] Exod. xxxii. 9—14.
[e] Ps. cvi. 43—45.

go to Tarshish[f]. Commentators have invented I know not how many apologies for Jonah: for instance, that he was actuated by a jealousy for the honour of his own nation: for Nineveh, being a city of Gentiles, he thought that the going to prophesy to them would be to transfer to them an honour due to Israel alone. Others suppose that he was impelled rather by fear; since, to deliver so awful a prophecy, could not but involve him in great danger. But the real ground of his disobedience was, that which he himself acknowledges: "He knew God to be a merciful God:" and he was afraid that the people would repent; and that God, on account of their repentance, would forbear to execute his threatened judgment upon them: and that thus *he himself would, eventually, be made to appear a false prophet*[g].

Whilst he was going to Tarshish, he was overtaken with a storm, which reduced the ship to such extreme danger, that all the mariners betook themselves to prayer, as their only refuge. The thought occurring to their minds, that possibly the storm might have been sent as a punishment of some great offence, they drew lots, in order that they might find out the offender: and the lot falling upon Jonah, he confessed his sin, and counselled them to cast him overboard, as the only means of pacifying the offended Deity, and of saving their own lives. Thus did judgment overtake Jonah, precisely as it had overtaken Achan in the camp of Joshua: and, like Achan, he might well have been summoned into the presence of his God. But, lo! God had prepared a great fish to swallow him up, not for his destruction, but preservation: for he preserved him alive three days and three nights in the fish's belly; and caused the fish to carry him to the shore nearest to Nineveh, and to cast him on shore without any injury to his body; yea, and with unspeakable benefit accruing to his soul: nay, more; his offended God not only spared him thus, but made him in this way one of the most eminent types of Christ that ever existed in the world.

Now, if Jonah knew *before* that God was merciful, how fully must he have known it *now!* Here was a mercy so extraordinary in its kind, so blessed in its results, and so marvellous, as being vouchsafed to him in the midst of his most impious rebellion, that it may well be adduced as one of the most astonishing displays of mercy that have ever been vouchsafed to man from the foundation of the world.]

2. In the sparing of the whole city of Nineveh—

[The inhabitants of that immense city, the capital of the Assyrian empire, had filled up the measure of their iniquities[h].

[f] Jonah i. 3. [g] ver. 2. [h] Jonah i. 2.

But, on the very first announcement of the impending judgments, they fasted and mourned, and cried mightily to God for mercy[i].—They had heard from Jonah nothing but the simple declaration, that in forty days the whole city should be overthrown. No hope of pardon had been held out to them; no idea had been suggested, that penitence, however deep or universal, would be of any avail: but they said, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not[k]?" And upon this mere presumption they ventured to cry for mercy. And, behold, how graciously God listened to their prayers! No sooner did he see them turning from their evil ways, than he "repented of the evil that he said he would do unto them; and he did it not[l]." This was the very issue that Jonah had anticipated. And what an encouragement does it afford to every living man, to humble himself for his iniquities, and to implore mercy at the hands of this gracious God!

But that to which I desire chiefly to direct your attention, is God's mercy,]

3. In the enduring with such inconceivable forbearance the expostulations and remonstrances of this impious man—

[This act of mercy towards Nineveh, so far from exciting joy and gratitude in the bosom of Jonah, filled him only with wrath; yea, with such ungovernable wrath, that he broke forth into reproaches against God himself, on account of it. Whilst he was in the whale's belly, he had repented; but now all his repentance had vanished, and he even vindicated before God the rebellion of which he had been guilty: and pleaded his anticipation of this very event, as a justification of it: "I pray thee, Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? *Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish.*" He even went further, and "prayed to God to take away his life;" for that, since he must appear to that people as a false prophet, "it were better for him to die than to live[m]." How astonishing was it, that God did not strike him dead upon the spot! All the mercy that had been vouchsafed to himself, Jonah had quite forgotten. It was nothing *now* that he had been preserved alive in the belly of the whale, and been cast uninjured upon the dry land: no, his honour was assailed; and every consideration of gratitude for his own mercies, and of compassion for above a million of souls that had been spared, was swallowed up in the apprehension that he should suffer in his credit, by reason of the revocation of God's

[i] Jonah iii. 4—8.
[k] Jonah iii. 9.
[l] Jonah iii. 10.
[m] ver. 3.

threatened judgments. And behold how God deals with this daring transgressor! He calmly asks him, "Dost thou well to be angry[n]?" And when the sullen rebel goes out of the city, and sits down in earnest hope that he shall see the whole city destroyed, God takes yet further means to convince him that his anger was unreasonable, and his complaint unmerited. Truly, Jonah, thou hast given occasion for such a display of God's mercy as thou thyself couldst not previously have conceived to be within the reach of possibility, or to be consistent with the other perfections of the Deity!]

O, Brethren, let us SEE in this history,

1. What monuments of mercy we ourselves are—

[Who amongst us has not rebelled against the commands of God; and betaken himself to any place, any company, any employment, rather than fulfil the duties to which he was averse? Who amongst us has not betrayed a sad indifference to the welfare of his fellow-creatures; seeking his own ease, his own interest, his own honour, when he should have been labouring rather for the salvation of those to whom he might have gained access for their good? And who has not grievously overlooked, or with base ingratitude forgotten, the deliverances that have been vouchsafed to him, even from diseases or accidents that have been fatal to others, and that might have had a fatal issue with him also? Aye, who has not been unmindful even of that wonderful redemption which God has vouchsafed to us, through *the death and resurrection* of his only dear Son?———I may add, too, who amongst us, when crossed in any particular object that has affected his interest, and especially his honour, has not been so vexed, as to murmur, if not *directly* against God, yet *indirectly*, being irritated against those who were the means and instruments which he employed in the dispensation that we complained of? Possibly, under some grievous trial, where our pride has been wounded, we have even wished ourselves dead, when, alas! we were far from being in a state to appear before God. Yet, notwithstanding all our provocations, here we are still on mercy's ground, when we might well have been made monuments of God's righteous displeasure! Truly, then, *we* may say to God, "*I know* that thou art a gracious God, and merciful; yea, *I am myself a living witness* that thou art slow to anger, and repentest thee of the evil." Yes, my dear brethren, flagrant beyond conception as was the impiety of Jonah, we, methinks, are not the persons to throw a stone at him; every one of us having indulged too much of the same spirit as he, and trodden too much in his steps. We should

[n] ver. 4.

rather take occasion, from what we have seen in him, to humble ourselves before God; and, from the mercies vouchsafed to him, to adore our God for the mercies vouchsafed unto ourselves.]

2. What encouragement we have to return unto our God—

[If there were a mere peradventure only that we might obtain mercy from God, *that* alone were a sufficient encouragement to humble ourselves before God. So the Prophet Joel, *using the very words of my text*, informs us[o]. Are there, then, amongst us those who are altogether ignorant of God, like the devoted Ninevites? I say, Humble yourselves before God, and you shall find mercy at his hands, especially if you seek it in the name of his only dear Son Jesus Christ——— Or is there any professor of godliness, who, like the Prophet Jonah, has given way to sin, and grievously dishonoured his holy profession? To such an one would I say, Abase yourself before God in dust and ashes. We are not, indeed, told that Jonah repented, and was forgiven; but we have reason to hope that this was the case, from his being called "the servant of God[p]:" and if *he* was forgiven, who has any reason to despair? Methinks I see one even in as vile a spirit as he; and yet I hear God addressing him in these tender terms: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee up, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me: my repentings are kindled together: I will not execute upon thee the fierceness of mine anger[q]." Indeed, indeed, Brethren, it will be your own fault, if any of you perish. "God willeth not the death of any sinner; but that he turn from his wickedness and live." I beseech you all, therefore, whatever guilt you may have contracted, never to *flee from* God in despondency, but to *go to* him, in an assured hope that he is still as gracious as ever; and that, how abundant soever have been his mercies in the days of old, they shall be renewed to you the very instant that you cry to him in the name of Jesus, who "was delivered unto death for your offences, and rose again for your justification."]

[o] Joel ii. 12—14. Cite the words.
[p] 2 Kings xiv. 25.
[q] Hos. xi. 8, 9.

MCCIII.

JONAH'S GOURD.

Jonah iv. 5—9. *So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat*

under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city. And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm, when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live. And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

WHETHER we look into the sacred volume or to the world around us, we are almost at a loss to say which is the greater, the depravity of man, or the tender mercy of our God ——— In the brief history which we have of the Prophet Jonah, they are both exhibited to our view in the most striking colours. Had Jonah been a professed heathen, we should have wondered less at his impiety: but being an Israelite, yea, a prophet too of the Most High God, and, we would fondly hope, a good man upon the whole, we are amazed at the very extraordinary wickedness which he manifested, and no less at the astonishing forbearance exercised by Almighty God towards him. In the former part of his history we have an account of his declining to execute the commission which God had given him to preach to the Ninevites, and, notwithstanding that rebellious conduct, his preservation in the belly of a fish. In the passage which we have now read, we see his perverseness carried to an extent that seems absolutely incredible, and God's condescension to him keeping pace with his enormities. It relates his conduct in reference to a gourd which God had caused to spring up over him, and which withered within a few hours after it had comforted him with its refreshing shade. That we may place the matter in a clear point of view, we shall notice,

I. His inordinate joy at the acquisition of the gourd—

He was at this time in a most deplorable state of mind—

[He had preached to the Ninevites, and his word had been attended with such power, that the whole city repented, and turned to the Lord with weeping and with mourning and with fasting. This, instead of exciting gratitude in the heart of Jonah, filled him only with rage; because he thought that God, in consideration of their penitence, would shew mercy to them, and that, in consequence of the judgments with which he had threatened them not being executed upon them, he himself should appear an impostor. It was of small importance that there were above a million of souls in the city: the destruction of them was of no moment in his eyes, in comparison of his own honour: he hoped therefore that God would at least inflict some signal judgment upon them, sufficient to attest the truth of his menaces, and to support his credit as a true prophet. With the hope of seeing his wishes realized, he made a booth on the outside of the city, and "sat there to see what would become of the city."]

Then it was that God caused a gourd to spring up suddenly, and cover the booth—

[What amazing condescension! How much rather might we have expected that God would have sent a lion to destroy him, as he had before done to a disobedient prophet! But instead of visiting his iniquity as it deserved, God consulted only his comfort; yes, this very man, who was so "exceedingly displeased with God's mercy to the Ninevites, that he could not endure his life, and begged of God to strike him dead; this very man, I say, was such an object of God's attention, as to have a gourd raised up over his head "*to deliver him from his grief.*" It should seem as if there was a contest between God and him; he striving to exhaust the patience of Jehovah, and Jehovah striving to overcome by love the obstinacy and obduracy of his heart.]

In the acquisition of this gourd Jonah exceedingly rejoiced—

[Had we been told that he was exceedingly *thankful to his God*, we should have been ready to applaud his gratitude: but he saw not God's hand in the mercy vouchsafed to him: it was his own comfort only that he cared about: and in the gift alone did he rejoice, forgetful of the Giver. The idea of a million of souls being saved from perishing in their sins gave him no pleasure: but the being more effectually screened from the heat of the sun himself, made him "exceeding glad." Had his mind been at all in a right state, his own comfort and convenience would have been swallowed up in thankfulness, for the preservation of so many souls, and for having been made the honoured

instrument of their deliverance: but love for ourselves, and indifference about others, always bear a proportion to each other in the mind of man: and their connexion with each other was never more strongly seen than on this occasion.]

His inordinate joy at the acquisition of the gourd was more than equalled by,

II. His intemperate sorrow at the loss of it—

God, seeing the ingratitude of Jonah, withdrew the gift soon after it had been been bestowed—

[He prepared a worm, which smote the gourd, so that it withered as suddenly as it had grown up. And where is there any gourd without a worm at the root of it? Our comforts may continue for a longer season than Jonah's; but there is in every creature-comfort a tendency to decay; and our most sanguine expectations are usually followed by the most bitter disappointments. Indeed God has wisely and graciously ordained, that abiding happiness shall not be found in any thing but Him alone: and the withdrawment of this comfort was in reality a greater blessing than its continuance would have been; since the gourd could only impart a transient comfort to his body; whereas the removal of it tended to humble and improve his soul.]

But the impatient spirit of Jonah only raged and complained the more—

[As soon as the heat became oppressive to him, Jonah renewed his former wish for death; and, when reproved by God for his impiety, he vindicated himself in the very presence of his God, and declared, that "he did well to be angry, even unto death." Who would conceive that such impiety as this should exist in the heart of any man, but especially of one who had received such signal mercies as he, and been so honoured as an instrument of good to others? But hereby God did indeed shew, that the excellency of the power was of him alone, and that he can work by whomsoever he will. It seems strange too, that, when God appealed to his conscience, an enlightened man could possibly be so blinded by passion as to give judgment in his own favour in such a case. But man has neither reason nor conscience, when biassed by his own lusts: and his very appeals to God can be little more depended on than the testimony of a man who is deliberately deceitful. But this we may observe in general, that the more there is of unhallowed boldness in any man's confidence, the more it is to be suspected; and the more ready he is to wish himself dead, the more unfit he is for death and judgment.]

Thus far our attention has been almost exclusively turned to Jonah: but, that we may bring the matter home more directly to our own business and bosoms, we would suggest a REFLECTION or two, arising out of the subject:

1. What selfishness is there in the heart of man!

[One would be ready to account this record a libel upon human nature, if we did not know assuredly that it is a true history, without any exaggeration or mistake. It appears incredible, that such inhumanity should exist in the heart of man, as that he should wish for the destruction of a million of souls, only that his own word might be verified; and that he should be so vexed by his disappointment, as to wish for death, and pray to God to terminate his life. Nor would one conceive it possible that a temporary inconvenience, which had in fact originated solely in his own absurd and impious conduct, should so irritate and inflame his mind, as to make him insult, to his very face, his almighty and all-gracious Reprover. But we know little of ourselves, if we do not recognize much of our own character in that of Jonah. We have had reported to us, time after time, the calamities of others, and have felt no more than if the most trifling occurrences had been related: or if we have felt at all, it has been only for a moment, and the tale has soon become as if it had passed before the flood. But, on the other hand, if any thing has arisen to thwart our own interests or inclinations, though it has been of less consequence than Jonah's gourd, we have laid it to heart, and been so irritated or grieved by it, that our very sleep has gone from us. Particularly if any thing has occurred that was likely to lower our reputation in the world, how keenly have we felt it, so as almost to be weary even of life! Or if any thing wherein we promised ourselves much happiness have been withdrawn from us, as wife or child, how little have we been able to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" Alas! we have more resembled Jonah, than Job: our every thought has been swallowed up in self: and neither God nor man have been regarded by us, any farther than they might subserve our selfish and carnal ends. Let us then in Jonah see our own character as in a glass, and let this view of it humble us in the dust.]

2. What mercy is there in the heart of God!—

[This is the improvement which God himself makes of the subject. Jonah had complained of God for exercising mercy towards the repentant Ninevites; and God vindicates himself against the accusations of Jonah. In doing this, he touches with exquisite tenderness the sin of Jonah; and represents him not

as actuated by selfishness and impiety, but as merely "having pity on the gourd." What a beautiful example does this afford us, who ought to extenuate, rather than to aggravate, the faults of our bitterest enemies! His argument on the occasion is this: 'If you have had pity on a poor worthless gourd, for which you never laboured, and in which you have only a slight and transient interest, how much more am I justified in having pity on a million of the human race, (six-score thousand of whom have never done good or evil,) and on multitudes of cattle also, which must have been involved in any calamity inflicted on that large city!' This argument is similar to one used in the Epistle to the Hebrews[a], and says in effect, 'If you were right in pitying a thing of no value, how much more am I in sparing what is of more value than ten thousand worlds!' This argument, especially as addressed to the self-justifying Jonah, was unanswerable: and the truth contained in it is consolatory to every child of man. God is a God of infinite mercy: he *may*, he *will*, spare all who truly repent. Whatever judgments he has denounced against sin and sinners, the execution of them depends solely on the sinners themselves: if they repent, sooner shall God cease to exist, than cease to exercise mercy towards them. Let this encourage transgressors of every class: let it encourage the abandoned to repent; and those who profess godliness to repent also: for all need this consoling truth, that "God willeth not the death of any sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live." Know then, both from his dealings with the Ninevites, and his forbearance towards his perverse prophet, that He is abundant in goodness and truth, and that where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound.]

[a] Chap. ix. 13, 14.

MICAH.

MCCIV.

BENEFITS ARISING FROM THE WORD OF GOD.

Micah ii. 7. *Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?*

GREAT and bitter prejudices are often entertained against the word of God; as though its only tendency was to pervert the judgments of men, and to disturb their repose. Hence, when the word is faithfully administered, many are offended at it; and say, as it were, to the messengers of heaven, "Prophesy not unto us right things; prophesy unto us smooth things; prophesy deceits." But the real reason of their disgust is, that they will not part with those sins which the word condemns, or practise those duties which the word enjoins: "they love darkness rather than light: they hate the light, and will not come to it, lest their deeds should be reproved[a]." If they were willing to renounce their sins, they would find the word precious and delightful to them; for it is as full of consolation to the upright, as it is of terror to the hypocritical. To this effect God speaks in the passage before us. He represents the people as saying to the prophets, "Prophesy not." Then addressing himself to them, he asks, Whether the messages which he sent them proceeded from any want of love and mercy in himself; or whether they did not arise solely from their obstinacy in sin? "O thou that art named the House of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? are these his doings?" Then

[a] John iii. 19, 20.

he appeals to them, whether his word would not be a source of unspeakable comfort to them, if they would turn to him aright? "Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?"

We propose to shew,

I. Who they are whom the word benefits—

Certain it is, that all are not benefited by the word. When it was dispensed by Him who "spake as never man spake," many made no other use of it than to cavil at it, and to form it into a ground of accusation against him. And when St. Paul laboured at Ephesus for three months successively to establish the truth, many were only hardened the more in their prejudices and infidelity[b]. While in every age it has been "to some a savour of life unto life, it has proved to others a savour of death unto death[c]." Those who alone are benefited by it, are "the people who walk uprightly," or, in other words,

1. The unprejudiced—

[If we come to the word of God with prejudices against any of the doctrines which it is supposed to contain, it is scarcely probable that we should receive any material good from it: for as soon as the truths which we hate are brought to light, we shall set ourselves against them, and exert all our endeavours to invalidate their force. The plainest and most fundamental doctrines of our religion are very commonly treated in this way. Men like not to hear of the depravity of the heart, the insufficiency of our best works to recommend us to God, the necessity of divine influences, and the impossibility of being saved without an entire dependence on the merits of Christ, and an unreserved surrender of ourselves to his service. But if, instead of reprobating these things as enthusiasm, we would lay our minds open to conviction, and submit to receive instruction from God, we should find a reality in these things which we never imagined, and an importance which we were not aware of. God has promised that "the meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way[d]."]

2. The diligent—

[Nothing is to be attained without diligence, in spiritual any more than in temporal concerns. If we read a portion of the Scripture in a superficial way, or hear it explained to us

[b] Acts xix. 8, 9. [c] 2 Cor. ii. 16. [d] Ps. xxv. 9.

without ever reflecting on what we have heard, we cannot expect to get any good unto our souls. Our Lord has illustrated this by a man sowing seed by the way-side. Can any one doubt whether the birds will come and take it away? Thus will Satan take the word out of our hearts, if it be not harrowed in by meditation and prayer[e]. Our Lord directs us to "search the Scriptures:" and St. Luke tells us, that saving benefit accrued to the Bereans from their diligence in this respect; "they were more noble than those of Thessalonica, because they searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so:" and then he adds, "*Therefore* many of them believed[f]." This indeed is agreeable to the established order of things throughout the world: for God has ordained, that while "the soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing, the soul of the diligent shall be made fat[g]."]

3. The humble—

[Pride and self-sufficiency are insurmountable obstacles to religious instruction. If the knowledge of divine truth were to be acquired merely by mental application, then indeed we might become proficients in it, notwithstanding our dependence were on our own exertions. But we are blind, and must have "the eyes of our understanding enlightened," before we can comprehend the mysterious truths of God: consequently, if we have not humility to pray for the teaching of the Holy Spirit, we must remain in darkness, with respect to the spiritual import of the word, however carefully we may investigate its literal meaning[h]. We must pray with David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law[i]." We must confess ourselves fools, if we would be truly wise[k]. When we are willing to learn with the docility of little children, then, and then only, shall "the things that are hid from the wise and prudent be revealed unto us[l]."]

4. The obedient—

[We must have a disposition, yea, a determination, through grace, to obey the word, if we would receive any substantial good from it. If we have any secret lust which we will not part with, it is in vain to hope that the word, whether read or preached, can ever profit us. Our bosom sin will necessarily warp our judgment, and dispose us to reject whatever militates against the indulgence of it. Being determined not to obey its dictates, we shall be always ready to dispute its meaning or deny its authority. Hence our Lord lays so great a stress

[e] Matt. xiii. 4, 19. [f] Acts xvii. 11, 12. [g] Prov. xiii. 4.
[h] 1 Cor. ii. 10—14. See also Prov. ii. 1—6. [i] Ps. cxix. 18.
[k] 1 Cor. iii. 18. [l] Matt. xi. 25.

upon an obedient frame of mind: "If any man will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God[m]." It is self-evident, that if a man be visited by the most skilful physician in the universe, he can derive no benefit from his prescriptions, unless he follow them. So it is in vain that the Scripture shews us infallibly the way to heaven, if we will not forsake that path that leadeth to destruction.]

The character of the persons whom the word of God benefits, being ascertained, let us inquire into,

II. The good which it does them—

But who can estimate this aright? Who can enumerate the benefits resulting from the sacred oracles when thus studied, and thus received? We must content ourselves with mentioning only a few of those blessings which will flow from the word:

1. It will teach us—

[The inspired volume cannot fail of conveying information to every man that peruses it, whatever be the state and disposition of his mind. But there is instruction which none but those who "have an honest and good heart[n]" can receive; and in comparison of which all other knowledge is only as dross and dung. An insight into the deceitfulness and depravity of the heart; a discovery of the glory and excellency of Christ; a view of the devices of Satan, and of the way in which alone he can be successfully opposed; a sight of the beauty of holiness, and of all those glorious privileges that belong to the children of God, are among those invaluable acquisitions which will reward the labours of the humble inquirer.]

2. It will comfort us—

[They who disregard the Holy Scriptures, are often so overwhelmed with their troubles, as to seek refuge in death from the calamities of life. But the person who "draws water from those wells of salvation," finds in them an inexhaustible fund of consolation. He perceives that his trials are all appointed by infinite wisdom; that his Lord and Master drank of the very same cup before him; that tribulation is the way in which all the saints must walk toward the promised land; and that the storms which seem to menace his very life, shall only waft him to his desired haven. All the wonders of redemption also furnish him with additional grounds of consolation; and every promise is like the balm of Gilead to his

[m] John vii. 17. [n] Luke viii. 15.

wounded spirit. Such was the benefit which David experienced from the word in his trials[o]; and such shall be experienced by all who "make it their delight and their counsellor."]

3. It will sanctify us—

[The word of God is that which is made the means of our regeneration; and the same is useful for the carrying on of the good work within us. The Apostles were purified in an eminent degree: and our Lord ascribes their sanctification to that as its proper cause; "Now ye are clean, through the word that I have spoken unto you[p]." And St. Paul tells us, that Christ still makes use of it for that end: "He gave himself for the Church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word[q]." Indeed its natural tendency is to effect this, because it points out to us our sins; it makes us to see the guilt and danger in which they involve us; it directs our eyes to Him who will give us the victory over them; and it assures us, that, after we have vanquished all our *spiritual* enemies, we shall be partakers of endless glory and felicity. Having the precepts for our guide, and the promises for our encouragement, we shall "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God[r]."]

4. It will save us—

[The word makes us not only wise, but "wise unto salvation." In this view St. Paul told the Corinthians that "he had preached the Gospel to them; and that they had received it, and were standing in it; by which also," says he, "ye are saved[s]." And O! how many myriads now in heaven can attest its efficacy in this respect! How must they say, 'That word taught me, when ignorant; quickened me, when dead; comforted me, when afflicted; strengthened me, when weak; and enabled me eventually to overcome all my enemies!' And thus shall all of you say in due season, provided you "walk uprightly" in a diligent study of the sacred oracles, and in an humble obedience to the will of God.]

In IMPROVING this subject, we shall,

1. Guard it against misconstruction—

[It is possible that the foregoing statement may be misunderstood: we would therefore suggest some brief hints, by way of explanation.

First then, it is *not the word* that does the good; *but the Holy Spirit, by the word.* If the word itself wrought any thing, its operation would be uniform and universal, or, at

[o] Ps. cxix. 92. [p] John xv. 3. [q] Eph. v. 25, 26.
[r] 2 Cor. vii. 1. [s] 1 Cor. xv. 1, 2.

least, in a much greater degree than it now is, and people would be benefited by it in proportion to the strength and clearness of their intellect. But the reverse of this is nearer the truth: for the poor and weak receive the Gospel, while the wise and noble reject it[t]. And daily experience proves, that the word then only comes with power, when it comes in the Holy Ghost[u].

Next, it is *not the knowledge of the word* that benefits us, *but the knowledge of Christ in the word.* We might be able to repeat the whole Bible, and yet perish at last. Christ must be known by us; and that, not speculatively, but experimentally: for "there is no other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ[x]."

Lastly, our "uprightness" is *not the meritorious cause of the good* we receive, *but the qualification necessary for the reception and enjoyment of what is good.* Nor is this a trifling distinction; for if we be not careful to disclaim all idea of merit, we shall make void the grace of the Gospel, and deprive ourselves of all the benefits to be obtained by it[y].]

2. Enforce it in a way of appeal to your consciences—

[*The text is an appeal,* an appeal of God to the consciences of his enemies. We therefore boldly appeal to you, and defy any man living to answer in the negative; "Do not God's words do good to him that walketh uprightly?"

Judge ye, who have despised the word: look at those of your acquaintance who have obeyed the word; compare their lives with what you remember them to have been, or with what yours are at this present time; and say, whether the word have not done them good? — — —

But ye, after all, are very incompetent judges: we therefore appeal rather to those who have received the benefit. Ye know what ye have received: say then, whether ye would exchange it for all that the world can give you? Reflect on the good ye have obtained; the pardon, the peace, the strength, the holiness, the glory; and say, whether it do not exceed the powers of the first archangel to compute its worth? — — —

But we need not dwell on this: it admits not of any doubt: all that is requisite is, that you press forward for the attainment of more good. Let the ungodly world say, that the word has done you *harm;* but regard them not. Only let your growth in every thing that is amiable and praise-worthy confirm the truth in our text, and justify the appeal which God himself has made.]

[t] 1 Cor. i. 28—30.
[u] 1 Thess. i. 5.
[x] Acts iv. 12.
[y] Rom. iv. 14.

MCCV.

MINISTERIAL FIDELITY.

Micah iii. 8. *Truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin.*

TO all God's servants this command is given: "He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully[a];" and "deliver it they must, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear[b]." The prophets have set us a noble example in this respect: and the Prophet Micah in particular.

Let us mark,

I. What the sins were which he was commissioned to reprove—

Most grievous was the state of the Jewish people in his day—

[All ranks and orders of men, from the highest to the lowest, were addicted to covetousness, and were ready to commit every species of iniquity for gain; princes, priests, judges, prophets, all were guilty of the grossest injustice, and made use of their respective offices only for the purpose of accumulating wealth. At the same time they professed a firm reliance upon God, and anticipated nothing but good at his hands[c] — — —]

And there is but too much ground for similar complaints amongst us—

[True, the conduct of our governors and judges is the very reverse of that which the prophet here imputes to the Jews. I suppose that greater integrity is not to be found on earth, than in those who hold the government, and dispense justice, and minister in holy things, amongst us; and we have abundant reason to bless God for the high tone of morals which prevails amongst them. But, if we descend to common life, we find all the same iniquities abounding in our land as were complained of by the prophet in his day. Covetousness and injustice prevail to a fearful extent amongst us, as do indeed the whole catalogue of sins forbidden in the Decalogue — — — And precisely the same self-delusion is cherished in

[a] Jer. xxiii. 28. [b] Ezek. ii. 7.
[c] ver. 9—11. Cite the whole of this.

almost every bosom. "We lean upon the Lord," just as the Jews did; and persuade ourselves that "no evil shall come upon us." "God is merciful," is a sufficient answer to every threatening contained in God's word. As for his justice, or holiness, or truth, no regard whatever is paid to them: all are superseded, all are swallowed up in the one attribute of mercy; and no room is left for the exercise of any perfection that shall interfere with the happiness of an impenitent transgressor. As to "be a child of Abraham" was with the Jews a sufficient security from God's wrath[d]; so, amongst us, is baptism into the faith of Christ: we cannot perish, because we are Christians.]

Let us however notice,

II. The manner in which he administered his reproof—

"He was full of power by the Spirit of the Lord:" for he and all the other "Prophets spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost[e]." With judgment, too, and with might, was he filled; so that, in all his reproofs, he shewed unquestionably that he was speaking under a divine impulse. And I too, my brethren, would execute my commission even as he did. With a mixture of tenderness and fidelity, "I pray you then, my brethren," bear with me, whilst, under the influence of God's Holy Spirit, I endeavour to shew you the folly of your ways.

1. Can you impose on God?

[You can, and do, deceive your own souls, and persuade yourselves that you have nothing to fear at the hands of an angry God. But if you make light of sin, can you convince Jehovah that it is so venial a thing as you make it, or that you have not committed it to an extent to merit his displeasure? — — —]

2. Can you prevail on God to cancel and reverse the threatenings of his word?

[See if you can prevail on him to change day into night, or to alter for you any of the common laws of nature: and if you cannot prevail in things which would involve no contradiction, how can you hope to obtain a revocation of his word, which would involve in it a sacrifice of truth itself? For, I

[d] Matt. iii. 9. [e] 1 Pet. i. 11. and 2 Pet. i. 21.

scruple not to say, that to hope for heaven in an impenitent and unbelieving state, is to "make God a liar[f]" — — —]

Can you, when your self-delusions have ruined you, come back again to rectify your errors?

[Verily, between God and the soul that perishes in its sins, there is a great gulf fixed, a gulf that never can be passed. The soul that has once passed into the eternal world has its state for ever fixed; and the man who dies impenitent will bewail his folly in irremediable and everlasting misery.

I ask then, Is it wise to continue in sin, saying, "No evil can come upon me?" — — — Not that I would dissuade you from "leaning upon God;" but only from leaning upon him in a way which he has never authorized; and from expecting at his hands what he has never promised, and what he cannot give without violating his most solemn declarations. Repent of sin, believe in Christ, and obey the commandments of your God; and then let your confidence be as strong as you please. Then will I also assure you, that God shall be with you of a truth, and that to all eternity shall no evil ever come upon you — — —]

[f] 1 John v. 10.

MCCVI.

UNIVERSAL ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTIANITY.

Micah iv. 1—4. *In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob: and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off: and they shall beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it.*

THE Prophet Micah was contemporary with Isaiah; and most probably had seen his prophecies. The prophecy before us is almost word for word the same as that in the second chapter of Isaiah, except indeed

the concluding part of it, which is peculiar to Micah. The mode in which the prophecy too is introduced is different. In Isaiah, it is the commencement of a new prophecy; but, in Micah, it is the continuation of a prophecy of a very different complexion. Micah was a man of singular fidelity and courage. He declared to all the elders of his nation, and in a way that made a deep impression upon all[a], that on account of their iniquities God would give up their city and temple, to be destroyed and "plowed up as a field." But, whilst he announced to the Jews God's determined purpose to punish them in this awful manner, he foretold also his intention at a future period to restore them to his favour, and to make them a source of blessings to the whole earth.

This is the substance of the prophecy before us; in elucidating which we shall notice,

I. The universal establishment of the Christian Church.

Here it will be proper to notice,

1. The prediction relative to it—

[The temple of Solomon was built on a lofty hill: the altars also which were consecrated to false gods, were built on high places: hence the Christian Church is called by the prophet, "the mountain of the Lord's House," and by the Apostle Paul, "Mount Zion[b]." Of this Church it is said, that it "shall be established on the top of the mountains," that is, on the foundations of the Jewish Church, and on the ruins of all idol worship. It is the superstructure for which alone the foundations of Judaism were laid: and, when this edifice shall be complete, all idols shall fall before it, as Dagon before the ark. The period for its completion is in the last days, the days of the Messiah; a period yet future, though, we hope, not far distant. The terms of the prophecy are such as evidently to shew, that the prediction has never yet been fulfilled, and consequently, that its accomplishment is yet to be expected by us in the appointed time.]

2. The mode of its accomplishment—

["People," or, as Isaiah expresses it, "all nations," "shall flow unto it." Yes, this "mountain shall be established on the top of mountains," and all nations, like a majestic river, "shall *flow* unto it." By this metaphor, which is indeed a most extraordinary one, it is intimated, that all nations shall be *united* in one common sentiment and purpose; that their *progress*

[a] Jer. xxvi. 18, 19. [b] Heb. xii. 22.

towards its completion shall be *irresistible;* and that the whole shall take place under *a preternatural* and divine *influence;* since the natural progress of a river is downward, whereas this shall be upward, to a mountain on the top of other mountains. What a grand idea does this convey! The natural propensities of all men checked in their course, and their affections directed into a channel, in which Omnipotence alone can uphold them!

But the mode in which this shall take place is more fully stated by the prophet himself. The people of different and distant lands shall suddenly become penetrated with one common principle, and shall call on one another to unite in one common cause, the cause of true religion. "Come," they will say, "let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, the House of the God of Jacob." Just as, in the days of old, the Jews from every part of their land went up thrice a year to worship at Jerusalem; so will the Gentiles in every quarter of the globe go up with one consent to the mountain of the Lord's House: "God will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear him for ever."

The motives too by which they will be actuated are here distinctly specified. They will not go from regard to a particular ordinance which they feel constrained to obey, nor from a mere carnal partiality, such as the Jews evinced for their native land; but from a real desire to *know*, and *do*, the will of God. It is this which they will contemplate with such peculiar pleasure. In the Christian Church they will have an opportunity of becoming more deeply acquainted with that "great mystery of godliness, God manifest in human flesh," and dying for the sins of men; and they will have ampler means of knowing the whole extent of their duty, which it will thenceforth be their one labour to perform: to attain these things, I say, will be the one object of their ambition; and they will be alike filled with this one desire, to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

This is the change which we expect assuredly to be wrought on the Gentile world in due time; and by this shall the predicted establishment of Christ's Church be fulfilled."]

Yet simple, and as it might be thought weak, are,

II. The means by which it shall be effected—

The mere preaching of the Gospel is the appointed instrument which God will make use of for the attainment of this great end; "The law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

The Gospel is here called "a law"—

[It is "a law," because it is authoritatively enjoined to be obeyed by every creature under heaven. And it is so called by

the Prophet Isaiah, who characterizes it as "God's judgment which he would make to rest for a light of the people (the Gentiles;) even as his righteousness (or method for making people righteous before him,) and his salvation, for which all the isles shall wait, and in which they shall trust[c]." St. Paul also calls it "the law of faith[d]."]

And by the publication of that shall the great work be effected—

[It was that which produced such wonderful effects in the apostolic age; and it is still a "weapon mighty through God to the pulling down of the strong holds" of sin and Satan. It is "the rod of God's strength which was to go forth of Zion," and by which all his enemies are to be subdued before him. If we look into the discourses of the Apostles, we shall find nothing of that high-wrought eloquence for which the orators of Greece and Rome were famed: we shall see little else than a simple exhibition of Christ crucified, and a solemn declaration, that there was "no other name given under heaven whereby any man could be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ." This is the truth which still approves itself "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword," and still is "made the power of God unto salvation" to many souls. This began to be preached at Jerusalem; and is from thence come forth; and will in due time be "preached unto all nations." No human power shall be called to its aid; no human policy shall co-operate with it: this alone, accompanied with power from on high, and "preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven," will do the work: conviction will flash upon the consciences of thousands, as on the day of Pentecost; conversion will instantly ensue: Christ being erected as "an ensign, all will flock to it," and "a nation will be born in a day." He shall be acknowledged by all as the "Shiloh that was to come: and to him shall the gathering of the people be." The doctrine of the cross being universally proclaimed, the *universal flow* shall take place, "and the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea."]

From the work itself let us turn to the contemplation of,

III. The fruits that shall every where proceed from it—

The Lord Jesus Christ will reign in the hearts of all—

[As judges of old swayed the sceptre of Israel, so will the Lord Jesus rule over the whole earth; and whatever is

[c] Isai. li. 4, 5. [d] Rom. iii. 27.

contrary to his will, he will "rebuke" and subdue. Nothing will be able to withstand his power: "He will work, and who shall let it?" As in former days, when he brought his people out of Egypt, and planted them in Canaan, he made them triumphant over every enemy, so will he do in the day to which we are looking forward: he will "go on in the chariot of his Gospel, conquering and to conquer," till all his enemies and theirs be put under their feet.]

Then shall peace and happiness universally prevail—

[The distinctions between nations will then be no longer accompanied with rivalry and hate: all will be as children of one common Father, all as members of the same body. War will then no longer be a science, which even the most peaceful nations are constrained to learn for their own preservation: the cultivation of peaceful arts will be the one desire of all; "they will beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks, and they will learn war no more." Then also personal and domestic peace will abound throughout the world: "every man will sit under his own vine and fig-tree," as in Patriarchal times, none attempting to molest him, and not so much as the fear of molestation existing in his mind[e]. Doubtless the internal peace which all will enjoy in their own heart and conscience is also to be included under this beautiful image: for the very character of Christ himself is, that he is the Prince of peace; and the character of his reign is, that it diffuses "an abundance of peace" throughout his whole empire, so that "the peace of all floweth down like a river." Blessed, blessed state! May "the Lord hasten it, in his time!"]

From this subject we may clearly SEE,

1. What an unspeakable blessing the Gospel is—

[Wherever the Gospel has come with power, these effects may be already in a measure seen. True it is, they are not seen to the extent that they will hereafter be, because real piety is at so low an ebb, even amongst the professed followers of Christ. But from what is partially seen, we may know what shall hereafter obtain throughout all the world. The hateful passions which produced so much hatred and contention in the world, are slain, wherever the Gospel has its due effect; and peace, and love, and every amiable disposition, have an habitual ascendant in the soul. O professors, judge yourselves in relation to this matter: see whether ye be "putting off the old man, which is corrupt, with its deceitful lusts; and be putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness

[e] Isai. xxxii. 16—18.

and true holiness:" and look to it, that, in these and all other respects, ye walk worthy of Him who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.]

2. How we may ensure to ourselves all its glorious effects—

[The Gentiles, in the latter days, may well be proposed as a pattern for us in the present day. Let an entire conformity of heart and life to God's revealed will be the one object of our pursuit. Seek knowledge, not for its own sake, but for its influence upon the soul: and seek grace, not for the aggrandizement of yourselves, but that God may be glorified in the whole of your conversation. If you come up to the House of God with such dispositions as these, you will find that there is a power in the word to enlighten and sanctify the soul; and, in proportion as you cultivate these dispositions, you will "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

It will also have a good effect to animate and encourage one another. This will characterize the Christians in the latter day: and the influence of social piety will be found most beneficial to your souls. Be careful, however, when exhorting others to come up to the House of the Lord, never to omit, in spirit at least, if not in word, "*I will go also*[f]."]

3. What glorious times are hastening upon us—

[We do hope that the times here spoken of are not far distant. Multitudes of us who are here present can remember when the Church was by no means what it now is: even twenty years have made an immense difference; so great, comparatively, has been the out-pouring of God's Spirit, beyond what it has been for centuries before. And we account it no small privilege to live in a day when some of the greatest Potentates upon earth are uniting, with their subjects of every denomination and description, to disseminate throughout the world the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. By this we may form some little judgment what to expect in that day, when, in every nation under heaven, kings shall be the nursing-fathers, and queens the nursing-mothers, of the Church. O blessed times! May God accelerate them! and may we all exert ourselves, as his instruments, to accomplish his will, and to hasten forward these glorious events! If it be thought that these prospects are too good to be ever realized; let any one only compare Britain as it now is, with what it was before the banners of the Cross were erected on our shores; and then he will see no reason to despair of those nations that are yet "sitting in darkness and

[f] Zech. viii. 20, 21.

the shadow of death." But were the change far more beyond the reach of human probability than it is, there would be no resason to doubt of its ultimate accomplishment, since Omnipotence is pledged to effect it: It shall take place, "for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."]

MCCVII.

THE WORLD'S AND THE CHRISTIAN'S GOD CONTRASTED.

Micah iv. 5. *For all people will walk every one in the name of his God, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.*

IT has been objected to Christianity, that it creates divisions in families, and in the world at large. But how should it not produce these effects, when the whole world is immersed in idolatry; and the direct end of Christianity is, to "turn men from idols, to serve the living God?" See the prophet's account of "the last days:" "It shall come to pass, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains; and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people, even all nations, shall flow unto it[a]." What can this import? What, but a general conversion to Christ; and, as far as that change shall extend, the determination here formed; "Every one will walk in the name of his God: and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever?"

Let us notice here,

I. The practice of the world—

Every unregenerate man is an idolater—

[Idolatry may be found no less amongst the professed servants of Jehovah, than amongst the worshippers of stocks and stones. Idolatry, in fact, is "the loving and serving of the creature, rather than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore[b]." Now it is a fact, that every man, in his unregenerate state, is under the dominion of some lust, which leads him captive. All are not governed by the same lust: the desires and appetites of men differ amongst different persons, and in the same person at different periods of his life. In youth, we

[a] ver. 1, 2. [b] Rom. i. 25.

are chiefly impelled by a love of pleasure and sensual indulgence. In middle age, we aspire after honour and advancement in the world for ourselves and our children. In more advanced life, the love of money not unfrequently gains an ascendant over us; and, at all events, a love of ease and quiet. Now, wherever these, or any other dispositions, operate upon us more powerfully than the love of God, they become, in fact, our god. As the sensual man is said to "make a god of his belly[c];" and the covetous man to make an idol of his gold[d]; so the votaries of any created being or enjoyment are, in reality, despisers of the one true God, and worshippers of idols.]

Whatever be the supreme object of a man's affections, "in the name of that he walks"—

[The young men are never weary in the pursuit of pleasure. Behold the gay, the dissipated, the voluptuous! From the nature of things, they cannot always be in a direct pursuit of their object: but it is never out of their minds, at least never so far removed, but they can revert to it with delight, and renew, in contemplation, the feelings which have already been indulged even to satiety. Of *this* the records of the whole world will testify: and he can know little of himself, who needs be told that it has been his own experience. The Apostles themselves confess this to have been once their own course[e]; nor has there been an exception to it, in the state of unconverted man, from the fall of Adam to the present moment.]

In direct opposition to this is,

II. The determination of the true Christian—

He also has his God—

[Yes, the Lord Jehovah is his God; and him alone is he disposed to serve. The Christian sees that Jehovah alone has any claim upon him. As his Creator, his Governor, his Redeemer, and his Judge, Jehovah demands of him all the affections of his soul, and all the services of his life: and *he* not only accedes to this demand, but accounts it his highest honour, and his truest happiness, to fulfil the duties imposed upon him.]

And in the name of this God he walks—

[This God he confesses before men; and for him determines to brave all the contempt and hatred of an ungodly world. He sees that the servants of Satan will cast every obstacle in his way: but he resolves, by the grace of God, to go forward, and to serve his God even unto death. Look at

[c] Phil. iii. 19. [d] Col. iii. 5. [e] Eph. ii. 3. Tit. iii. 3.

the saints of God in every age: they all united in devotion to one God, even to Him who made them, and to Him who redeemed them by his own most precious blood. The voice of every one of them was, in fact, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none on earth that I desire besides Thee[f]." And in the name of this God they walk; proceeding continually from grace to grace, from strength to strength, from glory to glory.]

And now, Brethren,

1. Choose ye whom ye will serve—

"Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "To whichever of the two ye cleave, ye must, of necessity, renounce and despise the other[g]." And can ye doubt whose ye shall be, and whom ye shall serve? What can the vanities of the world do for you?———On the other hand, what cannot, or will not, the Lord Jesus do for you?———Take him then as your God, and serve him faithfully with your whole hearts[h]———]

2. Be not out-done by the votaries of this world—

[Are they constant? Be ye also firm, uniform, unreserved. Let there not be a worldling in the universe so faithful to his god, as you to yours. Let the Apostle's counsel be the entire rule of your life: "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him; rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving[i]."

[f] Ps. lxxiii. 25.
[g] Matt. vi. 24.
[h] Josh. xxiv. 15.
[i] Col. ii. 6, 7.

MCCVIII.

THE MESSIAH TO BE BORN AT BETHLEHEM.

Micah v. 2. *Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me, that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

IN estimating the degree of credit due to prophecy, we naturally ask, Of what kind the prophecies were? Were they numerous? Were the persons who delivered them unconnected with each other? Were the things which were foretold unlikely of themselves to be accomplished? or were they such as might easily, by the united efforts of interested persons, be

brought to pass? If they were such only as might be the subjects of reasonable conjecture, or such as might by a confederacy of persons be easily devised and easily fulfilled, they would have but little weight; but if they were inconceivably varied, and absolutely incapable of being either feigned by impostors or fulfilled by friends, they will then carry proportionable evidence along with them. Such then were the prophecies relating to our blessed Lord: they were such as no deceivers could invent, and such as no confederacy whatever could cause to be fulfilled. Many of the most important of them were fulfilled by persons who sought to disprove the pretensions of Jesus to the Messiahship, and who unwittingly established what they laboured to overthrow. Others were accomplished through the instrumentality of persons who could have no conception whatever of the ultimate consequences which their actions would produce. Of this kind was the prediction before us; it declared that the Messiah should be born at Bethlehem; not at the Bethlehem in the land of Zabulon, but at that which was in the land of Judah. This, as will be seen presently, was so generally known, that the parents of our Lord might have known it, if they had been at all anxious to make the inquiry. But so little did they advert to it, that they never thought of going up to Bethlehem, till they were compelled to it by a decree of Augustus Cæsar. They were living at Nazareth, and would, if no such unforeseen edict had been issued, have continued there till the birth of Jesus. But the Scripture could not be broken; and God was at no loss to provide means for its accomplishment. He wrought therefore on the ambition of the Roman emperor, and prompted him to exercise his authority over the Jewish people, and to order that all of them should go and be enrolled in the different cities to which they belonged. This constrained Joseph (who was of the house and lineage of David) to go up to his own city, Bethlehem, to be enrolled there: and during his stay there (some unforeseen occurrences probably having necessitated

him to continue there longer than he had originally expected), the time for Mary's delivery arrived, and, contrary to all human expectation, Jesus was born in the city which had been specified by the Prophet Micah seven hundred years before. Thus, whilst the decree of Cæsar shewed that "the sceptre was now just departing from Judah," and, consequently, that the time for the advent of the heavenly "Shiloh was come," it unwittingly on his part caused the Messiah to be born in the very city which Micah had foretold.

The prophecy itself gives us such a glorious view of Christ, that we shall do well to enter more fully into it. It declares to us,

I. His advent in time—

Two things the prophet mentions respecting him;

1. The place of his birth—

[Bethlehem was of itself but a small city, and of little importance when compared with many other cities in the land of Judah; but it was the place of David's nativity[a], and the place therefore which God ordained for the birth of David's Son, the Lord Jesus. The prophecy respecting it, we have before said, was generally known, especially among those who were at all conversant with the prophetic writings; so that when Herod sent to the chief-priests and scribes to inquire where the Messiah was to be born, they all with one consent declared that Bethlehem was the destined place, and, in confirmation of their opinion, they cited this very passage which we are now considering[b]. And it is curious enough, that many years afterwards, when the enemies of Jesus insisted that, notwithstanding all his miracles, he could not possibly be the Messiah, they adduced this very passage[c]; which, if their premises had been correct, would have fully supported their conclusion: they *knew* that Jesus had been *brought up* at Nazareth; and they *supposed* he had been *born* there: and, if they had been right in this conjecture, he certainly could not be the Messiah; since it was ordained of God, that the Messiah should be born at Bethlehem.

This will account for the remarkable care which God in his providence took, that the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem should be placed beyond a possibility of doubt. Perhaps no other event, scarcely excepting, either his death or resurrection, was

[a] 1 Sam. xvi. 1, 11—13. [b] Matt. ii. 3—6. [c] John vii. 41, 42.

marked with such a variety of evidence as this. First, it was enrolled in the public records of Bethlehem, in consequence of Cæsar's edict. Next, it was attested by an angel announcing it to the shepherds as they were guarding their flocks by night. Next, this testimony was confirmed by a host of angels, who celebrated it aloud in the hearing of the shepherds. Next, it was marked by a star in the east, which conducted the Magi from a distant country to the very spot, and caused those wise men to carry the report of it back to their own land. Next, it was ascertained by the inquiries of Herod, and the united testimony of all the chief priests and scribes, that Bethlehem was of necessity to be the place. And lastly, it was marked by that most extraordinary act of cruelty, the slaughter of all the infants in and around Bethlehem, "from two years old and under;" which measure king Herod adopted, in order to ensure the destruction of Jesus, whom he dreaded as a future rival.

What a confirmation all this is of the Messiahship of Jesus, it is needless to observe.]

2. The character in which he should appear—

[He was to be "Ruler in Israel." If we look only at the *external* circumstances of his birth, we confess, he had not much the appearance of a "Ruler," seeing that his parents were in so low circumstances as to be able to get no better place for their accommodation than a stable, (though one would have thought that a person in Mary's situation would have found a thousand females ready to receive her into their houses;) nor any better receptacle for the new-born infant than a manger. Nor in his subsequent life did there appear what we should have expected in a "Ruler." To the age of thirty he wrought at the trade of a carpenter: and during the three years of his ministry, he went about as a poor man who "had not where to lay his head." Least of all, in his last hours, did he look like a "Ruler;" since he was treated with nothing but scorn, and put to death as the vilest of malefactors.

Yet even at all these periods, if we look more narrowly, we shall find circumstances that sufficiently declared his dignity. The songs of the heavenly choir at his birth, the miracles he wrought in his life, and the testimony borne to him by universal nature at his death, all proclaimed, that, under the veil of his humiliation, there was a character more than human, and that he was not only a "Ruler," but "King of kings, and Lord of lords."

The Jews, fixing their eyes only on his *external* appearance, deny that this prophecy was fulfilled in him. But we answer, that "his kingdom was never intended to be of this world:" it is a spiritual dominion that he was sent to exercise; and such

a dominion as no mere creature ever can exercise. He came to establish his throne in the hearts of men, and to bring their very thoughts into captivity to his holy will. And this empire he has established over millions of the human race, even over the whole Israel of God, in every age, and every place. To all of them without exception his will is both the *rule* and *reason* of their conduct. If only a thing be declared to be his will, that is a sufficient reason for their doing it, though they should see no other reason: and, rather than not do it, they would all without exception lay down their lives. This dominion he is now exercising over a willing and obedient people: and though Satan's vassals are infinitely the more numerous at the present day, the time is coming, when "all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom" of this great Ruler, when "all kings shall fall down before him," and "all nations shall serve him," and "his name shall be great unto the ends of the earth."]

For submission to this great "Ruler" the prophet prepares us, by declaring,

II. His existence from eternity—

The terms in which this is declared are as strong as the prophet could well use: they are equivalent to what the Psalmist says of Jehovah; "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God[d]." That Jesus did exist from all eternity is abundantly declared,

1. In the Old Testament—

[There is a remarkable passage to this effect in the book of Proverbs, where, under the name of Wisdom, Jesus is represented as having been, by the "Father, as one brought up with him, as being daily his delight, and rejoicing always before him[e]" — — — This passage is generally considered by the best commentators as relating to Jesus Christ; and its exact correspondence with the passage just quoted in reference to Jehovah, and with other passages in the New Testament, leaves no room to doubt, but that Jesus is the person there described. In the book of Psalms, we know infallibly that Jesus is the person spoken of, as "of old laying the foundations of the earth," and as continuing immutably the same to all eternity[f]. We know this, I say, infallibly, because St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, assures us that it was spoken *of*, and *to*, the Son; whom the Father addresses also in these

[d] Ps. xc. 2. [e] Prov. viii. 22—31. [f] Ps. cii. 25—27.

decisive terms; "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom[g]."]

2. In the New Testament—

[Our blessed Lord himself frequently speaks of his pre-existent state. To Nicodemus he speaks of himself as having come down from heaven, and as actually existing in heaven even whilst in his bodily substance he was on earth[h]. To the Jews who thought of him as a mere man like themselves, he says, "Before Abraham was, I am[i]." And, in addressing his heavenly Father, he prays, "Glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was[k]." His Apostles uniformly maintain the same language: "In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God; and the Word was God: the same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by *him*; and without *him* was nothing made that was made. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us[l]." This is the testimony of St. John: and that of Paul accords with it, that, whilst "*according to the flesh* Jesus was of the seed of David, *according to the spirit of holiness* he was by his resurrection declared to be the Son of God," even "God over all, blessed for ever[m]." In the book of Revelations there is a remarkable passage, where, speaking of our blessed Lord, the beloved Disciple attests his character in these expressive words; "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, THE ALMIGHTY:" and then he introduces that same Jesus speaking personally to him, and saying, "Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore; Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death[n]."

From all these testimonies then, we are prepared to welcome the advent of this august Ruler, in the language of the Prophet Isaiah; "To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and *the government shall be upon his shoulders;* and his name shall be called the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace: and of *the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end*, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever[o]."]

That we may suitably IMPROVE this subject,

1. Let us adore this divine Saviour for his condescension and love—

[g] Heb i. 8, 10—12. [h] John iii. 13. [i] John viii. 58.
[k] John xvii. 5. [l] John i. 1—3, 14. [m] Rom. i. 3, 4. & xi. 5.
[n] Rev. i 8, 17, 18. [o] Isai. ix. 6, 7.

[How wonderful is it that such love should ever be shewn to the children of men! that the Son of God, "Jehovah's fellow[p]," who was "one with the Father," "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person[q]," who "was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, should yet make himself of no reputation, and take upon him the form of a servant, and be made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, should humble himself and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross[r]!" How wonderful, I say, is this! and scarcely less wonderful, that *we*, towards whom this stupendous effort of love and mercy has been exercised, should feel so little, even whilst we profess to believe it, and to make it the foundation of all our hopes. But let us muse upon it; let us muse, till the fire kindle, and we speak with our tongues the wonderful works of God. Nothing but this is heard in heaven: and nothing but this should be heard on earth. Methinks there should be but one song heard amongst us day or night; "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing[s]."]

2. Let us submit to his government—

[Do we look for salvation through our adorable Emmanuel? Let us not forget that he came to be "a Prince as well as a Saviour," a "Ruler" as well as an Instructor. Let us willingly receive him in this character, and cheerfully dedicate ourselves to his service. Let us be his subjects, not in name, but in truth; not by an external profession only, but an internal surrender of our souls to him: let us do this, not by constraint, but willingly; not partially, but wholly, and without reserve. This is our first duty; this is our truest happiness; this is the way in which he expects us to requite him for all his condescension and love; and it is the only way wherein we can manifest our sense of the obligations he has conferred upon us. "He gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works:" let him find in us such a people; and he will then "see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied."]

[p] Zech. xiii. 7.
[q] Heb. i. 3.
[r] Phil. ii. 6—8.
[s] Rev. v. 12.

MCCIX.

STABILITY AND EXTENT OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

Micah v. 4. *He shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.*

OF whom the prophet speaks, there can be no doubt. The preceding context indisputably refers to the Lord Jesus Christ[a]——— Till he should come into the world, the kingdoms of Israel and of Judah should never be re-united[b]: but after he should have come, and finished his course on earth, he should establish his empire over the whole earth; and unite all, both Jews and Gentiles, in one body, as one fold under one Shepherd. Of this the prophet speaks in our text, even of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ: and he declares,

I. Its first establishment—

[Christ is "the Shepherd of Israel." As such, he feeds and *rules* his people[c]. In his appearance, indeed, he was mean; but he established his kingdom with power. It was announced as at hand by his forerunner, John[d]: and was declared by himself as already come[e]. By all his words and actions he shewed himself entitled to establish it[f]. And at the judgment-seat of Pilate he confessed himself a King[g]. For this, indeed, he was put to death[h]: as the superscription on his cross proclaimed[i]. On the very cross he acknowledged himself a King, and promised to the dying suppliant a participation of his throne[k]. Indeed, it was upon the cross that he triumphed over his enemies, and established his kingdom[l]. After his resurrection, he gave commission to his disciples to go forth in his name[m]: on the day of Pentecost he subdued multitudes to himself; and from that day he has been enlarging his kingdom in every quarter of the globe. Through the whole of his ministry on earth, he acted with authority, as here foretold; "standing and feeding in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God."]

[a] ver. 2. with Matt. ii. 6. and John vii. 42. [b] ver. 3.
[c] Matt. ii. 6. The Greek. [d] Matt. iii. 2. [e] Matt. xii. 28.
[f] John v. 22—29. Matt. xxv. 31, 32. [g] John xviii. 37.
[h] John xix. 3, 12—15. [i] John xix. 19. [k] Luke xxiii. 42.
[l] Col. ii. 14, 15. [m] Matt. xxviii. 18, 19.

From its first establishment, the prophet goes on to speak of,

II. Its subsequent preservation—

[From the first instant that the establishment of Christ's kingdom was announced, it was assailed from every quarter. The question asked by the eastern Magi was, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" And instantly was Herod's jealousy moved to such a degree, that, to ensure the death of Jesus, "he sent forth and slew all the children in Bethlehem and the surrounding country, from two years old and under[n]." From the time that he entered on his ministry, his life was sought; till at last his enemies accomplished their cruel purpose, unwittingly accomplishing, at the same time, the very end for which he came into the world. The same opposition has been made to his kingdom in every age and every place. The history of the Acts of the Apostles is one continued illustration of this fact. But greater was He that was in them, than he that actuated his malignant foes. In different places, indeed, his interests have been subverted, as in the Seven Churches of Asia; but if the candlestick have been taken from one place, it has been sent to another. The Church itself has stood, as a rock in the midst of the ocean, and has defied all the waves that beat upon it. Our blessed Lord said, that "it was founded on a rock, and that the gates of hell should never prevail against it[o]:" and this saying of his has been fulfilled: for though, like the burning bush, it has been continually immersed in flames, it never has been, nor ever shall be, consumed by them. "It shall abide," as the prophet has said[p]: "it shall break in pieces, and consume all other kingdoms; but itself shall stand for ever and ever[q]."]

My text yet further declares,

III. Its ultimate extension—

[Its limits hitherto have been narrow and contracted; but the time is coming when they shall extend "to the very ends of the earth." Yes, indeed, "He shall be exalted, and extolled, and be very high[r]." "All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him[s]." All the kingdoms of the world shall be his[t]; and under the whole heavens "there shall be but one Lord, and his name one[u]" — — —]

EXHORTATION—

[n] Matt. ii. 2, 16.
[o] Matt. xvi. 18.
[p] The Text.
[q] Dan. ii. 44.
[r] Isai. lii. 13.
[s] Ps. lxxii. 11.
[t] Rev. xi. 15.
[u] Zech. xiv. 9. See, to the same effect, Ps. ii. 8. and xxii. 27.

1. Let the kingdom of our Lord be welcomed by you—

[Verily his subjects are happy; for "his yoke is easy, and his burthen light." Not so the subjects of sin and Satan. No: "they are in sore bondage: for the way of transgressors is hard." Submit ye then, Brethren, to his sceptre: "obey his voice; for God's name is in him[x]:" and know assuredly, that if you still continue to rebel against him, the time is coming when he will say, "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me."]

2. Let his name be dear unto you—

["To them that believe, he is precious[y]." And he deserves to be so: for he "delivers his subjects from the powers of darkness," and makes them kings like unto himself[z]. He will be dear, and his name will be great amongst all nations[a]. O let him be so to you! Receive him into your hearts as your Saviour and Redeemer, yea, and as your Lord and Governor.]

[x] Exod. xxiii. 21.
[y] 1 Pet. ii. 7.
[z] Luke xxii. 29. Rev. i. 6. and iii. 21.
[a] Ps. lxxii. 17—19.

MCCX.

CHRIST OUR PEACE IN TROUBLE[a].

Micah v. 5. *This man shall be the Peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land.*

IT is of the very nature of prophecy to be dark and intricate: for, if it were perfectly plain, men would either labour to defeat the counsels of heaven, or ascribe the accomplishment of them to second causes. Among the various things which tend to obscure the predictions of the prophets, we notice more especially their complicated allusions to things temporal and spiritual, present and remote. In the prophecy before us, considerable difficulties occur, because it is so expressed as to comprehend several distinct events, and to be accomplished in a variety of ways: nevertheless the general scope of it is sufficiently plain; and the truth which we shall deduce

[a] Preached in July, 1803.

from it, is obvious and indubitable; it is none other than this, that Jesus Christ is the one source of peace to his people, under all their calamities, temporal or spiritual [b].

Christ then will be the peace of his Church,

I. Under all temporal calamities—

God may, for wise and gracious reasons, suffer his people to be reduced to the greatest straits and necessities; just as he did in the days of Hezekiah, when all Judæa was subdued by Sennacherib, and the capital itself was besieged by the Assyrian army. We must not therefore conclude that God has given us up, even though we should see our land invaded, and many strong places taken, and the capital itself in the most imminent danger of being plundered and destroyed. God may suffer it, in order to wean us from confiding in our fleets and armies, and to glorify himself in our deliverance. Supposing such a calamity to come upon this land, Christ will be our peace,

1. Through the instrumentality of others—

[In the words following the text, he promises to raise up for his people "seven shepherds and eight principal men," that is, an *indefinite* number[c] of eminent and useful men in all the departments of state, whom he would endue with wisdom and courage; and through whose instrumentality he would effect their deliverance. And is it not in this way that he has most marvellously interposed for *us?* Was there ever a period within our remembrance, when all ranks and orders of men were so unanimous as at the present? In the last war, some doubted whether we might not have avoided war; and others, whether we might not have terminated it long before. But is there a man in this whole kingdom who doubts whether our invete-

[b] The meaning of the context seems to be this: the prophet foretells that the enemies of Judah should "besiege" them, and treat their governor with contempt and cruelty; which may be considered as relating to the times of Hezekiah, and Zedekiah. He then foretells, that in the little city of Bethlehem the Messiah shall be born: but that, notwithstanding that event, the Jews, as a nation, shall be given up, till the time when Zion shall travail in birth (Isai. lxvi. 7, 8. with Gal. iv. 27.) and all, both Jews and Gentiles, be converted to the Lord. In the mean time, however, the Messiah shall govern and protect his people, and be a source of "peace" and comfort to them under their heaviest calamities.

[c] Eccl. xi. 2.

rate enemy would suffer us to be at peace; or whether if we were to make all the sacrifices that his ambition could dictate, he would not speedily find some fresh pretext for insult and exaction? No; we are unanimous in our conviction of the unavoidableness of war; unanimous too in our determination to maintain it with vigour, and to die rather than become the vassals of France: and this is a source of much peace and comfort to us in the midst of our impending dangers. And to whom can we ascribe this astonishing unanimity, but to Him who "has all hearts in his hand, and turneth them whithersoever he will?"]

2. Through his own immediate agency upon our minds—

[The Lord Jesus Christ is the Governor of the Universe; and he makes his people to know, that *their enemies derive all their power from his commission, the limits of which commission they cannot exceed, and the effects of which power shall be overruled for good.* These are sources of unspeakable peace to their souls. Suppose "the Assyrian to be come into our land," and to be bearing down all before him, our murmurs will be silenced by that reflection, "Is there evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it[d]?" The enemy is no more than "the axe with which HE hews, or the saw with which HE saws[e];" "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good[f]." Suppose the enemy to be vaunting like the blaspheming Rabshakeh, and to be regarding the riches of the capital as a nest of eggs on which he is just going to lay his hands[g]; even then, if the plunder of the capital be not within his commission, "God will put a hook in his nose, and a bridle in his jaws, and will cause him to return to his own land" ashamed and confounded[h]. Suppose he be suffered entirely to prevail, yet if it be over-ruled for the good of immortal souls, and the glory of our God, no temporal trials, however great, can counterbalance the benefit derived from them. It was by sending his people to Babylon that he cured them of idolatry; and if he may but cure this nation of its manifold impieties, all will be well. In these views then Christ will surely be the peace of his people, yea, he "will keep them in perfect peace, whose minds are stayed on him[i]."]

But these observations apply to us yet more forcibly,

II. Under all spiritual troubles—

There is not in all the sacred volume one single prophecy that more clearly speaks of Christ than that

[d] Amos iii. 6. [e] Isai. x. 15. [f] 1 Sam. iii. 18.
[g] Isai. x. 14. [h] Isai. xxxvii. 33—35. [i] Isai. xxvi. 3.

before us. It is repeatedly applied to Christ in the New Testament, as marking out with precision the very place where he should be born[k]. In explaining it therefore as referring to his spiritual kingdom, we cannot err.

The enemies of God's people of old were typical of those spiritual enemies with which his people have to contend in every age. And it is certain that the enemies of our souls may prevail for a season in a very alarming degree. But when sin and Satan make their fiercest assaults, even then will Christ maintain our peace,

1. By the merit of his blood—

[This it is which enables us to behold all our guilt without terror or despondency: this it is which enables us to answer the accuser of the brethren, "Who is he that shall condemn, since Christ has died[l]?" In this view especially is Christ called "our peace," since "he made peace for us by the blood of his cross;" and every one of us by believing in Him shall have peace with God[m].]

2. By the prevalence of his intercession—

[The prayers of Hezekiah and Isaiah were effectual for the peace of Jerusalem, even while the besiegers encompassed it[n]: and in answer to them, one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian army were slain by an angel in one night[o]. What then may not be expected from the prayers of our adorable Redeemer? Shall not *he* prevail, seeing that "He ever liveth on purpose to make intercession for us[p]?" To this, as to an inexhaustible source of consolation, we are taught to look, under the conflicts which we are called to sustain; "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is also the propitiation for our sins[q]."

3. By the sufficiency of his grace—

[We may be reduced to a more perilous condition than even Jerusalem itself, and yet find peace in the consideration, that Christ is all-sufficient, and that "through him we shall be more than conquerors." We can scarcely conceive a more distressing experience than that of Paul under the buffetings of Satan: yet this word, "My grace is sufficient for thee," was able to turn his desponding sorrows into joy and triumph[r]. In

[k] ver. 2. with Matt. ii. 6. and John vii. 42.
[l] Rom. viii. 34.
[m] Rom. v. 1.
[n] Isai. xxxvii. 22.
[o] Isai. xxxvii. 36.
[p] Heb. vii. 25.
[q] 1 John ii. 1.
[r] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

like manner we also may go forth with confidence against all our enemies, saying with him, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me[s]."]

4. By the inviolableness of his promise—

[To all his people is that word addressed, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee[t]?" And can we find one instance wherein he has ever violated that blessed promise? May we not then adopt that inspired inference, and say, "I will not fear what flesh can do unto me[u]?" If the Apostles, when almost overwhelmed in a storm, were blameworthy for entertaining fears while Christ was with them in the vessel[x], much more must we be faulty, if we give way to discouraging apprehensions of ruin, when the word of Christ is pledged for our security. Relying on his word, we have an anchor which will keep us steadfast in the midst of all the storms and tempests that can assault our souls[y].]

APPLICATION—

[*Let every one then seek to know this "Prince of Peace."* To "acquaint ourselves with him is the way to be at peace[z]." If we know him not, we cannot flee to him for refuge: but if we "trust in him, he will keep us in perfect peace."]

[s] Phil. iv. 13. [t] Josh. i. 5. [u] Heb. xiii. 5, 6.
[x] Mark iv. 38—40. [y] Heb. vi. 19. [z] Job xxii. 21.

MCCXI.

THE JEWS A BLESSING TO THE WORLD.

Micah v. 7. *The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.*

IN this chapter we have as explicit a prophecy respecting Christ, as any that is to be found in all the sacred volume. His person is described in terms that can belong to none but Jehovah himself: "His goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting[a]." The place of his nativity is expressly foretold, and so plainly mentioned, that all the Scribes and Pharisees at the time of our Saviour's birth considered it as an indisputable point, that their Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem; and not in the Bethlehem that was

[a] ver. 2.

in the land of Zabulon[b], but in Bethlehem Ephratah, which was in the land of Judah[c]. The establishment of his kingdom over the face of the whole earth was farther predicted[d]; and not only is the final restoration of the Jews to a participation of it declared[e], but their agency in the conversion of the Gentile world is distinctly asserted[f]. Whatever accomplishment the words of our text received in the apostolic age by the preaching of the Apostles and their immediate converts, they have respect to a period far remote from that age, a period yet future: they refer to a time, when Jehovah will gather his people from the four winds, and reign over them in their own land[g]; a time, when they shall vanquish all their enemies, as easily as a young lion prevails over a flock of sheep[h]; but shall be as rich blessings to others, as the dew or rain is to the thirsty earth.

To place this subject in a proper point of view, it will be necessary to shew,

I. The original design of God in their dispersion—

Once they were numerous as the stars of heaven: but now they are reduced to a small "remnant;" and are scattered over the face of the whole earth. This judgment is designed of God,

1. To punish their iniquities—

[Great and manifold were their transgressions, which caused them to be carried captive to Assyria and Babylon: but greater far has been their guilt in rejecting their Messiah, and "crucifying the Lord of glory:" and for that they have now been carried captive amongst all nations, and been reduced to the lowest state of degradation for the space of more than seventeen hundred years. The punishment inflicted for this crime is such as was foretold by Moses himself[i], and such as our blessed Lord also warned them to expect[k]. The Jews themselves see and acknowledge, that the hand of God is upon them on account of their sins: and it is God's intention that his dispensations towards them should be viewed in this light by every nation under heaven[l].]

[b] Josh. xix. 10, 15. [c] Matt. ii. 4—6. [d] ver. 4.
[e] ver. 3, 6. [f] The text. [g] Mic. iv. 6, 7.
[h] ver. 8. [i] Lev. xxvi. 27, 33. Deut. xxviii. 62—64.
[k] Matt. xxi. 39—41. [l] Deut. xxix. 24—28.

2. To bring them to repentance—

[In this present world the judgments which God inflicts are all intended for good. It was "for their good" that God sent his people into captivity in Babylon[m]: and for their good he has now scattered them over the face of the earth. The punishment inflicted on Levi for his cruelty to the Shechemites, was, that he and his family should have no lot among the tribes of Israel, but be scattered amongst them all[n]: yet was that overruled for their greater honour; they being appointed to minister in the sanctuary before the Lord; and pre-eminently honoured, as having the Lord himself for their portion[o]. In like manner, though the present dispersion of the Jews is a heavy judgment, God inflicts it, not as the sentence of an inexorable Judge, but as the correction of a loving Parent: and the very circumstance of his transferring his regards from them to the Gentile world, is a yet farther expression of his parental love, it being designed to provoke his deserted people to jealousy, and thus to bring them to a renewed enjoyment of their forfeited inheritance[p]. "They are cast off only for a season[q];" and, "if they abide not in unbelief, they shall yet again be grafted on their own stem," from which they have been broken off[r].]

But in the prophecy before us, our attention is particularly called to,

II. The ulterior purposes which they are destined to accomplish—

The dew and rain are sent by God to fertilize the earth[s]: and in like manner are the Jews dispersed throughout the world,

1. As witnesses for him—

[Whoever beholds a Jew, beholds a witness of *the proper Deity* of Jehovah. The whole of his history attests, that the Lord Jehovah is Lord of lords, and God of gods. Who amongst the gods of the heathen could ever have done for their votaries what Jehovah has done for his chosen people? Who amongst them could have predicted every thing that should befall them during the space of many thousand years? Who could have preserved their worshippers, as Jehovah has preserved his, unmixed with the people amongst whom they are scattered, and as distinct from all other people

m Jer. xxiv. 5. and Mic. iv. 10. n Gen. xlix. 5—7.
o Numb. xviii. 2—24. p Rom. xi. 11. q Rom. xi. 25, 26.
r Rom. xi. 23, 24. s Isai. lv. 10.

as they were when embodied in the land of Canaan? Other nations, that have been subdued and carried captive, have been blended at last with the inhabitants of the countries where they sojourned; but the Jews still, as formerly, "dwell alone" in the midst of the earth, as it was foretold they should do[t]. Hence they, above all people, are witnesses of his godhead. And in this view God himself appeals to them, yea, and appeals to the whole universe on the authority of their testimony[u]. We may say then of the Jews in every place throughout the world, that they are *living epistles* from God to man, yea, are "epistles known and read of all men;" so that, whatever be the language of the country where they live, they do unwittingly, yet most intelligibly and unquestionably, proclaim, "The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God[x]."

They are witnesses also of all *his glorious perfections.* Who that sees a Jew can help seeing in him *the power and love,* which God manifested to his fathers in all the wonders of his grace; in their very origin from parents, who, according to the course of nature, could have had no children; in bringing them forth also out of the land of Egypt, and carrying them in safety to the promised land, and, in short, in all his other dealings with them to the present moment? Who can but see also *the purity and holiness* of Jehovah, as marked in the judgments inflicted on them? Is it not evident, that they are monuments of God's wrath; and that, though God may spare long, he will at last visit the offences of his rebellious people? Above all, Who that sees a Jew, does not see in him *the truth and faithfulness* of Jehovah? God promised, that for Abraham's sake he would not utterly cast them off: and, notwithstanding all their provocations, he still preserves them, in order to their future restoration to their own land, and their renewed enjoyment of his special favour. David, expatiating on all the glorious perfections of God, interrupts, as it were, his song by what appears, at first sight, to be an unsuitable and irrelevant observation; "He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel[y]." But this one observation speaks more than the whole psalm besides; for it embodies all that is more particularly expressed, and gives, what we may call, a graphical exhibition, or picture, of the Divine character; and in the fewest possible words shews us, what will be God's conduct towards his people to the end of time. Precisely thus the sight of a Jew gives us a compendious view of all the Divine perfections, and sets God himself, as it were, almost visibly before our eyes.]

[t] Numb. xxiii. 9. [u] Isai. xliii. 9—12. and xliv. 6—9.
[x] 1 Kings xviii. 39. [y] Ps. ciii. 7.

2. As instruments in his hands to dispense his blessings to the world—

[The dew that floats in the air, and the clouds that are carried over the surface of the globe, are unconscious of the end for which they are sent; but they perform the most invaluable offices for the sons of men. In like manner the Jews are scattered through the world, unconscious of any particular good which they are destined to perform: but God designs to use them as his instruments, and by them to communicate the blessings of salvation to the whole world. This is plainly intimated in our text, and expressly declared by the Prophet Isaiah; "They shall declare my glory among the Gentiles, and shall bring them for an offering unto the Lord out of all nations[z]." Then shall be fulfilled, in its utmost extent, that prophecy of Zechariah, "It shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the Heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel, so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing[a]."

For this office they are fitted, having their own Scriptures in their hands, and understanding the language of the different countries where they sojourn: so that nothing is wanting but to have the veil removed from their hearts, and they are ready at this moment, each in his place, to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. And with what energy will they proclaim the Gospel, the very first moment that their eyes are opened! How deeply will they themselves be affected; and how much therefore will they affect others! How will they, when they "look on Him whom they have pierced, mourn, and be in bitterness, even as one that is in bitterness for his first-born[b]!" And how ardently will they love, when they see how much has been forgiven them[c]! How will they emulate the example of their fathers, the Apostles, in their zeal to spread the knowledge of their Messiah! and, when they hear that their brethren in every country under heaven are engaged in the same blessed work, how will they vie with each other in their endeavours to serve the Lord! With what effect too will they deliver their message! They are known every where to be the bitterest enemies to Christianity. They will not therefore be regarded, (as Christian preachers would be,) as a people endeavouring to propagate their own religion, but as people renouncing their own religion from conviction, and calling upon all other people to follow their example. This will create an interest which no other people could hope to excite: and the simultaneous efforts of their brethren in every quarter of the globe, accompanied as they will be by the operations of the Holy Spirit on the hearts

[z] Isai. lxvi. 19, 20.
[a] Zech. viii. 13.
[b] Zech. xii. 10.
[c] Luke vii. 47.

of men, will bear down all before them, like another Pentecost, and produce, as it were, a resurrection from the dead[d]. "THEN shall the heathen fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth his glory[e]:" and then shall be literally fulfilled those words of the prophet, "A nation shall be born in a day[f]."

Now in all this they will be, not as the canals which were made by man, to water the earth[g], but as the dew or rain, "that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men." As the clouds are not formed by man's device, or sent by the command of men, but owe both their original and their operations to God alone; so the Jews have gone to the ends of the earth, unsolicited, unsent, unconscious of their destiny; and in due time will exert such a genial influence on the souls of men, that "the wilderness shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose[h]."]

From hence we may SEE,

1. In what light we should regard the Jews—

[It cannot be but that God, in dispersing the Jews over the face of the whole earth, has designed, that we should gather instruction from his dispensations towards them, and subserve in some secret way his purposes towards them.

