

THE
INTENT AND PROPRIETY
OF THE
SCRIPTURE MIRACLES
CONSIDERED AND EXPLAINED,
In a SERIES of
SERMONS,

Preached in the Parish Church of
St. MARY LE-BOW,
In the Years 1769, 1770, and 1771;
For the LECTURE founded by
The Hon. ROBERT BOYLE, Esq;
By the Rev. Dr. HENRY OWEN,
Rector of St. OLAVE, Hart-Street.
And FELLOW of the ROYAL SOCIETY.

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O F

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*Yet they tempted and provoked the most high
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*But turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their
fathers: they were turned aside like a deceit-
ful bow.*

*For they provoked him to anger with their high
places; and moved him to jealousy with their
graven images.*

When God heard this, he was wroth; and greatly abhorred Israel. p. 1.

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S E R M O N XIII.

PSAL. lxxviii. ver. 56—59.

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God, and kept not his testimonies:*

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greatly abhorred Israel.*

WHAT influence or effect the foregoing manifestations of divine power actually had on the minds of the Canaanites, we are not expressly told. From certain cir-

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cumstances

cumstances it should seem, that they had indeed but very little; if, perhaps, any at all. For it is particularly remarked, that “there was not one city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all the rest they took in battle. For it was of the Lord,” says the text, “to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly^h:” that is, in other words—as they were a vile and obstinately wicked race, that would not accept of the terms proposed, God therefore judicially permitted their obstinacy to operate and run its course; to imbolden and urge them forwards, notwithstanding the miraculous warnings they had received, “to fight his people” to their own destruction.

But how small so ever the effect might be, which these mighty wonders produced on the Canaanites; yet certain it is, that they wrought most powerfully on the children of Israel: and, as appears from their conduct

^h Josh. xi. 19, 20.

on the supposed defection of some of their brethren, changed that propensity, which they had formerly shewn towards idolatry, into an utter dread and detestation of itⁱ.

Happy would it have been, had they always continued in this disposition; which the law and its sanctions had a peculiar tendency to cultivate and maintain. But their zeal gradually abated; and expired at length (at about twenty years from the death of Joshua) in a shameful, and almost universal apostasy^k. The source of their apostasy was derived from hence—that they not only spared the idolatrous nations, whom they were commanded to destroy; but, conversing with, and mingling among them, served “their idols, and learned their works^l.”

The first palpable defection broke out, it seems, in the tribe of Ephraim, and the house of Micah^m; who erected for his own

ⁱ Josh. xxii. 11---31.

^k Judg. ii. 10---13.

^l Psal. cvi. 34---36.

^m Judg. xvii. 1---13.

use a kind of oratory or tabernacle; placed in it two images and teraphim; and, having made an ephod and other habiliments, consecrated one of his sons (till he procured a Levite) to officiate as priest in this heterogeneous service. I call it *heterogeneous*, because it evidently consisted of the worship of God and the worship of idols, united and blended togetherⁿ.

In a short time after, this species of idolatry was fully adopted, as the whole furniture of the oratory was carried off, by the northern branch of the tribe of Dan. For “they took away the graven image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image, which Micah had made, and set them up in their own city; where the Levite and his sons were priests, until the day of the captivity of the Land^o;” or, as it is commonly understood, and might originally have been written, “till the day of the cap-

ⁿ Vide SELDEN, De Diis Syris. Syntag. I. cap. 2.

• Judg. xviii. 14—30.

tivity of the Ark^p—” till the time that God, as the Psalmist speaks, “forsook,” in his anger, “the tabernacle of Shiloh; and delivered his strength,” his ark, “into captivity; his glory into the enemy’s hand^q.”

Nor were the other tribes less faulty in this respect, than those we have already mentioned. For “they also forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods; the gods of the people that were round about them. They served Baalim and Ashtaroth^r ;” that is, the *heavenly host*; and particularly the *sun* and moon; whom they publicly adored with all the formalities of heathenish rites.

This base, idolatrous worship naturally corrupted their moral principles; and led

^p An ancient Transcriber might easily mistake ׀ןאן for ׀אן, and so produce the present Reading; which yet agrees neither with the following verse, viz. ver. 31—nor with the truth of history. See the Commentators.

^q Ps. lxxviii. 60, 61.

^r Judg. ii. 12, 13.

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them on, especially as there was then no power to controul them^s, into all the indulgences of lust and sensuality; into the foul commission of the most flagitious crimes.

Of this we meet with a deplorable instance in the history of the tribe of Benjamin; who, dwelling with the Jebusites, and adopting their manners, degenerated so far, and to so vile a degree, as nearly to approach the character of Sodom^t. For they not only rushed, prompted by the rage of brutal passion, into the horrid crimes of adultery and murder; but afterwards, in their cooler hours, and even under the weight of a sober remonstrance, had the assurance and effrontery to avow their deeds, and to stand up in defence of their abominations^u. Such wickedness, it is true, the other tribes were as forward to punish, as this was resolute to defend. But the whole was apparently from the Lord; that he might avenge himself of their evil doings. For since both parties

^s Judg. xvii. 6. xiii. 1. xxi. 25.

^t Ibid. xix. 22—24.

^u Ibid. xx. 12—14.

had,

had, in their several degrees, repeatedly transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and thereby incurred his resentment; he therefore wisely and judicially ordained, that they should now become mutual scourges to each other. And as their sins and transgressions were chiefly owing to their mixing and conversing with the heathen nations; so is it worthy our particular notice, that the tribe of Judah, which first exhibited a bad example in this way*, was expressly commanded “to go up first,” and begin the attack upon Gibeah: in which attack it seems to have sustained, as it justly deserved, a greater loss than any other†.

* Judah was the first, who, doubting the promises of God, failed in his duty of expelling the Canaanites. For when “the Lord was with Judah, and he had driven out the inhabitants of the mountain, yet *he proceeded not* (so the text should be rendered) to drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had *chariots of iron.*” Judg. i. 19. Et sic, quod peccarunt, non potuerunt expellere, &c. says the Targum in locum. But Barak, relying on the divine assistance, afterwards overthrew the host of Jabin, though it was supported by no less than *nine hundred* chariots of *iron.* Judg. iv. 13—16.

† Judg. xx. 18—21.

