

Irving's Orations

“Irving’s Orations,” written by Edward Irving (8/4/1792 to 12/7/1834) was published in 1825. The Orations, which I highly recommend reading, consist of:

- I. The Preparation for Consulting the Oracles of God.
- II. The Manner of Consulting the Oracles of God.
- III. The Obeying of the Oracles of God.

Edward Irving and his congregation believed and acted upon I Corinthians 12 & 14; they spoke in tongues, interpreted and prophesied in their Church. His attached writings are not about the above mentioned, which can be read in the book, “The Pentecostal Theology of Edward Irving” by Gordon Strachan, but it is worth mentioning because it reflects his heart for the obedience to our Father. He endured great persecution for this obedience. An extremely small portion of his writing is written concerning everlasting punishment, which is incorrect, but left in for continuity.

My supplication for you is that you will enjoy the richness of his writings as I have.

licitude, now about to fall into other hands. The Lord be with you and your household, and render unto you manifold for the blessings which you have rendered unto me. I could say much about these Orations, which I dedicate to you; but I will not mingle with any literary or theological discussion this pure tribute of affection and gratitude, which I render to you before the world, as I have already done into your private ear.

I am,
My honoured Friend,
Your's,
In the bonds of the Gosple,
EDW. IRVING.

*Caledonian Church,
Hatton-Garden.*

ORATIONS, LECTURES,

AND

SERMONS.

ORATION I.

JOHN V. 39. SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES.

The preparation for consulting the Oracles of God.

THERE was a time when each revelation of the word of God had an introduction into this earth which neither permitted men to doubt whence it came, nor wherefore it was sent. If at the giving of each several truth a star was not lighted up in heaven, as at the birth of the Prince of truth, there was done upon the earth a wonder, to make her children listen to the message of their Maker. The Almighty made bare his arm; and, through mighty acts shown by his holy servants, gave demonstration of his truth, and found for it a sure place among the other matters of human knowledge and belief.

But now the miracles of God have ceased; and Nature, secure and unmolested, is no longer called on for testimonies to her Creator's voice. No burning bush draws the footsteps to his presence chamber; no invisible voice holds the ear awake; no hand cometh forth from the obscure to write his purposes in letters of flame. The vision is shut up, and the testimony is sealed, and the word of the Lord is ended, and this solitary volume, with its chapters and verses, is the sum total of all for which

the chariot of heaven made so many visits to the earth, and the Son of God himself tabernacled and dwelt among us.

The truth which it contains once dwelt undivulged in the bosom of God; and, on coming forth to take its place among things revealed, the heavens and the earth, and Nature through all her chambers, gave it reverent welcome. Beyond what it contains, the mysteries of the future are unknown. To gain it acceptation and currency the noble company of martyrs testified unto the death. The general assembly of the first born in heaven made it the day-star of their hopes, and the pavilion of their peace. Its every sentence is charmed with the power of God, and powerful to the everlasting salvation of souls.

Having our minds filled with these thoughts of the primeval divinity of revealed Wisdom when she dwelt in the bosom of God, and was of his eternal self a part, long before he prepared the heavens, or set a compass upon the face of the deep; revolving also, how, by the space of four thousand years, every faculty of mute Nature did solemn obeisance to this daughter of the divine mind, whenever he pleased to commission her forth to the help of mortals; and further meditating upon the delights which she had of old with the sons of men, the height of heavenly temper to which she raised them and the offspring of magnanimous deeds which these two—the wisdom of God, and the soul of man—did engender between themselves—meditating, I say, upon these mighty topics, our soul is smitten with grief and shame to remark how in this latter day, she hath fallen from her high estate; and fallen along with her the great and noble character of men. Or if there be still a few names as of the Missionary MARTYN, to emulate the saints of old—how to the commonalty of christians her oracles have fallen into a household commonness, and her visits into a cheap familiarity; while by the multitude she is mistaken for a minister of terror sent to oppress poor mortals with moping melancholy, and inflict a wound upon the happiness of human kind.

For there is now no express stirring up of faculties to meditate her high and heavenly strains—there is no formal sequestration of the mind from all other concerns, on purpose for her special entertainment—there is no pause of solemn seeking and solemn waiting for a spiritual frame, before entering and listening to the voice of the Almighty's wisdom. Who feels the sublime dignity there is in a saying fresh descended from the porch of heaven? Who feels the awful weight there is in the least iota that hath dropped from the lips of God? Who feels the thrilling fear or trembling hope there is in words whereon the eternal destinies of himself do hang? Who feels the swelling tide of gratitude within his breast, for redemption and salvation coming, instead of flat despair and everlasting retribution? Finally, who, in perusing the word of God, is captivated through all his faculties, and transported through all his emotions, and through all his energies of action wound up? Why, to say the best, it is done as other duties are wont to be done: and, having reached the rank of a daily, formal duty, the perusal of the Word hath reached its noblest place. Yea, that which is the guide and spur of all duty, the necessary aliment of Christian life, the first and the last of Christian knowledge and Christian feeling, hath, to speak the best, degenerated in these days to stand rank and file among those duties whereof it is parent, preserver, and commander. And, to speak not the best but the fair and common truth, this book, the offspring of the divine mind, and the perfection of heavenly wisdom, is permitted to lie from day to day, perhaps from week to week, unheeded and unperused; never welcome to our happy, healthy, and energetic moods; admitted, if admitted at all, in seasons of sickness, feeble-mindedness, and disabling sorrow. Yea, that which was sent to be a spirit of ceaseless joy and hope, within the heart of man, is treated as the enemy of happiness, and the murderer of enjoyment; and eyed askance, as the remembrancer of death, and the very messenger of hell!

Oh! if books had but tongues to speak their wrongs, then might this book well exclaim—Hear, O heavens! and give ear, O earth! I came from the love and embrace of God, and mute Nature, to whom I brought no boon, did me rightful homage. To man I came, and my words were to the children of men. I disclosed to you the mysteries of hereafter, and the secrets of the throne of God. I set open to you the gates of salvation, and the way of eternal life, hitherto unknown. Nothing in heaven did I withhold from your hope and ambition: and upon your earthly lot I poured the full horn of divine providence and consolation. But ye requited me with no welcome, ye held no festivity on my arrival: ye sequester me from happiness and heroism, closeting me with sickness and infirmity; ye make not of me, nor use me for your guide to wisdom and prudence, but press me into a place in your last of duties, and withdraw me to a mere corner of your time; and most of ye set me at nought, and utterly disregard me. I came, the fullness of the knowledge of God; angels delighted in my company, and desired to dive into my secrets. But ye, mortals, place masters over me, subjecting me to the discipline and dogmatism of men, and tutoring me in your schools of learning. I came, not to be silent in your dwellings, but to speak welfare to you and to your children. I came to rule, and my throne to set up in the hearts of men. Mine ancient residence was the bosom of God; no residence will I have but the soul of an immortal; and if you had entertained me, I should have possessed you of the peace which I had with God, “when I was with him and was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him. Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they cry upon me, but I

will not answer, they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me.”

From this cheap estimation and wanton neglect of God's counsel, and from the terror of this curse consequent thereon, we have resolved, in the strength of God, to do our endeavour to deliver this congregation of his intelligent and worshipping people, an endeavour which we make with a full reception of the difficulties to be overcome on every side, within no less than without the sacred pale; and upon which we enter with utmost diffidence of our powers, yet with the full purpose of straining them to the utmost, according to the measure with which it hath pleased God to endow our mind. And do thou, O Lord from whom cometh the perception of truth, vouchsafe to thy servant an unction from thine own Spirit who searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God—and vouchsafe to thy people “the hearing ear and the understanding heart, that they may hear and understand, and their souls may live!”

Before the Almighty made his appearance upon Sinai, there were awful precursors sent to prepare his way: while he abode in sight, there were solemn ceremonies and a strict ritual of attendance; when he departed, the whole camp set itself to conform unto his revealed will. Likewise, before the Saviour appeared, with his better law, there was a noble procession of seers and prophets, who descried and warned the world of his coming; when he came there were solemn announcements in the heavens and on the earth: he did not depart without due honours; and there followed, on his departure, a succession of changes and alterations, which are still in progress, and shall continue in progress till the world end. This may serve to teach us, that a revelation of the Almighty's will makes demand for these three things, on the part of those to whom it is revealed. *A due preparation for receiving it. A diligent attention to it while it is disclosing. A strict observance of it when it is delivered.*

In the whole book of the Lord's revelations, you shall search in vain for one which is devoid of these necessary parts. Witness the awe-struck Isaiah, while the Lord displayed before him the sublime pomp of his presence, and, not content with overpowering the frail sense of the prophet, despatched a seraph to do the ceremonial of touching his lips with hallowed fire, all before he uttered one word into his astonished ear. Witness the majestic apparition to St. John, in the Apocalypse, of all the emblematical glory of the Son of man, allowed to take silent effect upon the apostle's spirit, and prepare it for the revelation of things to come. These heard with all their absorbed faculties, and with all their powers addressed them to the bidding of the Lord. But, if this was in aught flinched from, witness in the persecution of the prophet Jonah, the fearful issues which ensued. From the presence of the Lord he could not flee. Fain would he have escaped to the uttermost parts of the earth; but in the mighty waters the terrors of the Lord fell on him; and when ingulphed in the deep, and entombed in the monster of the deep, still the Lord's word was upon the obdurate prophet, who had no rest, not the rest of the grave, till he had fulfilled it to the very uttermost.

Now—judging that every time we open the pages of this holy book, we are to be favoured with no less than a communication from on high, in substance the same as those whereof we have detailed the three distinct and several parts—we conceive it due to the majesty of Him who speaks, that we, in like manner, discipline our spirits with a due preparation, and have them in a proper frame, before we listen to the voice. That, while it is disclosing to us the important message, we be wrapt in full attention. And that, when it hath disburdened itself into our opened and enlarged spirits, we proceed forthwith to the business of its fulfilment, whithersoever and to whatsoever it summon us forth. Upon each of these three duties, incumbent upon one who would not forego the benefit of a heavenly

message, we shall discourse apart addressing ourselves in this discourse to the *first* mentioned of the three.

The preparation for the Announcement.—When God uttereth his voice, says the Psalmist, coals of fire are kindled; the hills melt down like wax, the earth quakes, and deep proclaims it unto hollow deep. This same voice, which the stubborn elements cannot withstand, the children of Israel having heard but once, prayed that it might not be spoken to them any more. These sensible images of the Creator have now vanished, and we are left alone, in the deep recesses of the meditative mind, to discern his comings forth. No trump of heaven now speaketh in the world's ear. No angelic conveyancer of Heaven's will taketh shape from the vacant air, and having done his errand, retireth into his airy habitation. No human messenger putteth forth his miraculous hand to heal Nature's immedicable wounds, winning for his words a silent and astonished audience. Majesty and might no longer precede the oracles of Heaven. They lie silent and unobtrusive, wrapped up in their little compass—one volume, amongst many, innocently handed to and fro, having no distinction but that in which our mustered thoughts are enabled to invest them. The want of solemn preparation and circumstantial pomp, the imagination of the mind hath now to supply. The presence of the Deity, and the authority of his voice, our thoughtful spirits must discern. Conscience must supply the terrors that were wont to go before him; and the brightness of his coming, which the sense can no longer behold, the heart, ravished with his word, must feel.

For this solemn vocation of all her powers, to do her Maker honour and give him welcome, it is, at the very least, necessary that the soul stand absolved from every call. Every foreign influence or authority, arising out of the world, or the things of the world, should be burst when about to stand before the Fountain of all authority. Every argument, every invention, every opinion of man

forgot, when about to approach to the Father and oracle of all intelligence. And as subjects, when their prince honours them with invitations, are held disengaged, though pre-occupied with a thousand appointments—so, upon an audience fixed and about to be holden with the King of kings, it well becomes the honoured mortal to break loose from all thralldom of men and things, and be arrayed in liberty of thought and action, to drink in the rivers of his pleasure, and to perform the commissions of his lips.

Now far otherwise it hath appeared to us, that Christians, as well as worldly men, come to this most august occupation of listening to the word of God, preoccupied and prepossessed, inclining to it a partial ear, a straitened understanding, and a disaffected will.

The Christian public are prone to preoccupy themselves with the admiration of those opinions by which they stand distinguished as a church or sect from other Christians; and instead of being quite unfettered to receive the whole council of the divinity, they are prepared to welcome it, no farther than as it bears upon, and stands with opinions which they already favour. To this prejudgment the early use of catechisms mainly contributes, which, however serviceable in their place, have the disadvantage of presenting the truth in a form altogether different from what it occupies in the Word itself. In the one it is presented to the intellect chiefly, (and in our catechism to an intellect of a very subtle order;) in the other it is presented more frequently to the heart, to the affections, to the imitation, to the fancy, and to all the faculties of the soul. In early youth, which is so applied to with those compilations, an association takes place between religion and intellect, and a divorcement of religion from the other powers of the inner man. This derangement, judging from observation and experience, it is exceeding difficult to put to rights in after life; and so it comes to pass, that, in listening to the oracles of religion, the intellect is chiefly awake, and the better parts of the message—those which address the heart

and its affections, those which dilate and enlarge our imaginations of the Godhead, and those which speak to the various sympathies of our nature—we are, by the injudicious use of these narrow epitomes, disqualified to receive.