Wherever we see a Jew, we should regard him as an object *from whom we are to derive good*, and *to whom we are to do good*. There is no creature under heaven from the sight of whom we may derive greater good than from the sight of a Jew. We have before said, that, whether intentionally or not, he proclaims to all, in the most convincing way, both the nature and the perfections of God. But there is one lesson in particular which we may learn from him, namely, the guilt and danger of neglecting the Lord Jesus Christ. It was for rejecting and crucifying their Messiah that God's wrath fell upon that whole nation; and that it has now abode upon them for the space of almost eighteen hundred years. They knew him not; for "had they known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory:" yet, notwithstanding their crime admits of this extenuation, it has been visited with a punishment unprecedented in the annals of the world. What guilt then must *we* contract, and of what punishment shall *we* be thought worthy, if we "crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame," by continuing in our sins! *We* profess to know him, and to honour him, and to expect salvation from him: our conduct therefore in pouring contempt

[d] Ezek. xxxvii. 10. with Rom. xi. 15.
[e] Ps. cii. 13—15. Mark the word "*So*."
[f] Isai. lxvi. 8. [g] Deut. xi. 10, 11. [h] Isai. xxxv. 1.

upon him is aggravated in a ten-fold degree. O! how shall *we* escape? If such things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? If such judgments have been executed on them, what must be the end of *us*, if *we* obey not the Gospel of Christ? — — — Brethren, I entreat you never to look upon a Jew, without recalling to your minds this salutary and important lesson — — —

Yet be not content with deriving good from him, but put forth all your powers to do good to him. He, notwithstanding all the chastisements that are upon him, is still "beloved of God for his fathers' sakes. And, if he is beloved of God, should he not be beloved of you? If God have designs of love towards him, should not you seek to be an instrument in God's hands to accomplish towards him those gracious purposes? Can you think of the obligations which you are under to the Jews of former days, and not labour to requite them in their posterity? Or can you reflect on the purposes which are to be accomplished by the Jews in the present and future generations, and not endeavour to fit them for the work to which they are destined? If you have any love to the *Gentile* world, you should bestow all possible care on the instruction of *the Jews*, since it is by the Jews chiefly that the Gentiles will be brought into the fold of Christ. O! delay no longer to make this improvement of the circumstances before your eyes; but awake to all the calls of duty, of gratitude, and of love — — —]

2. What ends we *ourselves* should endeavour to answer in our respective spheres—

[Doubtless we should not live for ourselves, any more than they: we should all be inquiring, What can I do for God? or, what can I do for man? This is truly Christian; or, rather I should say, it is god-like. God himself is represented as resembling the rain[i], and being like the dew[k]: and O! what glorious effects does his descent upon the soul produce[l]! Would to God that we might live for the same ends, and produce, according to our measure, the same effects! Let every one know, that all his faculties, and all his powers, are the Lord's. Let all regard their time, their property, their influence, as talents committed to them by their God, to be improved by Him who has entrusted them to their care. If it be thought by any, that their talent is only as a single drop or two upon the barren ground, and too small to be of any use, let them remember, that a cloud is but an assemblage of drops; and that, if we only contribute according to our power, we may hope soon to see this "wilderness of ours become as

[i] Hos. vi. 3. [k] Hos. xiv. 5. [l] Hos. xiv. 6.

Eden, and this desert as the garden of the Lōrd[m]." We look for such a season both among Jews and Gentiles: and may we not expect it also amongst ourselves? Yes surely: if we were all, ministers and people, to unite our efforts for this end, God would be with us; our labour should not be in vain[n]: children should be born to God in this our Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all[o];" her children should be numerous as the piles of grass[p];" yea, "the birth of her womb should be as the dew of the morning[q]." May God give us to see such a season of revival in the midst of us, and throughout our whole land, for Christ's sake!]

[m] Isai. li. 3. [n] Isai. lv. 11. [o] Gal. iv. 26, 27.
[p] Ps. lxxii. 16. [q] Ps. cx. 3.

MCCXII.

GOD'S CONTROVERSY WITH HIS PEOPLE.

Micah vi. 2, 3. *Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the Lord hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel. O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.*

WHENEVER we call on men to serve the Lord, they have some excuses to offer, either for the deferring of their duty, or for the neglecting of it altogether. They will complain that the things required of them are too strict; that, by reason of the weakness of human nature, they are impracticable; or, at all events, that, under their present circumstances, it were better to postpone the observance of them. In these excuses, they do not intend directly to reflect on God: but, in reality, they do cast the blame of their iniquities on him: on him, I say, as a Lawgiver, that he has required too much of us; or on him as a Creator, in that he has formed us incapable of obeying his will: or on him as a Governor, who, in his providence, has assigned us a lot which does not admit of our fulfilling his commands. On these grounds God has a controversy with us; and appeals to the whole creation that he is greatly wronged by us. The whole process of his appeal is here stated.

We have here,

I. The court summoned—

[Sometimes God makes his appeal both to heaven and earth: "Hear, O heavens! and give ear, O earth; for the Lord speaketh[a]." At other times he calls to the earth alone, as in the passage before us: "Hear ye, O mountains, and ye strong foundations of the earth!" But what amazing condescension is here, that he should summon his own creatures, to sit, as it were, in judgment upon him! He has a right to do whatsoever he shall please: and to presume to question any thing that he does, is the height of impiety. Has not "a potter power over the clay, to make of the same lump a vessel unto honour or unto dishonour," as he shall see fit? Or has the "clay any right to say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus[b]?" If the Maker choose to mar the vessel the very instant he has formed it, he has a perfect right to do so: nor would the vessel have any reason to complain. So has God exactly the same right over us[c]. He has not injured us, because he did not make us of the highest rank of created intelligences: nor would he have done us any injury, if he had made us devoid of reason, like the beasts? If, when he endued us with reason, he had again bereaved us of it; or if he were at this moment to deprive us of all the advantages we enjoy; we should have no ground of accusation against him: he has "a right to do what he will with his own[d];" nor is he called to "give an account to us of any of his matters[e]." But when we arraign his conduct, he is willing to have his cause tried before a tribunal of his own creatures, and to place sinners themselves upon the seat of judgment. His permission, yea, his entreaty, to them is, "Judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard[f]."]

Viewing now the court assembled, let us hear,

II. The pleadings opened—

[Here is evidently an accusation implied; namely, God has both injured us, and even "wearied" us, by his oppressive conduct: and to this the Almighty, standing as a defendant before the court, answers, by challenging inquiry; and, with conscious rectitude, he says, in the face of his accusers, "Testify against me." Declare wherein I have injured you: "declare it, that ye may be justified[g]."

Have I injured you by any undue strictness in my *laws?* Point out one that could have been dispensed with, or one that could have been lowered. They are all reducible to *love:* they

[a] Isai. i. 2. [b] Rom. ix. 20, 21. [c] Jer. xviii. 6.
[d] Matt. xx. 15. [e] Job xxxiii. 13. [f] Isai. v. 3.
[g] Isai. xliii. 26.

require nothing, but that you should "love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength; and, that you should "love your neighbour as yourselves." Wherein could any abatement have been made? Point out, in any one particular, wherein these requirements are too strict; or whether they be not, in every respect, "holy and just and good[h]."

'Have I injured you at all in my *providential dealings*? You may not be so elevated in rank and affluence as others: but the human race is a body; and the body cannot be all eye, or all ear: it must have hands and feet; and every member must have its proper office: every member, too, must seek its happiness in the good of the whole; and be as willing to contribute, in its place, to the welfare of the rest, as to have its own welfare furthered by the rest. But it may be, that you have been peculiarly afflicted, in mind, or body, or estate. Be it so: but have you been afflicted beyond your deserts? "Can a *living* man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins[i]?" Hadst thou had thy desert, thou wouldst long since have been "in hell, without so much as one drop of water to cool thy tongue:" and thy sufferings are infinitely short of that; yea, and are mitigated also by numberless consolations. And art thou aware of all the ends for which these afflictions are sent? What, if they have been sent to call thee to repentance, and ultimately to save thy soul? Thou shouldst, then, be rather adoring me for them with the liveliest gratitude, than be complaining of them as injuries wantonly inflicted on thee.

'Perhaps it is of the *sanctions of my law* that thou complainest: they disquiet thee; they appal thee; the dread of them makes thy life a burthen to thee. But what less than heaven wouldst thou appoint for the reward of my faithful servants? or what less than hell for the punishment of those who rebel against me? The object both of the reward and of the punishment is the same—to make thee flee from sin, the only true source of misery; and to make thee follow after righteousness, which is a certain prelude to glory. Both sanctions are intended equally for good: the one, to operate on thy hopes; the other, on thy fears: and both together to secure thine everlasting happiness. But it is of the threatening only that thou complainest: thou thinkest it hard that such a punishment as death, eternal death, should be annexed to one transgression of my law. But I have told thee, that "the *wages* of sin is death[k]." The *provisions* which were the payment of a Roman soldier were surely no very extravagant remuneration for his services: nor is eternal punishment an undue recompence for sin: the *penal* evil of damnation does not in the least exceed

[h] Rom. vii. 12. [i] Lam. iii. 39.
[k] Rom. vi. 23. *ὀψώνια*, the provisions given to the soldiery.

the *moral* evil of sin. Only let it be considered what sin is, and against whom it is committed, and its turpitude and malignity will be found perfectly to justify the judgments denounced against it.

If there be any other matter which mine accuser has to lay to my charge, let him bring it forth: I am prepared "to plead with him:" let him "testify against me;" and let the court, before which we stand, judge between us.']

The charges being thus, for want of an explicit statement on the part of the accuser, inquired into, let us attend to,

III. The replication made—

[As far as relates to a vindication of Jehovah, in reference to some particular points, an answer has been provided in the allegations themselves: and, as nothing more specific is stated as the ground of complaint against him, all further vindication of him is waved: and now the complaints on his side must be brought forward. This is done in another part of Scripture, where the very complaints which are preferred against God are retorted by him on his accusers. "Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel. Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt-offerings; neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices. I have not (as thou pretendest) caused THEE to serve with an offering, or wearied THEE with incense; but THOU hast made ME to serve with thy sins, and wearied ME with thine iniquities[l]." Thus, also, in the passage before us, God prefers his charge against his accusers: "I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what Balak, king of Moab, consulted; and what Balaam, the son of Beor, answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord[m]:" that is, 'Call to mind the mercies I have vouchsafed to you, from the time I brought you out of Egypt, till your entrance into Canaan; and then say, whether you have cause to complain of me as acting unkindly towards you; or whether I have not rather reason to complain of you, for your base ingratitude, and your multiplied transgressions against me?' To the same effect may God well reply against *us*. 'You complain of me as acting oppressively towards you. Look at the redemption which I have vouchsafed unto you; and not by power only, but by price, even the precious blood of my only dear Son;—a redemption, too, not from a mere temporal bondage, but from sin and Satan, death and hell. Look also at the counsels

[l] Isai. xliii. 22—24. [m] ver. 4, 5.

which your great adversary, the Devil, has given, and at the efforts which he has made for your destruction; and see how I have preserved you in the midst of all; "from Shittim," where the counsels were given, "to Gilgal," in the very land of your inheritance. Look at these things, and then say, whether thine accusations against me are just; and whether there be any terms too strong wherein to state thy baseness and impiety?']

To this reply nothing is added. The truths contained in it being undeniable, not a word is spoken by way of rejoinder: the righteousness of Jehovah is admitted; and, by the consent of all parties, we have,

IV. The cause adjudged—

[As in the case before us, so in all cases "will God be justified when he speaketh, and be clear when he is judged[n]." Brethren, you may now offer your complaints as you please; and, whilst God is not permitted to be heard, you may have it all your own way: 'You are quite as good as you need to be; and God is unreasonable in expecting you to be better. The denunciations of his wrath are a mere fallacy: they will never be executed: he would be unjust, if he were to proceed in accordance with them: you have nothing to fear: you act in a very rational and justifiable way, whilst you live to yourselves and to the world, rather than unto him: and whatever he may have said to the contrary, "you shall have peace, though you walk after the imagination of your own hearts[o]," and trample under foot his holy laws.' Of all this you may be confident, whilst God is not heard: but let him be heard, and even you yourselves shall be judges in your own cause. Let him be heard, and not one of you will have a syllable to offer in your own defence, and much less in crimination of your God. If the man that had not on the wedding-garment was silent (was muzzled, as the word means[p],) much more will you, if you will bring your matters to a trial here; and, at all events, when standing before the judgment-seat of Christ. Indeed I am persuaded, that the cause between you and your God is already adjudged, even in your own consciences: for, where is there one of you who will venture seriously to arraign the conduct of his God, and not acknowledge, that "God's ways are equal, and that it is his own ways only that are unequal[q]?"]

Conceiving then the cause terminated, I will offer a few words,

1. In a way of candid appeal—

[n] Rom. iii. 4.
[o] Deut. xxix. 19.
[p] Matt. xxii. 12.
[q] Ezek. xviii. 25, 29.

[Is there one amongst us that will still persist in "charging God foolishly[r]?" When God asks, "What iniquity have ye found in me, that ye have gone far from me[s]?" will any of you venture to accuse him as the cause of your miscarriages? When he further asks, "Have I been a wilderness to Israel? a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee[t]?" will any one amongst you dare to maintain the charge that is here supposed? No: you all know that the fault is altogether in yourselves. You know, that God is worthy to be loved and served; and that to consecrate yourselves to him is "a reasonable service[u]." You know well, that you can neither substantiate your own accusations against him, nor rebut his accusations against you. I will, therefore, proceed to address you,]

2. In a way of salutary advice—

[Offer not excuses *now*, which will not avail you in the day of judgment. That time is quickly coming: and then God *will* be heard, whether ye desire it or not. You will not then have to make your cause good against a man like yourselves, but against the Omniscient and Almighty God. Cease, then, to determine from your own statements alone. Let God be heard speaking to you in his word. Try your case fairly, according to that book which you have in your hands, and by which you will be judged in the last day[x]. Be candid in weighing both sides of the question, and in giving "judgment according to truth." Then you will surely acknowledge, that by the law you are justly condemned; and that "God is true, though every man be made a liar[y]." But need you, on that account, despair? No. "If you have sinned, you have an ADVOCATE with the Father, even our Lord Jesus Christ; who is also the propitiation for your sins[z]." Put your cause into his hands; and though condemned by the law, you shall be acquitted by the Gospel: for through this Saviour you shall have all your past "iniquities blotted out," and a righteousness given to you that shall be perfectly commensurate with all the demands of law and justice[a]. Then, in the presence of the whole assembled universe, shall you stand approved; and "God himself be just in justifying" and rewarding you[b]. To that day, so terrible to the impenitent and unbelieving sinner, you may look forward with confidence and joy: for though guilty in yourselves, you shall be "accepted in the Beloved[c];" and, though in yourselves deserving of the heaviest condemnation, you shall receive "a crown of righteousness that fadeth not away."]

[r] Job i. 22. [s] Jer. ii. 5. [t] Jer. ii. 31. [u] Rom. xii. 1.
[x] John xii. 48. [y] Rom. iii. 4. [z] 1 John ii. 1.
[a] Rom. iii. 21, 22. [b] Rom. iii. 25, 26. [c] Eph. i. 6.

MCCXIII.

THE SUM OF PRACTICAL RELIGION.

Micah vi. 6—8. *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

IN human judicatories, offenders are arraigned, witnesses examined, sentence passed, in order to the punishment of crimes. But God has raised a tribunal, to which he summons his offending creatures, in order that when their mouths are stopped, and they plead guilty before him, he may pardon their iniquity, and restore them to his favour.

We have, in the chapter before us, God bringing a charge against his people, and calling upon the hills and mountains to judge between them. He first challenges them to allege any thing against him that can in any respect excuse their disobedience, or extenuate their guilt: and, when they are unable to do it, he proceeds to set forth his conduct towards them as the greatest *aggravation* of their guilt. He instances this in two particulars; in his exertions for them when he brought them out of Egypt into the wilderness; and in his kindness to them just when he was bringing them out of the wilderness into Canaan; when he overruled the evil purposes of Balaam, and constrained him to bless those whom he had been hired to curse. This having produced on some the desired effect, a repenting Jew is introduced, anxiously inquiring how he may be reconciled to his Maker, and serve him acceptably in future? and God, instead of inexorably consigning him over to the punishment he has deserved, prescribes to him the way wherein he must walk, and wherein he shall obtain the favour he desires.

Some have understood these words as proceeding

from Balak and Balaam: but Balak had no such wish to please God: on the contrary, he wanted nothing so much as to destroy his people: and Balaam expressed no such solicitude to lead Balak to a holy life; but, on the contrary, taught him how to ruin the souls of God's people, by tempting them to an illicit intercourse with the daughters of Midian.

The view before given seems to be the more just: and agreeably to it we shall consider,

I. The inquiries of an awakened soul—

A person convinced of his lost estate, cannot but desire to obtain peace with God—

[The most abandoned sinner, previous to the illumination of his mind by the Spirit of God, will be regardless of his state, and unconcerned about the account which he must give of himself at the judgment-seat of Christ. But, when once his eyes are opened to see his guilt and danger, he can no longer be indifferent about his eternal interests: he feels that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of God; and, however hardened he may have before been, he will cry out with agony of mind, "What shall I do to be saved[a]?" — — —]

But the ways he devises for his restoration to the Divine favour are invariably erroneous and absurd—

[The Jew, like all others of his own nation, first proposes a compliance with the ordinances of the ceremonial law; then, if that will not suffice, he will multiply them, so as to offer, if possible, thousands of rams instead of one, and "ten thousands of rivers of oil," instead of about one or three pints, prescribed for the meat-offerings[b]. If this be not of sufficient value, he is ready to offer even his first-born son; determined, that neither the heathen deities shall be more honoured than Jehovah[c], nor Abraham himself perform a more self-denying act of obedience than he[d].

Such are the means whereby men still hope to recommend themselves to the Divine favour. They will multiply rites and observances far beyond what God himself has required: they will very readily submit to penances, and mortifications, and all manner of painful discipline: but to part with their bosom lusts, and to obtain a thorough renovation of their souls, they have

[a] Acts ii. 37. and xvi. 30. [b] Lev. xiv. 10, 21. Exod. xxix. 40.
[c] 2 Kings xvii. 16, 17.
[d] This idea will account for such a proposal in the mouth of a *penitent* Jew. Gen. xxii. 2, 16.

no wish: they rest in *external* services; and substitute them in the place of an inward change of heart, and a thorough conversion unto God. And though we are not shocked at such views, as we are at the proposals of the Jew, yet are they, in fact, as derogatory from the Divine honour, and as unsuitable to the end proposed, as the grosser conceptions that are expressed in the text. The inquiries may be considered as twofold; first, How shall I obtain reconciliation with God? and next, How shall I walk so as to please him? Now is there any thing in external ceremonies, of whatever kind they be, calculated to answer either of these ends? Can superficial penitence, and ritual observances, worthless as they are in themselves, and still further debased by a presumptuous affiance in them, stand in the place of deep contrition, humble faith, and universal obedience? ———]

Their futility will appear from,

II. The answer of God to them—

God "has shewn to every person what is good"—

[It is true that God did require offerings and sacrifices under the law: but he did not require them *in lieu of* obedience[e]; nor *in preference to* obedience[f]; nor at all *for their own sake*[g]: when used in any of these views, they were even hateful in his sight[h]: and on account of the abuse made of them, he calls them "statutes which were *not good*[i]." He had declared by Moses, that the thing which *alone* he required, and to which all the ceremonial ordinances were subservient, was, the obedience of a humble and devoted heart[k].]

And the things specified in the text have an exclusive title to that character—

[Our blessed Lord, apparently referring to these words, throws the true light upon them[l]. He shews that the Pharisees substituted *ceremonial* in the place of *moral* obedience: and that, while punctilious and exact in outward observances, they neglected those things which God principally required, "*judgment*, *mercy*, and *faith*." *These are the very things mentioned in the text:* for the "walking humbly with God" evidently implies a *humble and believing dependence* on him.

Behold, then, what the Lord our God requires of us. First, we must "do justly." It is in vain to think that we can ever please God, if we be not honest and just in all our dealings.

[e] Isai. i. 10—17. [f] 1 Sam. xv. 22.
[g] Ps. l. 4—14. (Here is the same controversy as in the text,) and Ps. li. 16, 17.
[h] Amos v. 21—24. Isai. lxvi. 3. [i] Ezek. xx. 25.
[k] Deut. x. 12, 13. [l] Matt. xx i. 23.

Truth in our words, and integrity in our actions, are so essential, that a man may as well call himself an angel as a Christian, if he be allowedly defective in either. An adulterous Christian, or a murderous Christian, is not a greater contradiction in terms, than a lying Christian or a dishonest Christian. Hear this, ye professors of religion; and examine whether in your several trades and callings a dependence can be placed upon your word; and whether you are careful to "keep a conscience void of offence towards God and man:" and let it never be said of you, "They will talk about religion indeed, but they will lie and cheat as much, and perhaps more, than other people: a man of the world is more to be depended on than they." O, if you give occasion for such a scandal as this, cast off your religion at once; or else get it purified from these base and damning defilements.

Next, We must "love mercy." Justice admits of no degrees: we must be just or unjust; and therefore we are told to *do* justice. But mercy has gradations that are of an unlimited extent: and therefore we must *love* mercy; or we shall never attain such a measure of it as will adorn our holy profession. Mercy includes every act and office of love, at least as far as relates to the distressed, the indigent, or the offending. And this disposition must be cultivated in all its branches with assiduity and delight. This constitutes the image of God upon the soul: and therefore we are exhorted to "be merciful, even as our Father which is in heaven is merciful." Indeed if we shut up our bowels of compassion from a needy brother, all pretences to the love of God are vain and hypocritical[m]. Hear then again, ye who profess godliness; and bring your experience to the touchstone. See whether you are filled with tenderness and compassion towards the bodies and souls of your fellow-creatures? See whether you not only *do* a kindness when called upon, but whether you "*devise* liberal things," and deny yourselves with a view to the more extensive exercise of benevolence? Look at a professor that is hard-hearted, griping, covetous, vindictive; what a monster does he appear! How unlike to that adorable Jesus who laid down even his own life for his very enemies! Are there such people in the world? O "tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon."

Finally, We must "walk humbly with God." We have already shewn the construction which our Lord puts upon these words, and that without any force, they include the most essential doctrines of the Gospel. Indeed this requisition comprehends all our duty to God, as the two foregoing do our duty to our neighbour. Now our duty to God is, to "*walk with*" him, as Enoch and Noah did; and to walk "*humbly*" with him in a believing

[m] 1 John iii. 17.

dependence on his grace to help us, and his mercy to pardon our defects. Without this, our attention to relative duties will be of no avail. This chiefly distinguishes the true Christian from a proud self-righteous Pharisee. There certainly are people of the world, who are eminent for their honour and integrity, their benevolence and liberality: but when we inquire into their secret walk with God, they are found miserably defective; and especially with respect to the humiliation of their souls, and their exercise of faith on Christ. It is in the relative duties, that the hypocrite fails; and in the duties to God, that the defects of the moralist appear. But both of them, though in different ways, are departed from God, and in the high road to destruction. Examine yourselves, therefore, ye decent and externally blameless characters; search and try how it is with you in your secret chambers; see whether you be not habitually and allowedly wanting in respect of brokenness of heart, and a steadfast cleaving unto Christ? And remember, that, while you cherish such pride and self-sufficiency in your hearts, you are as far from heaven as the most abandoned profligate; for "God will resist the proud, and give grace only to the humble[n]."]

We shall conclude with a word of CAUTION,

1. To the careless and secure—

[We hear this passage quoted by many, with a view to subvert all the fundamental doctrines of Christianity: 'Tell us not,' say they, 'about regeneration, or faith in Christ: this is my religion; "Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God."' But can it be supposed that the prophet intended to contradict every other part of the inspired writings, and to tell us that morality was *all*, and Christ *nothing?* It has already appeared, from the words of Christ himself (wherein he seems to have referred to the very passage before us,) that "*faith* is one of the weightier matters of the law;" and that an acknowledging of ourselves to be lost sinners, and a believing in Christ for salvation, are absolutely essential to a humble walk with God. Let not then this mistaken confidence deceive you. Rest not in such an interpretation of the text as directly opposes the whole tenour of Scripture. But, if you will persist in this perversion of God's word, inquire, Whether you have perfectly, and at all times, complied with these directions? and know, that if you have not, you shall be judged out of your own mouth, and be condemned by your own law.]

2. To those who are concerned about their souls—

[As you must shortly appear before God, it becomes you to inquire, "wherewith you shall come before him with

[n] Jam. iv. 6.

acceptance?" and in answering this important question, there are two things against which you must guard with equal care, namely, a self-righteous dependence on your own works, and a presumptuous hope of salvation, while you live in any known sin, whether of commission or of omission. Nothing but Christ's obedience unto death can form a proper ground of your hope: yet nothing but a life wholly devoted to God can evidence your interest in Christ. If your faith be productive of good works, it is lively, and saving; if not, it is dead, worthless, delusive. Seek then a humble faith in order to a holy life. If ye will offer sacrifices, let them be "those of a broken and contrite spirit:" if ye will "give a first-born for your transgression," let it be God's First-born, yea, his only-begotten Son. But never forget that your duties to God and to your neighbour are of equal and immutable obligation; and that according to your performance or neglect of them you will be acquitted or condemned at the last day.]

MCCXIV.

PRAYER OUR GREAT PRESERVATIVE.

Micah vii. 7. *I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.*

IF we mark the discriminating character of the Lord's people, we shall find, that from the beginning of the world it has consisted in this: The ungodly "call not upon God[a];" but the "godly are a people near unto him[b]." Abraham, the father of the faithful, built an altar to God in every place where he abode. Moses, David, and all the saints, familiarized themselves with God, if I may so speak; and carried their every want to him, as their Father and their Friend. The Prophet Micah, in his own conduct, well illustrates this. The awful state of the world around him he declares in very pathetic terms; crying, in the view of it, "Woe is me[c]!" And having represented this with the fidelity that became him, he declares, with no common measure of complacency, the manner in which he proposed to occupy his mind: "*Therefore* I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will

[a] Ps. xiv. 4. [b] Ps. cxlviii. 14. [c] ver. 1.

hear me:" that is, the more others depart from God, the more will I seek his face.

From these words I shall take occasion to shew,

I. In what circumstances the godly are placed—

St. John expresses in one word all that can be said: "We are of God; and the whole world lieth in wickedness[d]." To the same effect, the prophet here speaks of the godly, as living in a world,

1. Where iniquity abounds—

[So universal was the reign of sin in Judæa, that scarcely was a person of real piety to be found. And what is the state of things at this day? Is there not occasion for the same lamentation now? If you go into any place where the Gospel is not preached with power, and wish to refresh your spirit with the society of those who are truly alive to God, will you not find yourselves like a person in a vineyard after that the fruits have been gathered, where he can scarcely obtain a cluster to satisfy his longing appetite? There is nothing but a small remnant to which he can get access; and *that*, alas! of stinted growth, and destitute of the luscious flavour with which he had hoped to be regaled. If we look at Christians of more favoured times, it seems as if "the good man had now almost perished from the earth;" so few are there who resemble the saints and martyrs of former ages[e].

In the administration of the laws, I confess, we widely differ from the Jews of old. The rich cannot oppress the poor; nor could they, amongst us, find judges corrupt enough to pervert the laws for gain. But in every other species of iniquity all classes of the community will uphold each other; insomuch, that, whether we notice the more refined sensuality of the rich, or the more degrading habits of the vulgar, all have their advocates; all are declared innocent, or treated with indulgent connivance: and "*so they wrap it up.*" Nothing is suffered to disgust us by its own proper character; but false names are imposed on every thing, to hide from us its deformity, and to give it a title to our regard. Not even palpable wickedness goes unexcused: licentiousness is made to wear the garb of piety; and worldliness of prudence. The rich and the poor, the old and the young, all shall have their appropriate gratifications; and all agree to hold each other innocent. "*So* (I say again) *they wrap it up*[f]."

And if we take persons of a better character, we shall find, that, however they may wear a good appearance at a distance, as a hedge of thorns or briers may do, the more closely you

[d] 1 John v. 19. [e] ver. 1, 2. [f] ver. 3.

come in contact with them, the more you are pained by them; "the best of them proving as a brier, and the most upright of them as a thorn-hedge[g]:" insomuch that he is really the happiest man who has least dependence on, or, except in a very distant way, communication with, his fellow-man. Such was the state of society in that day: and such, alas! it is at this very hour.]

2. Where piety is discountenanced—

[At different periods of the Jewish history, it was at the peril of a man's life to espouse the cause of the God of Israel; so entirely had idolatry superseded the worship of the one true God. At those seasons it was dangerous for a man to "trust his friend, or even the wife of his bosom," if he was inclined to serve the living God. "A son would rise up against his father, and a daughter against her mother; and a man's greatest enemies were often those of his own household."

It is remarkable, that our blessed Lord has cited this very passage, not only as applicable to, but as particularly *characteristic of, the dispensation which he came to introduce*: "The brother," says he, "shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes shall be those of his own household[h]." Such times have been in the very country in which we live: and such they would be again, if popery were to regain its ascendant. Not that we need go back to times of popery for acts of intolerance in reference to religion; for the same hatred of piety exists at the present day: and it not unfrequently happens, that persons are obliged to conceal from their parents, or from those under whom they live, their attachment to the Gospel of Christ; knowing that a disclosure of it would infallibly expose them to hatred and contempt.]

Such, then, are the circumstances under which the godly are placed: and, as they are confessedly arduous, it will be proper for me to shew,

II. To what measures they should have recourse—

Here the prophet's example will point out to us the precise line which every Christian should pursue. Mark,

1. The determination of his mind—

[Difficult as it was to maintain his integrity in such a time as that, he determined to spread his case before the

[g] ver. 4. [h] ver. 5, 6. with Matt. x. 21, 35, 36.

Lord, and to look to him for "strength according to his day." And, if the Lord should not instantly impart all the succour he could desire, he would "wait for the Lord," and tarry his leisure, and expect from him all that an indulgent Father can bestow.

Here is the line of conduct which all the godly must pursue. If they attempt to contend with these difficulties in their own strength, they must fail. The direction which God himself gives them is this: "Call upon me in the time of trouble; so I will hear thee; and thou shalt praise me[i]." What then should we do, but adopt, every one of us for ourselves, the determination of David, saying, "As for me, I will call upon God, and the Lord shall hear me. Evening, and morning, and at noon-day, will I pray, and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice[k]." Indeed David proposes himself to us as an example in this particular: "My soul," says he, "wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. *Trust in him at all times, ye people:* pour out *your* hearts before him: God is a refuge for us[l]." In the New Testament, the directions to this effect are numberless: so that we may conclude, that humble, fervent, and persevering prayer is the true remedy for every saint, against all the evils which he either feels or fears.]

2. The conviction of his soul—

[There is something very imposing in that declaration of the prophet, "My God will hear me." He speaks not of God's assistance as a matter of *hope*, but as what *he could not fail of obtaining:* so great, so irresistible, was the efficacy of believing prayer. And what says the Apostle John on this subject? "This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us. And, if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him[m]." Nor is this a rash assertion: it is confirmed by actual experience. "I sought the Lord," says David; "and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. Yes: this poor man cried; and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles[n]." I hesitate not, then, to say to all of you, that this measure shall be crowned with the desired success. "Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass: he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and

[i] Ps. l. 15. [k] Ps. lv. 16, 17. [l] Ps. lxii. 5—8.
[m] 1 John v. 14, 15. [n] Ps. xxxiv. 4, 6. See also Ps. xl. 1—3.

thy judgment as the noon-day[o]." God may not indeed interpose precisely at the time, or in the manner, that our impatient minds may dictate: but, "though he tarry long, he will come at last[p];" and in the event will surely shew himself "mighty to save." "Wait, then, on the Lord, every one of you; and be of good courage; and he will strengthen your heart: wait, I say, upon the Lord[q]."]

As a further IMPROVEMENT of this subject, learn,

1. The benefit of trials—

[Trials of every kind are painful to flesh and blood: but they are, in reality, blessings in disguise. See the effect of them on the prophet's mind. Were they unserviceable to *him?* Neither shall they be unprofitable to us. I will suppose that they are heavy: yet, if they bring *you* to *God*, and *God* to *you*, tell me, Have you any cause to complain?——God deals with you as a skilful person does with a wheel and engine that is under his controul. He lets down upon it so much water as will accomplish his own purposes; but whatsoever is superfluous, and would injure its movements, he turns off in another course. So does God deal with his people; permitting the wrath of man to prevail against them so far as shall be conducive to their best interests, but restraining the remainder, which would counteract his views[r]. He has promised, that you shall not be "tempted above that ye are able; but shall, with the temptation, have also a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it[s]." And, "if you lose father or mother, houses or lands, for his sake, you shall receive an hundred-fold more *in this life*, to supply their loss; and in the world to come, eternal life[t]." To exchange the creature for the Creator, need never be to any a subject of regret.]

2. The blessedness of those who have the Lord for their God—

[The world know not where to go in a time of trouble: but the righteous have God himself for their refuge. Perhaps a person viewing the ungodly in their prosperity, and the poor persecuted prophet in his troubles, would be ready to envy the wicked, and to regard the persecuted saint as an object of compassion. But who that turns aside the veil, and beholds the saint in communion with his God, will be of that opinion? Who that should see God attending to the supplications of his afflicted child, and giving his angels charge concerning him, and sending down the Comforter into his soul, and preparing for him a weight of glory proportioned to his trials, would not

[o] Ps. xxxvii. 4—6. [p] Hab. ii. 3. [q] Ps. xxvii. 14.
[r] Ps. lxxvi. 10. [s] 1 Cor. x. 13. [t] Mark x. 29, 30.

rather congratulate the saint, and say, "Blessed is the man whose God is the Lord!" Seek him, then, as your reconciled God in Christ Jesus; and then all things are yours: "whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's [u]."]

[u] 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

MCCXV.

ADDRESS OF THE JEWISH CHURCH TO HER ENEMIES.

Micah vii. 8—10. *Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness. Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the Lord thy God? Mine eyes shall behold her: now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets.*

IT is a matter of general complaint, that the minor prophets are difficult to be understood: and this is true to a considerable extent: but we apprehend that it arises very much from our not sufficiently bearing in mind the subjects on which they wrote. We do right in looking for many things applicable to the Messiah, and to his Church and kingdom: but we err in not having more respect to the Jewish Church as it existed in the times when the prophets wrote; and as it shall exist at a period yet future, when that people shall be gathered in from their present dispersion, and be restored to their own land. We complain that we cannot unlock those Scriptures; but we neglect to take the key that alone will fit the wards. If we kept the Jews more in view, many of the difficulties would vanish; and innumerable beauties would be seen in passages that are now passed over as devoid of interest. We believe verily that the day is fast approaching, in which "God will shew them marvellous things," not a whit inferior to those

which he wrought for them when he brought them out of Egypt[a]: and it is their privilege to be looking forward to that period, with earnest and assured expectation of the blessings prepared for them. In the prospect of that period, the Jewish Church is represented by the prophet as consoling herself with the reflections which we have just read: in our further consideration of which we shall notice,

I. The address of the Jewish Church to her enemies—

Bitter in the extreme was the enmity of many surrounding nations against the Jews; far more bitter, we apprehend, than in any of them against each other. The favours conferred upon the Jewish nation by Jehovah, and the entire separation of the Jews from all other people by the ordinances of their religion, tended to call forth this enmity, and to keep it, as it were, in continual exercise. In like manner at the present day, when they have ceased to exist in their national character, and are blended with the different nations where they dwell, they are still hated, and despised above any other people upon earth. This, no doubt, is a judgment inflicted on them for their murder of their Messiah: and under their present sufferings they may well adopt the language of our text. It is the language,

1. Of deep submission—

[Great were the iniquities of the Jewish people at the time that the prophet wrote[b]; and heavy were the judgments which God inflicted on them in Babylon on account of them. But far greater is the guilt which they have contracted in rejecting their Messiah, and in crucifying the Lord of glory. For this they have been punished now these seventeen hundred years, and been made a bye-word and a hissing amongst all nations. Under these circumstances, what will be the reflections of a pious Jew? He will say, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." Indeed, this, we apprehend, is, in words at least, the language of the Jews at this time generally, or perhaps universally, through the world. It is on account of their sinfulness that they suppose God has not yet sent them the Messiah that was

[a] ver. 15. [b] ver. 2—6.

promised to them so long ago, and who, but for their wickedness, would have come to them at the appointed time: and they submit to the dispensations of God towards them from this very consideration, that they are not yet in a state fit to receive his promised mercies. This is a favourable circumstance for their future conversion: and when this submission to the Divine chastisements shall be accompanied with suitable penitence and contrition, their deliverance will be speedily vouchsafed.]

2. Of patient hope—

[As the Edomites, the Ammonites, and others, formerly exulted over Jerusalem, and rejoiced in her calamities, so at this time her enemies regarded her as forsaken by her God, and doomed to interminable degradation. But the believing Jew knows that God has not forgotten to be gracious; nor so far shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure, as to be merciful to him no more. He knows, that even in the midst of all his troubles God is able to support and comfort him, and that in due season he will interpose to rescue his people from their oppressors. Hence he "encourages himself in the Lord his God;" and comforts himself with the hope, that, though his night of sorrow may be long and dreary, there is a morning of joy awaiting him, when he shall "put off his sackcloth, and gird him with gladness."]

3. Of joyful assurance—

[The Scriptures everywhere denounce the heaviest judgments on those who oppress the Jews, and who shall labour to obstruct their future restoration. Their enemies will be as incapable of offering to them any effectual opposition, as Pharaoh and his armies were of preventing the departure of their forefathers from the land of Egypt. Their enemies will indeed gather together for the purpose of preventing their re-establishment in their own land: but they will be only as "sheaves" collected into the barn "to be threshed out by men, or trodden out" by oxen[c]. Before them their adversaries will be only as sheep before the devouring lion[d]. An universal terror will seize on them, such as filled the Canaanites when Joshua invaded and subdued their land[e]. Though they appear weak and contemptible as a worm, yet says God to them, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob; thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and make the hills as chaff; thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel[f]." To

[c] Mic. iv. 11—13.
[d] Mic. v. 8, 9.
[e] ver. 16, 17.
[f] Isai. xli. 14—16.

this period the believing Jew may look forward with confidence, assured that his present degradation shall be more than equalled by his future exaltation[g].]

But if we would improve this passage aright, we must consider,

II. The lessons it teaches to the Church of God in all ages—

The Church of Christ bears a strong resemblance to the state of the Jewish Church: it is hated and despised by an ungodly world: it is "a speckled bird; and all the birds round about are against her[h]." All who truly follow the Lord Jesus, and "walk as he walked," are "for signs and for wonders;" "nor can they live godly in Christ Jesus without suffering persecution."

But from the address of the Jewish Church they may

LEARN,

1. Submission to God's chastisements—

[From whatever quarter our trials may come, we should view the hand of God in them, and receive them as from him. We must always however distinguish between the inflictions of judicial wrath, and the chastisements of paternal love. As a Father, God chastens his most beloved children: and they can never err in saying, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." When Shimei cursed David, and Abishai desired permission to go and inflict on him the punishment he deserved, David would not suffer it, but with holy meekness submitted to the indignity, saying, "Let him alone; and let him curse: for the Lord hath bidden him[i]." It is surprising what composure this will bring into the mind amidst all the sufferings that can be inflicted on us. The consideration that they are sent by a wise and gracious God will reconcile us to them: but the thought of their being chastisements for sin, and means of purifying us from our corruption, will make us to "kiss the rod, and to say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." Let us only see that he is "chastening us for our profit, and however we may, under the pressure of our anguish, deprecate the dispensation, we shall from our inmost souls refer ourselves to his all-wise disposal, saying, "Not my will, but thine be done."]

2. Hope in his mercy—

[g] Isai. xlix. 24—26. and li. 21—23. [h] Jer. xii. 9.
[i] 2 Sam. xvi. 7—11.

[However severely God may see fit to chastise his people, there are two things which he gives them for their support; namely, a sense of his presence with them in their affliction, and the prospect of a happy issue out of it. They may, by reason of his dispensations, "sit for a time in darkness: but he will be a light unto them." They may, like St. Paul, be "troubled on every side; yet shall not be so distressed" as not to know what to do: they may be "perplexed; but shall not be in despair:" they may be "persecuted; but shall not be forsaken; and cast down, but shall not be destroyed[k]." He will "hide them, as it were, in his pavilion," or rather, as it is yet more beautifully expressed, "in the secret of his presence;" so that, though in the fire, they shall not be burned; and though in the lion's den, they shall not be hurt. Besides, when his dispensations have produced their desired effect, he, as a refiner watching over the vessels which he has put into the furnace, will take them out, and shew that they have been purified by means of it, and have lost nothing in it but their dross. 'Under our afflictions the ungodly are ready to triumph over us, and to conclude, that God is visiting us in anger for some iniquity, which, though hidden from men, has been seen by him: but he will appear for us in due season, and "bring forth our righteousness as the noon-day." Thus he did for David, under all his persecutions from Saul: thus he did also for his only dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, when he raised him from the dead: and thus he will do for all who put their trust in him. If we only "humble ourselves under his mighty hand, he will in due season lift us up, to our greater comfort, and to the everlasting honour of his own name.]

3. An assured expectation of final victory—

[Even in this life the enemies of his people are often put to shame, and constrained, as Job's friends were, to confess that they had erred in judgment respecting us. But O! what shame will seize them in the last day, when they shall see those whom they once despised and persecuted for their religion, openly acknowledged by their Lord as good and faithful servants; and they themselves be bidden to depart from his presence, and to take their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone! Then will "their day come;" and "the righteous shall see it: they shall sit as assessors with Christ in judgment, and shall approve of the sentence denounced against them. Such is the honour reserved for all the saints. "No weapon that is formed against them shall prosper; but every tongue that rises against them in judgment shall they condemn[l]." Sooner or later will justice be administered both to the friends and enemies of Jehovah; and that which is spoken by the prophet, be

[k] 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9.

[l] Isai. liv. 17.

verified in all its extent; "Behold, my servants shall eat; but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink; but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice; but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart; but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit[m]." Well may this prospect compose the minds of all God's afflicted people; and well may they be contented to go on their way weeping for a season, when they have a prospect of such a harvest, and an assurance of bringing with them such sheaves into the garner of their God.]

[m] Isai. lxv. 13, 14.

MCCXVI.

THE MERCY OF GOD.

Micah vii. 18—20. *Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.*

TO acquire the knowledge of God we must study his *word;* but we should mark also particularly his *works:* *e.g.* of creation, providence, and redemption. The passage, if taken separately, is grand; but with the context it is infinitely more sublime. The prophet has been contemplating the glory of the latter day, and it is with an especial reference to *that* that he breaks forth into these strains of grateful adoration.

Let us consider the words,

I. As uttered by the prophet in the prospect of the mercies that await his people in the latter day—

To enter fully into his views we must mark,

1. The dispensation which he has been contemplating—

[He opens the subject of the Millennium, first, in a large and general view, (ch. iv. 1—4.) He next shews the blessings of which the Jews shall partake in that day, (ver. 6, 7.) This, though accomplished in part at Babylon, (ver. 10.) is certainly posterior to Christ's advent, as the events (ver. 11—13.) shew. It is to take place under the Christian dispensation, (ch. v. 2—4.)

At this time the Jews are destined to act an important part, as God's instruments for the conversion of the Gentiles, (ver. 7.) and for the subjugation of all opposers, (ver. 8, 9.) In the chapter before us, he represents, in moving terms, the Jews anticipating this period, (vii. 8—10.) Then, confirming this expectation as certainly to be fulfilled, (ver. 11—13.) he prays for it, (ver. 14.) To this prayer God returns a gracious answer, to the utter surprise and dismay of surrounding nations, (ver. 15—17.)]

2. The soliloquy in the contemplation of it—

[Picture to yourselves the prophet, or any other Jew, contemplating this event. He breaks forth into a devout ascription of praise, in a general view of the dispensation, (ver. 18.): in a view of the particular mercies that shall be vouchsafed under it, (ver. 19.) — — — in a view of the great result, (ver. 20.) — — —]

Now we may with propriety consider the words,

II. As uttered by a Christian in the review of his own daily experience—

Let us contemplate God in,

1. His mercy and loving-kindness—

[His people are a remnant, (Rom. xi. 5.) Towards them he exercises most stupendous mercy, "passing by their transgression," "not retaining his anger," "pardoning their iniquities." He does so, purely because he "delights in mercy." To him judgment is a "strange act." He "waits to be gracious." He deliberates long before he casts off any, (Hos. vi. 4.) He never casts off but with reluctance. (Luke xix. 41.) If he prevail over any, he rejoices. (Luke xv.) How can we but exclaim, "Who, &c."]

2. His power and grace—

[He continues with astonishing forbearance. They are prone to backslide from him; but he leaves them not to eat the fruit of their misconduct. He "turns again," after hiding himself for a season, (Isai. liv. 7. and lvii. 16—18.) He restores to them the light of his countenance; nor does he pardon only, but "subdues their sins." His very hidings are with a view to embitter sin. He renews their strength when faint, (Isai. xl. 29—31.); and gradually "perfects the work he has begun." To complete all, he "casts their sins into the sea;" "*all*," without exception, into "the depths" of the sea. Who can survey all this, and not exclaim, "Who, &c."]

3. His truth and faithfulness—

[His promises, as made to Abraham and his seed, are

"mercy." As confirmed to Jacob and his Church, they are "truth." They have been established with the sanction of an "oath." And they will be fulfilled "to all the seed." How will every glorified soul admire the Divine procedure in that day! ——— What energy will the sight of sins forgiven, of backslidings healed, of glory bestowed, give to the exclamation in the text!]

APPLICATION—

Let *the careless*, consider against whom their sins are committed—

[Will they never pause, and exclaim, as Joseph? (Gen. xxxix. 9.]

Let *the penitent* reflect on the description given of God in the Scriptures—

[Nor let them judge of him by the dictates of sense. Isai. lv. 8, 9.]

Let *the sincere believer* apply to himself that congratulation (Deut. xxxiii. 29.)

[Let him get a becoming frame of mind; and let him adopt that triumphant boast. Isai. xxv. 9.]

Let *all* contemplate the joy that will be felt when Jews and Gentiles all join in this ascription of praise.

MCCXVII.

GOD'S MERCY, AS RESERVED FOR THE JEWS.

Micah vii. 18—20. *Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again; he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities: and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old*[a].

TO acquire the knowledge of God, we must examine what is spoken of him in *his word*; and more especially the delineation which he has given of his own character, when, by an audible voice, he revealed

[a] This Discourse is added to the foregoing, not only in order to elucidate it more fully, but especially in order to mark the connexion of the text with the future restoration and conversion of the Jews.

himself to Moses[b]. Yet we must by no means overlook his character, as it is embodied in *his works.* In the works of creation, of providence, and of redemption, all his perfections are displayed; and in such a way as to make the deepest possible impression on our minds. The passage which we have just read, if taken apart from the context, exhibits Jehovah in the most glorious colours: but if we take it in connexion with the whole preceding prophecy, from which it results, it will present us with a view of the Deity surprisingly grand. It is evident that the prophet has been meditating on the Divine character as displayed in some stupendous acts of mercy, either already exercised, or designed to be exercised at some future period. Let us, then consider,

I. The dispensation which is here contemplated—

The Prophet Micah enters very fully into the subject of the Millennium, and opens it as circumstantially, especially as far as the Jewish nation are interested in it, as any prophet whatever. Let us hear what he says respecting it,

1. In the former part of his prophecy—

[In the fourth chapter he opens the subject nearly in the same terms with the Prophet Isaiah: "In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob: and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not rise against nation; neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts hath spoken it[c]."

He then proceeds to shew the blessings of which the Jews shall partake in that day: "In that day, saith the Lord, will I assemble her that halteth; and I will gather her that is

[b] Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. [c] Mic. iv. 1—4. with Isai. ii. 2—4.

driven out, and her that I have afflicted: and I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever[d]." *This*, he adds, shall be accomplished, *in part*, by their deliverance from Babylon[e]: but yet, in immediate connexion with that, he foretells events which were not accomplished at that period, nor shall be till the time fixed for their future restoration to their own land: "Now, also, many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. But they know not the thoughts of the Lord; neither understand they his counsel: for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor. Arise, and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make thine horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass; and thou shalt beat in pieces many people: and I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth[f]." Nothing like this was effected at any time subsequent to the Babylonish Captivity: and therefore we must, of necessity, look to some future period for its accomplishment. But the prophet himself goes on to declare, that these glorious events were not to take place till after that the Messiah should have been born at Bethlehem: "Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: THEN the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And HE (the Messiah) shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and *they* (the Jewish remnant) shall abide: for NOW *shall he be great unto the ends of the earth*[g]. This shall be the time for the universal reign of Christ: at which time the Jews are destined to act a most conspicuous part upon the theatre of the world: being, on the one hand, God's instruments for the conversion of the Gentile world; and, on the other hand, his agents for the destruction of all who shall oppose his will: "The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men. The remnant of Jacob shall also be among the Gentiles, in the midst of many people, as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep; who, if he go through, both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. Thine hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be

[d] Mic. iv. 6, 7.
[e] Mic. iv. 10.
[f] Mic. iv. 11—13.
[g] Mic. iv. 2—4.

cut off[h]." Now, in this passage we have a complete summary of all that shall take place in that day. The whole world of Jews and Gentiles shall be converted to Christ; but the Jews shall lead the way, and be God's honoured instruments for bringing in the Gentiles; by whom, in the first instance, they shall be fiercely opposed; but over whom they shall triumph with immense slaughter, and with the same facility as a lion triumphs over a flock of sheep.

Not less fully does the prophet speak also,]

2. In the chapter before us—

[He represents, in very moving terms, the Jew anticipating this blessed period: "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness. Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the Lord thy God? Mine eyes shall behold her: now shall she be trodden down, as the mire of the streets[i]." Then, after confirming this expectation as certainly to be fulfilled at the time appointed for the termination of their present sufferings[k], he himself cries to God in their behalf: "Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old[l]." And to this prayer God returns a most gracious answer; declaring, that he would interpose for them as wonderfully and effectually as he did for them at the time of their deliverance from Egypt, to the utter surprise and dismay of all surrounding nations: "According to the days of thy coming out of Egypt will I shew unto him marvellous things. The nations shall see, and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf: they shall lick the dust like a serpent; they shall move out of their holes, like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of the Lord our God, and shall fear because of thee[m]."

Thus it is that the words of my text are introduced: they arise altogether out of the foregoing subject, and ought to be considered in connexion with it. Let us then next mark,]

II. The soliloquy uttered in the contemplation of it—

The soliloquy may be regarded as proceeding from

[h] Mic. v. 7—9. [i] ver. 8—10. [k] ver. 11—13.
[l] ver. 14. [m] ver. 15—17.

the prophet himself, or from any pious and believing Jew.

Picture to yourselves, then, a Jew contemplating this event—

[He breaks forth into a devout ascription of praise to God: first, *in a general view of the dispensation;* then, *in a view of the particular mercies that shall be vouchsafed under it;* and, lastly, *in a view of the great result.* Let us follow him in each successive step.

'Who is a God like unto thee, O Lord, who dealest thus with the remnant of thine heritage? As thine "heritage," we were bound to serve thee: and as a "remnant" preserved from so many dangers, we were still more bound to manifest the greatness of our obligations to thee. Yet have we been a rebellious people from the day that thou calledst us. Our sins against thee have been greatly multiplied: but most of all have we deserved thy wrathful indignation for our rejection of thine only dear Son, whom thou didst send to be our Saviour and Redeemer. I am amazed that thou shouldest "pardon such iniquities," and "pass by such inconceivable transgressions." But I trace it to thine own love of mercy. It would have been impossible but that thou must have "retained thine anger" for ever, if it had depended on us to get it removed: but within thine own bosom thou hast found motives which could have been found no where else: and I am beyond measure astonished that ever thou shouldst contemplate such mercy towards thine offending people.

'The things which are so indispensable to our happiness, thou hast of thine own mercy decreed to give. Though we have so provoked thee to anger by our unparalleled iniquities, yet "wilt thou turn again, and have compassion upon us;" subduing for us the sins which have led us captive, and "casting into the very depths of the sea" the sins which have subjected us to thy displeasure. Once we saw our enemies subdued, and dead upon the sea-shore: and our sins, which are infinitely more formidable enemies, wilt thou treat in the same way, making us happy monuments of thine unbounded power and grace. O Lord, I look forward to that blissful period with eager expectation, and adore thee from my inmost soul, that thou hast such blessings in reserve for us.

'Then shall all thy promises to our nation be fulfilled in their utmost extent. To Abraham they were the fruits of "mercy," of free, unmerited mercy altogether: but to Jacob they were memorials of thy "truth;" seeing that thou hadst made them over to Abraham and *his seed*, by covenant and by oath. Then shall all that thou hast "sworn" receive its full accomplishment. Then shall the seed of Abraham possess, to

a far greater extent than they have ever yet done, their promised inheritance; and, at the same time, "in him shall also all the nations of the earth be blessed." When I look forward to these glorious events, I am altogether lost in wonder, love, and praise.']

But, as *we* also are interested in this salvation, let *us* also contemplate God's perfections as displayed in it—

[Here we may see distinctly marked, yea, written as with a sun-beam, his *mercy and loving-kindness*, his *power and grace*, his *truth and faithfulness*.

How greatly have we provoked him to anger, times without number! Yet "will he not retain his anger against us," but "will pass by our transgressions," yea, and "pardon them," and "blot them out as a morning cloud;" and solely "because he delighteth in mercy." It shall be in him altogether an act of sovereign love. Nothing have we ever done to merit it; nor is it possible for us, by any thing that we ever can do, to merit it: but the motives which he cannot derive from us, he will find within his own bosom: "he will have mercy, because he will have mercy; and will have compassion, because he will have compassion."

And what is there that he will not do for us? Verily, there is no limit either to his power or grace. Has the guilt of sin subjected us to his heavy displeasure? and is it like a millstone around our necks, ready to sink us into the bottomless abyss of hell? He will cancel it; and "put it away from us, as far as the east is from the west;" yea, "and cast it behind him irrecoverably into the very depths of the sea;" so that to us, no less than unto the Jews, shall that gracious promise be fulfilled, "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve[n]." Nor is this all. He well knows that sin, if suffered to retain its power over us, would still be, as it were, a hell within us, and infallibly plunge us into everlasting perdition: he therefore takes to him his mighty power, and, by the effectual operation of his grace, subdues it in us; so that we are renewed in the spirit of our minds, and are "transformed into his image in righteousness and true holiness." Thus, whilst he delivers us from hell, "he makes us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light."

And where is the person who ever laid hold on his covenant, and has not had it fulfilled to him in all its parts? No, verily: God has said, "I will never leave thee; never, never forsake thee:" and he is faithful to his word; nor has one jot or tittle

[n] Jer. l. 20.

of it ever failed. No, blessed Lord; to the final accomplishment of thy promises we look with unutterable joy. And, when we are once arrived at that promised land, the heavenly Canaan, O! what wonders of truth and faithfulness shall we have to contemplate! We shall view the acquisition doubtless as "mercy," in the first instance; but we shall view it also as "truth:" for "thou hast sworn" to give it to thy believing people: and thou didst "confirm thy promise with an oath, on purpose that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for thee to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to the hope that is set before us[o]." Lord, keep us unto that day; and "fulfil unto every one of us that word wherein thou hast caused us to put our trust!"]

A REFLECTION or two shall close our subject—

1. If such be the prospects of the Jew, in what a noble work are they engaged who are helping forward the attainment of them!

[God sent a Moses and an Aaron to bring his people out of Egypt. And shall he use no means to gather them from their present dispersion, and to restore them to the enjoyment of his favour? The whole Scriptures attest the contrary: and assuredly, when the time draws near, he will find persons to send to them, and will bless to the intended end their benevolent endeavours. What then should be our state in reference to them? Should we not say with the Prophet Isaiah, "Here am I: send me?" It is much to be lamented, that the Christian world feel a backwardness to this work, far beyond any which they feel in reference to the Gentiles. But wherefore is this? Has not God engaged to bring them to himself? And is he not as able to effect their salvation, as the salvation of the Gentile world? The truth is, that this backwardness is a remnant of that hatred and contempt which have subsisted against the Jews these eighteen hundred years, and have not even yet been dispelled by the kindlier offices of love. It is a scandal, however, to the Christian world, that this neglect of them should continue, in the midst of all the light which we now enjoy. It is a shame to ministers that they do not more unfold to their people the purposes of God respecting them; and to private Christians, that they never study the Prophecies relating to them. But I appeal to all of you: Is it not desirable that the glorious prospects of the Jews should be realized, and that Almighty God should receive the glory due unto his name? If, when Israel was saved from Egypt, they

[o] Heb. vi. 18.

sang, "Who is like unto thee, O God, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" should we not labour, that more elevated songs of praise should be poured forth to him on account of that infinitely greater deliverance reserved for them? I call upon you, then, to unite in this blessed work. I call upon you to anticipate the event with confidence, and to help it forward with zeal.]

2. If such be the feelings of a Jew, in the mere anticipation of those promised mercies, what should ours be, who are in the actual possession of them?

[Thanks be to God! we are in possession of them. *We* know what it is to have "our iniquities forgiven, and our sins covered:" yea, we know what it is to "have peace with God, and to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." Greatly as God has been provoked by us, we know that "his anger is turned away from us, and that he has comforted us." True it is, that, at the period before referred to, these blessings will be enjoyed in a far higher degree; for, "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound[p]." But still our privileges are exceeding great: and we should contemplate them, not with indifference or with some transient emotions of joy: no; we should feel ourselves altogether overwhelmed with a sense of God's goodness to us; and, in the spirit of our minds at least, if not in the audible expressions, we should be saying day and night, "O God, who is like unto thee?" I must say, that, if this be not our state, we are far from appreciating God's mercy to us as we ought. And I call on all of you so to meditate on his kindness to you, that your present sense of it may be a foretaste of heaven, and your songs of thanksgiving be a recital of those which you shall sing for ever in the realms of bliss.

I know, indeed, that the trembling sinner feels it difficult to view God in this endearing light. But I would ask of any one, what evidence would you wish for of God's disposition to forgive sin? Can you have greater evidence of it than in God's promised return to his outcast people, even to that people who imbrued their hands in the blood of his only dear Son, and have for so many hundreds of years cast all possible odium upon his name? I say then, Hear the Jew speaking in my text, and adopt his language in reference to yourselves. And know, that, as God will return to the Jewish people in due season, so shall "mercy rejoice over judgment," in reference

[p] Isai. xxx. 26.

to you: and, as they shall yet become most distinguished monuments of his mercy and truth, so shall mercy and truth abound towards you, and God be glorified in you for ever and ever. If there be here any one who is ready to suppose that the magnitude and long-continuance of his sins preclude a possibility of obtaining mercy, I would say to him, Though thou hadst upon thine own individual soul all the sins that ever were committed by the whole Jewish nation, if thou hadst even murdered the Son of God himself, and persisted in thy hatred of him eighteen hundred years; yet, on thy desiring to obtain mercy, thou shouldst find God all that he is represented to thee in the text. Let this saying sink down into your ears; and trembling as you are, your sorrows shall all be turned into joy.]

NAHUM.

MCCXVIII.

GOD A REVENGER OF SIN.

Nahum i. 2, 6. *God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies.... Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?*

MEN have such ideas of God's mercy, that they cannot persuade themselves he will ever execute judgment on impenitent transgressors. In fact, it is the hope of this which encourages men to go on in their sins: for, if once they could believe that they shall soon become monuments of God's righteous indignation, they would consider their ways, and labour by all possible means to avert his displeasure.

About one hundred and forty years before this was written, the Prophet Jonah had been sent to warn the Ninevites of their impending destruction. But they had repented of their wickedness; and God, in his mercy, had withheld his threatened judgments. But now he warns them, that since they had filled up the measure of their iniquities, his wrath should come upon them to the uttermost. Now, I would ask, supposing God to be determined to convince men that he would execute vengeance on the impenitent, what could he add to what is here spoken? Methinks there is here such an accumulation of words, as must defy incredulity itself to question the truth contained in them. It is not a pleasing subject that we are now called to insist upon: but it is necessary; and the more necessary, because of men's backwardness to

give it the consideration it deserves. Let us, then, consider,

I. The description here given of the Deity—

God is "a jealous God"—

[He has a claim to our undivided allegiance, and to all the affections of our souls. And when he sees how prone we are to set our affections on the creature rather than on him, it becomes him to be jealous. A man like ourselves would not do well to connive at the unfaithfulness of his wife, who was giving to others the affections which were his unalienable right: how much less, then, can God admit such an alienation of our hearts from him! He cannot: indeed "his very name is Jealous[a]:" and he must divest himself of his every perfection, before he can connive at the dishonour which our unfaithfulness reflects upon him.]

He will "take vengeance" on obstinate transgressors—

["The Lord revengeth; yea, he revengeth, and is furious." We are not indeed to conceive of him as feeling in his own bosom such emotions as constitute "fury" in man: in that sense "fury is not in him[b]:" but, so far as the effects of his displeasure are felt, it will be the same to *us*, as if he were filled with the utmost rage. At present, indeed, he bears with sinners with all imaginable patience and long-suffering: but "he reserves them unto the day of judgment to be punished[c]." In my text, the word "wrath" is in italics, to shew that it is not in the original. In truth, there is no word in any language that can express what God "reserveth for his enemies;" no, nor can any imagination conceive it. The Psalmist well says, "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath[d]."]

And "who can stand before his indignation?"

["Who indeed can abide the fierceness of his anger?" These pointed interrogations convey the most tremendous thoughts to our minds. *Now* we can "puff at God's judgments," as if they were scarcely worthy of a thought[e]: but it will not be so when the time for the infliction of them is fully come. *Then* "the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, no less than the poor bond-man, will hide themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains; and will cry to the mountains and rocks to fall upon them, and to hide them from the

[a] Exod. xxxiv. 14. [b] Isai. xxvii. 4. [c] 2 Pet. ii. 9.
[d] Ps. xc. 11. [e] Ps. x. 5.

face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." The great day of his wrath being come, who shall be able to stand[f]?" The wrath of *man* has been sustained, even when it raged to the utmost extent of human ingenuity to inflict pain: but who can sustain the wrath of *God?* The soul, aided by divine grace, has upheld *the body:* but who, or what, can uphold *the soul,* when it is God's arm, too, that inflicts the punishment? Some will console themselves with the thought that they shall do as well as others. But if they could for one moment descend to hell, and see the agonies, and hear the cries, of a damned soul, methinks it would be little consolation to think that they shall do as well as others. If they were only to be racked upon a wheel, and to endure its agonies but for an hour, their prospect, methinks, would be but little cheered by this thought: how much less then, when the wrath of an offended God must be endured to all eternity!]

But, that we sink not into despondency, let us attend to.

II. The advice, which one moment's reflection on this subject must suggest—

The doom of Nineveh was fixed: but not so the doom of any amongst us. No, Brethren, there is yet hope concerning you; yes, concerning every one of you. Only,

1. Abide not in impenitence—

[When Nineveh was warned by Jonah, though no encouragement was given them to repent, they humbled themselves, on a mere peradventure that God might possibly have mercy on them: and the mercy which they sought was accorded to them[g]. But to *you* I am authorized to proclaim mercy: for God's gracious message to you is, "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin[h]." Hear what God says to you by the Prophet Jeremiah: "Thus saith the Lord, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem; *lest my fury come forth like fire,* and burn that none can quench it[i]." Yes indeed, by timely humiliation, you may yet avert the wrath of your incensed God; who, "if you forsake your evil ways, and turn unto him, will have mercy upon you, and abundantly pardon," to the full extent of your multiplied transgressions[k].]

[f] Rev. vi. 15—17. [g] Jonah iii. 5—10. [h] Ezek. xviii. 30.
[i] Jer. iv. 3, 4. [k] Isai. lv. 7.

2. Abide not in unbelief—

[God has provided a Saviour for you, even his only dear Son; who has, by his own obedience unto death, effected a reconciliation for you; and "has committed unto us the ministry of reconciliation;" so that we are not only authorized, but commanded, to say to all of you, without exception, "Be ye reconciled to God[l]." He has illustrated this to you in his word, by the appointment of cities of refuge for those who by any accident should slay a man. The very instant he should get within the gates of any one of these cities, he was safe; and the pursuer of blood, however enraged, could not get at him to hurt him[m]. And who shall sustain any hurt, that flees to Christ for refuge? No: in him you will be safe. Once found in him, you have nothing to fear. You are as safe in him as you would be in heaven itself[n]. To every one of you, then, I give this counsel from the Lord: "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast[o]."]

3. Abide not in a proud defiance of your God—

[There were, in the days of old, some who, in answer to God's threatenings, said, "Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it[p]." And such there are amongst ourselves, who, in reply to all that we say, exclaim, "Ah, Lord God, doth he not speak parables[q]?" But indeed, my dear brethren, God's patience will have an end; and the very exercise of it will only aggravate our condemnation, if it do not "prevail to lead us to repentance[r]." Be persuaded that God's description of himself, in the words of our text, will be found true at the last. He is indeed "a consuming fire[s]:" and "can your heart endure, or your hands be strong, in the day that he shall deal with you[t]?" "Have you an arm like God? and can you thunder with a voice like him[u]?" No: it is in vain to contend with God: for "who shall set briers and thorns against him in battle? He will go through them, and burn them up together[x]." Verily, "it will be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God[y]." Be convinced of this; and "to-day, while it is called to-day," implore mercy at his hands: so shall you find, that "he will pardon your iniquity, and pass by the transgression of the

l 2 Cor. v. 18—20.
m Numb. xxxv. 9—25.
n Heb. vi. 17, 18. Rom. viii. 1.
o Isai. xxvi. 20.
p Isai. v. 19.
q Ezek. xx. 49.
r Rom. ii. 4—6.
s Heb. xii. 29.
t Ezek. xxii. 14.
u Job xl. 9.
x Isai. xxvii. 4.
y Heb. x. 31.

remnant of his heritage; for he retaineth not anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy[z]." And if the description of him in my text be true, you shall find that true also which is added in the seventh verse, "The Lord is good, a strong-hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."]

[z] Mic. vii. 18.

MCCXIX.

GOD A REFUGE IN TIME OF TROUBLE.

Nahum i. 7. *The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.*

WHEN God interposed in a cloud between the camp of Israel and the camp of the Egyptians, the cloud was to those a pillar of fire, to give them light; but to these a cloud of darkness, to obstruct their way. And such is the varied aspect of Jehovah to his friends and enemies in all ages. Towards the Ninevites, who had now nearly filled up the measure of their iniquities, and forced, as it were, from Jehovah a decree of utter and everlasting excision, he is represented in terms the most awful that language could afford: "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth, and is furious: the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies..... Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire; and the rocks are thrown down by him[a]." But, lest the Lord's people should apply this description of Jehovah indiscriminately to all persons of whatever character, the prophet stops abruptly, and declares, that towards his own believing people Jehovah is of a very different character; for that "he is good, and a strong hold in the day of trouble, and knoweth them that trust in him."

Let us for our comfort consider Jehovah as he is here depicted to us;

I. In the perfections of his nature—

[a] ver. 2, 6.

["He is good;" every way "good;" and appears to be so in all that he has ever done. His works of *creation* were all, after an attentive survey of them by the Divine Artificer, pronounced to be "very good." In the course of so many thousands of years there never has been found one single instance in which any work of his could be improved; so perfect has been the adaptation of every part to its respective use, and so complete the subservience of each to the good of the whole. His works of *providence* come less within the sphere of human observation, because we know not all the ends that are to be accomplished by them: but of those which have been the most dark or most calamitous we have had the unanimous testimony of the best judges, that "he has done all things well;" and that, however "clouds and darkness may have been round about him, justice and judgment have been the basis of his throne." Of his works of *redemption* what shall we say? In what terms can we convey any just notion of them? Verily the tongue of an archangel is incapable of expressing the goodness of God in giving his only dear Son to die for us[b]: this mystery far exceeds the comprehension of any finite intelligence: its "height and depth and length and breadth can never be explored:" suffice it to say, that the incarnation and death of the Son of God is the one subject of adoration amongst all the hosts of heaven, and will continue to be so through the countless ages of eternity[c].

But, whilst the goodness of God is readily acknowledged in reference to those who are the objects of mercy, it may be doubted in reference to those who shall be the objects of his everlasting displeasure. It may be asked, How can his punitive justice be good? I answer, If he did not maintain the rights of justice he could not be "good." Whatever ungodly men may imagine, justice is necessary in every government: and, if an earthly monarch would be thought essentially defective if he suffered all the laws of the realm to be outraged and set at nought with impunity, so would Jehovah, with reverence be it spoken, act unworthily as the Moral Governor of the universe, if he made no difference between the observers of his laws, and those who violated them without remorse. His law is a transcript of his holy will; and the honour of it must be maintained, either by the observance of its precepts, or by the execution of its penalties. Besides, if the justice of God were not displayed in the punishment of sin, he would neither be revered in heaven, nor feared on earth. In heaven, his justice and holiness and truth would be altogether darkened, and the radiance of all his other perfections obscured: and on earth, Satan would retain an undisputed sway over the hearts of men.

In every view therefore we must say, not only that God is

[b] 1 John iv. 8—10. [c] Rev. v. 12—14.

good, but that his goodness, no less than "his greatness, is unsearchable."]

We have a further insight given us into the character of God,

II. In the provisions of his covenant—

[Sin has brought misery along with it: and since the first introduction of sin into the world, "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." But God has entered into covenant with his only dear Son as our head and representative; and has made over to us himself as our God, at the same time that he takes us to himself as his people. In the day of trouble we feel, that none but God can afford us any effectual help: and he engages at that season to be a very present help unto us. Whatever our affliction be, we may go to him with it, and find him "a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall[d]." What a strong-hold he is we see in the instance of Hezekiah, when surrounded by the Assyrian army, whom, according to all human appearance, it was impossible for him to withstand: one assurance of protection from Jehovah enabled that holy prince to despise all the menaces of his blaspheming adversary, and to rest as secure and as composed as if there had been no danger at hand[e].

But if in temporal troubles God is such a refuge, much more is he when the soul is oppressed with a sense of sin. Hear what he speaks to us by his beloved Son: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Yes: our adorable Saviour was fitly represented to us by the cities of refuge, which were open day and night to the manslayer, and which afforded him perfect security from the pursuer of blood, the very instant he entered within their gates. Such a city is the Lord Jesus, "whose name is a strong tower, to which the righteous runneth and is safe." Has he not himself said, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out?" Let the afflicted sinner go to him, and he shall find that this "man," this God-man, "will be to him as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land[f]." Verily "He will save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him."]

We shall have a yet deeper insight into his character, if we view him,

III. In the dispensations of his grace—

[d] Isai. xxv. 4. [e] Isai. xxxvii. 21—33. [f] Isai. xxxii. 2.

["He knoweth those who trust in him;" not merely as distinguishing them from others, but as feeling towards them the most affectionate regard: (in this sense the word "knoweth" is frequently used[g].) He views them with the tenderest sympathy and compassion, being "touched with a feeling of all their infirmities[h]," and being "afflicted in all their afflictions[i]." Of his people, when suffering under their Egyptian task-masters, he said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their task-masters; for *I know their sorrows*[k]." And the same tender regard is shewn by him to a solitary individual as to a whole nation: for David says, "When my spirit was overwhelmed, thou knewest my path[l];" and again, "Thou hast known my soul in adversities[m]." The act of trusting in God is itself so pleasing and acceptable in his sight, that there is not any thing which he will not do for one who looks to him in such a frame[n]. So abundantly will he communicate to such an one the riches of his grace, that he will make his soul like a well-watered garden, filled with the richest fruits, suited to every season of the year[o]. Whatever enemies may assault him, God will "keep his soul in perfect peace[p]," and make him even as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever[q].']

What IMPROVEMENT shall we make of this subject?

I answer,

1. "Acquaint yourselves with God"—

[Study the character of God as drawn in the Holy Scriptures. Some think of him as a God of all mercy; and others, as clothed only in the terrors of inexorable justice. But the true character of God is, that he is "a just God and a Saviour." In the Lord Jesus Christ this union of justice and mercy is fully displayed. Once view him as dying, rising, reigning for sinful man, and then all the description given of God in our text will be seen in its true light, and all the brightness of the Godhead irradiate your souls.]

2. Glorify him as God—

[As far as we know God, even though it be only in the notices which he has given us of himself in the works of creation, we ought to "glorify him as God[r]." How much more then ought we to do so, when all his glory is made to shine before us in the face of Jesus Christ! How should we love him,

[g] Ps. i. 6. [h] Heb. iv. 15. [i] Isai. lxiii. 9.
[k] Exod. iii. 7. [l] Ps. cxlii. 3. [m] Ps. xxxi. 7.
[n] Ps. xxxi. 19. [o] Jer. xvii. 7, 8. [p] Isai. xxvi. 3.
[q] Ps. cxxv. 1. [r] Rom. i. 21.

serve him, trust in him, and delight ourselves in him! O, beloved, let your hearts ascend to him, and your souls be devoted to him, as the occasion demands. Is he "good?" praise him for his goodness. Is he "a strong-hold?" flee to him, and dwell continually in him. Does he "know those who trust in him?" let him have joy over you as monuments of his grace, and delight in you as heirs of his glory[s]. In a word, live but for him; and as he has "bought you with a price, see that ye glorify him with your bodies and your spirits, which are his[t]."]

[s] Zeph. iii. 17. [t] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

MCCXX.

THE PROPER IMPROVEMENT OF GOD'S MERCIES[a].

Nahum i. 15. *Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows.*

IN the writings of the prophets there is an abruptness of style, which often renders them intricate, and almost unintelligible. The rapidity of their transitions from one person to another, from one period to another, and from one subject to another, tends to bewilder the mind, and operates as a discouragement to us, when we endeavour to investigate and comprehend their meaning. But when we are on our guard respecting this, we shall often discover beauties that will amply repay the labour of investigation, and shall be led to admire those passages, which at first sight appeared to be involved in impenetrable obscurity.

The subject of the prophecy before us is the destruction of Sennacherib's army, as a prelude to the overthrow of the Assyrian empire, of which Nineveh was the capital. The prophet begins this chapter with expatiating in general terms on the power and vindictive justice of Jehovah[b]. He then speaks of these perfections with a more express reference to his main point[c]. After that, he proceeds to address himself to Nineveh, from whence that "wicked

[a] Thanksgiving Sermon for *Peace*, in May 1802.
[b] ver. 2—7. [c] ver. 8—10.

counsellor," Sennacherib, should come[d]. Then, in Jehovah's name, he addresses himself to the Jewish nation, to certify them, that, however greatly this formidable enemy should harass and distress them, they should be freed from his yoke[e]. Then he addresses more immediately Sennacherib himself, and declares that he, his family, and his idols, should be signally and entirely cut off[f]. Lastly, beholding, as it were, his prophecy already accomplished, he points to the Messenger hastening over the mountains to announce the glad tidings: and he calls upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem to resume their wonted occupations, and especially their religious ordinances, in humble acknowledgment of the Divine goodness, and with a faithful regard to those vows which they had made in the day of their calamity[g].

The affinity between this subject, and that which calls for our attention this day, will more fully appear, while we consider,

I. The tidings which are announced to us this day—

These certainly relate, in the first instance, to Hezekiah's deliverance by the destruction of Sennacherib's army—

[This was a great deliverance, wrought by God himself through the ministry of an angel[h]. And it may well serve to illustrate the blessings we this day commemorate[i] — — —]

But they relate also to the deliverance of mankind from sin and death through the intervention of the Lord Jesus—

[The deliverances vouchsafed to the Jews, are constantly represented in Scripture as typical of the great work of redemption: and the very expressions in the text are used by

[d] ver. 11. [e] ver. 12, 13. [f] ver. 14.
[g] ver. 15. [h] Isai. xxxvii. 36.

[i] If it be the Restoration of *Peace*, the parallel must be drawn between the dangers to which Jerusalem, and our nation, had been exposed. And, if there have been any signal interpositions of the Deity in favour of our land, the mention of them will mark the parallel more strongly. If it be *the Restoration of King Charles the Second*, the blessings of Hezekiah's government, and the renewal of the established ordinances of religion, must rather be adverted to as the ground of the parallel.

Isaiah with a more direct reference to that event[k]. Nor is this idea founded in conjecture; for St. Paul, quoting the words of both the prophets, applies them directly to the proclaiming of salvation to the Gentile world[l]. If then the prophet mingled these two events, well may we do so too; and from contemplating the mercies vouchsafed to us in a temporal view, take occasion to reflect on the infinitely richer mercies which we obtain through Christ[m] — — —]

We are at no loss how to improve these tidings, since the prophet himself suggests,

II. The duties resulting from them—

In an encouraging yet monitory strain, he exhorts us to,

1. A devout acknowledgment of the mercies received—

[The way to Jerusalem having been blocked up by the besieging army, the prophet tells the people, that now they may have free access to the temple, and come up at the appointed seasons to their solemn feasts. And should not *we* also now avail ourselves of the opportunities which are afforded us, and wait upon God without distraction[n]? We should at least spend this day, not in mere carnal mirth, but in solemn feasting before God, even in spiritual, and more appropriate joy.

The remembrance of the work of redemption more especially should kindle in our hearts a sacred flame of gratitude and thanksgiving, and should stimulate us to a more strict observance of the Sabbath, which, in commemoration of it, was made to supersede the original Sabbath, and was designated by that honourable appellation, The Lord's Day.]

2. A conscientious performance of the vows we have made—

[It is most probable, that many, during the siege of Jerusalem, would make vows to God, as the Jews from the beginning had been in the habit of doing under their calamities. Nor can we doubt but that many of ourselves, in seasons of

[k] Isai. lii. 7. [l] Rom. x. 13—15.

[m] Here the destruction of our spiritual enemies by Christ, "the *Angel* of the Covenant," may be announced, as joyful tidings to those who are "*shut up* under the Law," *the wretched expectants of death* and judgment.

[n] Here, if *the King's Restoration* be the subject of thanksgiving, reference may be made to the interruption of the established worship during the usurpation, and the danger of its entire abolition afterwards, during the time of the Revolution.

sickness or trouble, have purposed, and perhaps vowed, to change the course of our lives, if we were delivered from the distresses which we either felt or feared. At this time in particular we have been making vows, which we are bound to perform[o]. But, alas! if we compare our petitions in the midst of trouble, with our lives when delivered from trouble, what an awful contrast does there appear! Let it not, however, be so on this occasion; but let us remember the vows that are upon us; for "better were it never to vow at all, than to vow and not pay[p]."]

We conclude then with an ADDRESS, both inspired and uttered by God himself; "Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee! Offer unto God *thanksgiving*, and pay thy *vows* unto the Most High[q]."

[o] Such vows are constantly offered to God, in the forms of prayer for the 29th of May, and the fast-days; and they may here be quoted from the one or other of those forms, as the occasion requires; and may be pressed on the conscience as obligatory at this time.

[p] Eccl. v. 4, 5. [q] Ps. l. 7, 14.

HABAKKUK.

MCCXXI.

THE HOLINESS OF GOD.

Hab. i. 13. *Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.*

MEN do not sufficiently contemplate the character of God. The Psalmist, speaking of some in his day, says, "These things thou hast done; and I kept silence: and thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself[a]." In like manner, *we*, if we do not see before our eyes some visible displays of God's displeasure, are ready to imagine that he will suffer our iniquities to pass unpunished. But, whoever he be that commits sin, whether he be an avowed enemy of God, or one that is numbered amongst his people, let him know that "God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity" but with the utmost abhorrence. Primarily, these words have respect to the Chaldeans, who were about to invade Judæa, and to execute upon the whole Jewish nation the most fearful vengeance[b]. In reference to *them*, the prophet calls upon the holy God to arise and vindicate the cause of his people. But the words of my text contain a general truth, which it becomes us all most seriously to consider.

Let me then shew you,

I. What evidence God has given us of this truth—

If we look into the Holy Scriptures, we shall find them full of this truth. "Holiness" is that perfection

[a] Ps. l. 21.

