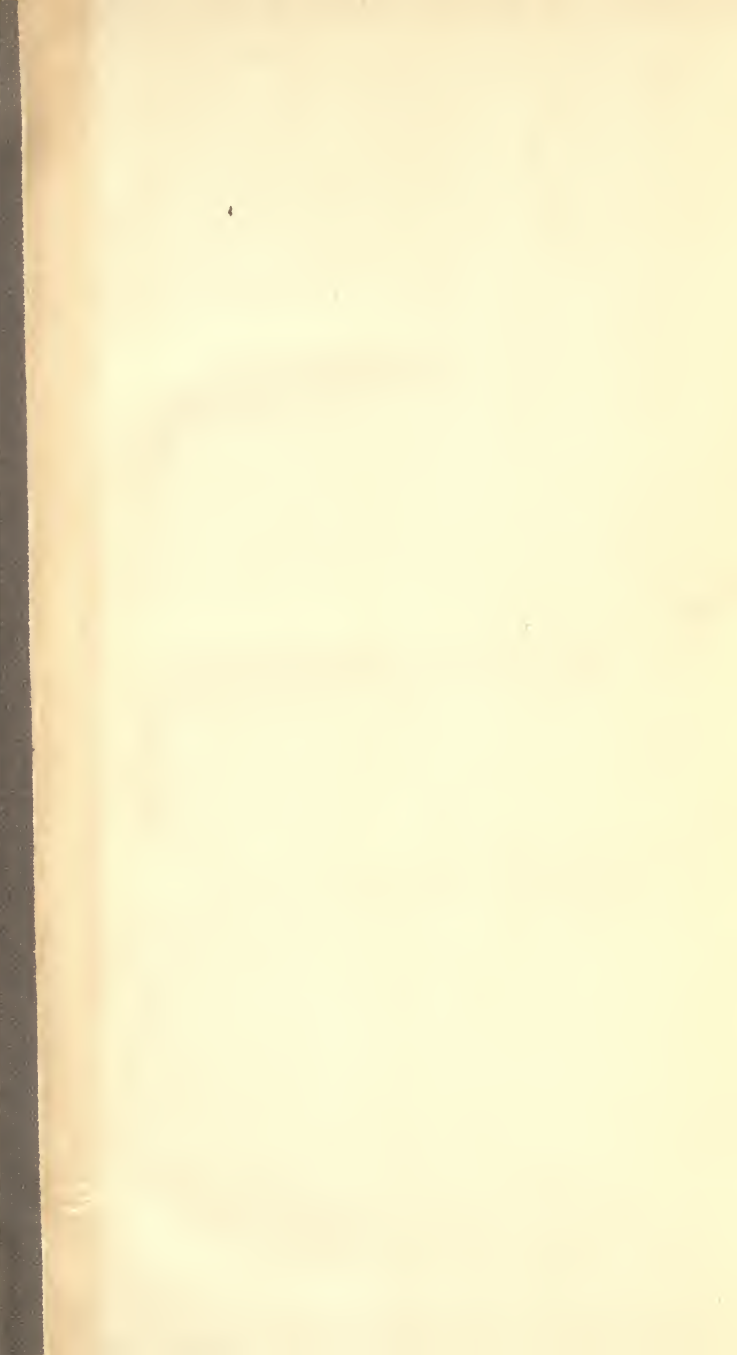




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TRACTS.

III.



TRACTS.

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FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE

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BY

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AND

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BY DR. PRICE.

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S E R M O N I.

OF THE SECURITY OF A VIRTUOUS COURSE.

PROVERBS x. 9.

HE THAT WALKETH UPRIGHTLY WALKETH
SURELY.

THESE words express one of the most important of all maxims. They tell us, that in the practice of virtue there is SAFETY. Much higher praise may be bestowed upon it. We may say that with it are connected peace, honour, dignity, the favour of God, happiness *now*, and ETERNAL happiness *hereafter*: And we have reason enough to think this true. But whether true or not, it is at least true, that there is safety in it.

Christianity informs us, that good men will be raised from death, to enjoy a glorious immortality, through that Saviour of the world who tasted death for every man. But let the evidence for this be supposed precarious and unsatisfactory. Let it be reckoned uncertain, whether a virtuous course will terminate in such infinite blessings under the divine government as christians are taught to expect: Still there will remain sufficient evidence to prove,

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that

that in all events it must be the *safest*, and therefore our *wisest* course.

I cannot better employ the present time, than in endeavouring to explain and illustrate this truth. But previously to this, it will not be amiss to make a few observations on the character of the man who walks uprightly.

Uprightness signifies the same with integrity or sincerity. It implies a freedom from guile and the faithful discharge of every known duty. An upright man allows himself in nothing that is inconsistent with truth and right. He complies with all the obligations he is under, and avoids every kind of prevarication and falsehood. He maintains an equal and uniform regard to the whole of righteousness. He hates alike all sin, and practises every part of virtue, from an unfeigned attachment to it established in his soul. This is what is most essential to the character of an upright man. He is governed by no sinister ends, or indirect views, in the discharge of his duty. It is not the love of fame, or the desire of private advantages, or mere natural temper, that produces his virtuous conduct; but an affection to virtue *as* virtue; a sense of the weight and excellence of the obligations of righteousness; and a zeal for the honour of God and the happiness of mankind. But to be a little more particular:—

Uprightness of character comprehends in it right
conduct

conduct with respect to God, and man, and ourselves. The person I am describing, is, first of all, upright in all his transactions with God. His religion is not a hypocritical show and ostentation. He is that which he *appears* to be to his fellow-creatures. His religious acts are emanations from a heart full of piety. He makes conscience of *private* as well as *public* devotion, and endeavours to walk blameless in all God's ordinances. He attends on religious services, not to be seen of men, but from a sense of duty and gratitude to his Maker; and, instead of making them a cover for bad designs, or compensations for immorality, he makes them incentives to the discharge of all moral duties, and the means of rendering him more benevolent, amiable, and worthy.

Again. Uprightness implies faithfulness in all our transactions with *ourselves*. It is very common for men to impose upon themselves; to wink at offensive truths; and to practise unfair arts with their own minds. This is entirely inconsistent with the character of an upright man. He endeavours to be faithful to himself in all that he thinks and does, and to divest his mind of all unreasonable biases. He is fair and honest in all his inquiries and deliberations, ready to own his mistakes, and thankful for every help to discover them. He wishes to know nothing but what is true, and to *practise* nothing but what is right. He is open to conviction,

tion, indifferent where he finds truth, and prepared to follow it wherever it can lead him. He is often disciplining his heart, searching into the principles of conduct within him, and labouring to detect his faults in order to rectify them.

Further. Uprightness includes in it candour, fairness, and honesty in all our transactions with our *fellow-creatures*. An upright man may be depended upon in all his professions and engagements. He never, in any affair, goes beyond the limits of justice and equity. He never deceives or overreaches. He is true to his promises, and faithful to every trust reposed in him. All his gains are the gains of virtuous industry. All falsehood and lies, all low cunning and fraudulent practices are his abhorrence. In short; he maintains a strict regard to veracity in his words, and to honour in his dealings. He adheres stedfastly in all circumstances to what he judges to be rightest and best; and were it possible for you to look through his soul, you would see the love of goodness predominant within him. You would see benevolence and piety governing his thoughts. You would see him within the inclosure of his own breast, as honest and worthy as he is on the open stage of the world.

Such is the character of the man who walks uprightly. I am next to show you how *surely* he walks.

In order to acquire a just notion of this, it is proper we should take into consideration, first,
the

the safety which such a person enjoys with respect to the happiness of the present life. Nothing is plainer than that, if we regard only our temporal interest, an upright course is the safest course. In order to be sensible of this, you should think of the troubles which men very often bring upon themselves by deviating from integrity. It is very difficult to go on for any time in dishonesty and falsehood, without falling into perplexity and distress. A man in such a course suspects every body, and is suspected by every body. He wants the love and esteem of his fellow-creatures. He is obliged to be continually on his guard, and to use arts to evade law and justice. He walks in the dark along a crooked path full of snares and pits. On the contrary, the path of uprightness is straight and broad. It is smooth, open, and easy. He that walks in it walks in the light, and may go on with resolution and confidence, inviting rather than avoiding the inspection of his fellow creatures. He is apprehensive of no dangers. He is afraid of no detection. He is liable to none of the causes of shame and disgrace. It is an advantage to him to be observed and watched. The more narrowly his conduct is examined, the more he will be loved and respected.

A person, for instance, who, in the affairs of trade, deviates from truth and honour, is likely to sink into great calamities. Want, and trouble,

and infamy often prove his lot. Most of us have been witnesses of this. How many instances are there of persons who, forsaking the plain path of uprightness, have entangled themselves beyond the possibility of being extricated, and involved their families in the deepest misery; but who probably, had they been honest, would have escaped every difficulty, and passed through life easily and happily? We know not, indeed, what we do, when we turn aside from virtue and righteousness. Such a train of consequences may follow, as will issue in the loss of all that is valuable. It is past doubt, that, in every profession and calling, the way of uprightness is the most free from perplexity. It is the way of peace and satisfaction. He that keeps in it will at least avoid the pain of a reproaching conscience. He is sure of enjoying his own approbation; and it may be expected, that his worldly affairs will go on smoothly, quietly, and comfortably.

This puts me in mind of desiring you to consider particularly, that an upright conduct is commonly the most sure way to obtain success in our worldly concerns. You will observe, that I say it is the most *sure* way; not that it is the *shortest*. There are many more *expeditious* ways of getting money and acquiring fortunes. He that will violate the rules of justice, or break the laws of his country, or not scruple to take false oaths, may easily get the

the start of an upright man, and rise in a little time to wealth and preferment. It is often in a man's power, by a base action, to introduce himself at once into ease and plenty. But wretched are those men who secure any worldly advantages by such methods. There is a canker at the root of their successes and riches. What they gain is unspeakably less than what they lose. It is attended with inward anguish, with the curse of heaven, and inconceivable future danger. But though it must be thus acknowledged, that there are *shorter* ways to profit and success than by walking uprightly, there are certainly none so *sure*. Universal experience has proved that (agreeably to a common and excellent maxim) "honesty is the best policy." It may be slow in its operation; and, for this reason, many persons have not patience enough for it. But it is in the end generally certain. An upright man must recommend himself by degrees to all that know him. He has always the greatest credit, and the most unembarrassed affairs. There are none who are not disposed to place a confidence in him, and who do not choose to deal with him. The disadvantages, therefore, already mentioned, under which he labours, are counterbalanced by many great advantages. He may not be able to thrive so fast, nor perhaps so *much* as others. He is obliged to deny himself the gains which others make by the wrong practices common in their trade; and, on

this account, he may be under a necessity of contenting himself with small gains. But it must be considered, that he can seldom fail of a tolerable subsistence, attended with comfort and the truest enjoyment of himself. Though his gains may be small, they are always sweet. He has with them an easy conscience, the blessing of God, and security against numberless grievous evils. And the smallest gains of this sort are infinitely preferable to the greatest gains that can be obtained by wrong methods.

Thus you see that, with respect to our interest in *this* world, he that walketh uprightly walketh surely.—Let us next consider the security which an upright conduct gives with respect to *another* world.

After this life is over, we are to enter on another world. The most sceptical principles give us no sufficient reason for denying this. Whatever may be true of the order and administration of nature, it must be *possible* that there should be a future state. And, if there is, it is highly probable, that it will be a state of much greater extent and longer duration than the present. Nothing, therefore, can be of more consequence to us than to know by what means we may secure the best condition and the greatest safety in it: And it is not possible to doubt, but the practice of religious goodness is the proper means to be used for this purpose. If any thing is clear

clear, it is so, that the upright and the worthy, in all events, through every period of duration, must stand the best chance for escaping misery and obtaining happiness. That our happiness hereafter may depend on our conduct here is certain, because we find, in the present state, that the happiness of every successive period of human life is made to depend, in a great measure, on our conduct in the preceding periods. The happiness of mature life depends on the habits acquired and the pains taken in early life; and mature life spent in folly and vice generally makes a miserable old age. It is, therefore, very credible that a virtuous conduct may have an effect on our condition hereafter. No one, indeed, can well carry infidelity so far as to deny, that, if there is a future state, it is likely that the righteous will fare better in it than the wicked. All we observe of the government of the Deity, and all that we can learn with respect to his character, leads us to believe that he must approve righteousness and hate wickedness: And, in the same proportion that he does this, he must favour the one and discountenance the other. We see, in what lies before us of the constitution of the world, many great evils annexed to wickedness, and many great blessings annexed to righteousness; and we see, likewise, in the one an essential tendency to produce universal evil, and in the other an essential tendency to produce universal good.

This

This demonstrates to us the holy disposition of the Author of nature; and what we ought to reckon upon, is, that he will manifest this disposition more and more; and that the scheme of moral government now begun will be hereafter completed. To act righteously is to act like God. It is to promote the order of his creation. It is to go into his constitution of nature. It is to follow that conscience which he has given us to be the guide of our conduct. It must, therefore, be the likeliest way to arrive at happiness, and to guard against misery under his government. The accountableness of our natures, and our necessary perceptions of excellence and good desert in virtue, demonstrate this; nor is it at all conceivable, that we do not go upon sure grounds, when we draw this conclusion. But there is much more to be here said. There are many reasons which prove, that the neglect of virtue may be followed by a dreadful punishment hereafter. The presages of conscience; the concurring voice of mankind in all ages; our unavoidable apprehensions of ill-desert in vice; and the distresses now produced by it, are enough to lead us to expect this. The christian religion confirms this expectation in a manner the most awful, by teaching us that the *wicked shall be turned into hell with all that forget God*; that they shall be excluded from the society of wise and good beings; and punished *with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and*
the

the glory of his power. It is, at least, possible that this may be the truth. The arguments for a righteous government in nature, and for the truth of christianity, have at least force enough to prove that it is not certain but that wickedness will produce the greatest losses and evils in another world; and that, consequently, there is a real and inconceivable danger attending it. Consider, now, that an upright life is a sure preservative from this danger. If all who forget God, and practise iniquity, are hereafter to be rejected by the Deity, and to be consigned to *everlasting destruction*; if, I say, this should prove to be the truth, the good man will be safe, and the wicked man undone. But should all that reason and christianity teach us on this point prove a delusion; still a good man will *lose* nothing, and a bad man will *get* nothing. Nay, a good man, even in this case, will gain a great deal; for he will gain all that satisfaction which goodness generally brings with it in this life, and which vice must want.

Thus you see what security an upright man enjoys. He goes upon even and firm ground. He has on his side all good beings; the convictions of his conscience; the order of nature; and the power of the Deity. It is impossible he should be deceived in thinking, that it is right to adhere inviolably to the laws of righteousness. Should there be that execution of divine justice on wickedness
which

which we have been taught to expect, he will have nothing to fear. The *worst* that can happen to him is better than the *best* that may happen to an unrighteous man. The *best* that wicked men generally expect is the loss of existence at death; and this is the *worst* that can happen to a good man. But upon the one, it will come after a life of shame, and disease, and folly; and on the other, like sleep at night after a day spent in peace, and health, and honour, and useful labour. I need not tell you what a recommendation this is of a course of uprightness. It is our surest guard in all events; our best shelter against evils under God's government. Safety is what every person, in the common concerns of life, values and seeks. Here alone is it to be found completely and certainly. Nothing but a virtuous conduct can preserve us from the danger of God's displeasure, and of ruin after death. Without it, we must stand exposed to the severest calamities that can come upon reasonable beings.

I will conclude this discourse with the following inferences.

First, From all I have said, we learn, in the plainest manner, how much we are bound in prudence to walk uprightly. This appears to be prudent, if we regard only our present interest. The way in which an upright man walks (it has been shown) is plain and open. It is so easy to find it,
that

that we can never swerve from it, while we retain an honest desire to keep in it. It is liable to no hazards; and it is always pleasant and joyous. More *compendious* ways, I have acknowledged, we may sometimes find to wealth and power, but they are full of danger; and he who forsakes integrity in order to go into them, and thus by a short cut to get at worldly advantages, acts like a man who forsakes a quiet and sure path in order to run the risk of being lost among quicksands, or of breaking his neck by going over rocks and precipices. If, therefore, we love prudence, we shall not, in our temporal concerns, ever swerve from uprightness.

But we have reason to apprehend that we shall exist in another state; and if we consider this, we shall be forced to conclude from what has been said, that the prudence of a virtuous course is greater than can be expressed. If this life be not our whole existence, some precautions ought to be used with respect to the state that is to succeed it; and the best precaution is the practice of true piety and goodness. If there be a life to come, it will, in all probability, be a state of retribution, where present inequalities will be set right, and the vicious sink into infamy and misery. The practice of virtue is, in this case, our security. It is the image of the Deity in our souls; and what we ought to reckon upon is, that nothing amiss will ever hap-

pen to it. Let us then adhere to it in all events. Let us endeavour, in this instance, to use the same prudence that the children of the world use in *their* affairs. What pains will they take, and what precautions will they employ, to avoid any dangers which they foresee, or to prevent evils which may possibly come upon them? There is a danger hanging over us, as moral agents, greater than any this world can threaten us with; a danger dreadful and unutterable; the danger of falling into the punishment of sin, and of losing eternal happiness. Were there ever so hard and expensive a method proposed to us of being secured against this danger, it would be our wisdom cheerfully to practise it. But true goodness affords us, not a hard and expensive, but a cheap and easy method of being secured against it. Walking uprightly will add to our *present* comfort, at the same time that it will preserve us from *future* danger. What is required of us, in this instance, is only to part with our follies and diseases; and to make ourselves happy *now*, in order to be safe *for ever*.

All I have been saying is true, though there should be the greatest uncertainty with respect to the principles of religion. I have been all along speaking on the supposition of such an uncertainty, in order to set before you, in a stronger light, the wisdom of being virtuous, and the folly of a sinful course. But if we will suppose that there is no uncertainty:

uncertainty : If we will suppose it not only possible, but probable or morally certain, that the principles of religion are true ; that christianity comes from God ; and that, agreeably to its assurances, all who are now in their graves shall hereafter *hear the voice of the Son of God, and come forth, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of damnation* : If, I say, we suppose this to be the truth, how great will the wisdom of a virtuous course appear, and how ~~in~~ ^{increasing} the folly of wickedness ?

There are, probably, few speculative and inquiring men, who do not sometimes find themselves in a state of dejection, which takes from them much of the satisfaction arising from their faith in very important and interesting truths. Happy, indeed, is the person who enjoys a flow of spirits so even and constant as never to have experienced this. Of myself I must say, that I have been far from being so happy. Doubts and difficulties have often perplexed me, and thrown a cloud over truths which, in the general course of my life, are my support and consolation. There are, however, many truths, the conviction of which I never lose.—ONE conviction in particular remains with me amidst all fluctuations of temper and spirits ; I mean my belief of the maxim in my text, that he *who walketh uprightly walketh surely*. There has not been a moment in which I have found it pos-

sible to doubt, whether the wisest and best course I can take be to practise virtue and to avoid guilt. Low spirits only give new force to this conviction, and cause it to make a deeper impression. Uncertainty in other instances *creates* certainty here; for the more dark and doubtful our state under God's government is, the more prudent it must be to choose that course which is the *safest*.

I will only further desire you to consider on this subject, with what serenity of mind a good man may proceed through life. Whatever is true or false, he has the consciousness of being on the *safe* side; and there is, in all cases, a particular satisfaction attending such a consciousness. A man who knows himself in a safe way goes on with composure and boldness. Thus may you go on in a course of well-doing. You have none of those calamities to fear to which others are liable. If the doctrines of religion be true, you will be completely happy through the Saviour of mankind. But should they *not* prove true, you will not be worse off than others. I have shown, on the contrary, that you will still be gainers. Your loss, in short, *can be nothing*. Your gain *may be infinite*. Forake, then, every thing to follow righteousness. Never consent to do a wrong action, or to gratify an unlawful passion. This will give you a security that is worth more than all the treasures of the earth. You may also, on all principles, entertain
the

the *apprehension* that the gospel has given right information concerning the abolition of death, and the happiness reserved for the faithful, in the future kingdom of Jesus Christ. That person must have considered the arguments for christianity very superficially, who does not see, that they amount to an evidence, which is at least sufficient to give a just ground for this *apprehension*; and, consequently, for a *hope* the most animating and glorious. Let us cherish this hope; and endeavour to keep the object of it always in sight. The slightest GLIMPSE of that ETERNAL LIFE which the New Testament promises, is enough to elevate above this world. The bare *possibility* of losing it; by sinful practices, is enough to annihilate all temptations. Wherefore, *let us be stedfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour MAY end in a blisful eternity; but, happen what will, CANNOT be in vain.*



S E R M O N II.

OF THE HAPPINESS OF A VIRTUOUS COURSE.

PROVERBS iii. 17.

HER WAYS ARE WAYS OF PLEASANTNESS,
AND ALL HER PATHS ARE PEACE. SHE IS
A TREE OF LIFE TO THEM THAT LAY HOLD
OF HER; AND HAPPY IS EVERY ONE THAT
RETAINETH HER.

IN my last discourse, I represented to you the *security* of a virtuous course. In doing this, I was led to touch upon its tendency to make us most *happy*, as well as most *secure*, under God's government. I shall now insist more particularly on this subject; and endeavour to give you a distinct account of the principal arguments and facts which prove the happiness of virtue; meaning, on this occasion, chiefly its *present* happiness.

The ways of wisdom (my text says) *are ways of pleasantness, and happy is every one that retaineth her.* Previously to any examination of the *actual* state of mankind, we may perceive a high probability that this assertion must be true. Virtue is the image of God in the soul, and the noblest thing in the

the creation; and, therefore, it must be the principal ground of true happiness. It is the rule by which God meant that we should act; and, therefore, must be the way to the bliss for which he intended us. That Being who gave us our sense of moral obligations, must have designed that we should conform to them; and he could not design this, and at the same time design that we should find it most for our advantage *not* to conform to them. This would have been to establish an inconsistency in the frame of nature; and acting in a manner which cannot be supposed of that supreme power, which, in every other part of nature, has discovered higher wisdom than we are able to comprehend.

But waving such reasonings, let us apply ourselves to the consideration of the *actual* state of mankind in this respect. And,

First, Let us consider, that by practising virtue we gratify the highest powers in our natures. Our highest powers are, undoubtedly, our sense of moral excellence, the principle of reason and reflexion, benevolence to our fellow-creatures, and the love of the Deity. To practise virtue is to act in conformity to these powers, and to furnish them with their proper gratifications. Our other powers being inferior to these and of less dignity, the happiness grounded upon them is also of an inferior nature, and of less value. Reason is the *nature* of a
reasonable

reasonable being; and to assert that his chief happiness consists in deviating from reason, would be the same as to say that his chief happiness consists in violating his *nature*, and contradicting *himself*.

Secondly, In connexion with this we ought to remember, that virtue, in the very idea of it, implies health and order of mind. The human soul is a composition of various affections standing in different relations to one another; and all placed under the direction of conscience, our supreme faculty. When we are truly virtuous, none of these affections are suffered to err either by excess or defect. They are kept in their proper subordinations to one another. The faculty that was made to govern preserves its authority; and a due balance is maintained among our inward powers. To be virtuous, therefore, is to be in our natural and sound state. It is to be freed from all inward tumult, anarchy, and tyranny. It is to enjoy health, and order, and vigour, and peace, and liberty; and, therefore, the greatest happiness. Vice, on the contrary, is slavery, disorder, and sickness. It distorts our inward frame, and unsettles the adjustments of our minds. It unduly raises some of our powers, and depresses others. It dethrones conscience, and subjects it to the despotism of blind and lawless appetites. In short; there is the same difference, in respect of happiness, between a virtuous and a vicious soul, as there is between a *dis-*
tempered

tempered body and a body that is *well*; or between a civil state where confusion, faction, and licentiousness reign, and a state where order prevails, and all keep their proper places, and unite in submission to a wise and good legislature.

Again, thirdly; It is worth our consideration, that, by practising virtue, we gain more of the united pleasures, arising from the gratification of *all* our powers, than we can in any other way. That is, in other words, our moral powers, when prevalent, encroach less on the inferior enjoyments of our natures than any of our other powers when *they* are prevalent. In order to explain this, I would desire you to consider, that the course most favourable to happiness must be that which takes from us the least that is possible of any of the gratifications and enjoyments we are capable of. We can take no course that will give us an equal and full share of all the gratifications of our appetites. If we will gain the ends of some of our affections, we must sacrifice others. If, for instance, we will rise to fame and power, we must give up ease and pleasure. We must cringe and truckle, and do violence to some of our strongest inclinations. In like manner, if we make money our principal pursuit, and would acquire wealth, we must often contradict our desires of fame and honour. We must keep down generosity and benevolence, and the love of sensual indulgences. We must pinch, and toil,
and

and watch, and eat the bread of carefulness. An *ambitious* man must sacrifice the gratifications of the *covetous* man. A *covetous* man likewise, must sacrifice the indulgences of a *man of pleasure*: and a *man of pleasure* those of the *ambitious* and *worldly-minded*. Since, then, in every course of life, there is such an interference between the several objects of our affections, that course in which there is the *least* of it, must be likely to make us most happy. And it is certain, that there is less of it in a virtuous course than any other. Virtue brings with it many exquisite pleasures of its own (as I shall presently observe more particularly), and, at the same time, does not necessarily encroach on other sources of pleasure. It is the very best means of obtaining the ends of most of our *lower* powers and affections. It is, for instance, the best means of gaining honour and distinction among our fellow-creatures; for the virtuous man is always the man who is most honoured and loved. It is, likewise, one of the best means of becoming prosperous in our affairs, and gaining a competent share of worldly blessings; for, agreeably to a maxim which we hear often repeated, “honesty is the best policy.” A virtuous man is the man who is most industrious, and likely to be most encouraged and trusted in every trade and profession. In short; it is a part of virtue to make use cheerfully of all the materials of happiness with which divine bounty has supplied us. There

is no lawful and natural pleasure of which it does not leave us in possession. It is favourable to every innocent pursuit, and an excellent friend to every just and laudable undertaking.

These observations remove entirely the objection to the happiness of virtue, taken from its requiring labour and circumspection, and obliging us to restrain our passions, and to practise self-denial. It is, indeed, true, that virtue requires this : but you should recollect, that it is by no means peculiar to virtue. I have, on the contrary, been showing that it is less applicable to virtue than to any other object of pursuit. What labour and self-denial do men often practise in pursuing fame, or honour, or money ! What a sacrifice does the man of pleasure make of his health and fortune ; and to what fatigues does he often put himself ! It is, therefore, the utmost injustice to virtue to imagine that the restraint of inclination, and the practice of self-denial, are peculiar to it. These are common to virtue and vice, and necessary whatever course we take. It would be very unreasonable to mention as an objection here, that virtue may oblige us to sacrifice to it even our lives. For this is what happens perpetually in vicious courses. Thousands are every day dying martyrs to ambition, to lust, to covetousness, and intemperance. But seldom does it happen, that virtue puts us to any such trial.

trial. On the contrary; its general effect is to preserve and lengthen life.