In the train of these comes Controversy, with his rough voice and unmeek aspect, to disqualify the soul for a full and fair audience of its Maker's word. The points of the faith we have been called on to defend, or which are reputable with our party, assume in our esteem an importance disproportionate to their importance in the Word, which we come to relish chiefly when it goes to sustain them, and the Bible is hunted for arguments and texts of controversy, which are treasured up for future service. The solemn stillness which the soul should hold before his Maker, so favourable to meditation and wrapt communion with the throne of God, is destroyed at every turn by suggestion of what is orthodox and evangelical—where all is orthodox and evangelical; the spirit of such readers becomes lean, being fed with abstract truths and formal propositions; their temper uncongenial, being ever disturbed with controversial suggestions; their prayers undevout recitals of their opinions; their discourse technical announcements of their faith. Intellect, cold intellect, hath the sway over heaven-ward devotion and holy fervours. Man, contentious man, hath the attention which the unsearchable God should undivided have; and the fine full harmony of Heaven's melodious voice, which, heard apart, were sufficient to lap the soul in ecstasies unspeakable, is jarred and interfered with; and the heavenly spell is broken by the recurring conceits, sophisms, and passions of men. Now truly, and utter degradation it is of the Godhead to have his word in league with that of any man, or any council of men. What matter to me whether the Pope, or any work of any mind be exalted to the quality of God? If any helps are to be imposed for the understanding, or safe-guarding, or sustaining of the

word, why not the help of statues and pictures for my devotion? Therefore, while the warm fancies of the South-erns have given their idolatry to the ideal forms of noble art—let us Northerners beware we give not our idolatry to the cold and coarse abstractions of human intellect.

For the pre-occupations of worldly minds—they are not to be reckoned up, being manifold as their favourite passions and pursuits. One thing only can be said—that before coming to the oracles of God, they are not pre-occupied with the expectation and fear of Him. No chord in their heart is in unison with things unseen; no moments are set apart for religious thought and meditation; no anticipations of the honoured interview; no prayers of preparation, like that of Daniel, before Gabriel was sent to teach him; no devoutness like that of Cornelius, before the celestial visitation; no fastings like that of Peter, before the revelation of the glory of the Gentiles! Now, to minds which are not attuned to holiness, the words of God find no entrance—striking heavy on the ear—seldom making way to the understanding—almost never to the heart. To spirits hot with conversation, perhaps heady with argument uncomposed by solemn thought, but ruffled and in uproar from the concourse of worldly interests—the sacred page may be spread out, but its accents are drowned in the noise which hath not yet subsided within the breast. All the awe, and pathos, and awakened consciousness of a divine approach, impressed upon the ancients by the procession of solemnities—is to worldly men without a substitute. They have not solicited themselves to be in readiness. In a usual mood and a vulgar frame they come to God's word, as to other compositions—reading it without any active imaginations about Him who speaks; feeling no awe of a sovereign Lord, nor care of a tender Father, nor devotion to a merciful Saviour. Nowise depressed themselves out of their wonted independence—nor humiliated before the King of kings—no prostrations of the soul—nor falling at his feet as dead—no exclamation,

as of Isaiah, “Woe is me, for I am of unclean lips!”—nor suit, “Send me,”—nor fervent ejaculation of welcome, as of Samuel, “Lord, speak, for thy servant heareth!” Truly they feel towards his word, much as to the word of an equal. No wonder it shall fail of happy influence upon spirits which have, as it were, on purpose, disqualified themselves for its benefits, by removing from the regions of thought and feeling, which it accords with, into other regions, which it is of too severe dignity to affect, otherwise than with stern menace and direful foreboding! If they would have it bless them, and do them good, they must change their manner of approaching it; and endeavour to bring themselves into that prepared and collected and reverential frame which becomes an interview with the High and Holy One who inhabiteth the praises of eternity.

Having thus spoken without equivocation, and we hope without offence, to the contractedness and pre-occupation with which Christians and worldly men are apt to come to the perusal of the word of God, we shall now set forth the two master feelings under which we should address ourselves to the sacred occupation.

It is a good custom, inherited from the hallowed days of Scottish piety, and in our cottages still preserved, though in our cities generally given up, to preface the morning and evening worship of the family with a short invocation of blessing from the Lord. This is in unison with the practice and recommendation of pious men, never to open the divine Word without a silent invocation of the divine Spirit. But no address to Heaven is of any virtue, save as it is the expression of certain pious sentiments with which the mind is full and overflowing. Of those sentiments which befit the mind that comes into conference with its Maker, the first and most prominent should be gratitude for his having ever condescended to hold commerce with such wretched and fallen creatures. Gratitude not only expressing itself in proper terms, but possessing

the mind with an abiding and over-mastering mood, under which it shall sit impressed the whole duration of the interview. Such an emotion as cannot utter itself in language—though by language it indicate its presence—but keeps us in a devout and adoring frame, while the Lord is uttering his voice. Go, visit a desolate widow with consolation and help and fatherhood of her orphan children—do it again and again—and your presence, the sound of your approaching footstep, the soft utterance of your voice, the very mention of your name—shall come to dilate her heart with a fulness which defies her tongue to utter, but speaks by the tokens of a swimming eye, and clasped hands, and fervent ejaculations to Heaven upon your head! No less copious acknowledgment of God, the author of our well-being and the father of our better hopes, ought we to feel when his Word discloseth to us the excesses of his love. Though a veil be now cast over the Majesty which speaks, it is the voice of the Eternal which we hear, coming in soft cadences to win our favour, yet omnipotent as the voice of the thunder, and overpowering as the rushing of many waters. And though the veil of the future intervene between our hand and the promised goods, still are they from His lips, who speaks and it is done, who commands and all things stand fast. With no less emotion, therefore, should this book be opened, than if, like him in the Apocalypse, you saw the voice which spake; or like him in the trance you were, into the third heavens translated, company and communing with the realities of glory, which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived.

Far and foreign from such an opened and awakened bosom, is that cold and formal hand which is generally laid upon the sacred volume; that unfeeling and unimpressive tone with which its accents are pronounced; and that listless and incurious ear into which its blessed sounds are received. How can you, thus unimpassioned, hold communion with themes in which every thing awful, vital, and

endearing, do meet together! Why is not curiosity, curiosity ever hungry, on edge to know the doings and intentions of Jehovah, King of kings? Why is not interest, interest ever awake, on tiptoe to hear the future destiny of itself? Why is not the heart that panteth over the world after love and friendship, overpowered with the full tide of the divine acts and expressions of love? Where is Nature gone when she is not moved with the tender mercy of Christ? Methinks the affections of men are fallen into the yellow leaf. Of your poets which charm the world's ear, who is he that inditeth a song unto his God? Some will tune their harps to sensual pleasures, and by the enchantment of their genius well nigh commend their unholy themes to the imagination of saints. Others, to the high and noble sentiments of the heart, will sing of domestic joys and happy unions, casting around sorrow the radiancy of virtue, and bodying forth, in undying forms, the short-lived visions of joy! Others have enrolled themselves the high priests of mute Nature's charms enchanting her echoes with their minstrelsy, and peopling her solitudes with the bright creatures of their fancy. But when, since the days of the blind master of English song, hath any poured forth a lay worthy of the Christian theme? Nor in philosophy, "the palace of the soul," have men been more mindful of their Maker. The flowers of the garden and the herbs of the field have their unwearied devotees, crossing the ocean, wayfaring in the desert, and making devout pilgrimages to every region of Nature, for offerings to their patron muse. The rocks from their residences among the clouds to their deep rests in the dark bowels of the earth, have a most bold and venturesome priesthood; who see in their rough and flinty faces a more delectable image to adore than in the revealed countenance of God. And the political welfare of the world is a very Moloch, who can at any time command his hecatomb of human victims. But the revealed sapience of God, to which the harp of David and the prophetic lyre of Isaiah

were strung, the prudence of God, which the wisest of men coveted after, preferring it to every gift which Heaven could confer—and the eternal intelligence himself in human form, and the unction of the Holy One which abideth—these the common heart of man hath forsaken, and refused to be charmed withal.

I testify, that there ascendeth not from earth, a Hosannah of her children to bear witness in the ear of the upper regions to the wonderful manifestations of her God! From a few scattered hamlets, in a small portion of her wide territory, a small voice ascendeth like the voice of one crying in the wilderness. But to the service of our general Preserver there is no concourse, from Dan unto Beersheba, of our people; the greater part of whom, after two thousand years of apostolic commission, know not the testimonies of our God; and the multitude of those who do, reject or despise them!

But, to return from this lamentation, which, may God hear, who doth not disregard the cries of his afflicted people! With the full sense of obligation to the giver, combine a humble sense of your own incapacity to value and to use the gift of his Oracles. Having to taste whatever for the mean estimates which are made, and the coarse invectives that are vented against human nature, which, though true in the main, are often in the manner so unfeeling and triumphant, as to reveal hot zeal, rather than tender and deep sorrow, we will not give in to this popular strain. And yet it is a truth by experience, revealed, that though there be in man most noble faculties, and a nature restless after the knowledge and truth of things—there are, towards God, and his revealed will, an indisposition and a regardlessness, which the most tender and enlightened consciences are the most ready to acknowledge. Of our emancipated youth, who, bound after the knowledge of the visible works of God, and the gratification of the various instincts of nature, how few betake themselves at all, how few absorb themselves with the study and

obedience of the word of God! And when, by God's visitation, we address ourselves to the task, how slow is our progress and how imperfect our performance! It is most true that Nature is unwilling to the subject of the scriptures. The soul is previously possessed with adverse interests; the world hath laid an embargo upon her faculties, and monopolized them to herself; old Habit hath perhaps added his almost incurable callousness; and the enemy of God and man is skilful to defend what he hath already won. So circumstanced, and every man is so circumstanced, we come to the audience of the word of God, and listen in worse tune than a wanton to a sermon, or a hardened knave to a judicial address. Our understanding is prepossessed with a thousand idols either of the world religious or irreligious—which corrupt the reading of the word into a straining of the text to their service; and when it will not strain, cause it to be skimmed, and perhaps despised, or hated. Such a thing as a free and unlimited reception of all the parts of Scripture into the mind, is a thing most rare to be met with, and when met with, will be found the result of many a sore submission of Nature's opinions, as well as of Nature's likings.

But the word, as hath been said, is not for the intellect alone, but for the heart, and for the will. Now, if any one be so wedded to his own candour as to think he doth accept the divine truth unabated—surely no one will flatter himself into the belief that his heart is already attuned and enlarged for all divine affections, or his will in readiness for all divine commandments. The man who thus misdeems of himself, must, if his opinion were just, be like a sheet of fair paper, unblotted, unwritten on; whereas all men are already occupied, to very fulness, with other opinions, and attachments, and desires, than the Word reveals. We do not grow Christians by the same culture by which we grow men, otherwise—what need of divine revelation, and divine assistance? But being un-

acquainted from the womb with God, and attached to what is seen and felt, through early and close acquaintance, we are ignorant and detached from what is unseen and unfelt. The Word is a novelty to our nature, its truths, fresh truths, its affections, fresh affections, its obedience a new obedience, which have to master and put down the truths, affections, and obedience gathered from the apprehension of Nature and the commerce of worldly life. Therefore, there needeth, in one that would be served from this storehouse of truth opened by heaven, a disrelish of his old acquisitions, and a preference of the new, a simple, child-like teachableness, an allowance of ignorance and error, with whatever else befits an anxious learner. Coming to the word of God, we are like children brought into the conversations of experienced men; and we should humbly listen and reverently inquire: or we are like raw rustics introduced into high and polished life, and we should unlearn our coarseness, and copy the habits of the station:—nay, we are like offenders caught, and for amendment committed to the bosom of honourable society, with the power of regaining our lost condition, and inheriting honour and trust—therefore we should walk softly and tenderly, covering our former reproach with modesty and humbleness, hasting to redeem our reputation by distinguished performances, against offence doubly guarded, doubly watchful for dangerous and extreme positions, to demonstrate our recovered goodness.

These two sentiments—devout veneration of God for his unspeakable gift, and deep distrust of our own capacity to estimate and use it aright—will generate in the mind a constant aspiration after the guidance and instruction of a Higher Power. The first sentiment of goodness remembered, emboldening us to draw near to Him who first drew near to us, and who with Christ will not refuse us any gift. The second sentiment, of weakness remembered, teaching us our need, and prompting us by every interest of religion and every feeling of helplessness to seek of him

who hath said, “If any one lack wisdom let him seek of God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not.” The soul which under these two master feelings cometh to read, shall not read without profit. Every new revelation, feeding his gratitude and nourishing his sense of former ignorance, will confirm the emotions he is under, and carry them onward to an unlimited dimension. Such a one will prosper in the way; enlargement of the inner man will be his portion, and establishment in the truth his exceeding great reward; affection to the Godhead will lead him on; and the strength which sustaineth the humble will be his reward. “In the strength of the Lord shall his right hand get victory—even in the name of the Lord of Hosts. His soul also shall flourish with the fruits of righteousness from the seed of the Word, which liveth and abideth for ever.”

Thus delivered from prepossessions of all other masters, and arrayed in the raiment of humility and love, the soul should advance to the meeting of her God; and she should call a muster of all her faculties, and have all her poor graces in attendance, and any thing she knows of his excellent works and exalted ways she should summon up to her remembrance: her understanding she should quicken, her memory refresh, her imagination stimulate, her affections cherish, and her conscience arouse. All that is within her should be stirred up, her whole glory should awake and her whole beauty display itself for the meeting of her King. As his hand-maiden she should meet him; his own handy-work, though sore defaced, yet seeking restoration; his humble because offending servant—yet nothing slavish, though humble—nothing superstitious, though devout—nothing tame, though modest in her demeanour; but quick, and ready, all addressed and wound up for her Maker’s will.