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But this chastisement, however severe—for it nearly extirpated one tribe, and greatly weakened all the rest—was yet insufficient to reduce the Israelites to a sense of their duty, and of the allegiance they had vowed to God. For “they ceased not from their evil doings, and from their stubborn way^z ;” but obstinately persisted both in their idolatrous and vicious practices, as if nothing had been done to reclaim them. Nay, they proceeded so far, as not only to make a league with the Canaanites ; but, in open defiance of the law, to make likewise intermarriages with them : the consequence of which was, as it had been long foretold, that they were drawn away, not merely to worship other gods in conjunction with their own ; but even totally to neglect, totally to “ forget the Lord their God, who had done such great things for them.”

Hereupon then, “ the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people ; inasmuch that he abhorred his own inheritance. He gave them over into the hands of the heathen,

^z Judg. ii. 19.

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who grievously oppressed them, and had them in subjection^a.” Yet nevertheless, such was his goodness and loving kindness, that, whenever they repented, and returned to their duty, “he regarded their affliction^b,” and raised up judges to be their deliverers. But, on the other hand, such was their folly and amazing perverseness, that the Judge, who had delivered them, was no sooner dead, than they revolted, and lapsed again: and again experienced the same calamities^c. So that the whole of this period was, in fact, nothing else, but an alternate succession of sinning and repentance on the part of the people, and of favour and severity on the part of God. But “these differences of administration,” so wisely adjusted to their character and conduct, will evidently appear, on due reflection, to be equally subservient to the purposes of the main design—to the suppression of idolatry, and the advancement of true religion.

^a Psal. cvi. 39---41

^b Ib. ver. 43.

^c Judg. ii. 16—19.

What

What it really was, that occasioned such defections among the Israelites; that prompted them so frequently to forsake their God, and run into the idolatrous customs of the nations, it is no easy matter to determine. But whether you suppose, that they thought the service of the true God a strange, rigid, and burdensome institution; and were therefore unwilling to bear it^d:—Or, that the temptations of the heathen worship (its pomp, splendor, and amusement, so agreeable to the corrupt inclinations of nature) operated upon them with such enchanting force, as they were not able to resist^e:—Or, that the long-confirmed prejudice in favour of local deities, and their superstitious reverence for the guardian gods of great and prosperous nations, led them to embrace and adopt their rites, in vain expectation of being made happy by them^f:—Which ever of these you fix upon

^d See Bp. PATRICK's Comment on Judg. ii. 12.

^e See PYLE's Pref. to Paraphr. on the Old Testament, vol. iv.

^f See Bp. WARBURTON's Div. Leg. vol. iv. Book v. § 2. p. 187, &c.

as the chief source of their idolatries; you will find, in the present dispensation of Providence, a powerful corrective applied to each. For,

If the grandeur and prosperity of the Assyrian empire allured them to adopt the Assyrian deities, in hopes of being advanced, by their benevolence and favour, to the like degree of eminence and power; what method can you conceive more proper to convince them, that such deities could neither befriend nor support them, than this which Providence now employed?—than his delivering them up into the hand of Cushan, king of Assyria; who enslaved and oppressed them for eight years together? In the course of which time they must needs perceive, that the gods they had chosen, were so far from affording them relief or profit, that they were really the cause of their thraldom and distress,

If their superstitious veneration for local deities led them to worship the gods of Ca-

8 Judg. iii. 8.

naan,

naan, for fear of some vengeance, which these gods, if neglected, might inflict upon them^h; how clearly did the Almighty, by securing them, when obedient, from all calamities; and by afflicting them, when they deviated into such strange services, with every kind of evil; how clearly, I say, did he evince the futility of this notion? How manifestly did he shew them by these proceedings, that there was nothing which they ought in reason to dread, so much as the vengeance of him alone, who had declared himself to be “a jealous God?”—A God that would never suffer his honour to be transferred, with impunity, to another: A God that could, and did stir up the very worshipers of these local deities, whom his people had foolishly adopted, to avenge the affronts, which they had repeatedly offered, by their base defections, to his divine majesty.

If the splendor and magnificence of the heathen worship, or the sensual rites with

^h Judg. vi. 10. 2 Kings xvii, 35, 38.

which

which it was celebrated, allured the Israelites to a sinful compliance; how sensible of their error must they needs become, whenever they found, as they always did, that they were debased thereby in their nature as men; and depressed in their condition as members of the community?

And lastly, if they deemed their ritual, and the institution they were under, a hard, rigid and burdensome service; how powerfully must the punishments, that attended their apostasy, serve to correct and reform such opinions? For surely they could not but acknowledge, that it was far better, far easier, and more comfortable, to worship the Lord in honour, affluence, and prosperity; than to serve and adore other gods, in oppression, affliction, anguish, and distress:—Afflictions that were always the more severe, as their revolts were more frequent, presumptuous, and provoking.

Now, as these inflictions tended to rectify their wrong principles, and to call them off from their idolatrous practices; so did that exuberance of mercy, which God exemplified

fied in his readiness to relieve their miseries, kindly invite, and warmly encourage them to amend their lives, and again embrace his worship and service. For “when he saw their adversity,” and found them disposed to return to their duty, “he heard their complaint,” and redressed their grievances. No sooner did they seek the Lord, but they experienced his kindness in a speedy deliverance. And in every deliverance he wisely contrived, that they should clearly see the power of his arm; and be convinced to whom they owed their success. He left them indeed, in most cases, so little to do for themselves, that they could never attribute the glory of the act to their own prowess; but were always obliged to “ascribe to his name the praise” and the honour of what had been done.

Thus, when they assembled in a body of above *thirty thousand*, and purposed to attack the Midianites; God, who had determined to grant them success, yet refused to employ so *large* a force, for fear of diminishing his own glory. He therefore reduced them to
three

three hundred men, to whom he vouchsafed a complete victoryⁱ; and vouchsafed it in such a manner, as “made his power known among the heathen, and his wonders among all people^k.”

So likewise, when he commanded Barak with ten thousand men to fall on the confederate forces of Jabin^l; though much might be owing to the valour of the Israelites, who chased and slew them with a great slaughter; yet, God took care to make it appear, that they were indebted for the victory to his assistance. He visibly espoused their cause; and made the gentile gods the instruments of his vengeance on these gentile idolaters. For “the stars” and elements “fought against Sisera^m—” the tempest and hailstones beat down part of his host;

ⁱ Judg. vii. 2—7.