It ought to be particularly observed on this occasion, that, in comparing the influence of different courses on our happiness, we should consider the influence they have on our moral and intellectual powers, as well as our other powers. Conscience is one important part of our natures. To leave it out, therefore, in forming a scheme of enjoyment, or in determining what course will bring us most happiness, would be preposterous and wild. That a course of conduct obliges us to run counter to our sense of moral good and evil, and to give up the satisfactions founded on this sense, ought to be allowed its just weight in judging of the happiness of an agent, and to be considered as a circumstance diminishing his pleasures, in the same manner as if he ran counter to any of his other powers, or gave up any other gratifications. Now, every species of vice interferes directly with our sense of moral good and evil. It gratifies one part of our natures at the expense of our judgment and reason; and this is as much an argument proving its hurtfulness, as if it opposed our desires of ease, or honour, or any of our other particular affections. There is, therefore, on this account, a severe and cruel self-denial in vice. At the same time that it encroaches on many of the lower springs of action, it puts a force upon the highest. It obliges us to

deny our consciences; and, these being most properly *ourselves*, it obliges us to practise a more proper and unnatural self-denial than any denial of passion and appetite.

But, to say no more on this head, what I have meant chiefly to inculcate is, that the course most conducive to happiness must be that which is most agreeable to our *whole* natures; and that this being evidently true of a virtuous course, it follows that it is our greatest happiness.

Hitherto, you have seen that I have argued for the happiness of virtue from the considerations, “that it affords our highest powers the proper gratifications; that it implies health, and liberty, and order of mind; and that it is more agreeable than any other end we can pursue to all the parts of our natures taken as making together one system.” There is a great deal more to be said, to which I must request your attention; for,

Fourthly, It deserves your consideration, that much of the pleasure of vice itself depends on some species or other of virtue combined with it. All the joys we derive from friendship, from family-connections and affinities, from the love and confidence of our fellow-creatures, and from the intercourse of good offices, are properly *virtuous* joys: and there is no course of life which, were it deprived of these joys, would not be completely miserable. The enjoyments, therefore, of vicious men are owing to
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the remains of virtuous qualities in them. There is no man so vicious as to have nothing good left in his character; and could we conceive any such man, or meet with a person who was quite void of benevolence, temperance, good-humour, sociableness, and honour, we should detest him as an odious monster, and find that he was incapable of all happiness. Wickedness, when considered by itself and in its naked form, without any connexion with lovely qualities, is nothing but shame, and pain, and distress. If the *debauchee* enjoys any thing like happiness, it is because he joins to his debauchery something laudable, and his tender and social feelings are not extirpated. In like manner, if a *covetous* man has any thing besides perplexity and gloominess in his heart, it is because there are some virtues which he practises, or because he disguises his covetousness under the forms of the virtues of prudence and frugality. This then being the case, since even the pleasure that vice enjoys is thus founded upon and derived from virtuous qualities, how plain is it that these constitute our chief good, and that the more of them we possess, so much the more must we possess of the sources of pleasure! The virtuous man is the most generous man, the most friendly, the most good-natured, the most patient and contented. He has most of the satisfactions resulting from sympathy, and humanity, and natural affection; and so certain is

it that such a person must be the happiest, that the wicked themselves, if in any respect happy, can be so only as far as they either *are* the same that he is, or *think* themselves the same.

Fifthly, I have already observed, that virtue leaves us in possession of all the common enjoyments of life. It is necessary now to add, that it goes much beyond this. It not only leaves us in possession of all innocent and natural pleasures, but improves and refines them. It not only interferes *less* with the gratification of our different powers than vice does, but renders the gratification of many of them *more* the cause of pleasure. This effect it produces by restraining us to regularity and moderation in the gratification of our desires. Virtue forbids only the wild and extravagant gratification of our desires; That is, it forbids only such a gratification of them as goes beyond the bounds of nature, and lays the foundation of pain and misery. As far as they were designed by our Maker to yield pleasure, we are at liberty to indulge them; and further we cannot go without losing pleasure. It is a truth generally acknowledged, that the regular and moderate gratification of appetite is more agreeable than any forced and exorbitant gratification of it. Excess in every way is painful and pernicious. We can never contradict nature without suffering and bringing upon ourselves inconveniences. Is there any man to whom food and sleep are so pleasant as
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to the temperate man? Are the mad and polluted joys of the fornicator and adulterer equal to the pure and chaste joys of the married state? Do pampered and loaded appetites afford as much delight as appetites kept under discipline, and never palled by riot and licentiousness? Is the vile glutton, the loathsome drunkard, or the rotten debauchee, as happy as the sober and virtuous man, who has a healthful body, a serene mind, and general credit?

Thus is virtue a friend even to appetite. But this is not the observation I intended to insist on. What I meant here principally to recommend to your attention was, that virtue improves all the blessings of life, by putting us into a particular disposition for receiving pleasure from them. It removes those internal evils, which pollute and impair the springs of enjoyment within us. It renders the mind easy and satisfied within itself, and therefore more susceptible of delight, and more open to all agreeable impressions. It is a common observation, that the degree of pleasure which we receive from any objects depends on the disposition we are in to receive pleasure. Nothing is sweet to a depraved taste; nothing beautiful to a distempered eye. This observation holds with particular force in the present case. Vice destroys the relish of sensible pleasures. It takes off (I may say) from the fruit its flavour, and from the rose its hue. It tarnishes the beauty of nature, and communicates

a bitter tincture to every enjoyment. Virtue, on the contrary, sweetens every blessing, and throws new lustre on the face of nature. It chafes away gloominess and peevishness; and, by strengthening the kind affections, and introducing into the soul good humour and tranquillity, makes every pleasing scene and occurrence more pleasing.

Again, sixthly ; Let us consider how many *peculiar* joys virtue has, which nothing else can give. It is not possible to enumerate all these. We may, on this occasion, recollect first those joys which necessarily spring from the worthy and generous affections. The love of the Deity, benevolence, meekness, and gratitude, are by their nature attended with pleasure. They put the mind into a serene and cheerful frame, and introduce into it some of the most delightful sensations.. Virtue consists in the exercise and cultivation of these principles. They form the temper and constitute the character of a virtuous man ; and, therefore he must enjoy pleasures to which men of a contrary character are strangers. It is not conceivable, that a person in whom the mild and generous affections thrive should not be in a more happy state than one who counteracts and suppresses them ; and who, instead of feeling the joy which springs up in a heart where the heavenly graces and virtues reside, is torn and distracted by anger, malice, and envy.

But further; Peace of conscience is another blessing

bleffing peculiar to virtue. It reconciles us to ourfelves as well' as to all the world. As nothing can be fo horrid as to be at variance with one's felf, fo nothing can be fo delightful as to be at peace with one's felf. If we are unhappy within our own breasts, it fignifies little what external advantages we enjoy. If we want *our own* approbation, it is of little confequence how much *others* applaud us. Virtue fecures to us our own approbation. It reduces to harmony, under the dominion of confcience, all our jarring powers. It makes our reflections agreeable to us; and the mind a fund of comfort to itfelf.

Again; A fenfe of God's favour is another fource of pleafure which is peculiar to virtue. The Divine government is an object of terror to a wicked man. He cannot think of it without trouble. But a virtuous man derives his chief confolations from hence. He is confcious of acting in concert with the Deity, of obeying his laws, and of imitating his perfections. He, therefore, exults in the affurance of having him on his fide, and of being under his Almighty protection. He knows that the Sovereign of the univerfe loves him, and is his unalterable friend.

Once more. A virtuous man poffeffes the hope of a future reward. Every one knows how mighty the power of hope is to invigorate and cheer the mind. There is no fuch hope as that of the virtu-

ous man. He hopes for a perfect government in the heavens; and this comforts him amidst all the disorders of earthly governments. He hopes for a resurrection from death to a blessed immortality. He expects soon to take possession of a treasure in the heavens that faileth not; to receive an incorruptible inheritance; to exchange ignorance and doubt for knowledge; and to be fixed in that world where he shall join superior beings, and be always growing more wise, and good, and great, and happy, till some time or other he shall rise to honours and powers which are no more possible to be now conceived by him, than the powers of an angel can be conceived by a child in the womb. This is indeed an unbounded and ravishing hope. If christianity be true, we have abundant reason for it. Christ came into the world to raise us to it; and the most distant glimmering of it is enough to eclipse all the glory of this world.

Such are the singular blessings of the virtuous man.

Let us, in the next place, take into consideration some peculiar qualities of the happiness now described. This will complete our view of this subject, and render it unnecessary to add any thing to convince an attentive person of the truth I am insisting upon. Virtue has a great deal of *peculiar* happiness; and that happiness has many excellent qualities, which belong to no other happiness. It is, for instance, more *permanent* than any other happiness.

happinefs. The pleasures of the vicious are *transient*; but virtue is a spring of *constant* pleasure and satisfaction. The pleasures which attend the gratification of our appetites soon pall. They are gone for ever after the moment of gratification; and, when carried to excess, they turn to pain and disgust. But nothing like this can be said of the pleasures of virtue. These never cloy or satiate. They can never be carried to excess. They are always new and fresh. They may be repeated as often as we please, without losing their relish. They are such as will not only *bear* repetition and reflection, but are *improved* by them. They will go with us to all places; and attend us through every changing scene of life. No inclosures of stone or iron, no intervention of seas and kingdoms can keep them from us. They delight alike at home and abroad; by day and by night; in the city and in the desert. The aid of wine and of company is not necessary to enable us to enjoy them. They are, in truth, enjoyed in the greatest perfection, when the mind, collecting itself within itself, and withdrawing itself from all worldly objects, fixes its attention only on its own state and prospects.

It follows from these observations, that the happiness of virtue is a more *independent* happiness than any other. It is, if I may so speak, more *one* with the soul; and, therefore, less subject to the operations of external causes. The pleasure
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arising from the consciousness of having done a worthy action, of having relieved a distressed family, or subdued our anger, our envy, or our impatience; this is a pleasure which enters into the very substance of the soul, and cannot be torn from it without tearing it from itself, and destroying its existence. All other pleasures are precarious in the highest degree. We have but little power over them; and they may be taken from us, the next moment, in spite of our strongest efforts to retain them. But the joy connected with a right action, with a self-approving heart, and the hope of a glorious eternity, no accidents can take away. These are *inward* blessings which are not liable to be affected by *outward* causes; and which produce a happiness that is immutable, and not possible to be lost, except with our own consent.

There is nothing that the ancient philosophers have taken so much pains to inculcate, as the importance of placing our happiness only in things within our power. If we place it in fame, or money, or any external good, it will have a most deceitful foundation, and we shall be liable to perpetual disappointment: Whereas, if we place it in the exercise of virtuous affections, in tranquillity of mind, in regular passions, in doing God's will, and the hope of his favour; we shall have it always at our command. We shall never be liable to disappointments. We shall find
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true rest to our souls, and be in a situation like to that of a person lifted to the upper regions of the atmosphere, who hears thunder roll, and sees lightnings flash, and the clouds spread below him, while he enjoys serenity and sunshine.

I must add, that the happiness of virtue is a *pure* and *refined* happiness. It is seated in the mind. Other happiness has its seat in the body. It is the happiness of angels. Other happiness is the happiness of brutes. It must, therefore, be also the most solid, the most substantial and exalted happiness. I observe this, because I believe the generality of men are disposed to look upon no happiness as solid which is purely spiritual. What I have just said affords a demonstration of the contrary. The most exalted happiness must be that of superior beings, of angels, and of the Deity. But this is a happiness that is spiritual, and which has no connection with the gratifications of sense. The happiness of the virtuous, therefore, being of the same kind, it must be the most real and substantial.

To say no more on this head; Let me desire you to consider, that the happiness of the virtuous man continues with him even in affliction. This is one of the most distinguishing properties of this happiness. Virtue, as it increases the relish of prosperity, blunts likewise the edge of adversity. It is, indeed, in adversity, that the power of virtue to make us happy appears to the greatest advantage.

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It kindles a light in the soul in the darkest seasons, and very often produces then the highest bliss when animal nature is at the lowest, and other joys have deserted us. There is, in this respect, a most striking difference between the condition of the virtuous and vicious man. In adversity the vicious man becomes completely wretched. He has no comfortable reflexions to support him; no protecting Deity to trust in; no prospect of future blessings to encourage him. Wherever he turns his eyes, all is confusion and distress. Reason and conscience have him to themselves, and inflict the sharpest sufferings. But the virtuous man in adversity may rejoice and exult. Whatever he now suffers, he may be assured that all will end happily. When flesh and heart sink under him, faith and hope and charity unite their influence to sustain him. A heavenly voice whispers peace to him, when all about him speaks terror; and the consolations of God delight his soul, when the springs of worldly comfort are dried up. Particularly, in the solemn hour of death he has reason to be composed and cheerful. That is the hour which seals the vicious man under ruin; but it confirms and perfects the happiness of the virtuous man, and sets him free for ever from pain and danger. He can therefore look forward to it without disturbance, and meet it joyfully. Religious and virtuous principles, if they have their due efficacy, will enable us to die with dignity and triumph

They will change the aspect of the king of terrors into that of a friend and deliverer, and cause us to desire and welcome his stroke.

Thus have I shown you that religious virtue is our chief good. And we may now, with full conviction, take up the words of my text, and say with Solomon, *That her ways are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are peace; that she is a tree of life to them that lay hold of her; and that happy is every one that retaineth her.*

I will only further desire your attention to the following inferences.

First. How wrong is it to conceive of religious virtue as an enemy to pleasure! This is doing it the greatest injustice. It is, without all doubt, the very best friend to true pleasure. Were we indeed to judge of it from the stiffness and severity of some who pretend to it, we might be forced to entertain a different opinion of it. But such persons do not show it us in its true form. They mistake its nature, and are strangers to its genuine spirit. One part of the duty it requires of us, is to accept thankfully every innocent gratification of life, and to *rejoice evermore*. Instead of driving us, with the wretched votaries of superstition, into deserts and cloisters, and making us morose and gloomy, it calls us out into society, and disposes us to constant alacrity and cheerfulness.

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Secondly.

Secondly. What strong evidence have we for the moral government of the Deity? You have seen that he has so constituted nature that virtue is, by its necessary tendency, our greatest bliss. He is, therefore, on the side of virtue. By establishing the connexion I have been representing between it and happiness, he has declared himself its friend in a manner the most decisive. What we see take place of this connexion in the present life is the beginning of a moral government; and it should lead us to expect a future life, where what is now begun will be completed; where every present irregularity will be set right, virtue receive its *full* reward, and vice its *full* punishment.

Lastly. What reasons have we for seeking virtue above all things? You have heard how happy it will make us. Let us then pray for it earnestly; and despise every thing that can come in competition with it. If we *have* this, we can *want* nothing that is desirable. If we *want* this, we can *have* nothing that will do us any substantial service. Go then, all ye careless and irreligious men. Take to yourselves your money, your honours, and polluted pleasures. I would desire VIRTUE only. There is nothing else worth an eager wish. Here would I centre all my cares and labours. May God grant me this, and deny me what else he pleases! This is his choicest blessing; his best and richest gift. This
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is that tree of life whose leaf never withers; and whose fruit will revive us in every hour of dejection, cure all our maladies, and prolong our existence to endless ages; for, as St. Paul speaks, *if we have our fruit unto holiness, our end will be EVERLASTING LIFE.*



S E R M O N III.

OF THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS.

JOHN xi. 43, 44.

AND WHEN HE HAD THUS SPOKEN, HE CRIED WITH A LOUD VOICE: LAZARUS, COME FORTH! AND HE THAT WAS DEAD CAME FORTH BOUND HAND AND FOOT WITH GRAVE-CLOTHES. AND HIS FACE WAS BOUND ABOUT WITH A NAPKIN. JESUS SAITH TO THEM: LOOSE HIM, AND LET HIM GO.

My design from these words, is to make a few observations on the miraculous fact related in them. This is one of the most remarkable of all our Saviour's miracles. It is related by the apostle John with a simplicity of style, and the main circumstances attending it are told with a minuteness, and, at the same time, a brevity, that cannot but impress an unprejudiced mind. Had a person, who knew he was endeavouring to gain belief to an imposition which he had been concerned in contriving, given us this narrative, it would have been told in a very different manner. It would, probably, have been drawn out to a greater length. No particular mention would have been made of times, places, and persons; and

some affected apologies and colourings would have been introduced to give it a plausibility, and to guard against objections. But, instead of this, we find it a narrative plain and artless in the highest degree, without a circumstance that shows an attempt to give it any dress, or an expression that betrays a design to surprise and deceive. In short; the astonishing miracle, which is the subject of this narrative, is told us exactly as we should expect an honest but unlettered man, who had been familiarized to miracles, to relate a fact of this kind, to which he was conscious of having been an eye and ear witness.

It has been thought strange that the other evangelists have omitted to give us an account of this miracle. Several reasons have been assigned for this omission, which I will just mention to you.

It should be considered, that none of the evangelists appear to have aimed at giving us a complete account of all our Saviour's miracles. It should be considered further, that this miracle was performed in the interval of time between our Saviour's going into the country beyond Jordan, and his going up to his last passover; and that this was a more private part of his ministry, concerning which the other evangelists have said little. But what deserves most to be attended to is, that the evangelists must have felt a particular delicacy with respect to the publication of this miracle. First; because it was a miracle performed on a *friend* in a family with which our Saviour was intimate. And secondly; because Laza-

rus might be still living at the time they wrote their gospels, and might be subjected to great inconveniences by having his name mentioned as the subject of such a miracle. This, however, was a reason which cannot be supposed to have existed when John wrote. There was a tradition among the Fathers, that *Lazarus* lived thirty years after his resurrection; and John did not write his gospel till at least forty or fifty years afterwards. Lazarus, therefore, most probably was not then alive; and John, for this reason, must have been more at liberty to give an account of his resurrection.

It seems proper further to mention here, that St. John, as he wrote last, wrote also on purpose to give a supplement to the other gospels. He had read these gospels; and finding that some important particulars were omitted in them, and others not fully enough related, he composed *his* gospel to supply their defects. John's gospel will appear particularly striking when viewed in this light. Whoever will compare it with the other gospels, must find that he is generally careful to avoid repeating accounts which the other evangelists had given before him; and that the bulk of it is a relation of facts and instructions about which they have been silent. The account I am now to consider is one instance of this. Though extremely short, considering the magnitude of the fact, it is given us more fully than most of the accounts of Christ's other miracles; and we cannot employ ourselves more profitably than in considering it.

What may be first worth your notice in this miracle

racle, is the character of the person on whom it was performed. Our Saviour had a particular affection for him. He calls him his *friend* in the 11th verse of this chapter, and the message which was sent him to acquaint him with his illness was expressed in these words; *Lord, Behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.* We may well believe, that a person who was thus distinguished must have been endued with some very amiable qualities. John tells us further, that he had two sisters, whose names were *Martba* and *Mary*; and that they lived together in a village called *Bethany*, within fifteen furlongs of Jerusalem. When Lazarus was taken ill, our Saviour was at a considerable distance from *Bethany*. It was natural for *Martba* and *Mary*, knowing the particular affection he had for their brother, to hope that he would exert those miraculous powers by which he had cured others, in recovering this his *friend*. They, therefore, sent to him to inform him of their brother's sickness, hoping that he would soon come to them, and give them relief. But, we are told, that, after receiving the message, he staid *two days* in the place where he was. The reason of this delay was, that he chose Lazarus should die before he got to *Bethany*, because he intended, for the fuller manifestation of his divine mission, to raise him from the dead. Had he been on the spot when Lazarus died, he would have suffered, perhaps, some troublesome importunities; nor, I think, would it

it have looked so well for him to have permitted Lazarus to die, while he was with him, and after that to raise him from the dead.

Secondly ; The HUMILITY which our Lord discovered on this occasion is worth our notice. After staying two days where he was when he received the account of Lazarus's sickness, he told his disciples that he was resolved to go into *Judæa*, and invited them to go with him, informing them, at the same time, of the death of Lazarus. The words in which he gave this information are a little remarkable. Ver. 11. *Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, and I go to awake him out of sleep.* He does not say, *Lazarus is dead.* That would have been too harsh. Nor does he say ; *I go to raise him from the dead, and thus to display my great power.* A deceiver would, probably, have used some boasting language of this kind. But he, avoiding all ostentation, expresses himself in the gentlest and simplest language, saying only, " that Lazarus was *asleep*, and that he was going to *wake* him." Another circumstance, to the same purpose, is his ordering the stone to be removed from the mouth of the sepulchre, just before he ordered Lazarus to come forth. He might, undoubtedly, have commanded the stone to roll away of itself ; and, perhaps, a bold impostor would have been represented as doing this. But our Lord did not multiply miracles needlessly, or do any thing for the sake only of show

show and parade. Again; the manner in which he refers this miracle to the will and power of God requires our attention.. After the stone was taken away, he made, we are told, a solemn address to God; and, lifting up his eyes, said, *Father, I thank thee, that thou hast heard me.* This implies, that his ability to work this miracle was the consequence of his having prayed for it. Throughout his whole ministry he was careful to direct the regards of men to the Deity, as the fountain of all his powers. His language was; *The Father who dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. I can of mine own self do nothing. I came to do the will of him that sent me.*

Thirdly; We should take notice in the account of this miracle of the TENDERNESS and BENEVOLENCE of our Saviour's disposition. It is said, that when he saw Mary weeping, and the Jews also weeping, he groaned in his spirit, and was troubled. And it is added, as a circumstance particularly observable, that HE likewise wept. JESUS WEPT. Ver. 35. The remarks which, we are told, the spectators made on this, are very natural. Some, imagining that his tears flowed from his concern for the death of his friend, said, *Behold, how he loved him!* Others, wondering that, as Lazarus was his friend, he had not exerted the miraculous powers by which he had cured others in curing him, said; *Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind,*
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have caused that even this man should not have died?

Ver. 37. The reason of his weeping could not be his sorrow for the death of Lazarus; for he well knew that he should soon restore him to life: but, most probably, his sympathy with the sorrow of Lazarus's friends, heightened by reflections, to which on this occasion he might be led, on death and its attendant evils. He might, likewise, be much impressed (as we find he was at other times) by observing the perverseness discovered by some of the Jews who surrounded him, and by his foresight of the calamities that threatened them. We have an account of his weeping on another occasion in Luke xix. 41. where it is said, that when he came near to *Jerusalem* and beheld it, he *wept* over it. In these instances we see plainly the workings of an ardent benevolence; and we may infer from them, that it is by no means below the character of a wise man to be, on certain occasions, so far overcome by his affectionate feelings, as to be forced into tears. This happened to our Saviour on the occasions I have mentioned; and he only appears to us the more amiable for it. Wretched, indeed, is that philosophy which teaches us to suppress our tender feelings. Such a philosophy, by aiming at elevating us above human nature, sinks us below it. Our Saviour was greater than any human being; and yet we find that even he wept. How foolish then would it be in us to be ashamed of any similar

similar tenderness into which we may be forced ! A stoical insensibility is certainly rather a vice than a virtue. At no time does a person appear more lovely than when conquered by his kind affections, and melted by them into tears. Let us then learn to despise all pretensions to a wisdom which would take from us any of our natural sensibilities ; remembering, however, to keep them always, as far as we can, under proper restraint. It is neither a sin, nor a weakness, to fall into tears ; but it is wrong to weep like persons who have no hope, or who are not satisfied with God's will. Our passions have been wisely and kindly given us ; and our duty is, not to eradicate, but to regulate them, by so watching over them as never to suffer them to lead us into any excesses that would betray an impotence of mind, and a diffidence of Providence.

Fourthly ; The DIGNITY of Christ in working this miracle deserves our attention. How great did he appear in his conversation with Martha before he got to the sepulchre ; and, particularly, when he declared of himself that he was the RESURRECTION and the LIFE, and that *he who believeth in him, though he were dead, yet shall be live !* How great did he appear when, after addressing himself to the Deity, he cried out with a loud voice at the sepulchre, LAZARUS, COME FORTH ! And when, in consequence of this call, *Lazarus* immediately

awoke from death, and showed himself in perfect health; what a manifestation was this of his glory, and how evidently did it prove that the power of God dwelt in him!

But this leads me to desire you to attend to the assurance this miracle gives us of the divine mission of Christ. We can scarcely conceive a more wonderful exertion of power, than the instantaneous restoration to life and health of a person whose body was putrefying in the grave. He that did this must have been sent of God. It is wholly inconceivable, that a deceiver should be able to produce such credentials. It is only the power which gave life that can thus restore it, and reunite our souls and bodies after a separation. We may, therefore, assure ourselves, that the person who worked this miracle, and who possessed such an absolute command over nature as Christ discovered, was indeed what he declared himself to be, a Messenger from heaven to save mankind, and that great Messiah, whose coming had been promised from the beginning of the world.

It has been urged by unbelievers, that, granting the reality of miracles, they are no proof of the truth of doctrines, there being no connexion between a display of supernatural power and truth. The shifts which unbelievers have laid on this objection is mere affectation. Did they believe the miracles, they would, whatever they pretend, find
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themselves under a necessity of receiving the doctrines of Christianity; and it will be time enough to answer this objection, when a man can be found not a lunatic, who can honestly say, that he believes the miracle in particular which is the subject of this discourse, but does not believe the doctrine which it was intended to prove.

But what deserves more particular notice here is, that it appears from this miracle, that Christ is hereafter to raise all mankind from death. Just before he performed it, *Martha* having said to him, *Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died*, he told her, in order to comfort her, that her brother should rise again. She, not understanding him, replied, *I know that he shall rise again at the resurrection at the last day*; to which he answered, with a voice of unspeakable dignity, *I am the RESURRECTION and the LIFE. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.* That is, “I am the person by whom mankind are
 “ to be raised from the dead. It signifies not
 “ whether he that is my true disciple is dead or
 “ alive. If he is *dead*, he shall live again; and if
 “ he is *alive*, his existence shall be continued to
 “ him beyond the grave, and his dismissal from
 “ this world shall be his introduction to a better
 “ world, where he shall never die.”—After making this declaration, and to demonstrate the truth
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of it by giving a *specimen* of that power by which he was to effect the universal resurrection, he walked to Lazarus's grave, and raised him from the dead. What evidence could be more decisive? We have in the gospel-history accounts of his raising from the dead two other persons; and, after being crucified and buried, he rose himself from the dead, and ascended to heaven. These facts exhibit him to our senses as indeed the RESURRECTION and the LIFE. No doubt can remain of a doctrine thus proved. Give me leave to hold your attention here a little longer. In John v. 25. our Saviour, we are told, said to the Jews, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and NOW IS, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.* Soon after uttering these words he said again, as we read in the same chapter, verse 28. *The hour is coming when all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and shall come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.*

In the circumstances which attended the resurrection of Lazarus, our Saviour seems to have referred to these declarations, and to have intended to verify and exemplify them. He cried, we are told, verse 43, with a loud voice, like, perhaps, to that by which he had said he would hereafter raise all the dead, *LAZARUS, come forth!* and in a

moment he did come forth. Thus will the whole world, at the last day, hear the voice of the Son of God. Thus will he then burst the bars of the grave, rescue from the king of terrors his prisoners, and call to life the dead of all nations, ranks, and times. How awful this prospect! How consoling and elevating to good men, amidst the waste that death is continually making around them! What reason have we to value our relation to that deliverer to whom, under God, it is owing! And how ought we to triumph in the assurance he has given us, that, though we must soon lose our powers in death, we shall hereafter recover them; spring up from the dust at his command, new-made and improved; and, with all the faithful, enter (not on such a life as that to which *Lazarus* was restored) but on a glorious and endless life in the heavens!