How different the ordinary proceeding of Christians, who with timorous, mistrustful spirits; with an abeyance of intellect, and a dwarfish reduction of their natural powers;

enter to the conference of the word of God! The natural powers of man are to be mistrusted, doubtless, as the willing instruments of the evil one; but they must be honoured also as the necessary instruments of the Spirit of God whose operation is a dream, if it be not through knowledge, intellect, conscience, and action. Now Christians, heedless of this grand resurrection of the mighty instruments of thought and action, at the same time coveting hard after holy attainment, do often resign the mastery of themselves, and are taken into the counsel of the religious world—whirling around the eddy of some popular leader—and so drifted, I will not say from godliness, but drifted certainly from that noble, manly, and independent course, which, under steerage of the word of God, they might have safely pursued for the precious interests of their immortal souls. Meanwhile these popular leaders, finding no necessity for strenuous endeavours and high science in the ways of God, but having a gathering host to follow them, deviate from the ways of deep and penetrating thought—refuse the contest with the literary and accomplished enemies of the faith—bring a contempt upon the cause in which mighty men did formerly gird themselves to the combat—and so cast the stumbling-block of a mistaken paltriness between enlightened men and the cross of Christ! So far from this simple-mindedness (but its proper name is feeble-mindedness) Christians should be—as aforetime in this island they were wont to be—the princes of human intellect, the lights of the world, the salt of the political and social state. Till they come forth from the swaddling bands in which foreign schools have girt them, and walk boldly upon the high places of human understanding, they shall never obtain that influence in the upper regions of knowledge and power of which unfortunately they have not the apostolic unction to be in quest. They will never be the master and commanding spirits of the time, until they cast off the wrinkled and withered skin of an obsolete age, and clothe

themselves with intelligence as with a garment, and bring forth the fruits of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Mistake us not, for we steer in a narrow, very narrow channel, with rocks of popular prejudice on every side. While we thus invoke to the reading of the Word, the highest strains of the human soul, mistake us not as derogating from the office of the Spirit of God. Far be it from any Christian, much farther from any Christian pastor, to withdraw from God the honour which is every where his due, but there, most of all his due where the human mind laboured alone for thousands of years and laboured with no success—viz. the regeneration of itself, and its restoration to the lost semblance of the divinity!—Oh! let him be reverently inquired after, devoutly waited on, and most thankfully acknowledged in every step of progress from the soul's fresh awakening out of her dark oblivious sleep—even to her ultimate attainment upon earth and full accomplishment for heaven. And that there may be a fuller choir of awakened men to advance his honour and glory here on earth—and hereafter in heaven above—let the saints bestir themselves like angels, and the ministers of religion like archangels strong!—And now at length let us have a demonstration made of all that is noble in thought, and generous in action, and devoted in piety, for bestirring this lethargic age, and breaking the bands of hell, and redeeming the whole world to the service of its God and King!

As he doth know this to be the desire and aim of the preceding Discourse, so may he prosper it to the salvation of many souls, that to his poor servant, covered over with iniquities, may derive the forgiveness and honour of those who turn many from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to the service of the living God.

ORATION II.

JOHN V. 39. SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES.

The Manner of Consulting the Oracles of God.

GOD, being ever willing and ever ready to second and succeed his Word, and having a most longing anxiety for the recovery of all men; when his Word fails of converting the soul (as it doth too often), that failure cannot be due to any omission upon his part, but to some omission or transgression upon ours. If any one, however, incline to refer the failure to a want of willingness, or a withholding of power, upon the part of God, whereof it is not given unto man to discover or remove the cause—Then in this his opinion, such a one must needs remain beyond the reach of help. If he think that notwithstanding of revelation, we are yet in the dark as to the putting forth of divine power—that in a sinner's conversion there is an element still undisclosed—that the information delivered in the scriptures is not enough, and the means there prescribed not adequate, and the divine blessing there promised not to be surely calculated on: but that over and beyond all, there is something to be tarried for—then, for one so opinioned, there is nothing but to tarry. For, except by what is revealed how are the councils of the Eternal known? and if revelation do not discover the way in which God may assuredly be found, what mortal or immortal can?—and if there be a gap between our present habitations and the Holiest of all, who can fill it up? and if one possessed of all God's revelations do still hold himself unaccomplished for the finding of God, who in heaven or earth can help him?—and, in short, if employing God's revelation as God himself directs it to be employed, and in the spirit proper to each taking every measure therein appointed, we may nevertheless be remote from

success, and nothing sure of our aim, then, what less shall we say, but that this book, the light and hope of a fallen world, is an idle meteor which mocks pursuit, and may be left to seek its way back into the hiding place of the Almighty's council, from which it hath come forth to man in vain!

But if, upon the other hand, any one believe that God's favour cometh not at random, nor by a way unknown, but may be calculated on in the way that God himself hath revealed it to proceed, and doth distil like the dew falling unseen, and rest upon every one who longeth after it, any who believes that our backward state cometh not of any darkness in the Word or abstinence in the Spirit of God, but of our own withdrawing from the light and fighting against the truth—who giveth to God thankfulness and praise, taking to himself all the blame—then, with such a one we are happy we can freely discourse, and, by God's blessing, we hope to help him onward in the way everlasting.

Yet for the sake of disabusing the others who stand looking for a dawning they know not whence nor when, let me interrogate any Christian, how he won his way from former darkness to present light? Not by knowledge alone of what the Word contains. True. By what then? by earnest prayer. But what taught him, what encouraged him to pray? Was it not certain revelations in the Word? Not by confidence in his knowledge or his strength, but by distrust of both. True. But what taught him to distrust himself? Was it not certain revelations in the word? Not by bold and urgent endeavours of his own, but by humble endeavours rested upon hope of heavenly aid. True. But what taught him to bridle his impetuosity and expect superior aid? Was it not certain revelations in the Word? And, to sum up all, how doth that Christian know, save by the image of righteousness revealed in the Word, that he is not yet in the bondage of his sins, but standeth sure in the liberty

of Christ? Why then, in the name of plain and honest dealing, will you hesitate to acknowledge and asseverate for the behoof of lingering and mistrustful men, that in God's revelations, rightly used, there is a reservoir of knowledge and direction, ample enough to feed the famished spirit of the world, whence every sinner may derive to himself a satisfying stream to refresh his present faintness, and to follow his footsteps through the tedious wilderness of life.

Therefore do we feel upon a useful and a hopeful topic, while we endeavour to discover what it is which hinders the Scripture from its full efficacy in deriving to us who search them the regeneration of our souls, and their renewal in the whole image of God.

And without recurring to what hath been already said of the PREPARATION necessary for perusing aright the Word of God, we come at once to the perusal itself, and shall now, not without much distrust of our own, and intercession for heavenly power, endeavour to take account of the spirit and style in which it is wont to be perused amongst us, and of the spirit and style in which it ought to be perused. And being conscious that we have many convictions, to express which chime not in with the temper of the times, and some sayings hard to be received by Christians disciplined in modern schools, we ask your patience and Christian courtesy, and pray God for your consent and approbation.

The more ignorant sort of men, who entertain religion by a kind of hereditary reverence, as they do any other custom, take up the word of God at stated seasons, and afflict their spirits with the task of perusing it, and, to judge from a vacant face and an unawakened tone, and a facility of enduring interruption, it is often as truly inflicted upon the soul as ever penance was upon the flesh of a miserable monk. Or, upon another occasion, when one beholds mirth and jocularities at once go dumb for an act of worship, and revive again with fresh glee when the

act is over, one cannot help believing that it hath been task work with many, if not with all. Holding of the same superstition is the practice of drawing to the Word in sickness, affliction, and approaching dissolution, as if a charm against the present evil, or an invocation of the future good. Against these and all other mortifications it were enough to quote that weighty sentence of Job. "Can a man be profitable to God, as one that is wise is profitable unto himself; or is it any profit to the Almighty that thou makest thy ways perfect?" It is well pleasing to him that his word is honoured, and that his name is magnified by the intelligent creatures which his hand hath formed; but he cannot endure to be approached with mere form, or served out of constraint. It is to be preferred above the creatures which he hath made that delights him; and to reign supremely in the soul; at all times to be held in reverence, and over all our actions to preside. The want of will to his service, or impatience in its performance, or joy when it is over, converts it into contempt, the more hateful because it is covered. The weakness and imperfections of our nature he will overlook, and if besought, will by his spirit remove; but guile and disguise and all hypocrisies his soul hateth, and cannot away with. And for studying his will, it is of no importance save to perform it in the face of all opposition from within and from without; therefore, of all seasons, sickness and affliction—when we are disabled from action, and in part also from thought—is, it seems to me, the season least proper for the perusal of the Word. If it cannot overmaster us when we are clothed in all our strength, then it is a poor victory to overcome us when disease hath already prostrated our better faculties. Then chiefly to take concern about the name and the Word of God, is a system of our weakness, not of our devotion. Take heed then ye present to the Lord no lame nor maimed offerings, or put off your allegiance with well-timed and well-mannered acts of occasional attendance; or think to satisfy Him with painful

instances of self-denial, who is only gratified when the service of his creatures goes with all their heart and soul, and yields to them the height of self-enjoyment.

From this extreme of narrow and enforced attendance upon the Word of God, there are many who run into the other extreme of constant consultation, and cannot pass an evening together in conversation or enjoyment of any kind, but call for the Bible and the exposition of its truths by an able hand. That it becomes a family night and morning to peruse the word—and that it becomes men to assemble themselves together to hear it expounded—is a truth; while at the same time it is no less a truth, that it is a monkish custom, and a most ignorant slavery, to undervalue all intellectual, moral, or refreshing converse, for the purpose of hearing some favourite of the priesthood set forth his knowledge or his experience, though it be upon a holy subject. It is not that *he* may talk, but that *we all* may talk as becometh saints; it is not that we may hear the naked truth, but that we may exhibit our sentiments and views of all subjects, our tempers in all encounters, to be consistent with the truth. It is not merely to try our patience in hearing but to exercise all our graces, that we come together. Let the Word be appealed to, in order to justify our opinions and resolve our doubts. Let there be an occasion worthy of it; then let it be called in. But it is to muzzle free discourse, and banish useful topics, and interrupt the mind's refreshment, and bring in upon our manly and freeborn way of life, the slavishness of a devotee, the coldness of a hermitage, and the formality of cloistered canons, thus to abolish the healthful pulses of unconstrained companionship, and the free disclosures of friendship, and the closer communion and fellowship of saints. Yet though thus we protest against the formality and deadness of such a custom, we are not prepared to condemn it, if it proceed from a pure thirst after divine teaching. If in private we have a still stronger relish for it than in the company of our friends

—if in silent study we love its lessons no less than from the lips of our favourite pastor—then let the custom have free course, and let the Word be studied whenever we have opportunity, and whenever we can go to it with a common consent.

Against these two methods of communing with the word of God, whereof the one springs from the religious timidity of the world, the other from the religious timidity of Christians; the one a penance, the other a weakness; we have little fear of carrying your judgments; but you will be alarmed when we carry our censure against the common spirit, of dealing with it as a duty. Not but that it is a duty to peruse the word of God, but that it is something infinitely higher. Duty means a verdict of conscience in its behalf. Now conscience is not an independent power, at the bidding of which the Word abides to be opened, and at its forbidding to continue sealed—but the Word, let conscience bid or forbid, stands forth dressed in its own awful sanctions. "Believe and live"—"Believe not and die." If conscience have added her voice also, that is another sanction, but a sanction which was not needful to be superadded. When my Maker speaks, I am called to listen by a higher authority than the authority of my own self. I should make sure that it is my Maker who speaks—and for this let every faculty of reason and feeling do its part; but being assured that it is no other than his voice omnipotent, my whole soul must burst forth to give him attendance. There must be no demur for any verdict of any inward principle. Out of duty, out of love, out of adoration, out of joy, out of fear, out of my whole consenting soul, I must obey my Maker's call. Duty, whose cold and artificial verdict, the God of infinite love is served withal is a sentiment which the lowest relationships of life are not content with. Servant with master—child with teacher—friend with friend—when it comes to the sentiment of duty, it is near its dissolution; and it never

thrives or comes to good but when it rests upon well-tried trust and hearty regard ; upon a love to our persons, and a confidence in our worth. And in the ties of nature, to parents, to children, to brethren, to husband and wife, there to be listened to out of cold constraint of duty argues nature gone well nigh dead. There is a prompter consent, a deep sympathy of love, an over-stepping of all the limits of duty, a going even unto the death, which hardly satisfies the soul of such affection. What then shall we say of that closest of all relations—creature to Creator—which hath in it the germ of every other : the parental, for he formed us ; the patronal, for he hath upheld us ; the friendly, for in all our straits he hath befriended us ; the loyal, for our safety is in his royal hand ; and, which addeth the attachment to very self, “for we are ourselves his workmanship !” To bind this tie, nothing will suffice but strong and stubborn necessity. Duty, in truth, is the very lowest conception of it—privilege is a higher—honour a higher happiness and delight a higher still. But duty may be suspended by more pressing duty—privilege may be foregone and honour forgot, and the sense of happiness grow dull ; but this of listening to His voice who plants the sense of duty, bestows privilege, honour and happiness, and our every other faculty, is before all these, and is equalled by nothing but the stubbornest necessity. We should hear His voice as the sun and stars do in their courses, as the restful element of earth doth in its settled habitation. His voice is our law, which it is sacrilege, worse than rebellion, worse than parental rebellion, to disobey. He keeps the bands of our being together. His voice is the charter of our existence, which being disobeyed, we should run to annihilation, as our great father would have done, had not God in mercy given us a second chance by erecting the platform of our being upon the new condition of probation, different from that of all known existences. Was it ever heard that the sun stopped in his path, but it was God that commanded? Was

it ever heard that the sea forgot her instability, and stood apart in walled steadfastness, but it was God that commanded? Or that fire forgot to consume, but at the voice of God? Even so man should seek his Maker's word, as he loveth his well-being, or, like the unfallen creatures of God, as he loveth his very being—and labour in his obedience, without knowing or wishing to know aught beyond.