[b] Compare ver. 2, 3. where the very same terms are used.

which, above all others, is celebrated in heaven[c] ——— and in which God is pre-eminently glorious[d]." But not to enumerate passages expressive of this truth, let one suffice: "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity[e]." It is by *an appeal to facts* that I propose to establish the truth before us. See how God has manifested it,

1. In a way of judgment—

[Go back to the very fall of man in Paradise. An offence was committed; an offence against a merely positive command; and which therefore had in it no intrinsic evil, except as a violation of, what I may call, an arbitrary appointment. Yet behold, on account of that one offence were our first parents, and all their posterity, consigned to death; yea, and the whole creation also, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate, was subjected to a curse.

Go on to the time of Noah, when, for the sins of men, the whole world, with every living creature, was overwhelmed with one universal deluge; one single family alone, with a small selection of the brute creation, being saved.

Go on to Sodom and Gomorrha, and to all the cities of the plain; and see them destroyed by fire and brimstone from heaven; not so much as a new-born infant being spared, or any, except righteous Lot and his two daughters. Are these no evidences of the truth before us? Methinks they declare, in language that cannot be mistaken, God's hatred of sin, and his determination to punish it to the uttermost.

Behold, at a later period, Achan keeping for himself a wedge of gold, and a Babylonish garment, which ought to have been destroyed. No one was robbed; and the offence was not known to any human being; but yet, on account of that, did God leave for a season all the whole nation, and never return to them in mercy, till the offender was sought out and punished with death.

A terrible act of vengeance also was executed on Uzzah, who, to keep the ark from falling, inadvertently stretched out his hand, and touched it; he himself not being of the Levites, who alone were authorized to touch it. Say, brethren, is not God a holy God? and is not sin, of what kind soever it be, "that abominable thing which he hates?"

Take but one more instance; that of David numbering the people. For that one offence were seventy thousand of his

[c] Isai. vi. 3. [d] Exod. xv. 11. [e] Ps. v. 4, 5.

subjects slain. What further proof can any man desire of God's irreconcileable abhorrence of all sin?]

2. In a way of mercy—

[When the whole human race were involved in Adam's guilt and misery, God could no more look upon them with the smallest measure of complacency. Before he could cast an eye of love upon so much as one single soul, its sins must all be expiated; and a perfect righteousness must be given to it; and its every desire must be renewed. But how could all this be effected? It could be effected only through the mediation of God's only dear Son, and by the operation of his own Almighty and eternal Spirit. To exercise mercy, was God's desire: and that he might exercise it in consistency with his own immaculate holiness, he determined to give his only-begotten Son, that through him, and in his sacred person, his hatred of sin might be made manifest; and to give his Holy Spirit also, that, through his effectual agency, his love of holiness might be displayed. Tell me, then, whether *this* does not confirm the declaration in my text? To all eternity, God will not look upon any sinner that is not washed in the blood of Christ, and clothed in his unspotted righteousness: nor will he ever look on one who is not "renewed in the spirit of his mind," and transformed by the Holy Ghost into that very image of the Deity which sin has effaced.

Verily, let these things be considered; and you will say, that "God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity:" for when sin was found upon his only dear Son, and *that* only by imputation, the cup of God's indignation must be drunk by him, even to the very dregs: nor, till that was done, should any soul of man find mercy at his hands.]

This truth being so clear, let us consider,

II. What lessons it inculcates on every one of us—

Of the admiration which this sublime character of the Deity demands, I shall forbear to speak. I will notice only those more plain and obvious duties, which are of prime importance to every child of man. This view, then, of God's holiness, may teach us all,

1. To repent of our former sins—

[Who is there that has not, in instances without number, grieved and offended this holy God? — — — Look back, my brethren, upon your lives, from the earliest childhood even to the present hour, and consult the records of conscience; and then say, whether God can ever look on you but with just and holy indignation? — — — O that all of us were duly

sensible of our transgressions, and were humbled before God on account of them! To hope for mercy without deep contrition is in vain. We might as well hope that God should cease to exist: for whilst he continues a holy Being, he never can behold but with anger an impenitent transgressor. He tells us plainly, that, "except we repent, we must all perish[f];" and it is "the broken and contrite heart alone that he will not utterly despise[g]."]

2. To flee to the Lord Jesus Christ for refuge—

[Christ is the city of refuge appointed for sinful man: and to him must every human being flee, if ever he would escape the sword of Divine vengeance. As for repentance, though it be necessary to prepare the soul for pardon, it can never of itself obtain pardon. Whole rivers of tears could never wash away so much as one single sin. Nothing but that which satisfied Divine justice can ever obtain for us the remission of any sin whatever — — — Indeed, Brethren, "no man can come unto the Father but by Christ:" "nor is there any name given under heaven but his, whereby any man can be saved." Bring then your sins to Christ, and lay them upon his sacred head, as the high-priest laid the sins of all Israel on the head of the scape-goat. Take also to yourselves his perfect righteousness, that in that you may "stand before God without spot or blemish." In that way you may hope for acceptance with a holy God: but in no other way shall any soul of man come up with acceptance before him — — —]

3. To implore of God the sanctifying influences of his Holy Spirit—

[To your latest hour will you find, that, in some respect or other, "the law of sin which is in your members will prevail over the better law of your minds," and bring defilement on your souls. In truth, if you be not upheld continually by the Spirit of God, there is not any sin into which you may not relapse. Your own wisdom will not suffice to keep you from temptation; nor will your own strength suffice to preserve you from falling by it. A new-born infant does not more need to be carried in its mother's arms, than you do to be upheld continually by the Spirit of the Living God. Be earnest, then, in crying to God for help: for it is through the Spirit alone that you can mortify the deeds of the body, or bring forth the fruits of righteousness to the honour of your God. And do not presume on God's past mercy to you: for it is an unalterable truth, that "God cannot behold evil:" and, "if you indulge iniquity in your heart, God neither will, nor can, regard you." To be accepted of him, "you must be holy, even as he is holy."]

[f] Luke xiii. 5. [g] Ps. li. 17.

MCCXXII.

OUR DUTY IN REFERENCE TO THE PROMISES.

Hab. ii. 3. *The vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come; it will not tarry.*

AS there is no one so secure, but he may fall, so there is no one in so low and afflicted a condition, but God may have mercy in reserve for him. It has pleased God on many occasions to suffer his people to be reduced to the very last extremity before he interposed for them, in order that his interposition for them might be more visible, and might produce in their minds livelier sensations of joy and gratitude. The prophet, having foretold the total destruction of his country by the Chaldean armies, was greatly grieved at the prospect of such extensive and dreadful calamities. He looked therefore to God, to know whether there were any alleviating circumstances which might console the people in their troubles; and he was favoured with a vision of their future deliverance from Babylon; and was ordered to write it down in terms so plain, that the most inattentive or superficial observer could not but understand them: but as the promise had respect to a distant period of time, he was told to bid them wait for its accomplishment, in a full assurance that they should not ultimately be disappointed.

But we must not confine the promise to this subject: for in the Epistle to the Hebrews this promise is quoted in a general manner, as applicable to all the distresses with which the Lord's people are tried[a]. The Lord himself stands engaged for their support and deliverance; and he enjoins them to wait his appointed time, in a certain expectation that he will in due season fulfil his word.

We propose then to shew,

I. The certainty of the promises—

[a] Heb. x. 37.

There is a time fixed in the Divine counsels for the accomplishment of every promise—

[The promises of God often have respect to a very distant period: yet that period is fixed; nor can it be either accelerated or delayed. The time for Christ's incarnation, though not revealed from the beginning, was appointed of God from eternity. Thousands of years rolled on before the period arrived; but at the time when, according to Daniel's prophecy, the Messiah's advent was generally expected, he came[b]. The time for detaining Abraham's descendants was fixed, even to a single day: and the accuracy with which the promise was fulfilled, is noted by the historian as a circumstance worthy of most attentive observation; "It came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, *even the self-same day it came to pass*, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night to be much observed unto the Lord[c]." The same remark also extends to every blessing which God has determined to confer upon his people: nor can they use a better plea on behalf of themselves or of the Church at large, than that which the Psalmist urges, "Arise, and have mercy upon Zion; for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come[d]."]

When that period is arrived, the promise, how improbable soever it may appear, shall be fulfilled—

[Nothing could be more unlikely, according to human apprehensions, than the deliverance foretold in the text: yet at the appointed time the Chaldeans were subdued by the Medes and Persians, and the Jews were liberated by the very man who had been foretold by name long before he had any existence in the world. The promise made to Abraham and Sarah was delayed, till the accomplishment of it, according to the course of nature, seemed impossible: yet it was not suffered to fall to the ground; in due time it received its completion, and gave a demonstration, that God was true to his word. Thus when God delays to give peace to the contrite, and victory to those who are conflicting with sin, we must not imagine that he has forgotten to be gracious, but that the time for the performance of his promise is not fully come. He has said, that "he will give his people the blessing of peace[e]," and that "sin shall not have dominion over them[f];" and he will "not suffer one jot or tittle of his word to fail." "His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure[g]."]

Being assured then of the stability of his promises, let us consider,

[b] Dan. ix. 25, 26. Luke ii. 38.
[c] Exod. xii. 40—42.
[d] Ps. cii. 13.
[e] Ps. xxix. 11.
[f] Rom. vi. 14.
[g] Isai. xlvi. 10.

II. Our duty with respect to them—

As "we know not the times or seasons which the Father has reserved in his own power," it becomes us to wait,

1. In humility—

[We can claim nothing at the hands of God. If he were to deal with us as he did with the fallen angels, we should have no more than our desert. The most distant hope of obtaining mercy is a marvellous favour conferred upon us. We should therefore lie low before him, as conscious of our utter unworthiness. We should implore mercy, only for the sake of that adorable Saviour who died for us. And we should cheerfully leave to God the time, the manner, the degree, in which he will shew mercy towards us.]

2. In faith—

[We must "not stagger at any of the promises[h]" on account of the greatness of them, or of our own unworthiness. We should remember WHO it is that promises; how sovereign HE is in the distribution of his favours, and how mighty to fulfil his word. It is true, a promise of pardon to such guilty wretches, and of everlasting happiness to those who deserved nothing but misery, appears great and incredible: but he has given us his only dear Son; and will he not with him also freely give us all things? Let us not then be requiring signs to confirm our faith[i], but believe that it shall be even as God has said unto us[k].]

3. In patience—

[If God should defer granting our requests till the latest moment of our lives, we should wait contentedly upon him: his blessing, if given at the expiration of a thousand years, would amply repay us for all our solicitude and suspense. Let us consider how long he has called, and we have refused to answer; and shall we be impatient if he delay to answer us? We exercise patience in hopes of obtaining in due season the fruits of the earth[l]: let us do the same in hopes of that grace which shall supply all our wants, and satisfy all our desires[m].]

INFER—

1. How attentive should we be to the promises which God has made us!

[There is not a situation in which we can be, wherein we

[h] Rom. iv. 20. [i] Judg. vi. 36—40. [k] Acts xxvii. 25.
[l] Jam. v. 7, 8. [m] Heb. x. 36.

have not many promises suited to our necessities. Should we not then treasure them up in our minds? Should we not plead them at a throne of grace? Should they not be to us "a light shining in a dark place?" Let us study the word of God with an especial view to the promises; for it is by them that we are to be "made partakers of a divine nature[n]," and by them to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit[o]."]

2. How ashamed should we be of ever yielding to unbelief!

[The office of faith is, to give to things invisible and future a present and visible existence. It was by faith that Abraham was assured that Isaac, after he should have been slain and reduced to ashes, would be restored to life; yea, he was as much assured of it, as if he had seen the very transaction pass before his eyes. This honoured God as a God of truth. But unbelief dishonours him in the highest degree: it says, in fact, that "the vision will lie." But what ground have we for such a suspicion? When did God falsify any one of his promises[p]? To guard against our unbelief, he has confirmed his promise with an oath[q]: and shall we *still* question his veracity? O blush, ye unbelieving people, who are doubting whether he will receive you to mercy, or supply all your need! Trust in him with unshaken affiance; and you shall find Him "faithful who hath promised."]

3. How awful is the state of those, who, instead of being interested in the promises, are obnoxious to the threatenings!

[Every word of God is equally true, and equally certain of accomplishment. The threatening that the whole world should be destroyed by a deluge, was executed, notwithstanding the scoffs of unbelievers: and every thing which he has spoken against sin and sinners shall be fulfilled in due season[r]. His vengeance is delayed in mercy; but it shall surely come at last[s]. Let the impenitent and unbelieving consider this, and "flee for refuge to the hope set before them."]

[n] 2 Pet. i. 4.
[o] 2 Cor. vii. 1.
[p] Josh. xxiii. 14.
[q] Heb. vi. 17, 18.
[r] 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4, 8, 9.
[s] 2 Tim. ii. 12, 13.

MCCXXIII.

FAITH AND UNBELIEF CONTRASTED.

Hab. ii. 4. *Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.*

THE sense of these words is not very obvious. In truth, the sense of them, as standing in the context, and as quoted in the New Testament, is so different, that we need examine them with great care, in order to find their true and full import. Their literal meaning, I apprehend, is to this effect. The prophet had foretold the captivity of the Jews in Babylon. The Jews would not believe that the predicted events could ever take place[a]. They therefore contended with the prophet; and he, wearied with their perverseness, spread his case before the Lord, and implored direction from him: "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say to me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved[b]." The Lord answers him, and commands him to write it in large and legible characters, for the instruction of the whole nation, that the predicted events should take place in their appointed season; and that those who, through pride and hypocrisy, rejected the Divine testimony, should perish; whereas those who, with simplicity of mind, believed it, should be saved.

Had we no further insight given us into these words in the New Testament, we should rest in that exposition of them, and conceive that we had given nearly the full meaning of them. But the captivity in Babylon was a forerunner of a yet more terrible bondage which they would suffer, through their contempt of that great Prophet who should come into the world. Through their pride and hypocrisy, they would reject HIM, even the Lord Jesus Christ, and would perish in their unbelief[c]: but those who should believe in Christ, and place their hopes entirely on

[a] Hab. i. 5, 6. [b] ver. 1.
[c] Compare Hab. i. 5. with Acts xiii. 41.

him, should be saved by him with an everlasting salvation.

Now, if an uninspired man had put this construction upon the passage, we should consider the interpretation as forced. But when an inspired Apostle, not once or twice only, but repeatedly, quotes this passage in this very sense; and not in an incidental way only, as it were by accommodation, but in a way of solid argumentation; we cannot doubt but that, in putting this construction upon the words, we express the mind of the Holy Ghost. St. Paul shews from these words, that the way of salvation is simply by faith in Christ: "Therein," that is, in the Gospel, "is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith[d]." Again, in another epistle, he takes occasion from these words to shew, that salvation is by faith *alone*, without the deeds of the law: "That no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident; for, The just shall live by faith[e]." In another epistle, he quotes the whole passage, to shew that, as our *entrance into* the way of salvation is by faith, so must also our *continuance in it* be: "Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry. *Now the just shall live by faith:* but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them that draw back unto perdition; but of them that *believe to the saving of the soul*[f]."

I conceive that the large and comprehensive view of this passage is that which we ought to take; and that it will properly give occasion for me to mark,

I. The evil of unbelief—

It was in reference to those who rejected his testimony, and who, by rejecting it, would perish, that the prophet said, "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is

[d] Rom. i. 17. [e] Gal. iii. 11.

[f] Heb. x. 36—39. The 37th and 38th verses are quoted from Habakkuk, exactly according to the translation of them in the Septuagint.

not upright in him." Here he marks the evil of unbelief *in its nature*, as the fruit of pride and hypocrisy; and *in its tendency*, as leading to destruction.

Let us notice, then, the evil of it,

1. In its nature—

[Persons would fain have it thought, that their unbelief arises from want of evidence: but in whomsoever it is found, provided he have had the means of information fully set before him, we hesitate not to affirm that it is the offspring of pride and hypocrisy. Men will not submit their wisdom to the wisdom of God; and, instead of receiving humbly what he has revealed, they will presumptuously sit in judgment upon him, and teach him, what he shall reveal, and in what manner he shall reveal it. They like not to be told that they are such guilty and helpless creatures as they really are. They like not to have all grounds of self-confidence taken from them; and to be necessitated to found their hopes altogether on another, even though that other be the Son of God himself. They like not that measure of self-denial and of devotedness to God, which the Scriptures require of them. Hence they endeavour to explain away the force of Scripture, if not to set aside its authority altogether. They do not examine it with the candour which they would exercise in the investigation of any other subject: they have a bias within them, arising from their prejudices and their passions: they *wish* to find occasion against the Scriptures, or an interpretation which shall enable them to evade their force. They do not set themselves diligently to conform to the word of God, as far as they believe it true: so that their whole conduct shews that "their soul is not upright in them." This habit of mind does not prevail in all *to the same extent;* but in every unbeliever is it found: and it is at the root of unbelief, wherever that baneful evil exists.]

2. In its tendency—

[It operated to the ruin of those who would not listen to the warnings of the prophets respecting the judgments that would be inflicted on them by their Chaldean invaders. And a similar consequence ensued to those who rejected the Saviour of the world. And what other effect can ever be produced by it? Were not the Apostles commanded to declare, through all the world, "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned?" Nor does this consequence result from any arbitrary appointment of God: it is, and must be so, in the very nature of things. "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son: he that hath the Son, hath life;

and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life." Now, if this life be in the Lord Jesus Christ, how can we receive it, if we believe not on him? We put it away from us: we do in fact say, 'I will not have life: if God will not save me in any other way, I will not be saved at all.' This is what our blessed Lord himself complained of: "Ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life." It is to no purpose to dispute against this. We cannot alter the Divine appointment. A Saviour is given us: a free offer of salvation through Him is sent us: not a creature in the universe is excepted: not any one who comes to God through Him shall be cast out. But, if this Saviour be rejected, "there is no other sacrifice for sin;" no other foundation on which we can build;" "no other name whereby we can be saved." We ought to be fully aware of this: for if we persist in our unbelief, "there remains for us nothing but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and of fiery indignation to consume us."]

Let us now view, in contrast with this,

II. The transcendent excellence of faith—

Faith is highly commended in the Scriptures of truth. And well it may be; for,

1. It is associated with candour—

["The just," is he who weighs with candour whatever is brought before him, and embraces truth wherever he can find it. This disposition of mind is called, in Scripture, "an honest and good heart:" and wherever that is, the seed of the Gospel which is sown on it will grow up, and bring forth its appointed fruit. The believer will not reject this or that declaration, saying, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" nor will he complain of "any commandment, that it is grievous." He will sit at the feet of Jesus, and hear his word: and, if he meet with any thing which strikes him as new, he will "search the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things be so:" and when any thing exceeds his comprehension, he will go to God in prayer, and implore the gift of his Holy Spirit to "open the eyes of his understanding," and to "guide him into all truth." In this way, his doubts are cleared; his difficulties are removed; his perception of truth is quickened: his submission to it increased; and his faith, which at first was only as a grain of mustard-seed, becomes a large tree, under the shadow of which he can safely repose, and by the fruits of which he is nourished unto life eternal. In a word, his faith unites him to the Lord, "in whom he finds both righteousness and strength." Thus, from his integrity of heart, he is enabled to discern what a jaundiced mind would reject: and, from a readiness to obey

the truth, he is put into possession of all those blessings which a proud, unbelieving hypocrite can never attain.]

2. It issues in salvation—

["The just shall live by his faith." At the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, the believers availed themselves of a favourable moment, and fled to Pella, and escaped; whilst the whole unbelieving nation endured the righteous vengeance of an offended God. And who are they that shall be saved in the last day? Believers; and they alone. They will be then acknowledged by their God: they shall stand at the right hand of their Judge: they shall be exalted to thrones of glory: they shall live before him for ever and ever. To this the whole sacred volume bears witness. Not an exception to this truth shall ever be found: however God may suffer his people to be sifted, "not the least grain shall fall to the earth." "It is not the will of our Father, that one of his little ones should perish." No, verily, "they shall never perish, but shall have eternal life."]

Suffer ye now, Brethren, a word of EXHORTATION—

1. Be candid—

[Be aware of the bias that is upon your own minds. You cannot but be sensible that there is in all of us a love of this present evil world, and a distaste for heavenly employments. You cannot but have seen it, both in your hearts and lives, from the very first moment that you began to act. You know that you have, by nature, no delight in communion with God, nor any realizing views of things invisible and eternal. You know that your affections are naturally set on the things of time and sense, and that you look to them with an intensity of interest which you do not feel in the concerns of your souls. How all this must operate on your minds, in relation to the Gospel, is obvious. That, as you well know, calls you to a renunciation of all earthly vanities, a mortification of all corrupt appetites, and a pursuit of holiness as your supreme good. Be sensible of this, when you either hear or read the blessed word of God: and beg of him to "put truth in your inward parts;" and, by the mighty power of his Spirit, to cast down all your lofty and carnal imaginations, and to bring into captivity every thought that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ."]

2. Be in earnest—

[It is not a mere speculation which I would impress upon your minds. No: it is the very truth of God; yea, "it is your very life." Your rejecting of the truth will "not make void the faith of God." It will stand, whether you reject it

or not: and the final judgment will assuredly be in conformity with it. Do not then trifle. Remember how much you have at stake. Lose no time. Hear the threatenings of God, and tremble at them: and listen to the promises of God with lively gratitude and humble confidence. Bear in mind the issue of things with respect to the Jewish people: has not every word of God been fulfilled to them? You shall surely, ere long, see the same in reference to yourselves. If you proudly despise the word of God, or hypocritically pretend a submission to it which you do not yield, nothing remains for you but the stroke of God's avenging rod. But if you will believe in Christ, and give yourselves up to him, you shall surely experience all the riches of his grace, and finally inherit all the fulness of his glory.]

MCCXXIV.

GOD GREATLY TO BE FEARED.

Hab. ii. 20. *The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.*

TO any one who beholds the works of creation, one would suppose that there could not exist a doubt respecting the being of a God: and to any one that contemplates an idol of his own formation, one would suppose it absolutely impossible that he should ascribe to it divine attributes, or worship it as his God. Yet experience shews, that God is thus overlooked, and that idols are almost universally substituted in his place. The very people of God themselves, to whom he had so often manifested himself in the most stupendous acts, were ever prone to renounce him, and to place their trust in idols of wood and stone. But a dreadful woe is denounced against all who so dishonour God, and debase their own souls; and the declaration of God to the whole universe is this, "The Lord is in his holy temple: let the whole earth keep silence before him."

Let us here contemplate,

I. The majesty of Jehovah—

Viewing him in contrast with senseless idols, let us contemplate him,

1. As in the temple of the universe—

[He is there as *the Creator* of all, *the Governor* of all, *the Judge* of all. Idols are the work of *men's* hands: but men themselves, together with every thing in the whole creation, are formed by *God;* who, by a single expression of his will, called them all into existence, and upholds them all by the word of his power. Behold the worlds and systems that are around us, every single star preserving its appointed course, and fulfilling the ends for which it was formed: who can behold them, and not acknowledge a God of infinite wisdom, and power, and grace? Or look at the smallest insect, that is scarcely visible to the naked eye, and can be distinctly seen only through the medium of a microscope; and say, whether the Deity be not as conspicuous in it, as in the universe itself? The whole of this is under his continual care. A poor senseless idol, so far from directing others, cannot even move itself, but is carried whithersoever the maker of it wills; and, instead of bearing others, is often itself, as the prophet well observes, "a burthen to the weary beast." But Jehovah governeth all things, both in heaven and earth; insomuch that not a sparrow falls to the ground, or a hair from the head of any one of his saints, without his special permission. His very enemies, whilst they think to oppose him, do, in fact, accomplish his will: even the crucifixion of his only-begotten Son, though so horrible an impiety, did in reality fulfil his eternal counsels: nor was there any part of that awful event which was not predicted by God, and "by him determined before to be done."

Nor is there so much as a transient thought in the mind of any man, but it is marked by him, and recorded in the book of his remembrance; and shall be brought forth at the day of judgment, as the ground of that sentence of condemnation or acquittal that shall be passed upon us. He appears, indeed, to be so far removed from us, that he cannot take cognizance of any thing that we do: but "all things are naked and open before him;" and "with him is no darkness at all; but the night and the day to him are both alike." As for idols, they are unconscious of what is done even to themselves; and themselves are falling to decay, and may at any time be cast into the fire and be burnt. How unlike are they to Jehovah, who will assign to every one his proper doom; and himself exist for ever, the joy of his redeemed people, the terror of his prostrate enemies!]

2. As in the person of the Lord Jesus—

[It will be remembered by you all, that Jehovah dwelt, as it were visibly, first in the tabernacle, and afterwards in the temple, in that bright cloud called the Shechinah, the symbol of the Divine presence. But yet more visibly, if I may so speak, did he dwell in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ:

according as it is said, "The Word was with God, and was God, and was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us." The expression here used has a direct reference to the tabernacle, which was a type of Christ's humanity: He was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us, *as in a tabernacle*[a]; and on that very account he is called *the image of the invisible God*[b]; that is, the person in whom the invisible God has condescended to make himself visible to mortal man. In this adorable Saviour "dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily[c]:" and in him all the perfections of his Father shine forth, insomuch, that he is "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person[d]." Behold, then, the incarnate Deity, sojourning on earth, to fulfil the counsels of eternal Wisdom, for the redemption of a ruined world. How contemptible are worthless idols in comparison of him! and how must every Dagon fall from its very base before him!]

Let us then contemplate,

II. Our duty towards him—

Well is it said, "Let the whole earth keep silence before him." Truly, as surrounded by his majesty, and upheld by his power, and saved by his mercy, we must behold him,

1. With reverential awe—

[He is indeed "greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him." If the rocks trembled at his presence when he descended on Mount Sinai[e], much more must his intelligent creation, and still more the sinners of mankind. In heaven, all his hosts, whether of sinless angels or redeemed saints, fall prostrate before him: and on earth, his most favoured people have never beheld his glory, or heard his voice, but they have fallen on their face, as Abraham did, with the profoundest awe, and in deepest adoration[f]. Even to a fellow-creature the most respectful reverence has been often shewn, and *that*, too, even by persons of the highest rank, through an admiration of his superior goodness and wisdom[g]: what, then, must be due to the God of heaven, whether as riding on the heavens in his majesty, or walking on the earth in the multitude of his tender mercy?]

2. With meek submission—

[Many things, of course, occur, which we feel to be painful, and are unable to comprehend: for "our God doeth

[a] John i. 1, 14. ἐσκήνωσεν. [b] Col. i. 15.
[c] Col. ii. 9. [d] Heb. i. 3. [e] Judg. v. 5
[f] Gen. xvii. 3. [g] Job xxix. 9, 10.

whatsoever pleaseth him;" "nor will he give account to us of any of his matters." Nor should we for one moment rise against any of his dispensations. However dark or trying they may be, we should say, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." In truth, his dispensations are frequently ordered for this very end, "to humble us, and to prove us," as he proved Israel of old: and he says to us, "Be still, and know that I am God[h]." This is our duty, whether we contemplate his majesty or his love; and in every event of life we must learn to say, Not my will, but thine be done."]

3. With humble affiance—

[Great as is our God, he has engaged to interpose in behalf of his people, and to order every thing for their good. On him, therefore, we should rely with perfect confidence; not doubting but that he will accomplish for us that which, on the whole, shall be most for our good. The example of David, in this respect, is most worthy of imitation: "In the Lord put I my trust. How say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain? For, lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart. If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" What? "The Lord is in his holy temple: the Lord's throne is in heaven[i];" and, as long as he is there to succour me, "I fear not what men or devils can do against me." In relation to every concern, temporal, spiritual, eternal, this must be our frame: and this our song, "If God be for me, who can be against me?"]

4. With unreserved obedience—

[No authority must be regarded in opposition to his; no disposition be harboured that is contrary to his will. Of the angels it is said, "They do his will, hearkening to the voice of his word." Thus should we be listening with deep attention to the manifestations of his will: and, when once we have discovered it, we should fulfil it with our whole hearts. Nothing should deter us, nothing should impede us: we should strive to do his will, with the readiness and constancy that it is done in heaven.]

From this subject we may gather ample matter,

1. For reproof—

[It is truly surprising, that, with all our knowledge of God, we should be so regardless of him, as not to have him "in all, or any, of our thoughts." It is not too strong to say of the generality of those who are called Christians, that they

[h] Ps. xlvi. 10. [i] Ps. xi. 1—4.

are "Atheists in the world[k]." But what impiety is this! yea, and what folly too! If, indeed, we could withstand his power, there were some kind of excuse for us: but "will our hands be strong in the day that he shall deal with us? or can we thunder with a voice like his?" Alas! we must assuredly stand at his judgment-seat, and "receive from him according to what we have done in the body, whether it be good or evil." I call you, then, to stand in awe of him, and to tremble at his presence: for, if you refuse to fear him now, oh! think what trembling will come upon you, when you shall be summoned to his bar, to receive your eternal doom. I pray you despise not this warning; but to-day, while it is called to-day, implore his mercy, lest he leave you to the hardness of your own hearts, and give you up to final impenitence.]

2. For encouragement—

[God is, indeed, in his holy temple, ready to hear the weeping suppliant, and mighty to save his repenting people. To the Jews of old, access was denied, yea, was denied even to the high priest himself, except on one day in the year, to the more immediate presence of their God: but for you the way into the holiest is made clear; so that you may come with boldness and confidence to the very throne of God, whenever a sense of your necessities, or of his mercies, inclines you to approach him. When your Redeemer died, the vail was rent in twain, in order to represent to you this delightful truth. In Christ, your God is reconciled unto you: in Christ, he is ever nigh unto you, and ever ready to impart unto you all the blessings of grace and glory. Nay: He will make even your own hearts his temple; and "will dwell in you," and "manifest himself unto you." To you, then, I will rather reverse the direction in the text, and say, "*Keep not silence;* but rather plead with him, and give him no rest, day or night[l]," till he grant you the desires of your heart. "Be not straitened in yourselves; for ye are not straitened in him." "However wide you may open your mouth, he will fill it," and will "give you exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or think." In reference to his dealings with you, indeed, you must keep the most reverential silence: for "his ways are in the great deep;" "nor are his thoughts" at all in unison "with ours." But I again say, in reference to all your own necessities, you can never ask too much, nor ever expect too much. Only look to him as "your God;" and you shall surely find him "a God unto you."]

[k] Eph. ii. 12. The Greek.

[l] Isai. lxii. 6, 7.

MCCXXV.

A REVIVAL DESIRED.

Hab. iii. 2. *O Lord, revive thy work!*

THE ministry of the Prophet Habakkuk seems to have been contemporaneous with that of the Prophet Jeremiah. He foretells the judgments which should be executed on the Jewish nation by the Chaldeans; and the fearful recompence which should come on the heads of the Chaldeans by the instrumentality of the Medes and Persians. But he was not willing that his people should wait so long without a blessing, even the whole period of their threatened captivity; and therefore, in a divine ode, an ode of peculiar sublimity, he implores of God the restoration of his favour towards them, and entreats him to blend his judgments with mercy: "O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years; in the midst of the years (of their captivity) make known: in wrath remember mercy!"

The petition here offered is highly proper to be presented to God, at all times:

I. For the Church at large—

It is proper,

1. For the Jewish Church—

[The captivity of that people in Babylon lasted only seventy years: but that to which they have been subjected, since their dispersion by the Romans, has lasted above seventeen hundred years: and in all this time there has been no material revival amongst them, in a way of humiliation, or of return to God. But now it seems as if God were about to return in mercy to them, and to restore them to himself: so that we are encouraged to cry unto him, "O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years!" And certainly we have the same encouragement which the prophet had. He in all the subsequent part of this chapter, reminds God of his former interpositions for them, in Egypt, and in the wilderness; and of the deliverances vouchsafed to them under circumstances of still greater difficulty than that with which they were encompassed in Babylon: and we may also well call those wonders to remembrance, as an encouragement to plead for them, and to

expect from God's hands the most signal interpositions in their favour. For their present dispersion is not more unfavourable than their oppression in Egypt; nor are the manifestations of God's favour, which we look for in their behalf, more glorious than those which were vouchsafed to them at the Red Sea, and on Mount Sinai. It is not a new work which we have to solicit for them, but only a *revival* of the former work. And we may hope, that God will yet again, and at no distant period too, take them under his protection, and "reveal unto them more richly than ever the abundance of peace and truth."]

2. For the Christian Church—

[This is at a low ebb, and greatly needs a revival. Where are the Pentecostal effusions of the Spirit, and the simultaneous conversions of thousands unto God? In great and extensive countries, where religion once flourished, the very name of Christ is now scarcely known. And amongst those who profess to be followers of Christ, how little is there of real piety, and of vital godliness! Whether amongst pastors or their flocks, we behold but little of that primitive simplicity, or of that entireness of devotion to God, which characterized the apostolic age. We read of "days of the Son of man;" and those are what we want to behold amongst us. We want to see the lighting down of his arm amongst us; and such displays of his power and glory as he gave when "he shook the room where his people were assembled, and filled them all with the Holy Ghost" and with power[a]. In a word, we are looking for "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord:" and for these we should be earnestly pleading with God in prayer; saying, with the prophet, "O that thou wouldest rend the heavens, and come down; that the mountains might flow down at thy presence[b]!" and, with David, "Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee? Shew us thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us thy salvation[c]."]

But the petition may be offered also,

II. For our own souls in particular—

Who amongst us does not need to offer it?

[We are but too apt, all of us, to experience changes in the divine life, similar to those which take place in the natural world. There are seasons of spring and autumn, summer and winter: and such we find at times within our own souls. In early youth, our feelings are warm and our imaginations lively: and we seem as if it were not possible for us ever to decline from the ways on which we have entered. But, when we have

[a] Acts iv. 31—33. [b] Isai. lxiv. 1. [c] Ps. lxxxv. 6, 7.

advanced to middle life, how often do we see reason to deplore the loss of those ardent affections which once glowed in our souls! "The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire of other things," have beguiled us, and caused a painful declension within us; so that we have need particularly to cry, "O Lord, revive thy work *in the midst of my years!*" — — —]

To the prophet's remedy, then, we should betake ourselves—

[Prayer is, of all things, the most effectual. Personal exertions are good in their place, and even necessary: but, to whatever extent they be carried, they will be of no avail without prayer. The husbandman may labour day and night; but he can never obtain a crop, without the shining of the sun, and the influences of the former and latter rain. All is under the controul of heaven with respect to him: and so it is with respect to us: and it is by prayer that the Divine blessing is to be obtained. And what would not the prayer of faith effect? Has it closed heaven for three years and a half, and then opened it again; and shall it not avail for *us?* Were we but earnest and constant in prayer, there would be little reason to complain of declension, though every day would still bring with it the need of a revival.]

And have we not the same encouragement?

[The prophet looked back to former days, and pleaded for a repetition of former mercies. And shall not we also look back to the day when he quickened us from our death in trespasses and sins, and created us anew, and translated us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son? We are taught to consider his gifts as earnests and pledges of further mercies: and that is a just mode of arguing which the Psalmist adopts, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death; Wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before the Lord in the light of the living[d]?" God says to us, "Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified[e]:" and if we use these means in faith, our success shall resemble that which the prophet describes: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord! awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old! Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and ever-

[d] Ps. lvi. 13. [e] Isai. xliii. 26.

lasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away[f]."]

APPLICATION—

1. Inquire now, I pray you, what is the state of God's work within you?

[Has he ever yet wrought effectually in your souls? Has he ever brought you out of bondage to the world, and sin, and Satan; and brought you to live in a state of entire dependence upon him, for guidance in his ways, for protection from enemies, for daily supplies of grace and peace, and for the final possession of the promised land? And are you advancing in the divine life, and "making your profiting daily to appear?" ——— If the work is not yet begun, lose not a moment in pleading with him, that you may obtain mercy at his hands. And if, through the prevalence of temptation, it has declined at all, cry to him with all possible earnestness, "O Lord, revive thy work!" and leave nothing undone, if by any means you may "strengthen in your souls what is yet remaining, but is ready to die[g]."]

2. Let nothing discourage you in your application to the Lord—

[See the state of the Jews in Babylon; and judge whether you can be in a more desperate state than they. To Babylon they had been sent by God himself, in token of his heavy displeasure: and there they were oppressed without mercy. No access to God had they in his ordinances; nor had they any hope of deliverance, except what was founded on his word of promise. Let your state, then, be as bad as your imagination can paint it, and the same blessed hope is yours: for God will not shut his ear against the cry of the poor destitute, or disappoint their desire. Go to him with that prayer of David, "Return, O Lord, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants. O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice, and be glad in thee all our days[h]!" and you may be perfectly assured that he will return to you, and "give you a reviving in your bondage[i]."]

[f] Isai. li. 9—11.
[g] Rev. iii. 2.
[h] Ps. xc. 13, 14.
[i] Ezra ix. 8.

MCCXXVI.

THE CHRISTIAN'S BOAST.

Hab. iii. 17, 18. *Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.*

A CHRISTIAN will be distinguished from others, whatever be his situation in life; but the more trying and afflictive his condition be, the more will he cause his light to shine before men, and demonstrate the excellence of the principles he has embraced. The prophet's resolution, in the prospect of the Babylonish invasion and of the calamities consequent upon it, affords a just picture of every child of God: for though all do not possess the same attainments, all determine through grace to make God the exclusive object of their joy and triumph. Taking then the text as expressive of the feelings of all God's people, we shall notice,

I. The Christian's boast—

The Christian is not exempt from the common calamities of life: but though he partakes of the troubles in which others are involved, he feels supports with which others are wholly unacquainted—

1. He views God as his God and Saviour—

[The Christian contemplates God as the Creator and Governor of the universe, but more especially as the Saviour of sinful man. He admires the stupendous method which God has devised for the salvation of sinners through the blood and righteousness of his only dear Son: but that which gives peculiar sweetness to his meditations is, that he is enabled to claim God as *his* Saviour, who *has been* already the "God of his salvation, and *is* daily his strength; and will be an effectual Saviour, making his feet like hinds' feet, and causing him to walk upon his high places[a]"— — —]

2. He determines, in the want of all other things, to rejoice in him—

[a] ver. 19.

[In possessing God, he enjoys a *suitable* good, an *all-sufficient* good, and an *everlasting* good; he has that which fully satisfies the desires of his soul[b] — — — which makes him regardless of all his wants or trials[c] — — — and which is unchangeable, no less in its operation than its existence — — — Hence he determines to rejoice in God, no less when bereft of all the necessaries of life, than when surrounded with a fulness of all earthly comforts.

Nor is this a vain boast: for it accords with the experience of the godly in all ages of the world[d] — — —]

We shall have a just view of the Christian, if we consider,

II. The insight which this gives us into his real character—

Following the clew which this passage affords us, we shall find that the Christian is,

1. An exalted character—

[His thoughts are not engrossed by the things of time and sense; he soars to heaven, and views God himself in all the perfections of his nature, and in all the wonders of his grace. Nor could he be contented to call the whole world his own: he will be satisfied with nothing but the enjoyment of God, and a well-grounded persuasion of an interest in his favour. In this respect he as much surpasses the wisest philosopher, as the philosopher excels the most illiterate clown; because they who search deepest into the works of nature are circumscribed by the creation, whereas the Christian contemplates the Creator himself. Indeed he emulates even the angels around the throne, who are represented as continually looking into the mysteries of redeeming love[e].]

2. A happy character—

[The Christian is not exempt from trials and troubles; yet is he far happier than any unregenerate man. There is not any earthly bliss of which he has not a higher relish than others, because he enjoys, not the creature only, but God in the creature. A carnal mind cannot form any estimate of the Christian's joys. To know what is meant by communion with Christ, by the witness of the Spirit, and by the love of God shed abroad in the heart, we must experience them ourselves; and without such experience we are as incapable of judging of them as a blind man is of colours, or a deaf man of sounds. No words can fully express the joy with which the

[b] Ps. iv. 6. [c] Ps. xlvi. 1—4.
[d] Heb. x. 34. Acts v. 41. and xvi. 23—25. [e] 1 Pet. i. 12.

Christian is sometimes favoured: it is represented as "unspeakable and glorified[f]."]

3. An independent character—

[Others, if bereft of earthly supports, are reduced to extreme distress: the Christian may be deprived of all external comforts, and still the source of his happiness will remain entire. He can even derive happiness from his afflictions; he can "rejoice in his sufferings," and "glory in his tribulations." He is independent of the whole world: none can greatly add to his happiness, or materially detract from it. In the fulness of earthly blessings he enjoys *God in all*; and in the absence of them he enjoys *all in God*[g].]

ADDRESS—

1. The careful Christian—

[God would "have you without carefulness[h]:" he commands you to "be careful for nothing[i]:' and four times in the space of a few verses does our Lord repeat the command, "Take no thought," that is, no anxious thought, "about any earthly thing whatever[k]." O ye who are "careful and cumbered about many things," see how ye live below your privileges. Get your hearts more filled with the love of God, and the cares of this world will be dissipated as the dew before the sun[l].]

2. The timid Christian—

[Some, though dead to the world, have not that joy in God which it is their privilege to possess. They meditate too much upon their own infirmities, and too little upon the perfections and promises of their God. O brethren, look at God as the God of salvation, as the God of *your* salvation, and you shall have your fears turned into confidence, and your sorrows into thanksgiving and the voice of melody.]

3. The confident Christian—

[If your confidence be tempered with humility and contrition, "hold it fast," and "keep the rejoicing of your hope firm unto the end." Such joy in God will recommend religion unto others, and "be the strength of your own souls." While living in this state you will be prepared for every event: you will be guarded equally against the allurements of prosperity, and the terrors of adversity. "Rejoice then evermore; rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice."]

[f] 1 Pet. i. 8.
[g] 2 Cor. vi. 10.
[h] 1 Cor. vii. 32.
[i] Phil. iv. 6.
[k] Matt. vi. 25, 28, 31, 34.
[l] Gal. vi. 14.

ZEPHANIAH.

MCCXXVII.

THE SECURE AND ATHEISTICAL CONDEMNED.

Zeph. i. 12. *It shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees; that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.*

SUCH was the state of the Jews for a long time previous to the Babylonish captivity, that the prophets had little to do, but to denounce the judgments of God against them. The promises which they were inspired to utter had respect to a different and distant period, a period for the most part yet future; shadowed forth indeed by their deliverance from Babylon, but to be realized only by their future conversion to the faith of Christ. Nevertheless, the warnings given to them are of use to the Church of God in all ages. The Christian Church at this time is in a state not very dissimilar to that of the Jews in the land of Canaan. We are externally the chosen people of God: we enjoy the ordinances of religion in their purity: and we have all the means of grace richly afforded us. But we rest in external services, as they did; and have as little of real piety as the generality of that infatuated nation. Whilst we call ourselves the people of the Lord, we differ but little from the nations that know not God. We conform in many things to customs most repugnant to true religion; and in the spirit and habit of our minds, shew, that, whatever we may retain of "the form of godliness, we are strangers to its power." The evils which God reproved

amongst them, are to be found in no less degree amongst us also: and the judgments that were denounced against them shew what reason we also have to dread the displeasure of God. In confirmation of this truth, we will consider,

I. The characters here described—

Such we behold in every place; persons sunk in,

1. Carnal security—

[The metaphor by which the state of these persons is depicted exhibits it in a most striking point of view. Wine, when "settled on its lees," retains for a long time its strength and flavour, which, if it were emptied from vessel to vessel, it would soon lose. In like manner, when, through a long period of ease and prosperity, persons have their natural dispositions fixed, and inveterate habits formed, they retain throughout their whole man, and manifest throughout their whole conduct, a savour of earthly things. The very habit of sin hardens them in sin; and the forbearance which God in his mercy exercises towards them, confirms in them an expectation of final impunity. This is the description which the Prophet Jeremiah gives of Moab[a]; and with it agrees the testimony of David respecting the ungodly in all ages: as long as they have no changes "to awaken them from their slumber, they fear not God." How true this is, we cannot but see in all around us. How securely do men live in a total neglect of their everlasting concerns! They have no dread of God's displeasure; no anxieties about the future judgment; no alternations of hope and fear as arising from an examination of their state before God. Whatever God may say in his word, they regard it not. If he tell them, that "broad is the road that leadeth to destruction, and that many," even the great mass of mankind, "walk therein; but that narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it;" they account it worthy of not the least attention: they cannot believe that they are in any danger; and they hold fast their delusions with a confidence that nothing can shake.]

2. Atheistical presumption—

[Persons, the more effectually to exclude all misgivings from their minds, deny that God takes any cognizance of their state. "Tush, say they, how shall God know? is there knowledge in the Most High[b]?" They think it would be dishonouring God to conceive of him as marking all the ways of the children of men in order to a future judgment. True

[a] Jer. xlviii. 11. [b] Ps. lxxiii. 11.

indeed, they hear him denounce many threatenings against the ungodly: but they will not believe that he will execute them. They hear him, too, promising many things to his humble and obedient people: but they cannot persuade themselves that he will fulfil them. They imagine that he has, as it were, "forsaken the earth[c]:" and quite contented are they that he should do so, since the very thought of his presence would disquiet them. Thus do they, in fact, "say like the fool, 'There is no God[d].'"

Not that this is the language of their *lips*: they would be ashamed to avow such sentiments as these. But it is the language of their *hearts*: "they say in their hearts, The Lord will not do good; neither will he do evil." If they believed in their hearts the promises and threatenings of God, they would manifest a suitable regard to them in their lives: but, as they neither delight themselves in the one, nor tremble at the other, they shew beyond all doubt what the secret feeling of their hearts is, and that the construction which God puts upon their conduct is true. They may be moral and decent in their outward conduct; but radically in their hearts they are "Atheists in the world[e]."]

After this view of the persons described in our text, we shall not wonder at,

II. The judgments denounced against them—

Two things God declares in the words before us;

1. That however hidden they may suppose their state to be, God will search it out—

[The Jews at the passover would search every corner of their houses with candles, in order to find the smallest portion of leaven which might lie concealed: and God will search with candles, not Jerusalem only, but every place, yea and every heart, to find the abominations which have been just described. They may not betray themselves by any overt acts, so as to excite the attention of men: they may even exist where all the outward conduct is correct; even as the most offensive masses of corruption are hid under a whited sepulchre. But God will not be deceived by any appearances, however specious; "The darkness is no darkness with him; but the night is as clear as the day:" before him all things are naked and opened: the thoughts and intents of the heart are discerned by him: and "he will make manifest its most hidden counsels." "He searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins," and "weigheth the spirit" as in a balance; and will interpret as infallibly the

[c] Ezek. viii. 12.
[d] Ps. xiv. 1.
[e] Eph. ii. 12. See the Greek.

language of the heart, as if it had been manifested by ten thousand acts. Let this be duly considered. We may deceive others, and we may deceive ourselves: but we cannot deceive our God; for "he knows the things that come into our mind, every one of them."]

2. That however innocent they may suppose their state to be, God will punish it—

[God cannot look upon persons of this description without the deepest resentment: for they place him on a level with the basest idol, whose proper character is, that "it can do neither good nor evil[f]." And how can a holy and jealous God endure this? Be it so: their wickedness is only, as it were, of a negative kind; and consists rather in a neglect of what is good, than in a perpetration of what is evil: but was this unpunished in the antediluvian world? "They ate, they drank; they planted, they builded; they married, and were given in marriage:" and, What harm, it may be asked, was there in all this? None: but the evil was, that they lived without any regard for God: and therefore God sent a deluge, and swept them all away. And so will he do with respect to those who now cast off all fear of him, and, in heart at least, banish him from the world which he has created. See in what light he views such conduct: he declares "the iniquity of it to be exceeding great[g];" and denounces against it his heaviest indignation[h]. And so far are these persons from being out of danger, that the more secure they apprehend themselves to be, the greater and more imminent their danger is. They may say, Peace and safety; but "sudden destruction will come upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape[i]:" they may sleep; but "their judgment lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." "The sins of some are open beforehand, going before to judgment: but they that are otherwise cannot be hid[k]." It is in vain to say that they do no harm: for the unprofitable servant, no less than the openly wicked, shall be "cast into outer darkness, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are living in the state above described—

[I will appeal to you yourselves respecting the wickedness of your lives. Judge ye between God and your own souls. Consider yourselves but as creatures; and does it become you to live without any regard for your Creator? But view your-

[f] Jer. x. 5. [g] Ezek. ix. 9. [h] Deut. xxix. 19, 20.
[i] 1 Thess. v. 3. [k] 1 Tim. v. 24, 25.

selves as sinners redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son; and then say, whether a life of carnal security and atheistical presumption be such an one as your condition calls for? ——— Look into the Scriptures, and see whether you can find any countenance for such a life, either in the commands of God, or in the examples of his saints? ——— Think whether your own opinion of such a state will always remain what you now profess it to be? Do you find that any awakened soul looks back on such a life with complacency? Does it appear to him a light matter to have lived all his days as without God in the world? If you continue to harden yourselves against God, he may give you up to your own delusions, and leave you under the power of them in your dying hour: but what think you will be your views of such a life the very instant your eyes are opened on the invisible world? What will be your views of it when standing in the presence of your Judge? and what will be your views of it, when you are eating the fruit of your own ways in that place from whence there is no return, and in which your residence will be fixed to all eternity? If in your hearts you think that you will then rejoice in the retrospect of a carnal life, go on; and sleep out the little remainder of your days. But if conscience tell you, that in that day you will have far different views from those which you now profess, then awake from your slumbers, and turn unto God without delay. God has given you a candle wherewith to search yourselves; (for "the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly[1]:") make use of it then with all diligence: "search and try your ways, and turn unto the Lord your God:" and doubt not but that in Christ you shall find a full and complete redemption. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall give thee light."]

2. Those who have attained deliverance from it—

[Blessed be God, if any of you have been quickened from your death in trespasses and sins: and now beware, lest ye relapse again into your former state of atheistical supineness. It is no uncommon thing for persons to run well for a season, and then turn back again; to "begin in the Spirit, and end in the flesh." But to you also will I make my appeal: Is it "a vain thing to serve the Lord?" Will he not do good to those who seek him in sincerity and truth? Is he not, as he has said, "the Rewarder of all such?" Does he not even now impart to the soul blessings that are of more value than ten thousand worlds? Does he not answer prayer? Does he not communicate to the soul a peace that passeth all understanding? Does

[1] Prov. xx. 27.

he not lift up the light of his countenance on the poor and needy? Does he not shed abroad his love in the heart? Does he not give the witness of his Spirit to the soul, and seal it unto the day of redemption? On the other hand, does he not hide his face when you become remiss, and leave you to feel what "an evil and bitter thing it is to depart from him?" Yes: you can testify that there is a God that ruleth in the earth; you can testify how rich his grace is, and how abundant his mercy in the Son of his love. You can testify that Christ "reveals himself to his people as he does not unto the world;" and that he dwells in them, and gives them, by the manifestations of his love, an earnest and a foretaste of their future inheritance. Go on, then, living by faith upon him, and cleaving unto him with full purpose of heart; and shew to all around you what the Christian life is. Run, as in a race, for an incorruptible crown: wrestle as one that is striving against all the principalities and powers of hell: and fight manfully till all your enemies are put under your feet. So shall you be living witnesses for God in this world, and partakers of all his blessedness in the world to come.]

MCCXXVIII.

REPENTANCE URGED.

Zeph. ii. 1—3. *Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you. Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.*

IN the preceding chapter, the most dreadful judgments are denounced against the whole Jewish nation. That devoted people are represented as a sacrifice, which God himself has prepared to be devoured by their enemies, whom he has invited as guests to come and prey upon them[a]. Yet, as God afforded space for repentance to the Ninevites, notwithstanding the apparent immutability of his decree against them, so he does here to his own people the Jews. By the voice of his prophet he bids them "gather themselves

[a] Zeph. i. 7.

together" for the purpose of national humiliation, and repent, before the threatened judgments come upon them. And, if they in their national capacity will not hear his voice, he bids the meek and contrite among them to abase themselves, that they at least may be preserved amidst the general wreck.

A similar exhortation is at all times seasonable; since at all times there are the heaviest judgments impending over the ungodly, and since by true and timely penitence they may be averted.

To analyze this passage, will be to enervate its force. I shall therefore ground upon it a general address, having respect to its main import, and prosecuting in an unartificial way its more prominent topics. Know then, that

The most dreadful judgments hang over an ungodly world—

[There is a day wherein "God will judge the world by that man whom he hath ordained, even by our Lord Jesus Christ." That day is called "the *day of wrath* and of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God;" and "*the day of the perdition of ungodly men*[b]." But the terrors of that day who can conceive? Who can form any idea of what is meant by *that wrath of God*, which is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men[c]?" Who can imagine what it is to be "cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone," where "the worm," that gnaws the conscience, "dieth not, and the fire is not quenched?" In a word, the "power of his anger who can tell[d]?"]

To escape those judgments should be the one concern of every living man—

[There is no man who is not justly exposed to them: all are trangressors of God's holy law, and consequently obnoxious to the curse which it denounces against sin. All then, as with one heart and one mind, should unite in deprecating the displeasure of their God, and in "fleeing for refuge to the hope set before them" in the Gospel — — — Hear this, "O people not desired:" whether through the hardness of your hearts ye are not *desired* by God, or through your ignorance of him are not *desirous* of his favour, (for the prophet's expression may be understood in either way;) you should not lose an hour in embracing the proffered mercy. If once "the decree bring

[b] Rom. ii. 5. 2 Pet. iii. 7. [c] Rom. i. 18. [d] Ps. xc. 11.

forth," there will be an end of all possibility of obtaining mercy to all eternity. "As the tree falls, so will it lie" for ever and ever. O, then let all of you "gather yourselves together," and, as the word also imports, "search yourselves," ere it be too late. For your immortal souls' sake, repent, I beseech you, without delay, "before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you."]

To those who have any measure of humility and contrition, this truth will approve itself as most unquestionable and most important—

[Prevalent as impiety is to a vast extent, there are some, I trust, "who have wrought God's judgment," and laboured in sincerity to fulfil his will. Such, it might be supposed, would be most self-confident. But the very reverse is their experience: the more observant they have been of the Lord's statutes, the more will they be humbled under a sense of their defects: they are, and ever will be, "the meek of the earth." To such then we address ourselves with the greater hope of success: "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth." You have already shewn that you think God is to be feared: your very attainments, small as they may be, yet testify in your behalf that you are neither "undesirous," or "undesired." You have chosen God; and that is a proof that God has previously chosen you[e]. Relax not then your endeavours: be not contented to have run well for a season: press forward, forgetful of all that you may have attained: "never be weary in well-doing," lest you "turn back," and "your last end be worse than your beginning."]

But let your humiliation be such as God requires—

["Seek righteousness, seek meekness;" "seek righteousness" in the way wherein God has appointed it to be obtained, even by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; who, by his own obedience unto death, has brought in an everlasting righteousness for the justification of the ungodly; and by his efficacious and all-sufficient grace will "sanctify you throughout, in body, soul, and spirit." Rest not in any thing short of the full possession of Christ and all his benefits: but labour night and day, till "he is, of God, made unto you wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Particularly "seek meekness" also; for that is the grace which God most delights in: "the broken and contrite heart he will not despise;" on the contrary, he will come down from the highest heavens to testify his regard for it, and to make it his habitation[f]. If there be one grace more than another which distinguishes the

[e] John xv. 16. [f] Isai. lvii. 15.

more advanced Christian, it is that of humility. Job was a "perfect" man before his sufferings; but, after them, his attainments in grace were exceedingly enlarged; and then it was that he "abhorred himself in dust and ashes." Do ye also aspire after perfection in every grace; but learn most of all to "lothe yourselves," when you have the most confident hope that "God is pacified towards you[g]."]

It shall then assuredly prove effectual for the salvation of your souls—

["Repent," says the prophet, "and turn from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin." Where the judgments are of a temporal nature, the true penitent may *hope* that God will put a difference between him and others[h]; but in reference to judgments that shall be inflicted in the eternal world, he may *be sure* of it. The sheep and the goats shall have their appropriate places assigned them; and the wheat be treasured up in the garner, whilst "the chaff is burnt up with unquenchable fire." Were there but a peradventure concerning this, it were quite sufficient to encourage our deepest penitence: but it is not a matter of uncertainty: it not only "*may be*," but *shall be*: and not the smallest grain of true wheat shall ever be lost[i]. Did Jesus, even in the days of his flesh, lose one whom the Father had given him? No: "nor will he ever suffer one to be plucked out of his hands." "Their lives are now hid with Christ in God; and therefore when He, who is their life, shall appear, they also shall appear with him in glory[k]."]

[g] Ezek. xvi. 63.
[h] Ezek. ix. 4.
[i] Amos ix. 9.
[k] Col. iii. 3, 4.

MCCXXIX.

WHAT RECOMPENCE WE MAY EXPECT FOR OUR NEGLECT OF GOD.

Zeph. iii. 7, 8. *I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings. Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey.*

IN great national calamities we are apt, for the most part, to overlook the hand of God, and to trace events only to second causes, or to ascribe them to mere chance. But whatever there be either of "good

or evil in the city," God must be acknowledged as "the doer of it." Moreover, in whatever he does, he has some fixed design: and to answer that design should be the labour of all his creatures. Now the general design of his judgments is, to awaken the inhabitants of the earth from their torpor, and to teach them righteousness: and if smaller judgments produce not this effect upon us, we may expect heavier to ensue. One very important object to be attained by cutting off the nations around Judæa, and by sending the ten tribes into captivity in Assyria, was to reform his more peculiar people, the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. And as his people were far from improving his judgments for that end, he declared that he would visit them in a way suited to display the enormity of their guilt, and the riches of that grace which they had so abused.

In order to accommodate this subject to the present occasion, we shall consider,

I. What God has been expecting from us—

Dreadful have been the judgments which God has inflicted on the surrounding nations—

[To whatever part of Europe we direct our attention, we shall see that the different nations have, during the last twenty years, been visited with calamities of a most afflictive kind: but more particularly, *the recent devastation of Russia*, the destruction of its ancient capital by fire, and the total annihilation of the French army in the space of a few weeks, are events that demand particular notice at this time[a]. Indeed, with the exception of our highly-favoured land, there is scarcely a country to which, at some period of this war, we may not in a measure apply the words preceding our text; "I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant."]

And has not God been speaking to us by these great events?

[Yes, surely: he has sought to reclaim us from our evil ways: he has "said with himself, Surely thou wilt fear me; thou wilt receive instruction; so that thy dwelling shall not be cut off, howsoever I punish thee." Of us this improvement of

[a] In October, 1813.

his judgments might well be expected, not only on account of the peculiar protection which has been afforded us, but on account of the transcendant advantages which we enjoy in the knowledge of God's word, and the ministration of his Gospel[b] ——— And now, I ask, was not this expectation reasonable? and is not that complaint which God made against his people of old, in the fullest and strictest sense applicable to us[c]? ———]

Alas! We have reason to blush and be confounded, when we reflect,

II. How we have disappointed his expectations—

Hear the accusation of God against us; "They rose early, and corrupted all their doings"—

[There is no sin, in the commission of which we are not as eager as ever. It should almost seem that "the goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance of God, which should have led us to repentance," have produced rather the contrary effect, of lulling us to sleep in our sins. The accusation is more fully stated in a preceding verse[d]: let us consider it more minutely: let us make use of it as a light by which to search and try our ways ——— Is it not true? and is not our guilt in this view exceeding heinous?]

And is not the accusation applicable to all ranks and orders amongst us, even as it was against the Jews of old?

[We do not in general wish to speak of others: but in a view of national iniquities we are constrained to do so, especially where the prophets lead the way. Behold then what the prophet speaks respecting the princes, the judges, the prophets, and the priests of his day[e]: we will not say that precisely the same iniquities prevail amongst those different orders in our land; but we appeal to you, whether any material change has taken place amongst the higher ranks; or whether those, whose duty it is to instruct and reform the world, have increased in activity and zeal, by any means to the extent that the occasion has called for? Alas! if we consult the records of the New Testament, and see what the Apostles preached, and how they lived, and then compare it with the lives and ministrations of the sacred order amongst us, we shall see cause to wonder that God has not already removed his candlestick from us, and left us in utter darkness ———

[b] Here shew particularly wherein that improvement should have consisted; and our additional obligation to it, arising from our religious privileges: ver. 5.

[c] Isai. v. 3, 4. [d] ver. 2. [e] ver. 3, 4.

And well may the misconduct of these orders be more distinctly noticed, since on them depends, in so great a degree, the state of all the other classes of society. If all ministers would preach the Gospel with fidelity, and exemplify its holy precepts in their lives; and if our princes and nobility would take the lead in the great work of reformation; an immense change would soon be wrought in every quarter of the land: but if, for want of their exertions, the whole land continue in its iniquities, let them not wonder that their criminality is exposed, and that the judgments reserved for them are proportioned to the guilt which they contract.]

The disappointment of God's expectations from us leads us naturally to consider,

III. What we may expect from him—

On this part of our subject we shall be led to extremely different views, according to the interpretation which we put on the concluding words of our text. Some understand the words thus: "Ye have disappointed all my reasonable expectations; therefore expect from me the most tremendous judgments." Others justly observe, that the word "*therefore*" may properly be translated "nevertheless[f];" and that the sense is, 'ye have disappointed all my reasonable expectations; *nevertheless* that shall not induce me to alter my gracious purposes towards Jews and Gentiles, whom I will unite under one head, and sanctify as my peculiar people.' In confirmation of this latter sense, we must say, that this is the very way in which God often introduces his most glorious promises[g]; and that the two verses following our text seem to require it. But as we cannot certainly determine which of the senses is the right, we include both; and shew what we may expect from God,

1. In a way of judgment—

[Often does God denounce especial vengeance against those who have abused his mercies[h]: and well indeed may we expect to have it executed upon us: well may we be constrained to drink the dregs of that cup which has been put into the hands of the surrounding nations. And how fearful

[f] That is evidently the true sense of the word in Mic. v. 2, 3.
[g] Isai. xliii. 22—26. and lvii. 16, 17. and Hab. ii. 12—14.
[h] Isai. v. 5, 6. Jer. v. 5, 6.

will be our state, if "God pour upon us his indignation, even all his fierce anger!" Let us not indulge in presumptuous security. Who that had been told a few years ago that either the ancient capital of the Russian empire, or that of the British empire, would before this be certainly destroyed by fire, would have imagined on which the lot should fall? O let us tremble for ourselves, and labour to fulfil the gracious designs of God, before his wrath come upon us to the uttermost — — —]

2. In a way of mercy—

[The Jews have an idea that the Messiah's advent was deferred on account of the wickedness of their nation: but it was not deferred; nor shall any thing prevent the final execution of God's promises, in the restoration of the Jews, and the bringing in the fulness of the Gentiles[i] — — — No: we look for those events with full assurance that they shall be accomplished in due season. It is probable, indeed, that great calamities will precede those events[k]; and there is great reason to hope, that the calamities of the present day are preparing the way for them. May God hasten forward that glorious period! and then, grievous as have been the distresses of the world for so many years, we shall not think we have sustained one too much, if it has been accessary in any measure to the promotion of so blessed an end.]

APPLICATION—

[Let us now drop all idea of *national* concerns, and come to those which are purely *personal*. Let us call to mind our *personal* transgressions, and reflect upon the *personal* judgments or mercies that await us — — — And may God reap the fruit of all his kindness; and Christ "see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied!"]

[i] ver. 9, 10. [k] Luke xxi. 25—28.

MCCXXX.

THE POOR LIVING BY FAITH.

Zeph. iii. 12. *I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people; and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.*

THE Lord's people have in every age been a mere remnant, in comparison of the great mass of mankind. At the time of the deluge they were confined to Noah and his family. In the patriarchal age, from the call of Abraham to the descent of his posterity into Egypt,

they were still a very "little flock:" and though they afterwards in appearance multiplied, and became a great nation, yet "they were not all Israel who were of Israel:" there was still but a small portion of that people who truly loved and served God; and even in the apostolic age St. Paul tells us, that they were then only "a remnant according to the election of grace." Moreover, this remnant has for the most part been of the description mentioned in our text, persons destitute of any thing whereon to found a carnal confidence, and necessitated to confide solely in their God. At the period referred to in the preceding context they will cease to bear the character of a remnant, seeing that they will fill the face of the whole earth, and comprehend in their number all the kings and princes of the world[a]: but till that period they will be characterized as "an afflicted and poor people, who shall trust in the name of the Lord."

In further speaking of them, we shall be led to notice,

I. Their low condition—

The description here given of them is for the most part verified in them,

1. As members of the community—

[Riches and poverty are relative terms; and, when viewed in a large and comprehensive sense, will serve to draw a broad line between the different classes of society. It is from the lower of these classes that the Lord's people are most generally taken. Others are not excluded; on the contrary, *some* of the opposite class will always be found among them: but "not *many* great, not *many* mighty, not *many* noble, are called: God has chosen rather the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised, that no flesh should glory in his presence[b]." So evident has this been in all ages of the Church, that St. James appeals to his brethren all the world over in confirmation of the fact: "Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom[c]?" Indeed to this circumstance our Lord himself referred as confirming the truth of his Messiahship, that "to the poor the Gospel was preached[d]:" and they received his

[a] ver. 9.
[b] 1 Cor. i. 26—29.
[c] Jam. ii. 5.
[d] Matt. xi. 5.

word, and "heard him gladly," whilst the Scribes and Pharisees almost universally rejected him.

Affliction too is not unfrequently associated with poverty in the Lord's people: for it is rarely that any man will turn truly unto the Lord, till affliction of some kind or other has prepared his heart, and "plowed up, as it were, the fallow ground" for the reception of the heavenly seed. Almost all have occasion to acknowledge, with the Psalmist, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray." The minds of men are so carnal and worldly, that they will scarcely admit a serious thought, till they are made to feel, like the Prodigal in the parable, the insufficiency of earthly things to comfort them in the hour of trouble. Then they awake, as it were, out of a dream; and begin to say, "I will go unto my Father, in whose house there is bread enough and to spare."]

2. As convinced sinners—

[In this state every child of God without exception answers to the character in our text. There was once a time when all of them thought that they were "rich and increased in goods, and had need of nothing;" but, when the Lord opened the eyes of their understanding, they were made sensible that they were "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." From that time they become "poor in spirit," and "go on their way weeping" for all their past iniquities and abominations. Now they have on their hearts a load too heavy for them to bear; and under the pressure of it they go to that adorable Saviour, who has invited to him the weary and heavy-laden, and who alone is capable of giving them rest. Such are the persons to whom alone the Gospel is acceptable[e], or can ever be preached with full effect: "the whole need not a physician:" it is the sick alone that desire his aid, or will receive his prescriptions. And such are the Lord's people: they feel themselves utterly destitute of all wisdom, goodness, and strength; and they are content to receive these blessings out of the fulness that is in Christ Jesus.]

3. As professors of godliness—

[In former ages, long before the coming of Christ, the Lord's people were persecuted by an ungodly world. Thousands "of whom the world," as the Apostle says, "was not worthy, had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented[f]." Of the saints under the Gospel dispensation it is needless to speak: the Acts of the Apostles

[e] Isai. xiv. 32.

[f] Heb. xi. 36—38.

amply testify, as the Epistles do also, that the followers of Christ have been treated as "the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things;" and experience proves that they are so regarded even to this day. The increase of civilization, and the protection afforded by human laws, prevent the same cruelties from being exercised towards them as in days of old: but it is as true at this day as at any period of the world, that "he who departeth from evil maketh himself a prey;" and that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." True, we are not dragged to the stake as formerly: but is it nothing to be hated, and despised of all men, and to be made a butt for impiety and profaneness to expend their arrows upon? Is it nothing, too, to have one's "greatest foes amongst one's own household?" Yet so shall every man, who will be faithful to his God, find it in his own experience: he shall surely have some cross to bear; and be himself a witness, that the Lord's servants are "a poor and afflicted people."]

Nevertheless they need not be discouraged, if only they will improve,

II. Their exalted privilege—

"The name of the Lord is to them a strong tower, to which they may run and be safe." It is their privilege to trust in,

1. His mercy to pardon their offences—

[Whatever their former sins may have been, their Lord and Saviour is ready to forgive them, and to blot them all out as a morning cloud. Even though they may have been "red like crimson, they, through the virtue of his blood, shall be made white as snow." Know then your privilege in this respect: let no sense of guilt keep you from him: limit not his tender mercies: look at those whom he received in the days of his flesh: and be assured, that he is still as gracious as ever; and that "those who come to him he will in no wise cast out." "Though your sins may have abounded, his grace shall much more abound;" and he will say to you, as he did to a notorious sinner of old, "Thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee."]

2. His power to uphold them in their difficulties—

[Great may be your conflicts with sin and Satan; but great shall be the succour which you shall derive from your living Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will "strengthen you with might by his Spirit in your inner man:" and "as your day is, so shall also your strength be." In you shall that sweet promise be verified, "The foot shall tread down its adversaries, even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy[g]." However

[g] Isai. xxvi. 6.

formidable then your enemies may appear, remember, that "your Redeemer also is mighty;" and that, "whilst God is for you, none can with any effect be against you."]

3. His love to overrule every thing for good—

[God has promised to his people that "all things shall work together for their good." How the good shall be elicited from the evil, and especially at the time, they have no idea. But God knows how to accomplish his own gracious purposes by the very means which his enemies are using to defeat them. The history of Joseph, and the book of Esther, draw aside the veil, and shew us how God is acting at this very hour. The instances that occur are invisible to mortal eyes, as they were in the histories referred to: but the plot is going forward; and in due time millions of other instances will be seen, no less real, and no less wonderful than they. It is the privilege of God's people to "commit their ways entirely to him," and he engages that he "will bring to pass" what shall eventually be for their greatest good.]

4. His faithfulness to keep them, even to the end—

[Never does he forsake his poor and afflicted people. He has promised them, "I will never leave thee; I will never, never forsake thee." We may be confident, as the Apostle was, that "where God has begun a good work, he will carry it on, and perfect it till the day of Christ." This is assured to them by covenant and by oath, that they may have the stronger consolation[h]. Not that a reliance on their Saviour is to supersede their own efforts, but rather to encourage them; seeing that it is by their own efforts he will work: but still it is their privilege to anticipate the issue of their conflicts with confidence; and to rest assured, that "nothing shall ever separate them from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus their Lord."]

ADDRESS—

1. Let it not be a grief to any that they are "afflicted and poor"—

[Such the Saviour himself was; "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." And shall it be a grief to any to be made like unto Him? ——— Besides, it is by our own utter destitution of all good, that the power and grace of Christ will be magnified. And shall we not thankfully acquiesce in any thing that glorifies him? The Apostle Paul "took pleasure in his infirmities and distresses," because "the power of Christ was made perfect, and manifested to be perfect, by his weakness[i]:" and this is the proper disposition for us all. Be contented to be nothing; that "Christ may be all in all."]

[h] Heb. vi. 17—19. [i] 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

2. Let the religion of the heart be more and more cultivated—

[We are far from undervaluing religious *acts:* they are excellent, as fruits of the Spirit, and as evidences of a lively faith. But it is the religion of *the heart* that must be our first concern; since till the tree be made good, it is in vain to hope for any good fruit to spring from it. The grand characteristic feature of the Lord's people is, that "they trust in his name." Now trust is altogether an act of the soul; an act invisible to mortal eyes. It realizes the presence of Jehovah, and his government of the whole universe. It rests on him: it reposes all its hopes on his agency; and thus honours him, far beyond all other exercises either of the mind or body. This then is to be the habit of our minds: and "the whole life which we now live in the flesh, we must live altogether by faith in the Son of God, who has loved us, and given himself for us."]

MCCXXXI.

THE DUTY OF THANKFULNESS FOR GOD'S MERCIES.

Zeph. iii. 14, 15. *Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the King of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more.*

THE prophets are chiefly occupied with reproving the evils which prevailed in their day, and with denouncing, both on Israel and the surrounding nations, the judgments they had merited by their multiplied transgressions. But occasionally they change their voice, and, as heralds of mercy, proclaim to all, but to Israel more especially, the blessings which God has in reserve for them in the latter day. In performing this office they quite exult; and, when they have begun, they scarcely know how to end, their benevolent congratulations. In the former part of this chapter the prophet brings his accusations against the Jews, who, disregarding the warnings which God in his providence had given them by the judgments visibly inflicted upon others, persisted in their iniquities without shame or remorse[a]. But, in the latter

[a] ver. 1—7.

part of it, he launches forth into a subject more congenial with his feelings, and announces, both to the Jewish and Gentile world, that God had designs of love towards them, and would incorporate them all in one blessed society, and restore them all to his favour. In the address which I have just read to you he is peculiarly animated. We may consider it as delivered,

I. To the Jews, *prospectively*, in a way of anticipation—

The events referred to are spoken of as already past, even though at this time, after the lapse of twenty-five centuries, we see not yet the predictions fulfilled. But this mode of speaking is common to all the prophets, who, knowing the unerring certainty of their predictions, look through intervening ages as through a telescope, and see the objects of which they speak accomplished before their eyes.

Now here the prophet felicitates the Jews as already liberated from the judgments which they had suffered, or which yet at distant periods impended over them—

[They were to be carried captive to Babylon and to Assyria, and to be utterly destroyed by the Roman power, and to be scattered over the face of the whole earth as objects of hatred and contempt amongst all people. And it is a fact, that no people that ever existed upon earth were ever so universally despised, and hated, and persecuted as they. But the prophet says to them by anticipation, "Thy judgments are taken away." This has already in part been "fulfilled." And it is certain that in God's good time her judgments shall be so perfectly taken away, as not to leave even the appearance, and scarcely the recollection, of them behind: "Thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband . . . . the God of the whole earth shall he be called[b]." So completely shall this be done, that Jerusalem shall yet become a name and a praise amongst all the people upon earth, as soon as ever the Lord shall have turned back the captivity with which his people are now oppressed[c].]

[b] Isai. liv. 1—10. See also Zech. i. 15—17. In a Discourse written on this subject, almost all the passages here referred to, under the first head especially, should be *cited at full length*.

[c] ver. 19. with Isai. lxv. 17—19.

But, to enter more distinctly into this subject—

[Three things are here predicted as grounds of unutterable joy: First; *Their enemies shall all be cast out;* next, *The Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, shall dwell in the midst of them;* and lastly, *There shall be an utter end of their troubles.*

Their enemies shall all be cast out. When the time shall arrive for the full accomplishment of this, the combination against them will be formidable in the extreme. But "all of their enemies shall fall for Zion's sake[d]:" yea, if there were "a confederacy of the whole earth against them," the Jews shall consume them "as easily as a torch of fire consumes a sheaf[e]," and as certainly "as a lion prevails over a flock of sheep[f]:" such "a burthensome stone shall Jerusalem be, to crush all her opponents;" and to such an abject state shall she reduce them, that, "like serpents, they shall lick the dust of the earth before her," and be "like worms that dare not to crawl out of their holes through fear[g]."

Then shall the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, descend to dwell in the midst of them. This is repeated in most glowing terms by the prophet in the second verse following my text[h]; and is affirmed also by the prophet Zechariah[i], and by Ezekiel also, who declares, that "they shall dwell in the land where their fathers dwelt," and that the true "David, their Messiah, shall be king over them;" and that "God's tabernacle shall be with them;" and his presence so conspicuous in the midst of them, that "all the heathen world shall acknowledge them as his peculiar people[k]." As to the personal reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years, I can say nothing to it. But I have no doubt, his manifestations of himself to them will be beyond all former example glorious; and his communications of his grace and peace to them far exceed all the precedents of former times, "the light of the moon being as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days[l]." Under the Mosaic dispensation they saw the Saviour as in a shadow: we see him as in a glass or mirror: but "the Jews in that day shall see him eye to eye," and face to face[m].

Then shall there be to them an utter end of all their troubles. "They shall not see evil any more." Then "will God take out of their hands the cup of trembling; and they shall drink it no more[n]." "No more will he hide his face from them[o]:" "the days of their mourning shall be ended[p]:" and they shall

[d] Isai. liv. 16, 17. [e] Zech. xii. 3, 6, 9. [f] Mic. v. 8, 9, 15.
[g] Mic. vii. 15—17. [h] ver. 17. [i] Zech. ii. 10—12.
[k] Ezek. xxxvii. 24—28. [l] Isai. xxx. 26.
[m] Isai. lii. 8. with 1 Cor. xiii. 12. [n] Isai. li. 21—23.
[o] Ezek. xxxix. 25—29. [p] Isai. lx. 15—20.

thenceforth be for a name and a praise to God amongst all the nations of the earth[q]."

And now I ask, is not this a ground for most exalted joy? So Jehovah himself regards it: "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. Be you glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy[r]." I call upon you then, my brethren, not to be indifferent to this sublime subject. If at the time when the prophecy was delivered, the prospect of these great events was a ground of joy, much more should it be so now, when the accomplishment of them is no near at hand. Could I address all the nation of Israel dispersed throughout the world, I would say to them, "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; rejoice and be glad with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem;" for thy complete redemption draweth nigh. I already see, as it were, "the glory of the Lord revealed to thee;" and in the name of the Most High God I proclaim unto thee, "Thy warfare is accomplished; thine iniquity is pardoned; and thou shalt receive at the Lord's hands mercies double" the amount of all the sins thou hast committed, and of all the judgments thou hast merited[s].]

But we must not confine the prophet's address to the Jews: whilst it was delivered to them in a way of anticipation, it was delivered also,

II. To us *immediately* in a way of congratulation—

It is in reference to converts from among the Gentile world that the prophet says, "Then I will turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one *consent*," that is (as the margin translates it), with one *shoulder*; the whole world, Jews and Gentiles, drawing together harmoniously, like well-disciplined oxen, in the same blessed yoke. The truth is, that every soul, on its conversion to God, is brought into this blessed state, and made a partaker of all these privileges. The only difference between the Millenarians and us is, that we enjoy, in the earlier dawn, the light which they will behold in its meridian splendour. To all of you then who have believed in Christ, and through him been made the children

[q] ver. 20.

[r] Isai. lxv. 17—19. and xlix. 13.