^k Psal. xcvi. 3.

^l Judg. iv. 14, &c.

^m Judg. v. 20, 21. JOSEPH. Ant. Jud. lib. v. c. v. § 4.

and

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and the swellings of Kishon swept away numbers of the fugitives ⁿ.

Such marvellous interpositions, so critically exerted in favour of the Israelites, and so accurately adapted to the exigences of their condition, did not only serve “to make known unto the sons of men the glorious majesty of the Lord, and the greatness of his excellency;” but also to engage all the wise and considerate among them, “to look up to, and place their confidence in, him” alone: as being well assured, that “there was no other god, that could uphold and deliver after this sort ^o.”

ⁿ The like interposition of divine power, and displayed for the same end, was afterwards visible in that marvellous victory, which JONATHAN obtained over the Philistines at Michmash, 1 Sam. xiv. 6—23. As also in that wonderful discomfiture of the united forces of Moab and Ammon, which basely invaded the land of Judah, in the days of Jehoshaphat. 2 Chron. xx. 1—24. To this head may be referred likewise the miraculous influx of water into the valley in the wilderness of Edom, for the support and refreshment of the confederate armies that were going against Moab, &c. 2 Kings ii. 16—20.

^o Dan. iii. 29.

With

With respect to the miracles, wrought at the request of particular judges, to assure them of success, or to encourage them in their undertakings ; and which therefore may be looked upon as so many episodes, or digressions from the general dispensation ; the propriety of these must be explained by, as it depends upon, the genius, temper, and situation of the persons, for whose sake they were so performed. And if we view them through this medium, they will appear to be wisely and perfectly adapted to satisfy the doubts of those desponding commanders, and to answer the ends for which they were exerted.

If the distressed Gideon, for example, thought, that “ the Lord had forsaken his people ;” and, because they were suffered to be so grievously oppressed, doubted almost the truth of the miracles, that were said to have been formerly wrought in their favour^p ; what surer sign could he wish to be shewn, in proof that God was still among them, than that of his bringing “ fire from the

^p Judg. vi. 12, 13.

rock^a?" And since he now saw, that miracles were not ceased; how fully must he be convinced, that the Lord could as easily destroy the Midianites, as he had then consumed the materials of his sacrifice? And lastly, what stronger assurance could he possibly obtain, that God would be with him, and prosper the enterprize he was going upon, than this gracious token of his acceptance of him^r?

And if Gideon's associates (who were, probably, most of them shepherds; and joined him, perhaps, at the time of shearing) wanted to be confirmed in the truth of his commission; how graciously did the Lord, by rendering "the fleece wet or

^a Judg. vi. 21.

^r The most ancient and evident token of God's acceptance, was his consuming the sacrifice by fire. Hence, where we read, Gen. iv. 4. that "God had *respected* unto Abel's offering;" THEODOTION says, *ἐντίμω*, "he *fixed* it." See Gen. xv. 17. Lev. ix. 24. 1 Kings xviii. 38. 1 Chron. xxi. 26. 2 Chron. vii. 1. See also Servius in *Æn.* xii. ver. 200.

dry,"

dry^s," condescend to indulge their request? And how suitably was the proof adapted both to their capacities, and their profession?

Hence then it appears, that these manifold exertions of divine power; whether displayed in support of particular judges, who were all, by the bye, strenuous reformers; or manifested for the deliverance of the people in general, when duly sensible of the heinousness of their apostasy, and penitently disposed to return to their God: hence, I say, it appears, that all these wonders, on whatever occasion at first wrought, yet ultimately conspired, and with no small efficacy, to promote that great and gracious end, which was the constant aim of divine government: I mean, the preservation and improvement of the true religion, in opposition to the reigning idolatry.

^s Judg. vi. 37—40. That this miracle was chiefly intended for the support of his doubtful and timid people, is plain from the next chapter, ver. 3.

But there is another event still to be considered ; which, as it closes this part of the divine dispensation, places likewise the intention of it in a clearer and more obvious light. In the days of Eli, the people of Israel, by the remissness of discipline, and the bad examples that, were set before them, became excessively profligate and impious. This excess of wickedness provoked the Almighty to deliver them up into the hands of the Philistines ; who, in a pitched battle, not only overthrew them with a great slaughter ; but, to complete their misfortune, took from them the ark of God †.

Now, this event, if not counterbalanced, must inevitably prove an unspeakable detriment to the cause of religion. For the Israelites, we may presume, would continually have deviated more and more from the pure worship and service of God, when they saw he was departed from them. And the Philistines, however they might dread

† 1 Sam. iv. 10, 11.

him before^v, yet, viewing him now in the contemptible light of a vanquished captive to their own deity, must lose all farther veneration for him. In this critical situation of things, when the Jewish œconomy seems to have been brought to a full stand; may we not reasonably expect, that God would interpose in some extraordinary manner, as well to vindicate his own authority, as to restore the ark to his despairing people? It is surely natural to expect it: nor are we left to expect in vain. For, when the Philistines

^v We read 1 Sam. iv. 7, 8. “And the Philistines were *afraid*; for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Wo unto us: who shall deliver us from the hand of this mighty God? This is the God that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness.” Such is the reading of our present Hebrew copies; but surely *this* reading cannot be true. For the Egyptians never reached “the wilderness;” and therefore could not be smitten with plagues” *there*. The fact is, that the Hebrew transcribers have been guilty of a grievous omission; which is in part supplied by the Arabic version, but more fully thus by the Chaldee paraphrase—*Qui percutit Ægyptios in omni percussione, et populo suo fecit mirabilia in deserto*. Hence it is to be hoped, that some Heb. MS. will be found at last to exhibit the following supplement—**וְלִצְמוֹ עָשָׂה נִפְלְאוֹת בְּמִדְבָּר**.

had carried the ark to Ashdod; and had placed it, as a signal monument of his victory, by the image of their god Dagon; behold, the next morning, they found their god, fallen from his pedestal, and lying prostrate before the ark*. An evident token of his inferiority and subjection! But evident as it was, his deluded votaries were yet blind to it. The following day brought them, however, fuller evidence. For when they saw him again in the same posture of humiliation, dismembered of his head and hands^y, they could no longer doubt, that his fall was owing to the prevalence of that God, that presided over the ark; and whom Dagon had neither the policy to evade, nor the power to withstand.