Necessity, therefore, I say, strong and eternal necessity, is that which joins the link between the creature and the Creator, and makes man incumbent to the voice of God. To read the Word is no ordinary duty, but the mother of all duty, enlightening the eyes and converting the soul, and creating that very conscience to which we would subjoin it. We take our meat not by duty—the body must go down to dust without it—therefore we persevere because we love to exist. So also the word of God is the bread of life, the root of all spiritual action, without which the soul will go down if not to instant annihilation, to the wretched abyss of spiritual and eternal death. But while we insist that the Scriptures should be perused out of the sense, not of an incumbency, but of a strong necessity, as being the issued orders of Him who upholdeth all things—we except against any idea of painfulness or force. We say necessity, to indicate the strength of the obligation, not its disagreeableness. But in truth, there is no such feeling, but the very opposite, attached to every necessity of the Lord's appointing. Light is pleasant to the eyes, though the necessary element of vision. Food is pleasant to the body, though the staple necessary of life. Air is refreshing to the frame, though the necessary element of the breathing spirit. What so refreshing as the necessary of water to all animated existence? Sleep is the very balm of life to all creatures under the sun. Motion is from infancy to feeblest age the most recreating of things, save rest after motion. Every necessary instinct for preserving or continuing our existence, hath in it a

pleasure, when indulged in moderation; and the pain which attends excess is the sentinel in the way of danger, and, like the sentinel's voice, upon the brink of ruin should be considered as the pleasantest of all though withdrawing us from the fondest pursuit. In like manner attendance on God's law, though necessary to the soul as wine and milk to the body, will be found equally refreshing; though necessary as light to the eyes, will be found equally cheerful: though necessary as rest to the weary limbs, will be found equally refreshing to our spiritual strength.

A duty which is at all times a duty, is a necessity; and this listening to the voice of God can at no time be dispensed with, and therefore is a stark necessity. The life of the soul can at no time proceed, without the present sense and obedience of its maker's government. His law must be present and keep concert with our most inward thoughts; from which, as we can never dissolve connection, so ought we never to dissolve connection with the regulating voice of God. In all our rising emotions; in all our purposes conceiving, in all our thoughtful debates, holden upon the propriety of things; in all the secret councils of the bosom—the law of God should be consentaneous with the law of Nature, or rather should be umpire of the council, seeing Nature and Nature's laws have receded from the will of God, and become blinded to the best interests of our spiritual state. The world is apt to look only to the executive part of conduct—to the outward actions, which come forth from behind the curtains of deliberative thought; and as these have stated seasons, and are not constantly recurring, it hath come to pass that the Word of God is read and entertained, chiefly for the visible parts of life; being used as a sort of elbow-monitor to guard our conduct from offence, rather than a universal law to impregnate all the sources of thought and action. My brethren, doth the hand ever forget its cunning, or the tongue its many forms of speech, or the soul its various states of feeling and passion? Is

there an interval in the wakeful day, when the mind ceases to be in fluctuating motion, and is bound in rest like the frozen lake? I do not ask, is it always vexed like the troubled sea—but doth it ever rest from emotion, and remain steadfast like the solid land? Doth not thought succeed thought, impression impression, recollection recollection, in a ceaseless and endless round? And, before this pleasant agitation of vital consciousness can compose itself to rest, the eye must be sealed to light, and the ear stopped to hearing, and the body become dead to feeling, and the powers of thought and action, done out, surrender themselves to repose. Nay, even then, under the death-like desertion of all her faculties and the oppressive weight of sleep, the mind in her remoter chambers keeps up a fantastical disport of mimic life, as if loth for an instant to forego the pleasure she hath in conscious being. Seeing, then, not even the sleep-locked avenues of sense, nor the wornout powers of thought and action, nor slumber's soft embrace, can so lull the soul that she should for a while forget her cogitations, and join herself to dark oblivion; seeing that she keeps, up the livelong day a busy play of thought, feeling, and action, and during the night keeps vigils in her mysterious chambers, fighting with the powers of oblivion and inertness, a battle for existence—how should she be able for any instant to do without the presence and operations of her Creator's laws—from which being at any instant exempted, she is a god unto herself, or the world is her god? From their authority to be detached, however brief a season, is for that season to be under foreign control, and rebellious to the Being of whom her faculties are holden, and by whom her powers of life are upheld.—His laws should be present in our inward parts, yea, hidden in our hearts, that we offend him not. They should be familiar as the very consciousness of life. Into the belief being received, they should pass into the memory, grow incorporate with the hidden sources of nature; until the array of our purposes and actions

learn to display itself under the banners of the Supreme; until instinct, blind instinct himself, have his eye opened and purged by the light of Heaven, and come forth submissive to Heaven's voice!

If any one who heareth me, have the Word so believed, so treasured, so incorporated, the same is a perfect man, and needeth only to preserve himself so. But as there is no one, or hardly any one, so instated; I take the benefit of these arguments and illustrations, to press home upon you the reading of the Word in another style than you are wont.

And, *First*,—That which I have sketched of the soul's necessities, needeth something more than to rake the scriptures for a few opinions, which, by what authority I know not, they have exalted with the proud name of *the doctrines*; as if all scripture were not profitable for doctrine.—Masterful men, or the masterful current of opinion, hath ploughed with the word of God, and the fruit has been to inveigle the mind into the exclusive admiration of some few truths, which being planted in the belief, and sacrificed to in all religious expositions and discourses, have become popular idols, which frown heresy and excommunication upon all who dare stand for the unadulterated, uncurtailed testimony. Such shibboleths every age hath been trained to mouth; and it is as much as one's religious character is worth, to think that the doctrinal shibboleths of the present day may not include the whole contents and capacity of the written Word. But, truly, there are higher fears than the fear even of the religious world; and greater loss than the loss of religious fame. Therefore, craving indulgence of you to hear us to an end, and asking the credit of good intention upon what you have already heard, we summon your whole unconstrained man to the engagement of reading the Word;—not to authenticate a meagre outline of opinions elsewhere derived, but to prove and purify all the sentiments which bind the confederations of life; to prove and purify all the

feelings which instigate the actions of life; many to annihilate; many to implant: all to regulate and reform;—to bridle the tongue till its words come forth in unison with the word of God, and to people the whole soul with the population of new thoughts, which that Word reveals of God and man—of the present and the future. These doctrines, truly should, be like the mighty rivers which fertilize our island, whose waters, before escaping to the sea, have found their way to the roots of each several flower, and plant, and stately tree, and covered the face of the land with beauty and with fertility—spreading plenty for the enjoyment of man and beast. So ought these great doctrines of grace of the God in Christ, and the help of God in the Spirit, and fallen man's need of both—to carry health and vitality to the whole soul and surface of christian life. But it hath appeared to us, that, most unlike such wide-spreading streams of fertility, they are often, as it were, confined within rocky channels of intolerance and disputation, where they hold noisy brawl with every impediment, draining off the natural juices of the soul; and, instead of fruits and graces, leaving all behind naked, barren, and unpeopled! which makes us lament.

In the *Second* place,—That the catechetical books of any church should have come to play such a conspicuous part in the foreground of the Christian stage; and have not kept their proper inferiority, and served as handmaidens to the book of God. They are exhibitions, not of the whole Bible, as is often thought, but of the abstract doctrines, and formal commandments of the Bible: and this not upon any super-human testimony, but after the judgment of fallible mortals like ourselves. We are not discontented with them on that account, but, on the other hand, we are proud to possess such as our church doth acknowledge: but we are very discontented that they should have stepped from their proper place of discerning heresy, and preserving in the church a unity of faith; that from this useful office they should have come to usurp

it as the great instrument of a religious education, and the great store-house of religious knowledge, in our families, in our schools, and even in the ministry of our churches. Now they are not good instruments of education, being above the level of youth and the most of men, and addressing only the intellect, and that only with logical forms of truth, not with narrative, with example, with eloquence or with feeling. And as to their being store-houses of religious knowledge—they want the most essential staples of our religion; for there is in them no authoritative voice of our God that we should fear them; no tender sympathetic voice of our Saviour, that we should tenderly affect them in return; no unction of the Holy One, that we should depend upon them for healing power. All we do is to believe them, and this not until we have carried an appeal to the word of God, which surely were as worthy a first appeal and a maiden faith. Moreover, there is in them no feature of Christian imagery, to catch the conception; nor patterns of holy men, to awaken the imitation of excellence, and draw on the admiration of holiness; no joyful strains of hope and promised bliss, to rouse Nature's indolence; nor eager remonstrances against the world's ways; nor stern denunciations, like the thunder of heaven upon the head of its transgressions; nor pathetic bursts of sympathy over Nature's melancholy conditions, and more melancholy prospects. On these accounts most indubitable it is that the rich and mellow Word with God's own wisdom mellow, and rich with all mortal and immortal attractions, is a better net to catch childhood, to catch manhood, withal, than these pieces of man's wording however true to Scripture, or compounded of the ingredients of human wisdom. From the prevalence of this taste for doctrinal and catechetical statements, there hath sprung,

In the *Third* place,—This succession of practical evils, over which we most bitterly lament. The Scriptures are not read for the higher ends of teaching the soul practical

wisdom and overcoming the practical errors of all her faculties, of all her judgments, and of all her ways. Then the Word, which is diversified for men of all gifts, cometh to be prized chiefly as a treasure of intellectual truth, elements of religious dogmatism—often an armoury of religious warfare. Then our spirits become intolerant of all who find in the Bible any tenets differing from our own, as if they had made an invasion upon the integrity of our faith, and were plotting the downfall of religion itself. Then an accurate statement of opinion from the pulpit, from the lips of childhood, from the death-bed of age, becomes all in all; whereas it is nothing if not conjoined with the utterances of a Christian spirit, and the evidences of a renewed life. Who can bear the logical and metaphysical aspect with which Religion looks out from the temples of this land, playing about the head, but starving the well-springs of the heart, and drying up the fertile streams of a holy and charitable life! An accurate, systematic form is the last perfection of knowledge; and a systematic thinker is the perfection of an educated man. Therefore, it is high intolerance of the far greater number, whose heart and whose affections may be their master faculty, to present nothing but intellectual food, or that chiefly: and moreover, it is a religious spoilation of the heavenly wisdom, which hath a strain fitted to every mood; and it is an unfeeling, unfaithful, dealing between God and the creatures whom he hath been at such charges to save. And to look suspicious upon those who are attracted to the sacred page by its gracious pictures of the divine goodness, and love it with a simple answer of affection to its affectionate sayings, or a simple answer of hope to its abundant promises—to undervalue those who feed their souls with its spiritual psalmody, or direct their life by its weighty proverbs, reckoning an authority and grace of God to reside in every portion of it—to suspect those who live on devotion, on acknowledgments of Providence, and imitation of Christ, because they cannot couch their

simple faith and feeling in technical and theological phrase, but sink dumb when the high points of faith are handled—all these—the baneful effects of holding so much acquaintance with formularies of doctrine, and so little of the Word itself—so much acquaintance with the religious spirit of the age and country, and so little with the spirit of God, argue a narrow form of religion, and an uncharitableness of spirit, from which we pray God, to deliver all who pertain to the household of faith!

Oh! brethren, let me now drop this strain of censure which the honour of the Bible hath forced me to maintain against my better liking, and speak persuasively in your ear for a noble and more enlarged perception of the truth. Pour ye out your whole undivided heart before the command of God. Give your enlarged spirit to the communion of his word. Be free; be disentangled. Let it teach; let it reprove; let it correct; let it instruct in righteousness; let it elevate you with its wonderful delineations of the secrets of the divine nature, and of the future destinies of the human race, higher than the loftiest poetry; and let it carry you deeper, with its pictures of our present and future wretchedness, than the most pathetic sentiments ever penned by the novelist:—and let it take affection captive by its pictures of divine mercy and forgiveness, more than the sweetest eloquence: let it transport you with indignation at that with which it is indignant, and take you with passion when it is impassioned; when it blames be ye blamed; when it exhorts be ye exhorted; when it condescends to argument, by its arguments be ye convinced. Be free to take all its moods, and catch all its inspirations. Then shall you become instinct with all Christian feeling, and pregnant with all holy fruits, 'thoroughly furnished for every good word and work.'

Why, in modern times, do we not take from the Word that sublimity of design and gigantic strength of purpose which made all things bend before the saints, whose

praise is in the Word and the church of God? Why have the written secrets of the Eternal become less moving than the fictions of fancy, or the periodical works of the day; and their impressiveness died away into the imbecility of a tale that hath been often told? Not because man's spirit hath become more weak. Was there ever an age in which it was more patient of research, or restless after improvement? Not because the Spirit of God hath become backward in his help, or the Word divested of its truth—but because we treat it not as the all-accomplished wisdom of God—the righteous setting works of men along side of it, or masters over it—the world altogether apostatizing from it unto folly. We come to meditate it, like armed men to consult of peace—our whole mind occupied with insurrectionary interests—we suffer no captivity of its truth. Faith, which should brood with expanded wings over the whole heavenly legend, imbibing its entire spirit—what hath it become? a name to conjure up theories and hypothesis upon. Duty likewise hath fallen into a few formalities of abstaining from amusements, and keeping up severities—instead of denoting a soul girt with all its powers for its Maker's will. Religion also, a set of opinions and party distinctions separated from high endowments, and herding with cheap popular accomplishments—a mere serving-maid of everyday life; instead of being the mistress of all earthly, and the preceptress of all heavenly, sentiments—and the very queen of all high gifts, and graces, and perfections, in every walk of life!

To be delivered from this dwarfish exhibition of that plant which our heavenly Father hath planted, take up this holy book. Let your devotions gather warmth from the various exhibitions of the nature and attributes of God. Let the displays of his power overawe you, and the goings forth of his majesty still you into reverend observance. Let his uplifted voice awake the slumber of your spirits, and every faculty burn in adoration of that image of the

invisible God which his word reveals. If Nature is reverend before Him, how much more the spirit of man for whom he rideth forth in his state! Let his Holiness, before which the pure seraph veils his face, and his Justice, before which the heavens are rebuked, humble our frail spirits in the dust, and awaken all their conscious guilt. Then let the richness of his mercy strike us dumb with amazement, and his offered grace revive our hopes anew; and let his Son, coming forth with the embraces of his love, fill our spirits with rapture. Let us hold him fast in sweet communion; exchange with him affection's kindest tokens; and be satisfied with the sufficiency of his grace; and let the strength of his Spirit be our refuge, his all-sufficient strength our buckler and our trust!