[s] Isai. xl. 1—5.

of the living God, I say, "Sing and shout, yea, be glad and rejoice with all your hearts;" for "Jerusalem is as much *your* mother," as she was of the Jews of old[t]. To you then I say,

"The Lord hath taken away your judgments"—

[Think what guilt you have contracted, and what condemnation you have merited, by your numberless transgressions in thought, word, and deed, from the first moment of your existence, even to the present hour: yet, if you have believed in Christ, I am authorized to declare, that "your sins are all blotted out as a morning cloud[u]," that "God has cast them all behind his back into the very depth of the sea[x]," and that "there is now no condemnation to you[y]"———]

"He hath also cast out all your enemies"—

[You well know, you cannot but know, how the world, and the flesh, and the devil, have had dominion over you, and led you captive at their will. But "by faith you have been enabled to overcome the world[z]:" "you have also crucified the flesh, with it saffections and lusts[a]:" and "from the snares of the devil are you recovered[b]." He is a vanquished enemy, "judged by God[c]," and "cast out from his dominion[d]," yea, and "overcome by you[e]," and so restrained, that he "cannot touch you[f]," though, like a roaring lion, he is incessantly seeking to destroy you. He is indeed still permitted to assault you: but his efforts are all in vain: the prayer of faith "puts him utterly to flight[g];" and in a little time "he shall be bruised for ever under your feet[h]." Whatever other enemies you may have, they shall all be put to shame, and, "through him that loved you, you shall be more than conqueror over all[i]"———]

"To you also does the Lord Jesus manifest himself as he does not unto the world[k]"—

["He dwells in your very hearts by faith[l]." He is altogether "one with you," "one body with you[m]," and "one spirit also[n]." So gloriously does he reveal himself unto you, that "you behold his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth[o];" you so "behold his glory, as to be changed by it into his image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord[p];" and you are

[t] Gal. iv. 26.
[u] Isai. xliii. 25.
[x] Mic. vii. 19.
[y] Rom. viii. 1.
[z] 1 John v. 5.
[a] Gal. v. 24.
[b] 2 Tim. ii. 26.
[c] John xvi. 11.
[d] John xii. 31.
[e] 1 John ii. 14.
[f] 1 John v. 18.
[g] Jam. iv. 7.
[h] Rom. xvi. 20.
[i] Rom. viii. 37.
[k] John xiv. 22.
[l] Eph. iii. 17.
[m] Eph. v. 30.
[n] 1 Cor. vi. 17.
[o] John i. 14.
[p] 2 Cor. iii. 18.

enabled by him so to "comprehend the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of his unsearchable love, as to be filled by means of it with all the fulness of God[q]." In a word, "He lives in you, and is your very life[r];" and from that very circumstance you are assured, that "at his future coming you shall appear with him in glory[s]" ———]

From this time also you may bid an eternal farewell to evil of every kind—

[You may have trials; but "they shall all work together for your good[t]:" they shall all prove only blessings in disguise. *Moral* evil shall no more prevail over you. *Penal* evil, so far as it is the loving correction of a Father, you may yet feel; but, as a vindictive process of a Judge, you shall never feel it to all eternity. Not one of your sins shall ever be remembered by him[u]; nor shall any one of your corruptions retain an allowed ascendant over you[x]. God engages that he *will* "perfect that which concerneth you[y]," and "finish in you the good work he has begun[z]." Though you be the least of his little ones, "he will not suffer you to perish[a]:" nor shall any prevail to "pluck you out of his hands[b]." Therefore, even whilst you are yet conflicting with evils of various kinds, you may rest assured, that "none of them, how great or formidable soever they may be, shall ever separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord[c]."]

And is not here abundant ground for joy?

[Well does David say, "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King[d]." I say then to you, in the name of Almighty God, "Rejoice in the Lord alway[e];" "rejoice evermore[f]:" yea, "though now ye see not your beloved Saviour with your bodily eyes, yet, believing in him, it is both your privilege and duty to rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and glorified[g]." In fact, "if you do not sing, and shout, and rejoice in him with all your heart, the very stones will cry out against you[h]."

Whilst I say this, I am far from recommending to you a tumultuous joy. A tender contrite spirit must be retained in the midst of all your joy. Even in heaven are his redeemed people all prostrate before him, whilst they sing with all imaginable love and gratitude his praise[i]. A similar prostration

q Eph. iii. 18.
r Gal. ii. 20.
s Col. iii. 4.
t Rom. viii. 28.
u Heb. x. 17.
x Rom. vi. 14.
y Ps. cxxxviii. 8.
z Phil. i. 6.
a Matt. xviii. 14.
b John x. 28, 29.
c Rom. viii. 38, 39.
d Ps. cxlix. 2.
e Phil. iv. 4.
f 1 Thess. v. 14.
g 1 Pet. i. 8.
h Luke xix. 40.
i Rev. vii. 11.

of spirit I recommend to you: and, if only that be preserved, your joy can never be too exquisite, nor your praises too devout ———]

APPLICATION—

[But do these congratulations belong to all of you, my brethren? Must I not rather say to many of you, "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep[k]?" Many, I fear, have never sought the removal of their judgments, so that "the wrath of God abideth on them to this very hour[l]." They are still, as much as ever, the bond-slaves of sin and Satan. As for union and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ, they are yet strangers to it, and know nothing of "a life of faith upon the Son of God, as having loved *them*, and given himself for *them*." What then shall I say to such persons? That "they shall not see evil any more?" No: I must rather say that nothing but evil is before them, both in this world and the next—an unholy life, an unhappy death, a miserable eternity. "O that mine head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep over them day and night[m]!" I pray you, brethren, see what mercies you lose, what blessings you despise. Were you but penitent, and believers in Christ, all the congratulations which we have been contemplating would be yours. The Lord grant that ye may avail yourselves of the opportunity now afforded you, and that "this day of grace may be the day of salvation" to all your souls[n]!]

[k] Jam. iv. 9. [l] John iii. 36.
[m] Jer. ix. 1. [n] 2 Cor. vi. 2.

MCCXXXII.

GOD'S DELIGHT IN SAVING SINNERS.

Zeph. iii. 17. *The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty: he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy: he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.*

HOW wonderful are these expressions, as uttered by Jehovah himself, in reference to such a worthless and sinful creature as man! But they are the very words of the Most High God addressed to his Church of old, and, in them, to us also. Behold then,

I. What bright prospects are here for the Jewish Church!

[Greatly had they sinned against their God and raised his indignation against them. Hence they are threatened with

utter destruction[a]. But their enemies too had grievously offended; and therefore they also are threatened with the visitations of his wrath[b]. But in the midst of judgment God remembered mercy towards his ancient people; and by his prophet announced his purpose to bring them back unto himself, and to make them happy in the enjoyment of his love[c]. But, scattered as they are over the face of the whole earth, this seemed to be almost impossible. He therefore reminds them how "mighty" he is to save, even as in the day that he delivered them from their Egyptian bondage. And, as he had rejoiced over her to do her good in former days, so would he again in the latter day, taking away all her judgments, casting out all her enemies, and so perpetuating his mercies towards her that she should not see evil any more[d]."———]

But let us notice also,

II. What bright prospects are here for every individual believer!

"Fear not, believer, nor let thy hands be slack," but consider for thine encouragement what thy God has here so graciously set before thee; namely,

1. His power to save—

[He who was in his Church of old, is equally present with thy soul: and he, even "the Lord thy God, is mighty." See what he wrought in the days of old, when he brought forth his people out of Egypt, delivering them from all their enemies,[e] and supplying all their wants[f]. And "is his hand now shortened that he cannot save, or his ear heavy that he cannot hear[g]?" Be assured, there is not any thing which he will not accomplish for you also, through the care of his providence[h] and the operation of his grace[i].]

2. His determination to save—

["He will save;" and none shall hinder him. Having bought you with the blood of his dear Son, and committed you to him, he will suffer "none to pluck you out of his hands." Under all circumstances, "the grace of Christ shall be sufficient for you," and "the strength of Christ be magnified in your weakness." Only "be strong in the Lord and in the

[a] Zeph. i. 12—18. [b] Zeph. ii. 1—15. [c] ver. 9—13.
[d] ver. 15. If this were the subject of a *Jewish Sermon*, the *four hints* in this last sentence should be distinctly considered, and largely amplified, by appropriate citations from Holy Writ.
[e] Exod. xiv. 27, 28. and xvii. 14. [f] Ps. lxxvii. 15, 16, 24, 25.
[g] Isai. lix. 1. [h] Rom. viii. 28. [i] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

power of his might," and "nothing shall be impossible unto you[k]."]

3. His delight in saving—

[You may see in the parable of the prodigal son, what are the feelings of Jehovah towards returning penitents. But if that convey not an adequate idea to your minds, call to mind the image under which God has condescended to set forth the joy which he feels in his believing people. Nothing that a natural man can experience, can exceed the joy with which a bridegroom, after a long season of suspense and fear, is animated in the possession of his bride. Yet to that does Jehovah refer as most fitly illustrating the delight which he has in manifesting his love to his chosen people[l].]

4. His immutability towards those whom he intends to save—

[Man is often alienated from the object of his affections, either by means of some unexpected evil he has discovered, or through his own fickleness and inconstancy. But God changeth not[m]. Whom he loveth he loveth to the end[n]. He hateth putting away[o]. And, as he loved his people from eternity[p], and chose them without any reference to good, either seen or foreseen, in them[q], so will he not forsake them on account of their infirmities[r]. He will indeed punish their transgressions with all needful severity[s]; but his gifts and callings are without repentance[t]; nor will he cast off the people whom he has chosen in Christ, and given to him[u].]

SEE, Brethren,

1. How marvellous the compassion of your God!

[Call to mind the wickedness of God's ancient people through the whole course of their conduct, till they completed it and filled up the measure of it in crucifying their Messiah, the Lord of glory. Yet to them is my text more immediately addressed, and in them shall it ere long be certainly fulfilled. How utterly does such love pass all human comprehension! But look back to your own ways, my brethren, and ye will have reason enough to adore and magnify the grace of God, when ye consider, that you also are interested in these promises, and that in you shall they receive a speedy accomplishment. Dear brethren, I would have this to be, if I may so say, the constant subject of your devoutest meditations. It is this that will

[k] Mark ix. 23. [l] Isai. lxii. 5. [m] Mal. iii. 6. Jam. i. 17.
[n] John xiii. 1. [o] Mal. ii. 16. [p] Jer. xxxi. 3.
[q] Deut. vii. 7, 8. and ix. 5, 6. [r] Isai. liv. 7—10.
[s] Ps. lxxxix. 30—34. [t] Rom. xi. 29.
[u] 1 Sam. xii. 22. Hos. ii. 19, 20.

set your hearts at liberty, and cause you to go on your way rejoicing. Nothing can obstruct the happiness of a mind habituated to such contemplations as these.]

2. How ardent should be your zeal in his service!

[Is his mind so set on you, and his power so engaged for you? how devoted then should ye be to him; and how entirely should your souls be occupied in endeavours to fulfil his holy will! Does he "rest in his love" to you, and will ye suffer one moment's intermission in your love to him? O stir yourselves up more and more to serve him; and let your every faculty, whether of mind or body, be in constant exercise for the advancement of his glory.]

HAGGAI.

MCCXXXIII.

CONSIDERATION OF OUR WAYS ENFORCED.

Hagg. i. 2—5, 12. *Thus speaketh the Lord of Hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built. Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Consider your ways. . . . . Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high-priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord.*

ALL the preceding prophets prophesied either before or during the Babylonish captivity: but Haggai, and the two who follow him prophesied after the return of the Jews from Babylon. What space of time Haggai continued to prophesy, we know not: but all his prophecies which are come down to us were delivered in the short space of two months. His principal office, in which he was soon joined by the Prophet Zechariah, seems to have been to stir up the Jews to rebuild their temple, and to assure them, that, however inferior to the former temple it might be in their eyes, it should in reality far surpass that in glory. In reference to their neglect, he reproves them with just severity; and shews them, that already had God inflicted his judgments on them on account of it; but assures them at the same time, that, if they will recommence and prosecute the work

with diligence, his blessing shall be visibly poured out upon them[a].

In discoursing on this subject, we will notice,

I. The conduct reproved—

They had begun to build the temple about sixteen years before; but having been stopped by an edict from Artaxerxes, they had desisted, and had attended only to their own personal accommodations. But the Persian monarch was now dead; and they ought therefore to have availed themselves of that circumstance, and to have proceeded with the work. A whole year had elapsed, and they had not even thought of resuming the pious labour: they were even well pleased with the obstacle that had been put in their way; and satisfied their consciences with saying, that "the Lord's time for rebuilding the temple was not yet come." They did not say that they would never execute that work; but they justified their present neglect of it by this vain excuse.

Now this is precisely what we ourselves are prone to do,

1. In reference to God's temple which is to be erected in the world—

[The Church is his temple, "the habitation of God through the Spirit;" and on the whole face of the globe is it one day to be erected. But when we call on persons to arise and work, they answer, "The Lord's time is not come." They see many difficulties to be surmounted; and, instead of regarding them as occasions only for calling forth their zeal, they consider them as indications that God does not require the work itself to be performed; thus making the dispensations of his providence a cloak for their own supineness. In reference to the conversion of the Jews in particular, this excuse is offered by many; and offered with as much confidence, as if they were acquainted with all the counsels of the Deity, and knew exactly all the times and the seasons which the Father has reserved in his own power. But this excuse of theirs is nothing more nor less than a plea for inactivity, and an acknowledgment, that they are altogether indisposed for the exertions which they are called to make in this sacred cause.]

[a] Hagg. ii. 15—19.

2. In reference to the temple which is to be erected in our own hearts—

[Believers are "temples of the Holy Ghost:" Christ dwells in their hearts by faith: "the Father too dwelleth in them, and they in him:" and such temples all of us are called to be. But when persons of every description are urged to consecrate themselves entirely to the service of their God, they reply, as with one consent, "The time is not come." They will not say, 'No; God never shall dwell in me;' but, acknowledging it to be their duty to surrender up themselves to him, they think themselves excused from it by some providential impediment: one is too young to engage in such holy services as yet: another is too much immersed in business to afford the time: another is for the present afraid of offending some earthly superior: and thus, like the persons invited to the wedding in the Gospel, they all, on some frivolous pretext or other, unite in saying, "I pray thee have me excused."]

But how vain such excuses are, may be seen by,

II. The reproof administered—

This consists of two parts; an expostulatory appeal, and a solemn admonition: "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore, thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Consider your ways."

We then in like manner make our appeal to you—

[Have you time for yourselves, and not for God? for your bodies, and not for your souls? for the affairs of this short transitory life, and not for those of eternity? Is it thus that ye have been taught of God; to "seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness *last?*" and to "mind your own things only, and not the things of Jesus Christ[b]?" Was this a just return from those who had been delivered from their captivity in Babylon? and, if not from them, is it from you, who have been redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son from a bondage infinitely more tremendous, a bondage to sin and Satan, death and hell? Judge ye, whether it becomes you to be seeking your own carnal ease, interest, and pleasure; and to be neglecting the work of God, and the welfare of your immortal souls? Only let conscience deliver an unbiassed testimony, and we consent that you shall be judges in your own cause.]

To you also we offer this salutary admonition—

[b] Phil. ii. 21.

["Consider your ways." Twice is this repeated by the prophet[c]: and repeatedly should it be urged on all who are guilty of the conduct before described.

"Consider your ways," *in order to your humiliation.* Look back, and see, how highly criminal they have been. The more fully you call them to remembrance, and the more distinctly you view them with all their several aggravations, the more you will see cause to humble yourselves before God in dust and ashes — — —

"Consider your ways," *in order that you may see what indignation they have already excited in the bosom of an avenging God.* The Jews were referred to the judgments which God in his providence had inflicted on account of their sin, as proofs of his heavy displeasure[d]: and, if we could with equal certainty be informed of the reasons of those chastisements which God from time to time has inflicted on us, either publicly in common with the whole land, or privately in our several persons and families, there can be no doubt but that we should find our sins to have been the root and ground of all. But without such infallible information from above, we should not presume to interpret the dispensations of Providence in this way, except in our own particular case; and even then we should do it with great caution and diffidence. Nevertheless in many instances we may clearly read our sin in our punishment. We have preferred the cares and pleasures of the world; and we have been given over to a worldly mind: we have been impenitent; and have been delivered up to hardness of heart: we have disregarded the gracious visits of our God; and he has withdrawn himself from us altogether: he has left us to "be filled with our own devices, and to eat of the fruit of our own ways."

Once more; Consider your ways, *in order to the amending of them in future.* To this the Jews were called[e]; and to this we also are called: and without this, all consideration of our ways would be to no purpose — — — Determine then, with David, "not to give sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eye-lids, till your hearts are become a temple for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob[f]."]

Happy the prophet who executed his office with such fidelity! and happy the people who were favoured with such a monitor! may our testimony also correspond with his in,

III. The effect produced—

Great and instantaneous was the change wrought on their minds—

[c] ver. 5, 7. [d] ver. 9—11. [e] Hagg. ii. 4. [f] Ps. cxxxii. 4, 5.

["The remnant of the people," from the highest to the lowest, all obeyed the voice of the Lord, and of the prophet whom he had sent unto them. They all began to "fear the Lord," and in little more than three weeks actually commenced the work to which they were called[g]. O that such a change also might be wrought in *us!* O that our governors also, both in Church and State, might obey the call; and that all classes of the community would begin, as with one heart and one mind, to serve the Lord; first, to get their whole souls sanctified unto the Lord; and then, to promote his glory throughout the world! — — —]

Great also was the encouragement instantly afforded them by God himself—

[No sooner did they evince a desire to comply with God's command, than God commissioned his prophet to say to them, "I am with you, saith the Lord[h]." And no sooner did they set about the work, than God called them to notice the very day, and pledged himself from that hour to bless them[i]. Yea, even the very day of their change did God himself register, not only in the book of his remembrance in heaven, but in the written records of his prophet on earth: "In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king[k]." O that this present year of our king might be so marked! yea, that this very day might be so registered, as the season of a remarkable conversion of our souls to God! Be assured, that, if only one amongst us should now begin to obey his call, and to turn from earthly vanities to the Lord our God, it should not be overlooked, nor should it be forgotten in the eternal world. The very angels in the presence of God would shout for joy: and if they would notice it with such delight, we may be well assured that our God and Saviour, at whose call we turn, will not be regardless of so blessed an event.]

CONCLUSION—

[The time will come when you will deeply regret that you have wasted the present hours in frivolous pursuits. Your past ease, and pleasure, and vanities, of whatever kind they have been, where are they? What fruit of them all have you at this time? Compare them with one single hour that has ever been spent in penitential sorrow: Is there any comparison as to the satisfaction they have left behind them?

Again: For what end is your time now allotted you by God? Is it for no higher purpose than to advance your temporal interests? Is there no work that you have to do for him, and none for your own souls? — — —

[g] ver. 14. [h] ver. 13. [i] Hagg. ii. 15—19. [k] ver. 15.

Again; Will it not be a bitter subject of regret to you in a dying hour, that the day in which you might have worked is passed away; and that the night is arrived when no man can work?

To all then, I say, in the name of the Most High God, "Consider your ways." Consider *the evil of them*, that you may see *your guilt*; consider *the fruit of them*, that you may bewail *your folly*; consider *the commands of God relating to them*, that you may *amend them* henceforth, *and obtain from God the blessings* reserved for you in the eternal world.]

MCCXXXIV.

CHRIST THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS.

Hagg. ii. 7. *The Desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of Hosts.*

MANKIND are apt to imagine that God is pleased with what is grand and magnificent in their eyes; hence the many splendid edifices that have been raised to his honour: but a contrite heart is a more acceptable residence for God than even the temple of Solomon itself[a]. The Jews, on their return from Babylon, began to rebuild their temple; but they, who remembered the former temple, wept aloud[b]. To encourage them to complete the structure, the prophet was sent to declare, that, however inferior *this* should be to the former in point of magnificence, it should exceed *that* in glory; for that the Messiah himself should adorn it with his own personal appearance.

Let us inquire,

I. Who is the person here spoken of—

The prophet does not speak of *desirable things*, as silver and gold[c]. He refers to Christ's advent, and

[a] Isai. lxvi. 1, 2. [b] Ezra iii. 11—13.

[c] Some, indeed, put that interpretation on the text: but it is not probable that such an event would be so solemnly introduced; or that such a fact ever took place in the degree supposed; or that, if it did, the glory of their temple could by such means be brought to exceed that of the former, considering how many things there were in the former, of which the latter was destitute.

appearance in the flesh. Christ is here properly called "the Desire of all nations[d]"—

Many in all nations do desire him—

[The Jews, by means of their captivities, or flight, were scattered through the Assyrian, Chaldean, Persian, and other empires, and since the establishment of Christianity there are Christians in every part of the globe. Amongst these, there is indeed found a considerable difference with respect to clearness of knowledge and fervour of affection; but the desire of them all accords with that of the Apostle[e].]

All nations, if they knew him, would desire him—

[He has in himself all imaginable excellencies, as God, as man, as mediator. Would we desire a *mighty* Saviour? he is God over all[f]. Would we desire one *in our own nature?* he was made flesh[g]. Would we desire one *that had testified his love?* he has died for us[h]. Would we desire one *that from his own experience might sympathize with us?* he has been tempted like us for this purpose[i]. If any hear of him, and desire him not, the reason is plain[k]—.]

He did in due season honour the temple with his presence—

[The season of his appearance there was foretold[l]. At the appointed time he was brought thither by his parents[m]: at twelve years old he sat there among the doctors[n], and afterwards it became the frequent place of his resort.]

The prospect of this event was peculiarly consoling on account of,

II. The consequences of his advent—

The presence of Christ in the temple "filled it with glory." It rendered the latter temple far more glorious than the former[o]."

He *more than supplied all those things which were wanting in this temple*—

[d] All nations indeed do not *actually* desire him, because they know him not: but they may be said to desire him, just as the *whole creation* is said to be waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, &c. Rom. viii. 19—21. or, as Mount Zion is said to be the joy of *the whole earth*, Ps. xlviii. 2.

[e] Phil. iii. 8—10. [f] Rom. ix. 5. [g] John i. 14.
[h] Eph. v. 2. [i] Heb. iv. 15. and ii. 18. [k] 2 Cor. iv. 4.
[l] He was to come while the temple was standing; Mal. iii. 1. and the text. About forty years after his death it was utterly demolished.
[m] Luke ii. 27. [n] Luke ii. 46 [o] Hagg. ii. 9.

[Though many of the sacred vessels were restored to the Jews by Cyrus, there was much that was irrecoverably lost. The *Shechinah*, the bright cloud, the symbol of the Deity, was withdrawn: the *ark*, with all that it contained, was missing[p]: the *urim and thummin*, or breast-plate, whereby the high-priest discovered the Divine will, was also gone: the *fire*, that came down from heaven, was extinguished. These defects however were more than supplied to the latter temple by the presence of Jesus. Instead of a shadowy resemblance of the Deity, it had God incarnate: it had the true ark, containing infinitely richer memorials of Divine love[q]: it had a divine Instructor, who revealed all his Father's counsels: nor could it need the fire to render the sacrifices more acceptable, since Jesus was about to offer one sacrifice for all. Thus did it excel in glory, even in those very particulars wherein it appeared most defective.]

He also *exhibited in it a brighter display of the Deity than ever had been seen in the former temple*—

[The glory of God did indeed fill the temple of Solomon[r], but in Christ it shone with brighter, though less dazzling splendour. Behold the *condescension* of the Deity, in that he not merely dwelt with man, but became man! Behold the *wisdom*, in every discourse that Jesus uttered[s]! Behold the *power*, in in his miraculous cures, and irresistible operation on the minds of men[t]! Behold the *grace*, in his treatment of the adulterous woman[u]! Such an exhibition of the Divine perfections *in the temple* far overbalanced every defect.]

APPLICATION—

[Wherever Christ dwells, he imparts a glory. And has he not yet a temple to which he will come[x]? Will he not vouchsafe his presence in his ordinances? And will not his presence in them make them glorious[y]? Will he not also make the souls of his people his habitation[z]? And will not the soul, in which he takes up his residence, be transformed[a]? Let him then be "the desire of our hearts; nor let us ever be satisfied till we possess that privilege[b]—.]

[p] viz. a copy of the law, the pot of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded.

[q] The Jews no longer need the law to instruct them, the rod to confirm their faith, and the manna to shew them how their fathers were sustained: since Jesus himself possessed all that was necessary for their instruction, confirmation, and nourishment.

[r] 1 Kings viii. 10, 11.
[s] John vii. 46.
[t] Matt. xxi. 12.
[u] John viii. 11.
[x] Matt. xviii. 20. and xxviii. 20.
[y] Isai. lx. 7, 13.
[z] 2 Cor. vi. 16.
[a] Isai. lv. 13.
[b] Eph. ii. 21, 22.

MCCXXXV.

INTEGRITY OF THE SOUL ENJOINED.

Hagg. ii. 11—14. *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands: and that which they offer there is unclean.*

THE one great rule of life which was given to Moses, and which is of universal and unchangeable obligation, is the moral law—the law of the ten commandments. But the ceremonial law also, which, in its primary use, was to shadow forth the Gospel of Christ, was of a moral tendency, and very instructive in that view. Take the most insignificant of its rites, such as the not wearing a garment of mixed materials, or sowing a field with different kinds of corn, or seething a kid in its mother's milk; they were all intended to teach us some practical lessons of great importance. The same we may say of the law mentioned in my text. Jehovah intended to reprove the supineness of his people in neglecting to rebuild the temple. For this end, he directed the Prophet Haggai to consult the priests as to the demands of the law; and from their answers, to deduce the truth, which he was instructed to enforce. They acknowledged, that the meat which belonged to the priests, as their share of the sin-offerings, could not, though holy in itself, make any thing else holy which it might come in contact with; though a person, who by the touch of a dead body was unclean, would, according to the law, render any thing else unclean which he might chance to touch[a].

[a] Whatever touched *the altar* was thereby rendered holy, as was also any thing which touched *the flesh* of the sacrifice (Lev. xxix. 37. and Lev. vi. 27.); but the cloth, in which such flesh was contained, conveyed no sanctity: but the clothes of one unclean communicated a ceremonial uncleanness. Numb. xix. 22.

From thence he took occasion to shew them, that the sacrifices which they offered, so far from cancelling their sins, were themselves vitiated, and rendered worthless by their supineness.

Now here was a valuable lesson for them: and it is no less valuable to us; since it is of use,

I. For the forming of our judgment as to the theory of religion—

To enter into this, consider the precise state of things at that time. The foundations of the temple had been laid several years before. The people having been obstructed in the work, became indifferent to it; and thought, that, by offering their sacrifices with regularity, they should supersede the necessity of incurring the expense and trouble of rebuilding the temple. 'Now,' says the prophet, 'your sacrifices themselves, instead of being accepted of God, are detestable in his sight, on account of the hypocrisy which yet reigns in your hearts.' In other words, we may consider him as determining two most important points:

1. That practice is of no avail without principle—

[The Jews supposed that their offering of sacrifices would be accepted, though they were wholly inattentive to the principles by which they were actuated. And a most common error this is. Men abound in duties, public, social, personal; and add to these the offices of kindness and liberality to their fellow-creatures; and then ask with confidence, "What lack I yet?" Such were the Pharisees of old; who even went beyond the law in their observances, whilst they "neglected many of the weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and truth." But I must declare, that these people labour under a most fatal error: for if St. Paul himself, who was, "touching the righteousness which was of the law, blameless," and who was therefore "alive, in his own estimation, without the law," but, when he saw the defectiveness of his obedience, saw and acknowledged himself to be a dead condemned sinner; if St. Paul himself, I say, so failed in establishing any righteousness of his own, much more must we lay aside such an erroneous conceit, and confess, that without a principle of faith and love we can never find acceptance with our God. We may attend the house of God every Sabbath; we may go to the table of the Lord; we may offer some stated prayers also in secret;

and yet, if impenitent and unbelieving, be consigned over to everlasting perdition. We may have the tongues of men and angels, and have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have faith so that we can remove mountains, and bestow all our goods to feed the poor, and even give our bodies to be burned; and yet be destitute of a principle, without which we are no better than "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal[b]." We may see clearly, that without a principle of real, vital, universal holiness in the soul, no external services, however good, can find acceptance before God.]

2. That principle is of no avail without practice—

[As men of a Pharisaic cast maintain the error which I have just mentioned; so men of an Antinomian complexion are prone to indulge this of which I am now to speak. They have embraced the Gospel; they believe in Christ: they see in him a perfect righteousness: they have that righteousness imputed to them: they stand, as they suppose, perfect and complete before God, and are in his sight "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing; yea, holy and without blemish[c]." But are they necessarily in the state which this profession seems to imply? The persons reproved in my text offered their sacrifices, and professed to look to that great Sacrifice which those offerings prefigured: but were they *therefore* accepted of their God? No: they were essentially defective as to practical religion: under the influence of covetousness and self-indulgence, they neglected to rebuild the temple of the Lord: and therefore all their professions of faith were vain. Thus it is with thousands who rely on the Gospel of Christ for salvation, but neglect to adorn it by a suitable conversation. Their faith does not "overcome the world," and "work by love," and "purify the heart;" and therefore "their faith, being without works, is dead; and is in reality no better than the faith of devils[d]."

Nor let any one imagine that it is only a *course* of *open* sin that will thus invalidate the efficacy of his faith. No: if there be in him any *secret* lust, such as covetousness, or pride, or envy, or impurity, or any other, it will "so defile him[e]," as to make all his professions of religion vain[f]." "A right eye or a right hand, which offends" against the principles of vital godliness, must be parted with, or "it will destroy him, both body and soul, in hell for ever[g]."]

But the reproof here given is yet further useful,

[b] 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.
[c] Eph. v. 27.
[d] Jam. ii. 19, 20.
[e] Mark vii. 21—23.
[f] Jam. i. 26.
[g] Mark ix. 43—48. with Jam. ii. 10.

II. For the regulating of our conduct, as to the practice of it—

You will observe in the text *the figure*, and *the truth contained in it*. Now both of these are instructive, in reference to practical religion:

1. From *the figure* we may learn to take heed to our communications—

[It is a far easier thing to convey defilement to the souls of men, than holiness. One man that is diseased may impart infection: but ten men that are in health cannot impart health. Now, it is common for persons professing godliness to associate with the world, under an idea of doing them good; forgetting how much more likely they themselves are to contract evil from such society, than to impart to them any substantial benefit. A heathen could say, "Evil communications corrupt good manners[h]." And experience proves the truth of it: for there is scarcely a person who associates much, and without necessity, with the world, but he imbibes the spirit of the world; and if not outwardly, yet in heart, declines from God. I mean not to say, that *all* connexion with ungodly men should be avoided; for "then must we needs go out of the world:" our duties in civil and social life require some measure of intercourse with them: but I mean, that we should be aware of the danger of infection from the ungodly; and that we should mix with them as a physican mixes with his patients in a hospital; having in our minds a desire to do them good, and exerting our influence for that end; and withdrawing, when we have fulfilled our duty, happy to breathe a purer atmosphere, and to associate with those whose state and habit are in accordance with our own. And this is the rule prescribed for us in the Gospel: "We are not to be conformed to this world[i]:" we are to "come out from it, and be separate[k]:" we are "not to be of the world, any more than Jesus Christ was of the world[l]:" we are "not to affect its friendship[m];" or to "love any of its ensnaring vanities[n]." Our affections must be "set rather on things above[o];" and "our conversation is to be in heaven[p]:" and we must be ever on our guard to keep our garments clean[q]: since it is almost impossible to come in contact with the ungodly, without contracting some defilement from them.]

2. From the *truth* itself we may learn to look well to our hearts—

h 1 Cor. xv. 33. from the poet Menander.
i Rom. xii. 2.
k 2 Cor. vi. 17.
l John xvii. 14—16.
m Jam. iv. 4.
n 1 John ii. 15, 16.
o Col. iii. 2.
p Phil. iii. 20.
q Rev. iii. 4. and xvi. 15.

[Solomon's advice is good: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life[r]." It is lamentable to think how much there may be amiss within us, whilst the external conduct is correct; yea, and whilst religion appears to have the chief ascendent over us. Truly, it becomes us to "search and try our ways[s];" yes, and to beg of God also to "search and try our hearts, to see whether there be any wicked way or principle in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting[t]." When we reflect, that one evil propensity, if indulged, will vitiate all our moral and religious acts; and that it will make "our very prayers an abomination in the sight of God[u];" we cannot but tremble for the great mass even of religious professors, who will be tried by the heart-searching God, and have their final doom fixed according to their real character, as it stands before *him*. Indeed, brethren, I wish you to examine yourselves well, whether ye be sound in principle, and upright in practice also. And be careful not to "deceive your own souls;" nor to rest, till you have an evidence in your own bosoms, and the witness of God's Spirit also, that ye are "Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile:" for whatever ye may imagine, it is "the pure in heart, and they only, that shall see God" with comfort in the day of judgment[x].

[r] Prov. iv. 23. [s] Lam. iii. 40. [t] Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.
[u] Prov. xv. 8. and xxviii. 9. [x] Matt. v. 8.

MCCXXXVI.

GOD RECOMPENSES OUR WORKS.

Hagg. ii. 19. *From this day will I bless you.*

MEN, when they see so great a disparity in the states of their fellow-men, are apt to imagine that there is an inequality in the ways of God. But "God's ways are equal," both in the dealings of his providence, and in the dispensations of his grace[a]. True, indeed, this equality, under the Mosaic economy, was evinced in temporal gifts, whereas it is now manifested rather in spiritual blessings: and we may all observe it in reference to ourselves, almost as clearly as they could who are addressed in my text. Let us,

I. Review the dealings of God with us in past times—

[a] Ezek. xviii. 25—29. with Ps. xviii. 25.

God called his people, after their return from Babylon, to "consider" how he had dealt with them. Whilst they were occupied only in their own concerns, and neglected to execute his will in the rebuilding of the temple, he visited them with sore and successive judgments: but now that they were engaged in that sacred work, he bade them take notice, even from the very day that they had commenced the work, that he would bless them. Now, "consider" how God has dealt with us,

1. Before we began to seek the Lord—

[We might prosper perhaps in temporal things, as the world accounts prosperity; but what was the real state of our minds? Did we find all the satisfaction in them which we hoped for? We sowed largely in hope: but when we reaped, and came to measure the produce, were we not grievously disappointed? Say, brethren, was there even *one half* the happiness derived from them that you expected[b]? Did you not find, that whilst you neglected to seek your happiness in God, the blessings which you sought with the greatest avidity and labour were but as "broken cisterns, that could hold no water[c]?" Yes; you must confess that every thing to which you looked for comfort has proved, not only "vanity, but vexation of spirit also[d]." There was a worm at the root of every gourd from which you expected consolation and repose[e].]

2. Since we turned to him—

[Possibly enough, in respect to temporal things, you may have suffered loss. But has not that loss been abundantly made up to you, by an increase of grace, and by the manifestations of God's love to your soul? Have you not learned, that "man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth[f];" and that he only is happy who seeks his happiness in God? Possibly, too, you may have been bowed down greatly under the weight and burthen of your sins: yet will I ask with confidence, whether you do not look upon that day, when you were first convinced of sin, and stirred up to flee from the wrath to come, as the best and happiest day of your life? From what time, think ye, would St. Paul date his happiness, but from the hour when he was struck to the ground in his way to Damascus, and when he received the first communications of converting grace? And if you could tell

[b] See ver. 16, 17. [c] Jer. ii. 13. [d] Eccl. i. 14.
[e] Jonah iv. 6, 7. [f] Luke xii. 15.

the time of your first awakening, with the same accuracy as the laying of the first stone of the temple was marked ("the 24th day of the 9th month"), you would be able to say with certainty, "*From that day God has blessed me.*"]

Supposing, then, that we have been truly converted to God, let us,

II. Consider the anticipations which we are authorized to indulge—

Here the promise in our text indisputably belongs to us: "From this day will I bless you." Again I say, that we are no longer to estimate the Divine favour by the measure of our success in temporal things. True indeed, "If we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all earthly things, *so far as they will conduce to our welfare*, shall be added unto us[g]." But that which we are authorized to expect, is, that "God will bless us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ Jesus[h]." God will give you,

1. The communications of his grace—

[These shall be suited to your necessities[i], and sufficient for your wants[k] — — —]

2. The manifestations of his love—

[No words can express what is implied in these. But "he will manifest himself to you as he does not unto the world[l]," and "shed abroad his love in your hearts[m]," and "give you the witness of his Spirit, as the earnest of your everlasting inheritance[n]" — — —]

3. A meetness for glory—

[His whole work of grace will he carry on within you[o], till you are transformed into his image[p], and fully prepared for his glory[q] — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. To those in whom the foundation of God's spiritual temple is not yet laid—

[You, alas! have no part or lot in these promises: and a far different portion have you to expect. If ye will be intent

[g] Matt. vi. 33. [h] Eph. i. 3. [i] Jam. iv. 6.
[k] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [l] John xiv. 21—23. [m] Rom. v. 5.
[n] Eph. i. 13, 14. [o] Phil. i. 6. [p] 2 Cor. iii. 18.
[q] Phil. i. 9—11. and Col. i. 9—12.

only on your own business, and be concerned only to please yourselves, how can you expect that God should bless you? "Consider, I pray you," whether they who serve not their God can reasonably hope for the same portion as his faithful servants shall enjoy[r]. I will be content that you shall judge this matter for yourselves. But, O! be persuaded, ere it be too late, to follow the convictions of your minds, and to turn unto God with your whole hearts.]

2. To those who are building up themselves a temple for their God—

[To you assuredly is the promise made, that God will bless you, both in time and eternity. Be more and more diligent, then, in the work in which ye are engaged. "Be coming daily to Christ, as lively stones, to be built up on him as the living foundation-stone[s];" and God will make you the habitation of his holiness for ever and ever[t].]

3. To those who think this distinction visionary—

[If such there be among you, put it to the proof. God himself challenges you to this[u]. Make but the experiment fairly, and I have no fear of the issue.]

[r] Mal. iii. 18.

[s] 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

[t] Eph. ii. 19—22.

[u] Mal. iii. 10.

ZECHARIAH.

MCCXXXVII.

AN EXHORTATION TO TURN TO GOD.

Zech. i. 3—6. *Say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts. Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the Lord. Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned, and said, Like as the Lord of Hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.*

TO those who look for novelties, and enjoy nothing but deep and curious speculations, the words before us will appear uninteresting: but to those who love practical religion, they will convey sentiments and feelings worthy to be cherished by every child of man. It is a sickly taste that cannot relish them; and that minister who cannot find in them a proper subject for his discourse, must either labour in a more fruitful part of the Lord's vineyard than any we are acquainted with, or have different views of Christian edification from those which we are accustomed to entertain. Men at this day, as well as in former ages, are departed from God; and need to be exhorted to "turn unto him" in newness of heart and life. They also need the same warnings and the same encouragements, as those did to whom the prophet spoke. We therefore, without thinking any apology necessary for the

selection of so plain a subject, (from which nothing can be offered which is not already familiar to all your minds,) proceed to call your attention to this solemn address: in which you may notice,

I. A friendly exhortation—

The Jews, after their return from Babylon, had been extremely remiss in rebuilding their temple; but they were almost instantaneously wrought upon by the preaching of the Prophet Haggai to resume the work which had been intermitted: and on this account God sent them another prophet, who by his exhortations and instructions should encourage them to proceed, and keep alive the zeal which had been kindled in their minds. But where is there not remissness in the work of God? Where is there one who does not need the direction and encouragement here offered? O brethren, hear ye the direction; "Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of Hosts"—

[We have all revolted, and turned aside from God: we have "all gone after vanity, and become vain:" we "have turned every one of us to his own way;" some after their vile lusts and passions; others after the world with all its cares and vanities; others in the more creditable, but not less fatal, way of self-righteous formality. But we should turn to the Lord, to him only, to him entirely, and with the whole heart. We should turn to him in a way of deep contrition for our past offences, of lively faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy and forgiveness, and of unreserved obedience to his commandments. This is the way in which God expects us to turn unto him[a]: and to this alone does he give any promise of a favourable acceptance[b]."]

Hear ye also the encouragement; "I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts"—

[God is alienated from us, as we are from him; and from us he turns, whilst in our unconverted state, with wrathful indignation. But, if we "turn to him, he will turn to us:" "if we draw nigh to him, he will draw nigh to us:" if we will call upon him in truth, he will hear, accept, and bless us. To the impenitent "he is a consuming fire:" but to the penitent, a Saviour and a friend. Search the inspired volume, search the annals of the whole world, and find, if you can, one mourning

[a] Jer. iii. 10. [b] Jer. xxix. 12, 13.

and believing penitent whom he cast out; or find, if you can, any limit to his mercy and grace. In "turning unto us" is implied not only a reversal of all the judgments which he had purposed to inflict upon us, but a communication of all that a Father's love, and a Saviour's grace can bestow—pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory.

And here it will be proper to notice the frequent repetition of his name, "The Lord of Hosts." Was that repetition without design? No: it is intended to impress on our minds, that, as the message is from him, so is the particular direction stamped with his authority, and the particular promise confirmed by his unchanging truth and faithfulness. It is in the name of the Lord of Hosts that we come; it is the word of the Lord of Hosts that we speak: it is the veracity of the Lord of Hosts that is pledged for its accomplishment.]

To this exhortation is added,

II. A salutary caution—

We are apt to follow the examples of our fathers, and to tread the path which they have trod before us. Not that we so readily conform to the practice of *godly* parents: their example, though not destitute of weight, finds more than a counterpoise in our evil passions, and in the conduct of those around us: but in justification of our own *evil* ways we are glad enough to plead the habits and authority of those who have gone before us. This however will be of no avail. Such examples form no precedent for us. The word of God is our rule: and according to that we must walk, regardless of all that others have done, or may do, to establish any other rule. Attend then to this salutary caution:

Walk not as your disobedient fathers have done—

[The generality of those who have gone before us have walked just as the great mass around us do at this time. But a state of worldliness, or sensuality, or carnal indifference was not *therefore right*, because they lived in it; nor is it *therefore safe*, because they died in it. In like manner, the conduct of our superiors at this day is no rule for us. If they truly and unreservedly obey the voice of God in his word, cleaving to the Lord Jesus Christ with full purpose of heart, and devoting themselves in body, soul, and spirit to his service, we may follow them: but even then we must not regard them as infallible: we must not follow even St. Paul himself any farther

than he followed Christ: and whereinsoever they deviate from the path marked out for them by Almighty God, there we must choose the more perfect way, and adhere exclusively to that which unerring wisdom has prescribed to us, knowing no other rule than that of God's commands.

Doubtless in dubious matters we would recommend much deliberation, and diffidence, and circumspection. We would not have young people setting up their judgment hastily against that of their superiors in age and station: for the young and inexperienced are apt to see things in a very partial light, and not to take a sufficiently comprehensive view of any subject; and hence they often err, when in their own judgment they are most confident that they are acting right. But still the word of God must be your rule: you must try every thing by that standard: if what you see, or what is recommended to you, be evidently contrary to that, you must not do it, though it be sanctioned by the authority of the whole world: nor, if a line of conduct be clearly and undoubtedly agreeable to that, must you be diverted from it even though the whole world rose up to oppose you. It is by the word of God that you will be judged in the last day; and therefore by that, and that only, must you be regulated now.]

This salutary caution is further confirmed by,

III. A convincing appeal—

"Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?" No: both the one and the other are gone to give up their account to God, and to receive from him their proper doom. Now, whatever they may have thought or done, they know that God's word is true, and that it shall stand for ever. But to a certain degree this may be seen even in this world.

Has not the word of God taken hold of multitudes who have gone before us?

[Look at the Antediluvian world: were not God's threatenings verified in them? Look at the Jews at the time of the Babylonish captivity: did the word of God fail with respect to them? They put to death their prophets for predicting that captivity; but were the predictions falsified? Were the Jews able to avert, or to escape, the judgments that had been denounced? Look at the Jews at this present time, and compare their state with all the prophecies concerning them, from the time of Moses to that of Christ and his Apostles: has one word fallen to the ground? Has not the word of God found

them out? In like manner, if we could go into the invisible world, we should there see, what now we are so unwilling to believe, that not so much as one jot or tittle of God's word has ever failed. Of the unregenerate, not one has entered into the kingdom of God; and of the impenitent and unbelieving, not one has "escaped the damnation of hell." This is a fearful thought: but, if in no instance that is visible has God's word ever failed, so neither has it, or shall it fail in those which are invisible.]

Have not many who have gone before us borne testimony to this truth?

[The Jews on many occasions acknowledged it[c], and actually returned to God in consequence of the conviction impressed by it on their minds. In fact, every real penitent is a witness for this truth. He confesses, that his sins have found him out, and that, if mercy interpose not for his deliverance, all the judgments denounced against sin will in due season come upon him. Be convinced, then, whilst conviction may be of some avail: and wait not to learn, by bitter experience, what now, if credited, you might escape. Let not that come upon you, of which you are forewarned in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The Rich Man would not believe the evil and danger of a carnal life, till he was made to experience its bitter fruits. His surviving brethren, too, who walked in his steps, accounted themselves sure of happiness in the eternal world, when, if a message could have been sent to them from the dead, they would have been better informed[d]. But they had Moses and the prophets; and so have you; yes, and Christ and his Apostles also, all bearing the same testimony. And therefore as unto dying men I would speak; knowing that I myself also am soon to die, and that both preacher and hearers must, in a very little time, appear at the judgment-seat of Christ;—I, to give an account of my ministry; and you, of the use you have made of it. I beseech you, receive not the grace of God in vain! In the name of the Lord of Hosts I declare unto you, that, if you will turn unto him in humiliation and faith, he will turn unto you in reconciliation and love; and that, if you will "turn from all your transgressions unto the Lord Jesus Christ, your iniquities, great and manifold as they have been, shall not be your ruin."]

[c] Lam. ii. 17. and iv. 11, 12. Dan. ix. 11—13.
[d] Luke xvi. 27, 28.

MCCXXXVIII.

GOD THE AVENGER OF SIN.

Zech. i. 5. *Your fathers, where are they?*

THE preachers of God's blessed word have in all ages had reason to complain, "Who hath believed our report?" True it is, that a faithful ministration of the Gospel is, to a certain degree, approved: but it is also true, that the approbation given to it is very different from that entire submission which it requires. The very people that commend the ministry will not obey the word delivered to them. They are pleased with an exhibition of truth; but they do not feel its force, or give themselves up to its influence. But the word of God will stand, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. Now, that the judgments of God are almost exclusively of a *spiritual* nature, and therefore invisible, we can only *declare* what God has *spoken*: but when the commands of God were enforced with *temporal* sanctions, the prophets could *appeal* to what he had *done*. God had threatened, that if his people were disobedient to his voice, they should be subjected to a great variety of calamities, and be cut off by his four sore judgments—by wild beasts, and pestilence, and famine, and the sword. Hence the prophet exhorted the Jews, after the Babylonish captivity, not to walk in the steps of their rebellious progenitors: and, to convince them of the fatal consequences that would ensue if they despised his voice, he appealed to them, "Your fathers, where are they?" that is, 'Have they not, agreeably to the predictions of former prophets, been made monuments of God's indignation? and have not you, therefore, reason to expect, that, if you resemble them in their disobedience, you will, like them, be made to experience also the bitter consequences of your transgressions?'

The question thus put to them, may be considered in a twofold view:

I. As a devout reflection—

Have those of former generations been able to protract their existence beyond the period allotted to them by Almighty God?

[No: however little they might think of death, they were overtaken by it; and, in the appointed season, fell beneath its stroke. Neither the people, nor the prophets who ministered unto them, could "live for ever." They had a space assigned to them for the discharge of their respective duties; and when that period had elapsed, they were summoned into the eternal world, to give an account of themselves to the Judge of quick and dead.]

And shall *we* continue here beyond our appointed time?

[Not an hour; no, nor a single moment. "Our times are in God's hands:" and, when called by him, we must bid an everlasting farewell to every thing here below. A tree, cut down, may sprout again: but man, once dead, can live no more[a]. "However esteemed, however admired, however regretted, he falls to rise no more in this world: he perishes like his own dung," as Job observes; and "they that have seen him in all his glory, shall say, Where is he?" Truly, "his place shall know him no more[b]." Death will shew no respect of persons. Whether we be unprepared to meet our God (and therefore desirous of a further respite); or be, like the holy prophets, actively engaged in his service (and therefore desirous of completing our work); we must equally obey the summons of Jehovah; "our bodies returning to their native dust, and our spirit ascending unto Him who gave it."]

Let us then reflect on the transitoriness of earthly things, and the certainty of our approaching dissolution—

[We have our occupations and enjoyments, even as our fathers had——— but how speedily will they pass away, and come to an end! We are apt to be promising ourselves months and years of pleasure; but "we know not what a single day may bring forth." The fate of the Rich Fool may be ours before to-morrow: "this very night may our souls be required of us;" and all the things from which we hoped to reap such a harvest of joy may be delivered over to some unknown possessor.

Truly this is a reflection which we ought to cherish, and on which we should dwell with deep concern: for, till we have learned to estimate the vanity of time, we shall never feel as we ought, the importance of eternity.]

[a] *Cite* the whole of Job xiv. 7—10. [b] *Cite* also Job xx. 4—7.

Let us next notice the question,

II. As a solemn admonition----

Their fathers had been disobedient, and had despised the warnings of Jehovah: but they were made to feel his righteous indignation, and to acknowledge that he had dealt with them according to their deserts[c]. In this view the question has the force of a most solemn warning to all who are disobedient to God's commands----

["Your fathers, where are they?" We will not speak of *persons*, but of *characters*. Of *persons* we know nothing: of *characters* we can speak on the authority of God himself. I ask, then, Can it be supposed that all who have passed into the eternal world are alike happy? Are none saying, "Like as the Lord of Hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us?" Do we believe, or does any one amongst us believe, that God will put no "difference between those who serve him, and those who serve him not?" We cannot but know, that many, whilst they were living amongst us, gave no evidence of real piety: and that, as far as we had any opportunity of judging, or have any just reason to believe, they were never truly and savingly converted to God. Now, our blessed Lord has said, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven[d]." Is this word true then, or is it not? If it be true, where are they who have died in an unconverted state? If not in heaven, there is but one other place in which they can be. In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, we hear of the one as "carried by angels into Abraham's bosom;" and of the other, that, immediately after his decease, he was "in hell, lifting up his eyes in torments." And such, we are assured, will be the condition of all in a little time, according as they shall be found at the time of death. I know how backward men are to believe this; and how fondly we cherish the delusion, that all, on their departure hence, are happy*. We will not even admit a thought

[c] ver. 5. [d] Matt. xviii. 3.

* In the writings of the pious Baxter, a fact, of which he was himself an eye-witness, is adduced, as illustrative of this truth. A flock of sheep being frightened as they were passing over a bridge, one leaped over the side of the bridge: the rest, in succession, having no apprehension of evil having befallen him, followed the example; and found out, till it was too late, how fatally they had been misled. Precisely thus it is that successive generations rush into the eternal world, deceiving and deceived.

to the contrary: and perhaps in our whole lives we never had the suggestion seriously proposed to us in reference to any departed soul, "Where is he?" To entertain a doubt of the happiness of any, would be deemed uncharitable in the extreme. But, be it known to you, that, however the wheat and the tares may resemble each other whilst growing in the field, a different end awaits them: the one is growing for the granary; the other for the fire, which, at their separation in the last day, will assuredly be their doom.]

Forcible as the question is when considered generally, it will acquire tenfold importance if we regard it with a special APPLICATION of it to our own souls—

1. Where are we?

[The general answer to this would be, "I am in a vain and transitory world." This is true. But there is another answer, to which I would wish to draw your attention; and it is *this*: "*I am on Mercy's ground.*" Could we but view life in this light, what an insight should we have into the great ends of life! We are sinners, condemned sinners, respited for a little season, till it shall be seen whether we will avail ourselves of the overtures of mercy which our God and King has sent us. Regardless of the sentence that has been passed upon us, we are wasting our time in thoughtless gaiety, or spending it in unprofitable pursuits. One and another is led forth to execution; but, not being eye-witnesses of their fate, we continue unaffected by their removal, till we ourselves are summoned to participate their lot. The Rich Man, of whom we have before spoken, had five brethren, who were following the steps which he had trodden before them, and were hastening unconsciously to the same awful end. So it is with us. We see not the state of those who have gone before us; and we put far from us all thought of the destruction in which their ways have issued, till, by bitter experience, we find that the warnings which have been given us are true.

Remember, then, that the time which is yet allotted us is given on purpose that we may seek reconciliation with our offended God, and avert, by a believing application to the Lord Jesus, the misery that awaits us. If we will consider life in this light, and improve it for this end, we shall be truly happy.]

2. Where shall we be in a little time?

[This is the question which every one of us should ask from day to day: nor should we ever rest, till we can give to it a satisfactory answer. Let us, then, put it to ourselves with

all seriousness at this time. Suppose, by disease or accident, we had been removed, as many others have been who were once as likely to live as we; where should we have been at this moment? Shall we reply, "I do not know?" What! Have we lived twenty, or perhaps twice twenty, years in the world, and left it still in doubt what our portion should be at our departure hence? According to our own acknowledgment, then, it appears that we *might* at this very moment have been in hell, writhing in anguish inconceivable, and looking forward to a never-ending eternity of woe. What an overwhelming thought is this! And what madness is it, to leave for one hour longer in uncertainty our acceptance with God! Let us come, then, to our *present* state: Where should we be, if we were to die this day? Are we prepared to meet our God? Have we washed in the fountain of the Redeemer's blood, and clothed ourselves in the spotless robe of his righteousness? Are we living, from day to day, not to ourselves, but unto him? And is the one object of our lives to advance in our heavenly course, so as ultimately to win the prize? If this be not our state, what but misery could await us, if we were taken hence? Awake, my beloved brethren! awake to your true condition! Can you give sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eye-lids, in such a state as this? Will not the thought of eternity appal you? If any of your fathers, who have gone before, could be restored for any fixed time to your state, think you that they would trifle away their hours as they once did, and as you now do? or, if permitted to come to you from the dead, would they not speak in far stronger accents than ever you were addressed by me? O! arise, and "redeem the time!" and "what your hand findeth to do, do it with all your might."

Let us not, however, close the subject without contemplating the state of those who have "fallen asleep in Christ." "Where are *they?*" O, how delightful the thought! They are at this moment with Christ in Paradise, and joining with all the hosts of the redeemed in everlasting Hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb. Think then, I say, of their state[f] — — — And endeavour so to live, that, at whatever hour your summons may arrive, you may be found ready, and "have an abundant entrance into the presence of your Lord."]

[f] If this were a *Funeral Sermon*, here the character and state of the deceased might be drawn, for the comfort and encouragement of survivors.

MCCXXXIX.

CHRIST'S INTERCESSION FOR JERUSALEM.

Zech. i. 12, 13. *Then the angel of the Lord answered and said, O Lord of Hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? And the Lord answered the angel that talked with me with good words, and comfortable words.*

TO the ancient prophets revelations were often made by visions. It was in a vision by night that this communication respecting God's designs towards Jerusalem was made to the Prophet Zechariah. There were presented to his view "a Man riding upon a red horse, standing amongst myrtle-trees in a bottom: and behind him a number of others, on red horses, and speckled, and white[a]." The "myrtle-trees in the bottom" represented the Lord's people in a low and debased state. "The Man on the red horse standing among them" was the Lord Jesus Christ (as we shall see more fully in the sequel); and "those on other horses behind him" were angels attendant on him, to execute his will. The prophet, anxious to know who these attendants were, asked the question, and gained from the Man (who is also called "the Angel") the desired information; namely, that they were beings, "whom Jehovah had sent to walk to and fro through the earth," and to bring him intelligence respecting the state of its inhabitants. These attendant angels being then interrogated respecting the result of their inquiries, informed the Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, that "all the earth was sitting still and at rest[b]." Upon this, "the Man," "the Angel," the Lord Jesus Christ, poured forth before his heavenly Father his intercession in behalf of Jerusalem under her present desolate condition, entreating that mercy might at last be vouchsafed unto her: and by his Father he is "answered with good words, and comfortable words."

[a] ver. 8. [b] ver. 9—11.

The two points then for our consideration are,

I. The Angel's intercession—

"The Angel" is no other than the Lord Jesus Christ—

["The Man," and "the Angel," are evidently the same person, even the Angel of the Covenant, who on many occasions, whilst he assumed the appearance of a "man," demonstrated himself to be of a superior order of Beings, even an angel, yea, and superior also to all the angelic host, even God himself, who had condescended to take on him the human and angelic appearance, in order to manifest himself to his people in a way suited to the weakness of their corporeal and mental faculties. It was in this way that he appeared to Jacob, wrestling with him as a man, and an angel, yet blessing him as God[c]. The Prophet Zechariah also speaks of him in another place as "the Man, that was Jehovah's fellow," or equal[d].

As the great Advocate of his people, he intercedes for them on all occasions, yea, "ever liveth on purpose to make intercession for them:" and in the passage before us he prophetically and mystically proclaimed his future office, which in our nature he should execute at the right hand of God.]

His intercession was for the restoration of God's favour to his chosen people—

[Though the Jews had returned from Babylon, yet had they not in any degree recovered from the desolations which had been spread through their whole country. The rebuilding of their temple, though begun, had been for some time suspended; and no prospect remained of their recovering their former prosperity, unless God by his special providence should interpose for them, and, by a richer effusion of his grace, stir them up to the exertions that were necessary for the occasion. The time was now particularly favourable: the attendant angels, whom he had sent forth to explore the state of the world, had brought word, "The whole earth was still, and at rest;" and consequently there was no just reason to fear those powerful interruptions which they had hitherto experienced: and, if other nations were prospering, how painful was it to see Jerusalem excluded from participating the blessings which were diffused all around her! Already had she endured the indignation of God during the space of threescore and ten years: it might be hoped therefore, that now, at last, the season was arrived when she should once more experience the blessedness of his favour.

[c] Compare Gen. xxxii. 24—30. with Hos. xii. 3—5. See also Josh. v. 13—15.

[d] Zech. xiii. 7.

Whilst we contemplate this intercession for the Jews at that period, how strongly are we reminded of our duty towards them at this time, when they have borne the indignation of Jehovah, not for seventy, but seventeen hundred, years; and when, so far from being restored to their country, they are still scattered over the face of the whole earth! The state of peace too which Europe now enjoys, leave us at liberty to seek their welfare in a way which was scarcely practicable in the midst of war. Our attention now may be more deeply fixed on them, and our means be more liberally employed in their service. And shall we neglect to improve the opportunity? Shall we see all the nations recovering from their distresses, and feel no desire to impart blessings to God's ancient people, who are still in as disconsolate a state as ever? Does not gratitude to God, and love to immortal souls, demand this at our hands? Methinks the present circumstances of the world afford us an occasion, not unlike to that which the Samaritan woman enjoyed, when conversing with Jesus; who said to her, "If thou hadst known who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water[e]. Yes, if we duly appreciated the benefits we now enjoy, we should labour to improve them, for the spiritual welfare of ourselves, and of all around us.]

What success we might hope for is manifest from the whole tenour of,

II. Jehovah's answer—

"The Lord answered the Angel with good and comfortable words."

What this answer was, we are afterwards more distinctly informed—

[The Angel who had interceded, kept not the answer within his own bosom, but imparted it to the prophet, and commanded him to communicate it to the people, for whom the intercession had been made. In substance it was this; That God had determined to restore Jerusalem; and that, notwithstanding her condition was in appearance hopeless, it should become more prosperous than at any period of her former history. As for those who had oppressed her, or were now at ease and regardless of her welfare, he was "sore displeased with them," and would require it at their hands: but Jerusalem herself should yet become the joy of the whole earth, enriched and comforted with all imaginable blessings[f].

The promises contained in this answer, doubtless have a primary reference to Judæa at that time: but they also look

[e] John iv. 10. [f] ver. 14—17.

forward to a period yet future, when the Jews shall return from their present dispersion, and be re-established in their own land. A beautiful description of that period is given in a subsequent chapter of this prophecy[g] — — — as also in numberless other passages of Holy Writ[h] — — —]

Say now whether these be not "good words, and comfortable words?"

[The re-establishment of the Jews in their own land at that time, and the restoration of divine worship in the midst of them, was an unspeakable blessing, for which no adequate thanks or praise could be rendered. But what will their future restoration be? How replete with happiness to them, and with honour to their God! Taken in connexion too with their spiritual welfare, and the welfare of the whole Gentile world, which will be promoted by it, how utterly will it surpass all human expectation, and all finite conception! Verily, "the light of the moon will in that day be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days." Let the promises then that relate to it be "good" in our estimation, and a source of "comfort" to all our souls.]

From hence we may SEE,

1. What encouragement we have to pray for our own souls—

[Alas! in what a low state is even the Christian world! Scarcely, if at all, are the generality of Christians in a better condition than the Jews themselves: the same neglect of God, the same worldly and carnal habits, the same indifference to the concerns of the soul, are found amongst the one as the other. For the most part, we are in the very same predicament as they were previous to the establishment of the Gospel among the Gentiles. They rested in the law, and made their boast of God, and, in consequence of their possessing a revelation of his will, assumed the high-sounding titles of 'guides of the blind, instructors of the foolish, teachers of babes;' and yet, though professing to be teachers of others, they taught not themselves, and, whilst making their boast of the law, through breaking the law they dishonoured God[i]. Thus do we act in relation to the Gospel. We glory over the Jews who are ignorant of the Messiah whom we worship; and yet, in point of pure morality and solid piety, we are not a jot superior to them. Nevertheless, if we implored mercy at the hands of God in the name and for the sake of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we should assuredly obtain an answer of peace. O what good and

[g] Zech. viii. 2—8.
[h] See Jer. xxx. 3, 9, 10, 17—22. and xxxi. 3—14.
[i] Rom. ii. 17—24.

comfortable words does the Gospel contain! What exceeding great and precious promises are there made to every true penitent! Will Christ ever cast out one of this description? Never. Is there to be found so much as one single word in all the Bible that should prove a source of discouragement to such a character? No, not one; on the contrary, if there were but one such being in the universe, God would fix his eyes upon him with pleasure, and press him to his bosom with more than parental kindness. Call then upon Him, whoever thou art that mournest thy low condition; and know, that, as sure as ever thou humblest thyself before God, thou shalt be exalted in due time.]

2. What encouragement we have to intercede for the Church of God—

[Whether we contemplate the state of the Jews or Gentiles, we find equal need to importune God in their behalf. Even the Christian world are far from being in that state of purity and blessedness which their superior privileges authorize them to expect. We should therefore lay to heart the state of the world around us: "our eyes should be as a fountain of tears, to run down day and night" in behalf of the myriads who are perishing in their sins. We should implore of God to take to him his great power, and reign amongst us, and to hasten the season when "all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." Our blessed Lord teaches us to make it a part of our daily prayer, and never to approach our God without saying, "Thy kingdom come." Did we but thus plead with God from day to day, what might we not hope for? Verily, our prayer should not go forth in vain: nor should it be with "good and comfortable words" only that God would answer us, but with an abundant effusion of his Spirit, as in the days of old. Then should "a little one become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation; for the Lord would hasten it in his time[k]."]

[k] Isai. lx. 22.

MCCXL.

GOD THE PROTECTION AND GLORY OF HIS PEOPLE.

Zech. ii. 5. *I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.*

IF some of the prophecies of Zechariah be dark and intricate, some are peculiarly clear. Such is that in the close of the preceding chapter, respecting

"four horns, and four carpenters;"—"the horns" denoting the enemies who had scattered Israel; and "the carpenters," those whom God would raise up for their restoration and protection. To the same effect is the vision of "a man with a measuring-line, going forth to measure Jerusalem;" in order that the city might be re-constructed on its former site, and be of the dimensions which God had previously ordained. As the former vision denoted the removal of all obstacles to this work, this marked its speedy and well-ordered accomplishment. But, as enemies had prevailed against the city before, so, it was feared, they might again: God therefore promises, that, though walls should be constructed, such should be the concourse of people to Jerusalem, that multitudes should live without the walls: yet should they be safe from every enemy, because God himself would be to them both a wall of fire for their protection, and the glory in the midst of them for their honour. What he had been to Israel when coming out of Egypt, *that* he would be to them again.

But, as the prophecy before us admits of a general application, I shall consider it,

I. In reference to the Jewish Church—

Respecting that, at the time the prophecy was delivered, it must be understood, in the first place—

[The Jews, after their restoration, were impeded in their endeavours to rebuild their city and temple; and it seemed as if they would never be able to accomplish it. But God promised that their enemies should not be able finally to prevail; for that he himself would be an effectual protection to them; not only as a wall which might keep off their assailants, but as "a wall of fire," that should devour them: and that his worship should be re-established among them, as in former days; so that they should again, as they had formerly been, become the joy and glory of the whole earth. Through the energy with which the people were inspired, they rebuilt the wall with incredible speed[a]: and the temple itself also, after many hindrances, was raised; and in some respects, especially by the presence of the Messiah himself in it, the glory of it was made to exceed even that of the former house[b].]

[a] See Neh. iv. 7, 8, 13—18. and vi. 15. [b] Hagg. ii. 9.

But it has a further reference to that Church in the latter-days—

[Their future restoration will be opposed with far greater vehemence and malignity than it was after the Babylonish captivity. Great and mighty nations will come against them, to destroy them[c]. But then will God be a wall of fire round about them; and not only will he protect them effectually, but he will spread such desolation amongst their enemies as has never yet been heard of, from the foundation of the world. When Pharaoh pursued them, God made the Red Sea a wall for their defence, and by that swallowed up all the hosts of Egypt: but when God and Magog shall come up against them, such shall be the extent of the victories that shall be gained by Israel, that the weapons with which they have been assailed, shall suffice for fire-wood in the whole land, for the space of seven years; and it shall occupy the whole people of the land seven months to bury the slain[d].

And how exalted shall be the piety of that Church in the latter day, the Prophet Isaiah very fully describes. The 60th chapter of his prophecies is generally understood as referring to the Gentiles: but, beyond all doubt, it relates primarily to the Jewish Church; which will then be so glorious, by reason of God's presence with her, that no earthly distinction can augment her glory: "The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory[e]."]

But the text may be understood also,

II. In reference to the Church of God in all ages—

To the Church at large, and to every individual in it, God promises,

1. The protection of his providence—

[Wonderfully was the Church of Christ preserved in the first ages of its establishment. What but Omnipotence could have kept it, amidst all the assaults which it had to endure on every side? But God had said, that "the gates of hell should not prevail against it:" and it yet exists, a monument of his Almighty power. And what is every individual believer, but a spark kept alive in the midst of the ocean? Verily, if "He who dwelt in the bush," which, though burning, was not consumed, had not dwelt in us, we must all have been consumed long ago. But the mercy vouchsafed to the Prophet Elisha

[c] Ezek. xxxviii. 14—16. [d] Ezek. xxxix. 8—13.
[e] Isai. lx. 19.

has been renewed to us; yea, and is renewed at this very moment, if we had but eyes to see it. There are chariots of fire, and horses of fire, round about us: and it is through their incessant and effectual interposition that no enemy has been able to prevail against us. There is not one of us that is not a witness for God, in this behalf.]

2. The blessings of his grace—

[What glory was seen in the Church on the day of Pentecost! That out-pouring of the Spirit, by which such miraculous effects were instantaneously produced, and so many souls converted unto God, when was any thing like it seen, from the foundation of the world? Such extraordinary manifestations of the Divine glory have, indeed, long since ceased in the Church: but is not God yet present with us? Yes, he is present, as he has said: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." Wherever his Gospel is preached with fidelity, there may the lighting down of his arm be seen: there are sinners quickened from their death in trespasses and sins, and enabled to live unto their God in righteousness and true holiness. And are there none here present who can bear witness to this truth? Yes, brethren, I bless God that there are those amongst you who can bear witness that God is with his Church: and that his word is still, as formerly, the power of God unto salvation! Nor is it only by the manifestations of his love to your souls that God is seen: he has raised up from amongst you, I trust, many who, by making their light to shine before men, constrain even the ungodly world to glorify him. His people are yet "lights shining in a dark world," and "cities set on a hill." They are still, as heretofore, "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men:" and "God is glorified in them," as he is not in the whole world besides.

How he shall be seen, admired, and glorified in them at the last day, when the whole number of his elect shall be assembled before his throne, every one shining forth in his Saviour's image, I forbear to say. But, in a measure, that time is already commenced; and we enjoy even now, in our better moments, the dawn of that bright and blessed day.]

As an IMPROVEMENT of our subject, let us contemplate,

1. What reason we have for thankfulness in the review of the past—

[As, at the rebuilding of Jerusalem, enemies arose to obstruct its progress, so, in every place where a Church is erected for the Lord, are enemies without number ready to destroy it. The same I may say respecting every soul that

sets himself to seek the Lord. Where shall we find one who has not many difficulties to contend with; and *that* too, not only from avowed enemies, but from professed friends. But here we are, this day, monuments of God's tender care; and, I would hope too, of his effectual grace. Let us not overlook this great transcendent mercy. Let us remember to whom alone we are indebted, if we have not long since fallen by the devices of our great adversary, and made shipwreck of our faith: and let us give glory to God, as a faithful and promise-keeping God.]

2. What ground we have of hope, prospectively, in the time to come—

[" The name of the Lord is a strong tower; to which, if we run, we shall be safe." Let no confederacy then, of men or devils, alarm us. " Greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world." Our enemies may be mighty; but our Friend is Almighty. He can do every thing *for* us, and every thing *in* us. Only let us look to Him, and rely on Him, and " no weapon that is formed against us shall ever prosper."]

MCCXLI.

GOD'S SYMPATHY WITH HIS PEOPLE.

Zech. ii. 8. *He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.*

GOD makes use of the wicked as his rod, wherewith to chastise his own children. But while he accomplishes his own gracious ends with respect to them, he is not indifferent to the conduct of his agents, who unwittingly fulfil his will; he notices their motives, and will call them into judgment for the dispositions they have manifested[a]: and because they exceed their commission, and seek the destruction, rather than the benefit, of his people, he will vindicate the cause of the oppressed, and recompense upon their own heads the wickedness of their oppressors[b]. This assurance the prophet gave to those who yet remained in Babylon after that the greater part of the captive Jews had returned to Jerusalem: he exhorted them instantly to come forth from that wicked city; for that God had tenderly sympathized with them in

[a] Isai. x. 5, 6, 7, 12. [b] Isai. xlvii. 6—9

the midst of all his chastisements, and had determined to visit with very signal judgments the Babylonish nation for the needless and excessive severities they had exercised towards them[c].

From these remarkable words we may observe,

I. God sympathizes with his people in all their troubles—

No terms can more strongly convey this idea than those used in the text—

[The eye is the tenderest part of the whole body; it not only is susceptible of injury from the smallest accident, but it feels most acutely any injury it may sustain. What exquisite concern then must God feel for his people, when their afflictions pierce him in so deep a manner; yea, when even that, which is but as a slight "touch" to them, inflicts on him so severe a wound! Can our imagination conceive a more expressive image, a more astonishing declaration?]

Nor is there any truth more abundantly confirmed in the Holy Scriptures—

[Look we for *examples* of it? how pitifully did he regard the afflictions of his people in Egypt[d], and how was "his soul grieved for the misery of Israel" (though they were but ill-deserving of such mercy) when the Ammonites came up to fight against them[e]! Nor does he sympathize with them under temporal troubles only, but still more under spiritual afflictions. When Ephraim bemoaned his guilty state, how attentively did God listen to his complaints, and how compassionately did his bowels yearn over him[f]! Look we for *promises* of similar regard? how does God represent himself to us as "the comforter of them that are cast down," yea, as a "God of all comfort[g]!" He calls himself the "God that pleadeth the cause of his people[h]:" He assures us that he pitieth them even as a father pitieth his own children[i], and he illustrates his compassion by the most tender image that the whole universe affords, even by that of "*a mother dandling upon her knee her suckling child*," and striving by all possible methods to soothe and please it[k]. Nor is he ever more ready to hear and answer our petitions, than when we plead like the Church of old, "Where is thy zeal, and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies towards me? Are they

[c] Zech. i. 15. and ii. 6—8.
[d] Acts vii. 34
[e] Judg. x. 16.
[f] Jer. xxxi. 18—20.
[g] 2 Cor. i. 3. and vii. 6.
[h] Isai. li. 22.
[i] Ps. ciii. 13.
[k] Isai. lxvi. 12, 13.

restrained? doubtless thou art my father, though Abraham be ignorant of me, and Israel acknowledge me not[l]."]

This truth, glorious as it is, is far from comprehending the full extent of God's love to his people; for,

II. He has communion with them in all their interests—

God considers himself as altogether *one* with his people—

[There is an union subsisting between him and them; yet not merely such as exists between a husband and wife, or a vine and its branches[m], but one far closer; for he is the head, and his people are his members[n]; he dwelleth in them, and they in him[o]; he is one with them, and they with him; in short, they are so united, as to be one body[p], and one spirit, with the Lord[q]. And when our Lord himself was pleased to illustrate this subject, in order, if possible, to convey to us some adequate idea of it, he set forth the union of the different persons of the Godhead as the truest pattern of that which subsists between himself and his people[r].]

Hence he participates in every thing which relates to them—

[Are any of them relieved? he acknowledges the kindness as shewn to *him*[s]. On the other hand, are they despised? he does not scruple to declare, that he will consider himself as the object of that contempt which is poured on them[t]. We have a memorable example of this in the account which St. Paul gives us of his own conversion: he was going with a commission to Damascus to extirpate, if possible, the Christian name: and, if he had been asked, Who were the objects of his rage? he would doubtless have branded the Christians with some odious name, and affirmed, that he was treating them as they deserved. Little did he think that the Lord of Glory himself was the person at whom his shafts were hurled. But Jesus stopped him in his mad career, and asked, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou ME[u]?" Thus at this day every thing done to the Lord's people is done to God himself; or, as the text expresses it, "Whoso toucheth them toucheth the apple of his eye."]

Nor is his a mere inactive sympathy; for,

[l] Isai. lxiii. 15, 16. [m] Rom. vii. 4. John xv. 1.
[n] Eph. iv. 15, 16. [o] 1 John iv. 12—16.
[p] 1 Cor. xii. 12, 27. [q] 1 Cor. vi. 17. [r] John xvii. 21.
[s] Matt. xxv. 40. [t] Luke x. 16. [u] Acts ix. 4.

III. He will avenge every injury inflicted on them—

Often has he interposed to rebuke and confound their enemies—

[What signal vengeance did he take on the Egyptians in ten successive plagues, and in the destruction of Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea! And with what righteous severity did he *command* the Israelites to blot out the very remembrance of Amalek from under heaven, on account of the cruelties they had exercised towards them forty years before[x]! Nor is it injurious treatment only that God notices, but even a neglect to succour them: he denounceth the bitterest curses against Meroz for refusing to help them, and bestows the highest encomiums on Jael for her exertions in their favour[y]. Indeed the Jews at this hour are a living monument of the indignation which God will manifest against all who hate his Christ, and persecute his people.]

And he will still plead their cause against all that injure them—

[Doubtless "the blood of his saints is as precious to him" as ever. And he accounts his own justice and holiness as pledged to render tribulation unto their persecutors[z]. Let those who revile and ridicule the Lord's people well consider this. He makes use of this as an argument why his people should forbear to avenge their own cause, namely, that vengeance will one day be executed on their enemies by himself, and *that* too in a more equitable and more effectual manner than it could be by an arm of flesh[a]. Nor will he punish only the positive evils that may be inflicted on them; he will mark also an inattention to their wants, and treat as despisers of himself, those who did not actively administer to their necessities[b].]

INFER—

1. How low are our conceptions of God's love to man!

[How little are any of us able to realize the idea in the text! how little can we comprehend the heights and depths of such unsearchable love! Still is he dealing with us as with his people of old[c]. Yet we, like little infants, are almost *unconscious* of our Father's love. But O that every heart might "praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men!"]

x Deut. xxv. 17—19. y Judg. v. 23, 24. z 2 Thess. i. 6.
a Rom. xii. 19. b Matt. xxv. 41, 42.
c Deut. xxxii. 9—12. and Isai. lxiii. 9.

2. How tender ought to be our concern for God!

[In general we think but little of his honour in the world. But shall he be so mindful of us, and we be forgetful of him? Shall he be so concerned for our welfare, and we be indifferent about his glory[d]. Shall not sin, the accursed thing which he hates, be a source of pain and anguish to our minds? Could we see the eye of an earthly parent pierced, and be unconcerned about it? Let "rivers of waters then run down our eyes because men keep not God's law[e]." Let us especially weep over the sins of his professing people[f]. And above all, let us lothe and abhor ourselves for all the evils of our hearts and lives. Let us feel, as it becomes us, our obligations to God, and labour to requite his kindness by a suitable deportment. Yes, while we entreat him to "keep us as the apple of his eye[g], let us keep his "law as the apple of our eye[h]," and, "whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, do all to his glory[i]."]

3. How strong a motive have we to beneficence!

[If God be so sensible of any injuries we receive, surely he cannot be regardless of any benefits conferred upon us: if he avenge the one, surely he will also reward the other. Nor is this an uncertain deduction of human reason: he himself tells us, that at the last day every kindness that was shewn to us shall be recorded as shewn to himself, and a suitable recompence be awarded for it[k]; nor shall even a cup of cold water given to one of his disciples lose its reward[l]. Shall not then this thought stimulate us to acts of beneficence? Has "Christ so pitied us as to give himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour," and shall not we endeavour to shew love to him[m]? Can I, in administering to the poor, relieve him who is my LORD and my GOD? Can I assist him, who, as my great High Priest, is yet daily and hourly touched with the feeling of all my infirmities[n]? O let no opportunity then be lost; nor let me ever think much of any thing that I can do for such a tender Friend, such an adorable Benefactor!]

[d] See the conduct of Moses, Exod. xxxii. 11—13. and of Joshua, Josh. vii. 9.

[e] Ps. cxix. 136. [f] Phil. iii. 18. [g] Ps. xvii. 8.
[h] Prov. vii. 2. [i] 1 Cor. x. 31. [k] Matt. xxv. 34, 35.
[l] Matt. x. 42. [m] Eph. v. 1, 2. [n] Heb. iv. 15.

MCCXLII.

THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWISH CHURCH PREDICTED.

Zech. iii. 1—5. *And he shewed me Joshua the high-priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the Angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the Angel of the Lord stood by.*

THE prophecies of Zechariah are by no means easy to be understood: but by attending to the general scope of his subject, we shall generally get an insight into their true meaning. It is not any one particular expression that will give us the best clew to the meaning of the prophet: on the contrary, we may, by laying an undue stress on some word or form of expression, involve the whole in insurmountable difficulty. For instance; if, because it is said, "The Lord hath chosen Jerusalem," we suppose Joshua to represent Jerusalem, and the whole people of the Jews; or, because "Satan is said to stand at Joshua's right hand," (the place of the accuser in a court of justice,) we interpret the whole as a judicial process, we shall never acquire a just and consistent view of the prophecy: we must bear in mind the prophet's main object, and then every part of his prophecy will appear easy, natural, and clear.

It shall be my endeavour to set before you,

I. Its primary and prophetical import—

The prophet was sent on purpose to encourage the Jews to rebuild their temple, and restore the whole worship of the temple as it had been prescribed by Moses. The former of these objects he had already

attempted, by assurances that Jerusalem should be restored to a great measure of its former splendour and prosperity: and the latter he now endeavours to promote, by declaring to them a vision with which he had been favoured, wherein it had been shewn him, that, however improbable such an event might be, it was ordained of God, and should surely and speedily be accomplished.