When the Lord had thus vanquished him, if I may so speak, in his *person*; he then proceeded to triumph over him likewise in his *kingdom*. Dagon was the god

* 1 Sam. v. 2, 3.

^y 2 Sam. v. 4.

of husbandry^a; and supposed to preside over the fruits of the earth: therefore the Almighty, to expose his weakness, caused a prodigious number of mice to spring up, and ravage the fields; which, feeble creatures as they were, yet, maugre all his divinity, devoured entirely the produce of the ground—sparing neither corn nor plants^a.

Seeing these alarming wonders, the Philistines, perhaps, might think it now particularly advisable to detain the ark, as a means of engaging this superior deity. But God soon convinced them, that he chose not to reside among them. For he smote them with sore and heavy plagues^b till the ark was dismissed; and shewed the concern he had for its return, by restraining the rage, and directing the steps of those

^a Δαγῶν ὅς ἐστι Σίλων, i. e. frumenti præses. PHIL. Byb. apud EUSEB. Præp. Evang. lib. I. c. x. p. 36.

^a 1 Sam. vi. 5. JOSEPH. Ant. Jud. lib. vi. c. i. § 1.

^b 1 Sam. v. 6—12. Psal. lxxviii. 66. See also HERODOT. Clio. c. 105.

unruly kine that were yoked to the carriage^c.

The Philistines, being eased on the departure of the ark, were thoroughly sensible of the hand that chastised them: nor could they well forget in a short time the mighty power and energy of it. But when they did forget, and made another assault upon the Israelites; they felt it again in a dreadful storm of thunder and lightening, attended with strong concussions of the earth, which not only dismayed, but totally overthrew them^d.

Nor was this miracle better suited to remind the Philistines of the supremacy of Jehovah; than it was to confirm the very same truth to his own people; who were but just reclaimed from the idolatrous worship of the host of heaven. Reclaimed however they were; and, after all their fluctuations, brought at length, under the wise and vigorous administration of Samuel, to

^c 1 Sam. vi. 10—15.

^d 1 Sam. vii. 10. JOSEPH. Ant. Jud. lib. vi. c. ii. § 2.

a settled course of piety and virtue. An effect, which, at the same time that it shews the intention of this branch of divine government; demonstrates likewise the suitableness and propriety of those wondrous manifestations, by which it was supported and carried on. And hence we discover on the whole, as well the patience and long-suffering, as the wisdom and power of God. To whom, for these, and for all other instances of his marvellous kindness, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour and glory, adoration and praise, both now, and for evermore. *Amen.*

S E R M O N XIV.

P S A L. lxxviii. 70—72.

*He chose David his servant, and took him
from the sheep-folds :*

*From following the ewes great with young, he
brought him to feed Jacob his people, and
Israel his inheritance.*

*So he fed them according to the integrity of
his heart ; and guided them by the skilfulness
of his hands.*

THE Israelites, under the vigorous administration of Samuel, were brought at length, as we have already seen, to a tolerable notion of the pre-eminence and sovereignty

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verignty of the true God; to a tolerable sense of their obligations to him; and in consequence thereof, to a tolerable regularity of life and manners. This conduct on their part, maintained by the prophet's close application, disposed the Almighty to be favourable unto them; and to bless and prosper them for a long season.

When Samuel was afterwards advanced in years, and grown unequal to the burden of his office; he committed the government of the Israelites to his sons. But these sons of his, elated with power, and the Israelites in general, debauched by prosperity, unhappily forgot themselves; and fell into base and wicked practices. His sons became vain, unjust, and luxurious^c; and the people, ungodly, refractory, and ambitious. In the ardour of their ambition, eager of shining in princely grandeur, and of sharing the distinguished offices of state; the heads of the tribes, taking umbrage at the unwarrantable conduct of his sons, tumultuously accosted the venerable prophet, and arrogantly de-

^c 1 SAM. viii. 3. JOSEPH. Ant. Jud. l. vi. c. iii. § 2.

manded a king. The *theocracy* no longer suited their humour. They wanted a government of another form. And nothing would now content them, but a *regal* one. “A King must be set over them, to rule and judge them, like all other nations^f.”

This insolent demand, founded in reality on pride and ambition, and not on any concern for the state, was no less displeasing and offensive to God, than it was to his upright and zealous prophet^g. And to both on the same account: because the establishment of a king after the manner of the nations, was the readiest way to lead them again into the customs of the nations; which would have deeply affected the growth and welfare of the true religion.

But insolent as it was, God, however, complied with their demand^h; and, reserving still the chief direction in his own hands, appointed them a king; who should rule and govern them as *his* deputy. And here

^f 1 Sam. viii. 5, 20.

^g Ib. ver. 6, 7.

^h Ib. ver. 9, 22.

again,

again, as the preservation of the œconomy, the great point in view, manifestly required, that both king and people should closely adhere to their religion and law; and faithfully obey the commandments of God; so he strictly enjoined them, in a special charge, to “attend diligently to these thingsⁱ :” and then shewed them by a miraculous storm of “thunder and rain at the time of wheat harvest^k,” that, whenever they offended, God had still a right to chastise them; and would accordingly do it, as often as their transgressions called for it. “If ye do wickedly, ye shall certainly be consumed, both ye and your king^l.” A plain intimation that they were to look upon their king in the light only of God’s deputy—and as one who was therefore bound, if he meant to preserve his dominion and power, to conduct himself with caution and prudence, and act conformably to the divine laws.

ⁱ 1 Sam. xii. 6---15.

^k Ib. ver. 17.

^l Ib. ver. 25.

In the appointment of their first king, God seems to have regarded the notion they entertained of royal majesty; and to have made choice of him accordingly, after the Eastern mode, because of the stateliness of his form and appearance. For the Scripture acquaints us, that “when Saul stood among the people, he was higher than any of them from the shoulders and upwards^m ;” that is, he was very tall, and of a majestic stature: the endowment that we find principally celebrated in all the accounts of Eastern monarchsⁿ.