Before I proceed * I shall here request your attention, while I briefly consider the objections which unbelievers have made to the account given by St. John of this miracle. Sufficient notice has been already taken of several of these objections; but there are some which have not been mentioned, and on which it will not be improper to make a few remarks.

It has been asked, whether there is sufficient reason to believe, that *Lazarus* was *really dead*. The
answer

* Here this sermon was divided into two sermons.

answer is, that he died, not *suddenly*, but of an illness that increased gradually, and lasted several days; that, in this case, there is no danger of mistaking the signs of death; that his friends had buried him, and, therefore, must have assured themselves of his death; that he had been in his grave four days; and that, had he not been dead, the napkin which, we are told, was tied round his face, and the grave-clothes and filletings with which he was bound, would alone have been sufficient to kill him.

It has been further inquired, how, if he was bound hand and foot, as St. John tells us, he could, on our Saviour's call, come forth out of the grave. The answer is obvious. Upon the supposition of the reality of the miracle, there can be no difficulty in conceiving it carried so far, as not only to bring Lazarus to life, but to present him also out of the grave before the spectators. But were it necessary to suppose the miracle not carried thus far, the objection would deserve little regard, because founded on an ignorance of the manner of burying among the ancients. The graves among the Jews, and other nations in former times, were caves hewn out of rocks, in the sides of which the dead, after being embalmed, were deposited without coffins. When, therefore, by our Saviour's order, the stone was taken away from the mouth of Lazarus's sepulchre, it is possible that his corpse might

be exposed to view; and when it is said, that he *came forth bound hand and foot*, the meaning may be, not that he walked out of the sepulchre, but that he raised himself up in the side of the cave or cell where he was laid, and slid down from it upon his feet, and there continued till he was unbound and could walk about.

But the chief difficulty, which occurs in considering the account of this miracle, is the effect which, we are told, it had on the chief-priests and pharisees. Instead of being properly impressed by it, we read, verse 53, that, after taking counsel together, they determined to use all possible means to put Jesus to death. They even went so far as to think of measures for putting *Lazarus* himself to death. Similar to this, according to the gospel-history, was the general conduct of the leading Jews with respect to our Lord. Instead of being engaged by the increasing glory of his character, and the overpowering evidence of his miracles, to submit to him, they were only stimulated to greater rage, and made more desperate in their resolution to crush him: and this may seem a pitch of wickedness so diabolical as to exceed the limits of human depravity, and, therefore, to be incredible. I am in hopes, however, that you will think otherwise, when you have attended to the following observations.

It is a previous observation necessary to be attended to, that the Jewish rulers appeared to have
been

been convinced of the supernatural power and prophetic character of our Lord. This the gospel-history plainly tells us. John xii. 42. *Among the chief rulers also many believed on him, but did not confess him, because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. We know, says Nicodemus (the ruler who came to Jesus by night,) that thou art a teacher come from God, for no one can do the miracles thou dost, except God be with him.* John iii. 2. On hearing the report of this miracle in particular, the language of the chief-priests and pharisees was; *What do we? for this man doth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him.* John xi. 47. When we read, that they did *not* believe in him, the meaning is, that they did not receive him and submit to him as a messenger from heaven; and what, therefore, is to be accounted for is, not so much their want of faith in him, as their rejection and persecution of him notwithstanding their faith.

In order to explain this, I would desire you to consider,

First, The general character of the Jews. In every age they had been infamous for their persecution of the prophets who were sent to them. About this time, more especially, it appears that they were arrived at a pitch of wickedness which went beyond common depravity. *Josephus* says, "that he believed there never existed, from the begin-
 "ning

“ning of the world, a generation of men more
“profligate than the body of the Jewish leaders
“and nobility were at the time Jerusalem was be-
“sieged by the Romans:” And if they were then
so vicious, it is not likely they were of a different
character forty years before, when our Lord preached
to them.

Secondly ; The provocation our Lord gave them
should be considered. It is remarkable, that it does
not appear that he ever expressed himself with par-
ticular warmth except when he spake of these men.
Against the scribes and pharisees we find him al-
ways declaring a most pointed and irreconcilable
indignation. He charged them with being guilty
of almost every vice that could stain a human cha-
racter; and, particularly, with religious hypocrisy,
doing all their good works to be seen of men; pre-
tending uncommon sanctity, and making long
prayers, but devouring widows' houses; straining
at a gnat, but swallowing a camel; careful not
to omit any punctilio of a ceremony, and paying
tithe of mint, anise, and cummin, but neglecting
the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy,
and fidelity; binding heavy burthens on others,
which they would not touch with one of their
fingers; compassing sea and land to make one pro-
felyte, who, when made, became tenfold more a
child of hell than themselves; claiming an abso-
lute authority over the consciences of the people;
while

while they taught for doctrines the commandments of men, and corrupted the law of God; loving greetings in the markets, and the chief seats in synagogues, and studying (by going about in long robes, praying in the corners of the streets, founding a trumpet when they gave alms, and enlarging the borders of their garments) to appear *outwardly*, righteous, while *inwardly* they were like whited sepulchres, full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. In short, their character, according to our Lord's representation of it, was completely detestable; and, perhaps, the account we have of it has been providentially given us to prevent our wondering at the violence of their opposition to our Saviour, notwithstanding all they saw and knew of his miraculous powers. He even declared a preference to them of publicans and sinners, of thieves and harlots, who, he assured them, were more likely to enter into the kingdom of the Messiah than they were.

His discourse in the 23d chapter of Matthew is particularly worth your attention on this occasion. In this discourse he denounces the judgments of heaven upon them for their wickedness, calling them blind guides, and a generation of vipers who could not escape the damnation of hell. He pronounces seven times the words, **WOE UNTO YOU, SCRIBES AND PHARISEES, HYPOCRITES!** and concludes with saying, there was no remedy for them,

them, but that *on them would come all the righteous blood which had been shed from the beginning of the world*; that is, a punishment so dreadful as to bear to be so expressed. Thus did he hold them up to public detestation as enemies to the progress of truth and virtue, and a body of pious knaves destined to destruction: and the effect must have been the ruin of their credit and authority. Could there have been a provocation more intolerable? In truth, the wonder is, that they bore him so long as they did; and the probability is, that they would have brought him to a quicker end, had it not been for an awe produced in their minds by the splendour of his miracles, united to their apprehensions of danger from the people, who, we are informed, all took him for a prophet, and were ready for a revolt in his favour.

But let us further consider what they must have done, and how much they must have relinquished; had they submitted to him. They must have made themselves the disciples of the son of a carpenter, followed by twelve mean fishermen, without state or pomp, or even a place in which to lay his head. They must have descended from their seats of power and influence, and placed themselves under the direction of an enemy who had unmasked and exposed them, and from whom they could expect no mercy. But above all, they must have acknowledged themselves the wicked wretches he had declared them to be,

be, and given up their ambition, their hypocrisy, and their vices. ' Is it strange, that even miracles, whatever conviction they might extort, did not produce this effect? Perhaps, indeed, there is not *now* a country under heaven, in which, in similar circumstances, our Lord would not meet with similar treatment. Suppose, for instance, that in *ITALY* a prophet was to arise and to go about preaching repentance to the inhabitants; calling them from the worship of the host, of images, the virgin Mary, and the saints, to the worship of one God; rebuking popery as a system of superstition and spiritual fraud and domination, injurious to the essential interests of men, by teaching a way of being religious without being virtuous, and of getting to heaven without forsaking vice; and, at the same time, delivering woes against the public teachers and rulers, as hypocritical corrupters of true religion, as supporters of idolatry and falsehood, and enemies to the improvement and happiness of mankind. Suppose, I say, this now to happen in *ITALY*; what can you imagine would be the effect? What evidence would be sufficient to engage the pope, the cardinals, and the different orders of priests, to listen to such a preacher, and acknowledge his authority; to renounce their usurped honours and dignities; to give up the abuses to which they owed their wealth and their consequence, and to reform their doctrine and manners?

ners? Would not the whole force of clerical and civil power be exerted to silence and crush him as soon as possible? Would miracles themselves, unless employed for the purpose of protecting him, long preserve him? Would he be perfectly safe, even in *this* country, were he to come to us and to attack established corruptions, provoke the vicious in high places, and unmask religious prevaricators, the supporters of abuses, and the enemies of reformation, in the manner our Lord did in *Judæa*?

The observation I am now making has been verified by the experience of all past ages. Such is the power of criminal prejudices, and such the stubbornness and often the fury of vicious men interested in maintaining abuses, that reformers, however powerful their admonitions have been and eminent their characters, have seldom long escaped persecution and violent deaths. Provocations, unspeakably less than those given to the Jews by our Saviour, have every where produced the same effects: in *ATHENS*, the poisoning of *SOCRATES*; in *BRITAIN*, the burning of *CRANMER*, *LATIMER*, *RIDLEY*, &c.

But this is by no means all that is to be said in answer to the objection I am considering. In our Lord's circumstances with respect to the Jews, there was much that was peculiar, and that can never again exist in any country. In order to understand this, you must recollect, that all the Jews were.

in the time of our Saviour, eagerly and impatiently looking for the Messiah promised in their sacred writings; and that the only notion they had of this Messiah was*, that he would be a temporal prince and a great conqueror, who would come with a train of splendid courtiers and signs in the heavens, set himself at the head of a mighty army, deliver them from the Roman yoke, restore them to their long lost liberty, and elevate them to the sovereignty of the world. Their leading men, in particular, reckoned on being the most favoured men in his kingdom, on having their consequence among the people confirmed and enlarged, and enjoying in the greatest abundance pleasures, preferments, honours, and riches. When, therefore, they heard the fame of Jesus, and saw the displays of his supernatural power, they could not but be led to conclude that he might prove the Messiah, or, at least, that the nation would take him to be so; and, as he had avowed himself their adversary, this would necessarily alarm them. It was impossible they should not dislike *such* a Messiah; a Messiah who was continually warning the people against them,

* This opinion was not confined to the Jews. "There had been, Suetonius tells us (Vespas. cap. 4), THROUGH ALL THE EAST, an ancient and constant expectation, that at that time some one from *Judæa* should obtain the empire of the world."

and who had sunk their credit; a Messiah who made humility, self-denial, repentance, and heavenly-mindedness, the conditions of his favour; a Messiah who publicly threatened them, who had pronounced them the worst of mankind, and declared that, instead of sharing in the happiness of the Messiah's reign, they would be excluded from it, become victims of divine justice, and suffer a punishment sharper than any that had been ever inflicted.

It is true that, with wonderful prudence, he avoided declaring himself the Messiah. The effect of such a declaration would have been producing tumults; which must have defeated his views. The proper time for this was after his departure from this world, when it would be impossible to mistake it for a call to rebellion. But the rulers of the Jews must have expected that he would soon quit his reserve, publish his pretensions, and set up his standard; and the more he distinguished himself, the more they must have apprehended that he might do this with a success that (either by enabling him to execute his threats, or by bringing the Roman power upon them) would occasion their ruin. Thus circumstanced, every miracle he wrought, every testimony he received of popular favour, and every display he made of his prophetic character, could, in their depraved minds, have no other effect than to increase their alarm, to work them up to greater violence,

violence, and to render them more desperate in their attempts to provide for their own security by destroying him.

Our Lord's parable of the vineyard let out to unfaithful husbandmen, delivered not long before his crucifixion, affords a particular confirmation of these observations. In this parable he intimates to the chief priests and elders of the people, that in spite of all their efforts he should rise to universal power; and that the consequence would be, his falling upon them (like a great corner-stone) and grinding them to powder. And we are told that they understood his meaning, and were so exasperated by it, that they endeavoured immediately to seize him, but were deterred by the people. See the xxist chapter of Matthew, from the 25th verse to the end.

In short; Jesus, after raising *Lazarus* from the dead, became possessed of an influence among the people, which would, had he availed himself of it, have been irresistible. They * were ripened by it for an insurrection, and the slightest encouragement would

* The disposition of the Jews, at this time, to rise in favour of every pretender who offered himself to them as the temporal deliverer they expected in the Messiah, is well known. It was this chiefly, as Josephus says, that produced the war which ruined them; and it was our Lord's disappointing their views, by refusing to be made a king, and suffering

would have brought them together to fight under him, and to proclaim him their great Messiah. The hypocrites, whom, in the tone and with the authority of a prophet sent from God, he had *proscribed*, could not observe this without terror. Their danger appeared to be increasing with every increase of his popularity, and growing more imminent in proportion to the proofs he gave of his divine mission. They could not but reckon, that as he rose they must sink; and that either *he* or *they* must perish. This produced a contest singular and unparalleled. Our Lord gave it up by yielding to their power. It was a great mistake to think, that his kingdom was a temporal kingdom, or that he had any worldly views. He did not come for slaughter and triumph like the savage conquerors of this world, but to suffer and to die;

himself to be taken and condemned, that made the people turn at last against him.

“The Jewish people,” says Dr. Lardner in his Collection of Jewish and Heathen Testimonies to the Truth of Christianity, chap. iii. sect. 7. “had met with many disappointments from our Lord; and yet, when he entered into Jerusalem in no greater state than riding on an ass, they accompanied him with loud acclamations, saying, *Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is the king who cometh in the name of the Lord!* And Jesus’ not assuming then the character of an earthly prince was a fresh disappointment to them, and left deep resentments.”

die; and it was necessary that his death should be a *public* death. His own resurrection (the ground of all human hope) could not otherwise have been properly ascertained. He, therefore, made a voluntary surrender of himself to his enemies; and, to fulfil the counsels of providence*, submitted to be publicly condemned and crucified.

These observations seem to be a full answer to the objection I have stated: and they explain what is said in Matt. xxvii. 18. that it was from ENVY the

* Their success in taking and condemning him led them to conclude they had obtained a complete victory over him, and had delivered themselves from the danger with which he had threatened them. But the events which soon followed proved the contrary. He rose to all power in heaven and earth; and, in a few years after this, sent his armies to destroy these murderers. Vengeance came upon them to the uttermost; and his prophetic denunciations were fully verified. *Josephus* tells us that twelve thousand of the Jewish nobility perished at the siege of *Jerusalem*; that the vengeance of heaven appeared plainly to be upon them; and that, in his opinion, all the calamities which had ever happened to any people from the beginning of the world were not to be compared with those which befel the Jews at this time. Multitudes, he says, were crucified by the *Romans* before the walls; and so great was the number of those who thus suffered, that room was wanting for crosses, and crosses were wanting for bodies.

chief priests and pharisees had delivered him ; that is, from a jealousy of his popularity, and a dread of its effects ; and, also, what we are told (in a passage already quoted) these chief priests said, on hearing of the resurrection of Lazarus, *What do we ? for this man doth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.* John xi. 47, 48.

There are two reflections which are naturally suggested to us by these observations.

First ; We should consider how striking a proof they give us of the truth of our religion. Had Christ been a deceiver, he would have fallen in with the prejudices of his countrymen ; he would have offered himself to them as just the Messiah they expected and wanted : for it was only in the scheme of such a Messiah the views of a deceiver could be gratified. He would have endeavoured to ingratiate himself with the chief priests and rulers, encouraged their ambition, and flattered their vices. You have heard how differently he acted ; how he provoked instead of soothing the Jewish rulers, and threatened instead of flattering them ; and thus made himself odious and terrible to them in the highest degree. There cannot be a stronger argument for his divine mission. If there be any person who does not feel the weight of it, he must be either very much prejudiced, or very inattentive.

Secondly ; We are led, by the observations I have

have made, to reflect on the wisdom of divine providence, in ordering the circumstances which attended the introduction of christianity into the world. Had the body of the Jewish leaders and priests (and consequently the nation in general) received Christ, the evidences of our religion would have been much diminished ; a suspicion would have been unavoidable, that it was an imposition contrived by the Jews, and which had made its way in the world by the power and policy * of the Jewish state.

But

* “ Had the great body of your nation, and especially the rulers of it in the time of Christ, embraced christianity, as it was a religion which sprang up among yourselves, it would have been said at this day, that it was a contrivance of those who had it in their power to impose upon the common people, and to make them believe whatever they pleased, and that your scriptures, which bear testimony to Christ, had been altered to favour the imposture. Whereas the violent opposition which your nation in general, and the rulers of it, made to christianity, will forever put it out of the power of unbelievers to say that it was a scheme which the founders of it carried on in concert with any human powers.” See the Letters addressed to the Jews by *Dr. Priestley*, in which, with a force of persuasion they ought to feel, he invites them to an amicable discussion with him of the evidences of christianity. Fifth Letter, p. 45.

But I have gone far beyond the bounds I intended in speaking on this subject.

Let us now pause a moment, and endeavour to bring back our thoughts to the resurrection of *Lazarus*. Never, except when Jesus himself rose from the dead, was a scene so interesting exhibited on the stage of this world. The consideration of it should engage us to exercise faith in Christ as our Saviour, and to rely on his power to deliver us from the all-devouring grave. His exhortation to his apostles just before his last sufferings was; *Ye believe in God: Believe also in me.* Thus also, in his words, would I now exhort you. “Ye believe in God.” He is the ONE SUPREME, and the cause of all the causes of your happiness. “But believe also in Christ.” He is the one mediator, and the chosen minister of God’s goodness to you. *As in Adam all die; so in him shall all be made alive.* 1 Cor. xv. 22. Soon he will descend again from heaven, not to labour and suffer, but to gather the fruits of his labours and sufferings; not to die, but to destroy death, and to *change these our vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to that mighty power by which he is able to subdue all things to himself.* Phil. iii. 21. *As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.* John v. 26. We have been contemplating a striking proof of this. As his call brought Lazarus to life; so will it, hereafter, bring to life
you

you and me and all mankind. At his coming *the sea shall give up the dead that are in it, and death and the invisible state shall give up the dead that are in them. He shall sit on the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations to be judged according to their works. He shall separate them as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. The righteous he shall place on his right-hand; the wicked on his left. To the former he will say; Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world! To the latter, Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!* God grant, fellow-christians, that we may be prepared for this solemn time! A step more may bring us to it. Death is pressing hard towards us; and when it comes, the curtain will drop which hides from our view another world, and these scenes will open upon us. The intervening time of lying amongst the dead our imaginations are apt greatly to misrepresent. There may be, to our perceptions, no difference whether it be four days, as in the case of Lazarus, or a thousand ages. Let us then be stedfast in every good purpose, never, while in the way of our duty, desponding under any troubles, or weeping as without hope, forasmuch as we know *that our Redeemer liveth, and will stand at the latter day on the earth; and that though our bodies must putrefy in the ground, and worms devour them, yet in our flesh we shall see God.* Job xix. 26.

And

And now, before I dismiss you, let me desire you to join with me in taking one more view of what passed at Lazarus's grave. It is pleasing in the highest degree to set before our imaginations that scene. Christ declares himself the resurrection and the life, and then walks to the grave. In his way to it (observing the sorrow of Lazarus's friends, and reflecting on the calamities of human nature) he falls into tears. When arrived at it, he orders the stone at the mouth of it to be taken away; and (in answer to Martha, who objected that the smell would be offensive) he says, that if she believed, she should see the glory of God. He solemnly addresses the Deity, and thanks him for hearing him: the spectators stand around big with expectation. He cries with a loud voice, *Lazarus, come forth!* Immediately he came forth, and showed himself alive. Conceive, if you can, the astonishment this produced. Think, particularly, of the emotions of Lazarus's friends. What delight must they have felt! How joyful must it have been to Martha and Mary to receive their beloved brother from the dead! With what ecstasies must they have embraced him, and welcomed him to the light of life! How, probably, did they fall down before Jesus in gratitude and wonder!

But let not our thoughts stop here. Let us carry them on to the morning of the universal resurrection. What happened now was a faint resemblance of what

will happen then. How gladly will virtuous men open their eyes on that morning, and hail the dawning of an endless day ! With what rapture will they then meet, congratulate one another on their escape from danger and trouble, and unite their voices in praising their Deliverer ! What will be their joy to exchange corruption for incorruption, and weakness for power ; to take leave of sin and sorrow, and lose all their maladies ; to throw off their fetters, recover perfect health and liberty, mount up on high to *meet the Lord in the air*, and draw immortal breath !

Oh ! blessed period ! Come, Lord Jesus ! come quickly ! And when thy voice shall hereafter awake all the dead, may we find this happiness ours, and be taken, with all we have loved here, to live with thee for ever !

S E R M O N . IV.

THE IMPORTANCE AND EXTENT OF FREE INQUIRY IN MATTERS OF RELIGION.

[Preached November 5, 1785.]

MATT. xiii. 9.

HE THAT HATH EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM
HEAR.

IN these words our Lord several times addressed his audience, in order to summon their utmost attention to his doctrine. It was a call to make use of their reason, in a case in which it was of the greatest consequence to apply it, and in which they were likewise capable of applying it with the greatest effect, viz. the investigation of religious truth. *Hear and understand* is another of his modes of calling the attention of his audience to the instruction that he gave them. And when he thought them deficient in their attention to his doctrine, and they did not appear to understand what he laid before them, he was not backward even in his reproaches on that account. *Are ye yet also without understanding? Do ye not yet understand?* His language that he

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once

once made use of; evidently implying some degree of surprize and displeasure. Matt. xv. 16, 17. And even in a case of considerable difficulty, viz. the right application of scripture prophecies, he said to the two disciples going to Emmaus, *O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!* Luke xxiv. 25.

The apostles continued the same earnest addresses to the reason of their converts; and Paul, in particular, gave the greatest exercise to the understandings of his hearers and readers, by very abstruse argumentation on subjects relating to religion. His epistles to the Romans, to the Galatians, and to the Hebrews, are chiefly argumentative; and those to the Corinthians, and some others, are very much so. For, after the death of our Saviour, new cases had occurred, and new difficulties had arisen, for which the instructions he had given them were not sufficient. And had the apostles continued to live to the present day, other cases would, no doubt, have occurred, in which their own reasoning powers, and those of their disciples, would have found continual exercise.

Indeed, it seems to be the design of providence that the present state should be a theatre of constant exercise and discipline, and that not of our passions only, but also of our understandings, that we may make continual advances in knowledge, as well as in virtue; to prepare us, no doubt, for our proper sphere

sphere of action in a future world; in which, we may assure ourselves, we shall find abundant exercise, as for the moral virtues that we acquire here, so also for that habit of patient inquiry, and close investigation of truth, and likewise that candour with respect to those that differ from us, which it is our duty to acquire and cultivate here below.

Man is a creature whose distinguishing excellence is the reason which God has given him, no less than his capacity for moral virtues. The perfection of man, therefore, must consist as well in the improvement of his reason, and the acquisition of knowledge, as in the attainment of all moral virtue. We should then always keep our attention awake to every interesting subject of discussion; and, whenever religious truth is directly or indirectly concerned, imagine that we hear our Saviour himself calling out to us, and saying, *He that hath ears to hear let him hear.*

The subject of *free inquiry*, I am well aware, is a very trite one, and especially as one of the usual topics of the fifth of November, on which it is customary to call the attention of protestants to the use of their reason in matters of religion, in order to vindicate the principles of the reformation; and also further to assert our liberty of dissenting from the established religion of this country. This has been done so often that many persons may think it a worn-out and useless topic. They may think

that the reformation has been abundantly vindicated, and that now we have nothing to do but to rejoice in that liberty in which the exertions of our ancestors, and the favour of divine providence, have made us free. Dissenters also may think the principles of their dissent from the establishment of their country sufficiently vindicated, and that now we have nothing to do but joyfully to acquiesce in our greater liberty; only being ready to oppose all attempts that may be made to encroach upon it.

This, however, is the language of those who think they have acquired all useful religious knowledge; whereas it is probable that this will never be the situation of man, not even in a future world, and much less in this. In nature we see no bounds to our inquiries. One discovery always gives hints of many more, and brings us into a wider field of speculation. Now, why should not this be, in some measure, the case with respect to knowledge of a moral and religious kind? Is the compass of religious knowledge so small, as that any person, however imperfectly educated, may comprehend the whole, and without much trouble? This may be the notion of such as read or think but little on the subject. But of what value can such an opinion be?

If we look back into ecclesiastical history (which is itself a study no less useful than it is immense, and despised by none but those who are ignorant of

it), we shall see that every age, and almost every year, has had its peculiar subjects of inquiry. As one controversy has been determined, or sufficiently agitated, others have always arisen; and -I will venture to say there never was a time in which there were more, or more interesting objects of discussion before us, than there are at present. And it is vain to flatter ourselves with the prospect of seeing an end to our labours, and of having nothing to do but to sit down in the pleasing contemplation of all religious truth, and reviewing the intricate mazes through which we have happily traced the progress of every error.

If, indeed, we confine ourselves to things that are *necessary to salvation*, we may stop whenever we please, and may even save ourselves the trouble of any inquiry, or investigation at all: because nothing is absolutely necessary to acceptance with God, and future happiness, in some degree, besides the conscientious practice of the moral duties of life. *What doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* But, certainly, we may mislead ourselves if we restrict our inquiries by this rule, as, according to it, christianity itself may be said to be unnecessary: for do any of us think that a virtuous heathen will not be saved? Paul says that they who are without the law of Moses shall be judged without that law. They have the law of

nature and of conscience, and will be judged by that. But, notwithstanding this, he thought it a great privilege to be a Jew, and a greater still, as it certainly is, to be a christian; and there were questions relating to christianity, to which he thought it proper to give his own closest attention, and to invite the attention of others. The manner in which he addresses the Galatians, the Corinthians, and the christians of other churches, on the subject of *false doctrine*, is equal in point of energy with the language of our Saviour, *he that hath ears to hear let him hear*; and that of the apostle John, in whose time error had spread wider, and taken deeper root, is still stronger. Do not these great examples then justify the most vigilant attention that we can now give to the purity of christian doctrine?

As new errors and mistakes are continually arising, it is of importance that these be corrected, even to keep the ground that we have already got; and it may well be presumed that the great corruption in doctrine, discipline, and worship, which began in the very age of the apostles, and which kept advancing for the space of near fourteen hundred years afterwards, may furnish matter for the laborious and spirited inquiries of a later period than ours. We have seen, indeed, the *dawn* of a reformation, but much remains to the light of *perfect day*; and there is nothing that we can now allege

lege as a plea for discontinuing our researches, that might not have been said with equal plausibility at the time by Wickliff, by Luther, or by later reformers, who stopped far short of the progress which you who now hear me have made. We think that they all left the reformation very imperfect, and why may not our posterity think the same concerning us? What peculiar right have we to say to the spirit of reformation, *So far shalt thou go and no further.*

Lutier and Calvin reformed many abuses, especially in the discipline of the church, and also some gross corruptions in doctrine; but they left other things, of far greater moment, just as they found them. They disclaimed the worship of saints and angels, but they retained the worship of Jesus Christ, which led the way to it, which had the same origin, and which is an equal infringement of the honour due to the supreme God, who has declared that he will not give his glory to another. Nay, the authority of the names of those reformers, who did not see this and other great errors, now serves to strengthen and confirm them: for those doctrines of original sin, predestination, atonement, and the divinity of Christ, which deserve to be numbered among the grossest of all errors, are even often distinguished by the appellation of *the doctrines of the reformation*, merely because they were not reformed by those who have
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got the name of *the reformers*; as if no others could have a right to it but themselves; whereas, excepting the doctrine of *atonement* (which in its full extent was an error that originated with the reformers themselves, who were led into it by an immoderate opposition to the popish doctrine of merit), they are, in fact, the doctrines of the church of Rome, which Luther and Calvin left just as they found.