[Joshua the high priest is here represented as ministering before the Lord Jesus Christ, in the regular exercise of his priestly office[a].

What the precise state of Joshua's mind was at the time, we are not *certainly* informed: but, from the whole of the vision, it appears, that he was bemoaning his own sins, and the sins both of the priests and people, and entreating God to interpose for the restoration of his own worship among them.

To obstruct his efforts, Satan put forth all his power. Satan is peculiarly active when the honour of God and the interests of immortal souls are to be opposed. He knew how greatly the restoration of divine worship would advance both the one and the other of these objects, and therefore he set himself instantly to counteract the designs of Joshua. It is probable that the means he used for this end were, first, by representing to God the greatness of the people's sins, to alienate the mind of God from them (in this way it was that he resisted Job[b];) and then by similar representations to discourage the heart of Joshua, and to fill him with despondency.

In support of Joshua, "the Angel of the Lord," that is, the Lord Jesus Christ, rebuked Satan, saying, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan." In this form of speaking, a distinction of Persons in the Godhead is clearly marked, as it is also in many other places[c]. The Angel of the Lord is here exercising the unalienable prerogative of Jehovah in forgiving sins; yet refers it to the Father to rebuke Satan, because he is acting the part of an Advocate with the Father in behalf of Joshua and the Jewish Church: and in the rebuke itself, he assures Satan, that all his attempts against Joshua shall fail. "The Lord had chosen Jerusalem;" and would not suffer his own eternal purposes to be defeated. Besides, Joshua, and the Jewish Church whom he represented, were "as a brand plucked out of the fire." *This* Satan could not but know and acknowledge: could he think therefore that they had been plucked out of the fire in order to be cast back again into it? Was this ever the way

[a] The priests *stood* to minister. See Deut. x. 8.
[b] Job i. 6—12. and ii. 1—6. [c] Gen. xix. 24. Ps. cx. 1.

in which Jehovah acted? Were not rather the manifestations of his mercy and love pledges and earnests of yet further blessings? Thus was Satan confounded before him, and Joshua comforted with the hope of ultimate success.

Satan being thus baffled, the angel proceeds to impart more fully to Joshua the assurance he so much desired. The temple not being rebuilt, Joshua had none but old and "filthy garments" wherein to minister before the Lord: the Lord Jesus therefore commands that these be taken from him, and exchanged for others more worthy of the office which Joshua was called to execute. And, as a mitre was no less requisite for the high priest than pure and holy garments, he orders "a fair mitre to be put upon his head." This signified two things; first, the removal of all guilt from Joshua and those whom he represented, so that they might stand with acceptance before God; and next, the restoration of the temple service in all its excellency and glory. *These were the points which Joshua had been pleading for before the angel; and these were the points assured to him in this vision.*

The attendant angels were employed in executing Jehovah's purpose in relation to these things: and "the Angel of the Lord," the Lord Jesus Christ, "stood by," to see that completed, which, by his effectual mediation, he had obtained.]

This appears to me to be the primary and prophetical import of the vision before us. We proceed to notice,

II. Its secondary and mystical import—

As individuals, no less than the Church at large, are the temple of Jehovah, so every true believer, no less than Joshua, is a priest unto his God[d]. Hence we may fitly consider Joshua as the representative of individual saints; all of whom minister before the Lord from day to day, under diversified discouragements, but with certainty of ultimate success. See here,

1. Their discouragements—

[The state of the Jews at that time may not unfitly be regarded as characterizing the state of a believer in the earlier stages of his progress. He has been delivered indeed from bondage; but he is still in a very low and destitute condition, and is ready to doubt whether the work that has been begun within him can ever be perfected. He goes before his God

[d] 1 Pet. ii. 9. Rev. i. 6.

from day to day; but comes away more discouraged than before. Satan, that malignant adversary, is more especially active at such seasons, and stands at his right hand to resist him. Numberless are the stratagems which this subtle enemy uses to obstruct his progress and to damp his hopes. He represents to the believer's mind the enormity of his sins; and intimates, that they are too great to be forgiven. He adduces them as proofs that God has not elected him; and that therefore to seek for mercy is a hopeless task. It is on this account that Satan is called "The accuser of the brethren," because he accuses them to God, and God to them; yea, and accuses them also to themselves, in order to bring them to despair.

We forbear to notice the outward opposition which Satan raises against them, by persecutions and temptations of different kinds, because it is of that opposition which he makes to them at the throne of grace that we are more particularly led to speak. But "he desires to have them," as he did to have Peter of old, "that he may sift them as wheat:" and if he were left without controul from a higher power, he would soon reduce them all to chaff.]

2. Their certainty of final success—

[Believers "have an Advocate with the Father," the Lord Jesus Christ, "who is also the propitiation for our sins[e]:" and through the care of this ever watchful Protector they are secured, so that "no weapon that is formed against them can prosper." In the rebuke which this Almighty Friend gives to Satan, there are two things which afford them peculiar consolation; namely, the evidence which they have, that, notwithstanding all their remaining infirmities, a work of grace has been begun upon them; and, the immutability of Him who has thus distinguished them by his grace. True, they see in themselves the fearful marks of the fire in which they have been burned, and a lamentable susceptibility of impression from fire, if by any means they come in contact with it. But from these very things a question arises in their minds, How is it that I am not wholly consumed? If "the bush burn with fire and is not consumed," is there not reason to hope that God is in the bush? Then I will hope, and not be afraid: for though with man it would be impossible to make use of me as a part of God's temple, it is not so with God; for with him all things are possible; and "his gifts and calling are without repentance[f]."

Further; whilst deploring their extreme unworthiness to serve and enjoy God, they hear the order given, "Take from him his filthy garments, and give him a change of raiment:" and, clothed in the unspotted robe of their Redeemer's right-

[e] 1 John ii. 1. [f] Rom. xi. 29.

eousness[g], they know that "their iniquity is taken away, and their sin covered[h]." They see that there is a sufficiency in the provision thus made for them[g], and they rejoice in it: and, thus habited, they hope to minister before God with increasing pleasure upon earth, and to stand before him with acceptance in his temple above.

Here is their hope; "The Angel of the Lord stands by." That Angel has said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world: and, with such an Advocate and Intercessor, they defy all the power of their enemy; assured, that "neither the power nor policy of hell shall ever prevail against them."]

Would we make a suitable IMPROVEMENT of this passage?

1. Let us not despair of the Church's prosperity, however low or desolate her present condition may be—

[The prophet's word was accomplished: and low as the state of the Jewish Church is, all that is spoken respecting her shall yet be accomplished. She is destined to be the joy and glory of the whole earth. The degradation and dispersion of her members shall not always continue. Glorious days are yet in reserve for her[i]; and, "when she shall turn to the Lord, her Messiah, ungodliness shall be turned away from her, and all Israel shall be saved[k]."

The Gentiles also, though now so dark,—millions upon millions of them being as ignorant of God and his Christ as the very beasts that perish,—shall one day be joined to the Lord, and, as a royal priesthood, shall offer to him the sacrifices of prayer and praise continually, throughout the whole earth. Who that sees the state of the Heathen world would suppose that this could ever be? But God has said, that "all the ends of the earth *shall* see the salvation of God:" and "he is not a man, that he should lie; nor the son of man, that he should repent."]

2. Let us commit our own souls altogether to the care of our all-prevailing Advocate and Mediator—

[Jesus lives: and because he lives, we shall live also; for "he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." If we be his people, we must expect that Satan will use his utmost efforts to destroy us: but he is a vanquished enemy; and "if we resist him manfully, he will flee from us." When he seems as if he would overpower us, let us call in Omnipotence

[g] Rev. iii. 18. [h] Isai. lxi. 10.
[i] Zech. i. 17. and ii. 10—12. and viii. 1—8. [k] Rom. xi. 26.

to our aid, and say, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan." Let us never doubt the power of our Almighty Friend to succour us, or his faithfulness to preserve us. If we look to ourselves, or if we look to our great adversary, there is nothing but discouragement: but if we look unto Jesus, there is no ground for fear: he can overcome the strong man armed, and liberate us from his yoke. He who "spoiled principalities and powers upon the cross," and "led captivity captive" in his ascension, can he not bruise Satan under our feet now? He can; he will: and the weakest believer who trusts in him shall "be more than conqueror" over earth and hell. "Faithful is He who hath promised; who also will do it."]

MCCXLIII.

ALL IS OF GOD.

Zech. iv. 6. *This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.*

MANY parts of the prophetic writings are extremely dark: but many, which appear dark, would become clear, if we were contented to explain their main scope, without descending to every particular contained in them. Indeed they are, for the most part, explained by God himself; so far, at least, as to leave us in no doubt respecting their general import. The vision before us appears to be of difficult interpretation: to the Jews, methinks, it was altogether inexplicable; but the design of it was plainly declared in the words which we have just read: and, indeed, the declaration of its chief design reflects no inconsiderable light on every part of it. Perhaps we may say, that the lamps are the Church of God; the oil which feeds them is the Holy Spirit; the pipes conveying it are the ordinances; the bowl which supplies those pipes is the Gospel; and the olive-trees, which pour continually their sacred stores into the bowl, are the Lord Jesus Christ, in his offices of Priest and Prophet[a]. But, supposing we are mistaken in the precise meaning which we have assigned to these several parts, the import of the whole together is perfectly clear. You perceive that these

[a] See this more fully treated, in the Discourse on ver. 11—14.

lamps are kept alight, *not by human agency, in any respect:* the oil is secretly conveyed, from God himself, to every lamp, through the means of his own appointment: and this is the precise meaning which God himself, by his angel, annexes to the vision: "Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my Lord. Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, asying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."

Let us consider these words,

I. In reference to the work which was then in hand—

Zechariah was sent to encourage the Jews to rebuild their city and temple. Great opposition was made to them; so that they despaired of ever accomplishing so great a work. But God, by this vision, instructed the prophet what to say unto them. He was to shew them,

1. That they needed not to desire the aid of men, nor to fear their opposition—

[Men are only what God is pleased to make them. They can do neither good nor evil, any further than he for his own glory enables them to do it. He had not sent armies to deliver them from Egypt: nor could all the power of Pharaoh detain them there. Nor had he brought them out of Babylon by human might or power. Mighty as the Chaldean empire was, and powerful as were the Medo-Persian conquerors of that empire, he had brought them forth, without force, to their native land: and therefore they should bear in mind how impotent the creature was, either to effect or prevent any thing, but in perfect accordance with his purpose, and in subserviency to his will.]

2. That they needed only to trust in Him alone—

[Nothing in the vision could either promote or obstruct the supplies of oil from the olives to the lamp: yet not a lamp was left destitute, or ceased to exhibit a splendid light. The Spirit of God did all; and kept alive the lamps, by a secret, continued, and effectual communication. It was the Spirit, that, by operating on the hearts of men, supplied every part of the furniture belonging to the tabernacle[b]. It was the Spirit alone that moved the heart of Cyrus to issue his proclamation for their return from Babylon[c]. And it was the

[b] Exod. xxxv. 21, 22, 26. [c] 2 Chron. xxxvi. 22, 23.

same Spirit that raised up Zerubbabel, and inspired them with a zeal to forward the great work which they had in hand[d]. And was He not still as able as ever to accomplish his own gracious purposes? or did they need to indulge either hope or fear with respect to man, when they had the Almighty God for their help?]

But, as the words are spoken generally, let us consider them more at large,

II. In reference to the work which was therein typified—

The whole work of redemption from Babylon was typical; and had respect to,

1. The establishment of Christianity in the world—

[What was then done for the Lord in the erection of a material temple, was done by Jesus Christ in the formation of a spiritual temple, "of which the Prophets and Apostles were the foundation, and he himself the Chief Corner-stone; and the whole being fitly framed together, is continually growing up a holy temple to the Lord[e]." But how has this been built? or how is it carried on? Is it, or has it at any time been, by might or by power? Who instructed the Prophets and Apostles? Who gave effect to their word? Who digs out the stones from the quarry, if I may so speak, and fits them for their places in this spiritual building[f]? It is the Spirit of God altogether. The powers of the world have been exerted to the uttermost against it: yea, men and devils have been confederate against it from the very beginning: but "it is founded on a rock; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."]

2. The maintenance of religion in the souls of men—

[The soul of every individual believer is a temple of the Lord[g]. But every such temple is "the workmanship of Jehovah" altogether[h]: it is a new creation. In the natural man there is not any thing of which such a building can be formed: there is not in him either power or inclination to serve God: it is the Spirit of God alone that "gives him either to will or to do, and *that* altogether of his own good pleasure." Human power has no part in effecting it: "We are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God[i]." "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy[k]:" and,

[d] Hagg. i. 14. [e] Eph ii. 19—22. [f] 1 Pet. ii. 5, 6.
[g] 1 Cor. iii. 16. [h] Eph. ii. 10. [i] John i. 13.
[k] Rom. ix. 16.

in the bestowment of his blessings, "the Spirit divideth to every man severally as he will[l]."]

3. The future restoration of the Jews—

[The restoration from Babylon was but a partial accomplishment of what is to be more completely fulfilled at a future period. If we look into the prophecies of Zechariah, we shall find that he peculiarly and pre-eminently delights to dwell on this subject[m]. And how shall this future restoration be effected? Not by human might or power; for all the power of man will be exerted to prevent it[n]; but by the power of the Holy Ghost: for the Prophet Hosea, speaking of the time when "the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together and appoint themselves one head, and shall come out of the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel," says expressly, "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God; and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen[o]."]

Thus we have ascertained the import of the declaration before us. Now let us proceed to the IMPROVEMENT of it.

It is clear, that when Almighty God saw fit to give a special vision to his servant, for the express purpose of fixing more deeply on his mind, and on the minds of the Jewish people, this particular truth, it must deserve at our hands the strictest attention. Learn then from it,

1. On whom alone to depend—

[We are prone to creature-confidence, and to place our reliance on an arm of flesh. But God denounces a curse on all who indulge this propensity: "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, or that maketh flesh his arm; and whose heart departeth from the Lord[p]." And the truly godly are particularly distinguished by their victory over this sin: "We are the circumcision, who have no confidence in the flesh[q]." It is not possible to divest ourselves of this propensity in too great a degree: for not even so small a matter as the falling of a sparrow takes place without the special direction of the

[l] 1 Cor. xii. 11.

[m] Compare chap. i. 16, 17. and ii. 10—12. and vi. 12—15. and especially the whole 8th chapter.

[n] Mic. iv. 11—13.

[o] Hos. i. 7, 11.

[p] Jer. xvii. 5.

[q] Phil. iii. 3.

Almighty. We see how dependent a little infant is on its mother; and such must we be in the arms of God. We must undertake nothing in our own strength: in no circumstances whatever may we lean to our own understanding: whatever is devised, or whatever is done, the creature must be nothing; but God must be all in all.]

2. To whom alone to give the glory of all that is done—

[We must not "sacrifice to our own net, or burn incense to our own drag[r]." God is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another. When Herod was pleased with the adulation of his courtiers, and took honour to himself, instead of giving it to the Lord, he was smitten and eaten up with worms[s]. And we also shall be made monuments of his displeasure, if we ascribe not to Him the glory due unto his name. Whereinsoever our success has been, whether in temporal or spiritual concerns, this must be our invariable acknowledgment, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name, be the praise[t]."]

3. In what light to view the very beginnings of grace—

[Were we left to accomplish any thing by our own might or power, we might well despond. But when we recollect that "all is of God," and that "He is a Being that changeth not," we may take comfort in the slightest expressions of his love, and in the smallest tokens of his grace. *This* is a very particular lesson to be learned from our text. We are "not to despise the day of small things[u]:" but to believe, that "He who has laid the foundation of good within us will also finish it[x]." And, if any enemy vaunt himself as sure to prevail against us, we should address him in that triumphant language, "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain[y]." The communication between the olives and the lamps could not be intercepted by mortal man; nor can the effectual aids of the Holy Spirit be kept from us. *These lessons, well learned, are worth a vision:* for in the practice of them shall all imaginable good flow down unto us, and God eternally be glorified.]

[r] Hab. i. 16. [s] Acts xii. 21—23. [t] Ps. cxv. 1.
[u] ver. 10. [x] ver. 9. [y] ver. 7.

MCCXLIV.

ZERUBBABEL A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Zech. iv. 7. *Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.*

OUR eyes are generally fixed more on the creature than on God. Hence we are apt to entertain many unnecessary fears. Nor are we unfrequently diverted by them from the path of duty. This was the case with the Jews when rebuilding their temple. Cyrus had given them permission to rebuild it. But they met with opposition from their envious neighbours. And through this they were intimidated and disheartened. But God encouraged them with an assurance of success[a]—

We may notice,

I. The difficulties that obstruct the building of God's spiritual temple—

The temple at Jerusalem was typical of that, which God erects *visibly in the world*, and *invisibly in the hearts of men*[b]—

1. The *visible* temple of the Church has much to obstruct its erection in the world—

[With what inconceivable difficulty are men hewn from the quarry, where they by nature lie! What an impenetrable hardness is there in their hearts! They pay little, if any, attention to the word of God. They set themselves against what is spoken to them in God's name. Their state seems almost to destroy all hope that the Gospel should ever operate effectually among them. *There is also much opposition made to them by all descriptions of people.* Many pretended friends, as well as open enemies, strove to impede the building of the material temple[c]. They sought to prevent it even by means of a legal process[d]. Thus both force and stratagem are used to stop the progress of the Gospel, and the united opposition of all ranks of men seems like an impassable mountain in its way. *Those too who are employed in erecting this spiritual temple, are weak and insufficient.* The work might call forth all the wisdom and energy of angels; but God has put his "treasure into earthen vessels."

[a] ver. 6, 7.
[b] In proof of this, see Eph. ii. 21. and 1 Cor. iii. 16.
[c] Ezra iv. 1—4. [d] Ezra iv. 5.

Even St. Paul cried, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Much more may inferior ministers adopt his language. Whoever knows his own insufficiency for so great a work, must often have felt it a source of discouragement, and almost of despondency.]

2. The *invisible* temple also which God is erecting in men's hearts, is retarded by many difficulties and obstructions—

[*The Christian finds many outward impediments.* The terrors and allurements of the world have great influence, and every Christian is, more or less, beset with these. Many, after running well for a season, are turned aside by them: yea, all find them obstacles very difficult to be surmounted. *He has also many inward difficulties to encounter.* The believer still feels sad remains of corruption within him. These are ever counteracting the efforts of his better principle[e], and he is often apprehensive that sin will regain its dominion. *Above all, he finds his strength to be perfect weakness.* He has learned by bitter experience, how weak he is. He has found, how his strongest resolutions have failed him. Hence he is led to fear, that he shall not persevere to the end.]

But whatever obstructions there be to God's work, God will manifest,

II. Their utter inefficacy to arrest its progress—

God enabled Zerubbabel to proceed in spite of all opposition. Nor will He suffer any obstacles to counteract his designs—

1. The visible temple of his Church shall still be carried on—

[In the first ages of Christianity the Gospel was victorious. Neither the lusts nor prejudices of men could withstand its power. The very persecutions raised against it were overruled by Him to promote its progress[f]: nor did the weakness of those who preached it prevent its success. That promise had then a glorious accomplishment[g]—. So now neither open nor secret assaults shall prevail against the Church. Of this we are assured by Him who governs all[h].]

2. The invisible temple also shall be advanced in our hearts—

[The work has hitherto been maintained, notwithstanding the most unpromising appearances. It has often been advanced

[e] Gal. v. 17.
[f] Acts viii. 1, 4. and Phil. i. 12—14.
[g] Ps. lxxii. 16.
[h] Matt. xvi. 18.

by the very things which seemed most likely to counteract it. There is an invisible and Almighty Agent engaged to carry it on[i]. He will fulfil what he has spoken by the prophet[k]—. Of this comforting truth we may be confidently assured[l].]

INFER—

1. In what manner we should *regard* difficulties—

[We are apt to exaggerate the difficulties that lie in our way; but, if we *inspected them more narrowly*, they would often appear contemptible. "Who art thou, O great mountain?" Art thou a fiery furnace, or a den of lions? I am ready to encounter thee: for, great as thou art, "thou art not worthy to be compared with the sufferings I shall escape, or the glory that shall follow[m]." However great they be, we should not be afraid to address them in the exulting language of the text. They will always, in the issue, be the means of glorifying Christ[n]. Let us therefore go forward in dependence on that promise[o]—.]

2. In what manner we may *overcome* difficulties—

[Remember who the Builder is: it is Zerubbabel, the Lord Jesus Christ; and is there any thing too hard for him? The greatest mountains before him will become a plain: he therefore must be viewed as our all-sufficient helper. If we trust in him, we shall never be disappointed. We shall surely experience the truth of that declaration[p]—. To him then let us commit ourselves with thankful adoration[q].]

[i] Isai. liv. 17. Ps. cxxxviii. 8. [k] Luke iii. 5. [l] Phil. i. 6.
[m] Rom. viii. 18. Acts xxi. 13. [n] 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.
[o] "Fear not, thou worm Jacob . . . . Thou shalt thresh the *mountains*." Isai. xli. 14—16. The whole passage is replete with beauty.
[p] Zech. iv. 9. [q] Jude, ver. 24, 25.

MCCXLV.

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS.

Zech. iv. 10. *For who hath despised the day of small things?*

IT is observable in the dispensations both of nature and of providence, that the greatest things take their rise from very small beginnings. From a view of a new-born infant we might be ready to imagine that it would never be capable of any exertions: but, when its faculties are strengthened and matured, it may

astonish the world with its profound wisdom, or its heroic exploits. Thus in the dealings of God towards the Jewish nation, they were frequently so reduced, as to be, to all appearance, incapable of attaining that state, which their prophets had given them reason to expect. After their restoration from the Babylonish captivity, their difficulties seemed absolutely insurmountable: but God, in the passage before us, assured them, that the very person, who had laid the foundation of their temple, should live to finish it; and exhorted them not to despise the present small beginnings; for that, in spite of every obstacle, they should have a favourable termination; the temple and city should be rebuilt, and the nation be restored, in a measure at least, to its pristine grandeur. Thus in the literal sense this promise refers to *the material temple at Jerusalem;* but it may well be applied,

I. To the mystical temple which God has erected in the world—

The very names of "Zion" and "Jerusalem" are often given to the Church of Christ. Nor can there be a doubt, but that the history to which the text relates was a typical representation of Christ's Church, which is brought out of bondage, and erected in the midst of unnumbered difficulties—

There have been many seasons when it has been "a day of small things" with the Church of God—

[If we look back to the days of Noah, Abraham, Elijah, and the prophets, we shall find that the true worshippers of God were so few as to be "for signs and wonders" in the age and nation where they lived[a]. After our Lord had preached for three or four years, the number of his disciples was no more than a hundred and twenty: and even at this day they are very few in comparison of those who serve mammon: they are "a little flock," who walk in a "narrow and unfrequented way[b]."]

But we must not "despise" the Church, however low it may appear—

[God has promised that his Church shall one day fill the world; that "all shall be righteous;" that "all shall know

[a] Isai. viii. 18. [b] Matt. vii. 14.

the Lord from the least to the greatest;" and that "Christ shall have the heathen for his inheritance, and the utmost ends of the earth for his possession[c]." True it is that there is very little prospect of such an event at present; but "faithful is he who hath promised: who also will do it[d]." "Before our Zerubbabel the mountains shall become a plain[e];" he shall "ride on in the chariots of the everlasting Gospel, conquering, and to conquer[f];" and "the knowledge of him shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea[g]." Instead therefore of despising the present low appearances, we must regard them as an earnest and pledge of that universal empire of Christ which shall in due season be erected in the world.]

The text is yet further applicable,

II. To the spiritual temple which is founded by God in the hearts of his people—

Believers are often called the Temple of God[h]: but so imperfect is their present state that it may well be said to be with them only as "a day of small things"—

[In some sense the most established believer is but in a low and despicable condition. What are any man's attainments when compared with *the law*, which is our rule, or with *Christ*, who is our pattern, or even with *Paul*, who was a man of like passions with ourselves? But to weak believers the text may be more properly applied. They have indeed been liberated from their sore bondage, and have had the foundations of grace laid in their hearts; but alas! how slowly has the work advanced! and how many obstacles do they meet with, that weaken their hands, and discourage their hearts! often are they ready to question, whether the work have been begun in them or not? and to say in despair, "There is no hope."]

But they should not despise the operations of grace, however small—

[The mode in which this part of the promise is conveyed, is worthy of notice. The interrogatory form of it puts the desponding soul, as it were, upon an inquiry, that by finding how important the day of small things is in the eyes of those who are competent to judge, it may not yield to its disquieting fears. Let the inquiry then be made; Who hath despised the day of small things? Did *the Father*, when he ran to meet the yet distant prodigal, and fell on his neck and kissed him? Does *Christ*, who "carries the lambs in his bosom,"

[c] Ps. ii. 8. [d] 1 Thess. v. 24. [e] ver. 7.
[f] Rev. vi. 2. [g] Isai. xi. 9. [h] 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17

and has promised never to "break the bruised reed," though it be so unfit for his use, nor to "quench the smoking flax," notwithstanding there is so much in it to disgust, and so little to please, him? Do *the angels*, who, instead of waiting till the penitent becomes established, shout for joy at the very first appearances of his conversion? Does *Satan?* Does he not act precisely like the kings of Canaan, who, the very instant they found the Gibeonites had made a league with Joshua, confederated to destroy them[i]? Yes; the moment we submit to Jesus, that roaring lion seeks, if possible, to devour us. If then they who best know the worth of true grace do not despise the very smallest portion of it, shall *we?* Shall we not rather value it, rejoice in it, adore our God for it, and take occasion from it to seek for more? Consider *the author* of it, God; *his design* in it, to make us his habitation; *the benefits* resulting from it, present peace and everlasting glory; and shall we despise it; especially when God himself has assured us, that, "wheresoever he has begun the good work, he will carry it on, and perfect it to the day of Christ[k]?" Did he notice "*some good thing*" in the heart of young Abijah[l], and will he forget you? Let not the thought be entertained one moment; but let the weak be strong, and the faint-hearted dissipate their fears; for behold, "the temple shall be built, though in troublous times[m];" and "the head-stone thereof shall be brought forth with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it!"]

To this encouraging subject we should subjoin a word or two of CAUTION:

1. Do not *mistake* the day of small things—

[As the wheat and the tares may be mistaken for each other in the early stage of their growth, so may good purposes and good desires be easily mistaken for the operations of saving grace. Religion may be counterfeited so well, as, in some instances, to deceive an apostle[n]; and in ten thousand instances are men led from very false or equivocal appearances to fancy themselves possessed of the reality. To guard against so fatal an error, we should inquire whether the foundation be laid deep in humility and contrition; for, where this is not done, the superstructure, how beautiful soever it may appear, will inevitably fall, and bury us in its ruins.]

2. Do not *think too highly* of the day of small things—

[i] Josh. x. 1—5. This seems to have been a typical event.
[k] Phil. i. 6. [l] 1 Kings xiv. 13. [m] Dan. ix. 25.
[n] Acts viii. 13, 21.

[If we have solid grounds for believing that God has begun a good work in our hearts, we must still remember that much remains to be done: many conflicts must be sustained before we can get the victory; and "it ill becomes him who girds on the armour, to boast as one that puts it off[o]." The difficulties which the builders of the material temple experienced, were shadows of those which we must expect in the divine life. Numberless are the devices of our subtle enemy; nor can we defeat his purposes, unless, while we build with one hand, we hold our sword in the other[p]. Be not then high-minded, but fear; and, while you rejoice in what God has done for your souls, "rejoice with trembling."]

[o] 1 Kings xx. 11. [p] Neh. iv. 17.

MCCXLVI.

THE VISION OF THE OLIVE-TREES.

Zech. iv. 11—14. *Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive-trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive-branches, which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered me, and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.*

VISIONS, under the Old Testament dispensation, were like parables under the New: they gave a shadowy representation of some important truths. They are frequently very obscure: yet there is almost invariably a clew given us, whereby to discover their real import; and not unfrequently an explanation of them is given by God himself. As in the parables, there will be sometimes found circumstances, the precise drift of which is not easy to be explained: but an attention to the main scope of the whole will keep us from ever deviating far from the true interpretation.

The vision which we are about to consider is certainly not very obvious at first sight; and it requires to be investigated with great sobriety of mind: but, when properly understood, it will richly repay the care we have used in the investigation of it. The

prophet's solicitude to understand it, shews us the propriety of inquiring into it with care and diligence. Let us therefore endeavour to ascertain,

I. The import of the vision—

The general scope of it is declared by God himself—

[The Prophet Zechariah was commissioned to encourage Zerubbabel and Joshua to proceed with the re-building of the temple, which had been long neglected. The Jews who had returned from Babylon were poor and feeble; whilst their adversaries were numerous and powerful. Hence they despaired of accomplishing, under such unfavourable circumstances, so great a work. But in this vision they were taught to look to God, who, if they confided in him, would assuredly crown their labours with success. With him on their side, they needed not either to regret the want of power in themselves, or to dread the existence of it in their adversaries, since he was almighty and all-sufficient for them. This was the construction which the prophet himself was taught to put upon the vision: "Knowest thou not what these be?" said the angel unto him: "And I said, No, my lord. Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts[a]."]

The particular parts of it will be found to bear upon this point with much beauty and exactness—

[In the second and third verses we have the vision: "What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold, a candlestick, all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps which are upon the top thereof; and two olive-trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl, and the other on the left side thereof." In our text there is an additional circumstance mentioned, namely, that "the olive-branches empty out of themselves golden oil through the two golden pipes." What the import of all this was, the prophet was very anxious to know; and therefore *repeated* his inquiries with a kind of holy impatience[b]: and the answer given him was, "The two olive-trees are the two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." From this answer we may gather both the *literal* and *mystical* interpretation of the whole.

The literal import then was this. Zerubbabel and Joshua were the two persons anointed of God to superintend; the one the civil, and the other the ecclesiastical, affairs of the Jews

[a] ver. 5, 6.

[b] Mark the repetition, ver. 11, 12.

at that time. They had but little power in themselves, yet were they ordained of God to effect great things: and God engaged through them to impart unto the people such supplies of wisdom and strength, as should enable the whole nation to shine with their former splendour. However weak therefore they were in themselves, they must not despair; for every mountain should, before Zerubbabel, become a plain.

The mystical import must be more minutely explained. It must never be forgotten that that whole dispensation was typical. The return of the Jews from Babylon, and the restoration of their civil and ecclesiastical polity, were typical of the deliverance of sinners from their spiritual bondage, and the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world. Bearing this in mind, we shall see how this vision illustrates the purposes of God, in relation to the Church of Christ. *The lamps* are emblems of his Church, which shines as a light in a dark world. *The pipes* are the ordinances of religion, by means of which continual supplies of oil are imparted to them, that their light may never be extinguished. *The bowl* is the Gospel, which abounds with blessings for all, according to their several necessities. *The oil* is the Holy Spirit, by whom alone the light that has been set up can be kept alive. And *the two olive-trees*, from whence that oil spontaneously flows into the bowl, are the kingly and priestly offices of Christ, who, like Zerubbabel and Joshua, is appointed of God to establish Jerusalem, and to build the spiritual temple of the Lord. He is exalted to the right hand of God, and "stands by the Lord of the whole earth," that he may carry on every thing in conformity with the Divine will, and accomplish, in due season, the work that has been committed to him. He himself, as the Messiah, the Christ, is the Anointed of the Lord; (the words Messiah and Christ both mean Anointed;) and from him flows "the unction of the Holy One," by which all spiritual light and life are communicated to the Church[c].]

The proof of these several points will be more advantageously adduced under the next head of our discourse, in which we propose to point out the proper improvement of the vision, or,

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

To ascertain this, we must bear in mind *the scope* of the vision: for, if we forget that, the whole interpretation of it may be thought fanciful: but, if we duly regard that, the whole instruction derived from

[c] 1 John ii. 20—27.

the vision will appear sober, just, and pertinent. It teaches us, then,

1. That Christ is, by his offices, qualified to support and perfect his Church—

[The offices filled by Zerubbabel and Joshua both unite in Christ. He is the High Priest of his Church; and in that capacity he is now officiating at the right hand of God. He offered himself a sacrifice for us at the appointed time; and he is now entered with his own blood into the Holy of Holies, to plead the merit of that blood, and to make intercession for us before the mercy-seat of Jehovah. Hence he is called "The Apostle and High-Priest of our profession[d];" and it is from the consideration that we have such an High-Priest, that we are encouraged to hold fast our profession[e]. Moreover he is a King; God has "set him as his King upon the holy hill of Zion[f]." And to this the Apostle Peter bore witness on the day of Pentecost, saying, "God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ[g]." From the union of these two offices in him arises his ability to build his Church. Were either of them wanting, he would fail; but, by the concentration of infinite merit and almighty power in his sacred person, he is fully qualified for the work assigned him. This is particularly marked by Zechariah in a following chapter, where he says, "Behold the Man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and *he shall build the Temple* of the Lord: even *He shall build the Temple* of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be A PRIEST UPON HIS THRONE: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both[h]." Thus standing by the Lord of the whole earth, and sustaining in himself the united offices of Zerubbabel and Joshua, he is really to the Church what they were in a shadow, the source of all that is necessary for her spiritual edification."]

2. That the fulness which is in him is expressly committed to him, for the use and benefit of his Church—

["It has pleased the Lord that in Him should all fulness dwell[i]." But for whose sake is it committed to him? His own? No; but ours. He appears in heaven, not in a private, but public

[d] Heb. iii. 1.
[e] Heb. iv. 14—16. and ix. 11, 12. and x. 21, 22.
[f] Ps. ii. 6. [g] Acts ii. 36.
[h] Zech. vi. 12, 13. It is remarkable, that in this passage, where our Lord is called a King and a Priest, he is particularly designated as *The Branch*.
[i] Col. i. 19.

capacity, even as the Head of his Church. At his ascension thither he *received* gifts; and received them *in order to impart* them to rebellious man[k]. He ascended, on purpose "that he might fill all things[l]." He is the Head; and "the Church is his body, the fulness of Him who filleth all in all[m]." Hence we find, that when the Holy Ghost was poured forth on the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter confidently traced the gift to HIM, even to that very Jesus who had so recently been crucified as a malefactor: "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses: therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and *having received* of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, *he hath shed forth* this which ye now see and hear[n]." And to the same effect St. Paul also says, that God "saves us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of *the Holy Ghost*, which he *shed on us* abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour[o]." These passages reflect great light upon our text, inasmuch as they shew that Christ is the true source of all spiritual blessings to the Church; and that the Holy Spirit, with all his graces and consolations, flows from him according to the Father's will, just as the oil in the vision dropped from the olive-trees into the bowl, for the continual supply of the lamps dependent on it.]

3. That in the use of his ordinances, we may expect all needful supplies—

[It was through the pipes only that the lamps received the oil; and it is through the ordinances only that we can receive "supplies of the Spirit from Jesus Christ[p]". He will be inquired of for all that he has promised us[q]. "If we ask not, we cannot have[r]." We must wait upon him in private, reading his word, meditating upon it, and praying over it. We must wait upon him also in public, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together," but expecting more particular manifestations of his love, and richer communications of his grace, through the medium of his preached Gospel. "Where two or three are met together in his name," there it is that he sheds forth his Spirit in a more abundant measure[s]. Verily, if we watch unto prayer, and abound therein with thanksgiving, we shall never be disappointed of our hope. We shall have just reason to say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." "The hungry he will fill with good things: it is the rich only," and the self-sufficient, "that he ever sends empty away." "The diligent soul shall be made fat."

[k] Compare Ps. lxviii. 18. with Eph. iv. 8. "received," "gave."
[l] Eph. iv. 10. [m] Eph. i. 20—23. [n] Acts ii. 32, 33.
[o] Tit. iii. 5, 6. [p] Phil. i. 19. [q] Ezek. xxxvi. 37.
[r] Jam. iv. 2. [s] Matt. xviii. 20.

And here let me observe, that, in the vision, *the lamps, the pipes, the bowl, the oil, were all of gold.* Those who wait upon the Lord in sincerity and truth are in themselves as superior to unregenerate men as gold is to the baser metals? And what is there of such value as the grace of which they have been made partakers? in comparison of it, all else is but as dung and dross. And are there not in the Gospel "unsearchable riches?" And may we not well say, that under the ordinances, whether public or private, we have enjoyed many *golden* opportunities? Yes indeed: and if we be careful to keep up the communication between Christ and our souls, we shall have all our wants abundantly supplied[t], and the "salvation ministered unto us shall be as a lamp that burneth[u]."]

4. That however low our state may be, or powerful our enemies, His grace shall be sufficient for us—

[Of this were Zerubbabel and Joshua assured: and the event corresponded with the vision. Of this too may *we* be assured; for to *us*, no less than to St. Paul, does the Lord Jesus say, "My grace is sufficient for you." Is that grace at present imparted in but a low degree? Still God says to us, "Who hath despised the day of small things[x]?" 'I do not: and therefore let not any of you do it.' Are our enemies exceeding powerful? God teaches us again to say, "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain[y]." Have we an evidence in ourselves that the Lord Jesus Christ has begun a work of grace within us? God again teaches us to say, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house: his hands also shall finish it[z]." Shall it be thought that these passages relate only to that particular occasion? Look then to the New Testament, and there you will find all the same assurances and triumphs. We are told that "He, who has been the author, will also be the finisher of our faith[a]." We may be confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in us, will perform it "until the day of Christ[b]." And even now, whilst yet conflicting with our enemies, we may say, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that shall condemn? Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No: I am persuaded, that neither angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love

[t] Phil. iv. 19.
[u] Isai. lxii. 1.
[x] ver. 10.
[y] ver. 7.
[z] ver. 9.
[a] Heb. xii. 2.
[b] Phil. i. 10.

of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord[c]." "The plummet is in the hands of our Zerubbabel, with those seven" attendant spirits, "who are the eyes of the Lord, and run to and fro through the whole earth;" and he will see that the work is perfected in us according to his will[d].

Look ye then, beloved, to our adorable Lord and Saviour, and let nothing interrupt your communication with him. It is your privilege to be daily and hourly "receiving, out of his fulness, grace," according to the grace that is in him, and sufficient for all your necessities[e]. Do you feel your need of repentance, or pardon, or any blessing whatsoever? Know that "he is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins[f]:" and though you are not to expect the Holy Ghost to be imparted to you in his miraculous powers, you may in his gracious influences: yes, "ye shall receive the Holy Ghost; for the promise is to you, and to your children, and to as many as are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call[g]." And though you may still have many conflicts, the time is not far distant, when, the work being completed in you, "the head-stone thereof shall be brought forth with shouting;" and to all eternity you shall cry, "Grace, grace unto it![h]"]

[c] Rom. viii. 31—39. [d] ver. 10. with Zech. i. 8—11.
[e] John i. 16. [f] Acts v. 31. [g] Acts ii. 38, 39.
[h] ver. 7.

MCCXLVII.

CHRIST SAVING BY HIS UNITED OFFICES.

Zech. vi. 12, 13. *Thus speaketh the Lord of Hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is* THE BRANCH: *and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord; even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.*

MANY of the most important prophecies were introduced with remarkable and appropriate signs. When God foretold to Moses the deliverance of his people from their bondage in Egypt, he appeared to him in a burning bush, which represented the state of his Church as persecuted on every side, but preserved from injury by his presence in it. Thus was Joshua the high-priest now made to receive an honour

which described in a very significant manner the glory and dignity of the promised Messiah. Some of the Jews who had chosen to remain in Babylon after that their brethren had returned to their own land, shewed that they were not altogether unmindful of their brethren or their God, by bringing a present of gold and silver for the use of the newly erected temple: and God instantly commanded that two crowns should be made of the gold and silver, and that these crowns should, in the presence of the donors, be put upon the head of Joshua: then, in explanation of this sign, the prophet was ordered to direct their attention to the promised Messiah, in whom all honour and power, whether regal or priestly, should be combined[a].

This prophecy will lead us to consider,

I. The name and work of the Messiah—

Christ is here referred to as "the man whose name is The BRANCH"—

[Frequently is he characterized by the prophets under this appellation[b]. Its import is, that he was to be a scion or shoot springing out of the stem of Jesse, that is, to be born of the house of David, when it was cut down and reduced to the lowest state[c]. But though he was to appear in such a weak and mean condition, yet he was to "sit upon the throne of his father David and to reign for ever." Nor can we err in applying this prophecy to Christ, since another prophet, *speaking of him by the very same name*, expatiates in exalted terms upon the glory of his majesty, and declares that the name whereby he should be still more eminently distinguished, should be, JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS[d]. In due time he "grew up out of his place," both out of Bethlehem, where he was born, and out of Nazareth, where he was brought up. We do not indeed find him called "*The Branch*," by any of the New Testament writers; but, *as the place where this branch was to grow up seems to be so particularly specified*, it is not impossible but that this prophecy received its accomplishment in that contemptuous appellation given to him, "*The Nazarene*[e]:" at all events it was fulfilled in that title so often ascribed to him, "*The Son of David*[f]."]

[a] ver. 9—11.
[b] Zech. iii. 8. Isai. iv. 2.
[c] Isai. xi. 1. and liii. 2.
[d] Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.
[e] Matt. ii. 23. The Hebrew word *Netzer* signifies *a Branch*.
[f] Matt. xx. 30, 31. and xxi. 9.

The work to which he was appointed was, to build the temple—

[The material temple was now rebuilding under the auspices of Zerubbabel and Joshua. In reference to that, the prophet speaks of another temple (of which that which was now erecting was but a type or shadow,) which should in due time be raised by the Messiah himself; and he repeats his declaration both to denote the great importance of it, and the certainty of its accomplishment. This temple is no other than the Church of God, which Jesus Christ has founded on the earth, and against which neither the power nor the policy of hell shall ever prevail[g].]

To him also, as the only builder, was to be given all "the glory"—

[Whatever instruments he uses, they can effect nothing but through the agency of his Spirit. Whether Paul plant or Apollos water, it is Christ alone that can give the increase[h]. The workmen in the material temple might say of the carved work, This and that was the work of my hands; it was formed by my skill, and is a monument of my power: but, in the Church of God, there is not one stone laid in the whole building, which was not dug from the quarry, fitted for its place, and fixed in its station by the hand of Jesus: and the chisel has as much right to boast against him who worketh with it, as any instrument, which the Lord may use, has to arrogate to himself any part of his honour[i]. When "the top-stone shall be brought forth with shoutings," there shall not be one in heaven or earth, who will not ascribe the glory to the Divine Architect, crying, "Grace, grace unto it[k]!"]

As his work was to be glorious, so were also,

II. The offices whereby he was to execute that work—

Mean as his appearance was, he was appointed to bear the highest offices:

1. He was to rule both as a King and as a Priest—

[As "King of kings and Lord of lords," he erects his throne over all in heaven and earth. But he exercises also a government which the Father has committed to him in his mediatorial capacity. This relates more immediately to the Church, the minutest concerns of which are all subject to his controul[l]. But though a King, he executes also the office of a

[g] Matt. xvi. 18. Eph. ii. 20, 21. [h] 1 Cor. iii. 7.
[i] Isai. x. 15. [k] Zech. iv. 7. [l] Eph. i. 22.

Priest; and appeared to the beloved Apostle arrayed in priestly vestments, in token that he still carries on the work which he began on earth[m]. In him the kingly power of Zerubbabel, and the priestly office of Joshua, were to be united: and it was for this reason that both the crowns were put upon the head of Joshua, who in so remarkable a manner represented him. Being "a priest upon his throne," his government was to be mild, like that of a compassionate Priest; and his intercession effectual, like that of an Almighty King.]

2. By these united offices he was to perform the work assigned him—

[The salvation of men has been contrived by infinite wisdom, and is effected only in that way which God has appointed. It is not accomplished either by power alone or by price alone; but by price and by power. Christ in his priestly office atones; and in his kingly office imparts the benefit of that atonement: "the counsel of peace is between them both." However meritorious the death of Christ might be as a sacrifice, we can receive no salvation by it, unless he exert his almighty power to renew and sanctify our nature; nor, on the other hand, would his grace be sufficient to bring us unto God, unless he had offered a sacrifice for our sins, and continued in heaven to make intercession for us. But by making satisfaction to the injured Majesty of heaven, and delivering us out of the hands of all our spiritual enemies, he both effects our reconciliation with God, and renders us meet for our heavenly inheritance.]

INFER—

1. What abundant provision has God made for our peace!

[A guilty conscience is not easily pacified: in the midst of all its endeavours to divert its attention from the state of the soul, it will feel many fears and secret misgivings: it will always suspect, either that something which they do not possess, is necessary for the securing of pardon, or that the exertions used for the attainment of holiness, are inadequate to the end proposed. But God has given us a Saviour, who equally bears the sacerdotal censer, and the regal diadem; and unites in himself the compassion of a Priest, with the power and authority of a King. What then can be wanting to satisfy our minds? Surely we need only believe; and "according to our faith so shall it be done unto us." If our minds be but "stayed on Christ" as a willing and all-sufficient Saviour, we shall, according to his word, be "kept in perfect peace."]

[m] Rev. i. 13.

2. How evidently must all the glory of our salvation be given to Christ!

[We always wish to ascribe some of the glory to ourselves: but the whole work is his from the foundation to the top-stone: He is "the author and the finisher of our faith." Are we reconciled to God? it is through the blood of his cross. Is our peace maintained with God? it is through his prevailing intercession. Are we freed from the bondage of sin and Satan? it is through his mighty power, and victorious grace. Let him then "bear the glory:" on him "let us hang all the glory of his Father's house[n]:" and let us now sing, as we hope to do to all eternity, "To him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen[o].]

[n] Isai. xxii. 24. [o] Rev. i. 5, 6.

MCCXLVIII.

OUTWARD SERVICES VAIN WITHOUT OBEDIENCE.

Zech. vii. 4—7. *Then came the word of the Lord of Hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did ye not eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves? Should ye not hear the words which the Lord hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity?*

THIS was an answer to a question which had been proposed to the prophet, by persons who had been sent from Babylon to consult him on a matter of considerable importance. The Jews, when carried captive to Babylon, instituted four annual fasts[a], two of which are mentioned in the text; that in the fifth month, in remembrance of the destruction of their temple and city by Nebuzar-adan, the Chaldean general; and the other, in remembrance of the murder of Gedaliah, who had been placed, as governor, over the poorer part of the Jewish population that were left in the land[b]. But the people were now restored to their land; and the temple was in part

[a] Zech. viii. 19. [b] 2 Kings xxv. 8—10, 22—25.

rebuilt; and therefore it was justly doubted, by those who yet remained in Babylon, whether it was proper to continue those fasts, now that the judgments on account of which the fasts were instituted were removed. This was a question which could not be satisfactorily answered, but by one who was inspired of God to declare his will respecting it. But before a direct answer was given to it, the prophet was instructed to reprove the whole nation, priests as well as people, for the manner in which those fasts had been observed. They are not blamed for instituting the fasts, but for the hypocrisy which they had manifested in the observance of them.

The reproof here given to the Jewish nation furnishes us with a fit occasion,

I. To inquire into the principles by which we have been actuated in our religious duties—

External acts are of no value in the sight of God, any farther than as they express the real dispositions of the mind. It is to the principle from which we act, and not to the mere act itself, that God looks: and it is to that that we also must look, in order to form a right estimate of our character. Consider then,

1. To whom we ought to have performed all our religious services—

[That "fasting and mourning" were religious services, is obvious: and that "eating and drinking" are here used in the same sense, is also obvious. The Jews were ordered by the Mosaic law to carry up their tithes, and their first-fruits, and their free-will offerings, to Jerusalem, and to eat them in the temple before the Lord[c]: and not being able to carry them thither, they observed the same rites in Babylon. Hence we may properly notice our own religious services in general, whether those of greater solemnity, as public fasts, or those which are of more ordinary occurrence, both public and private: in all of them we ought to have had respect to God; to *his will*, as *the cause*; *his word*, as *the rule*; *his glory*, as *the end*[d]. If not done *for* him, they are not acceptable *to* him: and the more entirely we have respect to him in them, the more pleasing they are in his sight. But if we examine our religious services in this view, how few will be found to have

[c] Deut. xii. 17, 18. [d] 1 Cor. x. 31.

been such as God could accept! Enter distinctly into those three points — — —, and then say what answer you can return to that searching interrogation, "Did ye perform them to *me*, even unto *me?*"]

2. To whom we have performed them—

[*Self* was the spring of all their services in Babylon; and self has been, for the most part, the true source of ours. With some they have been no more than a decent *regard for the customs* of the place wherein they live. With others, they have originated in *pride*, having been performed only to set a good example to others, or to gratify a self-complacent spirit in themselves. With others again, the observance of them has been prompted by *self-righteousness*, and a vain desire of establishing a righteousness of their own before God. With some too, it is to be feared, their services have been debased by, if not founded in, *hypocrisy*, having been little else than an endeavour to preserve a fair appearance before men, and to get advantage for the promoting of their temporal interests.

In any of these points of view, what is the principle that actuates us? Is it love for God, or zeal for his glory? No: it is *self*, and nothing but self; and inasmuch as we have performed religious services under any of these impressions, it must be said that we have done it "for ourselves," and not for God. Of Pharisaic hypocrisy we would fondly hope, that it is not a common principle amongst us: but formality, and pride, and self-righteousness operate to a vast extent. O let us search and try ourselves in relation to these things — — — and we shall find abundant ground for humiliation, where perhaps we imagined there was cause for nothing but self-approbation and joy.]

That we may not perform our services in vain, I will proceed,

II. To shew what practice is necessary to the acceptance of them before God—

The prophet appealed to the Jews, whether their attention ought not rather to be called to the commands of God, which in their more prosperous state they had neglected, and which even now they overlooked?

This is the duty to which we are called—

[Under all circumstances, our first duty is to obey the commands of God: and to bring us to obedience is the end of all his dispensations towards us. If he gives prosperity, it is to encourage us to what is good; and, if he send adversity, it is

to reclaim us from evil. Even in the gift of his only-begotten Son he aimed particularly at this, the reducing of men to a state of holy obedience, and of an unreserved devotedness to their God[e] — — —]

Without this, all services, of whatever kind they be, are of no avail—

[In numberless places is this declared by the voice of inspiration: the universal testimony of God's prophets is, "that God has not such pleasure in sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord; but that to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken than the fat of rams." The Prophet Isaiah in particular insists upon this truth, and in the strongest terms[f] — — — Indeed such is God's abhorrence even of the most exalted services, if offered as a substitute for obedience, that he accounts them no better than idolatry and murder[g]. Our blessed Lord in like manner expresses his indignation against those who profess regard for him without manifesting it by a life of holy obedience: "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" And, as the prophet appealed to the Jews respecting this, so we would make our appeal to you, assured that, if conscience be allowed to speak, there can be but one sentiment on this subject. It is an incontrovertible and fearful truth, that "He is an empty vine, who bringeth forth fruit to himself[h]."]

Let this subject be IMPROVED,

1. For our humiliation—

[Who amongst us does not, on a review of his past conduct, find abundant cause for self-condemnation in his religious duties? Who has not too much consulted *self*, and too little had regard to God? Truly, we all need one to "bear the iniquity of our holiest things," as well as of the things which have been more palpably contrary to the will of God. Let us look to that adorable Saviour on whom all our iniquities were laid, and seek through him alone that gracious acceptance, which services like ours can never merit.]

2. For our direction in future life—

[It is good to serve the Lord: and we must not be discouraged because we cannot serve him so perfectly as we could wish. *Self*, that subtle enemy, will more or less intrude into all we do. But let us be on our guard against this evil principle, and beg of God to deliver us from it. Let us endeavour to get a deeper sense of our obligations to God our Saviour,

[e] Rom. xiv. 7—10. Tit. ii. 14. [f] Isai. i. 11—16. and lviii. 1—7.
[g] Isai. lxvi. 3. [h] Hos. x. 1.

for all the wonders of redeeming love. This will do more than any thing else to counteract our natural depravity, and to make us "live in all things, not unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us, and rose again[1]."]

[1] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

MCCXLIX.

THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWS.

Zech. viii. 3—8. *Thus saith the Lord: I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts the holy mountain. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts: There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord of Hosts. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; and I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.*

THE restoration of the Jews from their present dispersion forms a very principal subject of all the prophetic writings; and one cannot but be amazed that it should occupy so small a share of attention amongst the ministers of religion, as scarcely to be noticed by them. Indeed those who do notice the passages relating to that event, pervert them for the most part, by applying them to the Church of Christ, and giving them an interpretation which they were never designed to bear. From whatever cause this proceeds, it tends exceedingly to keep out of view the mercy of God towards his once-favoured people, and to foster in our bosoms an indifference to their welfare. But let us indulge a more benevolent disposition towards them, and contemplate with pleasure,

I. Their interest in this prophecy—

In its primary sense, it was applicable to the Jews of that day—

[They were at present but a small "remnant," and under circumstances that were very discouraging. They had long been afflicted, both by God and man. Previous to their captivity, the judgments of God had been so heavily inflicted on them, that scarcely an old man was to be found among them; and nothing but want and misery was to be seen in the streets[a]: but now peace and plenty should be restored to them[b]. In a moral view, also, there should be a great and general improvement, insomuch that their city, which had been the seat of the most abominable idolatries, should be called "A city of truth;" and the mountain where their temple was rebuilding, "The holy mountain."]

But it had respect to the Jewish nation in days that are yet future—

[Of this there is abundant evidence: for Judah alone returned from captivity; whereas the chapter before us speaks of "Israel and Judah." Moreover, the Jews after their return never displayed any great piety; whereas they were, in this prophecy, designated as a holy people. They were also to "be a blessing among the heathen, as before they had been a curse[c]." But never, at any period, were they so execrated amongst the heathen, as since their dispersion by the Romans: nor, with the exception of the Saviour and his Apostles, have they ever been such a blessing to the world, as they will be at a future period, when they shall rise up as missionaries in all the countries where they have been scattered, and be the means of converting the whole Gentile world to the faith of Christ[d]. Nor can the concluding part of this chapter be referred to any events that have hitherto taken place in the world. The time is yet to come, when "many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem;" and when "ten men out of all languages of the nations shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you[e]."

What then are the things here predicted? First, the return of the Jews to their own land. And this is an event which shall certainly be accomplished in due season[f] — — — Next it declares their conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah, and their instrumentality in converting the heathen world. This also shall be accomplished at the appointed time[g] — — —]

[a] ver. 10. [b] ver. 11, 12. [c] ver. 13. [d] Mic. v. 7.
[e] ver. 20—23. [f] Isai. xxvii. 13. Jer. xxx. 3, 18, 19.
[g] Hos. iii. 5. Isai. lxvi. 19, 20. Rom. xi. 12, 15.

God, foreseeing the incredulity of all to whom this prophecy should come, declares,

II. The certainty of its accomplishment, notwithstanding all the difficulties which lie in the way—

When things are far beyond the powers of man we are apt to judge that they can never be effected—

[Unbelief is deeply rooted in the heart of man. When Sarah was informed, that she, notwithstanding the advanced age of herself and her husband, should bear a child, she laughed at the idea, as altogether incredible[h]. The Israelites in the wilderness, notwithstanding they had seen all God's wonders in Egypt and at the Red Sea, conceived it impossible that God should ever give them flesh to eat in the wilderness[i]: and Moses himself staggered at this promise through unbelief[k]. So it is with us all: "we limit the Holy One of Israel[l]," and "judge of him as if he were altogether such an one as ourselves[m]."]

But this is erroneous and absurd—

[Very pointed is that interrogation in the text: "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord of Hosts." "There is nothing impossible to God." He that by a word called the whole universe into existence, What can he not do? There were many in our Lord's days who doubted the resurrection of the body, because they could not conceive how the scattered atoms could ever be brought together and re-united into the same corporeal mass, so that every human being from the beginning to the end of the world should have his own proper body. But our blessed Lord said to them, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures and the power of God[n]." A just consideration of God's omnipotence would at once have removed all their doubts on this subject, as it will also on every other subject connected with prophecy. Particularly in reference to the final restoration and conversion of the Jews is the power of God insisted on, as a pledge and security for the performance of his promised mercy: "They shall be graffed into their own olive-tree again; *for God is able* to graff them in again[o]." When therefore we see the desperate state to which the Jews are reduced, and feel inclined to ask, "Can these dry bones live?" let us bear in mind, that God has declared they shall

[h] Gen. xviii. 9—15. [i] Ps. lxxviii. 19, 20. [k] Numb. xi. 18—23.
[l] Ps. lxxviii. 41. [m] Ps. l. 21. [n] Matt. xxii. 29.
[o] Rom. xi. 23.

live[p], and that "what he has promised he is able also to perform[q]."]

ADDRESS—

1. Let none indulge unbelief, in reference to their own souls—

[Frequently are persons ready to despond, as though their difficulties in the divine life were too great to be surmounted. And truly, if our salvation depended on our own efforts only, we might well despond. But has not God engaged to keep his people[r]? ——— Has not the Lord Jesus Christ assured us, that "his grace shall be sufficient for us[s]?" Why then should we be cast down, as though there were no hope? See how tenderly God chides us for such unworthy and unbecoming fears[t] ——— and learn to "live by faith in the Lord Jesus," and to be "strong in faith, giving glory to God[u]."]

2. Let none indulge it, in reference to the Church of God—

[We confess, "it is marvellous in our eyes," that the Jews should ever become such a people as we are taught to expect. But we are not therefore to doubt whether the promises of God respecting them will be fulfilled. What the prophet predicted respecting the speedy re-establishment of the Jews after their captivity, was fulfilled: and so will his predictions relative to their future restoration. Hence, in the words immediately following the text, it is said, "Let your hands be strong, ye that hear, in these days, these words by the mouth of the prophets:" and again, in ver. 13. "Fear not, but let your hands be strong." So then say I to you at this time: You who are engaged in promoting the welfare of the Jewish nation, "fear not, but let your hands be strong." Your prospects, humanly speaking, are discouraging; but God is on your side; and he who by the sound of rams' horns cast down the walls of Jericho, will, by your feeble efforts, "glorify himself, and make his own strength perfect in your weakness."]

[p] Ezek. xxxvii. 3—5.
[q] Rom. iv. 21.
[r] 1 Sam. ii. 9. Job xvii. 9. Phil. i. 6.
[s] 2 Cor. xii. 9.
[t] Isai. xl. 27—31.
[u] Rom. iv. 20.

MCCL.

THE CONVERSION OF THE GENTILES.

Zech. viii. 20—23. *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: and the inhabitants of one city shall go to*

another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of Hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.

IF we did not see that the generality of Christians, with the Scriptures in their hands, are yet ignorant of the plainest and most fundamental doctrines of our religion, we should wonder how the Jews, with the sacred oracles before them, could be such strangers to God's design of bringing the Gentiles into his Church. If there were no other passage, in all the inspired volume, relating to the subject, besides that which we have now read, they would have had abundant reason to expect that glorious event.

But the prophecy before us, however fulfilled in part in the apostolic and succeeding ages, is yet to receive, at a future period, a more complete accomplishment. In unfolding its meaning, we shall be led to consider,

I. The conversion of the Gentiles—

To human appearance, it must be granted, this event is very improbable: but,

It is certain—

[It is an event foretold from the earliest ages by Moses[a] and the prophets[b]; and we are confirmed in our expectation of it by Christ[c], and his apostles[d].]

It will, however, be sudden—

[There will probably be no more prospect of its arrival, than there was of the restoration of the Jews from Babylon a little time before it took effect. "A nation shall then, as it were, be born in a day[e]." "As soon as the people hear of Christ, they shall obey him[f]." No sooner shall his standard be erected, than they shall flock to it in crowds, "like doves to their windows[g]." Like persons eager for some great and

[a] Deut. xxxii. 21. with Rom. x. 19, 20.
[b] Ps. lxxii. 8—11. Isai. xlix. and lx.
[c] Luke xxi. 24.
[d] Rom. xv. 8—12. and xi. 25.
[e] Isai. lxvi. 8.
[f] Ps. xviii. 43, 44.
[g] Isai. lx. 2, 3, 8.

unexpected good, they shall "lay hold of the skirt" of him, who they think can aid them in the attainment of it. Yea, so vast and sudden will be the accession of converts to the church, that the places appropriated to divine worship shall not be able to contain them, and the people of God themselves shall be filled with wonder and astonishment[h].]

It will also be universal—

["All the ends of the world are given to Christ as his possession[i]." And in that day "many and strong nations" shall unite themselves to the Lord; and "men shall fear him from the rising to the setting sun[k]." "All shall know him, from the least of them even to the greatest[l]." All shall be righteous[m]: even the most ignorant countrymen shall be consecrated to the Lord[n]. None, or next to none, shall remain in an heathenish unconverted state[o]. The knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as universally as the waters cover the channel of the sea[p].]

Together with this assurance of the event itself, the text further sets before us,

II. The way in which it will be manifested—

Conversion, wherever it exists, uniformly produces the effects mentioned in the text:

1. A cordial delight in God's ordinances—

[A proud pharisee will go to the temple as well, and perhaps as often, as a repenting publican: but he never can find *delight* in the worship of God. Prayer is a task, that he performs either from necessity, or with a view to establish a righteousness of his own. But the true convert rejoices in opportunities of approaching God both in public and in private[q]——— There will indeed be many seasons when he will find his mind lamentably indisposed for holy exercises: but, when he is in a proper frame, his joy is in God alone[r].

Nor will any true Christian be satisfied to serve God alone: when once he has tasted the benefits of communion with God, he will desire to bring all he can to a participation of his bliss[s]. Nor will he readily be put off with vain excuses: he knows the danger of procrastination; and therefore says, Come, "let us go *speedily*, and seek the Lord:" yea, to give more efficacy to

[h] Isai. xlix. 18—22. [i] Ps. ii. 8. [k] Mal. i. 11.
[l] Jer. xxxi. 34. [m] Isai. lx. 21. [n] Zech. xiv. 20, 21.
[o] Zech. xiv. 21. [p] Hab. ii. 14.
[q] Ps. cxlviii. 14. Ps. xlii. 1, 2. 1 John i. 3.
[r] Rom. v. 11. [s] John i. 41, 42, 45. Cant. i. 4.

his advice, he is glad to lead the way[t], and to profit others by his example, as well as by his precepts.

This will be an universally prevalent disposition in the latter day[u]; and it will assuredly prevail, wherever the grace of God is received in truth.]

2. A zealous attachment to his people—

[A person truly converted to God can no longer associate with those who would turn him from the paths of righteousness[x]. He seeks rather those who will aid him in his journey heaven-ward. He sees that God is with his people, "comforting them with his presence[y]," and "blessing them with all spiritual blessings[z]." He therefore desires to cast in his lot with them[a]; he "takes the Lord's people, as it were, by the skirt, saying, I will go with you;" and, with Moses, accounts it better to renounce all the vanities of the world, and to "suffer affliction with the Lord's people, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season[b]." In this choice, he is not instigated by fear, as the heathen were in the days of Esther[c], but from a firm persuasion that God is with his Church, and that there is no solid happiness to be enjoyed but in connexion with it[d].]

This SUBJECT affords ample matter,

1. For reproof—

[With all our profession of Christianity, the generality never once in all their lives have manifested such a disposition as is described above. We frequently say to each other, 'Let us go to this or that amusement;' but never, "Let us go speedily and seek the Lord." On the contrary, though frequently and earnestly exhorted by the ministers of God, we cannot even be persuaded to seek the Lord for ourselves. What resemblance then is there between such persons, and the Christians of the latter day? Let us know that to call ourselves Christians, while we are wholly destitute of Christian principles and Christian habits, is a fond and fatal delusion.]

2. For encouragement—

[God is with his church at this time, as well as in the days of old[e]: and his people can testify, that it is well with those who seek his face[f]. Behold, then, we say to all, as Moses to his father-in-law, "We are journeying unto the place of

t "*I will go also.*"
u Mic. iv. 1, 2.
x 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15.
y John xiv. 21, 22.
z Eph. i. 3.
a Ps. xvi. 3. Isai. xliv. 5. with Acts ii. 41.
b Heb. xi. 24—26.
c Esth. viii. 17.
d 1 Cor. xiv. 25.
e Matt. xxviii. 20.
f Eccl. viii. 12. with 2 Chron. xxvi. 5.

which the Lord said, I will give it you: and it shall be, if ye go with us, *yea, it shall be*, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will he do to you[g]." Let the day then, the blessed day commence amongst us, when that prophecy shall be accomplished, "The children of Israel shall come together, going, and weeping; they shall go and seek the Lord their God: they shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten[h]."][i]

[g] See Numb. x. 29, 32. [h] Jer. l. 4, 5.

[i] This was written and published before the Author's attention was directed to the JEWS. He has now added another Discourse on the same text, more illustrative, he trusts, of its true meaning. And he leaves this as a lasting reproach to himself, for having passed over them in a passage, where, had he been duly alive to their welfare, he could not have overlooked them. Dr. Lowth has fallen into the same error.

MCCLI.

THE CONNEXION BETWEEN THE CONVERSION OF THE JEWS AND GENTILES.

Zech. viii. 20—23. *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of Hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you.*

WHEN the conversion of the Jews is proposed as an object proper to occupy the attention, and to call forth the exertions of the Christian world, it is often regarded as a visionary scheme, which it is in vain to hope will be realized in any other way than by miracle. The attempt also is deemed premature, because it is supposed that their conversion cannot be accomplished till the great mass of the Gentile world shall have embraced the faith of Christ. But the Scriptures give us no more reason to expect a miraculous interposition in behalf of the one, than of the other. The conversion

of both will be effected as in the apostolic age. Though miracles were wrought then for the confirmation of the word, neither Jews nor Gentiles were converted by miracle, but by the preaching of the word, and the mighty operation of the Holy Spirit upon their souls. So, also, will it be in the latter day; and in somewhat of a similar order too. In the apostolic age, a number of Jews were first called, and then the Gentiles. So, in the Millennial period, the awakening will commence among the Gentiles; and then shall come the conversion of the Jews; who, being turned to the faith, will be God's instruments for the bringing-in of the whole Gentile world. This, I apprehend, is strongly intimated in the passage before us; in considering which, we shall have to state,

I. The conversion of the Gentiles—

[This is an event which shall certainly take place in God's appointed time, and *that*, too, *through the instrumentality of human efforts*. As, in the apostolic age, the saints, on being driven from Jerusalem, "went every where preaching the word[a];" so, at the period we are now speaking of, all, as soon as they are themselves awakened to see and feel the excellence of religion, will exert themselves to propagate it to the utmost of their power; the inhabitants of one city going to those of another, and exhorting them without delay to seek the Lord. This has certainly never yet been accomplished: for, though it is true that great multitudes of Gentiles were converted in the apostolic age, and their union with the Christian Church may be fitly considered as a fulfilment of the prophecy which says, They should "come up to worship the Lord in Jerusalem," as all Israel were wont to do three times in the year; yet nothing has ever yet taken place that has corresponded with the strong expressions in our text. There has never yet been such a conflux of Gentiles to the Christian Church as has answered to the declaration, that "many people and strong nations" should come unto it. Whilst we admit, therefore, that there was, in the first ages of Christianity, a *partial* accomplishment of this prophecy, we must affirm, that its complete fulfilment is yet future, and that it is reserved for that time which is generally designated "the latter days." Then will a spirit of piety be diffused throughout the whole earth; insomuch that, "from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof, the name" of Jesus shall be adored[b], and "all

[a] Acts viii. 1—4. [b] Mal. i. 11.

the nations of the earth shall worship before him[c]." "Then shall there be but one King over all the earth[d];" and "all the kingdoms of the world be the kingdom of the Lord, and of his Christ[e]."]

This point, the future conversion of the whole Gentile world, being generally known and admitted, I forbear to enlarge upon it; and proceed to mark, what is less known and less considered,

II. Its connexion with, and dependence on, the conversion of the Jews—

The latter part of our text, like the former, may be regarded as having had a partial accomplishment in the days of the Apostles, through whose ministry vast multitudes were converted to the faith of Christ: for, as the Apostles were Jews, and as the Gentile converts, seeing, by the miracles which *they* wrought, that God was with them, freely and unreservedly submitted to their word; it might be said, that, in embracing the Gospel, they "took hold of the skirt of him that was a Jew." But we have already shewn that the whole prophecy relates to a future period, even to that period when all, both Jews and Gentiles, shall be united under one Head, and form one glorious Church, under the true David, the Lord Jesus Christ[f]. *Then shall the Jews, who reaped the first-fruits among the Gentiles, be employed to gather in the whole harvest;* and, to an extent that has never been seen before, shall ten men, out of all the languages of the nations, lay hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew; saying, "We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you."

To these words different interpretations have been given. Some suppose "the Jew" here spoken of, is the Gospel, as revealed by the Apostles, who were Jews: others understand the word as designating Christians generally, who are sometimes called "Jews." Others think that Christ himself is spoken of under this name. But I understand it as relating literally to the Jewish nation; and as declaring, that

[c] Ps. lxxii. 8—11. and lxxxvi. 9.
[d] Zech. xiv. 9.
[e] Rev. xi. 15.
[f] Hos. iii. 5.

the Jews shall be first converted to the faith of Christ; that *their conversion shall attract the notice and admiration of the Gentiles;* and that *they shall be eminently instrumental in converting the whole Gentile world.*

This appears,

1. From *the whole scope* of the preceding context—

[Can any one read the first eight verses of the chapter, and imagine for a moment that *the Apostles* are spoken of; or that *their word* is spoken of; or that *Christians* are spoken of, *under the name of Jews?* Beyond a doubt, the persons referred to are the descendants of Israel and Judah, who shall be restored to their own land, and enjoy there a state of unprecedented prosperity[g] — — —]

2. From many *particular expressions* throughout the context—

["The House of Israel and the House of Judah" are spoken of as the persons to whom the prophecy pertains, and as the persons who are to be instrumental in conveying "the blessings to the Gentile world." And these are the persons who have been "a curse" to the world. Can this refer to *the Apostles*, or to *the word* which they have transmitted to us, or to converted Christians, in any age? Have the Apostles ever been a curse to the world, or their word a curse, or pious Christians a curse? Have they ever been any thing but "a blessing?" But the *Jewish people* have been execrated all the world over; yes, and have been the occasions *of many judgments* to the people amongst whom they have dwelt: and of *them* it is said, that they shall be "a blessing[h]."

Again: God says, that as He repented not, but executed upon the Jews his threatened judgments, so will he assuredly fulfil to them his "promises to do them good[i]." What reference can this have to the Apostles, or their word, or to the Church of Christ?

Again: He exhorts them to "speak the truth, and love no false oath[k]." To whom can this refer, but to the Jews who shall exist at that time?

Again: He tells them, that the Fasts instituted in remembrance of the evils which had brought upon them the Divine judgments, and of the calamities which the Chaldeans had inflicted on them, should, at the appointed season, be turned to Feasts[l]. What sense can there be in this, as applied to the

[g] *Cite* the whole of the passages here referred to.

[h] ver. 13. [i] ver. 14, 15. [k] ver. 16, 17.

[l] ver. 18, 19. The two former of these, the Fast of the fifth month and of the seventh, are mentioned in chap. vii. 3, 5. That of the fifth

Apostles, or their word; or to the Christian Church? It can relate to none but the Jews personally; even those who shall be alive in the latter day.]

3. From the express words of our text—

[On a supposition that the great body of the Gentiles are to be converted first, and that they are to be the means of bringing in the Jews, the language of the text must be altogether changed. The Gentiles are more than a hundred times as numerous as the Jews; and if they are to be converted first, and then bring in the Jews, they must say, not as in the text, "Ten men shall take hold of the skirt of one Jew;" but, "WE TEN, out of all the languages of the nations, hold out *our skirts* to *you, a poor Jew*, saying, Come with US; *for ye have heard and seen that God is with* US." But this were to reverse the text altogether, which represents *ten Gentiles as taking hold of* the skirt of *one Jew*.]

4. From the passage to which the text itself evidently refers—

[There can be no doubt but that the prophet had in his mind the language used by Moses to Hobab, his father-in-law, when he endeavoured to persuade him to go up to the earthly Canaan: "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel. And it shall be, if thou go with us; yea, it shall be, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee[m]." Thus, in the latter days, the Gentiles, seeing beyond a doubt that God is with his people the Jews, will be anxious to go up with them to "the New Jerusalem, the city that cometh down from God out of heaven."]

5. From the whole Scriptures of truth—

[The whole Scriptures declare, with one voice, that the Jews shall be converted first, and be God's honoured instruments for the converting of the whole Gentile world. The Prophet Micah says, "The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men[n]." The dew and the clouds come not at man's

month (July) was in remembrance of the City and Temple burnt by the Chaldeans. See 2 Kings xxv. 8, 9. That of the seventh (Sept.) in memory of the murder of Gedaliah. See 2 Kings xxv. 25. with Jer. xli. 17, 18. That of the fourth month (June) commemorated the taking of Jerusalem. See Jer. lii. 6, 7: and that of the tenth (Dec.) the commencement of the siege by the Chaldean army. See Jer. lii. 4.

[m] Numb. x. 29, 32. [n] Mic. v. 7.

call; but go when and where the Lord is pleased to send them: and, unconscious of the ends for which they are sent, they fertilize the ground in God's appointed time, and diffuse life wherever they descend. So are the Jews scattered unwittingly, and unconscious of the ends for which they are sent, over the face of the whole earth, to impart, in due season, all the blessings of life and salvation to a perishing world. And to this effect does the Prophet Isaiah also speak, when of them, in their present scattered state, he says, "THEY *shall declare my glory among the Gentiles;* and shall bring all their Brethren, as the Children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the House of the Lord[o]." Whether the persons, here called their brethren, be their brethren of the ten tribes, whose place of residence is not known; or of the Gentiles, who may be called brethren by anticipation; I cannot exactly say: but *this* is plain; "THEY shall declare God's glory among the Gentiles." And speaks not the Apostle Paul also to the same purpose? He says, "If the fall of them (the Jews) be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, *how much more* THEIR FULNESS? If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, *what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead*[p]?" Yes, it is the admission of the Jews into the Christian Church that will be the means of awakening the attention of the whole Gentile world; who, *beholding and admiring the grace of God in them*, will, with holy zeal, embrace the Gospel of Christ, and fly to him with unanimity, "as a cloud," and with speed, "as doves to their windows[q]."

Thus I think it appears, both from the Scriptures in general, and from my text in particular, that the Jews must be converted *first*, before the great body of the Gentiles be gathered in; and that they are ordained of God to be his honoured instruments for the conversion of the whole world.

As for the notion of some Commentators, that *Christ* is the Jew, on whose skirt the Gentiles shall lay hold, it really is so foreign to the whole context, that it does not deserve a moment's consideration. The Jews themselves are far nearer to the true interpretation than such expositors as these. The Jews adduce this passage, to prove, that, instead of their ever embracing Christianity, *the Christian world are to become Jews;* since it is said, that the whole world shall "take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you." The Jews, I say, are so far right in this interpretation, that they are the persons designated in the text: only the passage must be understood of *Jews who have embraced their Messiah*, and not of Jews who

[o] Isai. lxvi. 19, 20. with Rom xv. 16. [p] Rom. xi. 12. 15.
[q] Isai. lx. 8. with Zeph. iii. 20. and Jer. xxxiii. 9.

continue to reject him. *With this only proviso, the Jews are right:* and we Christians should exert ourselves to the utmost, to prepare them for the work they are destined to perform.]

LEARN, then, from hence,

1. The great importance of the Jewish cause—

[By the Jewish cause, I mean the endeavours which are now making for the conversion of the Jews. It is a lamentable fact, that the Christian world has never yet, since the time of the Apostles, paid to it the attention it deserves. The situation of the Gentile world has not been overlooked; but that of the Jews has been altogether forgotten, except in one or two instances, where partial exertions have been made for their welfare. But why should they be thus excepted, and be the only people upon earth that are to be cut off from the flow of Christian benevolence? Are not their souls of as much value as the souls of others? Is it a small matter that six or eight millions of souls should be daily and hourly going down into perdition; and be left, in all their successive generations, to "perish for lack of knowledge?" But consider them as "beloved of God," as no doubt they still are, notwithstanding all that they are suffering at his hands; consider them, I say, as "*beloved* of *God*;" and will you think it right that they should be *despised* by *us?*

But come more closely to the point: view them as God's instruments for the conversion of the world; and then say, whether we should not seek to bring them to the knowledge of the truth? Verily, if we have no regard but for the Gentiles, we ought, even for *their* sakes, to express love to the Jews, and to labour, to the utmost of our power, to fit them for their destined work: yea, the greater our concern for the Gentiles, the more earnest should be our efforts for the Jews. Permit me then, if it be only for the Gentiles' sake, to urge upon you an attention to the Jews; and henceforth to labour for them, as their ancestors in the apostolic age laboured and endured for you — — — The husbandman, when his corn is ripe, looks out for reapers. Do ye the same now. The Gentile field is ripening apace: the Jews are God's appointed reapers. Engage them, then, without delay, that the harvest may be gathered throughout all the earth.]

2. The duty of Christians in all ages—

[You have seen the religion which will characterize that blessed period to which we are looking forward. There will be a delight in worshipping and serving God: there will be zealous exertions, too, in all, to stir up one another to a holy emulation in this good work. None will be satisfied with going to heaven alone, or serving God alone. All will be anxious for the good of all: all will be active, too, in honouring

their God, and in promoting the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom. The people of one city will go to another city, to exhort and urge them to an active concurrence in every good work. Methinks the means, which are now used on so contracted a scale that a few only embark in this service of love, will then be adopted on the largest scale; and whole societies, or rather whole cities, shall unite to provoke one another unto love and to good works.

Yet, let me say, I would not have any to imagine that a zeal either for Jews or Gentiles will stand in the place of *personal* religion. If we commend to any the blessed word of God, or the embracing of our holy religion, let us take care to lead the way, in the study of the one, and in the practice of the other. Let us never say to any, "Come," without adding at the same time, "I WILL GO ALSO." Yea, and let us so lead the way, as the Jew will do at the period before referred to: let us so walk before others, that they may see, and be constrained to acknowledge, "that God is with us of a truth." Let us be living "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men;" so that others may "lay hold of *our* skirt," and wish to "go with us," and have "their portion with us," in the realms of bliss. Let us "be as lights shining in a dark world;" and "so make our light to shine before men, that they, seeing our good works, may glorify our Father which is in heaven." *This* is our duty, no less than it will be of those who shall live in the latter day. Our religion must be neither wholly personal, nor wholly official; but a just combination of both: and, whilst we are labouring to the uttermost to "save ourselves," we must use all diligence to save every other person who can by any means be brought within the sphere of our influence."]