Then, stirred up through all her powers, and awakened from the deep sleep of Nature and oblivion of God, (which among visible things she partaketh,) our soul shall come forth from the communion of the Word full of divine energy and ardour, prepared to run upon this world's theatre, the race of duty for the prize of life eternal. She shall erect herself beyond the measures and approbation of men, into the measures and approbation of God. She shall become like the saints of old, who strengthened by such repasts of faith, "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

ORATION III.

JOHN V. 39. SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES.

The Obeying of the Oracles of God.

HITHERTO our way hath been easy, though among the prejudices of men. In claiming for the Almighty's voice a due preparation and a full attendance of our faculties, we have been handling a question of religious formality rather than of religious conduct. Conduct doubtless it is duly to wait upon the Lord, the conduct of the heart as well as of the outward man, but it is a conduct which may be assumed at little expense. It requires a sacrifice of convenience and of attention, which many should be content to render, if it would purchase them the favour of God: and many there be who give themselves with all diligence to the lessons already handled of making ready and giving ear to the divine Word, but stop short when summoned to the obedience of what they have heard. Then interest comes in to play its part, and custom, and the fear of change, with all the aversions of Nature to the will of God. The divine word, in old times, commended itself to the fears of men, while the emblems of omnipotence overhung them. The rebellion of Korah soon ceased when the earth opened her mouth; and the people left murmuring when the fiery serpents made havoc of the camp; and though these emblems have ceased, the Scriptures have around them so much of hereditary reverence, and so much of intrinsic recommendation, that the pleadings which we have made, seem to us easy compared with that upon which we have now to enter. We have now to contest it with the most stubborn habits and the most pleasing desires of Nature. It is no longer a matter of words to be listened to, but of deeds to be performed. The law

promulgated with such solemnity, and listened to with such devotion, has now to be obeyed. Then, brethren, lend us a favourable ear, and give to our words a generous welcome: the cause is difficult, the issues most momentous; the instrument is weak, and your interests are at stake; therefore may God, who sustaineth the right, not absent himself from the cause of his own holy law, but give efficacy to weakness, that his glory may the more abound.

There prevails universally against divine institutions not only a strong reluctance, but also a delusive prejudice, that they are an invasion upon the liberty of man's estate. The question is conceived to be, whether we shall be at our own liberty or at the disposal of God—a question between freedom and compulsion. This prejudice we shall first expose, and bring the fair statement of the question before you. Then we shall account for the reluctance which we feel to the law of God when we enter to its obedience. Then set before you the fatal result of persisting against it; and close this oration by contesting it with your demurs and oppositions.

The portion of truth which one can for himself examine, is so mere a scantling of what is needful for the service of his life, and has in it such instability when not under the helm of authority, human or divine, that men have found it necessary to lay up and patronize a store of common truth, out of which each man may be furnished ready to hand when he comes to need it, without the trouble of discovering for himself. This common store consists of the customs established, the opinions popular, the laws instituted, the private duties expected, and the manners approved. These are a grand legacy transmitted from successive generations, the accumulated wealth of the wit and wisdom of our fathers—in which to become conversant we are for nearly a third of our life regarded as under age, wards of our parents, and incompetent in great matters to act for ourselves. If we set any of these traditions aside, following our own inventions or giving scope to our per-

sonal freedom, we are eyed with suspicion or punished as defaulters, and, in capital matters, banished from good society, from our native land, and from life itself. Thus it fares with human kind; they are knit generation to generation. Our fathers bind us, and we shall bind our children. No man is free. All men are constrained by an authority over which they have no controul, and are in their turn controlling others who have yet to be.

Let no man, therefore, in the pride of his heart, revolt from the traditions of God as an imposition upon the freedom of his estate. If the wisdom of God take no hand in the ordination of our life, then the wisdom of our fathers will do it all. But for us, we shall be the same governed and shackled creatures as before. We may change the place of our residence for a country where God's traditions are unknown, and thereby change the degree or form of the bondage, but the necessity of it for peace and enjoyment will still remain. We may change our sphere in life to one where God's traditions are trampled under foot, and find a momentary release, but soon the habits of our new condition will become as peremptory as those of the old. In truth, there is no deliverance. Society is beforehand with us; and along with its beautified fields and happy inventions and manifold conditions of comfort, hands down to us as the price of these a thousand laws and restraints upon the freedom of our conduct.

Such being the hereditary bondage of all ages and of all nations, those are the happiest who have had the wisest and most virtuous ancestors, to derive to them only wholesome restraints upon the uncertainty of individual judgment and the waywardness of individual will;—those being the most blessed of all who have been favoured with laws and institutions from the perfection of wisdom which is with Him who knows the bounds of man's capacity, and the limits within which his happiness and honour reside. For the wisest men being little acquainted with the secret workings of their own heart, whose mysterious

organization is deep seated beyond our observation, are still less able to comprehend another's nature, so as to prescribe with infallible certainty for its government. The best they can do is to point out some palpable errors to be avoided, some gross delinquencies to be shunned, some common rights to be revered, some noble actions to be honoured, some base ones to be disgraced. They can buoy some few of the shoals and rocks of life, but the tides and currents which pervade it are beyond their management. They can construct ports and havens for us to touch at, but the manning and equipping and propelling the vessel is with God alone. He who gave the soul her powers, and to all his works their properties, can alone sweetly accommodate them with ordinances. The best attempts of lawgivers are but bungling artifices for compassing coarse designs, aiming at the security of some visible and external good, and that attaining not without great waste of private liberty and happiness: whereas God being perfectly acquainted with our most inward principles, and with all the shortest and safest ways to happiness, can, with no more effort than is necessary, carry us through all the departments and degrees of excellence. He, therefore, is the only fit lawgiver; His statutes the only liberty, all other obedience being an acquiescence in that of whose perfect rectitude we are nothing sure, has in it a servility—but this is honour, this is exaltation to fulfill all our powers for the purposes for which they were given, and after the rules of him who gave them.

The question, therefore, of a religious or an irreligious life, when thus opened up, no longer shows itself to be a question of liberty or of compulsion, but of one kind of authority against another. There are two competitors for our service, God and the world; and the question is, which will we obey. Will we yield to the sovereignty of the various laws and customs, which, upon coming to man's estate, we find established, time-serving what has in it no wit but the wisdom of man, and no stability but

the power of man, and which we had no say whatever in constructing, and which accommodates itself but ill to our conditions; or will we yield to the sovereignty of those institutes which have in them no seed of change, softly framed to sway the heart and to insinuate into all its corners the harmony and peace of heaven, which supply the deficiencies of our wisdom and stay the swervings of our life, and conduct us at length to the unchangeable happiness and honour of the life to come.

And yet though the question when thus accurately stated, stands beyond all reasonable doubt, and leaves us without excuse in preferring human authority to divine, such is the antipathy and resistance of human nature to God, that his statutes which rejoice the heart are obstinately withstood, while to the ordinances and customs of men we willingly yield our necks. There be multitudes with whom the voice of the Lord of Hosts hath no sway against the voice of fashion; and the saintly graces of the Spirit of God no chance against the graces of accomplished life. Multitudes, with whom the calls of low sensual instinct prevail against the calls of the Almighty to glory and honour. And multitudes to whom life's commonest drudgery is an enjoyment compared with the obedience of a godly custom or a Christian precept.

This reluctance to the divine, and compliance with the human institutions, might seem to bear against what we have advanced upon the superior wisdom and suitability of the former, and to prove that God in devising for human improvement had missed of his aim. We think it good therefore, to show how this reluctance comes about, and how we find ourselves at man's estate so enamoured of the world's bondage as to feel it like a second nature, which we cannot give up for the service of God without the most violent and painful effort. This inquiry, by revealing the sources of our enmity to the law of God, will show the time at which and the means by which it may be most successfully encountered.

At first our enmity was as strong to the world's institutions as it is now to the institutions of God. There is in every nature a preference of its own will, and a reluctance to surrender it to another. It is not till after many struggles that a mother gains the mastery of her child, and not till after much discipline that a youth gives willingly in to the tasks of his teacher. And to the moral and decent customs of life we know that many youths can never bring themselves to conform at all, but set them at open defiance, or hide in secrecy their violation of them. After twenty years of training to what is honourable and good, never omitted for a day, and hardly for a single hour, with the constant presence of examples and the constant terror of censures, such is the urgency of nature and her reluctance to controul, that a youth shall no sooner remove from the neighbourhood of his early restraints than he will cast them at his feet and take the whole scope of his self-willedness; and thus many run to ruin when they leave the home of their father and the eye of their friends. Let us not be amazed, therefore, that the statutes of the Lord, to which there is no constant or sufficient training of parents and of masters, and which take under their controul not only the form and fashion of life, but the whole thoughts and intentions of the heart, should fare the same, and have a fearful struggle with Nature's independence.

Now by the same means of early discipline and example by which we were brought to acquiesce in the government of our parents, the mastery of our teachers, and the authority of life's many forms and customs, we shall most likely be brought to acquiesce in the statutes of the Lord. Just as no parent who wished his child to be a well-doing member of society, would for the first years of his life turn him adrift from counsel and correction, but find for him masters to instruct, and patterns to copy after, adding to all the influence of his own parental authority and affection—even so, if you would have your child to

flourish in religious life, you must not sequester the subject of religion from your table or your household, nor keep him in the dark till he arrive at years of reflection; but from the first dawn of thought and effort of will, teach him with a winning voice, and with a gentle hand lead him into the ways of God. The raw opinion that a certain maturity of judgment must be tarried for, before entering into religious conference with our children, comes of that nation which pervades the religious world, that religion rests upon the concoction of certain questions in theology, to which mature years are necessary; whereas it rests upon the authority of God, which a child can comprehend so soon as it can the authority of its father the love of Christ, which a child can comprehend so soon as it can the love of its mother; the assistance of the Spirit, which it can comprehend so soon as it is alive to the need of instruction or of help from its parents; the difference between right and wrong, which it may be taught so soon as it can perform the one and avoid the other. There is a religion of childhood, and a religion of manhood; the former standing mostly in authority, the latter in authority and reason conjoined; the former referring chiefly to words and actions, the latter embracing also principles and sentiments. But because you cannot instil into children the full maturity of religious truth, is no more argument for neglecting the travel with them on religion, than it would be to refuse teaching them obedience to yourself and respect of others, till they could comprehend the principles on which parental obedience and friendly respect are grounded.

Now, we must confess it hath seldom fallen to us to see religion taught in the family with that diligence with which good manners, parental respect, and deference to custom are taught. The right and wrong of things is not distinguished with reference to the divine command, but with reference to the opinion of others and the ways of the world. Excellence is not urged from the approba-

tion of God, and the imitation of Christ, and the rewards of Heaven, but out of emulation of rivals, and ambition of the world's places. Companions are not sought according to their piety, their virtue, and their general worth, but according to their rank and their prospects in life. To which neglect of means, parents do often add the practical contradiction of religion, swearing perhaps, perhaps quarrelsome at home, entertaining worldly views of most subjects, religious views of almost none; and for six days in the week, banishing the face and form of religion from the eyes of their household. What glorious opportunities these for the despite of Satan to revel in. The mind, impressible as wax, wandering after novelty, and thirsting after knowledge of good and ill, unbound by habit and roving in its freedom, from within and from without solicited to evil—in this, the springtime of human character, when ye, the husbandmen of your children's minds, should be labouring the soil, and spreading it out to the sun of righteousness, and sowing it with the seed of the everlasting Word; ye are leaving it waste and undefended, for the enemy to enter in and sow it with the tares of wickedness, to take root and flourish, and choke any good seed which the ministers of grace may chance afterwards to scatter.

Have ye the conscience to think, brethren, that for this neglect an occasional visit to the church Catechism of a Sabbath night will compensate, or can you believe that certain words lying dormant in the memory during the years of budding manhood, will operate like an eastern talisman, or a catholic scapular, against the encounter of evil? Why should the wounded prejudices of any man wince while thus we speak, as if it were not God's truth we spoke? Have we not the experience within ourselves of having been mastered by this world's ambitious schools, albeit not untutored in the theological love of childhood, and have ye not the same experience? Feel ye not, when ye would set your hearts in order before the Lord,

that they are all like an unweeded garden, and that you have to begin by tearing and lacerating the loves, admirations, and proprieties, which in early life cast their seducements over you without note of warning from parents, or from the books in which your parents and your masters schooled you? Take heed, then, and resist the evil in its first beginning. Give the enemy the spring season, and you generally give him the summer, the autumn and the winter of life, with all eternity to boot; but tutor your children in the institutions of God, with a constant watchfulness, and a patient perseverance, beginning with restraint, then with the soft persuasion leading on, then with arguments of duty and interest confirming, and in the end, habit, which at first is adverse, will turn propitious, and the blessing of God, promised to the right training of children, will keep them from leaving his paths when they are old.

The want of a proper selection and application of means in early life, is a chief cause why we all find it such a task to conform our youth and manhood to the laws of God. It is not that these laws are ill adapted to our nature, whereof they are the guides, the sweeteners, and the perfecters; but that our nature hath got under adverse government, and been fed up with indulgences, and degraded with services, from which we cannot now without great pain and exertion be delivered. It is not that God hath withheld his blessing, which blessing I understand to be like an atmosphere around every man, that he hath at all times free liberty to breathe in through the use of appointed means. But, it is that in our youth we were not properly applied to, and mistrove for want of proper spiritual treatment. Far from us be the unholy office of reflecting upon our pious parents, whose faults, whatever they be, their children should modestly hide, not rudely discover. Farther be it from us to excuse their unworthy children, who, had they listened to a father's council, or been softened by a mother's tears, had not far wandered

from wise and prudent paths. But farther from us than both, be the impious thought, that there is any son of man whom the Almighty doth not wish to become a son of light, and for whose growth in grace, from very childhood, he hath not set forth a sufficient supply in the everlasting gospel. We blame not our parents—ourselves we excuse not, while we justify our Father which is in heaven. Parents may be more parental, children may be more obedient, but our Heavenly Father cannot exceed the boundless dimensions of his love to all mankind. Therefore, wherever the blame is of the present wildness and inculture of our spirits, most certainly it rests not with him.