It was great merit in them to go so far as they did, and it is not *they*, but *we* who are to blame, if their authority induce us to go no further. We should rather imitate them in the boldness and spirit with which they called in question and rectified so many long-established errors; and, availing ourselves of their labours, make further progress than they were able to do. Little reason have we to allege their name, authority, and example, when they did a great deal, and we do nothing at all. In this we are not imitating *them*, but those who opposed and counteracted them, willing to keep things as they were, among whom many were excellent characters, whose apprehensions at that day were the very same with those of many very good and quiet persons at present, viz. the fear of *moving foundations*, and overturning christianity itself. Their fears, we are now all sensible, were groundless; and why may not those of the present age be so too?

Dissenters, who have no creeds dictated to them
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by any civil governors, have, nevertheless, at this day no less need of such admonitions as these than members of established churches; because they may have acquired as blind an attachment to the systems in which they were educated as the members of any establishment whatever, and may be as averse to any further improvement. Indeed a similar temper is necessarily produced in similar circumstances, while human nature is the same in us all; and therefore a person educated a dissenter may be as much a *bigot* as any person educated a churchman, or a papist; and if he now be what he was brought up to, the probability certainly is, that, had he been educated differently, his prejudices would have been no less strong, though intirely different; so that the rigid dissenter would have been as rigid a papist or a churchman.

No person whose opinions are not the result of his own serious inquiry can have a right to say that he is a dissenter, or any thing else, *on principle*; and no man can be absolutely sure of this, whose present opinions are the same with those that he was taught, though he may think, and be right in thinking, that he sees sufficient reason for them, and retains them on conviction. This, however, is all that can be expected of any man; for it would be most absurd for a man to adopt new opinions, opinions entertained by no person besides himself, merely for the sake of proving that he has actually thought for himself.

himself. But still, thinking as others have thought, and for reasons which others have given, is no *proof* of a man having thought for himself, and therefore will not authorize his censuring of others. Such a person *may* have the true spirit of inquiry, he may have exerted it, and have found the truth; but he is incapable of giving that satisfactory *evidence* of it, which can be given by one, whose present sentiments are different from those in which he was educated, and which he could not have learned but from his own researches.

How few then of those of you who were educated dissenters can have a right to say, that you would have been dissenters if you had *not* been so educated! It is more than I would presume to say concerning myself. If those persons who now dislike the spirit of innovation were to go back in history, and place themselves in every age of reformation; still censuring that spirit which always gave offence in its day (being always the rebellion of *a few* against the authority of *the many*); they could not stop till they came to the heathenism of our barbarous ancestors: for it was the bold spirit of inquiry that made them christians.

Let all those who acquiesce in any system in which they were educated, or which they have learned from others, consider that, in censuring more modern innovators, they are censuring the *spirit* and *example* of the very persons whose opinions
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they have adopted, and of whose name they make their boast; and that if it had not been for that very spirit which they now censure, only exerted a century or two ago, their own opinions would have been very different from what they now are. They ought, therefore, to respect the *principle*, even though it should lead some into error. If the spirit of inquiry that carries some to socinianism be wrong, that which carries others to arianism is no less so; and if Arminius is to be condemned for abandoning the doctrine of Calvin, Calvin himself must be condemned for abandoning the doctrines of popery. It is the *spirit of inquiry*, which if error be established necessarily leads to *innovation*, that every man, who ranks himself with any class of christians now existing, must commend in some person or other: and if it was really commendable in the person, whose opinions he adopts, it cannot be censurable in the person, whose opinions he does not choose to adopt. The same spirit of inquiry is in itself equally commendable, or equally censurable in all, and whether it lead to truth, or to error.

It will be said, Is it not possible for the spirit of inquiry and innovation to be carried too far? Does liberty never degenerate into licentiousness? Admitting this, who is the proper judge in the case, when all are equally *parties*? The papist will say that the protestant has gone too far, the calvinists will say that the arminians are to blame, arminians will

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condemn the arians, and the arians the unitarians, and even some unitarians may condemn those of their body, who, differing from them in some respects, have not as yet got, but may hereafter get, some other name.

In fact, there is no reason to be alarmed at all in the case. Truth will always have an infinite advantage over error, if free scope be given to inquiry. It is very little advantage that any superiority of ability can give to the cause of error, and it cannot be of long continuance; not to say that the probability must always be, that a man of superior ability will discover the truth sooner than one of inferior talents; industry, and all other qualities being equal between them.

But the consideration that will perhaps contribute most to allay the apprehensions of serious and well-intentioned persons, with respect to all theological controversies, is, that nothing on which future happiness depends is concerned in any of them. Much more than has yet been called in question may be given up without abandoning christianity; and every thing that has yet been done towards stripping our religion of its foreign incumbrances has contributed to make many value it the more, and consequently, by giving it a firmer hold on men's understanding and belief, tends to give it a greater influence over their affections and practice.

There are, likewise, some other considerations, by means of which those persons who are not themselves

selves much given to speculation, and who are apt to be alarmed by the suggestions of others, may relieve themselves from the fears they entertain on these occasions. One is, that no principle or tenet is really dangerous that does not affect men's belief in the righteous moral government of God, and a state of rewards and punishments hereafter; because this is that religious principle which has the greatest influence on the conduct of men. Other principles, indeed, have an effect, in contributing to make us regard our governor and judge, and the maxims of his administration, with more satisfaction, and therefore may make religious obedience more pleasing, and they deserve our zeal and attachment on that account. Other principles again tend to make our religion approve itself to the reason of mankind, by removing from it what is manifestly absurd, or highly improbable and revolting; and therefore may recommend christianity to those who are at present prejudiced against it, and they deserve a large portion of our zeal on that account. But still the great thing, with respect to the professor of christianity himself, is his firm belief in a righteous moral government, and a future state of retribution; because these are the things that chiefly influence men's conduct.

In reality, there cannot be any better rule of judging in this case than that of our Saviour, *By their fruits ye shall know them.* Consider then the

temper and conduct of those persons whose opinions are said to be dangerous. Are they worse than other persons? Have they less piety towards God, or less good-will to men, or are they more indulgent to their appetites and passions? If this cannot be said of them, but on the contrary their conduct be as unexceptionable, and exemplary, as that of other christians, assure yourselves that there is no more real danger in their principles than in those of others. They cannot be bad principles with which men lead godly, righteous, and sober lives.

I do not, however, desire you to be determined by the observation of a single person, or of a few persons; because there may be causes of their good conduct independent of their principles, as there may be causes of bad conduct in those who hold good principles. But observe the general character of the sect, or denomination, whose principles are censured; and if it be not worse than that of others, assure yourselves that, whatever may be the vices or virtues of individuals, the general principles of the sect are not more unfavourable to virtue than those of other christians; and, therefore, that there is nothing in them that ought to give you any alarm.

But if, independent of practical consequences; you consider speculative principles only, and all your fears be for *Christianity*, it should be considered

sidered, that every man is a christian who believes the divine mission of Christ, and consequently the truth of his religion. And, for the reason given before, the only essential article of his religion is the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Who Christ himself is, personally considered, is not, of itself, of any consequence, but only whether he be sufficiently authorized by the *God of truth* to teach what he did teach in his name. If such doctrines be taught concerning Christ, personally considered, as men of sense will not readily believe; if it be insisted on that he is Almighty God, the maker of the world, or any thing else that will seem to be either impossible, or highly improbable (by which many persons may be indisposed to receive christianity, and especially the great bodies of jews and mahometans, who keep strictly to that most important doctrine of the *unity of God*), every rational Christian ought on that account, as well as others, to exert himself to refute such notions, and to prevent the spread of them. But still we ought to bear in mind, that any man is intitled to the appellation of a *christian*, who believes that Christ (whether he was himself God, or man, or something between God and man,) had a commission from God, that he died and rose again; and who, in consequence of it, expects a general resurrection, and a life of retribution to come.

But should free inquiry lead to the destruction

of christianity itself; it ought not on that account to be discontinued: for we can only wish for the prevalence of christianity on the supposition of its being *true*; and if it fall before the influence of free inquiry, it can only do so in consequence of its not being true. But every man who is himself a serious believer in christianity must have the most perfect confidence in its truth. He can have no doubt of its being able to stand the test of the most rigorous examination, and consequently he can have no motive to be unwilling to submit it to that test. None can well be enemies to free inquiry but those who, not believing christianity, or at least strongly suspecting that it may not be true, yet wish to support it for some private and interested considerations; like those who lived by the trade of making shrines for the goddess Diana, who were interested in the support of her worship at all events, whether they themselves believed in her divinity or not, because by *that craft they got their wealth*. But this is an argument that cannot much affect any besides members of civil establishments of religion. You, my brethren, have no interest whatever in the support of christianity, if it be false; and your ministers very little. We, therefore, as dissenters, shall be absolutely inexcusable, if we be not friends to free inquiry in its utmost extent, and if we do not give the most unbounded scope to the use of our reason in matters of religion.

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It is the great principle on which our cause rests, and without which it can never be worth supporting at all.

By all means, then, be so far consistent, as christians, as protestants, and as dissenters, as to give the greatest encouragement to free inquiry in matters of religion. Do you, who have leisure and capacity, study the subject of religion, the nature of its evidences, and every circumstance relating to it. No subjects of inquiry or speculation, within the reach of the human faculties, are so great and interesting as those which, in the most distant manner, relate to the revelation of the will of God to men, respecting our conduct here, and our expectations hereafter. The ultimate object of the whole scheme gives a dignity to comparatively little things belonging to it; and no studies are in their nature capable of becoming more pleasing and satisfying to the mind than those of theology. For this I may venture to appeal to the experience of all those who, in consequence of having a taste for these studies as well as others, and of having made real proficiency in both, are the only competent judges in the case. Their being the chosen studies of Newton and Locke, for the greater and more valuable part of their lives, clearly shows that they considered them as superior to those of mathematics and natural philosophy in the one case, and of metaphysics and various other liberal pursuits, in

the other. Compared with this testimony, so emphatically given, by the actual employment of their time, how contemptible is the opinion of men whose studies have been confined to polite literature, natural science, or that of men of the world, who cannot pretend to any knowledge of the subject on which they pass their hasty censures! You who have fortune, but little leisure or capacity for such inquiries yourselves, at least encourage them in others. Give assistance to their labours, and you will have a better right to enjoy the fruits of them, though you may not be qualified, in any other respect, to contribute to their success.

Do you, in general, who are private members of christian societies, be, at least, so far the friends of free inquiry, as to throw no obstructions in the way of it. Allow your ministers the liberty that you take yourselves, and take no umbrage if, in consequence of giving more attention to matters of theology than you have leisure for, they should entertain opinions different from yours, provided that your agreement on the whole be such, as that their services are useful and edifying to you. After a laborious and hazardous course of inquiry, of the difficulties of which you can hardly be aware, it is no great hardship upon you to give them at least a dispassionate and attentive hearing. They cannot force any opinions upon you. You will still have the power of judging for yourselves; and without
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hearing you cannot have even the means of forming a right judgment. And where an agreement cannot be had (and few persons who really think for themselves will agree in *all* things), you may exercise that mutual candour, which is of more value than any agreement in speculation.

If your ministers be men of sense, and have any knowledge of human nature, they will not trouble you, from such a place as this, with speculations into which you cannot enter, or the discussion of questions that are not of some importance to our common christianity. But you may easily suppose, that, giving more attention to speculative religion than you have leisure to do, they may see the importance of certain articles in a stronger light than you will at first be aware of; and that will justify them to themselves, and ought to justify them to you, if they propose those articles with such evidence as strikes their minds in their favour, and with a zeal which they may think they deserve. It is indeed their duty, in the sight of God, to inculcate upon you whatever they shall think to be of importance to you, as members of christian societies, whether you receive it well or ill.

There are many things which they may think to be highly interesting in *speculation*, and proper for your consideration in your closets, which they would not think of proposing promiscuously from the pulpit, not being of sufficient importance, and the
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minds of all not being sufficiently prepared for them. But there are some errors of a speculative nature, such as those respecting the unity of God, and the equity of his moral government, which have taken deep root among common christians, and which are perpetually inculcated from other pulpits, with respect to which it becomes us to oppose zeal to zeal; and every man who has *ears to hear* should be called upon to *bear and understand*, because every man who has ears to hear, and the most common understanding, may be made to see the absurdity and the mischievous consequences of such doctrines. The minds, therefore, of the commonest people ought to be enlightened, and their zeal excited, with respect to them. Let it appear that we, as well as others, despise what we think to be despicable, and abhor what we think to be shocking.

Let those, on the other hand, who are bold in speculation, bear with those who are not so, especially those who are in years, and who have not been much in the habit of diligent inquiry. God does not give the same disposition to every man; nor indeed does the purpose of his providence admit of it. Long prejudices are also always, or at least generally, to be treated with tenderness. Besides, as it is happy for the cause of truth that some should be forward in speculation, it is no less happy that others should be backward to receive new opinions;

as, in consequence of this, every thing is more thoroughly canvassed, and it is only after a due course of discussion, in which every objection shall be brought forth, that there can be any probability that the reception of any truth will be lasting. A truth that has never been opposed cannot acquire that firm and unwavering assent, which is given to that which has stood the test of a rigorous examination.

As we call upon every man that has *ears to hear*, that is, *ability to judge*, we must be prepared patiently to bear with the result of that judgment, whatever it be. If we invite examination and discussion, we should take the consequences of it, without complaining. If the cause for which we contend be a good one, it will stand its ground; and if otherwise, we ourselves ought to rejoice in the fall of it.

To conclude, whether in searching after truth, or in judging of it, let us give one another all the aid and assistance that we can; remembering that we are all frail and fallible creatures, liable to mistakes, and to faults more dangerous than any mistakes. Let it, therefore, be our greatest care to *provoke unto love and to good works, to exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

With respect to *opinions*, the time is coming that will try every man's work what it is, whether we
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are now building upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with suitable and durable materials, or such as will not bear the fire. And, with respect both to speculation and practice, let it be our great object so to acquit ourselves here below, in the absence of our Lord, that, when he shall return and take an account of his servants, we may be found of him without spot and blameless, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

REFLECTIONS ON THE PRESENT STATE OF
FREE INQUIRY IN THIS COUNTRY.

I PUBLISH the preceding discourse in part to oblige those before whom it was delivered; but chiefly because I do not think that the generality of even the more liberal-minded christians in this country have as yet given sufficient attention to the sentiments inculcated in it. This I perceive by the alarm that has been taken at some free but important discussions in the last volume of the *Theological Repository*. It was a willingness to convince such persons how groundless were the apprehensions they have expressed on this subject, that led me to the train of thought which runs through this discourse; though it will be perceived, that I had likewise a view to another class of persons, who despise all such discussions as those which I now allude to.

It has been too much the disposition of all christians to imagine that those who think a little more freely than themselves are ready to abandon christianity itself, together with their peculiar notions concerning it. They are so fully persuaded that their own opinions are contained in the scriptures, that they cannot separate the idea of renouncing the one from that of renouncing the other. But
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a little observation and reflection on what has passed of a similar nature might satisfy them, that their apprehensions have no solid foundation; their own peculiar notions not having, in reality, that necessary connexion with christianity which they imagine them to have, from not considering how few the essentials of christianity are.

From want of distinguishing essentials from non-essentials, the roman-catholics have thought that there can be no christianity besides their own; and too many of the several sects of protestants think the same with respect to their several tenets. Many arians (themselves held in abhorrence by athanasians) have said that they could not consider socinians as christians; and some are now unreasonably apprehensive that those who disbelieve the miraculous conception, or the plenary inspiration of Christ and his apostles in cases with respect to which the object of their mission did not require inspiration, are in danger of rejecting christianity; though they are as firm believers in the divine mission of Christ (which alone properly constitutes a christian) as themselves. This is the more extraordinary, as the doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the scriptures is, I believe, universally disclaimed by all who are called rational christians. But of what use is it to give up that doctrine, if we are never to avail ourselves of our opinion with respect to it, and do not thereby find ourselves at liberty to examine

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amine with perfect freedom narratives and reasonings which are confessedly not infallible, and in which therefore there may be mistakes? Besides, it is an allowed maxim with us, that the fewer blemishes of any kind we leave in our religion, the greater service we render it. But it is no uncommon thing to admit general *principles*, and yet startle at the natural and necessary *consequences* of them.

I am sensible that the present times are in more respects than one unfavourable to theological discussions. Very many, of whom better things might be expected, are averse to them; thinking them altogether useless, or perhaps dangerous. They are persuaded that their own opinions (which they have adopted without giving themselves much trouble about the matter) are perfectly rational, that the truth of them must be admitted, whenever they are fairly proposed to the mind, and that all we have to do is to apply them to their proper practical uses; and to the inculcating of these they would have all discourses from the pulpit, and from the press too, to be confined.

A great majority of every denomination of christians have always had this dislike of speculation; and therefore it is not at all extraordinary, that there should be so great a proportion of them, among those who think more rationally than their ancestors, and who therefore rank themselves in the class of *rational christians*. Their opinions are not

what they have investigated themselves, but what they have received from others, as much as the roman catholics have theirs. It may therefore be expected that they should be affected in the same manner towards them. Laborious inquirers after truth are but few in any community, nor is there any occasion that they should be numerous. It is only to be wished, that those who take no pains to inquire themselves would throw no obstacles in the way of him who does, and have the same indulgence for his feelings, that he has for theirs.

In another respect, also, the times in which we live are unfavourable to free inquiry in matters of religion. We are not, indeed, *persecuted* for our religious principles, and few persons have even much scruple of openly declaring what they think; but the influence of habit, of fashion, and of connexions, in these peaceable times, is such, that few persons, very few indeed, have the courage to *act* agreeably to their principles, so as to rank themselves, and to appear, in that class of men to which they really belong. They content themselves, as the heathen philosophers did, with *thinking with the wise, and acting with the vulgar*; a conduct certainly unworthy of a christian, who ought to sacrifice every thing to *truth, and consistency of character*. This good, however, arises from the evil, that such persons allow themselves more liberty in speculation than they probably would do,
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if they thought themselves bound in conscience to do what I should call acting agreeably to their principles; and by this means the foundation is gradually laying for a future change in the more public aspect of things.

The converts that are daily made to the unitarian doctrine, and who for the present continue members of trinitarian churches, may in time be sensible of the obligation they are under to withdraw themselves from that mode of worship; or, if not, they will always be ready to join their influence to forward any attempts that may be made towards a further reformation. And when the generality of those who really read and think shall become unitarians (and those who do not read or think for themselves are sure to follow their leaders, and of course join every majority), a small change in the political state of things in a country, such as no man can foresee before it actually takes place, and which may be at no great distance, may suffice to overturn the best-compacted establishments *at once*, before the bigotted friends of them suspect any danger. And thus the system which had stood for ages, without any visible marks of ruin or decay, may vanish, like an enchanted castle in romance. For then men, whose minds were already emancipated, will in a moment find themselves at liberty in all respects, without any motive whatever to engage them to give their support

to error and superstition. Circumstances may even arise in which the most indifferent may feel themselves inspired with courage, and become warm advocates for those principles which they now hold in perfect silence, hardly speaking of them to their nearest friends. How many are there already *speaking out*, who some time ago were almost afraid to *think*!

Let us not, therefore, be discouraged, though, for the present, we should see no great number of churches professedly unitarian. It is sufficiently evident that unitarian principles are gaining ground every day. Every attempt to suppress them by writing, or otherwise, has hitherto been favourable to their spread, and we may be confident it ever will be so. We are now sowing the seeds which the cold of winter may prevent from sprouting, but which a genial spring will make to shoot and grow up; so that the field which to-day appears perfectly naked, and barren, may to-morrow be all green, and promise an abundant harvest. The present silent propagation of truth may even be compared to those causes in nature, which lie dormant for a time, but which, in proper circumstances, act with the greatest violence. We are, as it were, laying gunpowder, grain by grain, under the old building of error and superstition, which a single spark may hereafter inflame, so as to produce an instantaneous explosion; in consequence

quence of which that edifice, the erection of which has been the work of ages, may be overturned in a moment, and so effectually as that the same foundation can never be built upon again.

If we be successful in the propagation of truth, we need not give ourselves any concern about the measures of government respecting it. This is equally out of our province, and unnecessary. Causes will always produce their effects; and though the cases be of a different nature, it is as certain an inference as any in geometry, that an unitarian people cannot long be subject to a trinitarian establishment. Indeed no motive can be imagined why any civil governors (supposing it to be in their power) should not allow the people the open profession of the religion they really choose, and are willing to support. Things are already in such a train, that, though no person can foresee the particular time and manner of the change in favour of unitarianism, we may be as certain of its taking place, as if we saw it actually accomplished. And till things are properly ripe for such a revolution, it would be absurd to expect it, and in vain to attempt it.

When a competent number of the more intelligent persons in all parts of the Roman empire were either declared christians, or so well disposed towards a change, as not to be sorry for it, the conversion of an emperor was sufficient to establish

christianity, without any alarming opposition. The conversion of Tiberius, of Vespasian, of Marcus Antoninus, or any other emperor in an earlier period, would not have done it. But when an *internal revolution* had been previously made in favour of christianity, though Constantine should not have been converted, the *external revolution* could not have been delayed much longer. It would certainly have taken place, whether any particular emperor had favoured it or not.

In like manner, when the minds of a proper number of persons were enlightened with respect to the grosser errors of popery, the boldness of Luther and a few others, roused by the impudence of the vendors of indulgences, was sufficient to produce what has been called *the reformation*. Ten Luthers, in an earlier period, would only have supplied so many victims for the inquisition; and though no Luther should have appeared at the beginning of the sixteenth century, things were then in such a state, that, by some other means, a similar revolution in favour of religious liberty would, no doubt, have taken place.

It has been well observed by philosophical historians, that if the loss of a single battle decide the fate of an empire, there must have been a previous reason, in the general state of things, why so much should depend on the event of a single battle; and

and that, in a different state of things, the loss of many battles would not have overturned the state.

It is our business, therefore, by conversation, by preaching, and by writing, to get access to the minds of those who are disposed to think; and without giving ourselves any trouble about the conduct of government, to employ ourselves simply in the propagation of truth. Here is a great and glorious field fully open to our utmost exertions, and requiring them. And while we are successful in these labours (and the success is visible every day), though we should not live to see any favourable change in the face of public affairs, we may die in as firm a faith of its taking place, as Joseph did of his countrymen inhabiting the promised land, when he ordered that he should not be buried, but that his body should only be embalmed, and put into a coffin in Egypt, ready to be carried away when they should leave that country.

The most equitable thing in the governors of any country would, no doubt, be to allow unitarians, or any other description of men, the use of a church, or any other public building in a town, in which they should be so numerous as to occupy one, and when their proportion of the tythes &c. would be sufficient for the maintenance of a minister of their persuasion; and no sort of inconvenience would arise to the state from such a measure as this. This was done in several places in Germany

many at the time of the reformation. But in the present state of things it is vain to expect any such equitable conduct. We may, however, besides *deserving* it, be doing that which shall ensure such an event at a future time; when it shall be sufficiently understood that unitarians are quite as good subjects as trinitarians, and therefore that there has been no good reason why the latter should so long have enjoyed their present exclusive advantages. How the belief of a mysterious doctrine operates to the prosperity and security of the state, is a problem not very easy to solve.

At Boston, in New-England (a country in which no man was taxed towards the support of any religion that he did not approve, and which never flourished the less on that account) there were three episcopal churches; and had the English government continued there, the English liturgy, in its present state, would, no doubt, have continued to be used in them all: but the principal of them has now adopted an unitarian form of worship, and the same will probably be done in other provinces of the United States. Was there equal liberty in this country (which may take place, by means as unforeseen by us as the revolution in America) there are few considerable towns in which the people (voting freely, and all the complex influence of the present establishment out of the question) would not have at least one unitarian church.

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And if one would be wanted now, there will, I am confident, be a demand for two twenty years hence. This may be said with tolerable certainty, from the consideration of the increase of unitarians in the last fifty years, the greater still in proportion in the last twenty, and the greatest of all in the last ten years. What then may we not reasonably expect from the train in which things now are?

The efforts of men to stop what they may call the mischief would be like the attempt to stop a rivulet supplied by a constant spring, however small. Nothing could be easier than to make a dam that would be sufficient for the purpose at first. But as the water keeps rising, the dam must be made higher and stronger, and (the effort of the water to burst its way continually increasing) the highest and strongest must necessarily fail some time or other, and the deluge, which would be the consequence, would be in proportion to the time in which it had been confined. Truth has never yet been conquered by power, numerous as have been the attempts of the latter to bear it down.

It may be said that since there has been an increase of unbelievers, as well as unitarians, in the last century, it may, on these principles, be predicted that *they* will continue to increase, to the extirpation of christians of all denominations. This reasoning, I own, would have been just, if men had become unbelievers, as well as unitarians, from
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reading and thinking. But there is in this respect a most essential difference in the two cases. Of the unbelievers of this age (I speak from the fullest persuasion) few indeed are so from that serious inquiry and real conviction, to which alone the spread of unitarianism can be ascribed. The rejection of christianity may be accounted for from many causes besides a serious conviction of its fallacy; but no other cause can reasonably be assigned why a trinitarian should become an unitarian; as the obligations of moral virtue are not relaxed by the change, and the allurements of honour and profit are on the side of the established faith.

It is evident to those who converse with unbelievers, that few of them are qualified to discuss the evidences of christianity; a proof that they have not rejected it from any deficiency that they found in its evidences; whereas there are great numbers of unitarians who can readily give the reasons of their faith, which shows that they have really considered and weighed the subject.

It is also to be observed, that a great increase of unbelievers has been owing to the corruptions of christianity; and this cause ceasing, in part by the efforts of unitarians, the effects will in due time cease of course. Christianity and its evidences are exhibited in such a light at present, that fewer philosophical persons, giving due attention to the subject (which is the great thing that is wanting, but
which

which many circumstances may excite), will be able to withhold their assent to it.

Others will object to the conclusiveness of this reasoning to prove the future universality of unitarianism, the rapid spread and long continuance of mahometanism in the world. But the grounds and principles of that religion underwent no severe discussion at the time of its promulgation. The professors of it wrote little in its defence; and there never was an age in which the mahometan and christian literati had so free and equal an intercourse, as to give room for much controversy. Whenever that shall take place, and the common people be in a capacity of reading and judging for themselves, less than a century, I am persuaded, will be sufficient fully to establish the credit of the one system, and to destroy that of the other. Which of the two must yield in the contest, I, who am a christian, cannot have a doubt.

On the contrary, christianity, from the earliest period, was eagerly attacked and defended, the common people gave great attention to the controversy, and it was the manifest superiority of the christian apologists in point of argument that decided between them.

The same observations will apply to the reformation from popery; and had not the civil powers intervened, there can be no doubt, but that an end would soon have been put to the authority of the church

church of Rome, and the chief corruptions of it. Had the reading of protestant books only been allowed in popish countries, the reformation would have kept advancing, notwithstanding all the opposition from the civil powers.

The controversy between the unitarians and trinitarians has been open many years, much has been written on both sides, the common people are become parties, and civil government does not directly interfere. In these circumstances, it is a fact which no person can deny, that a great number of the common people, with a much greater proportion of men of learning are become unitarians; and this has been the case so long, that there can be no doubt of its continuance.