MCCLII.

THE ADVENT OF JESUS A GROUND OF JOY.

Zech. ix. 9. *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation: lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.*

THERE is scarcely any circumstance relating to the life and death of Christ which was not made a subject of prophecy many hundred years before he came into the world. Even things the most improbable in themselves were predicted, that by their

accomplishment the truth of his divine mission might be more fully manifest. That the words before us do indeed relate to him, is certain; because the voice of inspiration assures us that they were fulfilled when he entered into Jerusalem riding on the foal of an ass. In discoursing on them we shall consider,

I. The description here given of Jesus—

In his office he is the "King of Zion"—

[The whole universe is under his dominion, seeing that he is "King of kings, and Lord of lords." But he is in a more eminent manner King of Zion, because all the members of Zion are his subjects *willingly* and by an unfeigned surrender of themselves to him. They gladly receive his laws; and he constantly affords them his protection. As the Church in the wilderness was under a *visible* theocracy, so is the Church in all ages, and every individual in the Church, *really*, though *invisibly*, under the care and government of Jesus[a].]

In his character he is the best of princes—

He is just—

[His justice appears in every law which he has enacted, and his righteousness in every part of his administration. There are indeed many things in his government, which we are not at present able to account for; but the day of judgment will clear up all the present obscurities, and manifest, that every the minutest occurrence was ordered by him with unerring wisdom, goodness, and truth. It will then be seen that "righteousness was at all times the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins[b]."]

He is powerful—

[Earthly kings may be just, yet not be able to screen their subjects from the injustice of others. But Jesus "has salvation" in his hand for all those who call upon him. Does sin oppress us? he can deliver us both from its guilt and power. Does Satan assault and buffet us? "*His* grace shall be sufficient" for the weakest of his people. Does "the fear of death keep us in bondage?" He can make us triumphant both in the prospect of it now, and in a happy resurrection at the last day.]

He is lowly—

[Great power and dignity are too often the means of engendering pride in our hearts. The kings of the earth would think it a degradation to converse familiarly with their meanest

[a] Eph. i. 22. [b] Isai. xi. 5.

subjects; but our Almighty Monarch possesses a lowliness of mind, which makes him accessible to every subject in his dominions. There is not any moment when we may not enter into his presence, nor any complaint which we may not pour into his bosom. His ear is ever open to hear, and his hand ever stretched out to relieve, his needy suppliants. The same lowliness which induced him, at his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, to ride upon a young ass, with no other furniture than the clothes of his poor disciples, when he might as easily have commanded all the pomp and splendour of an earthly monarch, still actuates him in his exalted state. There is no office to which he will not condescend for the benefit of those who wait upon him.]

From this description of Jesus we may well be prepared to hear,

II. The exhortation to rejoice in his advent—

The advent of such a prince is a proper ground of joy for all people—

[When first he came in the flesh, the event was announced by angels as glad-tidings of great joy to all people. And all the multitudes who surrounded him at the time referred to in the text, were penetrated with the liveliest joy. And is there not now as much cause for joy as on either of those occasions? Are not the great ends of his advent better understood now than at his incarnation? and the nature of his kingdom more clearly seen than at the time of his triumphant entry into Jerusalem? Surely then our joy should far surpass all that could be experienced at those seasons. How should poor captives now rejoice to hear that there is one proclaiming liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound! If an earthly king were coming not only to redress all the grievances of his people, but to relieve all their wants, and enrich them with all that their hearts could desire, would not all exult and leap for joy? Would not every one be impatient to see him, and to receive his benefits? Why then should not all rejoice in the advent of Him, who is come to bind up the broken-hearted, and to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness?]

But the "daughters of Zion" in particular should rejoice in this event—

[The daughters of Zion are the true members of the church, who have been begotten by the Word and Spirit of God. These are addressed by the prophet, and are bidden to exult and "shout" for joy. Well does the prophet select *them*

as the persons to whom he should direct his exhortation. "Let them give thanks whom the Lord hath redeemed." They know the glorious character of their prince. They have found both his laws and government to be "holy and just and good." They have experienced his power to save, "to save to the uttermost those that call upon him." They have continual proofs of his lowliness, being admitted daily to the most intimate fellowship with him. Should not *they* then rejoice? "Surely the very stones would cry out against them if they held their peace." "Behold" then, believers, your King, even he whom you have chosen to reign over you, is come. He now waits for you. "Arise, lo! he calleth you." Go, enter into his presence-chamber, and receive the blessings which he is come to bestow.]

APPLICATION—

[Are there any who feel no disposition to rejoice in this event? Alas! too many, like Herod and the Pharisees, cannot join in the general chorus. Let them not, however, imagine themselves related to the church of God: they are daughters of the world, but not daughters of Zion; nor need they have any other evidence of their alienation from God, than their want of joy in the Lord. How base is their ingratitude! that the Lord of glory should come down from heaven for them, and they have no hearts to welcome his arrival: that they should be gratified with the company of an earthly friend, and have no delight in communion with Jesus. Surely if they were to have all the curses of God's law inflicted on them, who served not the Lord with joyfulness and gladness of heart on account of the temporal benefits bestowed upon them[c], *they* must have a far heavier condemnation, who so despise the condescension and love of our incarnate God. Mark then the alternative to which ye are reduced; ye must begin now that joy in the Lord which ye shall possess for ever, or, by continuing insensible of his mercy, continue destitute of any interest in it to all eternity. Choose ye now whether ye will have life or death: remember, however necessary it may be at other times to weep for your sins, it is to joy that we now invite you; not to carnal joy, but to that which is spiritual and heavenly. We unite with the Apostle in saying, "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again, I say, Rejoice." Methinks such an exhortation should not be slighted, especially when your present joy is to be a certain prelude to eternal happiness: but if ye will still despise the mercies of your God, behold this King cometh shortly to judge the world; behold he cometh riding upon the heavens with myriads of the heavenly host: know

[c] Deut. xxviii. 45, 47.

too that he is *just* and *powerful;* but his justice will condemn, and his power punish you. Go to him then in this day of salvation, welcome him in this the accepted time; so shall you, at his second coming, behold his face with joy, and join the choir of heaven in everlasting hallelujahs.]

MCCLIII.

CHRIST A STRONG HOLD.

Zech. ix. 12. *Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even to-day do I declare that I will render double unto thee.*

IF the declarations of God be humiliating, and the denunciations of his vengeance awful, we must acknowledge that his invitations and promises afford us all the encouragement we can desire; inasmuch as they are addressed to persons in those very circumstances wherein we are. Nor should we be averse to confess the truth of our state, when we see what provision God has made for our happiness and salvation. The words before us lead us to consider,

I. The persons addressed—

All men, as sinners, are condemned by the law of God, and may therefore be considered as prisoners arrested by divine justice, and sentenced to eternal death. But they who hear the Gospel are "prisoners of hope:"

1. Though they be prisoners, yet they have a hope—

[Those, who have died in their sins, are utterly without hope, being reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day. But as long as we continue in the world, we need not to despair. The invitations of the Gospel are sent to us; nor can any thing but an obstinate rejection of divine mercy cut us off from the blessings of salvation. Though we are condemned, and are every hour in danger of having the sentence executed upon us, yet there is a way opened for us to escape, and we may obtain mercy even at the eleventh hour.]

2. There is however but *one* hope, unto which all are shut up[a]—

[a] Gal. iii. 23

[Christ is set before us as the way, the truth, and the life; nor is there any other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved. We are all enclosed as the prophets of Baal: and the order is given, Go in and slay[b]: but Christ says, "I am the door[c];" and if we will flee out at that door, we shall live; if not, we shall perish in our sins. Christ came on purpose to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound: to them that are sitting in the prison-house, he says, Go forth, and shew yourselves[d]. But if we spend our time in devising other methods of escape besides that which he has provided, the hour appointed for execution will come, and we shall suffer the punishment which our sins have merited.]

Thus while we see that all, who need the provisions of the Gospel, are addressed by it, let us consider,

II. The invitation given them—

Christ is here represented as a strong hold—

[Christ is evidently the person referred to in the whole preceding context. He is that meek but powerful King, who comes to subdue all nations to himself, not by carnal weapons, but by speaking peace to them; and who confirms his kindness towards them by a covenant sealed with his own blood[e]. He is represented as a strong hold to which, not the righteous only, but the most ungodly, may run for safety. Here may be some allusion to the cities of refuge to which the manslayer was appointed to flee, and in which he found protection from his blood-thirsty pursuer[f]. Such a refuge is Christ, an impregnable fortress, which defies the assaults of earth and hell.]

To this we are all invited to turn—

[The Gospel thus exhibits Christ, not as an abstract speculation, but as a remedy which we greatly need: and in exhorting us to "turn to this strong hold," it recommends us to renounce all false refuges, to regard Christ as our only Saviour, and to seek in him that protection which he alone can afford us. It stretches out the hand to us, as Christ did to Peter, when he was sinking in the waves. It urges us to go without hesitation, and without delay, to him, who alone can deliver us from the wrath to come, and bring us into the liberty of God's children. To the same effect it speaks in numberless other passages: it calls the thirsty to come for refreshment, the weary to come for rest, and to the dying says, "Look unto Christ and be ye saved."]

[b] 2 Kings x. 18—25.
[c] John x. 9.
[d] Isai. xlii. 7. xlix. 9. lxi. 1.
[e] Zech. ix. 9—11.
[f] Numb. xxxv. 11, 12.

But because even the most needy are apt to turn a deaf ear to the calls of the Gospel, we would direct your attention to,

III. The promise with which the invitation is enforced—

The terms in which the promise is conveyed, are somewhat obscure—

[The expression of "rendering double" will be best understood by comparing it with other passages of the same kind[g]. From them its import appears to be, that God will give us blessings in rich abundance; not *according to* the sufferings we have endured[h], but *double;* not *corresponding to* the punishment we have deserved, but *double;* not *equal to* the blessings enjoyed by our fathers, but *double.* Or perhaps it may be best explained by the Apostle's declaration, that God will give us "abundantly, exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think." Certainly the promise implies, that we shall not only be delivered from prison, but be restored to the favour of our God; not only have our debt discharged, but be enriched with a glorious inheritance.]

The manner in which it is given is peculiarly solemn and energetic—

[God is desirous that we should give implicit credit to his word: hence he speaks as one who would on no account recede from it: he speaks as in the presence of ten thousand witnesses, and pledges all his perfections for the performance of his promise. And as the day of our desponding fears is long remembered by us, and as we, in that day, find a want of all the support which God himself can administer, he dates his promise as made to us in that very day; not at a time when our difficulties were not foreseen, but when they were at the height, and when nothing but the immediate hand of God could deliver us. Yea, God would have us consider the promise as made to us *this* day, this very day, this very hour, when we most need the application of it to our souls; and, that every individual may take it to himself and rely on it as intended for himself alone, the *promise* is made *particular*, while the *invitation* is *general.*]

OBSERVE—

1. How astonishing are the condescension and compassion of God!

[Behold the Judge offers mercy to the prisoners, and urges them in the most affectionate manner to accept it!

[g] Isai. xl. 2. and lxi. 7. [h] Ps. xc. 15.

Methinks prisoners in general would need no entreaty to leave their dungeons; if their prison doors were open, and their chains were beaten off, they would be glad enough to effect their escape, though at the risk of a severer punishment. Nor would a manslayer need much importunity to enter into the city of refuge, if an armed avenger were closely pursuing him. Yet *we* slight the invitations of our God, and the security he has provided for us. Well then might he leave us to perish! But behold, he enforces his invitations with the most gracious promises: he engages to exceed our utmost wishes or conceptions. And shall we not admire such transcendent grace? Shall we not adore him for such marvellous loving-kindness? O let every heart glow with love to him, and every tongue declare his praise!]

2. How reasonable is zeal in the concerns of religion!

Zeal is approved in every thing, but in that which most of all deserves it. But would any one ask a defeated army, why they fled with haste to an impregnable fortress? Surely, it is no less absurd to condemn the prisoners of hope for any earnestness they may manifest in turning to their strong hold. Coldness in such circumstances is the most deplorable infatuation. Let all then exert themselves to the utmost of their power. Let them never regard the scoffs of those who are in love with their chains, and regardless of the salvation offered them. But let them strive, as men wrestling for the mastery, and run as those that are determined to win the prize.]

3. How great is the danger of delay!

[Now we are prisoners of hope! but soon we may be in that prison from whence there is no escape, and into which not one ray of hope can ever enter. Shall we not then turn, while the strong hold is open to us? Shall we stay till the gate is shut; and thus, instead of obtaining double mercies, procure to ourselves an aggravated condemnation? To-day God invites and promises; to-morrow may terminate our day of grace. Let us then no longer delay; but "to-day, while it is called to-day, let us hear his voice," and "flee for refuge to the hope set before us."]

MCCLIV.

THE GLORY OF CHRIST.

Zech. ix. 17. *How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!*

THE glory of Christ is manifested throughout all the Holy Scriptures. This is attested both by the

Apostles and by our Lord himself[a]. In the New Testament he shines like the sun in an unclouded atmosphere: in the Old, though generally veiled, he often bursts forth as from behind a cloud with astonishing beauty and splendour. Such a view of him is exhibited in the chapter now before us[b]: nor could the prophet himself forbear exclaiming with wonder and admiration, "How great is his goodness!" &c.

We cannot have our minds more delightfully occupied than in contemplating,

I. The goodness of our Lord—

In the context he is set forth as the God of providence and grace: and, in order to behold his goodness, we must view him in both respects:

1. As the God of providence—

[As all things were created, so are they upheld and governed by him. To him we owe the preservation of our corporeal and intellectual powers. We are continually fed by his bounty, and protected by his arm. The meanest creature in the universe has abundant reason to adore him. His own people in particular may discern unnumbered instances of his goodness in his dispensations towards them. His most afflictive as well as his more pleasing dispensations afford them much occasion for gratitude and thanksgiving[c].]

2. As a God of grace—

[Jesus is the one fountain of spiritual blessings to his Church[d]. Neither Prophets nor Apostles had any grace but from him[e]. To him we must ascribe every good disposition that is in our hearts[f]. What reason then have his faithful followers to bless his name! How thankful should they be that he called *them* by his grace! That he so distinguished them, not only from the fallen angels, but from multitudes of the human race! With what gratitude should they acknowledge his continued kindness! Though they have often turned back

[a] Acts x. 43. Luke xxiv. 27. John v. 39.

[b] After foretelling the preservation of the Jews amidst the destruction of surrounding nations, the prophet called their attention to Christ, as their lowly but triumphant king (ver. 9.), who should redeem them by his blood (ver. 11.), be a strong hold to all who should turn unto him (ver. 12.), and save them with an everlasting salvation. (ver. 16.)

[c] Ps. cxix. 75.

[d] Eph. i. 22.

[e] John i. 16.

[f] Phil. ii. 13. Heb. xii. 2.

from him, he has not cast them off. Yea, rather, he has "healed their backslidings and loved them freely." Surely, every blessing they receive, and every victory they gain, should fill them with admiring thoughts of his goodness[g]. Let every soul then comply with that injunction of the Psalmist[h]—. And, like him, repeat the wish, which a sense of his mercies must inspire[i]—.]

If we have just conceptions of his goodness we shall be more able to behold,

II. His beauty—

The world behold "no beauty nor comeliness" in the face of Jesus; but the saints of "old saw his glory as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father"—

This we also may see, if we survey him,

1. In his divine character—

["We cannot by searching find out the Almighty to perfection." Little do we know of the greatness of his *majesty*, or the thunder of his *power*[k]. We cannot comprehend his unsearchable *wisdom*, his unspotted *holiness*, his inviolable *truth* and *faithfulness*. We can scarcely form any idea of the inflexibility of his *justice*, the extent of his *mercy*, or the heights and depths of his *love*[l]. We know that Jesus is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person[m]: but, when we attempt to delineate that image, we only "darken counsel by words without knowledge[n]." His glory is more than the feeble language of mortality can express.]

2. In his human character—

[Here we look at him, as the Jews at Moses when his face was veiled, and can contemplate him more easily, because he shines with a less radiant lustre. Doubtless while he lay in the manger the virtues of his mind beamed forth in his countenance. Nor is it to be wondered at that the Jewish doctors were so filled with admiration at him while he was yet a child[o]. But principally must we view him during the course of his ministry. What marvellous *compassion* did he manifest to the souls and bodies of *men!* Not one applied to him for bodily or spiritual health without obtaining his request. And when many were hardened in their sins he wept over them[p]; yea, he even pleaded the cause of those who mocked and reviled him on the cross[q]. His *zeal for God* was ardent and

[g] 2 Cor. ii. 14. [h] Ps. cxlv. 7. [i] Ps. cvii. 8, 15, 21, 31.
[k] Job xxvi. 14. [l] Eph. iii. 19. [m] Heb. i. 3.
[n] Job xxxviii. 2. [o] Luke ii. 46, 47. [p] Luke xix. 41.
[q] Luke xxiii. 34.

unremitted. It was "his meat and drink to do the will of his heavenly Father;" nor could any thing for one moment divert or deter him from the prosecution of his work. His *meekness, patience, fortitude,* were altogether invincible. Whatever was amiable and excellent in man abounded in him[r]. He was not merely virtuous, but virtue itself incarnate. Nor, though continually tried in the hottest furnace, was there found in him the smallest imperfection or alloy[s].]

3. In his mediatorial character—

[With what readiness did he become a surety for sinful man[t]! What astonishing condescension did he manifest in uniting himself to our nature! How cheerfully did he go forth to meet the sufferings that were appointed for him. In the garden and on the cross, when to the eye of sense "his visage was marred more than any man's," his beauty was most conspicuous to the eye of faith. His obedience unto death was the fruit of his love, and the price of our redemption. How beautiful is he *now* in the eyes of those who behold his glory! And how will he "be admired and glorified by all" in the last day! Satan must have blinded us indeed if we be yet insensible to his charms[u]. If we be true believers, he cannot but be precious to our souls[x].]

APPLICATION—

1. To those who have never yet beheld the goodness and beauty of the Lord—

[We speak not *now* to those who seek his face, and long to enjoy him; for though their sorrow endure for a night, joy will come to them in the morning. But they, who pant not after him, are miserably ignorant of his excellency. Their views of Christ are different from those of the most competent judges[y], and different from what they will shortly be in the eternal world. Let such persons diligently consider the Saviour's character, and cry to God for that spirit whose office it is to reveal Christ unto us. Then shall they both see the King in his beauty, and be changed into his image[z].]

2. To those whose eyes have been opened to behold him—

[r] Ps. xlv. 2. [s] John xiv. 30. [t] Ps. xl. 7, 8.
[u] 2 Cor. iv. 4. [x] 1 Pet. ii. 7.
[y] To the Father he is "chosen and precious," 1 Pet. ii. 4; to the angels, the subject of their praise, Rev. v. 11, 12; to saints of old, an object of great desire, Hagg. ii. 7. John viii. 56; to all pious men at this time, their supreme good, Phil. iii. 7, 8.
[z] Isai. xxxiii. 17. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

[Let your meditations of him be more sweet and frequent. However much you know of him, there are unsearchable depths unfathomed. Let your determination therefore accord with that of David[a]—. View him as appointing your trials, and dispensing your mercies. Consider him as the fountain from whence you are to have supplies of grace. Look to him as the example which you are continually to follow. Above all, rely on him as expiating your guilt, and interceding for you. Thus will you glory in him as your "friend and your beloved;" and at last will see him as he is, and be like him for ever.]

[a] Ps. xxvii. 4.

MCCLV.

CHRIST THE STRENGTH OF HIS PEOPLE.

Zech. x. 12. *I will strengthen them in the Lord; and they shall walk up and down in His name, saith the Lord.*

IF we were to judge of Christianity from what we behold around us, we should give it a preference, perhaps, to all other religions; but we should be far from thinking very highly of its nature and effects. The generality of those who profess it, are but little elevated above the better orders of the heathen world; and, in some respects perhaps, have a lower standard of morals than they. If it were asked of the great mass of nominal Christians, What has Christianity done for you? in what respect are you either a better or a happier man, than you would have been if Christ had never come into the world? it would be difficult for them to give any satisfactory answer, consistent with truth. Even those who do feel somewhat of its influence are far from manifesting its full power. In order to judge of its real excellence, we must go back to former days, and see how it wrought in the apostolic age; or must look forward to that glorious period, when it shall prevail over the face of the globe, and exercise a more complete sway over the hearts of men. It is to this period that my text refers; a period, when, in comparison of the present, "the light of the moon

shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold, as the light of seven days[a]."

In opening the passage to your view, I shall be led to speak of,

I. The state to which the Jews shall, in due season, be restored—

The Jews will, at a future season, be restored to God—

[Of this, no man who believes the Scriptures can entertain a doubt. The passage before us, even if it stood alone, would be amply sufficient to warrant our expectation of this event. But it is one of many: for the prophets all, with one voice, agree in declaring that God has not finally cast off his people; but that they shall return to him, and enjoy under their Messiah a state of prosperity far exceeding any thing that they ever experienced since they became a nation. That that event is spoken of in the passage before us, will be evident to any one who will consult the context. Read it from the sixth verse. The persons spoken of are both Judah and Israel: "I will strengthen the House of Judah, and I will save the House of Joseph." It was the former only that were brought from Babylon: and therefore the prophecy must relate to a period yet future, even to the return of the whole nation from their present dispersion. "The Lord will hiss for them," as men in Eastern countries are wont to do when they would collect their bees[b]; and "they shall come from Egypt and Assyria," and from all countries whither they have been driven, "unto the land of Gilead and Lebanon," where they shall increase as rapidly as they did in former times; insomuch that "place shall not be found for them to dwell in[c]." This circumstance, which is considered by many as an objection to the LITERAL interpretation of those prophecies which speak of their return to their own land, instead of being an objection to such an interpretation, is actually contemplated in the prophecy, and specifically predicted. In their present dispersion, they seem as if they were *cast off:* but, though scattered over the face of the globe, they are only "*sown*" there, as seed which the husbandman casts over his field, with a view to reap, and gather it to greater advantage at a future period[d]. Their return will be a season of most sublime joy, both to them and their children[e]: and the interpositions of God in their behalf will be as visible and as effectual as those which

[a] Isai. xxx. 26. [b] Isai. v. 26. and vii. 18. with ver. 8.
[c] ver. 10. [d] ver. 9. [e] ver. 7.

were vouchsafed at the Red Sea, on their departure from Egypt; or at the river Jordan, on their entrance into Canaan. Every obstacle shall be removed from before them, and every opposing enemy be destroyed[f].

Persons who are adverse to the idea of a literal restoration of the Jews to their own land, will satisfy themselves with saying, that the whole of this description is figurative: but if this be figurative, where, I would ask, shall any thing be found that is to be taken in a literal sense? or, supposing God to have ordained to accomplish any thing literally, by what plainer terms could he possibly declare it? There must, I think, be an end of all certainty in language, if the event here predicted be not to be understood in its literal and most obvious sense.]

Their restoration, however, will be, not literal only, but spiritual also—

[At their triumphant entrance into Canaan, they were strong in the Lord Jehovah, in whose name they took possession of the land, and in dependence upon whom they walked through its length and breadth. At their future restoration to God, such also will be their confidence in their Messiah; whom they will then acknowledge as their Lord, and their God. The Prophet Hosea plainly declares this: "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their King; and shall fear the Lord, and his goodness, in the latter days[g]." In his name, and in his strength, will they then go forth against their spiritual, no less than against their temporal, enemies: and their victories over both the one and the other will be complete. It cannot be doubted, but that, in that day, they will be as much distinguished for righteousness as for prowess in arms[h]: for "they shall be all righteous[i]:" their penitence will be exceeding deep[k], their piety most refined[l], their devotion to God universal and entire[m].]

Christianity being already embraced by us, we may see in this passage,

II. The state which it is our privilege to enjoy at this day—

We have been redeemed, if not by the power of divine grace, at least by the price once paid for us on Calvary. As the Lord's people, therefore, we are privileged to live by faith on Christ, and to possess in him,

[f] ver. 11. [g] Hos, iii. 5. [h] Isai. lx. 1, 2.
[i] Isai. lx. 21. [k] Zech. xii. 10. [l] Zech. xiii. 9.
[m] Zech. xiv. 20, 21.

1. Invincible strength—

[In ourselves, we remain as weak as ever: but in Christ we are strong: for in him there is all fulness treasured up for us[n]; and out of that fulness we are privileged to receive even grace corresponding with all the grace that is in him[o]. He is appointed "Head over all things to the Church," for that very end[p]; that we, as members, may be "strengthened with all might, by his Spirit in the inner man[q], and have all our "enemies bruised under our feet." We are commanded to "be strong, not in ourselves, but in the Lord, and in the power of his might[r]:" and to regard our own weakness rather as an encouragement, than as any ground of despondency; because he will delight to "perfect his own strength in our weakness[s]."

Without hesitation, then, do I say to every believing soul, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus[t]:" and never contemplate the strength of your adversaries, but the power of your heavenly Lord. Never doubt, for a moment, but that "his grace shall be sufficient for you:" and let your daily consolation be, "that you can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth you[u].]

2. Assured confidence—

[St. Paul's direction, probably in allusion to this very passage, is, "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him[x]." Never for a moment forget "in whom you have believed, or how able he is to keep that which you have committed to him." Wherever you turn your steps, you will doubtless meet with many adversaries: but "IN HIM" you may "walk up and down" with confidence, defying every enemy, and saying, "If God be for me, who can be against me?" See how the Messiah himself exulted in the days of his flesh; and what an example he has therein afforded you! "The Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint; and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together. Who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up[y]." Indeed, this very language is adopted by the Apostle Paul, who proceeds yet further to challenge every created being: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or

n Col. i. 19. o John i. 16. p Eph. i. 22, 23.
q Eph. iii. 16. r Eph. vi. 10. s 2 Cor. xii. 9.
t 2 Tim. ii. 1. u Phil. iv. 13. x Col. ii. 6.
y Isai. l. 7—9.

nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord[z]." Here we have a perfect comment on the words of our text: here we see what that confidence is which every Christian should feel, when he says, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength[a]." Thus it is, that "in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified; and thus it is, that they should glory." To all of you, then, I say, "Walk in Christ, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."]

Is this, then, the state to which the whole world shall in due time be brought?

1. Contemplate it in reference to the Jews—

[Does it not rejoice you to reflect on the mercy which is in reserve for them;—for them, to whose ancestors you yourselves are so greatly indebted? As far as relates to their restoration to their own land, it is no otherwise of importance, than as fulfilling the Divine promises, and magnifying the grace of God towards them. But their believing in Christ, and experiencing the blessedness of his salvation, how ardently is it to be desired! and how should the prospect of it fill every soul with joy! Be not indifferent to it, beloved brethren. The Scriptures are full of this glorious subject; and universal nature is called upon to exult and glory in it. If you had no concern but for the benighted Gentiles, you should take an interest in the welfare of the Jews; seeing that the "receiving *them* into the Christian fold will be as life from the dead to the whole world[b]."

But put aside all consideration, except for the honour of your Lord and Saviour. Shall it be no joy to you that his kingdom shall be extended throughout all the earth; and that upon the whole face of the globe there shall be but "one Lord, and his name one?" Verily, if you have the smallest measure of love to his name, you will strive, and pray that this blessed period may be hastened, and that he may speedily be the "King over all the earth."]

2. Seek to enjoy it in your own souls—

[Hear the determination of the Church of old: "All people will walk every one in the name of his God: and we

[z] Rom. viii. 33—39. [a] Isai. xlv. 24, 25. [b] Rom. xi. 15.

will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever[c]." And is not this the proper resolution for *us* to adopt? Adopt it then, my brethren; and may Almighty "God strengthen you" to fulfil it! and may your whole "walk" and conversation, to your latest hour, illustrate and confirm it! — — —]

[c] Mic. iv. 5.

MCCLVI.

THE MUTUAL ABHORRENCE BETWEEN GOD AND SINNERS.

Zech. xi. 8. *My soul lothed them; and their soul also abhorred me.*

THE judgments of God that from time to time are inflicted on mankind are standing proofs that man has offended his Maker, and that God is displeased with his creatures. In this view they are continually represented in the Scriptures; and in this light the prophet taught his hearers to consider them. God had determined to "abolish that covenant which he had made with his people," and to destroy the Jewish polity, the sacred part of which he called "Beauty," and the civil "Bands." He speaks of himself as having already cut off (or perhaps, in prophetic language, as determined to cut off) three shepherds, the princes, the prophets, and the priests, in one month; and assigns as a reason for it, that there was a mutual abhorrence between himself and them; and that consequently there was abundant reason for the judgments he denounced against them.

The prophet, thoughout this chapter, personates the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom a part of it was very remarkably fulfilled, and to whom it is expressly applied in the New Testament[a]. But it is simply to the words before us that we would now draw your attention: and we will take occasion from them to shew,

I. What a deep-rooted enmity subsists between God and sinners—

[a] ver. 11, 12. with Matt. xxvii. 9, 10.

View it, where it first commenced:

1. On man's part—

[Ungodly men neither seek to please God[b], nor are at all grieved at having displeased him[c]: they like not to speak, hear, or even think of him[d]; they cannot endure (a melancholy proof of their aversion to him!) to be with him *alone*[e]; they hate every thing in proportion as it exhibits God to them, or would lead them to God[f]; they even wish there were no God[g]; yea, when God actually put himself into their power, they sold him at the price of a slave, and crucified and slew him[h].

What abundant proof is here, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God[i]!" And what an evidence of that abhorrence in which, according to the Scriptures, our adorable Saviour was to be held[k]!]

2. On God's part—

[Towards *penitent* sinners (as we shall have occasion to shew) God is reconciled: but, while they continue obstinate in their sins, he "lothes them," nor can even look upon them without the utmost abhorrence[l]. He will not vouchsafe them the smallest taste of those blessings which he imparts to others in the richest abundance[m]: he gives them up into the hands of their greatest enemies, to Satan and their own hearts' lusts[n]; he prepares his instruments of vengeance against the time when they shall have filled up the measure of their iniquities[o]; he even comforts himself with the prospect of pouring out his wrath upon them to the uttermost[p].

What awful evidences are these of the truth in question!

[b] Job xxxv. 10. [c] Jer. viii. 6. [d] Ps. x. 4.

[e] As men can meet their bitterest enemy in a crowd, but would be uneasy to be left alone with him; so the ungodly can meet God in his house, but cannot bear to commune with him in their secret chamber.

[f] Hence faithful ministers, and godly people, and searching discourses, yea, and the Bible itself, are neglected and despised.

[g] Ps. xiv. 1. This is a *wish*. The words, "there is," are not in the original.

[h] ver. 11, 12. with Matt. xxvii. 9, 10. [i] Rom. viii. 7.

[k] Isai. xlix. 7. [l] Hab. i. 13.

[m] Compare Ps. cxix. 165. with Isai. lvii. 21. and 1 Pet. i. 8. with Prov. xiv. 10.

[n] 2 Tim. ii. 26. Ps. lxxxi. 12. Rom. i. 24, 26, 28.

[o] Ps. vii. 12, 13. Deut. xxxii. 19, 20, 35, 41, 42. He even kindles with his own breath the fire that is to consume them. Isai. xxx. 33.

[p] Isai. i. 24. Ezek. xxi. 15. and v. 13.

what proofs that he even lothes and abhors all the workers of iniquity[q]!]

But, notwithstanding this mutual enmity, the Gospel shews us,

II. How it may be turned into mutual love—

There is, in truth, but one way in which reconciliation can be effected between God and sinners. Yet we may not unprofitably divide it into two heads:

1. Repentance towards God—

[This can never purchase our peace with God; yet is it absolutely necessary to prepare our minds for the reception of his favour. And wherever it manifests itself in deed and in truth, God will instantly put away his anger, and embrace the sinner in the arms of his mercy[r].— — —]

2. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ—

[It is this which unites us unto Christ, and gives us an interest in all that he has done and suffered on our behalf. If his hand were stretched forth, to plunge his sword into the bosom of any one amongst us, the very first act of faith should make it fall from his hands, and induce him to return it instantly to its scabbard[s] — — — Nor would he from that moment account any expression of his love too great for us[t] — — —]

Nor is God only reconciled to us by these means, but we also are reconciled to him—

[It is in this view that the Scriptures most generally represent our return to God[u]. And it is certain that from the very instant we repent and believe in Christ, our enmity against God is slain, and we delight in him as much as ever we once abhorred him. We love to hear and think and speak of him, and to maintain the closest fellowship with him: we love all who love him, and *that* too in proportion as they resemble him: and every thing that can discover him to us, or draw us nearer unto him, is on that very account unspeakably precious to our souls. As for the Saviour, who was sold for the price of the meanest slave, and who was once altogether despised by us, his name is as music in our ears; and the whole world is as dung in comparison of him[x].]

We SUBJOIN a word,

1. Of caution—

q Ps. v. 5. and x. 3.
r Jer. iii. 13. Isai. lv. 7. Ps. li. 17. Luke xv. 20. Jer. xxxi. 20.
s John iii. 16. and vi. 37. Acts xiii. 39. Isai. i. 18. Acts xvi. 30.
t Jer. xxxii. 41. Zeph. iii. 17. u 2 Cor. v. 18, 20. Col. i. 21.
x Phil. iii. 8.

[We may suppose that, because our enmity against God is the ground and reason of his aversion to us, our love to him is the ground and reason of his love to us. No: if we love him, it is because he first loved us[y]. Were it not that he of his own mere mercy vouchsafed to send us his grace, we never should have our enmity to him in the smallest degree abated. We must therefore take nothing but shame to ourselves; and give nothing but glory unto him. We must confess that our hatred of him was altogether without a cause[z]; whereas his aversion to us was just and merited. On the other hand, his love to us is free and sovereign; whereas ours is the tardy, forced, and disproportioned fruit of his victorious grace.]

2. Of encouragement—

[“The wicked man is lothesome[a]:” but how lothesome soever he be, he need not fear but that God is ready to receive him to the arms of mercy[b]———Let this be contemplated by all, till a lively hope is begotten in their hearts, and they are constrained to say, I will no more “abhor the Holy One, and the Just[c],” but will turn to him, and love, and serve, and glorify him, with my whole heart.]

[y] 1 John iv. 19. [z] John xv. 25. [a] Prov. xiii. 5.

[b] If instead of continuing the contest we apply to God through Christ, our peace with him shall soon be made. Isai. xxvii. 4, 5.

[c] Acts iii. 14.

MCCLVII.

THE CONTEMPT POURED ON CHRIST.

Zech. xi. 12, 13. *And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord*[a].

THE prophet, under the character of a shepherd, is declaring what reception he had met with from the

[a] The text may properly consist of these words only. Zech. xi. 13. *A goodly price that I was prized at of them!* And they may be treated 1. In reference to the Jews, who fulfilled the prophecy. (Here the first head might be introduced.) 2. In reference to ourselves. (Here the second entire head, and all the Application, would come in easily.)—If the subject have no immediate reference to the PASSION WEEK, *I would rather recommend this mode of treating it.*

flock committed to his charge, and what judgments awaited them for their treatment of him. Extremely beautiful and grand is the address at the beginning of the chapter, where he calls on all orders of the Jewish community to prepare for the sentence that was gone forth against them[b],——— and threatens to abandon them to their fate[c]. He then takes two staves or wands, one of which he called Beauty, and the other, Bands; and in their presence cut asunder the one that was designated by the name of Beauty, in order to intimate, that their whole ecclesiastical polity, which was the beauty and glory of the whole world, should be dissolved[d]. Obscure as this intimation was, it was understood by the poor, the humble, and the pious, who trembled at the voice of the Lord[e]. The other stick, named Bands, represented the civil polity of the Jews: and before he proceeded to cut asunder that also, and to declare the utter destruction of the whole nation, he made one more effort in their favour, and desired the chief priests and elders to signify their regard for his services by such a pecuniary tender as they deemed adequate to their value. They, in compliance with this demand, weighed out to him thirty pieces of silver, the price of a common slave[f]. Upon this, the Lord, full of indignation against them for so undervaluing his richest mercies, ordered the prophet to cast the money to a potter who happened to be in the temple, and then to cut asunder the other staff, in token of his giving them up to intestine commotions and to utter destruction[g].

But the whole of this transaction had respect also to other times, and other circumstances; and must be understood,

I. As a prophetic intimation—

The prophet was a type of that great and good Shepherd, who was in due time to come into the world, and "to lay down his life for the sheep:" and the treatment which he received, was typical of what

[b] ver. 1—3, 6. [c] ver. 9. [d] ver. 10.
[e] ver. 11. [f] Exod. xxi. 32. [g] ver. 13, 14.

should afterwards be accomplished by the Jews of later days in reference to their Messiah.

How exactly it was accomplished, the New Testament will inform us—

[When Judas conceived the design of betraying his Lord, he bargained with the chief priests, who offered him this precise sum, thirty pieces of silver, which he took accordingly, as the price of the Redeemer's blood[h]. After he had betrayed his Lord, he went to return them their money: and finding that they would not regard his overtures, he cast down the money in the temple, and went and hanged himself. And what did they with the money? They would not put it into the treasury, because it was the price of blood; but, after consultation had, they bought with it a potter's field, to bury strangers in: and thus, as an inspired Apostle informs us, fulfilled what had so many hundred years before been predicted concerning them[i].]

From this minute accomplishment of it we derive most important instruction—

[Mark how many circumstances in this extraordinary transaction concurred to fulfil the prophecy: *The person whose services were so valued;* the good Shepherd. *The price fixed;* thirty pieces of silver. *The application of the money;* given to a potter. *The spot where the transaction took place;* the temple of the Lord. *The persons chiefly concerned in it;* the priests and elders. All this was predicted, in order to attest the truth of Christ's Messiahship. And was there any concert, think you, to fulfil the prophecy? Did Judas and the chief priests commune together, to prove beyond a possibility of doubt that Jesus was the person to whom all the law and the prophets bare witness as the Saviour of the world? Behold then, from one proof out of a hundred, on how firm a basis our faith is fixed!

Nor is the accomplishment of this prophecy instructive only *as confirming our faith:* it goes much farther, and *gives us an insight into all God's dispensations, whether of providence or grace.*

God has ordered every thing, both in heaven and earth, both in time and eternity. But are men therefore to be considered as mere passive instruments in his hands? No: they are free agents in all that they do. The chief priests sought only the gratification of their own malice, as Judas did of his own covetous desires: neither the one nor the other acted from any impulse but of their own hearts. The spot where the transaction took

[h] Matt. xxvi. 14—16. [i] Matt. xxvii. 3—10.

place, the presence of a potter, the circumstance of his having a field of the precise value to sell, with various other circumstances, were all, as we should call them, accidental: but God foresaw all, and fore-ordained to accomplish his own will by means of all. And this shews us how God's decrees respecting the salvation of his people are accomplished. Men are not at all the less free because of his decrees; nor are the decrees of God the less certain because of man's free agency. There are ten thousand minute and accidental circumstances, as we should call them, necessary, as links in the chain of God's purposes; but not one shall be wanting; not one shall fail; nor shall one jot or tittle of God's word ever pass away. The responsibility of man will be precisely the same as if God had made no decrees: and the termination of events will be the same, as if God himself had produced them without the agency of man. With respect to man, all is uncertain: but with respect to God, all is as fixed, as if it were already done: "His counsel shall stand: and he will do all his will." Deep as these truths are, they are not at all inconsistent with each other: and if men will only mark in what way the prophecies have been fulfilled, they will have a key to all the difficulties which have embarrassed, and incensed against each other, the whole Christian world.]

But the transaction in our text must be yet further viewed,

II. As an emblematic act—

It was foretold by Isaiah, that the Messiah should be "despised and rejected of men[k]." But was it by the men of one generation only that he was to be so treated? No; but by men of every nation, and of every age. It is indeed humiliating to think that the prophecy in our text has been fulfilled in us: but it is not more humiliating than true. Consider,

1. What we have done to obtain an interest in Christ—

[After the things of this world we have burned with most intense desire: pleasure, riches, honour, have been in such request, that no measure of attainment of them could ever satisfy us: but after the knowledge of Christ we have felt no such longings: a small measure would satisfy us at any time: and we could be quite content to leave it in doubt whether he were our friend or not. Anxieties and disappointments in abundance we have felt in relation to earthly things; but not

[k] Isai. liii. 2; 3.

in reference to him; because it has been a matter of indifference to us, whether we possessed an interest in him or not. For earthly things we could consume the midnight oil, or encounter perils and fatigues: but an hour spent in prayer, in our secret chamber, has been a labour too irksome for us to endure. Whole years have passed; and not a single day been devoted by us to fasting and prayer for the obtaining of his salvation. Such a price as this has appeared an unreasonable demand; nor could we ever be prevailed upon to pay it: a faint wish, or formal service, has been the full amount of the estimate which we have set on His love. How justly then may God reject us with indignation, saying, "A goodly price truly is this at which I have been prized of you!"]

2. What we have been willing to suffer for him—

[Great are the sacrifices which we have made for the poor vanities of time and sense: but what have we sacrificed for the Lord? Paul counted not his life dear to him, so that he might but honour and glorify his Lord: but we have felt no such constraining sense of his excellency, no such disposition to part with all for him. An interest equivalent to the purchase of a potter's field has been at any time a sufficient barrier in our way to obstruct our progress, and prevent us from confessing him openly before men. It is really grievous to think how little we have been willing to bear for him. A frown, a threat, an ignominious name, have been quite sufficient to intimidate us; when, if we had valued Christ aright, ten thousand worlds would, in comparison of him, have weighed no more with us than the dust upon the balance.]

3. What efforts we have made for promoting his glory in the world—

[The Apostles and primitive Christians counted not their lives dear to them, so that they might but diffuse the knowledge of his salvation. And thus it should be with us. Our hearts should be ever intent on that object: we should never lose sight of it: we should live altogether for it. But, alas! how inactive have we been in his service! We have seen millions perishing for lack of knowledge, and used scarcely any means for their instruction. We have seen the kingdom of Christ invaded and usurped by the prince of darkness, and put forth no efforts to bring it to its rightful Owner. Say, would it have been thus, if we had valued him as we ought? Would the advancement of his glory have been so light a matter in our eyes, if we had formed a just estimate of his kingdom and glory? Surely God has had too much reason to cast this reflection upon us, "A goodly price it was that I was prized at by them." And all our worthless services he may well cast

away with indignation, as unworthy his acceptance, and fit only for the purchase of a potter's field.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are indifferent about Christ—

[Can it be so, that there should be any found of this description? Alas! they constitute the great mass, not of the heathens only, but of those who name the name of Christ. But will it be so always? Will it be so when you get into the eternal world? You can sleep now like the foolish virgins: but will you not in that day, when excluded from the marriage feast, cry, "Lord, Lord, open unto us?" Yes: you will then at least form a correct estimate, if you will not now: but I pray God you may learn to do it now, whilst it may be available for your good, and not wait till you shall know his value only by your loss. Better to know him now by the manifestations of his love, than to know him then by the terrors of his avenging arm.]

2. Those who desire to obtain an interest in him—

[Be ready to pay the price which your God demands. The wise merchant, when he has found this pearl of great price, will sell *all* to procure it. And this is what our blessed Lord himself requires at your hands. You must "forsake *all*, and follow him:" you must not love father or mother more than him. You must even "*hate* father and mother, yea, and your own life also," in comparison of him. He must have no rival in your estimation. There must be nothing which you will not do for him; nothing which you will not sacrifice. Be not like the Rich Youth, who renounced him rather than his wealth. The greater the sacrifices you make, the more must you account them grounds only of self-congratulation, and of joy[1]. O beg of God the Spirit to reveal him in your hearts; and so to make his glory pass before your eyes, that you may henceforth have no wish but to enjoy his presence, and to glorify his name!]

3. Those who profess that they do already possess this inestimable treasure—

[I can have no doubt but that there are many of this description here present: and I greatly rejoice that the Lord Jesus Christ is valued amongst us in some measure as he ought to be. But I tremble to think what changes may yet be wrought even in the most hopeful amongst us. Who that had seen the piety of Demas, would have expected such an issue of it as we read of: "Demas hath forsaken us, having

[1] Phil. ii. 17.

loved this present world[m]." Who that had beheld the Galatian converts, so full of love to the Apostles, that they would have "plucked out their own eyes, and given them to him," would have expected to find them afterwards so "bewitched" through the influence of false teachers, that they "accounted him their enemy for telling them the truth[n]?" But St. Paul, in all his epistles, complains, as St. Peter does also, that, as there had been "false prophets in former ages, so were there in their days false teachers, who brought in damnable heresies, and prevailed on many to follow their pernicious ways[o]." We read of "whole families being subverted and turned from the faith[p];" some through the instrumentality of Judaizing teachers, who blended with the Gospel the observance of the Mosaic rites[q]; and others, through the delusive statements of self-conceited philosophers, who, by their specious refinements, despoiled Christianity of all its simplicity and glory[r]. And as then multitudes were "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine," so it is now; as, indeed, we have been taught to expect it would be in these latter days. St. Paul says, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables[s]———" And what is the effect of this amongst *us?* it is precisely the same as in the Apostle's days; the minds of the simple are distracted; and instead of hearing, in every place, the praises of our adorable Redeemer, we hear of little but a "doting about questions and strifes of words;" and see little, but envy, and strife, and railing, and evil surmisings, and perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds[t]." And *this is the price at which our blessed Lord is prized by us!* Any new opinion, or fond conceit, has more attraction for us, than the contemplation of his love, and the adoring of his grace! Dear Brethren, "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ: but I fear lest, by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve, through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ[u]."

[m] 2 Tim. iv. 10.
[n] Gal. iii. 1. and iv. 15, 16.
[o] 1 Tim. iv. 11. 2 Pet. ii. 1, 2.
[p] Tit. i. 10, 11.
[q] Gal. ii. 14.
[r] Col. ii. 8.
[s] 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4. Mark here, 1. *The principle*, "after their own lusts." 2. *The habit of mind*, "itching ears," *that love to be scratched.* See the Greek. 3. *The conduct*, "heaping to themselves teachers." 4. *The effect*, "turning *from* the truth *to* fables." What an accurate and awful picture is here!
[t] 1 Tim. vi. 4, 5.
[u] 2 Cor. xi. 2, 3.

Be on your guard, I pray you, against his devices. He can now, as well as formerly, "transform himself into an angel of light, and make his ministers to appear as the ministers of righteousness[x]." But I appeal to all, whether the listening to "questions and strifes of words" does not divert the mind from Christ, and indispose the soul for communion with him. Then, I say, have a higher regard for Christ than to run after novelties, which only draw you from him. It is but little that you can know of him, how intent soever your minds may be upon him; and but little that you can do to requite his love, how devoted soever you may be to his service. Value him then as you ought; love him as you ought; serve him as you ought: let "all created things be as dung" in your estimation in comparison of him[y]: and endeavour now to keep your mind engaged, as it will to all eternity be occupied in heaven, in praising and magnifying him, who "loved you, and washed you from your sins in his own blood[z]."

Take care that you be not robbed of it. Satan will leave nothing undone to prevail against you. How he has prevailed over others, let the history of Demas inform you. Do not imagine, that because the world is as nothing to you now, it will always appear so vain and worthless. No: a change of circumstances often produces a change of views and habits. What changes may await you, God alone knows: but O! pray that there may never be a change in your regards for Christ, unless indeed that he may be increasingly precious in your eyes, and that your devotion to him may be more entire. And be assured that in the eternal world it will be no grief to you that you did too much for him, or suffered too much for him. Let it be to you "Christ to live; and it will in due time be gain to die."]

[x] 2 Cor. xi. 13—15. [y] Phil. iii. 8. [z] Rev. i. 5, 6.

MCCLVIII.

THE MEANS OF EVANGELICAL REPENTANCE.

Zech. xii. 10. *I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.*

REPENTANCE is a subject, with which every one supposes himself to be sufficiently acquainted, but

which is indeed very rarely understood. The Scriptures speak of a repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of[a]; intimating thereby, that there is a repentance, which is not unto salvation; and which therefore itself needs to be repented of. The text in this view deserves our deepest attention, since it opens to us,

I. The nature of evangelical repentance—

The sorrow, produced in the heart of a true penitent, is exceeding deep—

[Nothing can be more pungent than the grief of a parent who has lost "his first-born," "his only son[b]." Yet to that is the mourning of a penitent *twice* compared. In either case, the soul is bowed down greatly; it is indisposed for receiving gratifications from those vanities, with which it was before amused; and loves to indulge in pensive solitude, and painful reflections. The parent's anguish indeed may be softened by the assiduities of surviving friends; and may wholly lose its pungency through the lapse of time. But nothing can mitigate the pangs of a wounded spirit, nothing silence the accusations of a guilty conscience, till "the balm of Gilead," the blood of Jesus, be applied to it: nor even then will sin ever cease to be the grief and burthen of the soul[c].]

But repentance is then only to be called evangelical, when it has immediate respect to Christ—

[*Twice* is it said in the text, that men shall mourn "*for him*," that is, for Christ[d]. Not that the miseries, which Christ endured on the cross, are the proper grounds of a penitent's sorrow; but rather, it is his grief that he has so dishonoured Christ by his sins, and that he has yet again and again "crucified him afresh" by continuing in sin. Many, who are not really humbled, are concerned for their sins as having subjected them to God's displeasure[e]; but it is the true penitent alone, who mourns for sin, as dishonouring Christ, and as counteracting all the gracious purposes of his love.]

This will more fully appear by considering,

II. The means by which it is to be attained—

The effusion of the Spirit is the *primary* means of producing penitence in our hearts—

[The Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of grace and of supplication," because he is the Author and Giver of all grace,

[a] 2 Cor. vii. 10. [b] Luke vii. 12. [c] Ezek. xvi. 63.
[d] Comp. John xix. 37. [e] Exod. x. 16, 17. 1 Kings xxi. 29.

and because it is through his agency alone that we are able to pray. And this Spirit Christ will "pour out" upon us. He not only has a right to send the Holy Spirit, as being God equal with the Father, but in his mediatorial capacity he is authorized and empowered to send forth the Spirit, "having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost," on purpose that he may impart to us out of his own immeasurable fulness. To him all *must* look for this blessing[f]; and all *may* look with an assurance of obtaining it, provided they truly and earnestly desire it[g]. The great and learned, "the house of David," must submit themselves to his influence; nor shall the poorest or most illiterate of "the inhabitants of Jerusalem" be destitute of this mercy, if they will but ask it of their heavenly Father[h]. Nor till this Spirit convince us of our sin, can any of us know our state, so as to be suitably and abidingly affected with it[i].]

As a *secondary* mean, the Spirit turns our eyes unto a crucified Saviour—

[Nothing but a view of Christ as dying for us, can ever thoroughly break our obdurate hearts. But this has a powerful tendency to produce ingenuous sorrow; because, while it shews us the malignity of sin in most awful colours, it discovers to us also the remedy provided for the expiation of sin. In the one view, we are humbled by a sense of our extreme vileness; in the other, we are overwhelmed with a sense of the Redeemer's love: and a combination of these two effects constitutes that ingenuous shame and sorrow, which may be denominated evangelical repentance.]

We may IMPROVE this subject,

1. For conviction—

[All acknowledge that they need repentance, and profess an intention to repent. But let not any imagine that the slight acknowledgments, and faint purposes of amendment, which are usually made on dying beds, are sufficient. If the comparison in the text be just, nothing will suffice, but a heart broken and contrite under a sense of sin. And precisely such is the view which the Apostles also give of true repentance[k]. O that we may never rest in any thing short of such repentance, lest, instead of looking now on Christ with salutary contrition, we behold him hereafter (as we must do) with endless and unavailing sorrow[l].]

2. For encouragement—

[Many are discouraged by reason of the hardness and obduracy of their hearts. Indeed we all feel, that notwith-

[f] Acts v. 31. [g] John xiv. 13—17. [h] Luke xi. 13.
[i] John xvi. 7, 8. [k] 2 Cor. vii. 11. Jam. iv. 9. [l] Rev. i. 7.

standing we have so much cause to weep day and night for our sins, and are really desirous to do so, we can rarely, if ever, bring our souls to any measure of tenderness and grief. But let us look more at Christ as dying for us; and not confine our attention, as we too often do, to our sins. Let us particularly beg of Christ to pour out his Spirit upon us, and then the heart of stone shall soon give way to a heart of flesh[m]. The Spirit of grace and of supplications will easily effect, what, without his aid, is impossible to man: and the rocky heart, once struck by him, shall yield its penitential streams through all this dreary wilderness[n].]

[m] Ezek. xxxvi. 26. [n] Alluding to Numb. xx. 11.

MCCLIX.

CHRIST, THE FOUNTAIN OPENED.

Zech. xiii. 1. *In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin, and for uncleanness.*

THE various metaphors by which our Lord is described in Scripture, while they give just representations of him, are frequently calculated in a peculiar manner to impress the minds of those who heard them. This remark admits of the fullest confirmation from our Lord's own discourses[a]: it may also be illustrated by the prophecy before us. The Jews had heard of the wanderings of their ancestors in the wilderness; and they had themselves traversed a much larger tract of country in their return from the Babylonish captivity. To them therefore the tidings of a fountain to be opened would convey very strong and pleasing sensations. Nor shall *we* be unaffected by them if we lament our spiritual defilements.

We propose to consider,

I. The meaning of the prophecy—

The Scriptures often mention a time under the expression "that day"—

[This expression sometimes refers to the apostolic, and sometimes to the millennial period. It is to be understood in this place as designing the former. *That* was a day in comparison of which all preceding ages were but as the morning

[a] See John vi. 35. and xi. 25.

dawn: *then* the mists of Gentile ignorance and Jewish superstition were dispelled before the Sun of Righteousness.]

At that period Christ was to be known under the notion of "a fountain"—

[Christ is frequently spoken of under the metaphor of a fountain[b]. He virtually applies the name to himself[c]. He is described nearly by the same character even in heaven[d]. He justly answers to this description, having within himself an inexhaustible source of blessings.]

He was to be a fountain "opened"—

[From eternity was he as "a fountain sealed," having in himself all fulness, before there existed any creatures to whom he might impart of it. Before his incarnation he afforded a scanty measure of his Spirit[e]. At the time of his death he properly became a fountain opened.]

The persons for whom it was to be opened were "the house of David," &c.—

["The house of David" are the spiritual seed of Christ[f]. "The inhabitants of Jerusalem" are the members of the Christian Church. Both together import all believers, high and low, rich and poor; none are excluded who wish to participate his blessings.]

The end for which it was to be opened was, to cleanse from "sin"—

[There had been fountains for *ceremonial uncleanness*[g]. There were also fountains for the cure of *bodily disorders*[h].

[b] Jer. ii. 13. Isai. xii. 3.

[c] The Jews after their return from Babylon used on a certain day to fetch water in a joyous and triumphant manner from the pool of Siloam, in reference, it is supposed, to Isai. xii. 3. And on that day our Lord addressed them, and pointed them to himself as the true well of salvation, John vii. 37, 38.

[d] Rev. xxii. 1. The river, which John beheld, proceeded out of the throne of the Lamb.

[e] The meanest Christian is more enlightened than the greatest of the prophets, Luke vii. 28.

[f] He is the root as well as the offspring of David, Rev. xxii. 16.

[g] There was a brazen sea, above fifty feet in circumference, and almost ten in depth, wherein the priests were to wash their hands and feet: there were also ten lavers wherein the things offered for sacrifice were washed, and from whence the water for the sprinkling of the offerers was taken, 2 Chron. iv. 6.

[h] The pool of Siloam, whither our Lord sent the blind man to wash, (John ix. 11.) and which was typical of Him who was the Shiloh

But Christ was a fountain for *moral defilement*, and *spiritual maladies*.]

In due season this prophecy received its accomplishment.

II. The completion of it—

From the incarnation of Christ this fountain was more fully exhibited: during his ministry its waters flowed in partial streams; but at his death it was fully opened:

It was *broken open* on the cross—

[In our Lord's agony, the blood had flowed through every pore[i]: previous to his crucifixion his back had been torn with scourges[k]: the crown of thorns pierced his sacred temples[l]: his hands and feet were nailed to the accursed tree[m]; and his side, pierced with the spear, emitted blood and water[n]. Thus did men and devils concur in breaking open this fountain. The dying thief was made a monument of its cleansing efficacy[o].]

It was *set open* on the day of Pentecost—

[Then the Spirit was poured out in a more abundant measure: thousands, even of the murderers of our Lord, were cleansed by it. The effects produced were instantaneous and abiding[p]: the blackest guilt was purged, the most ferocious natures changed. Nor was its influence to be confined any longer to one age or nation.]

It was *left open* in the promises to all succeeding generations—

[We may say of this fountain as St. Paul does of the Gospel[q]—. The word is the channel in which it flows: it has already spread its streams to the ends of the earth[r]: it will flow till that prophecy be fully accomplished[s]—: the invitations to it are yet sounding in the ears of all[t]—.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who expect salvation while they live in sin—

of the tribe of Judah, (Gen. xlix. 10.) and eminently *the sent* of God. Compare John ix. 7. and vi. 38—40. Bethesda was still more appropriate to this use, John v. 2—4.

[i] Luke xxii. 44. [k] John xix. 1. Ps. cxxix. 3.
[l] Mark xv. 17, 19. [m] Ps. xxii. 16.
[n] John xix. 34. This imported that he should cleanse both from the guilt and power of sin, 1 John v. 6.
[o] Luke xxiii. 43. [p] Acts ii. 42—47. [q] Rom. x. 6—8.
[r] Rom. x. 18. [s] Hab. ii. 14.
[t] Isai. lv. 1. Rev. xxii. 17.

[If men could be saved *in* their sins, why was this fountain opened? Would God have given up his Son to death without necessity? or shall they who neglect the fountain be cleansed like those who wash in it? Let none deceive their own souls: to wash in this fountain is THE ONE THING NEEDFUL. They who cry with the leper, shall receive the same answer[u]—.]

2. To those who hope to cleanse themselves in some other way—

[Many hope to wash away their guilt by tears of repentance. But would God have opened *this* fountain, if any other would have sufficed? How lamentable that there should still be such cause for those expostulations[x]—! Let those who say like Peter, remember the answer given him[y]—.]

3. To those who doubt whether they may come to this fountain—

[Many imagine that the greatness of their guilt is a bar to their acceptance; but the fountain was opened *for* sin and *for* uncleanness. What would have been the effect of such hesitation at the pool of Bethesda[z]? Be it remembered that all, who have *a need*, have *a right* to wash: let every one then press forward, lest he lose the blessing.]

4. To those who have experienced its cleansing efficacy—

[It is in you that the efficacy of this fountain must be seen. Let it appear that it has cleansed you from earthly and sensual desires. But still you have need to wash in it daily[a]. This do, and you shall soon join in that triumphant song[b]—]

[u] Matt. viii. 2, 3. [x] 2 Kings v. 13. [y] John xiii. 8.
[z] John v. 4, 7.
[a] We contract defilement every step we take. Bishop Beveridge justly observes, "Our very tears need to be washed, and our repentances to be repented of."
[b] Rev. i. 5, 6.

MCCLX.

CHRIST SMITTEN FOR OUR SINS.

Zech. xiii. 7. *Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.*

THIS is generally thought to be the beginning of a distinct prophecy: yet it seems not only to be connected with, but in a measure to arise out of, the preceding context. The connexion, it is true, is not obvious: but it must be remembered, that this is the way in which some of the most important predictions in all the Scriptures are introduced. Take, for instance, the prophecy that Christ should be born of a pure virgin; a more wonderful event than which is not predicted in all the inspired volume: there was no necessary connexion between that, and the destruction of the ten tribes; nor between that, and the obstinate incredulity of Ahab: yet, on Ahab's declining to ask a sign that the deliverance promised to Judah should speedily be accomplished, the Lord gave him this sign; "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel[a]." In that prophecy, the event predicted appeared wholly foreign to the subject that was in hand: but in the prophecy before us it is not so. The chapter begins with a plain declaration, that in due time Christ, by the shedding of his blood upon the cross, should open unto mankind "a fountain to wash them from sin and uncleanness." It then goes on to say, that by him idolatry should be destroyed; and that both men and women, if tempted to idolatry by their own children, should immediately execute judgment upon them, and thrust them through with a sword or dart[b]: and that so general should be men's abhorrence of idolatry, that those who had been disposed towards it, and had even marked their bodies in honour of their idols, should deny their having ever felt any disposition towards it, and should ascribe the marks that were on their flesh to some "wounds which they had received, either accidentally, or for some particular purpose, in the house of their friends."

Then in our text God says, As the false prophet shall be *slain by his own father* for endeavouring to turn you from God, so shall the true prophet be *slain*

[a] Isai. vii. 10—14.

[b] This was agreeable to the law of Moses, Deut. xiii. 6—10.

by his father in order to turn you to God: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts."

In discoursing on these words we shall consider,

I. The commission given to Jehovah's sword--

It is bidden to "awake and smite:" but here two questions arise;

1. Whom was it to smite?

[It was assuredly the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone answers to the character here described. He is the Shepherd of Israel," appointed to that office by God himself[c]. He designates himself by that very name, and as the person to be smitten under that very character[d]. Moreover, he alone can be called "Jehovah's fellow:" for he was God as well as man[e], even the true God[f], the mighty God[g], altogether One with the Father himself[h], "God over all, blessed for ever;" and, being God in his own nature, and therefore incapable of suffering, he assumed our nature on purpose that he might suffer[i].]

2. In whose hand was it to inflict the stroke?

[It was the Father himself who was to wield it, even he who here calls upon it to arise and smite. True it was that men and devils were the more immediate agents[k]; but they were only instruments in the Father's hands: "they could have had no power at all against him, if it had not been given them from above." They were willing agents, no doubt, and executed what their own malignant dispositions dictated: but God overruled their designs for the accomplishment of his own eternal purposes[l]. There was not one thing done by them which had not been foretold; nor one thing predicted, which they did not unwittingly and exactly perform[m].

But even without the intervention either of men or devils, the Father himself smote him. What was it but a sense of God's wrath upon his soul that made him sweat great drops of blood in the garden? It was the Father himself who put that bitter cup into his hands. Upon the cross too, when Jesus uttered no complaints respecting inferior agents, he bitterly bewailed the hidings of his Father's face: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Thus was verified that awful prediction of the prophet, "It pleased the Lord, even Jehovah himself, to bruise him[n]."]

[c] Ps. lxxx. 1. Ezek. xxxiv. 23.
[d] John x. 11.
[e] John i. 1.
[f] 1 John v. 20.
[g] Isai. ix. 6.
[h] John x. 30.
[i] Phil. ii. 6—8.
[k] Luke xxii. 53.
[l] Acts ii. 23. and iv. 38.
[m] John xix. 28, 30.
[n] Isai. liii. 10.

Let us next inquire into,

II. The grounds and reasons of this commission—

It was the Father's purpose to exercise mercy towards our fallen race: but he would do it in a way that should be consistent with his own perfections. Hence he gave us his only-begotten Son to be our substitute and surety: and against him, when standing in that capacity, he called forth the sword;

1. To shew his indignation against sin—

[We presume not to say what God *might* have done, if it had pleased him: but we are sure that "it *became* him, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings[o]." As the Moral Governor of the Universe, it *became* him to vindicate the honour of his broken law, and to mark his utter abhorrence of iniquity: and this he did more strongly and effectually in smiting his only-begotten Son, than if he had smitten the whole human race. As for the children of men, they are but worms of the earth, far inferior to the angels that fell: but Christ was his co-equal, co-eternal Son, his fellow, his equal. O what an evil must sin be, when God would not suffer it to pass unpunished even in the person of his own Son, on whom it was found only by imputation! We may be well assured, that, on whomsoever it be found in the last day, it will be visited with "wrath to the uttermost."]

2. To reconcile justice with mercy in the salvation of sinners—

[Had sin been pardoned without any atonement, the claims of justice must have been superseded. But God would not exalt mercy at the expense of justice; and therefore he devised a way of satisfying the demands of justice, whilst he listened with complacency to the voice of mercy. "He laid our iniquities upon" his only dear Son, and exacted of him the debt which had been incurred by us: and that debt he paid to the uttermost farthing; so that justice itself has nothing more to require of us, provided only we plead what Christ has done and suffered in our behalf. Thus has God become "a just God and a Saviour," or, as St. Paul expresses it, he is "just, and yet the justifier of them that believe in Jesus."]

Such being the reasons for this mysterious commission, we proceed to notice,

III. The effects and consequences of it—

[o] Heb. ii. 11.

The *immediate* effect was the scattering of our Lord's disciples—

[One would have thought that our Lord's more intimate disciples, who for above three years had heard all his discourses, and seen all his miracles, would have firmly adhered to him, even to the end; more especially as they had promised, in the most solemn manner, to follow him, even unto death: but God, who knew what was in man, foretold that they would shamefully desert him in the hour of trial: yea, our Lord himself forewarned his disciples that they would forsake him, and thereby fulfil the prophecy in our text[p]: and the event, alas! corresponded with these predictions: the "Shepherd being smitten, the sheep were immediately scattered abroad;" "they all forsook him and fled[q]." What a poignancy must this circumstance have given to all the other wounds inflicted on our Lord! Where were all the myriads whom he had miraculously healed? Where were those whom he had raised from the dead? Were they all afraid to own him? Was not so much as one found to stand forth in his defence, or even to speak a word in his behalf? No: all were panic-struck and mute. Hear how our blessed Lord himself complains of this, as a bitter aggravation of his sorrows[r]——— But utter dereliction, unmitigated sorrows, were our desert; and he, as our substitute, endured it all in our behalf.]

The *ultimate* effect was their restoration and recovery—

[This is intimated in the last clause of our text. By "*turning his hand upon* his little ones," is meant, that he would accomplish upon them all his merciful designs, recovering them from their fears, and restoring them to the Divine favour[s]. This he did as soon as ever he was risen from the dead: he did not even except Peter, who had so shamefully denied him with oaths and curses[t]. On the day of Pentecost he so "strengthened his little ones," that they were henceforth no more intimidated, but boldly confessed him before all the rulers of their nation, and braved death in all its most tremendous forms, for the honour of his name. Similar effects were instantly produced on thousands of his followers: and to this hour is the same divine energy communicated to the feeblest of his people: though but "a little flock," they fear not the threats of any adversaries, because they know that it "is the Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom;" and, that they shall be "more than conquerors through Him that loved them."

[p] Matt. xxvi. 31. [q] Matt. xxvi. 56. [r] Ps. lxix. 20. and cxlii. 4.
[s] Compare Isai. i. 25. [t] Mark xvi. 7. John xx. 17.

Such were intended to be the effects of our Redeemer's death: "He suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God:" and to God he will bring us; so that "of those whom the Father hath given him, not one shall be lost."]

IMPROVEMENT—

Let us take occasion from this prophecy,

1. To admire the love of God the Father—

[When God called to his sword to "awake and smite," whom should we suppose to be the objects of his vengeance? Should we not conclude of course that *we* were to be the monuments of his wrath? *we*, towards whom he had so long exercised forbearance, and who had so obstinately persisted in our rebellion? Yes, methinks God would say, "Sword, go and smite those my incorrigible enemies; go and smite them to their inmost soul." But, behold, he sends his Son, "his fellow," and directs the sword to execute vengeance upon *him*, as our substitute! We wonder not so much that the Jews should cry out, "Spare not this man, but Barabbas:" but that Jehovah should give his direction to his sword, "Spare not my dear Son, my fellow, but Barabbas," is truly wonderful. Yet *this, in effect, he did say:* 'Spare the vilest of the human race, even though they be robbers and murderers; but "smite my Son, my fellow," and spare *not him*, in order that thou mayest spare *them*.' O wondrous love! Who can estimate it? What tongue can utter it? What imagination can conceive it? Well is it said, "God so *loved* the world, as to give his only-begotten Son:" but the heights and depths of that love are unsearchable, either by men or angels.]

2. To follow the steps of the good Shepherd—

[Jesus, Jehovah's fellow, is our shepherd; and we, as sheep of his pasture, are under his protection. Let us then, however weak in ourselves, despise the threats of all our enemies. Let us never for a moment indulge the fear of man, or entertain a thought of forsaking him who has laid down his life for us. Let us consider our obligations to him: let us consider them, till we feel our whole souls inflamed with love to him; and, under the constraining influence of his love, let us "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach," and "rejoicing, if we are counted worthy to suffer shame, or even death itself, for his sake." Let us "know in whom we have believed;" and say with David, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want;" nor "will I fear what man can do unto me."]

3. To seek the effectual influence of his grace—

[What shall we not be able to do, if "he turn his hand upon us for good?" Could Paul say, "I can do all things

through Christ, who strengtheneth me?" so then may *we* say. He was by nature no stronger than the weakest amongst us: and the weakest of us, by grace, may be as strong as he: "Christ's strength shall be perfected in our weakness," as it was in his. Let our eyes then be unto Jesus; that, as he has been "the author, so also he may be the finisher, of our faith." Let our expectations from him be enlarged: and, whatever our difficulties be, let us remember, that "our Redeemer is mighty," is almighty; and that he has pledged himself to us, that "none shall ever pluck us out of his hands."]

MCCLXI.

GOD'S METHOD OF DEALING WITH HIS PEOPLE.

Zech. xiii. 9. *I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, it is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God.*

AFFLICTION is the lot of mankind in general, and more especially of those who fear the Lord, who are all, in their measure, "predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ," as well in sufferings as in glory. In the context we are told what Christ would have to endure when once he should become incarnate; "Awake, O my sword, against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts; smite the shepherd." It is true, that Christ was to make satisfaction for sin by his sufferings and death; and *in that view* there is no occasion for us to "drink of his cup:" but it is true also that "he learned obedience, and was made perfect, by the things which he suffered;" and these ends are no less necessary to be accomplished in us; nor can they be effected in any better way. On this account God has determined to "bring the third part through the fire;" that so he may fit them for the fuller enjoyment of himself, both in this world and the world to come.

The text informs us how God deals with his people,

I. In respect of trials—

The people of God are but a small remnant—

[Perhaps the text may refer to that period when the Christian Church was to be delivered from the destruction which was coming on the Jewish nation. At that time they were very numerous in Judæa, and might, in general terms, be represented as a "third part." But in every age and place they have been comparatively a "little flock," or, as the Apostle calls them, "a remnant according to the election of grace." Even in one of the most distinguished Churches in the apostolic age we read that there were "but few who had kept their garments undefiled:" and, if those who bear the Christian name at this day were tried by the standard of God's word, the number of true disciples would be found very disproportioned to the collective body.]

But, whether few or many, they are all "brought to God through the fire"—

[It is no uncommon thing for persons to receive their first serious impressions by means of some afflictive dispensation: many must say with David, "Before I was afflicted I went astray." But, in whatever way they are converted to God, they seldom continue long in his service without experiencing some temporal or spiritual affliction. God, who is a wise physician, knows what is most conducive to the health of our souls. He sees that there is much "folly bound up in our hearts, and that nothing but the rod of correction can effectually drive it out." He sees it necessary "*to try* us, as gold, and *to purify* us as silver," that we may both manifest what we are, and become what we should be. If we be only superficial Christians, who, like "the stony-ground hearers, have no root in ourselves," we shall "be offended as soon as tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word:" but if we be "Israelites indeed," the trial of our faith, which is much more precious than gold, which, though it stand the trial of fire, yet perisheth at last, will be found to praise, and honour, and glory in the day of his appearing[a]." Besides, the very best have much amiss within them, which escapes their notice, till "God counsels them in the night season" of affliction, and discovers to them the hidden abominations of their hearts. On this account especially the saints have testified with one consent that they have found it "good to be afflicted;" and have seen reason to bless God more for their heaviest trials, than for their richest comforts.]

That their trials, however, are not unmixed, will appear by considering how God deals with them,

II. In respect of enjoyments—

If the Christian has much "bitterness of heart," with

[a] 1 Pet. iv. 12. and i. 6, 7.

which others are unacquainted, so has he also much "joy, with which a stranger intermeddleth not." He enjoys,

1. Communion with God—

[Before he was converted he knew nothing of fellowship with a reconciled God and Father. He performed perhaps many outward acts of worship, but never prayed from his inmost soul. He felt not the greatness of his wants; he knew not the excellency of spiritual attainments: he was not persuaded of the efficacy of prayer: no wonder therefore that he never cried to God in earnest, and consequently, that he never obtained an answer to his prayer. Not even Paul himself, notwithstanding all his zeal, had ever prayed aright, till Christ appeared to him in his way to Damascus[b]. But the true Christian is enabled to "pour out his soul before God:" and to him is that promise fulfilled: "Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear[c]." Often does he go to God weak, weary, or disconsolate, and return from a throne of grace strengthened with might, and filled with peace and joy.

Nor is this happy state a little promoted by his trials. When he is long at ease, he is too apt to relax his exertions, and to rest in a cold and carnal frame: but afflictions drive him to his God, and necessitate him to wrestle in prayer till he obtains the desired aid[d].]

2. Confidence before God—

[God is unspeakably gracious to the soul that seeks him. He will not only answer the prayers of his people, but will "shed abroad his love in their hearts," and give them such tokens of acceptance with him, as, in effect, to say to them, "Thou art mine." He will "seal them with the Holy Spirit of promise," and set his mark upon them in such a manner, that they themselves may know their relation to him. Moreover, by these manifestations of his favour he will embolden them to claim him as their God. Like the Church of old they shall make their boast of him; "My beloved is mine, and I am his," "This God is my God for ever and ever[e]."

This assurance too, no less than their fellowship with God, is advanced by means of afflictive dispensations. Their tribulation makes them apply to God for patience; the acquisition of patience gives them an experience of his truth and faithfulness; and this experience begets a lively hope[f], yea, oftentimes an unshaken confidence in God, which is as "an anchor of their souls both sure and steadfast."]

[b] Acts ix. 11. [c] Isai. lxv. 24. [d] Gen. xxxii. 24—26.
[e] Cant. ii. 16. Ps. xlviii. 14. [f] Rom. v. 3, 4.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are but little conversant with trials—

[Doubtless it is a mercy to be free from troubles, because "they are not joyous at the present, but grievous." But what do you find to have been the effect of this exemption? Have you not, like Jeshurun, "waxed fat and kicked?" "When you have eaten and been filled, have you not forgotten the Lord your God[g]?" Do you not find that your corruptions are unmortified? Are you not conscious that you have never yet experienced that exalted state of communion with God, and of confidence before him, which it is both your privilege and your duty to enjoy? Guard then against these pernicious effects of ease; for the prosperity of fools, as we are told, will destroy them[h]. Let the attainment of a holy and heavenly frame be desired by you far more than any temporal comfort. In a little time all present things, whether pleasing or painful, will come to an end: and then they only will be found happy, who sought an interest in Christ, and "had the Lord for their God[i]."]

2. Those who are "tossed with tempests and not comforted"—

[Though God brings his dearest children into the fire, he does not leave them there; he engages to bring them "through" it. While they are yet in it, he will be with them, that they may not be burned[k]: yea, "he will sit by them as a refiner and purifier of silver," to watch the process which he has ordained for their good[l]. He knows what heat is requisite for the accomplishment of his gracious purposes; and, when their dross is purged out, he will bring them forth as "vessels of honour meet for their Master's use[m]." Be patient then under your trials, knowing from whom they proceed, and for what blessed ends he has appointed them: and be rather solicitous to have your troubles sanctified than removed. Only let them drive you to a throne of grace, and not, as they too often do, discourage you from drawing nigh to God. Let them make you more earnest in seeking an assured confidence in his love, and an increasing meetness for his glory. Then shall you in due time be numbered with those blessed spirits, "who came out of great tribulation, and made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb." Nor need you fear but that the "eternal weight of glory" which you shall possess, shall abundantly compensate "the light and momentary afflictions" which you endured in the way to it.]

[g] Deut. viii. 10—14. and xxxii. 15. [h] Prov. i. 32.
[i] Ps. cxliv. 15. [k] Isai. xliii. 2. [l] Mal. iii. 3.
[m] Job xxiii. 10.

MCCLXII.

THE CONVERSION OF THE JEWS—OUR ENCOURAGEMENT TO PROMOTE IT.

Zech. xiv. 7. *It shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.*

IN the writings of the prophets, there are, as might be expected, many things difficult to be understood. Yet, even when a passage, in respect of its full import, is involved in the deepest obscurity, there may be some things perfectly clear, and capable of an easy application, for the elucidating of points that are of great importance. The prophecy before us is of this kind. It is generally understood as referring, in the first instance, to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies: it then, after some circumstances, which the events alone, when they shall have occurred, will enable us satisfactorily to explain, leads us forward to the period fixed in the Divine counsels for the conversion of the Jews to the faith of Christ; when "the Lord shall be king over all the earth, and when there shall be one Lord, and his name one[a]." The manner in which that day shall be introduced is particularly specified in the words immediately preceding my text: "It shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: but it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light." By this I understand, not, as some do, that there shall be one continued day, in which there will be no darkness at all; for *it is not of the Millennium itself that the prophet is speaking, but of the time when the Millennium shall be introduced:* and that will be a time "neither perfectly clear, nor altogether dark;" "not entire day, nor entire night:" but a time like the evening, when, though there is some light remaining, it seems gradually drawing towards extinction. When the Church is so circumstanced, *that* shall be the period for God's

[a] ver. 9.

appearance in behalf of his people: and when, according to general expectation, increasing darkness might rather be expected to ensue, *then* shall light arise in God's Church, and his purposes respecting it be accomplished.

For the purpose of confirming this interpretation of the passage, I will *first* consider the text *in reference to God's general dispensations*; and *then, in reference to the period more especially described.*

I. Let us consider the text in reference to God's general dispensations.

The more we examine the dealings of God with mankind, the more we shall see that he has, in all ages, permitted difficulties to arise, in order to make his people feel their dependence on him; and to display, eventually, in a more striking manner, his interposition in their behalf. In the 107th Psalm, this plan of the Divine government is illustrated in a great variety of particulars: *Travellers* "wandering in a wilderness[b];" *captives* "sitting bound in affliction and iron[c];" *sick persons* "drawing near to the gates of death[d];" and *mariners*, in their tempest-tossed vessels, "at their wit's end[e];" all having been brought to the utmost extremity, are made to know, by happy experience, that there is a God who heareth prayer, and who is able to save, from every kind of danger, all those who call upon him[f].

Nor is this his mode of dealing only in relation to temporal matters; it obtains equally in reference to men's spiritual concerns. The parable of the Prodigal Son is not unfrequently realized amongst ourselves. How often have persons been left to run to the utmost excess of riot, till the very extremities of want and misery, to which they have reduced themselves, are made the occasions of suggesting to their minds that salutary reflection; "In my Father's house there is bread enough and to spare, whilst I am perishing with hunger: I will return unto my Father." And in

[b] Ps. cvii. 3—7. [c] Ps. cvii. 10—14. [d] Ps. cvii. 17—20.
[e] Ps. cvii. 23—30. [f] Ps. cvii. 23—30.

this way they have found that mercy which their souls desired.