But whatever external accomplishments he possessed, his turn of mind was but ill adapted to the great purposes for which he was raised. He was so deeply prejudiced in favour of the policies of the neighbouring nations, that he became impiously cold and negligent in the support and advancement of the law of God. This is apparent from several instances:—from his hasty con-

^m 1 Sam. x. 23

ⁿ See HERODOT. lib. vi. c. 20, 77. Alex. ab Alex. lib. iv. c. xxiii. and the Commentators on the place last quoted.

tempt of the prophet's injunction, and his prophane usurpation of the priest's office^o; from his false compassion to those sinners, the Amalekites, whom God had commanded him to destroy^p; from his barbarous slaughter of Abimelech's family, and all the inhabitants of Nob^q, and from his burning that sacred sacerdotal city with fire; as if he meant to dissolve at one stroke the whole system of established worship; “and render the tabernacle,” as Josephus observes, “desitute both of priests and prophets^r.” Instances these, which clearly prove, that he paid little or no regard to the divine constitution of his country; and, consequently, was no longer fit to be intrusted with the guardianship and government of it.—God therefore deposed him: and raised up another in his stead of a quite contrary character. “He chose David his servant, and took him away from the sheep-folds:” took him,

^o 1 Sam. xiii. 8---14.

^p *Ib.* xv. 9.

^q 1 Sam. xxi. 17---19.

^r Antiq. Jud. lib. vi. c. xii. § 7.

“ that

“that he might feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance.” He chose him, because he foresaw, that he was properly disposed to become “his servant;” his true and faithful deputy: and he advanced him to this eminence, that he might shew his fidelity in the vigorous support of the divine dispensation. Nor did David herein ever fail. In this respect he was certainly a “man after God’s own heart;” and however faulty in other things, “as touching the LAW blameless.” His zeal for the *theocracy* was invariably strong. And as he laboured earnestly to promote the service of God, himself; so did he endeavour to infuse into his people the same concern and affection for it. “He fed,” that is, taught “them” the principles of religion, “with a faithful and true heart; and ruled,” that is, guided “them” in the practice of it, “with all his skill and power,”

Had they then, who have been so forward to revile the character of David, but

• Phil. iii. 6:

duly considered the great end for which he was advanced ; and also observed, with impartial eyes, how strenuously he laboured to promote that end ; they must doubtless have acknowledged, that, in his *public* conduct, he fully answered the divine appointment ; perfectly accomplished the divine intention ; and justly merited that glorious title, with which the Scripture honours his memory.

He is called “ the man after God’s own heart,” because he acted “ according to that which was in his heart.” Now, humanly speaking, what was uppermost in God’s heart, but the establishment of his dispensation ? And what could any man do more for the support and advancement of the divine dispensation, than David is known to have done ? He suppressed idolatry throughout all the land ; he established the worship of God at Jerusalem : and to engage his people the more effectually in this worship, he continually improved both the order and magnificence of it, till he brought it to an amazing perfection. He likewise composed
a Book

a Book of Psalms ; which, being publicly recited first in the tabernacle, and then in the temple, tended to exalt the religious sentiments and affections of the people, at the same time that they expressed his own ; and thereby contributed in an eminent degree to the growth and advancement of solid piety. For, as *some* of these Psalms, by setting forth the praises and perfections of Jehovah, helped to inspire his assembled worshipers with higher notions of his glory and greatness^t ; and consequently with a deeper sense of their dependance upon him^u ; so *others* again, by recalling nature to its proper office, and directing the several parts of the universe to recognize and celebrate the God that made it^x ; served to remind the same worshipers of the faith and allegiance they owed him : served to with-hold them from perfidiousness and apostasy ; from running back into the ancient idolatries, and abusing the creation to the dishonour of the Creator.

^t Ps. civ. cxlv. cxlvii.

^u Ibid. cxv.

^x Ibid. cxlviii.

In a word, David was a man of noble endowments and excellent dispositions; all calculated for, conspiring to, and bent upon, that one great purpose of promoting the knowledge and service of God; and, by means thereof, perpetuating the welfare and happiness of his people. Faults, we grant, he had a few; the effects of which he severely felt. But in the main tenour of his life, it must still be confessed, that whatever could be done, either by precept, example, threat, or encouragement, for the suppression of vice, and the propagation of true religion—this he was zealously careful to perform, and conscientiously diligent to put in execution.

He was likewise careful, that the same good principles should be instilled into his son; and solicitous that he should act upon them. Accordingly, when he resigned the kingdom into his hands, he exhorted him to fortitude and manly resolution in the government and regulation of it. And, well knowing that true religion was the grand support of true fortitude, as well as the

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source

source of national happiness, he solemnly charged him, with his dying breath, to pay a strict and faithful obedience to all the laws and commands of God; and to continue steadfast in his duty to him^y.

Solomon attended to his father's advice; and went on, for a time, in a manner perfectly agreeable to it. He built a magnificent temple for the Lord; and graced the service of it with all the embellishments of solemn pomp and engaging splendour: and thereby kept the people in willing obedience to the laws, as well as in a regular attendance on worship, of the great and true God.

Now, if we seriously contemplate these religious institutions, planned by David, and perfected by Solomon; and consider, at the same time, how effectually they were adapted, by their natural agency, to carry on the dispensation of Providence; we shall immediately perceive, that there was no need, during this period, of any miracles to

^y 1 Kings ii. 1---4. 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

support or advance it. Nor indeed do we read of any : unless you think proper to include in *that* term, the wonderful accomplishments of those manifold promises, that were graciously made and annexed to obedience. Of these, as we might well expect, we meet with numerous and frequent instances—not only in the amazing successes which uninterruptedly attended the Israelitic arms ; and in the consequent extension of the kingdom to its predicted boundaries² : but also in various other effects, which signally contributed, while the people placed their confidence in God, to their national security and happiness.

But to see these wonders in their true light, and discover their suitableness to the ends proposed, we must look back to their first commencement ; consider them in the order in which they arise ; and compare them with the circumstances to which they are related. Their commencement I fix at the Exode ; for then it was, that the

² 1 Chron. xiv. 8---17.—xviii. 1---13. 1 Kings iv. 21--24.

Israelites, being taken for a peculiar people, became entitled to peculiar distinction.