The effect of free discussion is to produce a number of persons capable of writing in defence of their principles. Unbelievers really qualified to write upon the subject are very few, compared with learned christians. It is no less evident that learned unitarians increase, while learned trinitarians decrease. These facts are sufficient to enable any person, without making himself master of the respective arguments, to conclude that unitarian christians will continue to increase, to the extermination of unbelievers on the one hand, and trinitarians on the other. The interference of the civil powers, and the influence of splendid establishments, may retard this event, but will not be able to prevent it.

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Some may smile at this method of calculating and predicting events. But moral causes are as uniform and certain in their operation as natural ones, and when the *data* are equally clear, the *principles* will authorize equally sure conclusions.

If a man of common sense only, without any knowledge of philosophy, were told that the Newtonian system of the universe, after having been canvassed by philosophers of all nations, had, notwithstanding great opposition, been gradually gaining ground for the space of more than half a century, he would not doubt the universality of its reception in time. Having similar *data*, I think we may venture to predict the universal prevalence of unitarianism in a future period.

If the controversy between the arians and the socinians should be kept up ten or twenty years longer, and in all that time the socinians should continue to increase, as they have done during the last ten years, few persons will be backward to prognosticate that arianism also will finally and even soon be exterminated, especially as it has not the support of the civil powers.

The *principles* on which I argue will hardly be contested; but persons, according as they are disposed with respect to particular controversies, will see the *facts* relating to them in different lights. What I say of the uniform spread of unitarian principles may possibly be denied by some trinitarians, but it is allowed by unitarians. To them, there-

fore, it holds out a sure prospect of a final triumph over all their adversaries, and it is for their encouragement that I make these observations.

To write in this manner may be said to be imprudent, as it is giving an alarm to those who now apprehend no danger, and therefore make no efforts to prevent it. But the friends of free inquiry and truth may rest satisfied, that, as every effort which has hitherto been made to bear down the cause for which they contend, has, in reality, served to promote it, so also will every future effort that can be made for the same purpose. The cause of truth may be compared to an engine constructed so as to be put in motion by the tide, and which is kept in its proper movement, whether the water flow in or flow out. Nothing here is wanting but *motion*, it being impossible for that motion, from whatever quarter it arise, to operate unfavourably.

The best worldly policy, in the enemies of truth, is, no doubt, that of those who endeavour to stifle all inquiry, who read nothing, and who reply to nothing. But even this will do but little, while the friends of truth are zealous and active in its interests; as by this means they have the advantage, in the eye of the world, of being known to invite and provoke discussion; being seen to walk over the field of controversy without an adversary; though it would certainly be more desirable still to have a respectable opponent.

As to this country, we may be confident that,

while error and superstition are falling every where abroad, they can never really gain ground here. We have in a great measure set the example of free inquiry, and have taken the lead in religious liberty to other nations; and though the policy of the times may be averse to any extension of this liberty, circumstances will, no doubt, arise, that will hereafter be as favourable to it in this country as they are now in others. Having hitherto been foremost in this great cause, it will not be in the power of man to keep us long behind the rest of Europe. Abroad they are *the governing powers*, that promote reformation; but with us, *the people* think and act for themselves, a circumstance infinitely more promising for an effectual and permanent reformation; there being nothing of *worldly policy* in the case, but a pure *love of truth* that is the great spring of action with us.

Notwithstanding, therefore, the indolence and indifference of friends, and the silence, or virulent opposition of enemies, let the advocates of free inquiry steadily pursue their purpose. Let us examine every thing, with the greatest freedom, without any regard to consequences, which, though we cannot distinctly see them, we may assure ourselves will be such as we shall have abundant cause to rejoice in.

Some persons dislike controversy, as leading to a *diversity of opinions*. But as this is a necessary, so it is only a temporary inconvenience. It is the only

way to arrive at a permanent and useful uniformity, which it is sure to bring about at last. Religious truth cannot be so different a thing from truth of every other kind, but that it must at length overcome all opposition; and the knowledge of its having stood the test of the severest examination, by men sufficiently able and interested to oppose it, will at last produce a firm conviction that all future opposition will be equally vain, and thus terminate in the most unwavering acquiescence.

It will be said that this process is a very slow one. But it is as sure in its operation, as it is necessary in the nature of things. Every great truth, in the firm belief of which mankind now universally acquiesce, has gone through the same process; and it has generally been longer in proportion to its importance, though somewhat shorter in proportion to the activity with which the controversies it has occasioned have been conducted. By promoting discussion, therefore, we really accelerate this progress, and are bringing forward the period of *uniformity*; while those who are the enemies of free inquiry, and who hate all controversy, are prolonging that state of suspense and diversity of opinion, which they so much dislike, and pushing back that very uniformity of opinion for which they sigh. For this *period of controversy* must have its course, and come to its proper termination, before any valuable and lasting uniformity can take place. The conduct

duct of those who wish to see an end of controversy at present may be compared to that of those who should endeavour to keep a ship steady in its place at sea; when our aim should be, by using all our sails and oars, to get into harbour, where alone it can be kept steady.

The great articles which are now in a course of discussion will not be determined in our time. But if we exert ourselves, this work may be accomplished in the time of our children, or grand-children; and surely if we have any elevation or comprehension of mind, we may look forward to, and actually enjoy, the happiness we procure for *them*. We scruple not to plant trees for the benefit of posterity. Let us likewise sow the seeds of truth for them; and anticipate the acknowledgments they will make us on that account.

I do not write this from a persuasion that every thing that I have myself contended for is indisputably true. On the contrary, I have, for the sake of discussion, hazarded many things, and shall probably hazard many more; and I have actually changed many opinions, theological as well as philosophical, which I have advanced since I was a writer. But if men make use of their faculties at all, and especially in that period which is most favourable to inquiry (which is about the middle-time of life), they may arrive at so much certainty, as will justify them in expressing a considerable degree of confidence.

dence, at least with respect to those subjects to which they have given the closest attention.

I do profess to have this confidence in my opinion concerning the doctrine of the trinity. I do not think the doctrine of transubstantiation more manifestly absurd, and this is by much the less mischievous of the two. Not that I think there are no wise and good men who are advocates for the doctrine of the trinity. I acknowledge there are. But there are likewise many persons, of whose ability and integrity also I think very highly, who are advocates for the doctrine of transubstantiation; and as there were learned pagans five centuries after the promulgation of christianity, there may be some respectable believers in the doctrines of the trinity and of transubstantiation, some ages hence.

The minds of a few *individuals* may be so locked up as that no keys we can apply will be able to open them. But it is with *the bulk of mankind* that we have to do, because they will always be within the reach of reason: and solitary unbelievers, or solitary bigots, may have their use in the general system; an use similar to that of the few idolatrous inhabitants of the land of Canaan, who were not extirpated; which was that of trying and exercising the Israelites, without having it in their power to drive them out again.

TWO DISCOURSES:

I. ON HABITUAL DEVOTION.

II. ON THE DUTY OF NOT LIVING TO OURSELVES.

[Published in the Year 1782.]



THE PREFACE.

THE former of these discourses I have been induced to publish by the request of the body of dissenting ministers who assemble annually at Dudley, in Staffordshire, before whom the greater part of it was delivered on Tuesday the 21st of May last. The latter was preached before the assembly of ministers of the counties of Lancaster and Chester, met at Manchester, May 16th, 1764, to carry into execution a scheme for the relief of their widows and children. But though it was printed at their request, it was not generally published; as only a small edition was printed, and sold in that neighbourhood. Several of my friends having expressed their wishes to see it made more public, I have thought proper to print them together, especially as the subjects of them have a considerable relation to each other; the one recommending a proper disposition of mind with respect to God, and the other that which respects men. In both of them, also, I have availed myself of Dr. Hartley's theory of the human affections, the excellence of which is, that it not only explains, with wonderful simplicity, many phenomena of the mind, which are altogether inexplicable on other principles, but also leads to a variety of practical applications, and those of the
 most

most valuable kind. Of this I have given several specimens in my *Observations on Education*, and others of my publications.

My apology for introducing any thing of this nature into these discourses is, that neither of them was composed for a common audience. Besides, the most abstruse parts of them are of such a nature, as to be pretty easily intelligible to persons of reflection, though they should have no knowledge of that particular theory. For the general doctrine of the *association of ideas* is known to all persons of a liberal education. Whenever I have delivered these discourses before a common audience, I have omitted whatever I thought would not be readily understood by them, and such passages (which however are not very many) may now be passed over, without much difficulty or inconvenience, by those persons for whose use they are not calculated.

To the former of these discourses the public are already under considerable obligations, though they have been ignorant of it; as it was the occasion of that excellent poem of Mrs. Barbauld, intitled *An Address to the Deity*, which was composed immediately after the first delivery of it, before an assembly of ministers at Wakefield, in Yorkshire, in the year 1767. Were I to inform my readers how soon that poem appeared after the delivery of the discourse, it would add much to their idea of the powers of the writer. I could also make the same observation.

observation with respect to several other pieces, and some of them the most admired in that collection.

If my theological publications have been more of a *speculative* than of a *practical* nature, it is merely because circumstances have led me to it, and by no means because the former are more pleasing to me. I hope I shall always consider speculation as subservient to practice. The most exact knowledge of truth, and the greatest zeal for it, will avail nothing without the practice of those virtues which the most uninstructed of mankind perfectly understand. Nay, the more knowledge we have of the christian religion, of the general plan and object of it, the more inexcusable shall we be, if we do not, in the first place, take care to impress our hearts with that *love of God*, and that unreserved devotedness to his will, which our Saviour calls *the first and greatest of all the commandments*, and also with that disinterested good-will to our fellow creatures, which he calls *the second great commandment, and like unto it*.

He was himself equally exemplary with respect to them both: and it is vain for us to pretend to be *christians*, if we do not study to resemble him (whom alone we are to acknowledge in the character of Lord and master) in the disposition of our minds, and in the conduct of our lives. May we all be so attentive to discharge our proper duty, and to improve the talents with which we are severally intrusted, that
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when, according to his promise, *he shall return, and take an account of his servants, we may be found without spot and blameless.*

The world in which we live, with all the influences to which we are subject, may be equally our friend or our enemy, according to the use we make of it. It is wonderfully adapted, by the exercise it gives to our faculties, and to our passions and affections, to *establish, strengthen, and settle us* in the habit and practice of all virtue, and to raise us to a pitch of excellence to which Adam in paradise could never have attained. But then it is equally possible that, by sloth and indulgence, we may debase our natures to a degree equally wonderful. The knowledge and belief of christianity itself, as well as every other advantage of which we are possessed, is also capable either of promoting the moral perfection of our natures, and our fitness for immortal happiness, or of making us the proper objects of a greater condemnation than that of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment.

It behoves us then to consider our situation and all our privileges very attentively, that we may make the best use of them. It is not in our option to be in any other circumstances than those in which our Maker has placed us. It will also avail us nothing to *hide any talent in a napkin*. As we have received it, we must give an account of the use we make of it.

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We are likewise ignorant of the time when this account will be called for; and, great and serious as the business of life is, the time allowed for the dispatch of it is both short, and uncertain. But, though short, it is sufficient for the purpose of it, if it be rightly improved; and then the uncertainty of its duration is a circumstance that does not need to give us any concern. *At such an hour as we think not the judge may come, but then, happy is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching.*

I shall take the liberty to close this preface with an extract of what is more peculiarly practical, and therefore more immediately suiting my present purpose, from Mrs. Barbauld's poem above mentioned.

If the soft hand of winning pleasure leads
By living waters, and through flowery meads,
When all is smiling, tranquil, and serene,
And vernal beauty paints the flatt'ring scene;
Oh teach me to elude each latent snare,
And whisper to my sliding heart, BEWARE :
With caution let me hear the syren's voice,
And, doubtful, with a trembling heart rejoice.
If, friendless, in a vale of tears I stray,
Where briers wound, and thorns perplex my way,
Still let my steady soul thy goodness see,
And with strong confidence lay hold on thee;

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With equal joy my various lot receive,
 Resign'd to die, or resolute to live;
 Prepar'd to kiss the sceptre, or the rod,
 While God is seen in all, and all in God.

With thee in shady solitudes I walk,
 With thee in busy crowded cities talk;
 In every creature own thy forming pow'r,
 In each event thy providence adore.
 Thy hopes shall animate my drooping soul,
 Thy precepts guide me, and thy fear controul.
 Thus shall I rest, unmov'd by all alarms,
 Secure within the temple of thy arms;
 From anxious cares, from gloomy terrors free,
 And feel myself omnipotent in thee.

Then, when the last, the closing hour draws nigh,
 And earth recedes before my swimming eye,
 Teach me to quit this transitory scene
 With decent triumph and a look serene;
 Teach me to fix my ardent hopes on high,
 And, having liv'd to thee, in thee to die.

SERMON V.

ON HABITUAL DEVOTION.

PSALM X. 4.

THE WICKED, THROUGH THE PRIDE OF HIS
COURTENANCE, WILL NOT SEEK AFTER
GOD. GOD IS NOT IN ALL HIS THOUGHTS.

GOD, my christian brethren, is a being with whom we all of us have to do, and the relation we stand in to him is the most important of all our relations. Our connexions with other beings, and other things, are slight, and transient, in comparison with this. God is our *maker*, our constant *preserver* and *benefactor*, our moral *governor*, and our final *judge*. He is present with us wherever we are; the secrets of all hearts are constantly known to him, and *he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*. Here, then, is a situation in which we find ourselves, that demands our closest attention. The consideration is, in the highest degree, interesting and alarming: knowing how absolutely dependent we are upon God, that *in him we live and move and have our being*; and knowing also, that by vice and folly we have rendered ourselves justly obnoxious to his displeasure.

Now, to think, and to act, in a manner corresponding to this our necessary intercourse with God, certainly requires that we keep up an habitual regard to it: and a total, or very great degree of inattention to it, must be highly criminal and dangerous. Accordingly, we find in the scriptures, that it is characteristic of a good man, that *he sets the Lord always before him*, and that *he acknowledges God in all his ways*. Whereas it is said of the wicked, in my text, that *God is not in all their thoughts*; and elsewhere, that *the fear of God is not before their eyes*; that *they put the thoughts of God far from them*, and *will not the knowledge of the Most High*.

This circumstance seems to furnish a pretty good test of the state of a man's mind with respect to virtue and vice. The most abandoned and profligate of mankind are those who live *without God in the world*, entirely thoughtless of his being, perfections, and providence; having their hearts wholly engrossed with this world and the things of it: by which means those passions, which terminate in the enjoyment of them, are inflamed to such a degree, that no other principle can restrain their indulgence. These persons may be called *practical atheists*; and the temper of mind they have acquired often leads them to deny both natural and revealed religion. They secretly wish, indeed they cannot but wish, there may be no truth in those principles,

ciples, the apprehension of which is apt to give them disturbance ; and hence they give little attention to the evidence that is produced for them, and magnify all the objections they hear made to them. And it is well known, that, in a mind so strongly biaſſed, the moſt cogent reaſons often amount to nothing, while the moſt trifling cavils paſs for demonſtration. It is the ſame with reſpect to any other ſpeculation, when the mind has got a *bias* in favour of any particular concluſion.

On the other hand, a truly and perfectly good man loves, and therefore cheriſhes, the thought of God, his father and his friend ; till every production of divine power and ſkill, every inſtance of divine bounty, and every event of divine providence, never fails to ſuggeſt to his mind the idea of the great author of all things, *the giver of every good and every perfect gift*, and the ſovereign diſpoſer of all affairs and of all events. Thus he lives, as it were, conſtantly *ſeeing him, who is inviſible*. He ſees God in every thing, and he ſees every thing in God. He *dwells in love*, and thereby *dwells in God, and God in him*. And ſo long as he conſiders himſelf as living in the world which God has made, and partaking of the bounty with which his providence ſupplies him ; ſo long as he is intent upon diſcharging his duty, in the ſituation in which he believes the Divine Being has placed him, and meets with no greater trials and difficul-

ties than he is persuaded his God and father has appointed for his good, it is almost impossible that the thought of God should ever be long absent from his mind. Every thing he sees or feels will make it recur again and again perpetually. His whole life will be, as it were, one act of devotion; and this state of mind, being highly pleasurable, and his satisfaction having infinite sources, will be daily increasing, so as to grow more equable, and more intense, to all eternity; when it will be *joy unspeakable, and full of glory.*

These are the two extremes of the sentiments and conduct of men with respect to God, and all the varieties of the human characters will be found somewhere between them; so that we may be deemed virtuous or vicious, in proportion as we approach to the one or the other.

The more imperfect of the middle classes of mankind will have their minds too much engrossed by this world and the things of it, so as to exclude, in a very great degree, the apprehension of God, and of their relation to him. Provided, however, that they have had a religious education, these thoughts cannot be prevented from recurring from time to time, and producing stronger or weaker resolutions of repentance and amendment; but not having their full influence, and therefore serving rather to disquiet the mind conscious of a want of perfect integrity, they will be apt to be overborne by the

superior power of things seen and temporal; and the minds of such persons being in this fluctuating condition, whatever success they may have in the world, their lives will contain a great mixture of anxiety and remorse.

But those whom we may style the more perfect of the middle classes of men, though, like the former, their minds may be now and then carried away by the magic influences of this world; and though they may give too far, and too eagerly, into the pursuit of its pleasures, riches, and honours, they will never wholly, or for a long time, lose sight of God, and of their duty; and pious sentiments, recurring with superior force at intervals, will produce a kind of *religious fervour*, which, rousing the mind to a greater exertion of its powers, will produce good resolutions with considerable strength and vigour, and thereby break their growing attachment to the world. These fervours, however, will of course remit, and other objects will necessarily resume some part, at least, of their influence: but if a sense of God and of religion have once taken firm hold of the mind, in the early part of life, there will be reason to hope that an express regard to them will return with greater force, and after shorter intervals, perpetually. By these means such strength will be given to the principle of conscience, that in the furthest excursions they make from the strict path of religion, even while they maintain no express

express regard to God in their actions, the bare apprehension of a thing being *right*, and their *duty*, will, in all considerable instances, immediately and inmechanically determine their minds; so that they will never deliberately do any thing which they are convinced is unlawful, and offensive to God. At most, if ever a stronger temptation than usual should induce them to transgress their known duty, in any of the greater instances of it, the state of their minds will be such, as that these transgressions will be followed by the keenest compunction and contrition, which will make them less liable to commit the same offence a second time.

Thus we see that those persons, in whose minds there is this prevailing disposition to virtue, will be improved both by the uniform practice of their duty, which necessarily strengthens the *habit* of it, and even by occasional transgressions, which gives a stronger *stimulus* to the power of conscience. But there is great danger, lest these violations of known duty be either so great as to produce despair, which naturally hardens the mind, or so frequent as to beget a habit. Both these weaken the power of conscience. The man then goes backward in religion, and may at last, even from this more advanced state of virtue, be brought to *commit all iniquity with greediness*. Let him, then, *who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*; and let all of us, conscious of the frailty of our natures, be in-
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tent upon *working out our salvation with fear and trembling.*

An *habitual regard to God* being the most effectual means of advancing us from the more imperfect to the more perfect state I have been describing, I shall endeavour to recommend this leading duty to you, by a fuller and more distinct enumeration of its happy effects; and I shall then show what I apprehend to be the most effectual methods of promoting it, and of removing the various obstructions to it.

I. An habitual regard to God in our actions tends greatly to keep us firm in our adherence to our duty. It has pleased divine providence to place man in a state of trial and probation. This world is strictly such. We are surrounded with a great variety of objects, adapted to gratify a variety of senses with which we are furnished. The pleasures they give us are all innocent in moderation, and they engage us in a variety of agreeable and proper pursuits. But our natures are such, as that the frequent indulgence of any of our appetites tends to make its demands inordinate, and to beget an habitual propensity to indulge it; and this proneness to the excessive indulgence of any of our passions enslaves our minds, and is highly dangerous, and criminal. By this means we too often come to forget God our maker, to injure our fellow-creatures of mankind, and to do a still greater, and
more

more irreparable injury to ourselves, both in mind and body.

It has pleased almighty God, therefore, from the concern he had for our good, to forbid these immoderate indulgences of the love of pleasure, riches, and honour, by exprefs *laws*, guarded with the most awful sanctions. Now we are certainly less liable to forget these laws, and our obligation to observe them, when we keep up an habitual regard to our great lawgiver and judge; when we consider him as always *present with us*; when we consider that *his eyes are in every place, beholding both the evil and the good*; that he *sees in secret*, and will one day *reward openly*. In this manner we shall acquire an habitual reverence for God and his laws, which will end in an habitual obedience to them, even without any exprefs regard to their authority. Thus we should certainly be less likely to neglect the request of a friend, or the injunction of a master, if we could always keep in mind the remembrance of our friend, or master; and a constant attention to them would certainly give us a habit of pleasing them in all things.

2. An habitual regard to God promotes an uniform cheerfulness of mind; it tends to dissipate anxiety, or melancholy, and may even, in some cases, prevent madness. Without a regard to God, as the maker and governor of all things, this world affords but a gloomy and uncomfortable prospect.

spect. Without this, we see no great *end* for which we have to live, we have no great or animating *object* to pursue; and whatever schemes we may be carrying on, our views are bounded by a very short and narrow space. To an atheist, therefore, every thing must appear little, dark, and confused. And let it be considered, that, in proportion as we forget God, and lose our regard to him, we adopt the sentiments and views of atheists, and shut our eyes to the bright and glorious prospects which religion exhibits to us.

Religion, my brethren, the doctrine of a God, of a providence, and of a future state, opens an immense, a glorious, and most transporting prospect; and every man, who is humbly conscious that he conforms to the will of his maker, may enjoy, and rejoice in, this prospect. Considering ourselves as the subjects of the moral government of God, we see a most important sphere of action in which we have to exert ourselves, we have the greatest of all objects set before us, *glory, honour, and immortality; an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*, as the reward of our faithful *perseverance in well-doing*; and we have a boundless existence, an eternity, in which to pursue and enjoy this reward.

These great views and objects, the contemplation of which must be habitual to the mind which keeps up an habitual regard to God, cannot fail to diminish

minish the lustre of *the things of time and sense*, which engage our attention here below; and while they lessen our solicitude and anxiety about them, they must cure that fretfulness, and distress of mind, which is occasioned by the disappointments we meet with in them.

For the same reason, this habitual regard to God, this life of devotion, which I would recommend, must tend in some measure to prevent that most deplorable of all the calamities mankind are subject to, I mean *madness*. It is well known, that the circumstance which generally first occasions, or at least greatly contributes to, this disorder, is too close and too anxious an attention to some *single thing* in which a person is greatly interested; so that, for a long time, he can hardly think of any thing else, and particularly is often prevented from *sleeping*, by means of it. Thus we frequently see, that when persons are of a sanguine temper of mind, a severe disappointment of any kind will end in madness. Also a sudden transport of *joy*, from unexpected success, will sometimes have the same effect. But, from the nature of the thing, this violence of either kind could hardly take place in a truly devout and pious mind, in the mind of a man who considers all the events, in which he can be concerned, as appointed by a God infinitely wise and good; who, he is persuaded, hath, in the most afflictive providences, the most gracious intention

to him, and to all mankind; and who, by the most prosperous events, means to try his virtue, and to put him upon the most difficult of all exercises, that of behaving properly in such circumstances. To a mind rightly disposed, and duly seasoned with a sense of religion, nothing here below will appear to be of sufficient moment to produce these dreadful effects. *We shall rejoice, as though we rejoiced not; and weep, as though we wept not; knowing that the fashion of this world passeth away.*

Deep melancholy is often occasioned, in persons of a lower tone of spirits, by the same kind of disappointments which produce raging madness in others. It is the effect of *despair*, and could never take place, but when a person apprehended that that which we may call his *all*, that in which he put his chief trust and confidence, had failed him, and he had no other resource to fly to. But a truly religious man can never despair; because, let what will befall him here below, he knows his chief happiness is safe, being lodged where *neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and where thieves cannot break through nor steal. In patience, therefore, he will be able at all times to possess his own soul, exercising a steady trust and confidence in God, the rock of ages, the sure resting-place of all generations.*

Melancholy, or despondence in a lower degree, what we commonly call *lowness of spirits*, generally arises from a want of some object of pursuit sufficient to engage the attention, and rouse a man to

the proper exertion of his powers. In this situation, he has nothing to do but to think of himself and his own feelings, which never fails to involve him in endless anxiety and distress. But a principle of religion will ever put a man upon a variety of active and vigorous pursuits. No truly pious and good man can be an idle man. He will fully employ all his power of doing good; he will not keep his *talent hid in a napkin*; and, far from complaining that time hangs heavy on his hands, he will rather complain, that he has not time enough for the execution of half his benevolent purposes.

3. An habitual regard to God fits a man for the business of this life, giving a peculiar presence and intrepidity of mind; and it is, therefore, the best support in difficult enterprises of any kind. A man who keeps up an habitual regard to God, who *acknowledges him in all his ways*, and lives a life of devotion to him, has a kind of *union with God*; feeling in some measure the same sentiments, and having the same views. Hence, being, in the language of the apostle, *a worker together with God*, and therefore being confident that God is with him, and for him, *he will not fear what man can do unto him*. Moreover, fearing God, and having confidence in him, he is a stranger to every other fear. Being satisfied that God will work all his pleasure in him, by him, and for him, he is free from alarm and perturbation, and is not easily disconcerted, so as to lose the possession of his own mind. And
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having this presence of mind, being conscious of the integrity of his own heart, confiding in the favour of his maker, and therefore sensible that there is nothing of much real value that he can lose, he will have leisure to consider every situation in which he finds himself, and be able to act with calmness and prudence, as circumstances may require.

Is there, then, any active and difficult service to which we are summoned by the voice of our country, of mankind, and of God, these are the men, I mean men of religion and devotion, in whom we can most confide. Other men may be roused by their passions to any pitch of patriotic enthusiasm. They may oppose the insidious attempts of corrupt ministers or tyrants to enslave their country, or may bravely face a foreign enemy in the field, though they risk their fortunes, and their lives in the contest. But mere worldly-minded men, staking their *all* in such enterprises as these, and having little more than a sense of *honour* to support them, may in some critical moment be sensible of the value of what they risk, and on that principle prove cowards.

Whereas the man of religion feels the same indignation against all iniquitous attempts to enslave himself and his country, and if he have the same native ardour of mind, he will be roused to act with the same vigour against a tyrant, or an invader; but, running no risk of what is of most consequence to him, he will not be so liable to be intimidated:

he will be more master of himself, have greater presence of mind, and act with greater prudence in time of danger. If he die in the glorious struggle, he dies, not with the gloomy ferocity of the mere man of this world, but with the triumph of a christian, in a consciousness of having finished his career of virtue in the most glorious manner in which he could possibly finish it, in the service of his country, and of mankind.

Having thus considered the important *effects* of an habitual regard to God in all our ways, I come to treat of the most proper and effectual methods of promoting this temper of mind.

1. If you be really desirous to cultivate this habitual devotion, endeavour, in the first place, to divest your minds of too great a multiplicity of the cares of this world. The man who lives to God, in the manner in which I have been endeavouring to describe, lives to him principally, and loves and confides in him above all. To be solicitous about this world, therefore, as if our chief happiness consisted in it, must be incompatible with this devotion. *We cannot serve God and Mammon.* If we be *christians*, we should consider that the great and professed object of our religion is the revelation of a future life, of unspeakably more importance to us than this transitory world, and the perishable things of it. As christians, we should consider ourselves as *citizens of heaven*, and only
strangers

strangers and pilgrims here below. We must therefore see, that, as christians, there is certainly required of us a considerable degree of indifference about this world, which was only intended to serve us as a passage to a better.