This our reluctance to divine institutions is a calamity to be accounted for and overcome, not a common place to be idly harangued of; and, instead of inditing popular truisms upon the corruption of human nature, we think it wiser to have pointed out to you the season at which that serpent within us may be most easily strangled. That season to most of us is past and gone; and here we are to contend against the mischief matured by time and confirmed by a thousand habits. To assist this struggle for conformity to the will of God, we brought forward on former occasions every solemn consideration of the honour done us, and the necessity laid on us, by his having ever condescended to become our law-giver. And now what more can we do, than set before you the consequences of resisting his revealed will, and craving you by every thing safe, manly, and honourable, to conform to his commandments, for the sake of all that is dear to you as immortal creatures.

Obey the scriptures or you perish. You may despise the honour done you by the Majesty above, you may spurn the sovereignty of Almighty God, you may revolt from creation's universal rule to bow before its Creator, and stand in momentary rebellion against his ordinances; his overtures of mercy you may cast contempt on, and

crucify afresh the royal personage who bears them; and you may riot in your licentious liberty for a while and make game of his indulgence and long-suffering. But come at length it will, when Revenge shall array herself to go forth, and Anguish shall attend her, and from the wheels of their chariot ruin and dismay shall shoot far and wide among the enemies of the king, whose desolation shall not tarry, and whose destruction, as the wing of the whirlwind, shall be swift—hopeless as the conclusion of eternity and the reversion of doom. Then around the fiery concave of the wasteful pit the clang of grief shall ring, and the flinty heart which repelled tender mercy shall strike its fangs into its proper bosom; and the soft and gentle spirit which dissolved in voluptuous pleasures, shall dissolve in weeping sorrows and outbursting lamentations; and the gay glory of time shall depart; and sportful liberty shall be bound for ever in the chain of obdurate necessity. The green earth with all her blooming beauty and bowers of peace shall depart. The morning and evening salutations of kinsmen shall depart, and the ever welcome voice of friendship, and the tender whispering of full-hearted affection, shall depart, for the sad discord of weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. And the tender names of children, and father and mother, and wife and husband, with the communion of domestic love and mutual affection, and the inward touches of natural instinct, which family compact, when uninjured by discord, wraps the five-long day into one swell of tender emotion, making earth's lowly scenes worthy of heaven itself—All, all shall pass away; and instead shall come the level lake that burneth, and the solitary dungeon, and the desolate bosom, and the throes and tossings of horror and hopelessness, and the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched.

'Tis written, 'tis written, 'tis sealed of heaven, and a few years shall reveal it all. Be assured it is even so to happen to the despisers of holy writ. With this in arrears, what boots liberty, pleasure, enjoyment—all within the

hourglass of time, or the round earth's continent, all the sensibilities of life, all the powers of man, all the attractions of woman!

Terror hath sitten enthroned on the brows of tyrants, and made the heart of a nation quake; but upon this peaceful volume there sits a terror to make the mute world stand aghast. Yet not the terror of tyranny neither, but the terror of justice, which abides the scorners of the most High God, and the revilers of his most gracious Son. And is it not just, though terrible, that he who brooked not in heaven one moment's disaffection, but launched the rebel host to hell and bound them evermore in chains of darkness, should also do his sovereign will upon the disaffected of this earth, whom he hath long endured and pleaded with in vain? We are fallen, 'tis true—we found the world fallen into ungodly customs, 'tis true—here are we full grown and mature in disaffection, most true. And what can we do to repair a ruined world, and regain a lost purity? Nothing—nothing can we do to such a task. But God hath provided for this pass of perplexity; he hath opened a door of reconciliation, and laid forth a store of help, and asks at our hand no impossibilities, only what our condition is equal to in concert with his freely offered grace.

These topics of terror, it is very much the fashion of the time to turn the ear from, as if it were unmanly to fear pain. Call it manly or unmanly, it is Nature's strongest instinct—the strongest instinct of all animated nature; and to avoid it is the chief impulse of all our actions. Punishment is that which law founds upon, and parental authority in the first instance, and every human institution from which it is painful to be dismembered. Not only is pain not to be inflicted without high cause, or endured without trouble, but not to be looked on without a pang; as ye may judge, when ye see the cold knife of the surgeon enter the patient's flesh, or the heavy wain grind onward to the neck of a fallen child, Despise pain, I wot not what

it means. Bodily pain you may despise in a good cause, but let there be no motive, let it be God's simple visitation, spasms of the body for example, then how many give it license, how many send for the physician to stay it? Truly, there is not a man in being whom bodily pain, however slight, if incessant, will not turn to fury or to insensibility—embittering peace; eating out kindness, contracting sympathy, and altogether deforming the inner man. Fits of acute suffering which are soon to be over, any disease with death in the distance, may be borne, but take away hope, and let there be no visible escape, and he is more than mortal that can endure. A drop of water incessantly falling upon the head, is found to be the most excruciating of all torture, which proveth experimentally the truth of what is said.

Hell, therefore, is not to be despised, like a sick bed, if any of you be so hardy as to despise a sick bed. There are no comforting kindred, no physician's aid, no hope of recovery, no melancholy relief of death, no sustenance of grace. It is no work of earthly torture or execution, with a good cause to suffer in, and a beholding world or posterity to look on a good conscience to approve, perhaps scornful words to revenge cruel actions, and the constant play of resolution or study of revenge. It is no struggle of mind against its material envelopements and worldly ills, like stoicism, which was the sentiment of virtue nobly downbearing the sense of pain. I cannot render it to fancy, but I cannot render it to fear. Why may it not be the agony of all diseases the body is susceptible of, with the anguish of all deranged conceptions and disordered feelings, stinging recollections, present remorse, bursting indignations, with nothing but ourselves to burst on, dismal prospects, fearful certainties, fury, folly, and despair.

I know it is not only the fashion of the world, but of christians, to despise the preaching of future wo; but the methods of modern schools which are content with one

idea for their gospel, and one motive for their activity, we willingly renounce for the broad methods of the Scripture, which bring out ever and anon the recesses of the future to upheave duty, and downbear wickedness, and assail men by their hopes and fears as often as by their affections, by the authority of God as often as by the constraining love of Christ, by arguments of reason, and of interest no less. Therefore, sustained by the frequent example of our Saviour, the most tender-hearted of all beings, and who to man hath shown the most excessive love; we return, and give men to wit, that the despisers of God's law and of Christ's gospel shall by no means escape the most rigorous fate. Pain, pain inexorable tribulation and anguish, shall be their everlasting doom! The smoke of their torments ascendeth for ever and ever. One frail thread snapped, and they are down to the bottomless pit. Think of him who had a sword suspended by a hair over his naked neck while he lay and feasted,—think of yourselves suspended over the pit of perdition by the flimsy thread of life—a thread near worn, weak in a thousand places, ever threatened by the fatal shears which soon shall clip it. You believe the Scriptures, then this you believe, which is true as that Christ died to save you from the same.

If you call for a truce to such terrific pictures, then call for mercy against the more terrific realities; but if you be too callous or too careless to call for mercy and ensue repentance, your pastors may give you truce to the pictures, but God will give no obedience to the realities into which they are dropping evermore, and you shall likewise presently drop, if you repent not.

Now, if you be aroused to think, let us argue together, and bring things to an issue. What hinders you from giving your souls to the divine institutions? Early habits hinder, the world's customary fashions hinder, and Nature's leanings the other way hinder, and passion hinders, and a whole insurrectionary host of feelings muster against the change. Well, be it granted that a troop of joys

must be put to flight, and a whole host of pleasant feelings be subdued. Then, what is lost? Is honour lost? Is fortune lost? Is God's providence scared away? Hath the world slipped from beneath your feet, and does the air of heaven no longer blow fresh around you? Has life deceased, or are your faculties of happiness foregone? Change, the dread of change, that is all. The change of society and habits, with the loss of some few perishable gaieties.

Now let us reason together. Is not that as great a change when your physician chambers you up, and restricts your company to nurses, and your diet to simples? Is not that as great a change when you leave the dissipated city, outworn with its excitements, and live with solitude and inconvenience in your summer quarters? And is not that a greater change which stern law makes, when it mures up our person and gives us outcasts to company with? And where is the festive life of those who sail the wide ocean; and where the gaieties of the campaigning soldier; and how does the wandering beggar brook his scanty life? If, for the sake of a pained limb you will undergo the change, will you not for the removal of the eternal pains of spirit and flesh? If for a summer of refreshment amongst the green of earth, and the freshness of ocean, ye will undergo the change, will ye not for the rich contents of heaven? And if at the command of law ye will, and if for gain the sailor will, and for honour the soldier will, and for necessity the strolling beggar will; men and brethren, will ye not, to avoid hell, to reach heaven, to please the voice of God, to gain the inheritance of wealth and honour, and to feed your spirit's starved necessities—Oh men will ye not muster resolution to enterprize the change?

Bring manly fortitude to this question, I entreat you, and look it in the face; compare these two alternatives—the world's principles and customs—Christ's principles and customs. When we entered into life we were equally

strangers to both, predisposed to have our own will in every thing, and reluctant to resign it either to the institutions of our ancestors, or to the institutions of Christ. By a greater aptitude of nature, and the neighbourhood of more examples, and the presence of more immediate rewards and punishments, and a youth of continual training, we have grown into the school of the world, where we are enchanted and spell-bound. I know not with what, but sure we are bewitched, or with thralldom worn down and unmanned. 'Tis not better fortune that holds us, that I deny; nor more accomplishments of mind, nor larger bounds of feeling, nor sublimer thoughts, nor more generous actions, nor more peaceful moments; which I affirm to be all on the other side. What then is the mighty gain? Next to nothing. A few gay smiles of companionship, a few momentary gratifications dear bought at the price of after-thoughts and after depressions; a few heady excesses of spirit, and extravagances of language, and irregularities of conduct; that is nearly the sum total of the benefit. Are you free? Not a jot. You are the slaves of the customs, and dare not on your peril depart from one of them. You call religion a bondage; yes, it is the bondage of angels strong, and seraphs blessed; Nature's well-pleased bondage to her Maker, the creature's reverence for his Creator; but yours, yours is a bondage to idle floating customs, narrow rules of men like yourselves, whose statutes enslave you. You have no privileges worth naming. You have heaven forfeited. You have hell forestalled: Pitiful drudgery. And this is what you are in love with and cannot leave. So were the swinish herd enamoured of Circe's cup forgetful of their former noble selves.

I wish I could disenchant you, that you might perceive the blessed truth, and love it—which I see not, but I may, seeing God grants his blessing to the weakest instrument. Let me speak a moment of the nature of this change; and if ever, now God send us persuasive words.

Ye take up the thing amiss when you think, as is too often represented, that it is a change to be succeeded in upon the spur of resolution. A beginning it must have, and that most noticeable when from leaving God's face and favour, we turn timorously to seek them again. But for its completion the age of Methuselah were insufficient; men are never converted, but always converting; saints never build up, but always building up. Now herein you do greatly err. Unless you change and master nature at once, you give it up for hopeless, and fall down into the quietus of man's total inability and forlornness. This is the grossness of stupidest error. Knowledge of God's will is not derived at once, cases of conscience are not settled at once, nor is the ability to overcome conferred at once. The conversation is the new birth, but to be born is not to be the man complete in feature and in mind, which groweth out of knowledge, experience, discipline of youth, observation of life, and the thousand appointed steps between the almost unconscious babe and the accomplished man. Even so, according to our humble view of the matter, the new birth is but the first germ of religion in the soul, which hath to be cherished, nursed, guarded, trained, and taught by methods and means of grace as manifold as natural strength is reared by. Therefore, so that your souls are longing after God, your ears drinking in his council, you feel moving, though faint, still moving in the path, be of good cheer, go on and prosper. Nay, so that you are losing conceit of sin by reason of better conceptions, and waxing in fear of future issues, and meditating your mortality more, it is symptomatic of good, go on and prosper. Despair not because you are not perfect, neither turn back because you frequently fall.

And ye advanced Christians, do not despise this day of small things in a younger brother, neither go impose upon him all your burdens, nor to minister the strongest meat which you can digest; but give Godspeed to any endea-

your after good, however small; his very aspirations despise not, his imperfections do not sorely rebuke. Strengthen the hands that hang down and the feeble knees confirm. Strengthen by encouragement and support, do not by rebuke and censure drive him to distraction.

Nevertheless, though this change may appear in various quarters of the horizon of a sinner's thoughts and interests, there are marks in its progression which may be laid down. Discontent with oneself, a fear of God's displeasure, a desire after the knowledge of his will, an acquiescence in his estimate of our sinfulness, a joyful reception of the Saviour, a growing peace, and with it a strict obedience, a sense of great weakness, a seeking for help by prayer, perusal of the Word, and waiting for the Spirit, and a progress in the way everlasting:—these things, not by order, as if there were an infallible order, which some in their witless unobservance of Christian life do imagine, but certainly, most certainly these marks will reveal themselves in the course of the progression; and such to whom these truths are not disclosing or disclosed are not christianizing or christianized.