And here we are to observe in the first place, that when the Israelites were ready to depart from Egypt, as they had lived long in poverty and oppression, they were, doubtless, but ill provided for their journey. Whatever might be their due, indigent was their condition. They had neither clothes to put on, nor money to buy food. In this situation they evidently wanted a large supply. And that supply was graciously and providentially administered to them. For the Lord enjoined them “to demand of the Egyptians” (in balance probably of their just rights) “jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment. And he gave them favour in the sight of the Egyptians; so that they readily granted them whatever they required^a.” Thus they marched out, by the kind and special influence of heaven, suitably accommodated and amply supplied.

But notwithstanding the provision, that was made for them in this respect; yet,

^a Exod. xi. 2, 3. xii. 35, 36.

when they marched out, they marched, we know, burdened and defenceless—"with their lumber on their backs^b, and nothing else but staves in their hands." They wanted therefore the security of weapons. For they were destined to travel through wild, difficult, and dangerous places; and to work their way at last into the possession of a country, which could only be obtained by force of arms. But how were these arms to be procured? By what possible expedient could human policy contrive to furnish so large a multitude^c? and yet furnished, somehow, they must needs be. But what human policy could not effect, divine Providence easily accomplished. For when God overwhelmed the host of Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen in the Red Sea; he caused that sea, by closing behind upon them^d, to drive
their

^b Exod. xii. 34.

^c About six hundred thousand men. Exod. xii. 37.

^d The sea began to open for the Israelites, from the Arabian shore; and began to close again upon the Egyptians, from their own shore; for in their return they are said "to flee against it." Exod. xiv. 25, 27. By this means the wind and the current
drove

their bodies, together with their armour, full on the shore where the Israelites stood. The Israelites stripped them, and accoutred themselves^c;—and werethus prepared (which is a striking circumstance) to vanquish Canaan with the arms of Egypt.

These marvellous instances of divine favour, displayed towards them on their first outset, were excellently calculated to create in the Israelites (which was very needful) a pious hope and firm reliance on God in all future occurrences.

And in the land of Canaan, singular occurrences did frequently happen, arising from

drove them directly towards the Israelites, “who saw them dead upon the sea shore:” ver. 30. that is, upon the Arabian shore, where they then stood. A circumstance favourable to the Israelites on various accounts—not only as it supplied them with sufficient arms, and valuable spoils; but as it exhibited a proof to the nations on this side the sea of the vengeance which God had taken on the Egyptians for their opposition to his people; and then, as it served to strike a terrour into all around; and dispose them the more readily to submit to their terms and proposals; or, if they refused, to forewarn them of the dreadful consequences.

^c JOSEPH. Ant. Jud. lib. ii. c. xvi. § 6.

the singular constitution of their law; which, without the immediate protection of heaven, must necessarily have exposed them to heavy distresses.

On their first entrance into that land, they were commanded to renew the rite of circumcision; which gave them a title to the inheritance of the country, and freed them from the reproach of being any longer slaves^f. But, notwithstanding the privileges it brought with it, how strangely impolitic must it seem, how excessively dangerous must it appear, in the eye of common prudence, to circumcise at once a whole army!—that is, to render them totally incapable of fighting, at a time when their enemies were full in view, and might instantly fall upon them! But here we see, let

^f Huc facit, quod Deus populum, recentem a circumcisionis vulnere, sic allocutus sit, (Josh. v. 9.) *Hodie abstuli opprobrium Ægypti a vobis*: hoc est, “ritu illo vos in civium meorum numerum adoptavi, ingenuos et terræ felices hæredes declaravi, et omnia seruitus Ægyptiacæ (dedecoris et opprobrii vestri) signa delevi et monumenta.” SPENCER de Leg. Hebr. lib. I, c. v. § 2. & § 5. Vide et JOSEPHI Antiq. Jud. lib. v. c. 1. § 11. in textu et notis. Ed. *Havercamp*.

human policy say what it will, that piety is the strongest guard, and obedience the best security. For now, in reward of their ready compliance, and also as an encouragement to farther confidence; God, who commanded the rite to be performed—and surely nothing less than the positive command of God could induce the general then to perform it—defended them throughout, by his gracious protection, from all the misfortunes and dangers that might attend it. He kept the Canaanites still and quiet within their own walls, till such time as his people were healed, and sufficiently able to attack them. But to proceed—

When they had gained possession of the promised land, where their law was to operate with its full force; they were strictly enjoined by a particular precept in that law, to suffer their ground to *rest* uncultivated, at the return of every *seventh* year^s: which was therefore called the *sabbatic* year. Now this precept was not only contrary to the com-

^s Lev. xxv. 2—5.

mon rules of rustic œconomy ; but seems to be also productive of many great and grievous inconveniencies. For if the Jews were forbidden to “ sow their ground, or prune their vineyards every *seventh* year ;” the consequence must necessarily be, that, unless they were supported in some extraordinary manner, they would often be liable to numberless hardships in those years, for want of bread, and other provisions^h. But God, who gave them this singular precept, and whose chief aim in giving it was to preserve in their minds a constant sense of their dependance on himself, promised to reward their observance of it with a *double*ⁱ increase the year pre-

^h Lev. xxv. 20.

ⁱ So I understand, Levit. xxv. 21. “ I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for *three* years—” i. e. for the *end* of the sixth, the *whole* seventh, and the *beginning* of the eighth ; which make in all *two* years ; and for which a *double* increase was sufficient. Mr. WHISTON (in his Josephus, vol. iv. p. 524, &c. 8vo.) supposes that something is wanting in the text, relative to the year of *jubilee* ; and says, that God here promises, he would not only give the Jews a *double* crop on the common *sixth* year,

preceding; by which the distresses, that might otherwise happen, were entirely and seasonably prevented. And this promise never failed them, whilst they observed the condition on which it depended. For when they suffered the land to enjoy the rest of the seventh year; “their barns,” on the sixth, “were filled with plenty; and their presses burst out with new wine^k. But whenever they transgressed in this point, whenever they profaned the sabbatic years,

to supply food for *two* years; for that *sixth* year itself; and for the following ordinary *seventh*, or *sabbatic* year: but that he would moreover give them a *triple* crop on the extraordinary *sixth* year, to supply food for *three* years: for that *sixth* year itself, and for the *two* following years of rest, the *sabbatic* year, and the year of *jubilee*. Others however affirm, that the year of *jubilee* never followed the *sabbatic* year; but was always co-incident with it: which, if true, entirely overthrows Mr. Whiston’s interpretation; and supercedes the necessity of the correction he proposes. But after all I must needs confess, that I still suspect there is some error in the text. For “if they sowed the *eighth* year,” ver. 21, they only wanted “the increase of” *two* years; whence it should seem, that, by an early mistake, לשלש was inserted instead of לשנים.