The Divine Being himself has made wise provision for lessening the cares of this world, by the appointment of one day in seven, for the purpose of rest and avocation from labour. Let us then, at least, take the advantage which this day gives us, of *calling off our eyes from beholding vanity*, and of *quickenings ourselves in the ways of God*.

This advice I would particularly recommend to those persons who are engaged in *arts, manufactures and commerce*. For, highly beneficial as these things are in a political view, and subservient to the elegant enjoyment of life, they seem not to be so favourable to religion and devotion, as the business of *agriculture*; and for this reason, therefore, probably, among others, the Divine Being forbade commerce to the people of the Jews, and gave them such laws as are chiefly adapted to a life of husbandry. The husbandman is in a situation particularly favourable to the contemplation of the works of God, and to a sense of his dependence upon him. The rain from heaven, and various circumstances relating to the weather, &c. on which the goodness of his crops depends, he receives as from the hand of God, and is hardly sensible of any secon-

dary, or more immediate cause. If he understand any thing of the principles of vegetation, and can account for a few obvious appearances upon what we call *the laws of nature*; these laws he knows to be the express appointment of God, and he cannot help perceiving the wisdom and goodness of God in the appointment; so that the objects about which he is daily conversant are, in their nature, a lesson of gratitude and praise.

Besides, the employment of the husbandman being, chiefly, to *bring food out of the earth*, his attention is more confined to the real wants, or at most the principal conveniences, of life; and his mind is not, like that of the curious artist and manufacturer, so liable to be fascinated by a taste for superfluities, and the fictitious wants of men.

Nor, lastly, does the business of husbandry so wholly engross a man's thoughts and attention, while he is employed about it, as many of the arts and manufactures, and as commerce necessarily does. And it should be a general rule with us, that the more *attention of mind* our employment in life requires, the more careful should we be to draw our thoughts from it, on the *day of rest*, and at other intervals of time set apart for devotional purposes. Otherwise, a worldly-minded temper, not being checked or controuled by any thing of a contrary tendency, will necessarily get possession of our hearts.

2. This brings me to the second advice, which is, by no means to omit stated times of worshipping God by prayer, public and private. Every passion and affection in our frame is strengthened by the proper and natural expression of it. Thus frequent intercourse and conversation with those we love promotes friendship; and so also the intercourse we keep up with God by prayer, in which we express our reverence and love of him, and our confidence in him, promotes a spirit of devotion, and makes it easier for the ideas of the Divine Being and his providence to occur to the mind on other occasions, when we are not formally praying to him. Besides, if persons whose thoughts are much employed in the business of this life had no time set apart for the exercises of devotion, they would be in danger of neglecting it entirely; at least, to a degree that would be attended with a great diminution of their virtue and happiness.

But, in order that the exercises of devotion may be the most efficacious to promote the true spirit and general habit of it, it is adviseable that *prayers* properly so called, that is, direct addresses to the Divine Being, be short. The strong feeling of reverence, love, and confidence, which ought to animate our devotions, cannot be kept up in such minds as ours through a prayer of considerable length; and a tedious languor in prayer is of great disservice to the life of religion, as it accustoms
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the mind to think of God with indifference; whereas, it is of the utmost consequence, that the Divine Being always appear to us an object of the greatest importance, and engage the whole attention of our souls. Except, therefore, in public, where prayers of a greater length are, in a manner, necessary, and where the presence and concurrence of our fellow-worshippers assist to keep up the fervour of our common devotion, it seems more advisable, that devotional exercises have intervals of meditation, calculated to impress our minds more deeply with the sentiments we express; and that they be used without any strict regard to particular times, places, or posture of body.

This method of conducting devotional exercises, which makes them consist chiefly of meditation upon God and his providence, has in many cases several advantages over a direct address to God, which should peculiarly recommend it to those who are desirous to cultivate the genuine spirit of devotion. Among other advantages, and that not the least, in meditation the mind is not so apt to acquiesce in the mere *work done* (what the schoolmen call the *opus operatum*) as it is in formal prayer, especially when it is made of considerable length. So prone, alas! is the mind of man to superstition, that hardly any thing can be prescribed to us as a *means* of virtue, but we immediately acquiesce in it as an *end*; and not only so, but the consequence of a punctilious

punctilious observance of prayer, and other means of religion, is too often made the foundation of a spiritual pride, and self-sufficiency, which is of a most alarming nature; being directly opposite to that deep humility and self-abasement, which is ever the predominant disposition of a mind truly devout. The sentiment corresponding to the language *Stand by thyself, I am holier than thou*, is not, I am afraid, peculiar to the pharisaical Jew, or the romish devotee. It infects many protestant religionists, being generated by similar causes. Rather than be liable to this, it is certainly better, far better, even to be less regular in our exercises of devotion. *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord.*

3. In the course of your usual employment omit no proper opportunity of turning your thoughts towards God. Habitually regard him as the *ultimate cause* and *proper author* of every thing you see, and the disposer of all events that respect yourselves or others. This will not fail to make the idea of God occur familiarly to your mind, and influence your whole conduct.

It is to be regretted, that the taste and custom of this country is such, that a person of a devotional turn of mind cannot indulge himself in the natural expression of it, even upon the most proper and just occasions, without exposing himself to the particular

lar notice, if not the ridicule, of the generality of those who may be present; whereas, could we decently and seriously express our gratitude to God upon every agreeable occurrence, and our resignation and submission to his will upon every calamitous event of life, it would tend greatly to strengthen the habit of *acknowledging God in all our ways*, and promote the spirit of devotion.

In no other country, I believe, whatever, neither among the roman catholics, nor mahometans, have people, even the most fashionable and polite, any idea of being ashamed of their religion. On the contrary, they are rather ostentatious of it, and therefore they seem to have more than they are really possessed of: and this is the case with some, both of the established church, and among the dissenters in England. But, unfortunately, this outward show of religion was carried to such a length, about a century ago, in this country, and was sometimes made to subserve such infamous purposes, that, I believe, the greater part of the most sincerely pious and humble christians now make a point of exposing to the world as little of the religion they have as possible; so that they are really possessed of much more than they seem to have. This I trust is the case with great numbers, who are little suspected of being particularly religious, because they are seldom or never heard to talk about it. And, upon the whole, while things are so unfortunately

tunately circumstanced, I think this extreme preferable to the other ; as, of all things, the reproach of hypocrisy ought to be avoided with the utmost care.

4. In a more especial manner, never fail to have recourse to God upon every occasion of strong emotion of mind, whether it be of a pleasurable, or of a painful nature. When your mind is labouring under distressing doubts, and great anxiety, or when you are any way embarrassed in the conduct of your affairs, fly to God, as your friend and father, your counsellor and your guide. In a sincere and earnest endeavour to discharge your duty, and to act the upright and honourable part, *commit your way unto him*, repose yourselves upon his providence, confiding in his care to over-rule every thing for the best, and you will find a great, and almost instantaneous relief. Your perturbation of mind will subside, as by a charm, and the storm will become a settled calm. Tumultuous and excessive joy will also be moderated by this means ; and thus all your emotions will be rendered more equable, more pleasurable, and more lasting. And this is produced not by any supernatural agency of God on the mind, but is the natural effect of placing entire confidence in a being of perfect wisdom and goodness.

But the capital advantage you will derive from this practice will be, that the idea of God being,
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by this means, associated with all the strongest emotions of your mind, your whole stock of devotional sentiments and feelings will be increased. All those strong emotions, now separately indistinguishable, will coalesce with the idea of God, and make part of the complex train of images suggested by the term, so that you will afterwards think of God oftener, and with more fervour than before; and the thought of him will have greater influence with you than ever.

5. In order to cultivate the spirit of habitual devotion, labour to free your minds from all consciousness of guilt, and self-reproach, by means of a constant attention to the upright and steady discharge of the whole of your duty. In consequence of neglecting our duty, we become backward, as we may say, to make our appearance before God. We cannot look up to him with full confidence of his favour and blessing; and are, therefore, too apt to omit devotion entirely. Besides, we always feel an aversion to the exercise of *self-abasement* and *contrition*, which are all the sentiments that we can with propriety indulge in those circumstances; especially as we have a secret suspicion, that we shall, for some time at least, go on to live as we have done; so that rather than confess our sins, and continue to live in them, we choose not to make confession at all.

But this, my brethren, is egregious trifling, and highly dangerous. Thus, at best, all improvement

is at a stand with us, if we be not going fatally backwards in our moral state. If this be our character (as I believe it is, more or less, that of a very great number even of those I have called the better sort of the middle classes of men), let us in time, and in good earnest, cast off all our sins, negligences, and follies, by true repentance. Let us draw near, and *acquaint ourselves with God*, that we may be at peace. You can have no true peace, assurance, or satisfaction of mind in this life without it; for, if you be of the class I am now referring to, it is too late for you to have a perfect enjoyment of a life of sin and dissipation. And between that kind of peace, or rather *stupor*, which those who are abandoned to wickedness, those who are wholly addicted to this world and make it their sole end, or those who are grossly ignorant of religion, enjoy, and that *inward peace and satisfaction* which accompanies the faithful and earnest discharge of every known duty, there is no sufficient medium. You may go about seeking rest in this wide space, while your hearts are divided between God and the world, but you will find none; whereas the *fruit of righteousness*, of a sincere and impartial, though imperfect obedience to the law of God, *is peace and assurance for ever*.

Sixthly, and lastly. To facilitate the exercise of devotion, cultivate in your minds just ideas of God, with whom you have to do upon those occasions,

sions, and divest your minds, as far as possible, of all superstitious and dishonourable notions of him. Consider him as the good father of the prodigal son, in that excellent parable of our Saviour. Let it sink deep into your minds, as one of the most important of all principles, that the God with whom we have to do is essentially, of himself, and without regard to any foreign consideration whatever, *abundant in mercy, not willing that any should perish, but that he had rather that all should come to repentance*: and then, notwithstanding you consider yourselves as frail, imperfect, and sinful creatures; and though you cannot help accusing yourselves of much negligence, folly, and vice; you may still approach him with perfect confidence in his readiness to receive, love, and cherish you, upon your sincere return to him.

In this light our Lord Jesus Christ always represented *his father and our father, his God and our God*. This is the most solid ground of consolation to minds burdened with a sense of guilt; and, what is of great advantage, it is the most natural, the most easy and intelligible of all others. If once you quit this firm hold, you involve yourselves in a system, and a labyrinth, in which you either absolutely find no rest, and wander in uncertainty and horror; or, if you do attain to any thing of assurance, it is of such a kind, and in such a manner, as can hardly fail to feed that *spiritual pride*

pride which will lead you to despise others; nay, unless counteracted by other causes, too often ends in a spirit of censoriousness, hatred, and persecution.

Religious melancholy, the most deplorable of all the cases of melancholy, will never be effectually relieved by any consideration but that of the mercy and clemency of the Divine Being. This unhappy state of mind arises from superstition. It consists in an excessive and unreasonable fear of God, and is peculiarly incident to persons of the greatest tenderness of conscience. And if we consider nothing but the holiness of the divine nature, and our proneness to vice and folly, there will be no end of this distressing scrupulosity in the best-disposed minds. But, in our situation, we must learn to acquiesce in the sense of our manifold imperfections, and the unavoidable consequences of them; and to take refuge in the goodness and compassion of God, who *considers our frame, and remembers that we are but dust*. This is the part of humility.

So long as we are seeking to justify ourselves in the sight of God (unless our minds be absolutely blinded) we shall not fail to condemn ourselves; for *there is not a man upon earth, not even the most just and righteous man, who doeth good and sinneth not*. Yea, in many things we offend all: so that, if we should say we have no sin, we should deceive our-

selves, and the truth would not be in us: but it is a never-failing source of consolation, that, if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Moreover, let it be considered, by persons labouring under this deplorable calamity, that this fear of displeasing God, and anxiety about our future state, is one of the best evidences we can have that *our hearts are, upon the whole, right towards God*; that we are seeking first, and before all things else, *the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, and that we are not so much concerned about *the bread that perishes*, as about *that which endures to everlasting life*. Our Saviour said, *Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted; blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled*; so that this excess of religious fear, producing despondence and melancholy, is a state of greater safety, though it be less pleasing, than that of religious joy.

This fear of God, when it has once exceeded its due bounds, and degenerated into superstition, and when it is not cured by a confidence in the divine mercy and clemency, by that *love which casteth out fear*, is of a most alarming nature, and has often been productive of the most fatal effects. What is it that superstitious mortals have scrupled either to do, or suffer, in order to recommend themselves to God? Voluntary pains, and penalties,

of the most frightful kinds, have not been spared for this purpose; and men like ourselves, yea, *the excellent of the earth*, men of whom the world was not worthy, have been persecuted, and massacred, under the idea of *doing God service*.

I shall, also, here give an admonition concerning another inconvenience which we are apt to be betrayed into, by imperfect and unworthy conceptions of God. It is that kind of enthusiasm which arises from an excess of religious joy, as the superstition I have just described arises from an excess of religious fear. It is well known, that, in the beginning of a religious life, persons of a warm temper of mind are apt to be carried away with extreme fervour. They are swelled with a tumultuous and rapturous joy, attended with great zeal in the discharge of their duty. But all this is of short continuance, and generally ends in a most unaccountable *languor*, and even a total indifference about religion, which astonishes them, and which they are apt to consider as the consequence of the presence of God deserting them; that peculiar presence which they supposed to be the cause of the preceding fervour. Also, in this deadness to devotional fervour, and indifference about religion, they are apt to imagine their former experience to have been an illusion. All religion, in that state of their minds, appears like a dream; and they afterwards often fancy themselves to have been

tempted by the devil, to disbelieve and renounce it all, natural and revealed.

But the peculiar warmth of those emotions is owing to the novelty of them, together with a kind of *familiarity* in our conceptions of God, which leads to such a passionate joy as we naturally indulge with respect to beings like ourselves. But more awful, and, on account of the preceding excessive familiarity, too awful ideas of God will follow and check that fond transport. The emotion itself, having been above the usual tenor of the sensations, will of course subside; and the idea of God, being as yet single, as we may say, and not associated with a sufficient variety of other objects, cannot long be retained in the mind, any more than any other single idea unconnected with others. Consequently, other objects, and trains of thought, which we have been before accustomed to, will force themselves upon the mind; and these, not having had any previous connexions with the ideas of God and religion, will exclude them, so that the former religious state of mind will as absolutely disappear for a time, as if it had never existed.

All this, however, is perfectly natural, and will give no alarm to those who have a sufficient knowledge of human nature. In this case, a person who would favour his progress in religion should calmly acquiesce in the imperfection of his devotion. He should give himself, in the intervals of
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it, to the steady prosecution of his lawful business, considering *that* as his proper duty, as *serving mankind* and *serving God*, and therefore by no means foreign to religion; depending upon it, that, if he only be careful to *keep his conscience void of offence*, his devotional feelings will return in due time. Let him then endeavour to purify and exalt his conceptions of God as much as possible; for this will tend both to give him humiliating views of himself, and to make his pious emotions more composed, and more permanent. And, by degrees, by frequently endeavouring to raise his views above the world, while he is employed in it, religion will come to be no longer the business of an hour, or of a limited time, with him, but he will *walk with God all the day long*, and proceed in the path of his duty with a calm and equal, a steady and a persevering progress.

I shall conclude this discourse with observing, that if a person should never experience any thing of this fervour of devotion, which I have been endeavouring to describe and explain, I should by no means pronounce him the less safe on that account. This fervour of devotion is in a manner incompatible with the constitution of some persons' minds; and an uniform care to *glorify God in all our actions*, and to *preserve a conscience void of offence towards God and towards all men*, without any thing of that warmth of zeal and devotion, which often delights, but also often misleads others; this, I say, will certainly

certainly be sufficient, according to the gracious constitution of the gospel, to entitle a person to that *glorious recompense of reward*, to that *eternal life*, which awaits all those who, by nothing but *patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality*. Our Saviour himself has assured us, that if a man *do the will of God* (he makes no other condition, he describes no particular *feeling*) he shall be to him as *a brother, a sister, or a mother*.

We well know, my christian brethren, *what it is that the Lord our God requires of us*, in order to live and to die in his favour, namely, *to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God*. To this plain path of duty, then, let us adhere, without being anxious about any thing further. Whether we have those fervours of devotion, which some feel, and are apt to be proud of, or not, we shall experience that *great peace of mind*, which *all those have who keep God's law*; and having lived the life of the righteous, our *latter end will also be like his*; the foundation of our joy being *the testimony of our consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world*.

It is true, we are imperfect, sinful creatures: but, notwithstanding this, we have all possible encouragement given us to trust in the abundant mercy of our gracious God and father, in that mercy which is essential to his nature, as a Being who is infinitely good, and who is *love itself*; and which,

which, if we could entertain the least doubt concerning it, he fully declared to all the world, by Moses and the prophets, by Jesus Christ and his apostles; whom he sent into the world to preach the grateful doctrine of *repentance and remission of sins*, thereby to *redeem* (*i. e. to deliver*) us from all iniquity, and to *reconcile us to God*. Animated, therefore, by the glorious promises of the gospel, *let us, my christian brethren, be stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labour shall not finally be in vain in the Lord.*

S E R M O N VI.

THE DUTY OF NOT LIVING TO OURSELVES,

ROMANS xiv. 7.

FOR NONE OF US LIVETH TO HIMSELF, AND
NO MAN DIETH TO HIMSELF.

It is the excellence of our rational nature that by it we are capable of living to some known end, and of governing our lives and conduct by some rule; whereas brute creatures necessarily live and act at random, just as the present appetite influences them. Let us then, my brethren, make the most of this our prerogative, by proposing to ourselves the noblest end of human life, and engaging in such a course of actions as will reflect the greatest honour upon our nature, and be productive of the most solid and lasting happiness, both in the performance and review of them.

Agreeably to this, let the principal use we make of our understanding be to discover what the great end of life is; and then let us use the resolution and fortitude that is either natural to us, or acquired by us, in steadily conforming ourselves to it.

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But as the regular investigation of the rule of life, from the light of nature only, may be tedious and perhaps at last unsatisfactory, let us, without waiting for the result of such an inquiry upon the principles of reason, take a more clear and sure guide, the holy scriptures, in so important a subject, and see, afterwards, whether reason and experience will not give their sanction to that decision.

The great end of human life is negatively expressed by the apostle Paul in my text. *None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself*; and, if we attend to the connection of these words, we shall find what, in the apostle's idea, is the true end to which men ought to live.

The apostle is here treating of a controversy, which had arisen in the christian church, about the lawfulness of eating meat sacrificed to idols, and keeping holy certain days, together with some other ceremonious observances, and exhorting both parties to do nothing that might give offence, or be a snare to the other, lest, by their means, any one should perish for whom Christ died.

As the best foundation for mutual tenderness and charity, he reminds them that both parties acted, with regard to all ritual observances, as they imagined was the will of Christ. *He that observeth a day observeth it to the Lord; and he that observeth not a day, to the Lord he observeth it not*. And after giving his sanction in the fullest manner to this maxim,

maxim, and deciding, with respect to this particular case, that all christians ought to act according to the will of Christ, and consult the good and the peace of their fellow-christians, he declares in general, that *no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; but whether we live, we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we die unto the Lord*; that is, in all our actions our views should not be directed to ourselves; but to the interest of our holy religion. And as the christian religion has for its object the happiness of mankind (since *Christ came to bless us in turning us away from our iniquities*), it is the same thing as if he had said, the great scope of all our conduct should be the real welfare of all to whom our influence can extend.

We should therefore, my brethren, according to this apostolical maxim, by no means confine our regards to ourselves, and have our own pleasure, profit, or advantage in view, in every thing we undertake; but look out of, and beyond ourselves, and take a generous concern in the happiness of all our brethren of mankind, making their sorrows our sorrows, their joys our joys, and their happiness our pursuit: and it is in this disinterested conduct, and in this only, that we shall find our own true happiness.

That this is the true rule of human life, will appear, whether we consider the course of nature without us, the situation of mankind in this world,

or take a nearer view of the principles of human nature. And we shall likewise find that several considerations drawn from the holy scriptures will further confirm and illustrate this maxim of human conduct which was first suggested by them.

I. This disinterested conduct of man is most agreeable to the course of nature without us. There is no part of the creation, which will not, if it be viewed attentively, expose the selfishness and narrow-mindedness of men. For, among all that infinite variety of things and creatures which present themselves to our view, not one of them appears to have been made merely for itself, but every thing bears a relation to something else. They can hardly be said to afford any matter for contemplation singly, and are most of all the objects of our admiration when considered as connected with other things. The primary uses of things are few, but the secondary uses of every thing are almost infinite. Indeed, the secondary uses of things are so many, that we are lost in the multiplicity of them; whereas we can give no answer, if we be asked what is the primary use of any thing, but this general one, which will equally suit every thing, that every creature which is capable of happiness was made to enjoy that share of it which is suited to its nature.

Now, what do we mean, when we say that the several parts of nature are *adapted to* one another, but that they are *made for the use* of one another? I shall mention only a few of these mutual relations

and uses, beginning with those parts of nature which are the most remote from one another, and whose mutual relations and uses are the least obvious, and proceeding to those in which they are more obvious. The sun, the moon, the planets, and comets, are strictly connected, and combined into one system. Each body, though so exceedingly remote from the rest, is admirably adapted, by its situation, magnitude, and velocity in its orbit, to the state of the whole, in those respects and many others. This connexion, probably, also extends to the remotest bodies in the universe: so that it is impossible to say, that the withdrawing of any one would not, in some respect or other, affect all the rest.

The clouds and the rain are designed to moisten the earth, and the sun to warm it; and the texture and juices of the earth are formed so as to receive the genial influences of both, in order to ripen and bring to perfection that infinite variety of plants and fruits, the seeds of which are deposited in it. Again, is not each plant peculiarly adapted to its proper soil and climate, so that every country is furnished with those productions which are peculiarly suited to it? Are not all plants likewise suited to the various kinds of animals which feed upon them; so that, though they enjoy a kind of life peculiar to themselves, and all the influences they are exposed to be adapted to promote that life, they themselves
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are as much adapted to maintain that higher kind of life which is enjoyed by creatures of the animal nature?

The various kinds of animals are again, in a thousand ways, adapted to, and formed for, the use of one another. Beasts of a fiercer nature prey upon the tamer cattle: fishes of a larger size live almost wholly upon those of a less: and there are some birds which prey upon land-animals, others upon fishes, and others upon creatures of their own species.

That brute animals are excellently adapted to the use of man, and were, therefore, made to be subservient to the use of man, man will not deny. The strength of some, and the sagacity of others, are as much at our command, and are as effectually employed for our use, as if they belonged to ourselves. We can even turn to our advantage every passion of their nature; so that we can safely repose the greatest confidence in many of them. They are the guardians of our possessions and of our lives. They even enter into our resentments, and, at our instigation, take part in our revenge.

Having now advanced to man, the chief of this lower creation, and shown that all creatures of the vegetable, and merely animal, nature live and die for his use; pride might bid us here break off the chain of mutual relations and uses, which we have been pursuing thus far, and leave man in the en-

joyment of his superiority : but, beside that it is contrary to the analogy of nature, in which we see nothing but what has innumerable secondary relations and uses, that *man* only should be made for himself;

2. The situation of man in this world, or the external circumstances of human nature, still oblige us to assert, with Paul, that *no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself*. Man himself is but a link, though the highest link, of this great chain, all the parts of which are closely connected by the hand of our divine author. Nay, the more various and extensive are our powers, either for action or enjoyment, on that very account the more multiplied and extensive are our wants : so that, at the same time that they are marks of our superiority to, they are bonds of our connexion with, and signs of our dependence upon, the various parts of the world around us, and of our subservience to one another.

In fact, every time that we gratify any of our senses, though it be in consequence of the exertion of our own powers, we are reminded (if we will be so just to ourselves as to take the hint) of our dependence upon something without us. For the means of our gratifications are, in all cases, evidently without ourselves.

If we be served by the vegetables and the animals which this earth affords, we are obliged, in our turn,

turn, to favour their propagation, to promote their cultivation, and to preserve them in a healthy and vigorous state : and employment of this kind doth, in fact, take up a great part of our attention and labour. We must make the creature in some measure happy, if we would be effectually served by it. And the attention which domestic animals give to us, and their anxiety for us, is not to be compared to the attention we bestow on them, and the anxiety we undergo on their account.

But my subject leads me to attend to the connexion which man has with man, rather than with the inferior part of the creation ; though it seemed not improper to point out that. In general, nothing can be more obvious than the mutual dependence of men on one another. - We see it in the most barbarous countries, where the connexions of mankind are the fewest and the slightest. This dependence is more sensible, indeed, in a state of infancy, when the least remission of the care of others would be fatal to us ; but it is as real and necessary, and even vastly more extensive, though less striking, when we are more advanced in life, especially in civilized countries. And the more perfect is the state of civil society, the more various and extended are the connexions which man has with man, and the less able is he to subsist comfortably without the help of others.

The business of human life, where it is enjoyed

in perfection, is subdivided into so many parts (each of which is executed by different hands) that a person who would reap the benefit of all the arts of life in perfection must employ, and consequently be dependent upon, thousands: he must even be under obligations to numbers of whom he has not the least knowledge.

These connexions of man with man are every day growing more extensive. The most distant parts of the earth are now connected: every part is every day growing still more necessary to every other part. And the nearer advances we make to general happiness, and the more commodious our circumstances in this world are made for us, the more intimately and extensively we become connected with, and the more closely we are dependent upon, one another.

By thus tracing the progress of man to that state of happiness which he now enjoys, we may be led to think, that, in pursuing it still farther to a more happy state of being, adapted to our social natures, we shall find ourselves still more variously and intimately connected with, and more closely dependent upon, one another; which affords a far nobler and more pleasing prospect to a person of an enlarged mind, and of a social and benevolent disposition, than he could have from supposing, that after death all our mutual connexions will be broken, and that every good man will be made transcendently

ently happy within himself, having no intercourse, or, however, no necessary intercourse, with any being beside his maker.

By these arguments, which are drawn from facts that are obvious to every person who attends to the external circumstances of mankind, it is plain that no-man *can* live of himself; and even that the rich are, in fact, more dependent upon others than the poor; for, having more wants, they have occasion for more, and more frequent supplies. Now, it will easily be allowed, that every reason why we cannot live *of* ourselves is an argument why we ought not to live *to* ourselves: for certainly no person receives an obligation, but he ought to confer one. Every connexion must, in some measure, be mutual. And, indeed, the circulation of good offices would in a great measure cease, if the passage were not as open, and as free from obstruction, in one part of the common channel as another. The rich, if they would receive the greatest advantages from society, must contribute to the happiness of it. If they act upon different maxims, and think to avail themselves of the pleasures of society without promoting the good of it, they will never know the true pleasures of society. And, in the end, they will be found to have enjoyed the least themselves, who have least contributed to the enjoyment of others.