Allow me, then, to gather up the whole that hath been said and dismiss the subject. This world into which we are born age after age, is marshalled into two parts—those who give heed to the Lord's revelations and thereunto conform their lives—those who give not heed to them, but set up a system of life according to hereditary law, honour and custom. To the one or the other we must submit, there is not one in a thousand who dissents from both, and setteth up for himself. Whichever you destine your children to, to that breed them like a business. Those that have not been so trained, but find themselves confederate with the world, have only to enter themselves to the school of Christ, nothing doubting of success, if they consult and obey the word of God. They shall feel it new, and therefore seemingly more restrictive, but in truth not more restrictive than the old, but otherwise

more liberal, more generous, more ennobling, more peaceful and more joyful.

Come over, cast in your lot with the saints, you have every thing to gain—peace of conscience, a divine joy, a fellowship with God, a special providence, a heritage of promise and blessing, a triumphant death, and a crown of everlasting life. The choice of men are here—the prime specimens of manhood, the royal priesthood and chosen generation of mankind—and worth domestic, with Piety, her guardian genius, is here; and worth public, with Charity, her guardian genius, is here; and enterprise heroic, with Faith, her guardian genius, is here; and the chief fathers of science and knowledge have likewise clave with the saints; and the greatest inventors, the inventors of reformation in all worthy matters, are here; apostles and prophets and patriarchs are here; and, finally, the first-born of every creature who is God over all blessed for ever! Amen.

ORATION IV.

JOHN V. 39. SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES.

The Obeying of the Oracles of God.

WE have discoursed upon the preparation necessary for holding intercourse with the word of God, summoning your souls to it as to a most honourable interview, a feast of heavenly wisdom. We have detailed the place which you occupy, and the part which you should perform, when listening to the voice of your Creator, and receiving the law at his mouth—giving ear as the light did when first summoned from its primeval residence; or the sun, and the moon, and the stars—and as mute Nature listens still. We have searched into that strong reluctance which we bear to the divine law, and sought to overcome it by the fearful picture of the desolation which overtakes transgressors;—arguing sore between the world and the word of God, and praying you to be reconciled for the sake of Christ. Heaven grant that we may not have spoken in vain: and now that we are to address ourselves to a loftier argument, may his Spirit fill us with knowledge and affection, that his mysterious and momentous truths may suffer no disparagement from our weak conception and feeble utterance. The argument for which we now pray to be enabled, is the good fruit which will accrue to all who search and entertain and obey the Scriptures after the manner we have set forth. This we shall display under three heads: the knowledge obtained; the life of heavenly enterprise begotten; and the eternal reward to be gained.

The eternal power and Godhead of our Creator, says St. Paul, speak through the things which are made, and there is no doubt that the oracle of the works of God is loud in commendation of his power and providence. But

it is not easy to be explored by the multitude, little enlightened by knowledge, and much taken up with the necessary avocations of life.—And those who are conversant with it, do generally, in the act of consulting, stop short in admiration of the temple which he inhabits, paying their reverence to its richness and decorations, but seldom reaching the inward sanctuary where his voice is heard. Nature hath changed her song, or man hath lost his faculty of interpreting it; for into his ear she uttereth many a strain in commendation of herself, hardly one in commendation of her God. Now natural knowledge, when thus divorced from the knowledge of Nature's God, satisfieth not the ethereal spirit, which must join league with spirit in order to taste its proper delight. For what communion is there between the soul of man and the superficial beauty of the earth, which they call Taste, or the knowledge of matter's changes, which they call Science?—a most unnatural match yielding no profitable fruit. When the soul once finds a kindred soul, then beginneth her revelry of delight. Unfeigned friendship, chaste love, domestic affection, pure devotion—who compares the intensity and delight of these conjunctions with the stale and heartless sympathy there is between a naturalist and his museum, or a scholar and his books? The human soul groans in languor till she finds a fellow spirit, or a generous cause of human welfare to engage her affections.

Even such languor, such a dissatisfaction finds the soul when, without a guide, she goes to seek God in his natural universe, groping about and unrested, hungering for larger insight, perplexed with difficulties, and finding no end in wandering mazes lost. How refreshing to such a spirit when the dark cloud God has retired within bursts, and in visible glory he displays himself to his benighted children, speaking to them in an intelligible voice and revealing the mysteries of his nature. Then cometh rest, and with rest refreshment and enlargement of soul.

There is no cause beyond to long after. Than God the mind can ascend no higher, and should be satisfied with his likeness. Here there is perfection without a blemish, which we range the world for in vain,—justice never perverted, which it hath been the glory of man to live under,—mercy, with all the tender affections which pacify and harmonize the life of man,—holiness, holding a spotless reign over the happy fields of heaven—All composed and peaceful within that same Being, who is clothed with the elemental powers, armed with the thunder, and served by the army of heaven and the voice of fate.

Do ye love to meditate nobleness of nature?—Here it is infinitely noble. Do ye love to contemplate stupendous power put forth in soft acts of goodness?—Behold it here, pouring the full river of pleasure though the universe. Here is the Father of all families, from the highest in the heaven above to the lowest tribe upon the earth beneath, serving out justice and liberality to them all. What would you more to fill your mind with than the idea of God, which, while it fills, elevates, enlarges, and refines. With what ardour men behold their favourites of the present or past ages, aiming generously to equal or excel them. What silent musings over their history, and estimation of their parts! Now what hinders their rising higher to contemplate the revealed image of the invisible God. He is not seen; neither are the worthies of a former age. They are written of.—He is written of. The one is as lawful an object of thought and imitation as the other.

Nay, the closer to bring you into fellowship, he hath despatched from his highest sphere the image of himself to act the divine part among earthly scenes, and seeing we had fallen from his neighbourhood, and could not regain our lost estate, hath he sent forth his own son, made of a woman, made under the law, down to our sphere, to bind the link between heaven and earth which seemed for ever to have been broken. He clothes himself in the raiment of flesh; he puts on like passions and affections, and pre-

sents himself to be beheld, talked with and handled of the sons of men. He opens up the heart of God, and shows it wondrous tender to his fallen creatures. He opens up his own heart, and shows it devoted to death for their restoration. He stretches out his hand, and disease and death flee away. He opens his lips, and loving-kindness drops upon the most sinful of men. He opens a school of discipline for heaven, and none is hindered. Whosoever comes he cherishes with food, fetched from the storehouse of his creating word. The elements he stilleth over their heads and maketh a calm. He brings hope from beyond the dark grave, where she lay shrouded in mortality. Peace he conjures from the troubles of the most guilty breast. The mourner he anoints with the oil of joy. The mourner in sackcloth and ashes he clothes with the garment of praise. He comforts all that mourn. And what more can we say?—but that, if the knowledge of death averted from your heads be joy, and the knowledge of offences forgiven be contentment, and the knowledge of God reconciled be peace, and of heaven offered be glory, and the fountain of wisdom streaming forth be light, and strength ministered be life to the soul,—then, verily, this peace, contentment, honour, and life is yours, Christian believers, through the revelation of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God.

Thus to be brought into the secret counsels of the Almighty, by familiar teaching of one himself almighty, is an exaltation of human nature only surpassed by the perfect satisfaction which it yields to her various conditions. to know things as they are to be, and have no perplexities about the future—this is the resolution of a thousand doubts which were wont to afflict the speculation of man. To have that future filled with life and immortality, honour and glory—this is the conquest of all earthly trials and troubles. To know what is best to be done in every predicament from the mouth of God—this is safety. To know when we have done amiss where to find forgiveness

—this is relief. To know in life's embarrassments where to look for sufficient help—this is assurance. In life's disappointments to know a heaven to flee to, and in life's griefs a comforter to repose on;—to have, in short, the faculties of our minds directed, and the ambiguities of our conduct cleared up, and our prayers listened to our wants supplied—This is unspeakable privilege, and the knowledge which unlocks is not only the eternal but the present life of man.

Oh! brethren, why stop we short, contenting ourselves with the troublesome parts of knowledge, but from this in which lieth its true delectation, turning ourselves away. How many of us are content to know only the arts of our livelihood, as if the hands were all the faculties of man, and his body all his consignment from God. Ah! what comes of love and devotion, and ambition, and the other faculties of the inner man? and what with the hands can the soul lay up for eternity? Faith must supply her with a busy hand, and the Scriptures with a field to labour on, which being employed, she shall speedily treasure up a sufficiency for eternity.

Not less have the prime ministers and chosen favourites of knowledge departed from the fountain of intelligence. Becoming acquainted with some chamber of Nature's secrets, they think to find satisfaction there: and a satisfaction they do find—the vulgar satisfaction of being honoured, flattered and perhaps enriched. Equal satisfaction have the most ignorant who may happen to be born affluent or noble; but wisdom's highest satisfaction, consisting in a soul enlightened, and delivered from prejudice and error, and contented with its sphere, it hath not been our lot to find amongst the wise of this world's generation. Their knowledge alters not their hearts, but opening new fields for gratifying temper, gives strength to the evil as often as to the good of their nature, making them more powerful either to good or ill; and hence, according to St. Paul, it puffeth up. But if, instead of rest-

ing in the blind adoration of Nature, which, being uninspired with soul cannot benefit their soul with its communions, they would rise to Nature's God, and acknowledge him not only as powerful to create and move the universe, but as merciful to save, and condescending to visit his meanest creature, than would their travelling with knowledge bless them, and add no sorrow, but advance them into the fellowship of God's nature and blessedness.

Such are the benefits which accrue to us from the knowledge of the word of God, that nothing derived from any other kind of knowledge can compensate for its absence. Political knowledge carried to excess, makes men proud, bitter, and contentious. Poetical knowledge carried to excess, disposeth men to be contemptuous of the wise and prosaic ordinances of customary life. Practical knowledge of affairs makes men worldly and artful. Knowledge of the Scriptures is the only wisdom which shall elevate a man's conceptions, while it purifies his principles and sweetens his temper, and makes his conduct bountiful and kind to all around. No matter what be your condition, you shall find direction to dignify and adorn it, and make it large enough for the sanctification of your Spirit for heaven.

This reminds us of the second benefit to be derived from perusing the Scriptures: viz. The life of heavenly enterprise to which they move us. If a man would arise at all above the level of a mere slave, obedient to the habits and customs of the age and place he lives in, to have some say for himself in the regulation of his conduct—then, when he delivers himself from the slavery of custom and example, if he take not to the word of God for his guide, he shall feel himself distracted among the contending principles and desires of his nature. Interest drawing him one way, affection another, and passion hurrying him a third. He shall find how weak are his better perceptions—how weak reason is, how unwilling is will, how conscience expires among the uncertainties, and reso-

lution among the difficulties of an upright course. Such will be, at least the general experience of men, who, while they refuse human, lean not to divine authority, but conduct life by principles of their own choosing. Some there are blessed with such weak passions and strong reason as to steer without foreign help; but though such may be found to succeed, instead of being admired for their noble independence by the crowd who cling to ancient and present customs, they will generally be stigmatized as self-conceited, or persecuted as innovators, so that disturbance from without, if not from within, shall invade every one who, shaking loose of religious or customary restraints, adventures for himself.

Yet such adventurers should all men become. What to us are the established rules of life, that they should blindly overrule us? Must we be bound in thralldom, to fill and do no more than fill, the narrow bounds of the condition we are born into? Is there nought noble, nought heroical, to be undertaken and achieved? Must the budding desires of our youthful nature be held in check by the narrow prescriptions of an age and an authority we despise; and the labour of a life end in nothing but contemptible drudgery, to keep our tabernacle in being?—Adventurers above your sphere I would have you all to become; brave designs, not antiquated customs, should move your life. A path heroical you should trace out, and follow to glory and immortality.

But if you resign the rudder of the world's opinions, and cease to be tame, then unruly shall you become, and more unhappy to yourselves, to the world more vexatious, if you adopt not the better rudder of God's own guidance. Human reason in its fallen state may do much to assist, but it is incompetent to guide, and overmaster you. Better be slaves, like the world's generations to the soil, and work out the pitiful emolument of temporal and physical comfort they derive, than set their maxims at defiance, and run a wayward course of your own—ordinarily a

course of ruin. Yet, in God's name! set these worldly maxims at defiance, their paltry emoluments despise, array yourselves under the safe conduct of the word of God; it will lead you, it will guide you, it will raise you high above earthly objects, through a noble course of well-doing, to the holy place where the Most High abides.

There is a spell of custom, the scriptures call it a dead sleep, in which men are bound. They will not think, they will not feel for themselves; and, which is worse, they will not allow God to think and feel before them. Brethren, what comes of this slavery? the strong and immortal parts of your nature wax weak, the love of good degenerates, and the power of good altogether dies. To renovate your nature, to fill you with a divine nature, to make you, whatever your condition, the companions of God, and the members of Jesus Christ—objects of angel visits—the honoured ministers of God upon this earth—and kings and priests to God—this no less is the design of the Holy Scriptures, and their fruit to those who obey them. Know them, and upon the knowledge act, and all meanness shall forsake your conduct, with all hypocrisies; and all the struggles of passion with interest, and of interest with duty; and your character shall come forth in the strength and beauty of holiness, to the honour and glory of your Creator.

Then you walk with God, and his favour shall compass you around—you are in the way of his commandments, and the great peace which is in the keeping of them, shall be your portion—you are living by faith on Christ, and the spirit of Christ shall be in you—you are walking in the Spirit, and no condemnation remaineth for you. The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, shall put your enemies to flight. The in-dwelling of the Spirit shall move your soul to divine attainments, and the world's hindrances shall not hinder you from running the race for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus.

I know nothing able to restrain or limit the perfection of the meanest man who will submit himself to the word of God. Hard labour may wear you down, but as your day is, so shall your strength be. Your own evil nature may hold back, but the Spirit is powerful over all carnal affections. Temptations may delude you; God will not suffer you to be tempted above what you can bear. Whatever man has been enabled to reach by divine grace, I see not but man, every man, by the same grace, may still attain; therefore adventure, under God's management, to any reach of holy and heavenly life. Put no limitation within the bounds of God's revelations. It depends not on station, it depends not on natural knowledge, it depends not on fortunate accidents, all it depends on is the craving desire to know, and the assiduous endeavour to attain. God is not loth to do his part, nor the word of God difficult to comprehend. Nought is wanting but the desire to be instructed, and furnished to every good word and work.