Nor is this process observed only at the first conversion of men to God. The saints are sometimes permitted, through the violence of temptation, to fall into the very depths of despondency. What can be conceived more distressing than the state of Asaph's mind, as depicted in the 77th Psalm? "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" In this extremity God mercifully interposed, to shew him that these fears were altogether groundless: and then the desponding saint acknowledged, that "this was his own infirmity[g]." Multitudes of others also, in every age of the Church, are enabled to bear the same testimony; and to say with David, "I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry: he brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay; and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings: and he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God[h]." In truth, this is what may be well expected under all trials, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature: for, from the days of Abraham to this present hour, has that proverb been verified, "In the mount the Lord shall be seen[i]."

We must not, however, suppose that these dispensations are limited to individuals: they may be seen with equal clearness in God's dealings with the Church at large. Let us go back to those two redemptions which his people experienced from Egypt and from Babylon. In Egypt they were reduced to the lowest ebb of misery[k], and had their afflictions for a time augmented by the very means used for their deliverance; so that they were in utter despair[l]: but *then* it was that God interposed with a mighty hand, and a stretched-out arm, to bring them out from their

[g] Ps. lxxvii. 7—10. [h] Ps. xl. 1—3. [i] Gen. xxii. 14.
[k] Judg. x. 16. with Acts vii. 34. [l] Exod. v. 20—23.

captivity. Yet there was not even then an end put to their troubles: on the contrary, their danger became speedily more imminent than ever. Though they went forth out of Egypt, they soon found themselves enclosed by mountains and morasses on either side of them; by the sea before them, and by the Egyptian army in their rear: now their fears rose as high as ever, and they regretted that they had come out of Egypt at all. "They said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness[m]." *Then* did God open a way for them through the Red Sea; and complete their deliverance, by making a channel through the great deep a path to Israel, and a grave to Egypt.

The deliverance of Israel from Babylon, also, was scarcely more within the reach of reasonable expectation. It might possibly be hoped, that, after having kept them seventy years in a state of rigorous servitude, their Babylonish oppressors should relent, and suffer them to return to their own country. But who would have supposed, that the Persian conqueror of Babylon should confer on them so great a benefit? Yet was that very conquest the means of their deliverance; and Cyrus, as had been foretold three hundred years before, freely dismissed them to their own land, laden with the spoils which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from them. How surprising this event was to them, may be seen in a psalm composed on the occasion; "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream[n]." As Peter, when rescued from prison by an angel, could not believe the fact, but thought he saw a vision; so the people of Israel, when liberated by Cyrus, could scarcely believe that so great a mercy had been vouchsafed to them; so strange was it in itself, and so contrary to all human expectation.

[m] Exod. xiv. 11, 12. [n] Ps. cxxvi. 1—3.

But from the Jewish, let us turn our attention to the Christian Church; for in the establishment of that, also, we shall see the same truth illustrated with peculiar force. Behold the Founder of this Church riding triumphant into Jerusalem, amidst the acclamations and hosannahs of the multitude, and you will think the day of his reign had begun to dawn: but see him, in the space of four short days, apprehended, crucified, entombed, and his little band of followers scattered, without a ray of hope in their minds; and you will say, that all prospect of his reign has for ever vanished. Yet behold, within how short a space of time light rises up in obscurity, and the darkness becomes as the noon-day! On the third day he rises from the dead; and, after giving to his disciples many infallible proofs of his resurrection, he ascends to heaven, in the presence of no less than five hundred brethren; and then sends down the Holy Spirit to testify of him, and to confirm the word which his disciples should preach in his name. Here *indeed* it may be said, that "at evening time it was light:" and it is probable that at that period the prophecy before us received a partial accomplishment; for then did "the living waters go out from Jerusalem," even those waters of salvation which have since, in a measure, flowed towards every quarter of the globe, and which in due season shall "cover the earth as the waters cover the sea."

Thus we see how the text has already marked and characterized God's general dispensations, as well towards his Church at large, as towards individuals in particular. And let not the time spent in this statement be grudged, as though it did not bear sufficiently on the main subject of our consideration: for when we have seen to what an extent the leading features of our text have been illustrated in the dispensations of God, whether general or particular, from the foundation of the world, we are more disposed to admit, that such a mode of procedure is likely to be adopted in the latter day, and consequently are better prepared to view the text,

II. In reference to the period more especially described.

The declaration, that "in that day the Lord shall be king over all the earth; and that there shall be one Lord, and his name One;" clearly shews, that the period referred to has not yet arrived. From the very time when the prophecy was delivered, to the present hour, there have been lords and gods without number, worshipped by the different nations of the earth. But the time is coming, when the Gospel shall be preached to all nations, and "all the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of the Lord and his Christ:" and to that time the text clearly refers. The whole concluding part of the chapter also, whether literally or spiritually interpreted, manifestly determines our views to that period.

We have then, in our text, an intimation of the time when we may expect this great work to commence: it will be a time when it is "neither day nor night," but, as it were, "the evening time," partaking in a measure of both.

The conversion of the Jews to the faith of Christ is an event which every one who believes the Scriptures looks forward to as certain. But the time for it is supposed to be yet far distant; and all attempts to promote it are deemed visionary and absurd. Persons will say, 'Look at the Jews: see in what a low degraded state they are; how deep and inveterate are their prejudices against the very name of Christ; how intrenched they are in their own forms and ceremonies; and how inaccessible to the Christian world: they will not suffer you to converse with them on the subject of Christianity: they will not read the books which you put into their hands. As for the Christian Scriptures, they will not look into them. Look at the efforts which have been made for their conversion; how vain and nugatory they have been. If some have professed to embrace the faith of Christ, it has only been for the purpose of advancing their temporal welfare: and they have no sooner gained their end, than they have proved themselves to be the most consummate hypocrites, and been an utter

disgrace to the religion which they have professed to honour. What has the Society°, which has now existed a dozen years, effected in their behalf? There has been no want of zeal in them, or of liberality in the public; and what have they done, but waste the public money in unprofitable speculations? This is a clear proof, that the time for the conversion of that people is not come, and that there is no hope of effecting it by any human efforts.'

I hope it will be allowed, that I have stated with sufficient force what is urged by those who deride the efforts of the Society: and though I must declare, that these objections are by no means true, to the extent that they are urged, yet I willingly admit that they are true in part. I acknowledge also, that the difficulty of the work is great; and that the efforts, which have been already made, have not succeeded so far as might have been wished, or so far as persons of a sanguine temperament, and unacquainted with the difficulty of the undertaking, were induced at first to expect: consequently, I acknowledge, that, in relation to this great work, there is abundant evidence that *it is not "day."*

But, if it be not "*day*," must it therefore be "*night?*" Does not my text speak of a time when it shall be "neither day nor night?" Allowing, then, that it is not *day*, I ask, *Is it night?* Let any candid person hear and judge.

Consider the state of *the Christian world.* For eighteen hundred years, if we except a partial effort or two made in their behalf, the Christian world have been altogether asleep, as it respects this object: but now they have begun to awake to a sense of their duty, and to the necessities of this outcast nation. Societies have been formed in different parts of Britain, for the express purpose of aiding the efforts of persons whose time and attention are mainly fixed on this object: and a work has been accomplished, a work which one would have supposed should have been executed many centuries ago, but which has

° The London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews.

never before been attempted for circulation amongst the Jews—the translation of the New Testament into pure Biblical Hebrew. It is well known, that the Jews will not read the Christian Scriptures in the vernacular languages of the countries where they dwell; but it was hoped that they would read it in the language which they venerate as sacred; (and in this hope, as I shall shew presently, the Society has not been disappointed:) and thus have they opened a channel of communication with them, whereby all the most intelligent amongst them are rendered comparatively easy of access. Till this was effected, it was not to be wondered at that no great success attended the Society's labours; but now they may hope to exert themselves with more effect. It is well known, that the long extant and widely-diffused translation of the *Hebrew Scriptures* into *Greek* afforded great facilities for the spread of Christianity amongst the Gentiles; and it may well be hoped, that the translation of our *Greek Scriptures* into the *Hebrew* tongue will subserve, in no small degree, the reception of the Gospel amongst the Jewish nation. Add to this, the interest which many crowned heads in Europe have begun to take in the welfare of their Jewish subjects. It may be said, that this attention to them respects only their temporal advancement in the scale of society: still, it tends to remove that stumbling-block which has been so long laid in their way; and to diminish the odium with which they have ever regarded (yea, and too justly regarded) the Christian name. And if the generality of these monarchs have in view no higher object than that which is merely political, it is by no means so with one of them, at least; who, by providing an asylum for those who shall be persecuted for embracing Christianity, has rendered a most essential service to the Christian cause. Is this, then, I would ask, to be called "*night?*"

But consider, also, the state of *the Jews themselves.* We have sent forth a few missionaries amongst them, (others are now in a course of preparatory studies, in a seminary recently established for them,) and they

have, in many instances, been most kindly received by the Jews; who, instead of rejecting the offer of the Hebrew Testament, as in the preceding objections is supposed, have most gladly and thankfully received it; and, indeed, have expressed the most ardent desire to obtain it. They have shewn a great willingness, also, to be instructed in the knowledge of Christianity; and, to a very great extent, have they shaken off the yoke of Rabbinical tyranny and Talmudical superstition: so that, when we shall be able to send forth amongst them a larger number of well-instructed missionaries, there is every reason to hope that the light of Divine Truth will arise upon them, and "the word of the Lord have free course, and be glorified" among them.

Whilst, then, on the one hand, I readily acknowledge that it is not "*day*," I think that any person of candour, who shall compare the present state of the Christian world towards them, and of the Jews themselves, with what it has been in past times, must admit that *it is not "night."*

Is it then, "neither day nor night?" Methinks there is reason to hope that it is the very time fixed in the Divine counsels, even "the evening time," wherein the prophet tells us "there shall be light." Whether it be the full time for the calling in of the Jewish people generally, I presume not to determine; but that it is at least the proper time for our exertion, there can be, I think, no doubt. If a *sign*, whereby we may ascertain this fact, be demanded, I ask, What sign can any man reasonably require? He will not surely call for a gift of prophecy, or for a power of working miracles; but if, with the exception of these, he demand the same signs to mark the Messiah's advent to convert his Jewish brethren as were given to mark his advent in the flesh, I am not sure but that we may venture to put the matter upon that issue. For what were the principal signs which marked his advent in the flesh? There was a general expectation of him amongst the Jews themselves; there were some more particularly "waiting for

redemption" in Jerusalem, and ready to welcome his arrival; and there were some actually converted to the faith of Christ by the ministry of John the Baptist. And is there not a general expectation amongst the Jews at this time, that the Messiah is near at hand? Yes; and in a degree that has not existed before. Nor will I say this on mere report: for a prophet of their own, writing expressly against the Society, to correct their too sanguine expectations, has undertaken to fix the time; and, after giving it as the opinion of one great and eminent Rabbi, that there were only twenty-nine years more to the coming of the Messiah, he gives a calculation of his own, and says, "*There are yet thirty-six years to the end of the jubilee of Israel; and before the end of these thirty-six years, Israel will be restored, and the Messiah will take possession of his empire*[p]." So that, according to these two Rabbins, the period now remaining at this time, (for that calculation was made eight years ago,) it is not more than twenty-one, or, at the utmost, twenty-eight years[q]. As for the opinions, I lay no stress on the one or the other; but I adduce them, to shew that the Jews themselves, even those who are averse to the idea of his speedy advent, expect assuredly that their Messiah is, at no distant period, to appear.

That there are many, especially among the Christian world, ready to welcome the Messiah's arrival and to advance his kingdom, is sufficiently evident, both in Europe and America: and that some of the Jewish nation have been truly converted to God, is a fact to which we can appeal with perfect confidence. Some are at this time employed as missionaries to their brethren; some, of whose piety we can no more doubt than we doubt the piety of multitudes amongst ourselves: and the New Testament, distributed amongst the Jews, is doing its work silently, but effectually; being "mighty through God to the

[p] Rabbi Crooll on the Restoration of Israel, pp. 48, 66.

[q] This Discourse was delivered before the University of Cambridge, 1820.

pulling down of strong-holds, and casting down imaginations, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Whether they shall all continue steadfast unto the end, I pretend not to say; for, after the most eminent saints recorded in Scripture have fallen, I know no man under heaven respecting whom a continued steadfastness can be certainly and unerringly predicted: but this I say, that, if there be genuine piety depicted in any human composition whatever, it is depicted in the experience of some who are at this moment in connexion with our Society: so that, if we cannot boast of Pentecostal conversions, we have seen *some*, the first-fruits before the harvest, the drop before the shower.

If, then, there exist at this time signs similar to those which marked the Messiah's advent in the flesh, I think we have abundant evidence, that, whether the time for the national conversion of the Jews be come, or not, the time for our exertion is come; and we ought to "go forth to the contest with them, seeing that our God is gone out before us[r]." To prevent misapprehension, I repeat, that of "the times and seasons which God has reserved in his own power," I presume not to speak: but of our duty I do speak, and *that* with confidence: and if the time for the light to arise be that of "evening-time, when it is neither day nor night," then do I think, that at this hour we have all the encouragement to exert ourselves that we can reasonably desire.

But it is in vain to urge on men the performance of their duty, whilst so many objections lurk against it in their minds. Of the duty itself, I am well assured, nothing need be added to what I spoke in my former Discourse[s]. I hope and trust, that, *on that subject, there is but one feeling amongst us all.* But, as I then observed, we too readily listen to objections; and perhaps feel somewhat of a pleasure in embracing any thing which may serve as a plea for postponing at least, if not altogether neglecting, our duty. Hence, on the last occasion, I observed, that, in the present

[r] Judg. iv. 14. 2 Sam. v. 24. [s] See Disc. on Jer. xxx. 17.

Discourse, I would address myself somewhat more fully to this part of my subject. And if, in doing this, I should trespass somewhat longer than usual on your time and patience, I trust that the importance of the subject will plead my excuse, and be kindly received by you as an apology.

To the first and most common objection, that *the time is not come*, I need add little to what I have already said. If only it be borne in mind, that I am not speaking of the complete in-gathering of the Jews, but only of our duty to seek their conversion, I may reply to the objector, 'When is the time not come? What period has there been, from the first establishment of Christianity to the present hour, when we were released from all obligation to fulfil this duty?' And, if to this I add, that the present moment singularly accords with that which is described in my text, I conceive that the objection will be allowed by all to have no reasonable weight. If the fallacy of it was made apparent, when urged by the Jews for their delay in building the second temple[t], much more will it be found altogether vain, when urged by us as an excuse for our neglect to re-edify his spiritual temple amongst the Jews. Some, indeed, have been led to this idea by that passage of Scripture, "Blindness in part is happened to Israel, till the fulness of the Gentiles be come in:" from whence they couclude, that the great body of the Gentiles must first be brought into the fold of Christ; and that *then* the conversion of the Jews is to commence. But what, then, is the meaning of those words in the very same chapter, "If the fall of them (the Jews) be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness?" And again: "If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead[u]?" Here we see that it is the fulness of the Jews that is ordained to be "as life from the dead" to the whole Gentile world. That there is no real opposition between

[t] Hagg. i. 2—4. [u] Rom. xi. 12, 15, 25.

these two passages, we may be well assured. The question is, how to reconcile them? In order to this, I would observe, that, in my apprehension, the word 'fulness' is not to be understood of a complete and universal change in either case, but only of *the commencement* of the two periods referred to. The commencement of a work amongst the Gentiles will introduce the in-gathering of the Jews: and in like manner, when once the Jews shall begin generally to be converted to the faith, they will be the means of awakening the great body of the Gentiles, and of bringing them also into the fold of Christ[x]. But, in many parts of the earth, the Gentiles, through the unprecedented dissemination of the word of God, and the multitude of missions established among them, are already beginning to experience the blessings of the Gospel; and therefore we may well conceive, that the period for the conversion of the Jews also is near at hand. And the man who most earnestly desires the salvation of the Gentiles ought, on his own principles, to be the warmest friend to the Jews.

An idea prevails with some, that *the Jews are to be converted by miracle;* and, that it is presumptuous in us to attempt so great a work. But this is altogether a mistake. They are to be converted precisely in the same way as they were in the first ages, and as the Gentiles also were; namely, by the ministration of the Gospel. Let any one examine the prophetic writings, and he shall find that there is no difference whatever between the conversion of the Jews and the calling-in of the Gentiles at the latter day; except, indeed, that the Jews shall be gathered in first, and be God's instruments for the conversion of the Gentile world. The fulness, both of one and of the other, shall be brought in; and be, though not perfectly simultaneous, yet as nearly so as the rejection of the Jews and the calling of the Gentiles

[x] This interpretation makes the import of the word 'fulness' the same in both passages; and, in the author's opinion, it is the most plain and simple.

were, at the first establishment of Christianity[y]. That it is to be wrought by human means, and not by miracle, is clear from those injunctions which the Prophet Isaiah has given us: "Go through, go through the gates: prepare ye the way of the people: cast up, cast up the highway: gather out the stones: lift up a standard for the people. Behold, the Lord hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh[z]." Here it must particularly be observed, that the proclamation respecting the Messiah's advent is not made by Jehovah himself, but by the Gentile world: "The Lord hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, SAY YE to the daughter of Zion; *ye Gentiles*, deliver *ye* this message; SAY YE to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh!" Here, then, our duty is clear: we are commanded by God himself to remove every obstacle out of their way; to prepare, with great labour and diligence, a path for them; and to direct them, by all possible means, to their Saviour and their God.

Some, however, who will not call it presumptuous, yet regard it as *a hopeless task*. But why should not the Jews be converted, as well as the Gentiles? Whatever blindness there may be in their minds, God is able to remove it now, as well as in former ages. Who is it that has wrought effectually for the Gentiles? Is his arm so shortened, that he cannot effect the same for the Jews? Shall we say, like those of old, "He has smitten the rock indeed, that the waters gushed out like a river; but can he give bread also, or provide flesh for his people[a]? The same power is alike competent for both; and he who has engaged that his outcast people *shall* be restored, will be at no loss to effect it. St. Paul puts this matter beyond a doubt: "They, if they abide not in unbelief, shall be graffed in; for God is able to graff them in again. For, if thou wert cut out of the olive-tree, which is wild by nature; and wert

[y] See Acts xiii. 46 [z] Isai. lxii. 10, 11. [a] Ps. lxxviii. 19, 20.

graffed, contrary to nature, into a good olive-tree; *how much more* shall *these*, which be the natural branches, be graffed into *their own* olive-tree[b]?"

If, notwithstanding these assertions, any one still think that the low estate of the Jews is a just cause for despairing of success in our efforts with them, be it known, that the lower their degradation is, and the more desperate, according to all human appearance, their condition, the more assurance we have that the season for their restoration is near at hand: for God's express declaration concerning them is, "The Lord will judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and that there is none shut up or left[c]."

By many it is objected, that *the labours of the Society are a mere party-matter*, being not set on foot by authority; and prosecuted chiefly by a few, whose opinions and habits differ widely from those of the generality. But, with submission, I would ask, With whom did Christianity originate? or, with whom the Reformation? In reference to both, great stress was laid on the objection, that it was not supported by the rulers. But was either the one or the other less excellent in itself, or less worthy of support on this account? Supposing, then, that the objection were admitted as true, it would have no real weight. But it is far from true in reference to the Society of which we speak; for that is patronized by some, whose names would add weight to any cause: and I doubt not, but that, when the object itself shall be better understood, it will be more justly appreciated, and more universally espoused, amongst the higher orders, as well as amongst the community at large. As for its being advocated by persons of a peculiar class, if it were true, whose fault would it be? It is the duty of every Christian in the universe to seek the salvation of the Jews: and if any neglect to do it, the fault must rest with them. We invite all to unite in this good work. It does not belong to a party; it is the work of God, and the duty of all, without exception;

[b] Rom. xi. 23, 24. [c] Deut. xxxii. 36.

and we would have all, of every rank, and every class, to co-operate with us in the performance of it[d].

Not very different from this is the objection arising from *a disapprobation of some parts of the plan adopted by the Society.* Some do not approve of *the education of Jewish children;* because, as they think, it operates as an inducement with parents to violate the dictates of their conscience, in permitting their children to be instructed in a faith which is contrary to their own. But to this I would say, that the same argument will hold equally against every missionary society for the conversion of *the Gentiles;* since the education of *their* children has uniformly constituted a very leading feature of such Societies: and, if we reflect from what a state of depravity and ignorance these children are rescued, and what attention is paid to their best interests, every benevolent mind must rejoice that so great a benefit is accorded to them. Some have thought that *the children* were *collected by undue means;* but none are admitted, except a written request be delivered in by the parents themselves; some of whom are altogether indifferent what religion their children embrace; whilst others would gladly inquire after Christianity themselves, if the fear of utter destitution did not constrain them to decline it.

Exceptions have been taken against *the affording of temporal relief* to such Jews as have embraced our holy religion, as though that operated with them as a bribe to profess what they did not believe. But

[d] It is a curious fact, that, whilst Churchmen urge this objection, it is equally alleged against the Society by Dissenters also, who, because the Society is now conducted by members of the Established Church, imagine that their great object is to enlarge and aggrandize the Establishment. But the object of the Society is to convert the Jews to Christianity; and not in Britain only, but in every part of the world; and this is a work in which every Christian under heaven, to whatever Church he may belong, may well join. For, whatever be men's peculiar sentiments in relation to Church government, there can be no reason why they should not help forward the circulation of the New Testament amongst the Jews, and their conversion to the faith of Christ; this being a labour of love, which both requires and deserves the united efforts of all who "love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

this plan has been abandoned, in compliance with what appeared to be the general wish: though it may well be doubted, whether we have not thereby rendered the gate of heaven more strait than God ever designed it to be: for the first converts, when cast off by their former friends, were not left to perish with hunger, but were supplied with necessaries out of a common fund. One benefit, however, accrues from this; namely, that the funds of the Society, which are very inadequate to the objects we have in view, are by these means more entirely devoted to what may be called the primary and more important parts of the institution: and it is to be hoped that private benevolence will supply what necessity alone constrains us to withhold.

The objection which, perhaps, is urged with most confidence is, that *the Society has spent much money, and effected but little, if any, good.* That large sums have been spent, is certain: and that several of the plans first prosecuted were unsuccessful, must also be acknowledged. But the object was altogether new: and it is not to be wondered at, that, where the path was untrodden, the most perfect way should not be found at once. It must be confessed, also, that there was too little attention to economy among those who first established the Society. But the plans have since been simplified; every improvident scheme has been laid aside; and the utmost attention paid to economy in every part of the institution. As to that part of the objection, that little good has been effected, it is what I can by no means admit. It was to be expected, that the work of conversion amongst the Jews should be slow and gradual. Their prejudices are strong; and, till lately, they were almost inaccessible to us: but, since the publication of the New Testament in Biblical Hebrew, the effects have been as great as could reasonably be expected: for *some*, at least, have been truly converted to God; and vast multitudes have been stirred up to inquire after Christianity; so that I might almost say of different parts, both of Germany and Poland, that "the fields are

white already to harvest." But, were it not so, shall it be said that little has been done, when a work has been sent forth into the world which, since the first promulgation of Christianity, was never before attempted; and which, of all the works that ever can be conceived, is the most likely to be effectual for the desired end? If we look forward to its ultimate results, as likely to be the one great means of qualifying the Jews in every quarter of the globe to become at a future period the instructors of the Gentile world, the importance of it can scarcely ever be duly appreciated. There are also many other things now in operation, which till lately could not be brought to bear: missionaries are sent out to different parts: others are receiving appropriate instruction in a seminary recently instituted for that special purpose: and a variety of other plans are now in full activity, and, I would hope, with good effect: so that it can by no means be said, that there is little doing, or little done. In point of efficiency, the Society will be found, especially since it came under the management of its present directors, to bear a comparison with other institutions of a similar nature. As to its progress, compare it with the Reformation: Was that wrought in a day? How long had Wickliffe protested against the abominations of Popery, before any considerable portion of the Church could be effectually purged from its corruptions? and how little has been done towards the diffusion of the Protestant religion in a neighbouring portion of the United Kingdom during the space of above two hundred years? Nay, let any one of us labour only in a single parish, with every possible advantage, for a number of years, and see how few are truly converted to God; and, of those few who profess to have received the word into their hearts, how very small a portion "bring forth fruit unto perfection," and "endure unto the end!" Let us but judge candidly in this matter, and we shall see indeed but little reason for this complaint.

Regretting that I have been necessitated to detain

you so long, I will mention but one objection more; and it is this: *I will wait and see what others do, before I will commit myself as a friend and patron of this Society.* But, if all proceed on this plan, how is any thing to be done? If the thing be good, we should aid it, even though no one else should either lead the way, or follow our example. Instead of hesitating or delaying, we should all vie with each other in this long-neglected duty, and labour to redeem the time we have lost. If any would still procrastinate, I would ask, Have not the Jews been neglected long enough? Will not *seventeen centuries* suffice to have left them in their perishing condition? Would we still leave generation after generation to die in the ignorance of that Saviour whom God has sent for them as well as us, and through whom we profess ourselves to have obtained eternal life? Have we not yet filled up a sufficient measure of iniquity by our neglect? Would we add yet more to all the *inhumanity* we have been guilty of? Would we carry on to an indefinite period our *injustice* and *ingratitude* towards them, and continue our *impiety*, till it is past a remedy? If the Jews have no claim upon us, let us acknowledge none: if the reproofs of God respecting our neglect are not deserving of attention, let us disregard them: if there be no excellency in love, let us forbear to exercise it: and if our own souls be of no value, let us continue to trifle with them, even unto the end. But if, as was shewn in our former Discourse, God will resent this apathy, and call us into judgment for it, let every one of us act for himself, and obey, without delay, the dictates of his conscience, and the commands of God. Let none think it beneath them to espouse the cause of that despised people. Let none suppose, that, because they stand pre-eminent for rank or learning, they should account themselves excused from this sacred work. I ask of all, Are the Jews at this day in a more desperate or degraded state than they were when labouring at the brick-kilns in Egypt? or are any amongst us more

distinguished for rank or talents than Moses, who was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," and, in the first court at that time in the universe, was inferior only to the king himself? yet did he not merely condescend to patronize that injured people, but, at the peril of his own life, he espoused their cause, yea, and joined himself to them, that he might participate their afflictions; "esteeming even the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt[e]." To any such exercise of self-denial as this, I readily grant, *we* are not called. But to a zeal for God's honour, and his people's good, we are called: and I feel assured, that if, in this benevolent and holy cause, we do make some sacrifice, the time is coming when we shall not regret it. In the court of Pharaoh, it is highly probable that all those who were ignorant of the high principles by which Moses was actuated, regarded his condescension as folly, and his zeal as madness. But far different is the estimate that has been formed, both of the one and of the other, by the Christian, no less than by the Jewish, Church; amongst whom, from that very hour, it has been an acknowledged principle, that it is "better to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." This I say, in case it should please God to raise up amongst us men of piety and talent, who shall enter fully into this subject, and devote themselves to the arduous and long-neglected office of enlightening and converting the Jews. Of course, this can be expected of few, and of those only who feel themselves at liberty to consecrate their time and talents to this blessed work. But, after the statement you have heard, I hope I may be permitted to say, without offence, If you are convinced that the cause in which we are engaged is good, aid us by your patronage and your contributions: and let it be seen, that, whilst Monarchs are declaring before the whole world that such efforts

[e] Heb. xi. 24—26.

'equally become the statesman and the friend of humanity[f],' we, in this seat of learning and religion, know what becomes the liberality of Britons, and the disciples of Christ.

[f] See "PROTOCOLE"—

"*Séance du* 21 *Novembre*, 1818.

entre les cinq Cabinets.

(Signé) METTERNICH.
RICHELIEU.
CASTLEREAGH.
WELLINGTON.
HARDENBERG.
BERNSTORFF.
NESSELRODE.
CAPO D'ISTRIA."

MCCLXIII.

CHRIST'S REIGN ON EARTH.

Zech. xiv. 9. *The Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one.*

UNDER the Jewish dispensation, the saints looked forward to the first coming of our Lord; at the prospect of which, though at the distance of two thousand years, Abraham exulted, and leaped for joy. Under the Christian dispensation, we look forward to his second advent: when he shall take to him his great power, and reign over the face of the whole earth. The near approach of this great event should make us more intent upon it, and fill us with delightful anticipations of the blessings which will then be diffused throughout all the world. The words which we have just read will furnish us with an occasion to consider,

I. The incalculable importance of this prophecy—

It is of importance,

1. To the world at large—

[At present, our blessed Saviour reigns over a very small part of the globe. By far the greater part of mankind are sunk in the grossest idolatry — — — But there is a time coming, when every Dagon in the universe shall fall before

the ark, and Christ shall be King over all the earth. In every place under heaven shall men "cast their idols to the moles and to the bats," and Christ be made the one object of supreme and universal regard.

The delusions of Mahometanism shall also then be banished; the worshippers of that false prophet shall be undeceived; and Christ be acknowledged as that Prophet of whom Moses spoke, as ordained of God to be supremely and exclusively the Teacher of the world.

God's ancient people, too, shall then be brought to "look on Him whom they pierced, and mourn; and be in bitterness, as one that mourneth for his only son." To him shall they submit, as King in Zion; and thus all, both Jews and Gentiles, shall become "one fold under one Shepherd."

To all these things the Scriptures bear witness, in so plain and abundant a measure, that we must doubt altogether the inspiration of the sacred volume, if we can doubt that these things shall be fulfilled in their season[a] — — —]

2. To the Church in particular—

[Even in the Christian world there is almost as little subjection to one Head as in the world at large. Both in the Roman Church and the Greek Church, superstition prevails to such a degree, as in a great measure to supersede the work and offices of Christ. And even among Protestants, the divisions which exist tend greatly to embitter their minds against each other, and to prevent that union which ought to subsist amongst the members of Christ's mystical body. As, of old, the tribes of Judah and of Ephraim were in a state of most inveterate hostility against each other, even so it is now. But as, in reference to *them*, we are told that the two sticks in the prophet's hand became one, as shadowing forth *their* future union[b], "(Ephraim no longer envying Judah, nor Judah vexing Ephraim[c]," but both living together in harmony and love,) so *we* may assuredly expect, that, at the season predicted in my text, all will become, as at the day of Pentecost, "of one heart and one mind;" all, as it were, "being like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus; and all, with one mind and one mouth, glorifying God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ[d]."]

3. To every individual of mankind—

[Who amongst us has not reason to confess, that "other lords besides Jehovah have had dominion over us?" But at that time we shall all say, "By thee, and the influence of thy grace, will we henceforth make mention of thy name, even of

[a] Ps. ii. 6, 8. xxii. 27, 28. lxxii. 8, 11. and Dan. ii. 44, 45.
[b] Ezek. xxxvii. 16—22. [c] Isai. xi. 13. [d] Rom. xv. 5, 6.

thine only[e]." An entire subjection of the soul to Christ is a very rare attainment. But in that day there shall be none to "say, Lord, Lord, without doing the things which he commands." Hypocrisy will then be banished from the world; and all who are called Israel, will be "Israelites indeed[f]." "All will be righteous in that day[g]." Every vessel in the Lord's house, from the greatest to the least, will be holiness to the Lord: nor shall there any more be the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts[h]."]

Is this the true import of the prophecy? How great then must be,

II. The blessedness of the period to which it refers—

Surely it will be a season of great *temporal prosperity*—

[There will then exist few, if any, of those calamities which now overrun the world. Do wars now rage, and desolate the earth? They shall then cease: "the swords shall be beat into plow-shares, and the spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more[i]." Do unfruitful seasons reduce men to great distress? There shall then be such fertility in the earth, that "every man shall sit under his own vine and fig-tree[k]," in the undisturbed possession both of peace and plenty. Do injustice and oppression prevail? Universal righteousness will then obtain; and neither fraud nor violence be suffered upon earth[l]. Do diseases bring men to an untimely end? To such a degree shall the constitutions of men be strengthened, that a person at the age of a hundred years shall be accounted only a child; and if he die at that early age, he shall be judged as cut off prematurely by a judicial act of God's displeasure. In truth, the whole system of things will appear like "a new creation;" "a new heaven, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness[m]."]

Then, also, shall *spiritual blessings* most richly abound—

[Men's knowledge of the Gospel shall then far exceed any thing that is possessed at this day: "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke

[e] Isai. xxvi. 13. [f] John i. 47. [g] Isai. lx. 21.
[h] ver. 20, 21. [i] Mic. iv. 3. [k] Mic. iv. 4.
[l] Isai. xi. 6—9. and lx. 17, 18.
[m] Isai. lxv. 17—20. and 2 Pet. iii. 13.

of their wound[n]." At present, our views of Christ are obscure: we see him only as a shadow, or, at the best, only "as in a glass darkly:" but then "we shall see him eye to eye," and, as it were, face to face[o]. The grace also that shall accompany this knowledge will be proportionably enlarged. Exceeding beautiful is the description which the Prophet Joel gives us of the state of things in that day: "It shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters; and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim[p]," a place proverbially dry and barren. In fact, so universal and abundant will be the prevalence of real piety, that it will seem as if all the saints that have ever died had risen again, and Christ himself were dwelling and reigning in the midst of them[q].]

Above all, it will be a season when *God will manifest himself on earth*, almost as he does in heaven itself—

[Some think that Christ will *personally* reign on earth, during the whole Millennium. But, without acceding to that opinion, I think it clear that he will manifest himself on some special occasions, as once he did upon Mount Tabor in his transfiguration: and so bright will be his glory, that the moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously[r]." In fact, the city in which we shall dwell will have no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it: for the glory of God will lighten it, and the Lamb will be the light thereof[s]." See the exultations of the saints in that day, as expressed in the prophetic writings[t]——— See them, also, as declared in the book of Revelation, where they refer expressly to the period when "the saints shall reign on the earth[u]:" and, methinks, you will say that that season will be to every living man an earnest and a foretaste of heaven itself.]

Let me then ENTREAT you, Brethren,

1. To seek the establishment of Christ's kingdom in your own souls—

[If He is to reign over all at the period referred to, should not his kingdom be established in *our* hearts? O, let him not find a rival there! Let every thing that exalts itself

[n] Isai. xxx. 26. [o] Isai. lii. 8. [p] Joel iii. 18.
[q] Rev. xx. 6. and xxi. 2—4. [r] Isai. xxiv. 23.
[s] See Rev. xxi. 22—26. [t] Ps. xcviii. 1—9. and Isai. xii. 3—6.
[u] Rev. v. 9, 10.

against him be cast down; and every thought and desire of your hearts be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.]

2. To promote its establishment throughout the world[x]—

[x] Here may be an exhortation, suited to the occasion, and to the particular circumstances of the case at that time.

MCCLXIV.

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES.

Zech. xiv. 16—19. *It shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the Lord will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.*

MANY passages of Holy Writ derive an interest from the plainness of their import, and the force with which they are expressed; and many attract our attention from the peculiarity of the subject, and even from the difficulty of finding the just interpretation of them. It is in this latter view that I propose to call your attention to the passage which I have now read. That vast importance is attached to the subject by the prophet himself, is evident: and therefore it should not be overlooked by us. But, whether the true sense of it has yet been ascertained, may well admit of doubt.

There are two points of view in which it may be considered:

I. As a prediction to be accomplished in due season—

[That the event which it refers to is yet future, can admit of no doubt. It is not to take place till the period shall arrive, when "the Lord shall be King over all the earth;" and when,

instead of the multitudes of gods that are now worshipped, "there shall be but one Lord, and his name one[a]."

By the Mosaic law there were appointed three great feasts, for the observance of which all the males in Israel were to go up to Jerusalem: these were the feast of the Passover, the feast of Pentecost, and the feast of Tabernacles; and they were all partly commemorative, and partly predictive. The Passover referred to the deliverance of the Hebrew first-born through the sprinkling of the blood of the paschal lamb, when the Egyptian first-born were slain: the Pentecost reminded them of the giving of the law from Mount Sinai: and the feast of Tabernacles brought to their remembrance their dwelling in tents for forty years in the wilderness. The event predicted by the Passover was the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ for the sins of the whole world[b]; and that predicted by the Pentecost was the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit upon the fiftieth day after the deliverance by Christ's death should have been effected, and the writing of God's law by him upon our hearts[c]. But now comes the difficulty: What was the event predicted by the feast of Tabernacles? Commentators have mentioned two; namely, the incarnation of our blessed Lord, and the state in which all his people should live in this dreary wilderness. For the former of these, there appears some foundation in Scripture: for our blessed Lord's advent was, in all probability, at that season of the year, the autumn; and not, as we generally imagine, in the winter: and the expression whereby his incarnation is designated by St. John seems to have a special reference to this feast: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt (tabernacled) amongst us[d]." And this being so wonderful an event, and withal so accordant with the other two, it may well be supposed that the expectation of it should be kept up by a particular feast instituted for that express purpose. But then there arises a great difficulty: Why should *this* be so particularly, and so *exclusively*, celebrated in the latter day? Why should such heavy judgments be denounced against those who should omit to celebrate this, whilst yet no notice at all is taken of the other two? This necessitates one to look for some other event, which is of sufficient importance to justify the appointment of a feast, and which demands that peculiar honour which is here exclusively reserved for it. As for the state in which all are to live under the Christian dispensation, there is nothing at all mysterious in that, nothing that calls for such a typical prefiguration, and nothing that is peculiarly appropriate to the latter-day. We therefore dismiss that altogether from our thoughts, *as far as the prediction is concerned.*

[a] ver. 9. [b] 1 Cor. v. 7. [c] Acts ii. 1—4. [d] ἐσκήνωσεν.

In order to discover what event there is, which the prophet had in view, and which, either by itself, or in connexion with Christ's first advent, corresponds with the feast of Tabernacles, and which moreover calls for such distinguished honour in the latter day; we must examine the whole preceding context. The prophet is speaking respecting the future restoration and conversion of the Jews[e]. He foretells, that it will be opposed to the uttermost by the heathen nations: but that the Jews will triumph over all their enemies[f], and having destroyed immense multitudes of them, will be the instruments of converting the rest to the faith of Christ[g]. Now, it is obvious, that the Jews, in going up to their own land, must dwell in booths made of the branches of trees; or, at best, in tents, such as soldiers use when they take the field. It is equally obvious, that, in appearance, they will be as likely to fall a prey to their enemies, as when they came out of Egypt to sojourn in the wilderness. Yet shall they be as miraculously preserved then as heretofore; not only through the destruction of their enemies, but by a supply of all their wants: and they shall have renewed to them all their former mercies under their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will then reign over them, and fix his Tabernacle in the midst of them, as their Head and King[h]. By this blessed event, their surviving enemies will be convinced, and converted to the faith of Christ: and all who shall resist the evidence thus afforded them, and refuse to join them in the worshipping of the Saviour, shall be visited with plagues, which shall mark plainly the indignation of God against them. At the feast of Tabernacles they were wont to pray for the latter rain, which fell at that season of the year[i]: and God threatens, that they who should not unite with them in these holy exercises "should have no rain." And whereas Egypt was independent of rain, their land being fertilized by the overflowing of the Nile, they should have some other plague equivalent to that inflicted on other disobedient nations[k]: for God would sorely chastise all who should refuse to unite in celebrating this wonderful event, and in honouring the Saviour who shall have brought it to pass.

Now, here we have an object worthy of such an ordinance to prefigure it: for it is the consummation of all the prophecies, relating either to the Jewish or Gentile world. And here we see why this feast is to be observed, not only in preference to, but to the exclusion of, the other two. And certainly, if we conceive, as many do, that the Lord Jesus Christ will then descend, and *personally* reign on earth, the connexion between

[e] ver. 11. [f] ver. 12—14. See also Zech. xii. 3, 6—9.
[g] Isai. lxvi. 14—16, 19. [h] Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. with Rev. xxi. 3.
[i] Joel ii. 23. [k] ver. 18.

his first and second advent will more strongly appear, and the authoritative injunction respecting the observance of that feast will be more fully accounted for. Could we make up our minds to this point, it must be confessed it would throw great light on the passage before us; because this feast would then have the same direct reference to Christ as is unquestionably found in the other two. But of his *spiritual* reign there can be no doubt: and *that* being then more glorious than ever, and over both the Jewish and Gentile world in one collective body, it may well be regarded as a renewal of his presence upon earth, and an accomplishment of the prophecy before us.

But there is yet further reason for supposing the conversion of the Gentile world to be the immediate subject of this prophecy: for the feast of Tabernacles was expressly called "the feast of in-gathering[l];" and therefore it might well prefigure that second advent of "Shiloh, to whom shall the gathering of the Gentiles be[m]." And, in fact, the whole current of prophecy seems to determine the point: for "at that period shall many people and strong nations come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem; and ten men out of all languages of the nations shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you[n]."]

Having endeavoured to throw light on my text as a prediction, I shall now proceed to notice it,

II. As a command, to be obeyed in all ages—

Beyond all doubt, that which is so authoritatively required of the whole world at a future period, must, in spirit at least, be required of the Church in all ages. Now, the spirit of the ordinance plainly inculcates,

1. A grateful remembrance of past mercies—

[This was indisputably one great end of the feast, as it was originally established: "Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths; that your generations may know, that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt[o]." In that state they were exposed to the want of every necessary of life, and to numberless dangers, both from men and beasts: yet were they preserved by the continued care of their Heavenly Protector. And have not *we*, also, similar mercies to recount? With respect to our bodies, what

[l] Exod. xxiii. 16. [m] Gen. xlix. 10.
[n] Zech. viii. 22, 23. See also Isai. lx. 10—14. and lxvi. 13.
[o] Lev. xxiii. 39—43.

care has God taken of us, from the first moment that we came into the world! How many millions of the children of men have never attained to our age, or had such blessings multiplied to them as we! And if we speak of our souls, we must know all the devices of Satan himself, before we can estimate aright the care which we have experienced at the hands of our heavenly Father. There has not been an hour in which we should not have been destroyed, if God had permitted Satan to sift us, as he gladly would have done. It is through God's unbounded mercy that "we continue to this day" following after God, and that we have not long since "turned back unto perdition." If, through mercy, we can say, "My foot standeth fast;" it becomes us gratefully to add, "In the congregations will I bless the Lord[p]."]

2. An humble dependence on God for future blessings—

[In the passage before cited, to shew that the ordinance was appointed for the remembrance of past mercies, it is added, "I am the Lord your God[q]." This taught the Hebrews to expect a continuance of those blessings at his hands. And to whom shall *we* look? Whither shall *we* go for blessings, either temporal or spiritual? If we lean on the creature, we shall find it a broken reed. We must rely on God alone. We must look to Him, as "our Sun and our Shield:" we must "rely on him both for grace and glory;" and rest assured, that "he will withhold no good thing from us, if only we walk uprightly before him;" "acknowledging him in all our ways," and "committing" our every concern "into his hands[r]."

It is worthy of observation, that, *on the last day of this feast*, the Jews were wont to go to the pool of Siloam, and to pour out water with joy; referring, in their minds, to the promise, that at that time "living waters should go out from Jerusalem[s];" and to that particular song which the Prophet Isaiah had taught them, "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation[t]." In the midst of that ceremony, our blessed Lord addressed the whole multitude, saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto ME and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. And this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him should receive[u]." If only we look to Him, "we shall want no manner of thing that is good[x]."]

p Ps. xxvi. 12. q Lev. xxiii. 43. r Prov. iii. 6.
s ver. 8. t Isai. xii. 3. u John vii. 37—39.

x In the Church of England we have *Rogation-days*, for the express purpose of supplicating God's blessing in reference to the fruits of the earth, and the out-pouring of his Spirit on the Church: and these begin *the Sunday before Whitsunday*.

3. A self-denying surrender of our whole selves to God—

[It was no little act of self-denial, for the whole nation to leave their houses, and live in booths (not in *tents* of canvass, as we are apt to imagine; but in *booths*, made of the branches of trees) for seven days every year. In truth, this ordinance was so contrary to flesh and blood, that, from the days of Joshua, till after their return from the Babylonish captivity, the people never once observed it. But *we* must not draw back from any act of self-denial whatever. We must forsake all, and follow Christ: father, mother, houses, lands, yea, and life itself, must be hated by us in comparison of him. Though *in* the world, "we must not be *of* the world;" but "be crucified to it," and "have our conversation altogether in heaven." This is our duty: "we must live not to ourselves, but to Him who died for us, and rose again." Nor must we account any thing hard: we should rather "rejoice, if we are counted worthy to suffer shame or loss for the Lord's sake;" and "not count even our lives dear to us, if only we may honour him, and "finish our course with joy." At the discovery of their long-neglected duty through the instructions of Ezra, the people, even all the congregation of those who were come out of captivity, made themselves booths, on the roof of their houses, and in their courts, and in the courts of the House of God, and in the street of the water-gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim: and there was very great gladness[y]." O, that there were in us also such a heart! For I hesitate not to affirm, that the more self-denying readiness we manifest to obey the commands of God, the more solid joy shall we possess. Verily, "*in* keeping God's commandments there is great reward."]

4. A joyful anticipation of the period more especially referred to—

[Abraham, two thousand years before the Saviour's advent, was filled with joy at the glimmering view of it which he beheld: and shall not we rejoice in the prospect of his second advent, when all the ends of his incarnation and death will be gloriously accomplished; and when all, both Jews and Gentiles, shall be gathered together as "one fold under one Shepherd?" "Woe be to us, if we are at ease in Zion," and altogether insensible to these great events! Were "the Ammonite and the Moabite forbidden to enter into the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation, because they met not the Hebrews with supplies of bread and water, when they came out of Egypt[z];" what judgment, then, think ye, may we expect, if we

[y] Neh. viii. 14—17. [z] Deut. xxiii. 3, 4.

help not forward, to the utmost of our power, this glorious consummation, of which their deliverance from Egypt was but a faint shadow! Truly, God calls us to enter into the subject with our whole hearts, and to help it forward with our whole souls. "Thus saith the Lord: Sing with gladness for Jacob: shout among the chief of the nations: publish ye; praise ye; and say, O Lord, save thy people, the remnant of Israel[a]!" This is addressed to us: and if it was the duty of Gentiles five hundred years before the first coming of Christ, what must it be now that his second advent is so nigh at hand? Come, Brethren; rise to the occasion: prepare to keep the feast. If ye refuse to participate in this joy, no wonder "ye have no rain" upon your souls; no wonder ye are visited with plagues: but, if ye will enter fully into the design of this mystery, then shall ye "come with singing unto Zion, and with everlasting joy upon your heads."]

[a] Jer. xxxi. 7.

MCCLXV.

THE MILLENNIAL GLORY.

Zech. xiv. 20, 21. *In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses,* HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; *and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts.*

THE period to which the text refers is yet future. If there be in the preceding context much that is difficult to be understood, there is much also that is plain. It is here plainly foretold, that the Jews shall be restored once more to their own land[a]: that those who oppose their settlement there, how numerous or powerful soever they may be, shall be destroyed[b]: that both Jews and Gentiles shall embrace the faith of Christ[c]: that those who refuse to do so, whether Jews or Gentiles, shall be visited with heavy plagues[d]: and that, amongst those who do turn unto the Lord, there shall

[a] ver. 11.
[b] ver. 12—15.
[c] ver. 9.
[d] ver. 16—19.

be such high degrees of holiness as have never yet been generally found in the Church of God[e].

By "the bells or bridles of the horses" may be meant the ornaments of horses, not merely of those used in war, but rather of those used for common purposes, whether of labour or pleasure. On them shall be inscribed "HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD," just as there was on the mitre of the high-priest[f], in order to shew, that the owners of the horses consider them as consecrated to the Lord, and desire to glorify God in the use of them. By this I understand, that, in all the comforts and conveniences of life, God will be acknowledged, as much as he formerly was in the most sacred ordinances and appointments.

Every service then will be, in fact, a religious service. In the tabernacle and the temple were "pots," both of earth and brass, for the use of the priests; and "bowls" of gold for the blood of the sacrifices, which was to be sprinkled according to the prescribed forms. These were more holy as being used in the more immediate service of God. But in that day, "the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar," every meal being partaken of in the same devout spirit as a sacrifice, and every common office of life being performed as unto God himself. Nor will this obtain amongst the priests only, but amongst the people also, and *that* of every rank and order in society; for "every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord." The seething of the flesh of the sacrifices in the pots formerly belonged only to the priests[g]: but under the Christian dispensation all are priests, even "a royal priesthood[h]," and are therefore entitled to "seethe therein;" "the people who sacrifice" being in this respect as the priests themselves.

So universal will holiness then be, that "there will no more be the Canaanite in the house of the Lord." In the Promised Land the Canaanites retained a possession for many centuries, and were with great

[e] The text.
[f] Exod. xxviii. 36.
[g] Lev. vi. 25—28.
[h] 1 Pet. ii. 9. Rev. v. 10.

difficulty extirpated at last. At this time too there are in the Church many who dishonour their holy profession; nor can the tares be in any tolerable degree separated from the wheat; but at that day "Jerusalem shall be altogether holy[i]," and in the Lord's highway no unclean thing or person shall be found[k]

From the text thus explained, we may see,

I. The true character of the Gospel dispensation—

The law was holy; and not the moral law only, but the ceremonial law also: for though, in comparison of the Gospel, it consisted only of poor and "beggarly elements," yet it tended to render sin odious, and to impress on the mind the fear and love of God. But the Gospel is yet more holy, being itself the substance of those things of which the law was only a shadow. The whole character of it is holiness:

1. It displays above all things the holiness of God—

[See what an atonement was offered for sin! nothing but the blood of God's only dear Son could make satisfaction for it — — — What a holy God must *he* be, who required such a sacrifice! — — —]

2. It proposes to us no lower pattern than God himself—

[We are required by it to "be holy, as God is holy;" and "perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect." Far as we are from this, we must press forward for it, and rest in nothing short of it — — —]

3. The holiness which it requires of us, it promises to us—

[It makes not any one perfect in this life; but it delivers us from the dominion of all sin and transforms us into "the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness," and *that* "from one degree of glory to another, even as by the Spirit of the Lord[l]." This it does for all who receive it aright: for "every one that has a good hope in Christ, purifies himself, even as he is pure[m]" — — —]

To illustrate this yet farther, we shall mark,

[i] Joel iii. 17.
[k] Isai. xxxv. 8. and lx. 21.
[l] 2 Cor. iii. 18.
[m] 1 John iii. 3.

II. The effect which it produces, in proportion as its influence is felt—

"It bringeth forth fruit in all the world:" and that fruit is of the richest kind, even as the fruit of Paradise itself. In the last day it will operate in its full extent: and now, if we cordially embrace it,

1. We shall regard all that we have as consecrated to the Lord—

[Whatever we posssess, whether for use or pleasure, "Holiness unto the Lord" will be inscribed upon it. Our bodies with all their members, our souls with all their faculties, our time, our property, our influence, all will be considered as talents received from him, and to be improved for him[n].]

2. We shall perform our most common services in a religious manner—

[As the ungodly carry a worldly spirit into their most sacred duties, so, on the contrary, do the saints endeavour to do every thing for God. This is shewn us particularly in reference to religious servants, whose privilege it is in the most menial offices to serve the Lord Christ[o] ——— In like manner all of us are to regard "our pots and cups as the bowls before the altar," and "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, to do it all for the glory of God[p]."]

3. We shall suffer no sin willingly to abide in our hearts—

[The Canaanite will be expelled, and no truce be made with him. "The right eye will be plucked out, and the right hand or foot will be cut off." To the harbouring of one sin the penalty of "hell fire" is annexed: and no candidate for heaven will knowingly subject himself to this fearful alternative[q].]

ADDRESS—

1. Let none be ashamed of religion, which ought to shine before men—

2. Let none rest in any measure of religion short of that which will characterize the Millennial age———

[n] Isai. xxiii. 18. and lxiii. 9.
[o] Eph. vi. 5—8.
[p] 1 Cor. x. 31.
[q] Mark ix. 42—48.

MALACHI.

MCCLXVI.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD'S GRACE.

Mal. i. 2, 3. *I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau.*

THE scope of this prophecy is, to reprove the Jews for their impiety, after their re-establishment in their own land, especially for their neglect and profanation of God's ordinances. To give the greater weight to his reproofs, he begins with reminding them of the mercies which they, above all people, had received; and which they, therefore, should have requited in a far different manner.

To us, no less than to them, may this address be applied. In considering it, I shall be led to shew you,

I. The distinguishing mercies which we have received at God's hands—

These may be contemplated,

1. In our national capacity—

[It is in this view that our text must be primarily understood: for of the temporal condition of the Jews, as contrasted with that of the Edomites, the prophet evidently speaks; the Jews having been favoured with the possession of Canaan, and restored to it after their temporary captivity in Babylon; whilst the Edomites had a very inferior portion in Mount Seir, to which, now that they were expelled from it, no efforts of theirs should ever be able to restore them[a].

And what nation under heaven has ever been more highly

[a] Compare Gen. xxv. 23. with ver. 4, 5. and Jer. xlix. 17, 18.

favoured than ours? What nation has more to be thankful for, than we have at this time; having for so long a period escaped the desolations with which other countries have been visited, and been so elevated amongst the kingdoms after so many and great perils[b]? The very constitution of our kingdom is such as no other nation in Europe enjoys, or is found capable of enjoying; so great is the liberty possessed by every subject of the realm, and such safeguards existing in the very constitution itself for the preservation of it. As for our religious advantages, they are of incalculable value. No nation under heaven possesses either more light than we, or more liberty to walk, every one of us, according to the dictates of his own conscience. Not Israel itself was more highly favoured than we, in the administration of divine ordinances, or in the communications of God's blessings by means of them.]

2. In our individual capacity—

[St. Paul evidently understood our text as comprehending this also: for, having quoted the words in proof of God's right to dispense his blessings to whomsoever he will, without any respect to their character, past, present, or future, he deduces from it this universal position: "So, then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy[c]."

Let us see then, whether, as individuals, we have not received many distinguished mercies from God's hands. If we look around us, may we not see thousands whose lot differs widely from ours, in that we are living in the enjoyment of health, and peace, and perhaps of plenty too, whilst others are pining away, under disease of body, or trouble of mind, or want of even the necessaries of life. Yet is not Esau Jacob's brother? and are not we thus favoured solely through the good providence of our God?

But let us come to things of greater moment, even to those which affect our everlasting state. May I not say, that God has highly distinguished you, in that you have had, and *that* for the space of forty years, the Gospel ministered unto you, in all its freeness, and in all its fulness. If all the same truths have with the same fidelity been proclaimed in *every* place, whence is it that any stigma has been affixed to the ministrations which ye attend? I have no wish to speak of others: but, respecting the Gospel as preached unto you, I am in duty bound to speak; and to say, before you and the whole world, that "I have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you," but "have declared unto you, as God has helped

[b] After the war, during the French Revolution.
[c] See Rom. ix. 16.

me, "the whole counsel of God." Yes, verily, "many kings and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." To some of you, too, I trust, the word has come with power, even to the quickening, and sanctifying, and saving of your souls; so that you are walking in the light of God's countenance, and in a prospect of his glory, whilst others around you are yet sitting in darkness, and perishing in their sins. Yea, I must further add, that many, who were once partakers of all the same advantages with yourselves, are now gone beyond the hope of redemption, and suffering the vengeance of eternal fire; whilst ye are numbered with the saints of God, heirs and expectants of all the blessedness of heaven. Yet, "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" Are not those very persons, whose misery we have so much reason to bemoan, members of the same community with you; yea, perhaps of the very same family?

See, then, the truth of God's assertion in my text: "I have loved you, saith the Lord."]

Yet, whilst we contemplate these mercies, let us mark also,

II. Our insensibility in relation to them—

The question with which God's assertion was repelled by Israel may serve to shew us how his distinguishing favours are regarded by us.

1. By some they are utterly disclaimed—

[This is the plain import of that impious reply, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" The same kind of reply is made to every accusation which is brought by the prophet; and it invariably imports a denial of his assertions[d]. There is not any thing more offensive to the proud heart of man, than to be told that God has dealt with him in a way of sovereign grace and love. Men will not hear of God's sovereignty: and, though they claim a right to dispose of their own things according to their own will, they deny that right to God. They affirm, that the idea of electing love is subversive of God's justice: as though man had any claim upon the *justice* of his God. We had no claim on his justice, *as creatures:* he might, if it had so pleased him, have reduced us to a state of non-existence, the very hour after he had formed us: how much less can we have claim on his justice, *as sinners!* The very devils have as much claim on his justice as we: and if mercy did not rejoice over judgment, there is not one of us that would not, in one moment, be a partaker of their doom.

[d] ver. 6, 7. and Mal. ii. 17. and Mal. iii. 7, 8, 13, 14.

By many, it is supposed, that, to speak of an interest in God's electing love, must necessarily be an indication of the most insufferable pride. But who, I would ask, are lifted up with pride; those who acknowledge every blessing to be the unmerited gift of God; or those who imagine that God has had respect to some goodness in *them*, as the ground on which he has been constrained to distinguish them from others? Who, I say, are obnoxious to the charge of pride, they who give all the glory to God's free and sovereign grace; or they who arrogate to themselves some good qualities, as determining God in his selection of them in preference to others? If, of two stones lying in a quarry, a builder take one, and polish it with care for a conspicuous ornament to his edifice, and leave the other without so much as giving it any place in his building; has that favoured stone any ground for glorying? Or, if a potter take of one lump of clay a portion, to make it a vessel of honour, whilst of another portion, equally good in itself, he makes a vessel into dishonour; has the one any reason to glory, or the other any reason to complain? This is St. Paul's own application of our text[e]. One distinction indeed he makes; and it is of great importance that we should make it also; namely, that the vessels of honour are made so *by Him;* whereas the vessels of dishonour are made so *by themselves*[f]: but this is clear, beyond a possibility of doubt, that it is not the person who refers every thing to God as its Author, and acknowledges his obligation to *His* free and sovereign grace; it is not he, I say, that is to be accused of pride; but he who founds his hopes on some past or future good within his own bosom, as the determining cause with God for the bestowment of his blessings, and the procuring cause of them to his own soul.

Those, therefore, who, in the language of my text, deny the exercise of God's sovereign grace, are justly obnoxious to his heaviest displeasure.]

2. By others they are received with sad indifference—

[This is the least that the question in my text can possibly import: "You speak of God's love to me; but I need to be informed what evidence you have of it: for, if any instances of it have occurred, I have quite forgotten them."

Now, it is in this way that God's mercies are, for the most part, received by us. How little do we reflect on the blessings of a free government, which, as Britons, we possess in rich abundance! And how sadly are *our personal and domestic comforts* overlooked! But, not to dwell on matters of subordinate

[e] Rom. ix. 19—21. [f] Rom. ix. 22. See the Greek.

importance, how little are we sensible of the blessings of a preached Gospel? How many refuse to avail themselves of the advantages they enjoy! and how many make no better use of them than to lull their consciences asleep in sin! Even of those who, in the judgment of charity, are partakers of salvation, how few are impressed with this privilege as they ought to be! Little do they think of the awful state of the Esaus that are around them, and of the obligations they owe to God for his distinguishing love and mercy. My dear brethren, if our minds were in a proper state, we should scarcely find time to think of any thing else but of the wonders of God's love to us in Christ Jesus, and of the privileges we enjoy as his redeemed people. Suppose an angel were sent down from heaven to occupy our post, would he ever have occasion to put the question, "Wherein has thou loved me?" No: he would never for a moment be insensible of God's love towards him. And, though we cannot hope to attain to the perfection of angels, this should, on the whole, be our state; more especially because our calls for gratitude infinitely exceed all that angels have ever experienced.]

Let us LEARN, then, from hence,

1. To trace all our mercies to the proper source—

[God's *love* is the true source of all. And if we were in the habit of tracing them to this, how sweet would our smallest and most common mercies appear! Verily, such a habit as this would be a foretaste even of heaven itself. But the mercy which swallows up, as it were, every other, is the gift of God's only dear Son to die for us: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life[g]." In this we are told, "God *commendeth* his love towards us[h]:" referring to it as the most stupendous display of his love that ever was, or ever can be, exhibited to mortal man. On this, then, we should dwell with wonder and amazement: for no such mercy was ever vouchsafed to the fallen angels; yet *as creatures*, they were our elder brethren: nor is the knowledge of him vouchsafed to above one-sixth of the human race; yet are that vast majority descended from one common parent with us: nor, where his name is known, is his Gospel truly preached, probably not to one part in a hundred of the Christian world: and of those to whom it is ministered, how few receive it in truth! Yet, "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" What thanks, then, do *we* owe to God, if it has been made the power of God to the salvation of *our* souls! Beloved brethren, trace ye this to its proper source. God has loved you with an everlasting love; and therefore with

[g] John iii. 16. [h] Rom. v. 8.

loving-kindness has he drawn you: and whereinsoever ye differ from others, "it is He, and he alone, that has made you to differ."]

2. To improve them for their proper end—

[The Apostle tells us, "We love him, because he first loved us." And, verily, so it ought to be. The mercies of God ought so to affect our minds, as to make us "yield up our whole selves as living sacrifices unto him." This is "our reasonable service:" and to perform it should be the continued labour of our lives. What was it that wrought so powerfully on the heart of Paul, and made him so zealous in the service of his God? He tells us, "The love of Christ constraineth me[i];" or, as the word imports, 'carries me away, like an impetuous torrent.' Thus, then, should it operate on us: and verily it would so operate, if we reflected on it as we ought. If we strove, as we ought, to "comprehend the height and depth and length and breadth of the love of Christ, it would surely fill us with all the fulness of God[k]." I am perfectly persuaded, that the reason of our making such low attainments in religion is, that we forget to meditate on this glorious subject, and occupy our minds with considerations which tend only to depress them and to enervate all their energies. Let us turn our eyes from the world and from our various discouragements, to view the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; and we shall soon be "changed by it into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord[l]."]

[i] 2 Cor. v. 14. [k] Eph. iii. 18, 19. [l] 2 Cor. iii. 18.

MCCLXVII.

RELATIVE DUTIES TO GOD AND MAN.

Mal. i. 6. *A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts.*

THE unfolding and enforcing of relative duties, is a very essential branch of the Christian ministry; and conducive, in a variety of views, to the most important ends. If indeed the whole of religion were made to consist in the performance of those duties, or if men were urged to perform them in their own strength, or with a hope of meriting God's favour, then the foundations of Christianity would be sapped, and the whole fabric would fall to ruin. But, if they be set

forth in order to shew to the ungodly their transgressions, and their consequent need of mercy; or if they be inculcated on the believer in order that he may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour; no subject can be more weighty, or more deserving of our attention. But there is yet another view, in which the consideration of them may subserve the best of purposes. Men, however disposed they may be to limit the extent of their own duties, are easily led to acknowledge the obligations of others towards themselves. Hence, there being always a number of persons interested in discovering their own rights, and disposed to insist upon them; and every person having risen, or hoping to rise, from a subordinate relation to one invested with authority; the duties of every distinct relation are ascertained and approved. This is not the case with respect to the duties of men towards God. The authority there is all on one side, and obedience is wholly on the other. Hence all men feeling the same desire to limit and curtail the rights of their Governor, and to extend the boundaries of their own liberty, the laws of God are almost entirely superseded: disobedience to them is universally connived at, as though it were no evil; and the general welfare of society is made the ground and measure of all morality. Here then the relative duties may be introduced to great advantage; these being already admitted, serve as acknowledged principles, from whence we may argue; and the application of them to the duties of the first table is obvious and irresistible. This use of them God himself has taught us, as in many other passages, so especially in that before us; in illustrating which we shall propose for your consideration the following observations:

I. There is no duty of earthly dependents towards their superiors, which does not exist in an infinitely higher degree towards the Governor of the universe.

II. However attentive men are to fill up their duties in domestic life, they are universally prone to neglect their duties towards God.

III. The performance of duties towards men, instead of extenuating, as many suppose, the guilt of neglecting God, is in reality a great aggravation of it.

I. There is no duty of earthly dependents towards their superiors, which does not exist in an infinitely higher degree towards the Governor of the universe.

Reason, no less than Revelation, teaches us that a child owes subjection to his parent, and a servant to his master: nor is there any one so depraved as to controvert this general position, however indisposed he may be to act conformably to it in his own particular situation. What the laws of nature inculcate in the one case, is established by a particular compact in the other: and an habitual infringement of it is considered as a subversion of social order, and an inlet to universal anarchy. Still however there are limits, beyond which no human authority extends: and, when these are exceeded, resistance, rather than obedience, is our duty. But God's claim to honour and obedience knows no bounds. He is, in some sense, the Father of our bodies, which could not exist without his creating hand: but in a more eminent manner is he "the Father of our spirits;" because he forms them without the intervention of human agency, and endues them with powers which matter could not generate. Being the Creator of all, he is also, of necessity, the Lord of all; to whom every faculty and every power should be consecrated. The honour which we pay to parents is but a faint shadow of that reverence with which we are to approach him, and of that profound respect, which we are to entertain for his person and character, his word and will. The obedience which we yield to earthly superiors, relates chiefly to outward acts: but God has a right to controul our inmost thoughts. We are to believe every thing he says, because he says it; to love every thing he does, because he does it; and to execute every thing he enjoins, because he commands it. We not only may, but must, inquire into the injunctions of

men, whether they be right in themselves, and whether a compliance with them be agreeable to the mind and will of God? But there is no room for such questions respecting any of the commands of God. If God say, "Abraham, take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him up; slay him with thine own hand, and consume him to ashes;" there is no room for deliberation: Abraham has no right to gainsay the decree of heaven; he is not at liberty to offer any objections: it is sufficient for him to know what the will of his Maker is; and then he must perform it instantly, without reluctance. Had the command been given by an earthly superior, there had been ample ground for hesitation, for expostulation, for disobedience: no parental, no magisterial authority should be regarded in such a case. But against a Divine command there never can be any ground for the exercise of carnal reason: a prompt, a steady, a determined acquiescence on our part, is our truest wisdom, and our bounden duty. Our obedience however is not to be that of a slave to an imperious and cruel master, but like that of a dutiful child to an affectionate and beloved parent. We ourselves consider the mind and disposition with which we are served, as affecting very materially the acceptableness of the service itself. That which is done for us grudgingly, and through mere constraint, is of very little value in our eyes: it is the willing, cheerful obedience that engages our esteem, and endears to us the persons actuated by such a spirit. Similar to this is the service which God requires. He justly expects that we should be like "the angels, hearkening to the voice of his word," and waiting for the slightest intimations of his will, in order to execute it with all possible readiness and despatch. We should come into his presence with the confidence of beloved children: we should ask from time to time, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" We should set about the duties of our calling as regularly as the most diligent servant prosecutes his accustomed labours: we should never think any thing done, as long as there

remains any thing to be done. If an arduous service occur, we should not draw back from it, like the Rich Youth in the Gospel; but should rather address ourselves to it with increased energy, and regard it as a favourable opportunity of displaying our zeal and love. If we could be freed from his yoke, we should decline the proffered liberty, and, like the servant under the law, request that our ear might be fastened to the door-post, in token that we account his service to be perfect freedom, and that it is our desire to continue in it to the latest hour of our lives. We should find our reward in our work, and our happiness in honouring and enjoying God. We may indeed without impropriety "have respect also to the recompence of the reward," which we shall receive in another world: but our principal incentives should be of a more disinterested and ingenuous nature: we should perform the will of God, because we love the very things which he prescribes; and because it is our highest ambition to please and glorify him.

But truth compels us to observe,

II. That however attentive men are to fill up their duties in domestic life, they are universally prone to neglect their duties towards God.

Amidst all the depravity which has deluged the world, there may be found, in many instances, a conscientious regard to relative duties. If some have reason to complain of disobedient children and unfaithful servants, others can testify, that the persons so related to them are deserving of the highest commendations on account of their fidelity and affection. Even where spiritual religion is overlooked and despised, this attention to relative duties frequently obtains. A good natural disposition, united with a sense of honour, and a regard to interest, will often produce habits, which may provoke to emulation those, who profess to be actuated by the sublimer principles of the Gospel.

But where, except among the despised followers of Jesus, shall we find those who fulfil their duties to

God? That many are punctual in some outward observances, is readily acknowledged. But we shall do well to remark, that the inquiry in my text does not relate to outward actions so much as to the inward dispositions of the mind; "If I be a father, where is my *honour?* and if I be a master, where is my *fear?* saith the Lord of Hosts." Let our attention then be directed to this point: let us, in our self-examination, keep this in view. Has there been in our hearts an habitual fear of offending God? Has there been a holy reverential awe upon our minds whenever we have entered into his presence? Has there been an unwearied solicitude to please him, and a determination, through grace, to prove ourselves faithful to him in all things? Have we sought carefully to know his will; and then set ourselves diligently to perform it? Have we been afraid of wasting his time in vain unprofitable pursuits, and endeavoured to lay out to advantage the talents he has committed to our care? Have we, together with the fidelity of a servant, combined the love and confidence of a child? Have we entered into his presence with joy, and made known our requests with a humble yet thankful assurance, that he would hear and answer our petitions? Have we cast our care upon him, not doubting but that he would care for us, and order every thing for our good? Have we, at the same time, taken an interest in every thing that relates to him? Have we been filled with grief and indignation, when we have beheld the contempt poured upon him by an ungodly world? And has it been a source of lively joy, if at any time we have heard his name exalted and his glory extolled? If we have felt towards him as duteous children, we must have considered ourselves as having a communion of interests with him; and must have participated in all these emotions, which the advancement or declension of his cause are suited to inspire.

Let us examine in this manner the conduct both of ourselves and others, and then answer, if we can, that pointed interrogation, "*Where* is mine honour?" Blind and partial as we are, we cannot be so blind or

so partial, as not to confess, that, however attentive men may be to their relative duties, they are not mindful of their duty to God. There is doubtless a considerable difference between some and others: some have respect for religion, while others despise it; and some endeavour in a self-righteous way to please God, while others care not how much they provoke him to anger. But, as to the dispositions of a faithful servant and a dutiful child, there is not a person in the universe who feels them, except the few who have "entered in at the strait gate, and are walking in the narrow path" of evangelical obedience. All others prefer their own ease to God's service, their own will to God's precepts, their own interests to God's honour.

And what shall we say to these things? Shall we leave men to imagine that their punctuality in some duties will atone for their remissness in others? No: we must rather say, (what indeed we proposed as the third head of our discourse,)

III. That the performance of duties towards men, instead of extenuating, as many suppose, the guilt of neglecting God, is in reality a great aggravation of it.

In one view indeed it must certainly be allowed, that the fewer laws any man transgresses, the less guilt he contracts: and that therefore he who obeys, though imperfectly and exclusively, the injunctions of the second table, is better than he who lives in the unrestrained violation of *all* the commandments. Nevertheless it is certain that obedience in some cases may be a great aggravation of our disobedience in others; inasmuch as it may argue a preference given to the creature above the Creator, and may therefore excite the fiercer indignation of a jealous God. More especially if the duties of the second table be exalted to the neglect of those of the first table, and obedience to the latter be pleaded as excusing our transgressions of the former, then our partiality becomes an awful aggravation of our guilt. For, what is this, but to

raise altar against altar, to set God at variance with himself, and to "provoke to jealousy" the Holy One of Israel? We can scarcely conceive any thing worse than such conduct as this. For, shall God be denied the honour which is paid to man? Shall he alone be treated with contemptuous neglect? Shall he be excluded from the minds of those whom he created and upholds? Shall all the wonders of redeeming love be requited in no better way than this? Shall we refuse to him the homage which we exact from our fellow-creatures, and which we even pay to those who are authorized to receive it? Would not God be justly indignant, if he were only placed on a footing of equality with men? How much more then, when he is degraded so far below them! Surely every mercy he has ever vouchsafed to us, but especially the gift of his dear Son, will dreadfully enhance our guilt and condemnation, if our obligations to him do not operate to produce in us a reverential honour of him as our Father, and an unrivalled obedience to him as our Lord and Master.

This mode of arguing is very common in the Scriptures. God is pleased frequently to suggest the relation subsisting between himself and his people with the same view as in the passage before us. Sometimes he does it to raise *our expectations from him*; and at other times to shew the reasonableness of *his expectations from us*. In the former view he says, "Which of you, if his child should ask for bread, would give him a stone? How much more then will your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him!" In the latter view he says, "We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" Precisely thus does he speak in the text; with this only difference; that the conclusion drawn from his statement is not merely an appeal to our reason, but a reproof for our misconduct. The interrogations are extremely pointed: they intimate a mind justly incensed: they express the highest indignation against

us for refusing to our Maker what we concede to our fellow-worms: "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if I then be a father, where is MINE honour? if I be a master, where is MY fear? saith the Lord of Hosts."

We shall more easily enter into this idea, if we suppose a child or servant of our own fulfilling his duties with some considerable care to others, but violating all which he owed to us. If his attention to others were adduced in vindication of his neglect of us, should we not argue in the very same way that Jehovah does in the text? Should we be satisfied with his serving others, when he withheld his services from *us?* Should we not insist upon our superior title to his regards? Should we not represent the violations of his duty to us as more heinous, in proportion to the right which was vested in us by virtue of our relation to him? When he told us of what he did for others, should we not say, "But where is *my* honour? where is *my* fear?" Should we not consider his conduct as in the highest degree insolent and contemptuous, when we ourselves, who had an exclusive, or at least a superior, claim to his affection, were particularly selected as objects of his neglect? There can be no doubt: and therefore we may be well assured, that the very pleas which we are apt to urge in extenuation of our guilt, will one day be adduced as the greatest aggravations of it.

Permit me now to ask a question or two, in reference to the foregoing subject. Supposing that God should now call us to account, as certainly he will ere long, and ask, What proofs we have given of our allegiance to him? What proofs have we to adduce? Can we appeal to the heart-searching God, that we have indeed respected his authority, that we have habitually conducted ourselves towards him as faithful servants and obedient children? Let us examine well our own hearts: let us not be hasty to conclude that all is well: it is easy to deceive ourselves; but we cannot possibly deceive God. Every act of our lives has been registered in the book of

his remembrance; and we shall be judged, not by the partial verdict of our own self-love, but by the unerring testimony of truth itself. And if it be proved that our allegiance to God amounted to no more than "saying, Lord! Lord! without doing the things which he commanded," our Judge will pronounce upon us that awful sentence, "Depart from me; I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity!"

We cannot however CONCLUDE this subject, without suggesting some consolatory considerations—

To those who are conscious of having neglected God.

Our God and Father does not instantly disinherit the rebellious child, or exclude for ever the disobedient servant: Onesimus may yet return, through the mediation of his heavenly Sponsor; and the Prodigal may yet be feasted on the fatted calf. Only let us confess our sins, and turn to God with humiliation and contrition; and we shall soon find, that "he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness." Let us, like the penitents under the law, lay our hands upon the head of our Great Sacrifice, and transfer our guilt to Him, who taketh away the sins of the world. Then shall we have no cause to fear the displeasure of an angry God: our iniquities shall be forgiven, and our sins be covered: and though unworthy in ourselves to obtain the smallest mercy, we shall be dealt with, not as servants merely, but as sons, and be made partakers of an everlasting inheritance.

MCCLXVIII.

GOD'S APPEAL TO SELF-JUSTIFYING SINNERS.

Mal. i. 8. *If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts.*

SELF-VINDICATION is natural to fallen man: it began in paradise, as soon as ever sin entered into

the world. "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat," was Adam's excuse, when exculpating himself at the expense both of his wife and of God himself[a]. Eve, too, excused herself by casting the blame of her transgression upon the serpent who had beguiled her[b]. In all their descendants, the same propensity has shewn itself, and often with a degree of vehemence amounting to indignation and disdain. In the time of the Prophet Malachi it prevailed to an extraordinary degree; or he at least records it with more than ordinary minuteness and force. He was inspired of God, to shew the Jewish people their transgressions: but to every charge which he brought against them, they replied with a degree of petulance savouring of extreme impiety and obduracy. When God addressed by him the priests, as despising his name, they utterly denied the charge; and insolently asked of God himself, "Wherein have we despised thy name?" And when he told them that they had offered polluted bread upon his altar, they challenged him to tell them when: "Wherein have we polluted thee[c]?" When the prophet complained of them as having "wearied the Lord with their words," they immediately asked, in the same contemptuous spirit, "Wherein have we wearied him[d]?" Even when God graciously invited them to return to him, saying, "Return unto me, and I will return unto you;" they deny that there was any necessity for such an invitation, saying, "Wherein shall we return[e]?" And when God tells them that they had robbed him, they reply, with undiminished effrontery, "Wherein have we robbed thee[f]?" And when God complains of all this, saying, "Your words have been stout against me; they still persist in the same impious strain, "What have we spoken so much against thee[g]?" In every instance God substantiates his charge, by declaring wherein they had committed the offence imputed to them: but, in the words of

[a] Gen. iii. 12. [b] Gen. iii. 13. [c] ver. 6, 7.
[d] Mal. ii. 17. [e] Mal. iii. 7. [f] Mal. iii. 8.
[g] Mal. iii. 13.

my text he does it in a way which nothing but the most inveterate impiety could resist. He appeals to them, Whether they could deny either the conduct of which they were habitually guilty, or the construction which he put upon it? "If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor: will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of Hosts."

In opening to you these words, we shall consider,

I. The appeal of God to man—

Nothing can exceed the condescension of Almighty God, in his reasonings with sinful man. He here grounds his appeal to us,

1. On the standard which exists in our own consciences—

[The Jews knew that God was to be served with the best of their flocks. His express command to them was, "If there be any blemish in the firstling of thy herd or of thy flock, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it to the Lord thy God[h]." To go in direct opposition to this command, they knew to be "evil:" they knew that it would, in fact, be a pouring of contempt on God himself; and justly did God denounce a curse on all who should so presumptuously sin against him[i].

Now we know the same, in relation to our *spiritual* sacrifices: we know that God requires the heart: and that whatever we present to him without the heart, is only to mock and insult him. It is an acknowledged truth, that to "draw nigh to God with our lips, whilst our hearts are far from him," is to offer him a sacrifice, which he can never accept[k].

Let us, then, examine our offerings by this test: and, if the services which we present to him be *ignorant*, *formal*, *hypocritical*, what do we, in fact, but commit, as far as we are able, the very same evil which obtained amongst the Jews, when they offered in sacrifice to God "the blind, the lame, and the sick?" That our services are *ignorant*, is but too clear: for we know not the true character of that God whom we profess to worship; nor how he is to be approached; nor what are the services we should render him. If we were duly enlightened on these subjects, it would be impossible for us to approach him as we do, or to conceive that he could ever be pleased with such services as we render him.