Thus it appears from a view of the external circumstances

circumstances of mankind, that man was not made to live to himself. The same truth may be inferred,

3. From a nearer inspection of the principles of human nature, and the springs of human actions.

If any man look into himself, and consider the springs and motives of his own actions, he will find that there are principles in his nature which would be of no use, were the intercourse he has with his fellow-creatures cut off; for that both the efficient and final causes of their operations are without himself. They are views of mankind, and their situations, which call those principles into action. And if we trace the operation of them, we shall clearly see that, though they be strictly connected with private happiness, their ultimate and proper object is the happiness of society:

What other account can we give of that impulse, which we all, more or less, feel for society? And whence is that restless and painful dissatisfaction which a man feels when he is long excluded from it, but that, in such a solitary condition, his faculties have not their proper exercise, and he is, as it were, out of his proper element?

Whence is that quick sensibility which we are conscious of with respect to both the joys and the sorrows of our fellow-creatures, if their happiness or misery were a matter of indifference to us? Can we feel what is sometimes called the contagion of the

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the passions, when we find that our minds contract a kind of gloom and heaviness in the company of the melancholy, and that this melancholy vanishes in company which is innocently cheerful, and question the influence of social connexions? Much less can the reality or the power of the social principle be doubted, when a fellow-creature in distress calls forth the most exquisite feelings of compassion, attended with instant and strong efforts towards his relief.

So essential a part of our nature are these social passions, that it is impossible for any man wholly to escape the influence of them; but if we would be witnesses of their strongest effects, and see them branched out into that beautiful subordination which corresponds to all the varieties of our mutual relations, we must look into domestic life. There we shall clearly see, that the most frequent and almost the only cause of a man's joys and sorrows are the joys and sorrows of others, and that the immediate aim of all his actions is the well-being and happiness of others.

Doth not the sense of honour in the human breast derive all its force from the influence which social connexions have over us? Of what use could it be but to beings formed for society? What do we infer from our dread of infamy, and from our being so strongly actuated by a passion for fame, and also from the universality and extent of this principle, but that our nature obliges us to keep up a regard
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to others in our whole conduct, and that the author of nature intended we should? And is it not a further evidence of the ultimate design of this principle, that, in general, the means of being distinguished, at least of gaining a solid and lasting reputation, among men, is to be useful to mankind; public utility being the most direct road to true fame?

Every noble and exalted faculty of our nature is either directly of a social nature, or tends to strengthen the social principle. Nothing can be more evident than that the dictates of conscience strongly enforce the practice of benevolence: and the pleasures of benevolence certainly constitute the greatest part of those pleasures which we refer to the moral sense. They must necessarily do so, while the foundation of all virtue and right conduct is the happiness of society: for then every reflection that we have done our duty must be the same thing as a reflection that we have contributed what was in our power to the good of our fellow-creatures.

Lastly, of what doth devotion itself consist, but the exercise of the social affections? What are the dispositions of our minds which are called forth into action in private or public prayer, but reverence for true greatness, humility, gratitude, love, and confidence in God, as the greatest and best of Beings; qualities of the most admirable use and effect in social life?

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I may add, that not only are the highest and the worthiest principles of human conduct either truly social, or a reinforcement of the social principle, but even the lowest appetites and passions of our nature are far from being indifferent to social connexions, considerations, and influences. That the pleasures we receive from the fine arts, as those of music, poetry, and painting, and the like, are enjoyed but very imperfectly except in company, is very evident to all persons who have the least taste for those pleasures. I may even venture to say, that there is hardly a voluptuary, the most devoted to the pleasures of the table, but indulges himself with more satisfaction in company than alone.

Having given this general view of the social turn of our whole natures, whereby we are continually led out of ourselves in our pursuit of happiness; I shall now consider further, how all our appetites and passions, which are the springs of all our actions, do, in their own nature, tend to lead us out of ourselves, and how much our happiness depends upon our keeping their proper objects in view, and upon our minds being thereby constantly engaged upon something foreign to themselves; after which I shall show what are the fittest objects thus to engage our attention.

In order to preserve mutual connexion, dependence, and harmony among all his works, it has pleased

pleased our divine author to appoint, that all our appetites and desires, to whatever sense, external or internal, they be referred, should point to something beyond ourselves for their gratification; so that the idea of *self* is not in the least necessary to a state of the highest enjoyment.

When may men be said to be happy, but when their faculties are properly exercised in the pursuit of those things which give them pleasure? I say the pursuit rather than the enjoyment, not because enjoyment makes no part of our happiness, but because the vigorous and agreeable sensations with which our minds are impressed during the pursuit of a favourite object are generally, at least in this life, of vastly more consideration. The pleasure we receive the instant we arrive at the height of our wishes may be more exquisite, but the others are of much longer continuance; and, immediately upon the gratification of any of our desires, the mind is instantly reaching after some new object.

Supposing now the mind of any person to be fully and constantly engaged in the pursuit of a proper object, to the possession of which he is sensible he every day makes near approaches, and his desires be not so eager as to make him uneasy during the pursuit, what more is requisite to make him as happy as his nature can bear? He will not be the less happy because the object he is in pursuit of is foreign to himself; nor would it make him any happier to

have the idea of its contributing to his happiness. Nay, it may be shown, that it would be better for us, in general, with respect to real enjoyment, never to have the idea of the relation which the objects of our pursuit bear to ourselves: and this is most of all evident with respect to the higher pleasures of our nature, from which we derive our greatest happiness.

Our benevolence, for instance, leads us immediately to relieve and oblige others. Pleasure, indeed, always attends generous actions, and is consequent upon them; but the satisfaction we receive in our minds from having done kind offices to others is far less pure, and less perfectly enjoyed, if at all, when we had this, or any other private gratification in view before the action.

In like manner, he who courts applause, and does worthy actions solely with a view to obtain it, can have no knowledge of the genuine pleasure arising either from the good action itself, or the applause that is given to it; because he is sensible, in his own mind, that if those persons who praise his conduct were acquainted with the real motive of it, and knew that he meant nothing more, by his pretended acts of piety and benevolence, than to gain their applause, they would be so far from admiring and commending, that they would despise him for it.

It is evident, for the same reason, that no person

can enjoy the applause of his own mind, on the account of any action which he did with a view to gain it. The pleasures of a good conscience, or, as they are sometimes called, those of the moral sense, cannot be enjoyed but by a person who steadily obeys the dictates of his conscience, and uniformly acts the part which he thinks to be right, without any view to the pleasure and self-satisfaction which may arise from it.

The idea of *self*, as it is not adapted to gratify any of our appetites, and can contribute nothing towards their gratification, can only occasion anxiety, fear, and distrust about our happiness, when it is frequently the subject of our thoughts. The apprehension and dread of misery (which is certainly the occasion of most of the real trouble and misery of men in this life) is beyond measure increased from this source: and the effects of it are most sensibly felt both in the less and greater scenes of our lives.

It is chiefly an anxious solicitude about ourselves, and the appearance we shall make in the eyes of others, which is the cause of that affectation and constraint in behaviour which is so troublesome to a person's self, and so ridiculous in the eyes of others. This trifling remark, being so frequently verified, may serve to show that these sentiments are by no means merely speculative; but that they enter into the daily scenes of active life. Indeed they are in the highest sense practical, and upon them

them depend those maxims of conduct which contain the great secret of human happiness, and which are confirmed by every day's experience.

That the idea of *self* frequently occurring to our minds in our pursuit of happiness is often a real and great obstruction to it, will be more obvious from a short series of plain facts and examples, which I shall therefore mention.

Why are brute creatures, in general, so contented and happy in their low sphere of life, and much more so, than the mind of man could be in their situation? Is it not because their views are perpetually fixed upon some object within their reach, adapted to their desires; and that the abstract idea of *self*, together with the notion of their being in the pursuit of happiness, and liable to be disappointed in that pursuit, never comes in their way, to interrupt the uniform and pleasurable exertion of their faculties in the pursuit of their proper objects?

The days of our infancy are happy for the same reason, notwithstanding the imperfection of our faculties, and the greater proportion of pains and disorders we are then liable to. Those years of our lives slide away in unmixed enjoyment; except when they are interrupted by the actual sensations of pain: for we are then incapable of suffering any thing from the *fear* of evil. It is not till after a considerable time that we get the abstract idea of *self*; an idea, which the brutes, probably, never

arrive at, and which is of excellent use to us, as will be shown in its proper place, in our pursuit of happiness, but is often abused to the great increase of our misery, as will appear by the facts we are now considering.

Why are persons whose situation in life obliges them to constant labour, either of body or mind, generally more happy than those whose circumstances do not lay them under a necessity to labour, and whose own inclination does not lead them to it; but because the former have their thoughts constantly employed in the pursuit of some end, which keeps their faculties awake, and fully exerted? And this is always attended with a state of vigorous, and consequently pleasurable sensations. Persons thus employed have not much leisure to attend to the idea of self, and that anxiety which always attends the frequent recurring of it; whereas a person who has no object foreign to himself, which constantly and necessarily engages his attention, cannot have his faculties fully exerted; and therefore his mind cannot possibly be in that state of vigorous sensation in which happiness consists.

The mind of such a person, having nothing without him sufficient to engage its attention, turns upon itself. He feels he is not happy, but he sees not the reason of it. This again excites his wonder, vexation, and perplexity. He tries new expedients; but, as these are only temporary, and
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generally whimsical choices, none of them have sufficient power to fix and confine his attention. He is still perpetually thinking about himself, and wondering and uneasy that he is not happy. This anxious perplexed state of mind, affecting the nervous system, necessarily occasions a more irritable state of the nerves, and of the brain, which makes the unhappy person subject to more frequent alarms, to greater anxiety and distress than before; till, these mental and bodily disorders mutually increasing one another, his condition is at length the most wretched and distressing that can be conceived. No bodily pain, no rack, no torture, can equal the misery and distress of a human being whose mind is thus a prey to itself. No wonder that, in this situation, many persons wish the utter extinction of their being, and often put a period to their lives.

This is certainly the most deplorable situation to which a human being can be reduced in this world, and is doubly the object of our compassion, when the disorder has its seat originally in the body, in such a manner, as that no endeavours to engage a man's thoughts upon other objects can force his attention from himself.

It is no wonder that we see more of this kind of unhappiness in the higher ranks of life, and among persons who are in what is called *easy circumstances*,

than in any other. Indeed, the case is hardly possible in any other than in easy circumstances: for, did a man's circumstances really find constant employment for his thoughts; were his business so urgent as to leave him no leisure for suspense and uncertainty what to do; it is plain, from the preceding principles, that such anxiety and distress could not take place. It is well known that the mind suffers more in a state of uncertainty and suspense, for want of some motive to determine a man's choice, than he can suffer in the vigorous prosecution of the most arduous undertaking. I appeal to men of leisure, and particularly to persons who are naturally of an active and enterprising disposition, for the truth of this fact.

These principles likewise, as is evident without entering into a detail of particulars, furnish us with a good reason why we generally see fathers and mothers of large families infinitely more easy, cheerful, and happy, than those persons who have no family-connexions. The greater affluence, ease, and variety of pleasures which these can command (subject to the inconveniences I have mentioned, and which are commonly visible enough in the case I refer to) are a poor equivalent for the necessary, constant, and vigorous exertion of their faculties, and consequently the strong sensations, and lively enjoyments, which a variety of family-cares, con-

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jugal and parental tenderness, supply for the others.

This would be the case universally, where large families could subsist, if the parents had sufficient employment, and if an early-acquired taste for superfluities had not taken too deep root in their minds.

Happy is it for the world, and a great mark of the wisdom and goodness of divine providence, that men's minds are so constituted, that, though they be in easy circumstances, they are never completely satisfied. The passions of most men are still engaging them in a variety of pursuits, in which they are as eager, and which they prosecute with as much alacrity and earnestness, as if necessity compelled them to it. Otherwise, every person who could live easy would be inevitably miserable.

Infinitely happier would it be for themselves, and for the world, if all their pursuits were such as would give them satisfaction upon the reflection as well as in the pursuit, and be of real advantage to the rest of mankind; which two circumstances never fail to coincide. However, with regard to a person's self in this life, any end is unspeakably better than no end at all; and such is the wise appointment of providence, that bad ends tend, in a variety of ways, to check and defeat themselves, and to throw the minds of men into better, nobler, and more satisfactory pursuits; a consideration, which

which cannot fail to suggest, to a benevolent and pious mind, a prospect of a future happy and glorious state of things.

It may be said, that if happiness consist in, or depend upon, the exertion of our faculties upon some object foreign to ourselves, it is a matter of indifference what the object be. I answer, that during the pursuit it is nearly so; and universal experience, I imagine, will justify the observation. This is the reason why we see men equally eager, and equally happy, in the pursuit of a variety of things which appear trifling to one another. Thus the florist, the medalist, the critic, the antiquary, and every adept in the minuter branches of science, all enjoy equal happiness in the pursuit of their several objects; and as much as the historian, the astronomer, the moralist, or the divine, who refers his nobler studies to no higher end, and to whom they only serve as an exercise of his faculties.

But though an eager pursuit tends to keep the mind in a state of vigorous and lively sensation, that pursuit only can give us the *maximum*, the highest possible degree, of happiness, which has the following characters. It must be attended with the probability of success, consequently it must be generally successful; and it must also terminate in such gratifications as are least inconsistent with themselves, or with the other gratifications of which our nature makes us capable. And it may be demonstrated

monstrated (though I shall not undertake to do it particularly in this place) that no pursuits answer to this description but those in which the love of mankind, the love of God, or the dictates of conscience, engage us.

For, in all other pursuits, such as those of sensual pleasure, the pleasures of imagination, and ambition, we are liable to frequent disappointments; the gratifications in which they terminate are inconsistent with themselves, and with each other; and they almost entirely deaden and disqualify the mind for the nobler pleasures of our nature. It is the love of God, the love of mankind, and a sense of duty, which engage the minds of men in the noblest of all pursuits. By these we are carried on with increasing alacrity and satisfaction. Even the pains and distresses in which we involve ourselves by these courses are preferable to the pleasures attending the gratification of our lower appetites.

Besides, these noble pursuits, generally at least, allow us even more of the lower gratifications of our nature than can be obtained by a direct pursuit of them. For a little experience will inform us, that we receive the most pleasure from these lower appetites of our nature, as well as from the highest sources of pleasure which we are capable of, when we have their gratification least of all in view. There can be no doubt, for instance, but that the labourer, who eats and drinks merely to satisfy the calls of
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hunger and thirst, has vastly more pleasure in eating and drinking than the epicure who studies the pleasing of his palate.

They are the pleasures of benevolence and piety which most effectually carry us out of ourselves; whereas every other inferior pursuit suggests to us, in a thousand respects, the idea of *self*, the unreasonable intervention of which may be called the *worm* which lies *at the root* of all human blifs. And never can we be completely happy, till we *love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; and our neighbour as ourselves.*

This is the christian *self-annihilation*, and a state of the most complete happiness to which our natures can attain; when, without having the least idea of being in the pursuit of our own happiness, our faculties are wholly absorbed in those noble and exalted pursuits, in which we are sure not to be finally disappointed, and in the course of which we enjoy all the consistent pleasures of our whole nature; when, *rejoicing with all that rejoice, weeping with all that weep*, and intimately associating the idea of God, the maker of all things, our father and our friend, with all the works of his hands, and all the dispensations of his providence, we constantly triumph in the comfortable sense of the divine presence and approbation, and in the transporting prospect of advancing every day nearer to the accomplishment-

accomplishment of his glorious purposes for the happiness of his creatures.

If this be the proper and supreme happiness of man, it may be asked, Of what use is the principle of self-interest? I answer, that though an attention to it be inconsistent with pure unmixed happiness, yet a moderate attention to it is of excellent use in our progress towards it. It serves as a scaffold to a noble and glorious edifice, though it be unworthy of standing as any part of it. It is of more particular use to check and restrain the indulgence of our lower appetites and passions, before other objects and motives have acquired a sufficient power over us. But though we ought, therefore, to exhort those persons who are immersed in sensuality and gross vices, to abandon those indulgences out of a regard to their true interest, it is advisable to withdraw this motive by degrees. However, as we shall never arrive at absolute perfection, we necessarily must, and indeed ought to be influenced by it more or less through the whole course of our existence, only less and less perpetually.

The principle of self-interest may be regarded as a medium between the lower and the higher principles of our nature, and therefore of principal use in our transition, as we may call it, from an imperfect to a more perfect state.

Perhaps the following view of this subject may be the easiest to us. A regard to our greatest happiness

pineness must necessarily govern our conduct with respect to all those virtues which are termed *private virtues*, as temperance, chastity, and every branch of self-government: but it always does harm as a motive to the *social virtues*. When, therefore, self-government, which is our first step towards happiness, is established, we ought to endeavour to excite men to action by higher and nobler motives. For, with regard to all those virtues, the ultimate object of which is not private happiness, an attention to self-interest is of manifest prejudice to us; and this through the whole course of our lives, imperfect as we are, and as much occasion as we have for every effectual motive to virtue.

We are now come, in the last place, to see what considerations drawn from the holy scriptures will further confirm and illustrate this maxim of human conduct which was first suggested by them.

That the scriptures join the voice of all nature around us, informing man that he is not made for himself; that they inculcate the same lesson which we learn both from a view of the external circumstances of mankind, and also from a nearer inspection of the principles of human nature, will be evident, whether we consider the object of the religion they exhibit (that is, the temper to which we are intended to be formed by it), or the motives by which it is enforced and recommended to us in them.

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That the end and design of our holy religion, christians, was to form us to the most disinterested benevolence, cannot be doubted by any person who consults the holy scriptures, and especially the books of the New Testament.

There we plainly see the principle of benevolence represented, when it is in its due strength and degree, as equal in point of intenseness to that of self-love. *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* The plain consequence of this is, that if all our brethren of mankind with whom we are connected have an equal claim upon us (since our connexions are daily growing more extensive, and we ourselves are consequently growing daily of less relative importance in our own eyes), the principle of benevolence must in the end absolutely swallow up that of self-love.

The most exalted devotion, as even superior both to self-love and benevolence, is always every where recommended to us; and the sentiments of devotion have been shown greatly to aid, and, in fact, to be the same with, those of benevolence: and they must be so, unless it can be shown that we have some senses, powers, or faculties which respect the Deity only.

In order to determine men to engage in a course of disinterested and generous actions, every motive which is calculated to work upon human nature is employed. And as mankind in general are deeply

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immerfed in vice and folly, their hopes, but more especially their fears, are acted upon in the ftrongeft manner by the profpect of rewards and punifhments. Even temporal rewards and punifhments were propofed to mankind in the earlier and ruder ages of the world. But, as our notions of happinefs grow more enlarged, infinitely greater but indefinite objects of hope and fear are fet before us. Something unknown, but something unfpeakably dreadful, in a future world, is perpetually held up to us, as a guard againft the allurements to vice and excefs which the world abounds with. And ftill further to counteract their baleful influences, the heavenly world (the habitation of good men after death) is reprefented to us as a place in which we fhall be completely happy, enjoying fomething which is defcribed as more than eye hath feen, ear heard, or than the heart of man can conceive.

These motives are certainly addreffed to the principle of felf-interest, urging us, out of a regard to ourfelves and our general happinefs, *to ceafe to do evil, and learn to do well*. And, indeed, no motives of a more generous nature, and drawn from more diftant confiderations, can be fuppofed fufficient to influence the bulk of mankind, and *bring them from the power of fin, and Satan, unto God*.

But when, by the influence of thefe motives, it may be fuppofed that mankind are in fome meafure
recovered

recovered from the grosser pollutions of the world, and the principle of self-interest has been played, as it were, against itself, and been a means of engaging us in a course and habit of actions which are necessarily connected with, and productive of, more generous and noble principles, then these nobler principles are those which the sacred writers chiefly inculcate.

Nothing is more frequent with the sacred writers, than to exhort men to the practice of their duty as the command of God, from a principle of love to God, of love to Christ, and of love to mankind, more especially of our fellow-christians; and from a regard to the interest of our holy religion: motives which do not at all turn the attention of our minds upon themselves. This is not borrowing the aid of self-love to strengthen the principles of benevolence and piety; but it is properly deriving additional strength to these noble dispositions, as it were, from within themselves, independent of foreign considerations.

We may safely say, that no degree or kind of self-love is made use of in the scriptures, but what is necessary to raise us above that principle. And some of the more refined kinds of self-love, how familiar soever they may be in some systems of morals, never come in sight there. We are never exhorted in the scriptures to do benevolent actions for the sake of the reflex pleasures of benevolence,

or pious actions with a view to the pleasures of devotion. This refined kind of self-love is no where to be found in the scriptures.

Even the pleasures of a good conscience, though they be of a more general nature, and there be less refinement in them than in some other pleasures which are connected with the idea of *self*, and though they be represented in the scriptures as the consequence of good actions, and a source of joy, as a testimony of a person's being in the favour of God, and in the way to happiness, are perhaps never directly proposed to us as the reward of virtue. This motive to virtue makes a greater figure in the system of the later stoics (those heathen philosophers who, in consequence of entertaining the most extravagant idea of their own merit, really idolized their own natures to a degree absolutely blasphemous) than in the scriptures. And if we consider the nature of this principle, we shall soon be sensible, that if it be inculcated as a motive to virtue, and particularly the virtues of a sublimer kind, it should be with great caution, and in such a manner as shall have the least tendency to encourage self-applause. For, does not self-applause border very nearly upon pride and self-conceit, and that species of it which is called spiritual pride, and which is certainly a most malignant disposition?

If this same principle have power to excite such ridiculous vanity, intolerable arrogance, inveterate rancour,

rancour, and supercilious contempt of others, when it has nothing but the trifling advantage of skill in criticism, a talent for poetry, a taste for belles lettres, or some other of the minuter parts of science, to avail itself of; what have we not to dread from it, when it can boast of what is universally acknowledged to be a far superior kind of excellence!

To guard against this dangerous rock, so fatal to every genuine principle of virtue, the utmost humility, self-diffidence, and trust in God, are ever recommended to us in the holy scriptures. Good men are taught to regard him as the giver of every good and every perfect gift. They are represented as disclaiming all the merit of their own good works, and expecting all favour and happiness, private or public, from the free goodness and undeserved mercy of God. *When we have done all that is commanded us, we must say we are unprofitable servants, we have done only that which it was our duty to do.*

In the representation which our Saviour has given us of the proceedings of the last great day of judgment, it is in this respect that the temper of the righteous is contrasted with that of the wicked, though that was not the principal design of the representation. The righteous seem surprised at the favourable opinion which their judge expresses of them, and absolutely disclaim all the

good works which he ascribes to them. *When saw we thee, say they, hungry, and fed thee; or thirsty, and gave thee drink; when saw we thee a stranger and took thee in, or naked and clothed thee; when saw we thee sick and in prison, and came unto thee?* Whereas the wicked are represented as equally surpris'd at the censure our Lord passes upon them, and insist upon their innocence; saying, *When saw we thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?*

This, too, is the excellent moral conveyed to us in the parable of the pharisee and the publican; and the import of one of the blessings which our Lord pronounced in a solemn manner at the beginning of his ministry on earth, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*; and also the spirit of many of our Lord's invectives against the pride and hypocrisy of the scribes and pharisees.

No other vice seems capable of disturbing the equal and generous temper of our Lord. Other vices rather excite his compassion: but pride, together with its usual attendant hypocrisy, never fails to rouse his most vehement indignation; inso-much that, before we attend to the heinous nature and dreadful consequences of those vices, we are apt rather to blame our Lord for intemperate wrath upon these occasions, and to wonder why a person, who

who otherwise appears to be so meek, should, in this case only, be so highly provoked.

How severely doth he check the least tendency towards pride and ambition in his own disciples, whenever he discovers in any of them a disposition to aspire to distinction and superiority ! closing his admonition, on one remarkable occasion, with these words, which are characteristic of the temper of his religion ; Matt. xxiii. 11, 12. *He that is greatest among you shall be your servant : Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted ?*

What temper can be supposed more proper to qualify us for joining the glorious assembly of the spirits of just men made perfect, and perhaps innumerable orders of beings far superior to us both in understanding and goodness, when all the splendour of the invisible world shall be thrown open to us, but a spirit of the deepest humility, and the purest benevolence ? This alone can dispose us truly to rejoice in the view of every kind and degree of excellence wherever found, without the least uneasiness arising from pride, envy, jealousy, or dislike ; all which vicious qualities of the mind are nearly connected together. And how can a spirit of true humility and pure benevolence, which cannot exist without humility, be attained, if our regards be perpetually, or frequently, directed to ourselves ? Where *self* is considered, pride, vanity,
or

or self-conceit, with all their hateful consequences, seem, in some degree, to be unavoidable.

Whoever, therefore, lays the foundation of human virtue on the principle of self-interest, or, what is nearly the same thing, self-applause, is erecting a fabric which can never rest on such supports ; and he will be found in fact to have been pulling down with one hand what he was endeavouring to build up with the other.

To draw to a conclusion. This doctrine abounds with the noblest practical uses, and points out directly the great rule of life, and source of happiness ; which is, to give ourselves wholly up to some employment, which may, if possible, engage all our faculties, and which tends to the good of society. This is a field which is open to the exertion of all human powers, and in which all mankind may be equally, mutually, and boundlessly happy.

This will render all expedients to *kill time* unnecessary. With our affections and our faculties thus engrossed by a worthy object, we scarcely need to fear being ever dull, pensive, or melancholy, or to know what it is to have our time hang heavy upon our hands. And I think I may so far presume upon the known connexion of mind and body, as to say, that this is the best preservative against hypochondriacal disorders, to which persons whose situation in the world doth not lead them into the active scenes of life are peculiarly subject. Every day passed in the
steady

steady and earnest discharge of a man's known duty will pass with uniform cheerfulness and alacrity. And in the glorious animating prospect of a future happy state of mankind, on which, in a humble trust and confidence in the assistance and grace of God, he has spent all his cares and exerted all his powers, that joy will spring up in his heart here, which will hereafter be *unspeakable and full of glory*.

If troubles and persecutions arise on account of our adhering to our duty; if we be opposed in the prosecution of laudable undertakings, or suffer in consequence of undertaking them; the true piety of a person who habitually lives to God, and not to himself, is capable of converting them all into pure unmixed joy and transport. Then the human mind, roused to the most intense exertion of all its faculties, burdened with no consciousness of guilt, referring itself absolutely to the disposal of its God and father, distrusting its own powers, and confiding in the infinite power, wisdom, and goodness of God, acquires a fervour of spirit, a courage, fortitude, and magnanimity, tempered with the most perfect serenity, and the greatest presence of mind, that is sufficient, and more than sufficient, to bear a man through every difficulty, and even to convert all pain into pleasure. His highly agitated state of mind, in those trying circumstances, is almost pure rapture and ecstasy.

In those circumstances, which appear so distressing,
numbers,

numbers, I doubt not, have been able, according to our blessed Saviour's direction, to *rejoice and be exceeding glad, knowing that their reward was great in heaven*; and have experienced more real comfort, peace of mind, and inward joy, in the greatest adversity, than they had ever felt in the days of their prosperity. Yea, what is related by historians of some christian and protestant martyrs appears to me not incredible; namely, that in the midst of flames they have felt no pain. Their minds were so intensely agitated, and so wholly occupied with opposite sensations of the most exalted nature, as to exclude all external sensation whatever, vastly more than we can form any idea of from the trances and reveries which any person was ever subject to.

What the extraordinary exercises of devotion are able to do upon extraordinary occasions, the habitual moderate exercise of piety will be able to do in the ordinary course and the common troubles of our lives; so that it may not only be compared to a strong cordial, to be applied when the mind is ready to faint under adversity, but to that food which is the daily support of our lives.