But if you rather prefer the fortune of the brutes that perish, to look upon the light of the sun, and eat the provision of the day, to vegetate like a plant through the stages of life, and, like a plant, to drop where ye grew, and perish from the memory of earth—having done nothing, desired nothing, and expected nothing beyond:—If this you prefer to the other, then have you heard what you lose in the present; hear now what you lose through eternity—

You lose God's presence, in which all creation rejoiceth. You lose God's capacity to bless you with his manifold blessings, which the cherubim and seraphim can speak of better than a fallen man. You lose the peace and perfect blessedness of heaven, which from this earth we can hardly catch the vision of. Have you suffered spiritual oppression and drowning from fleshly appetites, freedom from this you lose. Have you groaned under the general bondage of the creature, and called for deliverance,

this deliverance you lose. Have you conceived pictures of quiet and peaceful enjoyment amidst beautiful and refreshing scenes, the realities of these you lose. Have you felt the ravishment of divine communion, when the conscious soul breathes its raptures, but cannot utter them, the eternal enjoyment of these you lose. What Adam and Eve enjoyed within the unblemished paradise of Eden; with the presence of God, you lose. What Peter and John felt upon the mount of transfiguration, where they would have built tabernacles and remained forever, you lose. Can you, brethren, think of this world's fare with contentment? If you are wicked, how do your sins find you out, or overhang you with detection. If you are holy, how your desires outrun your performance, and your knowledge your power; how you fall, are faint, are backsliding, are in darkness, are in doubt, are in dismay. You are not content with this world's fare, you long after something higher and better; hence the perpetual cheering of hope, and instigation of ambition, and thirst after novelty, and restlessness to better your condition. When man cometh to wish, to expect to labour or care for nothing higher or better than his present condition, he is supremely miserable. God hath left these witnesses within our breasts out of whose mouth to convict us. He will say, "Ye strove after something happier. 'Twas the labour of your life to reach it. I let down heaven's glory to your eager eyes. You put it away; therefore be it put away from your habitation for ever. Oh, ye who labour by toil and trouble to exalt your condition, will ye not exalt it far above the level of thrones or principalities, or any name that is named upon the earth."

Would that, like St. John in the Apocalypse, I had seen, or like Paul in the trance, I had felt, the glories of heaven, that for your sakes I might unfold them. I have spoken of the removal of earthly disasters and embarrassments, which cleave to the lot of the religious in our kind, and to the lot of the wicked in another kind. But

the removal of these is nothing. I have spoken of the gratification of all Nature's hungerings and thirstings after truth, knowledge, goodness, and happiness. But this is nothing, these distresses, these desires pertain to a weak and fallen creature. It behoves to speak of the enjoyments and desires of angels—of their fervours, their loves, their communions. But who can speak of them?

Yet if emblems can assist you, then do you join in your imagination the emblems and pictures of heaven. What is the conditions of its people? That of crowned kings. What is their enjoyment? That of conquerors triumphant, with palms of victory in their hands. What their haunts? The green pastures by the living waters. What their employment? Losing their spirits in the ecstasies of melody, making music upon their harps to the Lord God Almighty, and to the Lamb for ever and ever. For guidance, the Lamb that is in the midst of them, shall lead them by rivers of living waters, and wipe away all tears from their eyes. For knowledge, they shall be like unto God, for they shall know even as they are known. For vision and understanding, they shall see face to face, needing no intervention of language or of sign. For ordinances through which the soul makes imperfect way to her Maker, there is no temple in the city of their habitation, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof. There shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever, nay, the very sense hath its gratifications in the city of God. The building of the wall is of jasper, the city of pure gold like unto clear glass; the foundation of the wall garnished with all manner of precious stones. Every one of the twelve gates are pearl. Now what means this wealth of imagery drawn from every storehouse of nature, if it be not that the choicest of all which the eye beholds or the head is ravished with—that all which makes matter beautiful and the spirit happy—that all which

wealth values itself on and beauty delights in, with all the scenery which charms the taste, and all the employments which can engage the affections, every thing, in short, shall lend its influence to consummate the felicity of the saints in light.

Oh, what untried forms of happy being, what cycles of revolving bliss, await the just! Conception cannot reach it, nor experience present materials for the picture of its similitude; and, though thus figured out by the choicest emblems, they do no more represent it, than the name of Shepherd does the guardianship of Christ, or the name of Father the love of Almighty God.

Then, brethren, let me persuade you to make much of the volume which contains the password to the city of God, and without which it is hid both from your knowledge and your search. And if in this volume there be one truth more prizeworthy than another, it is this, that Christ hath set open to you the gates of the city, and that he alone is the way by which it is to be reached. He hath gone before to prepare its mansions for your reception, and he will come again to those who look for his appearing. For his sake be ye reconciled to God, that ye may have a right to the tree of life, and enter by the gate into the city.

Thus by the combined considerations which have been set before you in succession—by the awfulness of God's presence in his word—by the necessity of listening to it—by the terrific issues of disobeying it—and now by these, the present and eternal gains of obedience—have we pleaded at length for the oracles of God, being convinced, that, until they be taken up and perused and obeyed, under the solemn impression of such feelings, they will never have their proper place in the minds of men, but continue, as they are to most, a book purchased, but little read; esteemed, but little acted on. It is shameful to men of talents and power, that they should allow themselves such inde-

cision upon the subject of religion, which by its effects upon the world, is more entitled to preference in their consideration, than science or literature, or policy or arms. It proves the grossness rather than the refinement, the bondage rather than the liberty, of their minds, that they should be so engrossed with fame, and wealth, and power, and the other rewards which wait on eminence in any profession, as to have no thoughts to spare upon revelation and futurity, but go to their graves as ignorant, and undecided, and uninfluenced, in these matters, as if they were living in the ages before the birth of Christ. I have more respect infinitely for one who, having dealt with the subject of the Scriptures, finds a verdict against them, than I have for those who have not soul enough to see in the subject aught worthy of their thoughts, although they take up with the merest novelties in fashion and politics, and arts and science, pluming themselves upon the high walk of human interest which they are taking. Would they know, would they think, would they come to a conclusion, would they justify their neglect of God's great commandments, by a manifesto of reason or feeling, or interest, showing that it is silly, ignoble, or useless, to give heed to the Almighty, then they would acquit themselves like men; but it doth bespeak in them a frivolity of mind and a lightness of heart, of which the age and country may well feel ashamed, that they see no good in that heartfelt vital godliness, which hath written its blessed fruits in every characteristic page of our history, and in almost every article in the charter of English rights. No wonder that venality and factious self-interest should come to play in public affairs such leading parts, and that the names of principle and virtue should be smiled on with sceptical scorn by public men, when thus are cast away the fear of God and the expectation of heaven—the fulcrum upon which magnanimity and disinterestedness in former times did rest, when they poised up rooted corruption and arbitrary power from their ancient seats.

Would mathematical science thrive, if Euclid and the *Principia* were to cease from the studies of our youth? Would the public watchfulness of the people over their rulers thrive, if they were to refrain from perusing the daily intelligence, and conversing of public affairs? Will religion thrive, if the word of God be not studied, and its topics conferred on? If, at that season when our youth of first family and ambition are preparing their minds for guiding affairs, by courses of early discipline in public schools, and those of second rank are entered to the various professions of life, if then no pains be taken to draw their attention to the sacred writings, and impress principles of piety and virtue upon their minds, how can it be expected that religion should even have a chance. One cannot always be learning: youth is for learning, manhood for acting, and old age for enjoying the fruits of both. I ask, why, when the future lawyer is studying *Blackstone* or *Littleton*; the future physician, *Hippocrates* and *Sydenham*; the future economist, *Smith* and *Malthus*; the future statesman, *Locke* and *Sydney*; each that he may prepare for filling a reputable station in the present world—why the future immortal is not at the same time studying the two testaments of God, in order to prepare for the world to come, in which every one of us hath a more valuable stake? If immortality be nothing but the conjuration of priests to cheat the world, then let it pass, and our books go to the winds, like the *Sibyls'* leaves; but if immortality be neither the dream of fond enthusiasts, nor the trick of artful priests, but the revelation of the righteous God; then let us have the literature, and the science, and the practice, for the long after-stage of our being, as well as for the present time, which is but its porch. These pleadings are to men who believe immortality, (we may hereafter plead with those otherwise minded;) therefore justify your belief, and show your gratitude by taking thought and pains about the great concerns of that immortality which you believe.

If a man is fed on unwholesome foods, his health and strength decay, and if he be greedy after such, it proves his whole constitution to be diseased; therefore it troubleth our mind to see what shoals of literary works circulate through the minds of this people day by day, week by week, month by month, quarter by quarter, eagerly longed for and as greedily devoured, in which there is not one chistian sentiment for a thousand that are unchristian. Such virulence of party feeling and violence of personal abuse, and cruel anatomy of men's faults and failings, such inventions of wit and humour, to disguise truth and season falsehood, issue forth from the press amongst the people; that if the contrary influences of religion do not counteract the poison, and build up the noble and generous parts of nature, the public character of the nation for truth and sincerity must fall away, and the people come under the leading of those who write for fame or spite, or hire themselves for pay. This is not meant to bring a railing accusation against the circulating literature, but to hold up to all interested in religion, how they are called upon to labour in behalf of the oracles of God now more than ever, when the oracles of vanity and calumny and party rage are so borne abroad upon a thousand wings. The culture which these circulating works give to the faculty of thought, is all in our favour, for our religion stands by thought, and hath been always the mother of thought; but the culture given to bad passions and unholy feelings, is all against us, creating habits and likings which our religion must reverse in its progress over the mind. This, zeal alone will not effect; the character of the age calls for argument and deep feeling and eloquence. You may keep a few devotees together by the hereditary reverence of ecclesiastical canons, and influence of ecclesiastical persons; but the thinking and influential minds must be overcome by showing, that not only can we meet the adversary in the field by force of argument, but that the spirit of our system is ennobling

and consoling to human nature—necessary to the right enjoyment of life, and conducive to every good and honourable work. Religion is not now to be propagated by rebuking the free scope of thought, and drafting, as it were, every weak one that will abase his powers of mind before the zeal and unction of a preacher, and by schooling the host to keep close and apart from the rest of the world. This both begins wrong and ends wrong. It begins wrong, by converting only a part of the mind to the Lord, and holding the rest in superstitious bonds. It ends wrong, in not sending your man forth to combat in his courses with the unconverted. The reason of both errors is one and the same. Not having thoroughly furnished him to render a reason of the hope that is in him, you dare not trust him in the enemy's camp, lest they should bring him over again, or laugh at him, for cleaving to a side which he cannot thoroughly defend. I mean not in this and the many other allusions which I have made to the degeneracy of our times, to argue that every Christian should be trained in schools of learning or human wisdom, but that the spirit of our procedure in making and keeping proselytes should be enlightened and liberal, and the character of our preaching strong and manly, as well as sound. That we should rejoice in the illumination of the age, and the cultivation of the public mind, as giving us a higher tribunal than hath perhaps ever existed, before which to plead the oracles of God—before which to come in all the strength and loveliness of our cause, asking a verdict not from their toleration of us its advocates, but upon their conscience, and from the demonstration of its truth.

In such a manner we have endeavoured to conduct the discourse, which we now bring to a close. Whether it may gain the conviction of those to whom it is addressed, we leave in the hands of God, who giveth the increase, possessing within ourselves the satisfaction of having designed and endeavoured the best; adding to all, this, our

solemn conviction; That until advocates of religion do arise to make unhallowed poets, and undevout dealers in science, and intemperate advocates of policy, and all other pleaders before the public mind, give place, and know the inferiority of their various provinces to this of ours—till this most fatal error, that our subject is second rate, be dissipated by a first-rate advocacy of it—till we can shift these others into the back-ground of the great theatre of thought, by clear superiority in the treatment of our subject, we shall never see the men of understanding in this nation brought back to the fountains of living water, from which their fathers drew the life of all their greatness.

Many will think it an unchristian thing to reason thus violently; and many will think it altogether unintelligible; and to ourselves it would feel unseemly, did we not reassure ourselves by looking around. They are ruling and they are ruled, but God's oracles rule them not. They are studying every record of antiquity in their seats of learning, but the record of God and of him whom he hath sent, is almost unheeded. They enjoy every communion of society, of pleasure, of enterprise, this world affords; but little communion with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. They carry on commerce with all lands, the bustle and noise of their traffic fill the whole earth: they go to and fro, and knowledge is increased—but how few in the hasting crowd are hasting after the kingdom of God. Meanwhile Death sweepeth on with his chilling blast, freezing up the life of generations, catching their spirits unblest with any preparation of peace, quenching hope and binding destiny for ever more. Their graves are dressed, and their tombs are adorned. But their spirits, where are they? How oft hath this city, where I now write these lamentations over a thoughtless age, been filled and emptied of her people, since first she reared her imperial head! How many generations of her revellers have gone to another kind of revelry; how many generations

of her gay courtiers to a royal residence where courtier-arts are not; how many generations of her toilsome tradesmen to the place of silence, whither no gain can follow them! How time hath swept over her, age after age, with its consuming wave, swallowing every living thing, and bearing it away unto the shores of eternity! The sight and thought of all which is our assurance, that we have not in the heat of our feelings surpassed the merit of the case. The theme is fitter for an indignant prophet, than an uninspired, sinful man.

But the increase is of the Lord. May He honour these thoughts to find a welcome in every breast which weighs them—may He carry these warnings to the conscience of every one whose eye peruseth them. And may his oracles come forth to guide the proceedings of all mankind, that they may dwell together in love and unity, and come at length to the everlasting habitation of his holiness. Amen.

END OF THE ORATIONS.