[h] Deut. xv. 21 [i] ver. 14. [k] Matt. xv. 7, 8.

In all our services, we are *formal.* We are punctual, perhaps, in certain observances of man's invention; and should be greatly offended if any one omitted to comply with certain prescriptions relating to the posture of the body. But, as to the prostration of the soul, we are unconcerned about it; and judge that we have done our duty, if we have gone through the appointed round of bodily motions, though our mind have not accorded with the body in any part of the service.

In truth, our services have been *hypocritical* throughout. Had any one come into the house of God, and overheard our confessions, petitions, and thanksgivings, he would have supposed that we were the most humble, spiritual, and devout persons in the universe: but had he been privy to the real state of our souls, how little would he have seen of humiliation in our confessions, or of fervour in our petitions, or of gratitude in our thanksgivings! He would, for the most part, have seen, that the whole was only a solemn mockery; and that, instead of being Israelites indeed, in whom there was *no guile*, we were base hypocrites, in whom was *no sincerity.* Times without number we implore mercy as miserable sinners; but if any man were to express his thoughts of us in accordance with our confessions, we should be full of wrath and indignation against him. And, if God were to offer to hear and answer many of our prayers, especially those which we have presented for the conversion and renovation of our souls, we should be ready to pray them back with ten times more fervour than ever they were uttered. As for our thanksgivings, the whole state of our souls has shewn that we *felt* nothing, and *meant* nothing, at the very time that we professed to *mean* so much and *feel* so much.

Now, let me ask, in the name of God himself, what reason you can have to think that such services should ever be accepted by him? If, indeed, he were like ourselves, and could see only the outward appearance, we might hope, that, being imposed upon and deceived, he would be pleased with us: but, when we bear in mind, that "he searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins," and that "all things are naked and open before him," we must be sure that our very "sacrifices are an abomination in his sight."]

2. On the standard which exists between man and man—

[We are fond of reducing God and his services to this standard; and to infer, that, because *we* would not act in such or such a way towards each other, *God* can never deal so or so with us. This, however, is no proper standard at all; because we bear a very different relation to God from what any man can bear to us. But yet God condescends, on this occasion,

to put himself on a footing with an earthly governor; and to ask, how even such an one would be pleased with the treatment which he receives at our hands? Now let us suppose, that, whilst professing allegiance to an earthly monarch, we were as lukewarm in his service as we are in the service of our God: that we shewed no more zeal for his honour, no more concern for his interests, no more respect for his laws, than we have towards our heavenly Master; would he consider us as good, loyal, duteous, and loving subjects? Would our love to his enemies, and conformity to their wishes, create no jealousy in his mind, especially whilst we thought that our attentions to him were quite equal to his deserts?

Or, to bring the matter more home to ourselves: if a son of ours felt as indifferent towards us, as we do towards our God; or a servant were as little anxious to please us, as we are to please him: if, when he rose in the morning, he thought as little what work he had to do for us; and, when he went through the day, attended as little upon us; and, when he lay down to rest at night, felt as little dissatisfied with himself as we do with our conduct towards God; should we be pleased with him? Should we account ourselves well treated by him? Should we, when he was brought before us, commend him, saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant?"

Now, if an earthly governor would not accept from us, or we from our own servants, such services as these, how can we suppose that God should be pleased with them? I think we shall scarcely venture to say that God is entitled to less at our hands than we are at the hands of our fellow-creatures: and therefore, according to this lowest of all standards, we are exceeding faulty, and may justly be condemned out of our own mouths.]

If we have nothing to urge in reply to this appeal, let us attend to,

II. The obvious and necessary deductions to be made from it—

It is plain from hence,

1. That our defects are exceeding great—

[If every service, of the kind we have been speaking of, is evil, what must we think of our whole lives, which have been spent either in open rebellion against God, or, at best, in a continued series of such services as these? To appreciate your state aright, I will not refer you to your more flagrant sins: I will set before you your very duties, yea, your best duties, your confessions, your prayers, your sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving: and I will take these, not in your private chambers only, where perhaps, from want of suitable helps,

you have not been able to express, as you could wish, the feelings of your hearts; but in the very house of God, where all suitable expressions have been provided for you, and put into your mouths, if you had had but a state of mind suited to them: yet even there have the words been repeated by you without one corresponding emotion in your souls, and your Amen been added without the smallest concern whether God ever heard the prayer or not. Tell me, in the review of a life thus spent, what should be your estimate of your state before God? If you would have a very mean opinion of a servant who had so conducted himself towards you, what should be your judgment of yourselves, who have so acted towards God?]

2. That all self-justification must be most offensive to God—

[Suppose a servant, who had dealt with you as you have with God, were to applaud himself as deserving commendation at your hands; What would you think of him? What would you think of his respect for you, or of his views of his duty towards you? Would you not be offended with his estimate of your character and your rights? What then must God think of you, when, instead of lothing yourselves for your short-comings and defects, you are taking credit to yourselves for your fidelity towards him, and claiming a reward for that very conduct which has excited nothing in his breast but wrathful indignation? You will find in Scripture, that there is no sin whatever marked with more heavy displeasure than self-righteousness and self-applause. It was this, more than any thing else, that sealed up the Jews under guilt and condemnation: they would "trust to their own righteousness, instead of submitting to the righteousness of God[1]:" and therefore they were rejected by God; whilst the idolatrous, but self-condemning, Gentiles were admitted to his favour. So shall you also, yea, and every child of man, find it, both in this world and in the world to come: the self-condemning Publican shall be justified before God; but the self-applauding Pharisee shall be condemned.]

3. That without a Saviour we must all perish—

[What has any one of us whereon to ground his hopes of acceptance with God? Our works will not even stand the test that we have established for our intercourse with each other; and how much less will they stand before the holy law of God? If, then, we have not a Saviour to make an atonement for our sins, and to work out a righteousness wherein we may be justified, what hope have we? Verily,

[1] Rom. ix. 30—33.

we have no more hope than Satan himself: for he may as well hope to satisfy divine justice, as we; or to merit heaven by his own works, as we. The very thought of seeking heaven by any righteousness of our own must be put away, as the most fatal delusion: and all of us, the best as well as the worst, must look to Christ alone, as "all our salvation and all our desire." Beloved brethren, I charge you before God to remember this: for no man can ever come to God but by Christ; "nor is there any other name given under heaven whereby any man can be saved, but the one name of Jesus Christ." "In Him must all the seed of Israel be justified; and in Him alone must they glory."]

4. That if any service of ours be ever accepted of our God, it must be entirely through our Lord Jesus Christ—

[After what has been said respecting the imperfection of our works, can it be hoped that any thing which we can do should ever find acceptance with God? Yes, if it be done for his glory, and not relied upon as a foundation of our hope before him. The services which we render to our governor are not perfect; yet are they pleasing to him, if they be done with a view to his honour and interest: so are the services which we ourselves receive from others most truly gratifying, when they are rendered from a principle of love. And God is infinitely gracious and condescending to accept our poor unworthy offerings, when they are presented to him in humility, and with a sincere desire to please and honour him. This is very strongly marked by God at the very time that he most strongly insists upon the necessity of presenting to him none but perfect offerings. Hear his words, in the 22d chapter of Leviticus: "Ye shall offer at your own will a male without blemish, of the beeves, of the sheep, or of the goats. But *whatsoever hath a blemish, that shall ye not offer;* for it shall not be acceptable for you. And whosoever offereth a sacrifice of peace-offerings unto the Lord, to accomplish a vow, or a free-will-offering in beeves or sheep, *it shall be perfect* to be accepted; *there shall be no blemish therein.* Blind, or broken, or maimed, or having a wen, or scurvy, or scabbed, *ye shall not offer these unto the Lord,* nor make an offering by fire of them upon the altar unto the Lord." Here you would suppose, that to present such imperfect offerings as ours were vain: and so it would be, if we relied upon them in the smallest measure for our acceptance with God: but, if we rely altogether on Christ's perfect sacrifice for our justification from sin, and then present our imperfect offerings to God, as tokens of our love, they shall come up with acceptance on his altar, and be truly pleasing in his sight. This is what, in the very

next words, he has expressly declared: "Either a bullock or a lamb that hath any thing superfluous or lacking in its parts, THAT MAYEST THOU OFFER FOR A FREE-WILL-OFFERING; but for a vow it shall not be accepted." Here you see the very distinction which your necessities require. If you would present any thing to God towards your justification, you must bring only the perfect righteousness of Christ: but if you would do any thing to glorify your God, your own poor services, mean and worthless as they are, shall be accepted of him for Christ's sake. And this is the very statement which is so frequently and so fully given us in the Gospel. St. Paul says, "By HIM let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name. But to do good, and to communicate, forget not: for *with such sacrifices God is well pleased*[m]." St. Peter also speaks to the same effect: "Ye are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ[n]." Be not discouraged, then, by the imperfection of your services: for, if only you do indeed set yourselves to seek the Lord, and endeavour to serve him with your whole hearts, he will not be extreme to mark what is done amiss; but will cast a veil of love over your imperfections, and crown you with his applause, saying, "Well done, good and faithful servants." Only "be steadfast, unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord;" and ye may be assured that "your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."]

[m] Heb. xiii. 15, 16. [n] 1 Pet. ii. 5.

MCCLXIX.

THE CALLING OF THE GENTILES.

Mal. i. 11. *From the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles: and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts.*

THROUGHOUT all the prophetic writings we shall find the predicted abandonment of the Jews followed by a promise respecting the future call of the Gentiles. It should seem as if God intended by this to provoke his people to jealousy, according as he had before intimated by Moses, in order that by any means he might stir them up to deprecate his threatened

judgments. In the passage before us, Jehovah complains of the extreme impiety of the Jewish nation. Amongst the priests themselves, who should have been an example to others, such was the selfishness and utter destitution of every religious principle, that none were to be found who would even shut the temple dòors for nought, or kindle a fire upon his altar but for their own temporal advantage. God therefore tells them, that he would "no more accept an offering at *their* hands." But would he therefore be destitute of a people, and be forgotten in the world? No: "*for*" he would take to himself a people from among the heathen, amongst whom such offerings should be presented to him as he would accept, and "his name," which the Jewish people had so dishonoured and despised, "should be great among them to the ends of the earth." Thus would he make their apostasy subservient to the good of others, or, as St. Paul expresses it, "the fall of the Jews should be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them should be the riches of the Gentiles[a]."

In further considering this prophecy, I shall notice,

I. What is implied in it—

We may see here by implication,

1. The intended abolition of the Mosaic law—

[Sacrifices and incense were to be offered at Jerusalem alone, and in the temple, in which God had chosen to place his name there[b]. But in the prophecy before us it is intimated, that incense and offerings should be presented to the Lord in *every* place; which could not be without a disannulling of the commandment before given. Of course, with this one commandment must the whole law be abrogated, because the whole priestly office, in all its most important operations, would be superseded. Nor is this an inference of mine only: it is drawn by an inspired Apostle from premises precisely similar. God had foretold, by David, that a new order of priesthood should arise, even one after the order of Melchizedec. This would of necessity militate against, and supersede, the established priesthood; that which was predicted being to arise from the tribe of Judah, whilst that which had been established was confined to the tribe of Levi. From hence the Apostle infers the total

[a] Rom. xi. 11, 12. [b] Deut. xii. 10—14.

abolition of the Levitical priesthood, and of the whole law with which it was connected[c]: and the same inference is plainly deducible from the prediction contained in our text.

This observation shews how mistaken the Jews are in thinking their ceremonial law to be of perpetual obligation; since their own prophets frequently, and in the plainest terms, intimated, that it was intended only for a season, to prepare the way for a better and more spiritual dispensation: and, in conversing with the Jews, it will be well to shew them this from their own Scriptures, as St. Paul himself has done, in the most satisfactory manner, in his Epistle to the Hebrews.]

2. The nature of that worship which alone is acceptable to God—

[Of the ceremonial observances, when unattended with a spiritual frame of mind, God himself has frequently spoken in the most contemptuous terms[d] ——— The temple itself, as the first martyr Stephen informed the Jews, was despicable in God's eyes, if its ordinances were not administered in a becoming manner[e]. It is the incense of a devout spirit, and the offering of a pure heart, that God approves: and wherever these are presented to him, there will he give manifest testimonies of his favourable acceptance. This is plainly intimated in the prophecy before us; and by our Lord himself it is unequivocally declared to the Samaritan woman; "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him[f]."

This is a point that deserves attention from us, as much as from the Jews. We, no less than they, are apt to rest in external observances, and to think that we serve God, if we perform some outward act which he prescribes. But we must never forget that he looketh at the heart, and estimates all our services entirely by that ——— "If we draw nigh to him with our lips, whilst our heart is far from him, we worship him in vain[g]."]

But to enter more fully into the prophecy, we must notice,

II. What is expressed in it—

It announces clearly,

[c] Heb. vii. 11—14.
[d] See Isai. i. 10—14. Jer. vi. 20. Amos v. 21—23.
[e] Isai. lxvi. 1, 2. with Acts vii. 48—50. [f] John iv. 21, 23.
[g] Matt. xv. 8, 9.

1. The calling of the Gentiles—

[It is surprising that the Jews should not have seen that the Gentiles were, in God's time, to be called into his Church. The prophecies relating to this subject were innumerable: yet not even the Apostles themselves, for several years after the day of Pentecost, were able to enter into their import, or to acquiesce in the purposes of the Most High. It will not be unprofitable to turn to a few passages in the Psalms, and in the Prophets, relating to this event[h] ——— We may consult also some passages adduced by the Apostles in relation to it[i] ——— What can be more clear? Even the text alone, if there had been no other passage, would have been sufficient to establish this point beyond a doubt. How strange then is it, that, even to this hour, the Jews should not be able to see in us the accomplishment of their own prophecies! But it has been well said, that prejudice has neither eyes nor ears; nor can any evidence suffice, without the operation of divine grace, to bear down its influence. We see this in relation to the Jews and *their* Scriptures; and we must not be stumbled, if we see it in Christians also, notwithstanding the superior light which they enjoy.]

2. The state of the world when that event shall take place—

["God's name will then be great," in every place, and in every heart. The regard paid to him will no longer be formal and fictitious: it will be spiritual and real, from the inmost soul. All his perfections will be then adored: all his dispensations will be received with the profoundest reverence, as the counsels of unerring wisdom, and as the fruits of unchanging love. The name of Christ especially, O how precious will that be! when all the glory of the Godhead is beheld in his face, and all the treasures of divine grace are received through him: verily, as the prophet has said, he will in that day "be exalted and extolled, and be very high." That this will be the case in the latter day, may be seen by what took place in the apostolic age. It may be farther seen in what is yet daily realized in our own hearts: and so far will it be from being diminished by the further diffusion of divine light, that in that day "the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days;" and "the knowledge of the Saviour's glory will be, no less in depth than in extent, as the waters that cover the sea" ———]

[h] Ps. xxii. 27. and lxxii. 11. In Ps. xcviii. 1—3. it is spoken of as if it were already accomplished. See also Isai. xi. 9. and xlix. 6, 22, 23. and Zech. viii. 20—22.

[i] Acts xv. 14—17. Rom. xv. 9—12.

This subject may be yet further IMPROVED—

1. For the edification of our own souls—

[Let us see how far our calling has been productive of suitable effects. What is the estimation in which our Saviour is held by us? and, What are the offerings which from day to day we are presenting before him? Truly if we view him aright, all other things are as dung and dross in comparison of him——— and, if we are serving him aright, our whole selves, body, soul, and spirit, are sanctified unto him, as a reasonable service[k] ———]

2. For the encouragement of our exertions in behalf of others—

[This prophecy must be fulfilled in all its extent. Whatever difficulties may lie in the way, they shall all vanish, as soon as the Lord's time is fully come. The evening shades may in appearance be more and more obscuring the horizon; but "in the evening time it shall be light." As instruments, we may be but weak: but this need not discourage us. We are not weaker than was the rod whereby Moses wrought all his miracles. If God be pleased to make use of us, "the depths of the sea shall become a way for the ransomed to pass over;" and "the rock shall pour forth its streams to give drink to the chosen people of the Lord." "The Lord will work; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."]

[k] Rom. xii. 1.

MCCLXX.

REPENTANCE GLORIFYING GOD.

Mal. ii. 2. *If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.*

THE whole Scripture bears witness, that "God willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live." For the advancement of this object, nothing is omitted; but every argument that can influence the human mind, whether in a way of terror or desire, is adduced. In the passage before us, the whole people of Israel, and the priests in particular, are addressed. Their sins

had been very aggravated: the offerers and the priests had been alike implicated; and in my text they are all called to repentance[a]. The *admonition* here given them is extremely solemn. In it we notice,

I. The duty prescribed—

This, in general terms, was repentance[b], which does all that a sinner can do to glorify that God, whom, by his past iniquities, he has dishonoured. "It gives glory to God's name," and honours every one of his perfections.

1. His holiness—

[The Law of God is holy: it is a transcript of the mind and will of God himself: and every penitent expresses his perfect approbation of it, and his shame and sorrow on account of his numberless violatious of it[c] — — —]

2. His justice—

[God has denounced his judgments against every violation of his law. And the penitent acknowledges from his inmost soul his desert of those judgments. He attempts not to extenuate his guilt; but confesses, that death, everlasting "death, is the just wages of his sin" — — —]

3. His mercy—

[On God's mercy the penitent casts himself, as Benhadad did upon the mercy of the king of Israel; "going before him with a rope round his neck, and sackcloth on his loins;" and relying simply on the compassion of him against whom he had warred, and whose captive he was[d] — — —]

4. His truth—

[The penitent lays hold on the promises which God has made to returning sinners, and to Christ, "in whom all the promises of God are yea and amen." He looks to the Saviour as having died for him; and he pleads before God the merit of *his* blood; of "His blood, which cleanseth from all sin"— — —]

This is genuine repentance, such as is prescribed under the Christian dispensation: nor will any man, who truly "lays to heart" his past sins, be satisfied with any thing less — — — Nor will any thing less prevail, to avert,

II. The judgment threatened—

[a] See Mal. i. 7, 8, 13, 14. [b] Josh. vii. 19.
[c] Here his views and feelings may be stated.
[d] 1 Kings xx. 31, 32.

God declared, that, if his people would not give glory to him, "he would curse their very blessings:" yea "he had cursed the offenders already, because of their impenitence." Now, it is a fact, that God has inflicted a curse upon the whole world; not only by temporal judgments of various kinds, but by turning their very blessings into a curse. This he has done in relation to,

1. Their temporal blessings—

[Behold men in the possession of health, and wealth, and all those things which the carnal mind affects; and say, what use they make of these benefits. They are all employed as occasions and instruments of sin; and involve the possessors of them in far greater iniquity than they would have been able to commit if these blessings had been withheld from them. The like evil accrues also from their domestic blessings. Men seek for happiness in the married state, and in the increase of their families. But, if we look through the world, we see little but misery arising out of these relations; husbands and wives, parents and children, only embittering each other's life; and proving, in too many instances, no better than curses to each other — — —]

2. Their spiritual blessings—

[God has given his dear Son to die for men; his Holy Spirit to instruct them; and his holy Gospel to make known to them all the provisions of his grace and love. But how are these received? In every place where the Gospel comes, divisions are created; and the great mass of the people make it an occasion of offence. Even Christ himself is made "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence;" over which men fall, to their utter ruin[e]. And the monuments of grace, whom God raises up in different places, are treated with scorn and derision; so that the very means which God has used for the salvation of men, become the occasions of their heavier condemnation. Our blessed Lord declared this to be the effect of the blessings vouchsafed to the people of Capernaum: they were "lifted up to heaven in their privileges, and were cast down the deeper into hell" for their abuse of them[f]. And this, alas! is the unhappy portion of the great mass of those to whom the tidings of salvation are sent: they will not repent, but will still go on in their wickedness: and the greatest blessing that God has ever vouchsafed to them becomes their heaviest curse — — —]

[e] Isai. viii. 14, 15. Luke ii. 34, 35. Matt. xi. 6.
[f] Matt. xi. 21—24.

LEARN then,

1. What is the proper object of a Christian's ambition—

[You should not be content to avoid gross and open sin: you should seek to "glorify your God[g]:" and if you have not done this by a course of holy obedience, you should at least endeavour to do it by a course of penitential sorrow, and by a due improvement of those blessings which God has vouchsafed to you in his Gospel[h] — — —]

2. What is the proper object of a Christian's hope—

[Only walk with God as his redeemed people, and you shall have all imaginable blessings from your God: as he has said, "The faithful man shall abound with blessings[i]." Nay more: as for his people of old "he turned the curses of Balaam into blessings to them[k]," so will he do to you: your trials, your troubles, your losses, your very temptations, shall be the means of weaning you more and more from this world, and perfecting the work of divine grace in your souls[l], and bringing you into a state of nearer access to God, and preparing you for higher degrees of glory; according to that saying of St. Paul, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory[m]." This, brethren, may be your assured hope, if only you will serve your God aright: such "showers of blessings shall be poured out upon you[n]," and so greatly will God magnify himself in your salvation[o]. Only do you glorify him here, and "he will be glorified in you" to all eternity[p].]

g 1 Cor. vi. 20. h Jer. xiii. 15, 16. i Prov. xxviii. 20.
k Neh. xiii. 2. l Rom. v. 3—5. m 2 Cor. iv. 17.
n Ezek. xxxiv. 26. o Phil. i. 20. p 2 Thess. i. 10.

MCCLXXI.

THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE.

Mal. ii. 5—7. *My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.*

THE priests, in the days of Malachi, were extremely degenerate. It was to them principally that

the prophet addressed himself, because to them principally was owing the degeneracy of the people. In the preceding chapter he complains of them as despising God, and polluting his altar, and offering to him such worthless sacrifices as they would not have dared to offer to an earthly governor; yea, and as so venal, that "not one amongst them would shut the doors of the temple for nought, or kindle a fire on his altar for nought[a]." In this chapter, after calling them to repentance[b], he contrasts their conduct with that of those to whom the priesthood was first committed; such as Aaron, and Eleazar, and Phinehas, whom he designates by the name of Levi, from whom they sprang. The piety of those early priests he describes in the words of my text; and then, *with a special reference to the terms used in that description*, he addresses the priests of his day, saying, "But *ye* are *departed out of* the way: *ye* have *caused many to stumble* at the law: ye have *corrupted the covenant* of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts."

The description given of the Jewish priesthood, at the period of their first appointment, will serve to shew us what the Christian priesthood should be. In it we see the minister of the Gospel drawn, as it were, at full length. We see,

I. His obligations—

With Levi, the Jewish priesthood, "God had made a covenant of life and peace"—

[At the time that the people turned aside to worship the golden calf, Moses gave commandment, that they who were on the Lord's side should gird on their swords, and go through the camp, slaying every one, even his nearest relatives, if he should find them in the act of idolatry: and the tribe of Levi in particular obeyed with promptitude this trying injunction, and executed without any partiality this severe decree[c]. As a reward for this ("for this fear wherewith Levi feared him"), God gave to that tribe the priesthood in perpetuity: "Of Levi he said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one; who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor

[a] Mal. i. 7—11. [b] ver. 1, 2. [c] Exod. xxxii. 26—28.

knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt-sacrifice upon thine altar[d]." The same grant was re-renewed to Phinehas, on account of his zeal in slaying a prince of Israel, who, in the sight of all the congregation, had taken a Midianitish woman to his tent[e]. "The covenant of an everlasting priesthood" given to him, was that which, in my text, is called "a covenant of life and peace." And to that tribe was the priesthood confined, even to the latest ages; they alone being consecrated by God to that high office, and having God himself for their portion; whilst all the other tribes had their portion allotted out of the Promised Land[f].]

The Christian priesthood, in like manner, are consecrated to the special service of the altar—

[Every pious minister has been truly "called of God, as was Aaron;" and every one, at his ordination, expressly avows his persuasion, that he has been moved by the Holy Ghost to take the office of the ministry upon him. Every such minister has entered into covenant with God at his altar, engaging to renounce all worldly pursuits, and to dedicate himself exclusively to the work he has undertaken. Of all engagements that any man can enter into, this is the most solemn: for by this act he makes himself responsible for all the souls committed to his charge, and must answer with his own soul for the blood of every one who perishes through his neglect[g]. St. Paul, under a sense of his deep responsibility, said, "A dispensation is committed to me: and woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel[h]!" And "the same necessity is laid on" every minister of Christ; who, by his own solemn engagement, is bound to disregard even life itself, in the discharge of this all-important duty[i].]

In the description of the Jewish priests, a Christian minister may further see,

II. His office—

The Jewish priests were "messengers from God" to all the tribes of Israel—

[They were to study the law of God, and to teach it unto others; at the same time exemplifying it both in their hearts and lives. To them the people were to apply for information; and they were to give their instructions with simplicity and

[d] Deut. xxxiii. 8—10.
[e] Numb. xxv. 6—8, 11—13.
[f] Numb. xviii. 20, 21.
[g] Ezek. xxxiii. 6—9.
[h] 1 Cor. ix. 16, 17.
[i] Acts xx. 24.

godly sincerity: "the law of truth was to be in their mouth, and no iniquity was to be found in their lips." At the same time, they were so to "walk with God in peace and equity," that their whole life might be a visible lesson to the people, or all that God required of them.]

Such "messengers" are the Christian priesthood—

[Ministers should not only study the Gospel, but be able to declare it from their own experience; saying, "What my ears have heard, my eyes have seen, and my hands have handled, of the word of life, that same declare I unto you[k]." In truth, brethren, "we are ambassadors from God:" we come in the name, and stand in the very place, of God himself. We bring to you from him "a covenant of life and peace[l]:" we set before you the terms on which he will accept you to his favour: and "we beseech you, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God[m]." The word which we deliver is God's, and not our own; and "it must be received, not as our word, but God's[n]." And what we deliver with our lips, we are bound to exemplify in our lives, so as to be living "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men[o]." We should ourselves be living witnesses of its excellency and power, so as to address you in the words of St. Paul; "Whatsoever ye have seen and heard in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you[p]." Nor should you account it any indignity to look up to us for information, and to "receive the word at our mouth." True, you have the Scriptures in your hands; and by them should you "try every word that proceeds from us[q]:" but, whatever we deliver in accordance with them must be received by you as from God himself: for be ye assured, "if you despise it, you despise not us who deliver it, but God himself" who revealed it[r].]

In the discharge of this office, God gives him many promises for,

III. His encouragement—

The Jewish priests were instruments in God's hands, to "turn many from iniquity"—

[God had promised to all his faithful servants, that, though they should not all be crowned with equal success, no one of them should labour in vain. And this he casts in the teeth of the false prophets: "I have not sent these prophets; yet they ran: I have not spoken unto them; yet they prophesied. But

[k] 1 John i. 1—3.
[l] Ezek. xxxvii. 26, 27. Mark the agreement of this with the text.
[m] 2 Cor. v. 18—20. [n] 1 Thess. ii. 13. [o] 2 Cor. iii. 3.
[p] Phil. iv. 9. [q] 1 Thess. v. 21. 1 John iv. 1.
[r] 1 Thess. iv. 8. with Luke x. 16.

if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings[s]."]

But far greater encouragement is given to us under the Christian dispensation—

[The Gospel is far more powerful than the law. It is, by way of eminence, "the rod of God's strength[t];" and has been in every age "the power of God unto salvation, to all who truly believed it[u]." St. Paul, by means of it, "turned multitudes from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God[x]." To the Thessalonian Church he could make his appeal: "Ye see what manner of entering in we had unto you; and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come[y]." And are not we also assured, that, if we "take heed to ourselves and to our doctrine, we shall both save ourselves and them that hear us[z]?"

Behold, then, what encouragement is here! Were we instrumental only to the saving of one soul, it would well repay a whole life of labour. Yet may we hope to "turn *many* unto righteousness," if we faithfully discharge our high office; and, as the fruit of our labours, to have "many for our joy and crown of rejoicing in the last day[a]."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have taken, or are about to take, upon themselves the sacred office of the ministry—

[You have seen what holy and useful priests there were under the law: and shall we, whose employment is so much more spiritual, be less distinguished under the Gospel? Think, I pray you, of your obligations — — — your offices — — — and your encouragements; and "give yourselves wholly to these things," that your profiting may appear unto all. At the same time, bear in mind your fearful responsibility: for of all people under heaven, none are so contemptible in the sight both of God and man, as those who violate their covenant-engagements, and mind the fleece only, instead of attending to their flocks[b] — — —]

2. Those who desire to derive benefit from the ministry of the Gospel—

[s] Jer. xxiii. 21, 22. [t] Ps. cx. 2. [u] Rom. i. 16.
[x] Acts xxvi. 18. [y] 1 Thess. i. 9, 10. [z] 1 Tim. iv. 16.
[a] 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.
[b] ver. 8, 9. with 1 Sam. ii. 30. This subject should be touched with a due regard to the *age* and authority of the preacher.

[If your ministers must be careful in the discharge of their duty, so must you also in the discharge of yours: and if they have need to fear lest they contract additional guilt by the neglect of their duty; so have you, lest you, by not paying due attention to the word, bring upon yourselves an aggravated condemnation. Capernaum, which was exalted to heaven in its privileges, was cast the deeper into hell for its abuse of them. Yea, even Sodom and Gomorrha will have a less severe doom at the day of judgment, than they will who harden themselves against the Gospel of Christ. Remember, you too have entered into covenant with God: and you too have your proper offices to sustain and execute, if you will approve yourselves God's faithful servants. May you then know the day of your visitation! and may we so preach, and you hear, that we may all rejoice together for ever in the great day of the Lord Jesus!]

MCCLXXII.

THE EFFECTS OF CHRIST'S ADVENT.

Mal. iii. 1—3. *Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his people, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' sope. And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.*

THE goodness and long-suffering of God are often made an occasion of profane derision and atheistical contempt. Because he does not instantly interpose to vindicate the honour of his injured Majesty, many will deny his interference in the concerns of men, and his determination to punish sin in a future world. We are assured that such scoffers will be found in the latter days, who will insultingly cry, "Where is the promise of his coming[a]?" And such there have been in every age and place. In the days of Malachi there were many who "even wearied God" by their impious language: they said, that God delighted in the

[a] 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

wicked as much as in the good; and denied that he would ever put any difference between them; "Where," said they, "is the God of Judgment[b]?" It was in answer to that question that the Lord Jesus Christ inspired the prophet to announce his advent in the flesh, and to declare the discriminating effects that should be produced by it.

Let us notice what he says respecting,

I. Our Lord's advent—

Jesus is here described under the most august titles—

[He is "the Lord," the supreme Ruler and Governor of heaven and earth, "the Lord of all[c]," even "Lord of lords, and King of kings[d]." Yet, notwithstanding his equality with the Father as God, he "assumes the form of a servant, and comes as "the Messenger of the covenant." He made a covenant with the Father for us, and himself became "the surety of that covenant[e]," pledging himself to God, that our part should be performed, and to us also, that God's part should be fulfilled. This covenant he confirmed and ratified with his own blood[f]; and he "calls us into the bonds of it," assuring us, that it is "ordered in all things and sure," and that all the blessings of it shall be imparted to those who believe in him. In this office he was "an object of desire and delight" long before he came into the world: He was "the desire of all nations[g]:" not indeed that all actually sought and delighted in him; but he was the joy of all that knew him; they who saw his day, though at ever so great a distance, rejoiced in it[h]; and if all the earth had known his office and character, they would have been like-minded with those, who "waited for him as the consolation of Israel," and "looked for redemption in Jerusalem[i]."]

The circumstances of his advent also are minutely foretold—

[He was to be preceded by a herald, or harbinger, who was to announce his speedy approach, and "to prepare" the minds of men for his reception. This messenger was John, who had the distinguished honour of pointing him out as that very "Lamb of God, who should take away the sin of the world[k]."

[b] Mal. ii. 17. [c] Acts x. 36. [d] Rev. xvii. 14.
[e] Heb. vii. 22. and viii. 6. [f] Luke xxii. 20. 1 Cor. xi. 25.
[g] Hagg. ii. 7. [h] John viii. 56. [i] Luke ii. 25, 38.
[k] John i. 23, 29.

The temple was the place to which in a more especial manner he was to come: yes, it was while the second temple was yet standing, that he was to come. And thither was he brought at the purification of his mother, when that holy patriarch, Simeon, took him up in his arms, and blessed God for permitting him thus to embrace the promised Saviour[l]. It was at the temple also that his parents found him conversing with the doctors when he was but twelve years of age: and, when his mother expressed the sorrow that she and her husband had felt while seeking him, he answered, (doubtless in reference to this and similar prophecies,) "Wist ye not, that I must be at my Father's[m]?" It was in the temple that he delivered many of his instructive discourses, and wrought many stupendous miracles, and he repeatedly purged it from the profanations which the venal priests had allowed[n].

His advent, however, though so long predicted, was to be "sudden," as in fact it was: for though there was then a general expectation of his arrival, yet the manner of his appearance was so contrary to the carnal notions which were entertained respecting him, that he was overlooked; and, instead of being welcomed as the Messiah, was rejected as an impostor.

The repetition of this prediction in the close of the verse is remarkable as being intended to evince the certainty of the event predicted.]

The prophet, having thus foretold the Messiah's advent, proceeds to declare,

II. Its diversified effects—

As the characters of those, to whom he was to come, were very various, so his advent was to prove,

1. Discriminating—

[Many in that and every age have professed a great regard for the law of God, while they have really hated it in their hearts, and have shewn their utter enmity to God under the semblance of zeal for his honour. On the other hand, many, who have been despised of their fellow-creatures on account of some enormities they may have committed, have really possessed a broken and contrite heart, and have proved incomparably more willing to submit to Jesus, than any self-applauding Pharisee ever was. Now to discover these hidden dispositions of the heart was one intent of our Lord's coming: "He was set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign that should be spoken against, *that the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed*[o]." And this was the very

[l] Luke ii. 27—29.
[m] Ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρός μου.
[n] Matt. xxi. 12, 13, 14, 23.
[o] Luke ii. 34, 35.

effect produced by him; for the Scribes and Pharisees, filled with a conceit of their superior knowledge and goodness, cast him out with abhorrence, while many publicans and harlots believed on him to the saving of their souls. This very effect also still follows from the preaching of his gospel; the precious are separated from the vile, and men, though unconscious of it themselves, are led to manifest their real characters, as careless Gallios, atheistical scoffers, proud Pharisees, or humble believers.]

2. Purifying—

[Some there were in our Lord's day, who, the more they were rubbed with the fuller's sope, and heated by the refiner's fire, were the more freed both from their *outward* filthiness and their *inward* depravity: the apostle tells us of many, who, having once abandoned themselves to the most infamous lusts, were "washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God[p]." So at this time many of the "sons of Levi," not ministers only, but people also (for all believers are now "priests unto God") are "purified as silver and gold, and offer to the Lord their offerings in righteousness." And it is no small consolation to them to know, that, while they are in the furnace, the Refiner himself "sitteth" over them, watching the process with all due solicitude, and taking care that they shall lose nothing but their dirt and dross.]

3. Destructive—

[A "refiner's fire" will consume the dross, and "fullers' sope" will destroy the filth, of that to which it is applied: so will our Lord eventually destroy many of those to whom he comes; He will prove to them no other than "a stumbling-block, and a gin, and a snare[q]." When he appeared in the days of his flesh, how many were there that could not "stand" the trial! their prejudices were excited, their enmity called forth, their hearts hardened, their sins multiplied. Thus it is also in this day: Christ comes, in the preaching of his Gospel, and "sits as a refiner and purifier of silver:" but do all, to whom his word is preached, approve themselves to be pure gold? Would to God that this were the case! But, alas! the greater part shew themselves to be but "reprobate silver," or mere dross; who, instead of being purified and rendered "meet for their Master's use," are only "as vessels of wrath, fitted for everlasting destruction[r]."]

Let two QUESTIONS close this interesting subject—

[p] 1 Cor. vi. 11. [q] Isai. viii. 14. [r] Rom. ix. 22.

1. What reception have you given to Christ since his first coming?

[Ministers are sent, like John, to prepare his way; they are "a voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert an highway for our God!" Let me then ask, Are you "seeking this Lord?" Are you "delighting in him as the Messenger of the covenant?" Do you open your hearts to him as "his temple," and invite "the King of glory to enter in?" Are you welcoming him even under the character of a refiner, and saying, 'Put me, Lord, into any furnace, so that I may but come out of it purified as gold?" Is it your one desire and endeavour to "offer unto him your offerings in righteousness?" and do the sacrifices of prayer and praise ascend up daily from the altar of your hearts, inflamed by fire that you have received from heaven? This, this is the reception which he should meet with; God grant that he may be thus precious to all our souls!]

2. What preparation have you made for his future advent?

[It is no less certain that He will come again, than that he has already come. Nor will his advent be less "sudden" than at his first arrival: yea rather, as Noah's flood, it will come wholly unexpected by the world at large[s]. "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?" That will be a discriminating day indeed: all that have ever lived will have "the counsels of their hearts made manifest;" and the tares shall then be separated from the wheat, and the sheep from the goats. Alas! how will his fire then burn up the ungodly[t]! and how strict a scrutiny must every one undergo, before he shall be finally approved[u]! Brethren, are ye ready? Are ye "prepared to meet your God?" Have ye been so purified from the love of sin, that ye are now "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light?" Are ye so "seeking and delighting in Jesus" now, that ye can give up your account to him with joy and not with grief? O say not, Where is the God of judgment? Think not that he delighteth in any who commit iniquity: but know that "he will come even as a thief in the night;" and that it is to those only who look for him, that he will appear to their everlasting salvation[x].]

[s] Matt. xxiv. 37—39.
[t] Compare Mal. iv. 1. Nah. i. 6. Rev. vi. 15—17.
[u] 1 Cor. iii. 13, 14.
[x] Heb. ix. 28.

MCCLXXIII.

THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD.

Mal. iii. 6. *I, the Lord, change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*

THERE is not any thing in the whole creation that is in itself immutable. The angels indeed are, by God's gracious favour, established, so that they are no longer in any danger of sinning: but the fall of the apostate angels sufficiently shews, that the highest creatures are changeable in themselves; and that their stability, whatever it be, is derived from, and dependent on, the power that formed them. As for man, he is in a state of continual change: some of us are yet in a state of childhood: some are grown up to maturity: some have arrived at the period when nature hastens to decay, and when their great last change is near at hand: but all are changing every day, every hour, every moment: like the earth which we inhabit, we have our revolutions of day and night, summer and winter; and in a short period shall undergo an infinitely greater change than any we ever yet experienced. But there is one who changeth not; even Jehovah, from whom all other beings derive their existence. This immutability he claims as his prerogative, and mentions it as a source of unspeakable blessings to his people. In considering his words, we shall notice,

I. The immutability of God—

The gods of the heathen were frail and perishable, being wood and stone: but Jehovah is immutably the same,

1. In his essence—

[There is nothing *from without* that can effect a change upon him; because all things were formed by him, and depend upon him for their agency and existence. Nor is there any principle *within* him that can operate to produce a change; because a contrariety of principle would argue imperfection, and consequently be a denial of his Godhead. Besides, if he were to change, it must be either for the better or the worse: if for the better, he was not perfect before; and if for the

worse, he would not be perfect now: in either case he cannot be God. His very name, JEHOVAH, implies and supposes immutability.]

2. In his perfections—

[He ever was, and ever will be, the same holy, and just, and good, and merciful Being, that he now is. He was not more just, when he condemned the fallen angels; nor more merciful, when he sent his only-begotten Son into the world. In the one case he *displayed* his justice, and, in the other, his mercy, more than he had done before; but his perfections in either case remained the same. "He is a rock: his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he[a]."]

3. In his purposes—

[Every thing is done agreeably to "his eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord[b]." God is said indeed to have "repented that he had made man[c]," and that he had raised Saul to be king[d]: he also revoked the sentence denounced against Nineveh[e], and Hezekiah[f]: on these accounts he may be thought to have altered his original purpose: but he speaks only after the manner of men, who change their conduct in consequence of a change of mind: God knew from the beginning what he would do[g]: and the change was, not in his purposes, but in his dispensations *according to his purpose*[h].]

4. In his promises—

["All the promises of God in Christ are yea, and amen[i]." If we ever imagine that they fail of their accomplishment, it is wholly owing to our own infirmity[k]. There is no foundation whatever for any such apprehension: for "his gifts and calling are without repentance[l]." We must distinguish indeed between the promises that are conditional, and those which are unconditional: those which are conditional, are of no force, if the condition whereon they are suspended be not performed: and, in reference to those, God said to his people, "Ye shall know my breach of promise[m]." But the unconditional promises (such as that which says "the gates of hell shall never prevail against the Church[n]") are as firm as Omnipotence can make them: "heaven and earth shall pass away; but not a jot or tittle of God's word shall ever pass away[o]." In the day of judgment every believer will be constrained to confess, that,

[a] Deut. xxxii. 4. [b] Eph. i. 11. and iii. 11. [c] Gen. vi. 6.
[d] 2 Sam. xv. 35. [e] Jonah iii. 4, 10. [f] Isai. xxxviii. 1, 5.
[g] Acts xv. 18. [h] Isai. xiv. 24, 27. and xlvi. 10.
[i] 2 Cor. i. 20. [k] Ps. lxxvii. 8, 10. [l] Rom. xi. 29.
[m] Numb. xiv. 30, 34. [n] Matt. xvi. 18. [o] Luke xxi. 33.

"of all the good things which God had spoken concerning him, not one has failed[p]."]

Nor is this a merely speculative truth, but one in which our welfare is deeply involved. This will appear, if we consider,

II. The benefit we derive from it—

To this alone can we ascribe it, that "we have not long since been consumed"—

[The Israelites in this respect were types of us. They were a stiff-necked people, that deserved, on ten thousand occasions, to be destroyed utterly. Moreover, if left to themselves or to their enemies, they would again and again have been consumed. But God spared and preserved them for his word's sake. He had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that in their seed should all nations be blessed; and on that account, though he visited the Israelites with many judgments, he did not wholly destroy them. "He changed not; *therefore* they were not consumed."

And what other reason can be assigned for our continuance on mercy's ground? *Have we never merited excision?* Search, and judge——— *Have we no enemies, who would gladly execute upon us the Divine judgments*, if they could gain permission? What else do Satan and his hosts so earnestly desire? ——— *Have we no inward fire, which, if suffered to burst forth, would effect our ruin?* We should soon follow Judas and Ahithophel, if God should withdraw from us his restraining grace——— *Have we not at some time or other been, as it were, within a hair's breath of ruin*, either from sickness, or accident, or from some foul transgression which would have issued in final obduracy?——— Let us then "give God the glory." Our preservation has not been the effect of our own wisdom, or strength, or goodness, but of God's unchangeable love and mercy. It is to his immutability we owe it, that, notwithstanding all our provocations, he has not been stirred up to destroy us: had he been mutable, like us, his wrath would long since have broken forth against us, and consumed us utterly.]

In this view the Holy Scriptures uniformly represent our obligations to the Deity—

[Moses traced to this source, even to the immutability of Jehovah, the continued mercies which Israel experienced in his day[q]. In the Psalms, God himself has been pleased to shew explicitly in what manner he will deal with his offending people, so as to reconcile their welfare with his own veracity[r].

[p] Josh. xxiii. 14. [q] Deut. vii. 6—9. [r] Ps. lxxxix. 28—35.

By the Prophet Isaiah he expresses a holy jealousy, lest his dispensations should be misconstrued as violations of his word: and declares, that whatever come to pass in the course of his providence, he will never break his covenant with his people, nor suffer his kindness to depart from them[s]. In short, the whole volume of inspiration attests the same blessed truth, that "we are not consumed, because the Divine compassions fail not[t];" and that "the Lord does not forsake his people, because it hath pleased him to make them his people[u]."]

INFER—

1. What evidence have we of the Divinity of the Lord Jesus?

[Immutability is the unalienable prerogative of the Deity. Creatures may be fixed by God in the condition in which they are: but, as they have only a derived existence, there must have been a period when they began to be what they were not before. But Jesus is, and ever has been, the same with respect to the nature which he possessed before his incarnation[x]; and therefore, with respect to that nature, he is truly and properly God[y]. Let us then hold fast this blessed truth, and rejoice in Christ as an unchangeable Saviour.]

2. What consolation does this subject administer to believers?

[The frames and feelings of believers are extremely variable: but He who hath chosen them has "no variableness, neither shadow of turning[z];" and "whom he loveth, he loveth to the end[a]." Now this consideration God has endeavoured strongly to impress upon our minds, (he has even confirmed his promises with an oath,) on purpose that we may derive strong consolation from it[b]. Let every one therefore take comfort from it: and be encouraged, not to indulge sloth and security, (for that were a horrible abuse of this doctrine,) but to apply to God for fresh mercies, and to regard past communications as an earnest and pledge of future blessings.]

3. What a ground of terror is here afforded to the impenitent?

[God has said, that "except we repent, we shall all perish;" and, that "except we be born again, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven[c]." If therefore any impenitent or unregenerate man be saved, God must falsify his word. O that those

[s] Isai. liv. 8—10. [t] Lam. iii. 22. [u] 1 Sam. xii. 22.
[x] Heb. i. 10—12. and xiii. 8. [y] 1 Tim. iii. 16.
[z] Jam. i. 17. [a] John xiii. 1. [b] Heb. vi. 17, 18.
[c] John. iii. 3.

amongst you who are unconverted would consider, for one moment, on what ground they stand! Beloved brethren, consider this; *Either God must change, or you.* But will *God* change? "Is he a man, that he should lie; or the son of man, that he should repent[d]?" Will he alter his very nature, and sacrifice all his perfections, in order to save you? All that he can do consistently with his own honour, he is ready and willing to do: but you cannot suppose that he will, or can, divest himself of all the properties of the Godhead, to save you *in your sins.* Know, then, that there must be a change in *you:* and, if you become not new creatures in Christ Jesus, you must perish. As long as God is true, your doom is fixed. O "turn ye then! for why will ye die?"]

[d] Numb. xxiii. 19. 1 Sam. xv. 29.

MCCLXXIV.

SIN A ROBBERY OF GOD.

Mal. iii. 8. *Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me.*

FIDELITY in Ministers, how unacceptable soever it may be to their hearers, is their indispensable duty. Accordingly, we find all the prophets, and all the Apostles, distinguished for it, notwithstanding they exercised it at the peril of their lives. And God's word to all his servants is, "He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully." True it is, that in the execution of this duty we may be accounted harsh: but we must commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God, and deal faithfully with all, "whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear." The Prophet Malachi has set us, in this respect, a noble example; seeing that he charged the whole nation of Israel with being thieves and robbers in the sight of God. In conformity with this example, I will proceed to shew you,

I. What an odious thing sin is—

By the excuses which we invent for it, and the specious names we put upon it, we contrive to hide from ourselves its horrid deformity: but, if we look at it as it is represented in the Scriptures, we shall not hesitate to pronounce it odious in the extreme.

Hear God's description of it, as existing,

1. In our very nature—

["The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be[a]." By "the carnal mind" we are to understand the disposition of every man by nature: and this is not merely *inimical* to God, but *enmity itself* against him: there is not any faculty in his soul that is in accordance with God; nor any thing that is in God that is pleasing to him. There is the same contrariety between him and God, as between fire and water, or between light and darkness; which cannot coalesce in any degree, but have a mutual tendency to destroy each other. "The carnal mind not only *is not*, but *cannot be*, subject to God's law." Were it ouly *inimical* to God, a reconciliation might be hoped for: but the whole soul being *enmity itself* against God, it can never be brought to submission to God, till the enmity itself is slain. What a picture does this give us of our fallen nature! There is nothing in man which does not hate God; nor any thing in God which man does not hate. What can be conceived more odious than this?]

2. In the more moral of mankind—

[Of those who are grossly immoral, I forbear to speak. But look at those who, like the Pharisees of old, have a semblance of religion; and who, from a conceit of their own superior sanctity, look with contempt on their less specious neighbours: of these our Lord says, that they are whited sepulchres, which have a fair outside indeed, but "within are full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness." Now, let us endeavour to realize this image. Let us suppose a grave, in which a number of bodies have been buried, opened, whilst the putrefaction is in full process: we could not endure the sight or smell, even for a moment. Yet such an object is the heart of a decent Pharisee in the sight of God. His exterior before men may be fair enough; but God, to whom the inmost recesses of the soul are open, turns away from him with disgust, not able to endure the sight of such a nauseous object. Nor can we ever have a just view of our fallen nature, till we see it in this lothesome and offensive light.]

3. In those who make a faint profession of religion—

[Nothing but perfect sincerity can approve itself to God. If "the heart be not right with him," it is as odious in his eyes as if it were altogether insensible before him. Its professions

[a] Rom. viii. 7.

of sanctity render it only the more detestable in his sight, whilst the life corresponds not with his professions. To the Philadelphian Church, God says, "I would thou wert cold or hot: but, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth[b]." To our ears, this very expression is so offensive, that, if it were not the very word of God himself, we could not venture to use it: but the more offensive it is, the more it serves to illustrate that which I am endeavouring to mark—the odiousness of sin. Let us remember, that there is nothing of gross sin imputed to these persons: nothing is laid to their charge, but a want of zeal in the service of their God: yet of *them* is it said, that they fill Jehovah himself with such disgust, that he cannot endure the least connexion with them, but casts them off with utter abhorrence. What can shew sin in its true colours, if this do not?]

4. In those who, after some profession of religion, turn back from it—

[To these is applied a proverb, which places them in their just light: "They turn back with the dog to his vomit, and with the sow, that was washed, to the wallowing in the mire." Take these images: ponder them in your minds: conceive what *a taste* they display: and then transfer the idea to a man's returning to sin. Is it possible for language to convey, either in more appropriate or more disgusting terms, the truth I am insisting on? Only let us realize these images, and we shall need nothing further to shew us "the exceeding sinfulness of sin."]

From this view of the odiousness of sin, let me proceed to state,

II. What reason we have to humble ourselves before God on account of it—

Men will not acknowledge themselves so vile as God represents them to be: and, even when he himself accuses them, they will insolently deny the charge, just as those did whom the prophet addressed in the words before us. It is remarkable, that to every distinct charge of the prophet, whether implied or expressed, the Jews returned the very same challenge: "Return unto me." "Wherein shall we return?" that is, 'We do not know that we have ever departed: how then can we return?' So in the text: "Ye have robbed God." 'Wherein have we robbed him?

[b] Rev. iii. 15, 16.

'Tis a false accusation, a downright calumny.' So again; "Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord: yet ye say, Wherein have we spoken so much against thee?" 'We deny the charge altogether.' Now this shews the spirit with which men reply against God himself. But, if we be dared to the proof of our assertions, we will meet the challenge, and adduce our proofs.

[We say, then, of you, my brethren, whether ye will acknowledge it or not, that "ye have robbed God, even this whole nation[c]." Ye have robbed him of his dues to a great extent. Even in regard to your temporal concerns, who amongst you has been a faithful steward to his God? Whatever has been committed to you in respect of property, it has been put into your hands, as stewards, to dispose of altogether for your God. But who has not accounted it his own; and disposed of it rather for the gratification of his own lusts than for the honour of his God? But, waving this matter, I will speak of other things which God may justly claim as his own. Your Sabbaths, how have *they* been spent? God has given you six days in the week for yourselves, and required the seventh to be consecrated wholly to his service. It has been your duty not to do your own works, or speak your own words, or find your own pleasure on that blessed day, but to keep it holy to the Lord. But have you so kept your Sabbaths? Have you not profaned them by carnal ease and temporal occupations, and robbed God of the glory that would have accrued to him by a due improvement of them? But a daily sacrifice of prayer and praise should also have been offered to him, every morning and every evening of your life. And how has this service been performed? Has God seen them ascending from the altar of your hearts, burning with fire that came down from heaven? Tell me, whether your own consciences do not accuse you of having withheld these sacrifices; and whether, when you have attempted to offer them, you have not been content with offering the blind and the lame for sacrifice, rather than the choicest affections of your souls? God has said to us, "My son, give me thine heart:" "your head and your hands you may devote to the world, but your heart must be reserved for me." I ask you then, my brethren, as before God, Whether you have not alienated from him this which he claims as his exclusive property? Had a fellow-creature dealt with you as you have dealt with God in this matter, I need not ask with what name you would brand him. Know, then, that *that* is the name which belongs to you in the

[c] ver. 9.

sight of God. True, it is very humiliating to be designated by the name of thieves and robbers: but, till we feel ourselves deserving of those opprobrious appellations in the sight of God, we shall never attain that contrite spirit which our state so justly demands. Methinks I hear one and another saying, like Hazael of old, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do such things?" Yes; this is not what you *will do*, but what you *have done*: and it is only by pleading guilty to the charge, that you can ever obtain the remission of your sin.]

Let me now ADDRESS you, Brethren,

1. In a way of indignant inquiry—

[Will you continue thus to "rob God?" As for denying the charge, it is in vain. You must fall under it. You must confess your guilt. You must humble yourselves for it in dust and ashes. If you plead for further indulgence in a way of sin, I ask, How much longer will you hold fast your wickedness? and when will you consent to pay the Lord his dues? Know assuredly, that your iniquity is all recorded in his book: and, when "a bill is sent to you of one hundred, it will be in vain for you to write fourscore." You must answer for your whole debt, and "be cast into prison, till you have paid the utmost farthing." Increase not, then, the awful account which you have to give: but surrender up yourselves to God without delay; and devote to him all that you are, and all that you have. Less than this will not suffice: for "ye are not your own: you are bought with a price: and therefore you are bound to glorify God with your bodies and your spirits, which are God's[d]."]

2. In a way of affectionate exhortation—

[The charge here adduced against you reminds me of One, who says, "I restored that which I took not away[e]." Those words, however they may be spoken of David in the first instance, are undoubtedly spoken of the Messiah, who redeemed our souls by his own obedience unto death. Yes, brethren, HE, even the Lord Jesus Christ, has discharged our debt, and made perfect satisfaction to God for all the injury that he has sustained from us. Undertake not, then, to pay Jehovah from any funds of your own. To all eternity you would be unable to present to him an equivalent for the smallest sin. But you need not attempt it. In Christ you have "a propitiation not for your sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Go to him, therefore, as your Surety; and plead with God all that HE has done and suffered for you: then shall your sins be blotted out of the book of God's remembrance: and, though you owe him ten thousand talents, you "shall freely be forgiven all."]

[d] 1 Cor. vi. 20. [e] Ps. lxix. 4.

MCCLXXV.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP APPROVED OF GOD.

Mal. iii. 16, 17. *Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels: and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.*

THE wicked in all ages harden themselves and one another in their iniquities. They vindicate their ways even against the charges of God himself; and hope by a kind of confederacy to maintain their cause against God. It is to this that God refers, when he says, "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." To what an extent the Jews carried this daring and contemptuous conduct, may be seen in the preceding context: "Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee?" They deny the charge, and defy even the omniscient God himself to prove his allegations: and even when their impious speeches are adduced in proof of the charge, they still hold fast their sentiments, and maintain boldly that the service of sin and Satan is preferable to the service of their God[a].

Now from this the people of God may learn a very important lesson, namely, to be as bold for their Master as the wicked are for theirs; and to unite as firmly with each other in maintaining the cause of piety, as the wicked do in upholding the maxims and habits of ungodliness. The propriety of this was felt by the godly in the prophet's days; and the Lord testified, by the prophet, his approbation of their conduct.

Let us for our own edification consider,

I. The conduct approved—

There were some, even in the worst of times "who feared the Lord," and maintained frequent fellowship

[a] ver. 13—15.

with each other for their mutual support. Their conduct in this respect was such as befitted their circumstances, and became their holy profession. Such conduct is extremely useful—

[Those who fear the Lord have the whole world combined against them. They are, however unintentionally on their part, a reproach to the wicked: they exhibit a light, which the ungodly cannot but see: and being actuated by faith, and manifesting, by the whole of their life and conversation, that their one object is to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life, they, like Noah of old, "condemn the world," who will neither believe, nor endeavour to escape, the impending judgments of their God[b]. Hence "the world hateth them, because they testify of it that the works thereof are evil." Nor is it a slight measure of hatred which they incur: on the contrary, from the moment that they begin to walk in the steps of their Lord and Master, they are made to participate all the odium that was cast on him: and they must consider themselves highly favoured, if they be not called to sacrifice even life itself in the service of their God.

But how shall they endure all these trials? Instead of receiving support from their friends and relatives, they will usually find, that "their greatest enemies are those of their own household." True, it may be said, 'They have a God to go unto; and he will give them all needful succour.' I acknowledge this; and readily grant that no effectual succour can be derived from any other quarter: but still we need, on ten thousand occasions, advice and encouragement from one another; and often derive from fellowship with the saints such consolation as bears us up against all the power of our adversaries. Hence it is that so many directions are given us in Scripture, relative to the performance of this duty. We are all considered as members of one body, every member of which is to extend its regards to the whole, and to supply to those which come in contact with it all the support which it is able to administer[c]. We are to exhort one another[d], and comfort one another[e], and to edify one another in every possible way[f]. Of the benefit arising from such communications we may judge by the effect produced on the minds of the Apostles, when joined by their Lord in their way to Emmaus: "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures[g]?" Yes, and thousands have experienced the same blessed consolations and supports from

[b] Heb. xi. 7. with Prov. xxviii. 4.
[c] 1 Cor. xii. 25. Eph. iv. 16.
[d] Heb. iii. 13. and x. 24, 25.
[e] 1 Thess. iv. 18. and v. 11.
[f] 1 Thess. v. 14. Col. iii. 16.
[g] Luke xxiv. 32.

occasional intercourse with their fellow-saints, who by seasonable advice have "strengthened their hands in God[h]."]

When wisely regulated, too, it is deserving of high commendation—

[Doubtless the conversation of those who profess religion may easily degenerate, and not unfrequently does degenerate, into the mere "talk of the lips, which tendeth only to penury[i]." But when it is humble, modest, spiritual; when it has a divine savour in it, and nothing is sought but the glory of God, and the edification of the soul; then it is an ordinance of the Lord, which he will honour with his more immediate presence, agreeably to what he has said, that "where two or three are gathered together in His name, there he will be in the midst of them."]

But of this, we shall see more, by considering distinctly,

II. The approbation given—

God, in testifying his approbation of his people's conduct, speaks of,

1. That which he himself felt in secret—

[Inexpressibly beautiful is the image here presented to our view. We are not to suppose that God needs to listen, in order that he may know what is said; or to write it down, in order that he may remember it. These terms are merely used for the purpose of conveying to our minds, by a familiar image, what, if conveyed in a more abstract form, we should not so readily comprehend. God here represents himself as a parent overhearing the conversation of his little children. In itself, the observation of a child is not worth the attention of a man: but when uttered by a man's own child, it becomes extremely interesting, especially when it is on a subject which denotes the presence of early piety. Hence God represents himself as greatly interested by the conversation which he, as it were accidentally, overhears. The very accents seem to be such as his holy mind will approve: "he hearkens; he hears;" he is, if I may so speak, struck with astonishment; he is exceedingly delighted; he determines not to forget it; he takes a book, "the book of his remembrance, and writes it down," that from time to time he may refresh his memory with it, and, if occasion offer, bring it to the remembrance of the child himself. Can we conceive any thing more expressive of approbation than such a representation as this, more especially when we consider that it is the Almighty God who

[h] 1 Sam. xxiii. 16, 17. [i] Prov. xiv. 23.

portrays himself in this posture, and assumes to himself this character? Know then, that whilst we are affectionately communicating our sentiments and feelings to each other, unconscious that any eye is upon us, or any ear within the reach of our voice, our heavenly Father beholds us, and notes down in his book our every word, and every thought[k]; and that no parent in the universe feels such exquisite delight in the most sagacious observations of his little child, as God does in the mutual communications of his believing people.]

2. That which he will manifest before the assembled universe at the last day—

[There is a day coming when "God will make up his jewels," gathering them together from every quarter of the globe; that, being put together, each in its proper place, they may compose the crown with which the Lord Jesus Christ shall be adorned to all eternity. In that day will God search them all out: not one shall be missing; nor shall one counterfeit be found amongst them. Amongst them will be found all who bear the character assigned them in the text, even all who "feared God, and spake often one to another" respecting the things belonging to their everlasting peace. In themselves they are unworthy of such an honour, yea, deserving rather of God's wrath and indignation: but God will spare them, not merely as a father spares a disobedient son, but as he would spare the most faithful and beloved of his children. To enter into this representation, reflect on David's anxiety for Absalom, at the very time that Absalom was come forth to dethrone and destroy him: and further reflect on the grief, the inconsolable grief he expressed, when he heard that this rebellious son was slain in battle. If he then, a mortal man, felt such solicitude to spare a rebellious and parricidal son, what must be implied in the promise of the Most High God to "spare his people as a man spareth his own son that serveth him?" Surely no evil from whatever quarter shall come unto them: when the goats are banished from his presence, the sheep shall be gathered into his fold; when the chaff is burnt up with fire unquenchable, they, as wheat, shall be treasured up in his garner; and as his peculiar treasure shall they be preserved to be his joy, and glory, for evermore. They confessed him before men in this world; and he will confess them in the presence of all his holy angels for ever and ever.]

We will yet further IMPROVE this subject,

1. In a way of advice—

[Do not rest satisfied with a religion that is altogether secret. Religion doubtless, in its sublimest actings, is secret,

[k] See Jer. xxxi. 18. Hos. xiv. 8. Ps. lvi. 8.

because it consists in the exercise of our affections upon God himself: but it is impossible so to conceal our piety, that the world shall not discern its operations; for it must influence us in the whole of our life and conversation: and if any one think to maintain an upright walk before God, and at the same time to escape the reproaches of an ungodly world, he deceives his own soul. We might as well hope that light should pass unobserved in darkness, as that a man who fears God should pass unnoticed through a world that lieth in wickedness. The world unite with those who are of the same mind and spirit with themselves: and so must the godly do: and "in the excellent of the earth must be their chief delight." And the man who, through fear of the cross, draws back from the society of the saints, has yet to learn what is meant by being ashamed of Christ, and what portion all such persons have to expect at his hands[l]. Let all therefore learn to confess Christ openly before men, and to "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach:" and instead of shunning the cross, let all learn to rejoice and glory in it, and to "account, as Moses did, the reproach of Christ a greater treasure than all the riches of Egypt."]

2. In a way of caution—

[Whilst we advise all not, through fear, to shun religious society, we would affectionately guard all against placing their religion in social converse of any kind. It is not always those who "speak most one to another" that are the best in God's estimation: on the contrary, those who are the most forward to talk, are often the least humble, and the least correct in their secret deportment. Persons of this description ought to be peculiarly jealous of themselves, lest, whilst they pretend to be seeking the edification of others, they be in reality filled with self-conceit, and advancing only their own glory. God, who sees the heart, often beholds a thousand times more piety in the humble hearer, than in the admired speaker: and therefore it is particularly marked in my text, that God noted in his book the frame of those "who *thought upon* his name." Yes, the *thinkers*, if I may so speak, whilst lamenting perhaps their incapacity to speak, and admiring, almost with envy, the fluency of others, are often noticed by God with pre-eminent delight; whilst the *speakers*, being filled with pride and self-sufficiency, are objects of his abhorrence. Let none then pride themselves in their fluency, or be dejected for the want of it: but let all remember, that, when "God shall bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart, they, and they only, shall have praise of God[m]," whose fear of him was accompanied with love, and evidenced by an humble, holy, heavenly deportment.]

[l] Mark viii. 34—38. [m] 1 Cor. iv. 5.

MCCLXXVI.

THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS ARISING.

Mal. iv. 1, 2. *Behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.*

THE thought of many is, that "God will do neither good nor evil," and that it is therefore unnecessary and vain to make him an object either of our hope or fear. This was the state of mind in which the greater part of the Jews were in the time of Malachi: and God sent his prophet to warn them, that a time was coming when they should clearly discern between the righteous and the wicked by the awful judgments he would inflict on the one, and the unspeakable benefits he would confer on the other[a].

In the words before us are contained,

I. A warning to the wicked—

The following context leads us immediately to the times of the Messiah; and to them we must look for the accomplishment of this tremendous threatening—

[Temporal judgments are often predicted in similar language. The enemies of the Jews[b], and the Jews themselves[c], yea, and all the enemies of God[d], are menaced in this manner. But never were they fulfilled so fearfully as in the destruction of Jerusalem. Thither almost all the whole Jewish nation were assembled; and, being shut up in the city, as in an oven, they were made astonishing monuments of God's fiery indignation.]

But doubtless this warning refers also to the day of judgment—

[In that day the Judge himself will come in flames of fire[e]: and the earth, the theatre on which so much wickedness has been acted, shall be burnt up[f]: and the objects of God's

[a] Zeph. i. 12. [b] Isai. x. 16—18. [c] Zeph. i. 14—18.
[d] Ps. xxi. 8, 9. [e] 2 Thess. i. 7—9. [f] 2 Pet. iii. 10—12.

displeasure shall be cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone[g].

It is asked, Who they are that shall then suffer the vengeance of eternal fire? We answer, The proud contemners of God's law, and they who "go about to establish their own righteousness" instead of submitting to the righteousness of God; and they who think religion vain and unprofitable[h]; yea, moreover, all who commit any kind of wickedness knowingly, deliberately, and habitually, all, I say, without exception, shall be as stubble to the consuming fire[i]———

And shall we not take warning, when we know that the day is coming, and that every hour brings it nearer and nearer? O "let it not overtake us as a thief!" Our forbearing to reflect upon it cannot delay its approach, or mitigate its terrors. Be persuaded to prepare for it, that, instead of dreading, you may welcome, its arrival.]

We turn with pleasure from this awful subject to contemplate the latter part of the text, wherein we have,

II. A promise to the righteous—

Whatever distant reference there may be in these words to the deliverance of the Christians from Jerusalem, when, according to our Lord's instructions, they took advantage of the retreat of the Roman army, to flee out of it to Pella, we must certainly look for the accomplishment of the promise principally in the *spiritual* blessings conveyed by the Messiah.

The Christian character is briefly delineated in contrast with God's enemies—

[The fear of God is often represented as comprising the whole of religion: and indeed, wherever that obtains, pride will be humbled, wickedness banished, and every holy affection cultivated to the utmost[k]———Let those who have reason to think themselves under its genuine influence, listen with gratitude to the promise, which God himself addresses to them.]

[g] Rev. xxi. 8. [h] Mal. iii. 13, 14.

[i] Rom. i. 18. The four distinct characters here enumerated, should be separately and distinctly addressed, and in very pointed terms, as very especially warned by God himself.

[k] These also, with some distinctness of delineation, should here, in very encouraging terms, be called upon to consider themselves as especially addressed by God.

To those who answer to this character, shall Christ be a source of the richest blessings—

[Christ is "the Sun" of the spiritual world, and the one fountain of light and life to all that believe in him. He is also the Sun of Righteousness, not only as being pure and spotless in himself, but as being the Author of all righteousness, whether of that which is imputed to us for justification, or that which is imparted to us by sanctification. And how delightful was the sight of him to those who beheld him rising on this benighted world, to those, into whose hearts he shined with his refreshing beams! On them he shone, not with burning rays, that dry up and wither the earth and all its fruits, but with genial warmth, "healing" the desolations of winter, and causing every herb to spring forth into life and vigour. How did the first Christians "go forth" out of a dead and carnal state, and "grow up" with astonishing rapidity and strength "as the calves of the stall!" ——— Thus also, in this day, does the light of his countenance convey healing to our souls. A sight of him removes both the guilt we have contracted, and the pollutions whereby we have been defiled; thus "healing" at once the deadly wounds of sin, and restoring health and beauty to those who have been debased by more than leprous deformity. Who would not wish to bask in his beams, and to experience the full effects of his renovating power?]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. How different *even in this life* are the states of God's friends, and of his enemies!

[The "proud are *called* happy[l]:" but *are* they so? the heart-searching God declares that they have no solid peace. Nor is it possible that they can look forward to the day of judgment without much disquietude of mind. Their joys, such as they are, are "like the crackling of thorns under a pot," of short duration, and succeeded by smoke and darkness, by spleen and melancholy ——— But, is this the state of God's people? Let the text declare, and let the experience of all the saints attest ——— The more they enjoy of the light of this Sun of Righteousness, the more they anticipate the blessedness of heaven.]

2. How different will be the states of God's friends and enemies *in the eternal world!*

[The day of judgment is called "the day of wrath," and, "the day of the perdition of ungodly men[m]." Alas! alas! whither shall the objects of God's vengeance flee? How shall

[l] Mal. iii. 15.

[m] Rom. ii. 5. 2 Pet. iii. 7.

they "dwell with everlasting burnings?" Who can conceive the anguish with which they will "weep and wail and gnash their teeth?" View, on the contrary, the godly healed of every malady, grown to the full measure of the stature of Christ, and enjoying continually the meridian glories of the Sun of Righteousness. Who can conceive the happiness of such a state? But though "we know not yet what we shall be," so far as respects the *degrees* of our happiness or misery, we know that the distance between the righteous and the wicked will be immeasurably great. Would to God that, in the contemplation of it, we might all fear the Lord, and walk in his fear to the latest period of our lives!]

MCCLXXVII.

ELIJAH TO PRECEDE OUR LORD.

Mal. iv. 5, 6. *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.*

THE advent of our blessed Lord has been foretold from the beginning of the world. No sooner had man in Paradise fallen, than God promised him a Saviour in that seed of the woman, who should bruise the serpent's head[a]. From that time has it been predicted with increasing clearness by many successive prophets, that so he might be easily and clearly discovered at the period of his arrival. At last, the Prophet Malachi foretold the very person who, as his harbinger, should precede him, and point him out to the people.

The day of his arrival is here, as well as in the Prophet Joel, called, "the great and *terrible* day of the Lord." But St. Luke, quoting the Prophet Joel, calls it "the great and *illustrious* day of the Lord[b]." And it was, indeed, both illustrious and "dreadful:" for then did God himself become incarnate, for the salvation of all who would believe in him; but then also were inflicted, on those who rejected him, such judgments as were altogether unprecedented in the

[a] Gen. iii. 15.

[b] Compare Joel ii. 31. and the text, with Acts ii. 20. ἐπιφανῆ.

annals of the world[c]. Truly, from that day to this, has "their whole *land* been smitten with a most dreadful curse."

The prophecy before us closes the canon of Scripture under the Mosaic dispensation, and is peculiarly worthy of our closest attention. In two points of view I propose to consider it:

I. As evincing the truth of Christianity—

In this view this prophecy is considered by all who have written on the evidences of our holy religion—

[It was a prophecy pre-eminently insisted on at the time of our Saviour's advent. When our blessed Lord had manifested to his disciples his glory on the mount of transfiguration, where he had conversed with Moses and Elijah, "he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of Man were risen from the dead. Upon which they asked him, "Why say the Scribes that Elias must first come[d]?" that is, 'Why, now that we have had this accumulated evidence of thy Messiahship, are we to conceal it from others, more especially since it is, in part at least, that very evidence which the Scribes, and all who are instructed in the prophecies, are looking for?' Moreover, when almost the whole of the Jewish nation flocked to John's baptism, the rulers sent priests and Levites to him, to inquire, "Whether he was himself the Christ; or whether he was Elijah," whom they expected as his Forerunner[e]? Hence it appears that the people at large expected, about that time, the literal accomplishment of this prophecy.

And accomplished at that time it was. Previous to John's conception in the womb, the angel, who announced to his parents God's merciful intentions towards them, said of him, "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God: and he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord[f]:" in other words, he shall fulfil the prophecy of Malachi, which you are all now expecting to see accomplished. Our blessed Lord yet more strongly declares, that John was the person ordained of God to fulfil that prophecy. John, being shut up in prison, and hearing of the miracles which Jesus had wrought, sent two of his disciples to Jesus, to inquire, whether he was the predicted Messiah; or whether they were to look for some other person to sustain

[c] Luke xxi. 22—27.
[d] Mark ix. 9—11.
[e] John i. 19—21.
[f] Luke i. 16, 17.

that office? Our Lord referred them to the miracles which he wrought before their eyes, in proof of his Messiahship; and then expressly declared concerning John, that he was that very "Messenger," whose coming the Prophet Malachi had foretold; and that very Elias also, of whom the same prophet had spoken as the precursor of the Messiah: "If ye will receive it, *this is Elias which was for to come*[g]." And here you will see, that *our Lord himself explains the two prophecies as relating to one and the same person;* the messenger being Elias, and Elias the messenger.

The messenger then, even Elijah, having come, and borne his testimony to Jesus as the Messiah; the Messiah is come, and the religion introduced by him is of divine authority; or, in other words, Christianity is true.]

The objections by which the Jews would set aside this conclusion, though plausible, are of no real weight—

[A Jew would say, 'It is confessed by all, that Elias must come before the Messiah: but John was not Elias: yea, when expressly interrogated upon that subject, he himself plainly and unequivocally stated, that he was not Elias[h]: therefore Elias not having appeared, the Messiah cannot be yet come; and, consequently, Christianity is an imposition upon the world.'

This being one of the strong-holds of Judaism, it must be overthrown, before we can hope to convert the Jews to Christianity.

It is said by the Jews, that, because Elias did not *personally* appear, the prophecy before us cannot have been fulfilled. But I will ask a Jew; Are you not told, by Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and Hosea, no less than six times, that in the latter day your whole nation, Israel as well as Judah, shall be restored, and that they shall be "united under one Head, even David, who shall be king over them all for ever[i]?" But is there any learned Jew that expects David *personally* to come and reign on earth again? Have not all commentators, both ancient and modern, agreed, that the person here spoken of is the Messiah; who yet is called David, because he was typified by David, and shall inherit, as it were, his throne? Then why may not John, who came *in the spirit and power of Elias*, bear *his* name; when, in fact, there was as striking a correspondence between the two, *in their whole office and character*, as can be

[g] Compare Matt. xi. 10, 14. with Mal. iii. 1. and iv. 5, 6. See also Matt. xvii. 11—13.

[h] John i. 19—21.

[i] Compare Jer. xxx. 9. Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. and xxxvii. 24, 25. Hos. iii. 5.

conceived? If an absolute identity of person be dispensed with in the one case, it may also be dispensed with in the other: and, *so far as that is concerned*, the objection falls to the ground.

But it is said, that John acknowledged that he was not Elias. True; he did so. The Jews supposed him to be Elijah the Tishbite, or probably Jeremiah: but he declared he was neither the one nor the other: but, *at the very time that he declared this*, he informed them, that he was the Forerunner of the Messiah, even the person whom Isaiah had described as "a voice crying in the wilderness." "They said to Him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the Prophet Esaias[k]." Now, there is not a learned Jew in the universe who does not interpret this passage of Isaiah as referring to the Forerunner of our Lord: and therefore we see, not only that our blessed Lord assigned that office and character to John, but that John himself claimed it, at the very time that he denied himself to be Elijah the Tishbite: and it is remarkable, that our blessed Lord, in asserting his own Messiahship, appealed to the testimony of John as decisive of the point; and thus put all his adversaries to silence. When the chief priests asked him "by what authority he did the things which they saw," he answered by putting another question to them: "The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?" And, when they saw to what a dilemma they were reduced, and declined giving him an answer, he disdained to give any reply to their question; which, in fact, needed no answer at all; for it was self-evident, that if John was indeed a prophet, as he had clearly proved himself to be, his testimony must be received; and Jesus, of whose Messiahship he had testified, must be the Messiah.

Thus, then, have we shewn, that there was no necessity for Elijah *personally* to come, in order to fulfil this prophecy: it was sufficient that John came "*in the spirit and power of Elijah*," and fulfilled all that the person spoken of in my text was to execute. That he did this, he himself declared: and, when his testimony was appealed to as decisive, the Jews themselves were put to silence. The objection, therefore, which the Jews found on this passage, is obviated; and the truth of Christianity is proved from the very passage which the Jews adduce to overthrow it.]

The prophecy, however, may be considered yet further,

II. As illustrating the scope and intent of Christianity—

[k] Isai. xl. 3. with John i. 22, 23.

That which was the primary scope of John's mission was, to bear witness to Christ. But, in conjunction with this, his office was to turn men to God, and thus to prepare them for Christ as his peculiar people. And these are the two great objects of Christianity in the world:

1. To convert men to God—

[It was said of John, "He shall turn many to the Lord their God[l]." This he was to effect amongst persons of every age in life, and every order in society: he was to "turn the heart of fathers to their children, and the heart of children to their fathers." According to the general effect of divine truth, it must be expected that the Gospel will create only division in families, "setting the father *against* the son, and the son *against* the father[m]:" but his ministry was to operate rather in a contrary way, bringing all the nation, as it were, old and young, to an earnest and *harmonious* expectation of the Messiah; "fathers *with* their children, and children *with* their fathers." And thus the Gospel is to work on all, without exception; so that they may move harmoniously, like a river turned by the tide, up towards the fountain-head. However contrary to nature this may be, even like a river ascending a lofty mountain, it shall be effected: for "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established *on the top of the mountains*, and all nations shall *flow unto it*[n]." Wherever it prevails, it produces this union, this *harmony*, this *progress contrary to the course of nature*[o]: and if, either in individuals or communities, it fails of this object, it is published in vain, and the grace of God is so far "received in vain."]

2. To prepare men for Christ—

[This was done by John, to a very extraordinary degree: for, in a very short space of time, a few months at the utmost, "there went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan; and were baptized by him in Jordan, confessing their sins[p]." "He went before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation to them, for the remission of their sins[q]."

And this is the great scope of the Gospel ministry—to "preach Christ crucified[r];" and to bring all to "behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world[s]." Every faithful minister has, like John, "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord[t]." It is said in the book of Revelation,

[l] Luke i. 16. [m] Luke xii. 51—53. [n] Isai. ii. 2.
[o] Phil. ii. 2. [p] Matt. iii. 5, 6. [q] Luke i. 76, 77.
[r] 1 Cor. i. 23. [s] John i. 29. [t] Luke i. 17.

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted, that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints[u]." And may I not say, that we ministers are assistants to the Bride? O blessed office, to prepare you, brethren, for that great solemnity, when you shall be for ever united to the heavenly Bridegroom! Gladly would we see you adorned with all the graces of the Spirit. Gladly would we see you habited in white raiment from head to foot, without one spot that should be unsuited to your high character[x]. And we do indeed account it an honour to be instrumental, in any measure, to the preparing of you for this glorious consummation. Beloved brethren, concur with us in this good work. Attend to all the counsels which are given you from the Lord; and readily adopt "every method which he has ordained for your purification;" that, when you come into his presence, you may find the most "cordial acceptance with him," and "receive at his hands a crown of glory that fadeth not away[y]."]

[u] Rev. xix. 7, 8.
[x] Rev. iii. 4.
[y] Esth. ii. 12, 17. with 1 Pet. v. 4.

END OF VOL. X.

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