To have God always in our thoughts, is not possible in this world. Present objects, to the influence of which we are continually exposed, must necessarily engage a great part of our attention; and worldly objects, by continually engrossing our thoughts, are apt to become of too great importance

ance to us. We grow anxious about them, and our minds are harassed and fatigued with a constant and close attention to them. Now, it is when the mind is in this state, or rather tending towards it, that the benign influences of devotion are, in the ordinary course of our lives, the most sensibly felt; when the mind, looking off, and above all worldly objects, and deeply impressed with a sense of the infinite power, wisdom and goodness of God, unburdens itself of every anxiety, and casts all its cares upon its heavenly father; and when the preceding tumult and disorder in the passions only serves to augment that unspeakable joy, satisfaction and confidence, with which a deep sense of the presence and providence of God inspires the soul.

The relief which a benevolent mind feels from communicating its troubles and cares to an intimate friend, in whose wisdom and integrity he can confide, though of the same nature, is but a faint image of what the truly pious soul feels in the delightful seasons of the devout intercourse which he maintains with his God.

This is a perpetual source of joy and satisfaction to a truly devout mind, which the wicked, those persons who live to themselves and not to mankind, or to God, intermeddle not with. Not even an idea of that sweet tranquillity, exalted joy, and calm fortitude which true devotion inspires, can be communicated to another who hath had no experience of it himself.

This

This is true of those things of which St. Paul says that *the animal man cannot comprehend them, and that they are foolishness to him, because they are spiritually discerned.*

I would be no advocate for enthusiasm. The fervour of devotion cannot always be kept up. That is inconsistent with the condition of our nature, and far from being necessary in our present state : but that cheerful serenity and composure in which moderate acts of devotion leave the mind, is an excellent temper for entering upon, and persevering with spirit and alacrity in, any useful and honourable undertaking.

The sum of this practical doctrine, suggested by revelation, and confirmed by reason and observation, is, that NO MAN CAN BE HAPPY WHO LIVES TO HIMSELF ; BUT THAT TRUE HAPPINESS CONSISTS IN HAVING OUR FACULTIES WHOLLY ENGROSSED BY SOME WORTHY OBJECT, IN THE PURSUIT OF WHICH THE STRONGEST AND BEST OF OUR AFFECTIONS HAVE THEIR FULL PLAY, AND IN WHICH WE ENJOY ALL THE CONSISTENT PLEASURES OF OUR WHOLE NATURE ; that though a regard to our greatest happiness be of excellent use, particularly about the beginning of our progress towards perfection and happiness, in bringing our inferior appetites and passions into due subjection to the superior powers of our nature ; yet that self-love, and a regard to ourselves, is very apt to grow too intense, and is in fact the cause

of a great deal of the useless anxiety, perplexity, and misery which is in the world; and that therefore it ought to be our care, that our minds be engrossed as much as possible by other objects; and that even motives to virtue which turn our attention frequently upon ourselves should be used with caution; for fear of feeding that vanity and self-conceit which we ought to study every method of repressing, as the greatest bane of true religion, being most opposite to the genuine temper of christianity, and most destructive of human happiness.

I cannot make a better application of this general maxim of conduct, namely, to propose to ourselves, and, in the language of Solomon, *to pursue with all our might*, some worthy object, some honourable and useful employment, especially in the present circumstances of things among us, than in encouraging you, my brethren in the ministry, to prosecute with vigour that excellent scheme in which you have already shown so much laudable zeal, and have made so successful a progress. I need not add, that I mean the scheme of a provision for the more comfortable support of ministers' widows and orphans.

This particular subject has the easiest and happiest connexion imaginable with the general one I have been discussing; as it is both a worthy and benevolent undertaking itself, and is designed for the relief of those persons who have shown themselves to be actuated by the same excellent sentiments; of persons who have

not lived to themselves, but to society ; who have entered into the social connexions of life, and who have exposed themselves and families to peculiar hardships in consequence of those honourable connexions.

If any set of duties shine with peculiar lustre, and make a greater figure than the rest, in our holy religion, they are those of humanity and compassion. Through all the books both of the Old and New Testament, they are the most frequently, and the most earnestly, inculcated of any particular duties : doubtless, because they are of the strongest obligation in themselves, the finest exercise for our faculties (having the greatest tendency to advance the perfection of our nature); and the best adapted to promote the ease and happiness of mankind in general.

The Divine Being himself is always represented as taking particular notice of the treatment which the poor and distressed meet with. He hath styled himself the *father of the fatherless, and the widow's God*: and therefore, when we undertake those humane and kind offices, we may, with more propriety than in any other sphere, consider ourselves as acting the glorious part of God's deputies, and as stewards of the divine grace and goodness here below.

If we be obliged to contribute of our substance to the relief of the distressed, much more is it incumbent upon us not to withhold our labour and our interest in the prosecution of proper schemes for their relief. And the method in which it is proposed to relieve the

the distressed persons we have now under consideration is one that is quite free from all the difficulties which lie in the way of common charities (though the objections to common charities have no weight in this particular case), and a method which is, in all cases, the most eligible, when it can be pursued with effect; namely, to put those persons whose circumstances are distressing, or liable to be so, in the way of relieving themselves. It is to exert our humanity in the way of encouraging, if not industry, at least frugality.

This, consequently, is a method which will relieve the minds of the distressed of a burthen which is often less tolerable than most kinds of calamity, namely, the sense of dependence and obligation. It may be a false kind of delicacy which makes some persons so extremely sensible upon these occasions: but it is a sensibility which only the most amiable and deserving persons are subject to; and there is certainly a peculiar propriety in attending to this circumstance in the case before us.

Who are, generally, the unhappy widows whose case we are now considering, but persons who have been brought up in easy and genteel circumstances, and whose small fortunes, joined to the income of their husbands, and managed with great frugality, have been just sufficient to bring up a family in that decent and reputable manner, in which a regard to their station in life, and to the congregations in whose service their husbands were engaged, are uni-

versally acknowledged to require? These unhappy persons, therefore, are reduced at once, upon the death of their husbands, and the great reduction, if not total ceasing, of their incomes (which is the immediate consequence of that event), to one of the most distressing situations that can occur in human life.

Here is to be seen the deepest affliction for the loss of that companion and friend for whose sake they had sacrificed perhaps better prospects, and situations in which it would have been more in their power to support themselves and families in the like circumstances; the greatest indigence, to which they have never been accustomed, with which they are therefore wholly unprepared to encounter, and which, in their time of life, they are utterly incapable of remedying; and all this joined with that generosity of sentiment, inspired by their education, and cherished by the company and acquaintance they have always kept up, to which relief itself is distressing, unless conferred with the greatest prudence and delicacy.

To augment the distress of these disconsolate widows, they see nothing before them but a number of children educated in the same decent and frugal manner in which their parents were obliged to live, with expectations (if they be of an age capable of having any) almost unavoidably above their rank and fortune, wholly unprovided for, and destitute, in a great measure, of their fathers' interest and friendships,

ships, on which were founded all their expectations of being introduced with tolerable prospects into the world.

Here then, my brethren, are the worthiest objects of charity, and here is the most unexceptionable and desirable method of bestowing it; so that no circumstance seems wanting to engage every benevolent and public-spirited person to join heartily in a scheme which is calculated for so excellent a purpose.

Consider, my brethren, how many worthy persons are anxious about the prudence and the vigour of your present resolutions; with what tender and heart-piercing concern the worthy and pious parent regards the wife of his bosom, and the children of his love, when he feels the symptoms of his own declining nature, and dreads to communicate the alarming intelligence; and how earnestly he wishes it may be in his power to do something, while living, which, when he is dead, may be the means of providing a small substitute for the fruit of his present labours; when, alas! no substitute can be provided for himself, for his advice, his instructions, his consolations, the charms of his conversation, and all his personal kind offices. Of what a load of anxiety and distress, which tends to hasten the dreaded event, would this scheme ease the worthiest and most considerate of human minds!

Consider also, how many persons, the best qualified

to bear their parts with propriety and honour in social life, and to exhibit the finest example of the several relative and domestic duties to others, and who are thereby capable of having their own usefulness greatly extended, are restrained from engaging in social connexions by that peculiar tenderness and humanity, which a liberal education, and a life devoted to the service of a benevolent religion, inspires; and also by that very prudence, which would eminently contribute to their fulfilling the most important duties of it in the most exemplary manner.

So excellent an undertaking will doubtless be its own sufficient reward; and if *the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*, what good may you not reasonably expect that the devout blessings and fervent prayers of the many excellent persons interested in your present resolutions will procure you, from that God *who is able to make all grace abound towards you, and to supply all your wants, out of his abundant fulness in Christ Jesus?*

Let us then, my brethren, *be steadfast and unmoveable in this, as well as always abounding in every good work; forasmuch as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.*

S E R M O N VII.

OF THE DANGER OF BAD HABITS.

HOSEA iv. 17.

EPHRAIM IS JOINED TO IDOLS. LET HIM
ALONE.

EPHRAIM is here put for the whole kingdom of Israel, of which it was a part; and this awful sentence pronounced upon it was delivered during its declension, and not long before its final dissolution by the kings of Assyria.

Many prophets had God sent to this unhappy nation, and by repeated messages had he expostulated with them, from time to time, for their crying wickedness and provocations. They had had *line upon line*, and *precept upon precept*; but all had been to no purpose. They showed no sign of repentance, but *held fast their iniquity*, and *would not let it go* till the divine patience and forbearance were wearied out. Mercy could plead for them no longer, their fate was determined; and the execution of the just judgments of God upon them was only delayed, but was sure to take place in the end.

This is the case of a whole nation abandoned of God in this fearful manner. But whatever has been the case of one nation may not only be the case of another

another nation, but also that of any *individual*; and it is the possibility of this being the case of our own nation, or of ourselves, that makes it to demand our attention. To the Almighty, with respect to moral government, a nation is as one man, and one man as a whole nation. He punishes vice, and he rewards virtue, in both; and whatever is agreeable to wisdom and equity in the case of a nation is likewise agreeable to wisdom and equity with respect to individuals. Supposing, therefore, that the cases are exactly similar, I shall, in discoursing from these words,

First, State the case with as much exactness as I can;

Secondly, Show the probability and danger of it with respect to human nature; and

Thirdly, Consider the equity and propriety of it with respect to God; applying the whole doctrine to the cases of individuals.

In the first place, I am to state this case with as much exactness as I can.

In general, when any person is in the condition of Ephraim in my text, so that God shall, as it were, say of him, *he is joined to idols* (he is joined to his lusts and vices), *let him alone*, his day of trial and probation may be said to be, to all important purposes, expired. He is no longer a *subject of moral government*, because he is utterly incapable of *amendment*, which is the end of all moral discipline; and though, through the goodness of God, which is over all his works, he
may

may live many years longer, yet his final doom is in reality fixed; his sentence is irrevocable, and the execution of it only deferred.

Not that the reformation of any sinner is ever *naturally impossible*, or that, if he truly repent, he shall not find favour at the hand of God. For *nothing is impossible with God*, and a *truly humble, penitent, and contrite heart* he will never despise, whenever and wheresoever he finds it. But the change may be *morally impossible*, or not to be expected according to the usual course of things; and this is sufficient to authorize us to make use of the language.

Supposing a man to have lived so long in the habits of vice, as to have lost all relish for every thing that is good, that he has no pleasure in the company of the sober, the virtuous, and the pious, but only in that of those who are as abandoned as himself, and that the greatest satisfaction he has is in corrupting others (and further than this depravity cannot go); supposing that, in the course of his life, this man, besides every advantage for *instruction*, had experienced a great variety of prosperity and adversity; and yet that prosperity, instead of making him more thankful and obedient to God, made him forget him the more; and that afflictions, instead of softening and bettering his heart, only served to harden it, and make it worse: Do I say that this abandoned wretch *cannot* be reformed, that God cannot, by any methods whatever, work upon his heart, and bring him to serious thought

and reflection? By no means. That would be to limit the power of God, to whom all things are possible. He can work *miracles*, if he should think proper so to do. But then I say this would be a proper miracle, such as, at this day, we are not authorized to expect. And judging by what we see actually to take place, and what we must conclude to be just and right, God *may*, and probably *will*, leave such a one to himself. He may determine to try him no longer by any of those methods of his providence which are usually employed for the purpose of reclaiming sinners.

For instance, afflictions, and especially bodily sickness, are a great means of softening and bettering the minds of men : but God may resolve that he shall be visited with no remarkable sickness, till he be overtaken with his last ; or he may cut him off by a sudden and unexpected death, in the midst of his crimes. The death of our friends, or any calamities befalling them, have often been the means, in the hands of divine providence, of bringing to serious thought and reflection those who have survived those strokes ; but God may resolve never to touch him in so tender a part, but rather make use of his death as a warning and example to others.

Now, when a man is thus *left of God*, and no providential methods are used to reclaim him, we may conclude that he is irrecoverably lost. It is in fact, and according to the course of nature (and we know of no deviations from it since the age of the apostles), absolutely

absolutely impossible that he should repent, or be reformed. And though he should continue to live ever so long after God has thus forsaken him; he is only, in the awful language of scripture, *treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath; and there remains nothing for him but a fearful looking for of judgment, and of that fiery indignation which shall consume the adversaries of God.*

Having thus stated the nature of this awful case, and shown in what sense, and on what account, it may be said that it is quite desperate and hopeless, viz. because it may be morally impossible that he should ever truly repent and be reformed, by reason of God's withdrawing those providential methods by which he uses to work upon men's hearts, and to bring them to serious thought and reflection, I come

2dly, To consider the *probability* and *danger* of the case with respect to human nature; how far men are liable to fall into this fearful condition, and by what means they fall into it.

A man's case may be pronounced to be thus desperate, when his mind is brought into such a state as that the necessary means of reformation shall have lost their effect upon him; and this is the natural consequence of confirmed habits of vice, and a long-continued neglect of the means of religion and virtue; which is so far from being an impossible or improbable case, that it is a very general one.

In order to be the more sensible of this, you are to
consider

consider that vice is a *habit*, and therefore of a subtle and insinuating nature. By easy, pleasing, and seemingly harmless actions, men are often betrayed into a *progress*, which grows every day more alarming. Our virtuous resolutions may break with difficulty. It may be with pain and reluctance that we commit the *first acts* of sin, but the *next* are easier to us; and use, custom, and habit, will at last reconcile us to any thing, even things the very idea of which might at first be shocking to us.

Vice is a thing not to be trifled with. You may, by the force of vigorous resolution, break off in the early stages of it; but *habits*, when they have been confirmed, and long continued, are obstinate things to contend with, and are hardly ever entirely subdued. When bad habits *seem* to be overcome, and we think we have got rid of our chains, they may perhaps only have become, as it were, *invisible*; so that when we thought we had recovered our freedom, and strength, so as to be able to repel any temptation, we may lose all power of resistance on the first approach of it.

A man who has contracted a habit of vice, and been abandoned to sinful courses for some time, is never out of danger. He is exactly in the case of a man who has long laboured under a chronical disease, and is perpetually subject to a relapse. The first shock of any disorder a man's constitution may bear, and, if he be not naturally subject to it, he may perfectly

fectly recover, and be out of danger. But when the general habit is such, as that a *relapse* is apprehended, a man's friends and physicians are alarmed for him.

The reason is, that a relapse does not find a person in the condition in which he was when the first fit of illness seized him. That gave his constitution a shock, and left him enfeebled, so as to be less able to sustain another shock; and especially if it be more violent than the former, as is generally the case in those disorders.

In the very same dangerous situation is the man who has ever been addicted to vicious courses. He can never be said to be *perfectly recovered*, whatever appearances may promise, but is always in danger of a fatal relapse. He ought, therefore, to take the greatest care of himself. He is not in the condition of a person who has *never known the ways of wickedness*. He ought, therefore, to have the greatest distrust of himself, and set a double watch over his thoughts, words, and actions, for fear of a surprise. For if once, through the force of any particular temptation, he should fall back into his former vicious courses, and his former disposition should return, his case will probably be desperate. He will plunge himself still deeper in wickedness; and his having abstained for a time will only, as it were, have whetted his appetite, and make him swallow down the poison of sin by larger and more eager draughts than ever.

Such persons may be so entirely in the power of

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vicious

vicious habits, that they shall be in no sense *their own masters*. They may even see the danger they are in, wish to free themselves from the habits they have contracted, and yet find they have no force, or resolution, to relieve themselves. They are not to be rescued from *the snare of the destroyer*, and brought to their *right mind*, but by some uncommon and alarming providence; which is in the hands of God, and which he may justly withhold when his patience and long-suffering have been much abused. Justly may he say to such an habitual sinner, as he did to Ephraim in my text; *He is joined to idols*; he is joined to his lusts; *let him alone*. He is determined to have the *pleasure of sin*; let him receive the *wages of sin* also.

This brings me to the third head of my discourse, in which I propose to consider the equity of the proceeding with respect to God. It may be said that it is not agreeable to equity for God to favour some with the means of improvement, and suffer others to abandon themselves to destruction without a possibility of escaping. But I answer, that the persons whose case I have been describing have had, and have outlived, their *day of grace*. God has long exercised forbearance towards them, but they have wearied it out; and it could not be expected to last for ever. They have had gracious invitations to repentance, but they have slighted them all: they *stopped their ears*, and *refused to return*. They have been tried with a great variety both of merciful and

of afflictive providences, but they made no good use of them. *Why then, as the prophet says, should they be stricken any more, when they will only revolt more and more?*

A day of trial and probation, or what is frequently called a *day of grace*, must necessarily have some period; else, when would the time of retribution, when would the time of rewards and punishments, take place? A state of trial necessarily respects some future state, in which men must receive according to their deeds. But this state of trial it has pleased God to make of uncertain duration, no doubt to keep us always watchful, having our accounts always in readiness, because *in such an hour as we think not our Lord may come*, and require them. The state of trial, therefore, is with some of much longer duration than it is with others; and God is the sovereign arbiter of every thing relating to it. He makes our lives longer or shorter, as seems good in his sight, and at death a state of trial ends of course. We may, therefore, as well pretend to question the justice and equity of God's cutting us off by death when and in what manner he pleases, as arraign his justice in sealing up our doom, though while we live, whenever he pleases. No doubt, God gives to every person a sufficient trial; for *he is not willing that any should perish, but had rather that all should come to repentance*. We may therefore assure ourselves, that he will not cease to endeavour to promote the reformation of a sinner by all

proper means, till he shall become absolutely incorrigible, and the methods taken to reclaim him would be abused and lost. And if we consider that every means of improvement neglected adds to a man's guilt, and aggravates his condemnation, it may even appear to be mercy in the Divine Being to grant a person no further means of improvement, after it has been found, by actual trial, that they would only have been abused, and therefore have proved highly injurious to him. Not but that it might have been sufficient to silence every cavil of this kind, to say, as Paul does on a similar occasion, *Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?* or with Abraham, *Shall not the judge of all the earth do that which is right?* But it is proper to show that *in the midst of judgment God remembers mercy.*

There is a very pathetic description of the case of a sinner, who, after a relapse into vicious courses, is justly abandoned of God, to seek his own destruction, in a parable of our Saviour's, formed upon the popular opinion of the Jews of his age concerning demons or evil spirits, Matt. xii. 43, &c. "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return to my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in,

“in, and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.” The application of this parable either to the case of the Jews (for whom it seems to have been originally intended) or to particular persons, who after a seeming reformation have relapsed into vicious courses, is too obvious, to be particularly dwelt upon.

To come, therefore, to a general application of this doctrine; Let all persons who are sensible of the folly and evil of sinful courses, and of the danger of persisting in them, make a speedy and effectual retreat. Let us do nothing by halves. To be lukewarm in religion, is in effect to have no religion at all. We must give God our hearts; we must give him an undivided affection; for we cannot truly love God and mammon, or the world, at the same time. In this unsettled and fluctuating disposition, temptations will have a great advantage over us. We shall ever be in danger of throwing off all restraint, and of running into every kind of riot and excess, till nothing on the part of divine providence shall occur to reclaim us.

In reality, my brethren, and to every valuable end and purpose, the term of our trial and probation does generally expire long before the term of our natural lives. For, how few are there whose characters, whose dispositions, or habits of mind, undergo any considerable change after they are grown to man's estate! Our tempers and general characters are usually fixed

as soon as we have fixed ourselves in a regular employment and mode of life. For, after this, we see almost every person continue the very same to the end of his life. Some remarkable providential occurrence, some fit of sickness, or some unforeseen misfortune of any kind, may alarm those who have been addicted to vicious courses, and for a time bring them to serious thought and reflection; but if they be turned thirty or forty years of age, how soon do the serious purposes, which they then form, go off, and their former modes of thinking and living return! Not only with respect to *temper* and *disposition of mind*, as it relates to virtue or vice, but with respect to those habits which are indifferent to morals, we see that, excepting one case perhaps in a thousand, they are not subject to change after the period that I have mentioned. Any habits that we contract early in life, any particular bias or inclination; any particular cast of thought, or mode of conversation; even any particular gesture of body, as in walking, sitting, &c. we are universally known by among our acquaintance, from the time that we properly *enter life* to the time that we have done with it; as much as we are by the tone of our voice, or our hand-writing, which likewise are of the nature of *habits*, or *customs*.

These observations may be applied in a great measure even to matters of *opinion*, (though, naturally, nothing seems to be more variable) as well

as to mental and corporeal *habits*. A man who has studied, or who fancies he has studied, any particular subject, sooner or later *makes up his mind*, as we say, with respect to it; and after this, all arguments, intended to convince him of his mistake, only serve to confirm him in his chosen way of thinking. An argument or evidence of any kind, that is entirely *new* to a man, may make a proper impression upon him; but if it has been often proposed to him, and he has had time to view and consider it, so as to have hit upon any method of evading the force of it, he is afterwards quite callous to it, and can very seldom be prevailed upon to give it any proper attention. This consideration accounts, in some measure, both for the great influence of christianity on its first publication, when the doctrines were *new* and *striking*, and also for the absolute indifference with which the same great truths are now heard in all christian countries.

It accounts also for the more striking effect of the preaching of the methodists than ours. They find people utterly ignorant, to whom the truths, the promises, and the threatenings, of the gospel are really *new*; whereas we have to do with persons who have heard them from their infancy, and have, alas, acquired a habit of disregarding them. But then our people, having, in general, been brought up in habits of virtue, such great changes of character and conduct are less necessary in their case. It is to be regretted, however, that they too seldom exceed that mediocrity

mediocrity of character which they acquire in early life. I speak of the generality among us. For others are remarkable exceptions, persons of *distinguished and heroic virtue*, in full proportion to the superior advantages which they enjoy.

The resistance which the mind makes to the admission of truth, when it has been strongly prejudiced against it, is evident both with respect to the belief of christianity in general, and of particular opinions relating to it. There are many persons, by no means defective with respect to *judgment* in other things, of whose conversion to christianity we can have no more reasonable expectation than of the sun rising in the west, even though they should consent to hear, or read, every thing that we could propose to them for that purpose. There are also many conscientious and intelligent roman-catholics, absurd as we justly think their principles to be, who would deliberately read the best defences of protestantism, without any other effect than that of being more confirmed in their prejudices against it. The same may be said of persons professing other modes of faith; so that their persuasions are not to be changed, except by such a method as that which was applied for the conversion of the apostle Paul. The same observation may also be applied to many opinions, and especially to a *general bias, or turn of thinking*, in matters of a political nature, and even in subjects of philosophy, or criticism.

Facts of this kind, of which we are all witnesses,
and

and which come within the observation of every day in our lives, show, in a very striking light, what care we ought to take in forming our *first judgments* of things, and in contracting our *first habits*, and therefore deserve the more especial attention of *young persons*. For we see that when these *principles* and *habits* are once properly formed, they are generally fixed for life. Whatever is fact with respect to *mankind in general*, we ought to conclude to be the case with respect to *ourselves*; that the cause is in the constitution of our *common nature*, and dependent upon the fundamental laws of it, and, no doubt, a wise and useful part of it; and we must not expect that *miracles* will be wrought in our favour.

To show that there is the greatest advantage, as well as some inconvenience, resulting from this *disposition to fixity*, as we call it, in our own nature, let it be observed, that if there was nothing *fixed* or *permanent* in the *human character*, we should find the same inconvenience as if any other law of nature was unsettled. We should be perpetually at a loss how to conduct ourselves, how to behave to mankind in general, and even to our own particular friends and acquaintance, especially after having been for any space of time absent from them. We do not expect to find persons the very same in all changes of condition or circumstances, as in sickness and health, prosperity and adversity, &c. but then we generally know

know what *kind of change* to expect in them in those circumstances, and we regulate our conduct towards them by our experience of the usual effect of similar changes.

These observations, when applied to *opinions*, may serve to amuse us, but when they are applied to *practice* they ought seriously to alarm us. Let all those, therefore, who, being at all advanced in life, see reason to be dissatisfied with themselves, with their disposition of mind, and their general conduct, be alarmed; for there is certainly the greatest reason for it, probably much more than they are themselves aware of. Persons in this state of mind always flatter themselves with a time when they shall have more leisure for repentance and reformation; but, judging from observation on others, which is the surest guide that they can follow (infinitely better than their own imaginations), they may conclude, that it is almost a certainty that such a time will never come.

If they should have the *leisure* for repentance and reformation which they promised themselves, it is not probable that sufficient *strength of resolution* will come along with it. Indeed, all resolutions to repent at a future time are necessarily insincere, and must be a mere deception; because they imply a preference of a man's present habits and conduct, that he is really *unwilling* to change them, and that nothing but necessity would lead him to make any attempt of the kind.

kind. In fact, he can only mean that he will discontinue *particular actions*; his *habits*, or *temper of mind*, remaining the same.

Besides, a real, effectual repentance, or reformation, is such a total change in a man, as cannot, in the nature of things, take place in a short space of time. A man's habits are formed by the scenes he has gone through, and the impressions which they have made upon him; and when death approaches, a man has not another life, like this, to live over again. He may, even on a death-bed, most sincerely *wish* that he had a pious and benevolent disposition, with the love of virtue in all its branches: but that *wish*, though it be ever so sincere and earnest, can no more produce a proper change in his mind, than it can restore him to health, or make him taller, or stronger, than he is.

The precise time when this confirmed state of mind takes place, or, in the language of scripture, the time when any person is thus *left of God*, or *left to himself*, cannot be determined. It is necessarily various and uncertain. But, in general, we may say, that when any person has been long abandoned to vicious courses, when vice is grown into a habit with him, and especially when his vices are more properly of a *mental nature*, such as a disposition to *envy*, *malice*, or *selfishness* (which are the most inveterate, the most difficult to be eradicated, of all vices); when neither health nor sickness, prosperity nor ad-
versity;

verity; when neither a man's own reflections, the remonstrances of his friends, nor admonitions from the pulpit, have any visible effect upon him; when, after this, we see no great change in his worldly affairs, or connexions, but he goes on from day to day, from month to month, and from year to year, without any sensible alteration, there is reason to fear that he is fallen into this *fatal security*, that he is, as it were, *fallen asleep*, and that this sleep will be *the sleep of death*.

However, a shadow of hope is not to be despised. One chance in a thousand is still a chance; and there are persons whose vigour of mind is such, that, when sufficiently roused, they are equal to almost any thing. Let those, therefore, who see their danger at any time of life, be *up and doing, working out their salvation with fear and trembling, that, if possible, they may flee from the wrath to come*.

THE END.

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