^k Prov. iii. 10.

their

their affairs took instantly another turn^l. Though they sowed their fields, and pruned their vineyards, yet the produce was, to speak in the language of the prophet Haggai, “as when one came to an heap of twenty measures, and behold there were but ten; or, as when one came to the press-fat, for to draw out fifty vessels, and behold there were but twenty. For God smote them with blasting, and with mildew, and with hail, in all the labours of their hands^m.”

Now these distributions of plenty and scarceness, adjusted to the character and conduct of the Jews, whilst they rewarded their observance, or punished their neglect of this precept, plainly demonstrated that the precept itself was derived from God:

^l Their neglect of this law for seventy Sabbatic years is reckoned among the chief causes of their seventy years captivity in Babylon; when the land recovered the full respite, of which they had deprived it before. Comp. Lev. xxvi. 34, &c, with 2 Chron. xxi 21.

^m Ch. ii. 16, 17.

plainly

plainly demonstrated, that God presided over their nation ; took particular cognizance of all their actions ; and would always recompence them as their works deserved. And so far, we see, contributed to support and advance their religion.

But the principal support of their religion and government was manifestly derived from their solemn festivals ; which, at the same time that they inspired them with gratitude to God, united them in friendship with each other, and compacted them firmly in one body. It was therefore of the highest importance that these sacred solemnities should be regularly observed. And hence we find, that “ all the males from the age of twenty, were required to appear before the Lord three times a yearⁿ, ” to acknowledge his mercies, to rejoice in his favour, and to offer up the tribute of thanksgiving to him. Now the singularity of this law is not more remarkable, than the danger of observing it

ⁿ Exod. xxiii. 17. Deut. xvi. 16.

was obvious and alarming. For when the men were removed, at these stated periods, from all quarters to the center of the kingdom, to what dreadful invasions were their borders exposed! and how easily might their enemies ravage their country! But as he, who appointed these solemn assemblies, had promised the Jews, that “no man should desire their land,” when they went up to the celebration of them^o; so their constant experience could witness for him, that he never deserted them at such times; could witness for him, that he impressed the nations around with terror; and thereby preserved his people at ease, and secured their land from all molestations.

Such wonderful instances of paternal regard, exercised towards them on all occasions, plainly shewed them, how much it was their interest, as well as duty, to rely constantly on God’s protection, rather than on their own strength. Whilst they depended upon it, they were always safe; but whenever “they made flesh their arm, and in

^o Exod. xxxiv. 24.

their

their hearts departed from the Lord^p," all their hopes continually failed them; and they were sure to suffer and smart for their folly. Thus, when David in a fit of vanity, commanded the number of his forces to be taken, which manifestly implied, that he prided himself, and placed a degree of confidence in them; how soon was his pride and arrogance checked! and how severely was his folly punished! a grievous pestilence seized his people; which, by sweeping away *seventy thousand* of them together^q, effectually taught him to rely no more on the multitude of his host; but to look up steadfastly for the future to that God, who is the Lord of hosts: to that God, "unto whom alone power belongeth;" and who, with respect to the Jews, always delighted "to make his strength appear perfect in their weakness^r." To forget him therefore now in their prosperity, and vaunt themselves in their own abilities, was evidently a sin of an

^p Jer. xvii. 5.

^q 2 Sam. xxiv. 15.

^r 2 Cor. xii. 9.

heinous nature, and deservedly called for this signal punishment: a punishment which shewed them, how frail and weak they really were; and how much it was their wisdom, in their best condition, to rely on the favour and protection of God.

And indeed, to give them their due, they became so wise from henceforth, as to place a full and implicit confidence in their great and gracious protector; and to pay him a willing, unfeigned obedience. They went on improving in religion and virtue; and were accordingly blessed with a proportionable increase of wealth, happiness, and honour. These they enjoyed without interruption. “For they had peace on all sides round about; and they dwelt safely, every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba.” The Canaanites became also tributaries to them, and eased them of their servile employments; whereby they were all in a manner ennobled, being favoured with admission into the offices of

1 Kings iv. 25.

state^c. They lived moreover in high esteem with all the nations far and near, who honoured them with large and magnificent presents, and stored their houses with the choicest goods^d. They carried on a very extensive trade; which brought into the kingdom such immense riches, that “Solomon made silver to be in Jerusalem, as stones^e ;” that is, of little value, because of its abundance. Nor did other things, perhaps, abound there in less profusion. “For king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth, for riches, and for wisdom^f : and his subjects, partaking of this wisdom, and making themselves eminently religious, were now also, in consequence, eminently happy.

Their happiness stood always annexed to their observance of the law. And since the law had now its perfect influence upon them; and was magnified in the abundance of those

^c 1 Kings ix. 20—25.

^d Ibid. x. 25.

^e Ibid. 27.

^f Ibid. 23.

good works, which its precepts engaged them to discharge; their obedience was therefore attended with the accomplishment of its promises, in the full enjoyment of all temporal felicities. In short, whilst the inhabitants of Judea strove to make it a land of holiness, God took care to make it likewise a land of plenty—the pride and glory of the whole earth.

A plain demonstration this, of the divinity of the constitution under which they lived. For who, but the Lord of the whole earth, could thus reward the piety of his servants with all the blessings that earth can bestow?—But here let us remember, that they were *then* his servants; and were no longer blessed, than while they continued such. For though we have now seen to what a glorious height their “righteousness exalted the nation² ;” yet the next discourse will exhibit a clear and woful proof, how soon their “fin” became not only the shame and “reproach,” but also

² Prov. xiv. 34.

the ruin “of this very people.” Equally gracious however will the Lord appear, both in his judgments, and in his mercies.— To him therefore be ascribed, as is most due, all honour, glory, adoration, and praise, both now, and for ever-more. *Amen.*

S E R M O N XV.

HOSEA V. 5.

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

WE have seen the Israelites, about the middle part of Solomon's reign, advanced, in consequence of their piety and virtue, to an eminently glorious and happy state. But this state was, alas! of no long continuance. For their prosperity soon debased their principles, and corrupted their morals to a strange degree. The king, in-
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dulging

dulging his lustful inclinations, “grew mad in his love of women.” These foreign women seduced his heart from the true God; and attached him to the service of their false deities^a. Hence idolatries of various kinds, together with the abominations attendant upon them, spread and prevailed over the whole land; and infected the mass of the people.

As their wickedness increased, their happiness declined: insomuch that the kingdom, which had once been so greatly admired for the order and excellency of its government, gradually sunk, through the vices of its inhabitants, into a factious, unsteady, and tottering condition.

On the death of Solomon, ten of the tribes revolted from his son, and made Jeroboam their king^b. The kingdom, which Jeroboam obtained by rebellion, he determined to establish by apostasy. And therefore, to prevent his people from going up to the temple at Jerusalem, which might favour

^a 1 Kings, xi, 4—8.

^b Ibid. xii, 20.

their

then union again with Judah^c, he set up two golden calves, on the plan of worship he had learned in Egypt^d, to which they might sacrifice in their own country.

This base defection God was highly incensed at. And to apprize Israel of the effect of his resentment, he sent a prophet to Jero-boam, at the time he was engaged in the first act of innovation, and standing before his altar at Bethel; who foretold them in the name of the Lord, that, “the days were coming on, when the false priests should themselves be slain; and their bones burnt on that very altar.” And this event, he assured them, would as certainly come to pass, as that “the altar should then break asunder, (which instantly happened) and the ashes upon it be poured out^e.” Nor should it ever be in the power of any of their kings to prevent this calamity; but every hand, that endeavoured to oppose it, should be enfeebled and deadened, as they now saw the

^c 1 Kings xii. 26, 27.

^d See PATRICK’S Comment on the place.



^e 1 Kings xiii. 1—5.

hand of Jeroboam, for his attempt on him who declared these tidings.

This warning, confirmed, by such a complication of miracles, must have been sufficient, one would think, to awaken the Israelites; and bring back that deluded people to the worship and obedience of the true God. But so infatuated were they now grown, that they still persisted in their former impieties; and even proceeded to higher provocations.

They harassed Judah by continual wars; and industriously employed every possible advantage against them^f. The accession of Abijah^g, who was young and inexperienced, afforded them an opportunity too favourable

^f 1 Kings xv. 6, 16, 17.

^g Abijah (2 Chron. xiii. 1.) is in 1 Kings xv. 1. &c. called Abijam—which difference, as the Jews wrote on *ruled* vellum, may be easily accounted for. The space between the two sides of the final , being filled up by the *dark ruled* line, the transcriber mistook it for a *mem* . This is observed, not so much for the sake of the word in question; as for the sake of many other and more important *variations* which may be accounted for on the same principle.

to be overlooked^h. They collected therefore a numerous army; and malevolently marched against him, in confidence of being able to subdue at once the two tribes, and bring them entirely under their own power. Now had they prospered in this attempt, their success would have been fatal to the cause of religion; as it would probably have involved the whole land in one general apostasy. God therefore, who saw their iniquitous design, was pleased to defeat their scheme; and to grant Judah a perfectly marvellous and unparalleled victory. For they slew in this engagement, *five hundred thousand* of their enemies; and took Bethel, the seat of their idolatry, among others of their strongest citiesⁱ. A slaughter, which not only manifested the fierceness and severity of the divine displeasure against these ten idolatrous tribes; but also reduced their authority, and power to a balance with the other two. And this balance was afterwards preserved all the while tolerably even, as well by the suc-

^h JOSEPH. Ant. Jud. lib. viii. c. xi. § 2.

ⁱ 2 Chron. xiii. 2—20.

cesses which Judah, when obedient, enjoyed; as by the frequent calamities which befel Israel, on account of their repeated and enormous sins ^k. For they never ceased; notwithstanding these severe, though merciful inflictions, from their detestable impieties and wicked works.

But, impious as the kings of Israel had been, yet Ahab exceeded all his predecessors. For to the idolatries of Jeroboam (whose chief fault consisted in worshiping the true God by a foolish representation of his own invention) this king superadded the worship and service of *strange* deities ^l. He adopted the gods of the Sidonians and Tyrians; set up the worship of Baalim and Ashtaroth; that is, of the *sun*, *moon*, and *stars*; and laboured to restore that ancient idolatry, which the Israelites had been raised on purpose to destroy.

^k The accession of those, out of the other tribes, who feared the Lord, and came to Jerusalem, contributed likewise to the same end. See 2 Chron. xi. 16, 17.—xv. 9.—xxx. 1, 18.

^l 1 Kings xvi. 30, 33. JOSEPH. Ant. Jud. l. viii. c. xiii, § 1.

Whilst

Whilst he thus madly counteracted the scheme of Providence, Elijah was sent to reprove his folly. This zealous prophet, it should seem, expostulated the matter warmly with him : asked him on what principles he forsook the Lord ; and what benefits he expected from his adopted deities ? Is it in their power, says he, to bless and fertilize your country ? “ Can the *vanities* of the Gentiles cause rain ? or can the *heavens* give showers ^m ? ” To convince you that they cannot ; “ as the Lord liveth, before whom I stand,” and whose minister I am, “ there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, but according to my word ⁿ . ”

When they had sufficiently experienced the impotence and futility of their own deities ; and had suffered severely by drought and famine for the space of *three* years ; Elijah came to them with a promise of relief, provided they returned to God and their duty. But as he wished their reformation might be founded and established on due conviction ; so he de-

^m Jer. xiv. 22.

ⁿ 1 Kings, xviii. 1.

fired Ahab to convene Israel, and all the priests, at a particular place on mount Carmel. The people being accordingly assembled, he accosted them in the following terms: “How long will ye halt between two opinions? If Jehovah be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him^o.” “Now, that ye may be satisfied which of them is really God, we’ll put them both to the trial. You, who are his prophets, maintain, that Baal, the sun, is the true God. The essence of the sun is *fire*: and surely, if he can display himself in any thing, it must be in *that*. I e *that* then the test;” “the God that answereth by *fire*, let him be God^p.”

This was a rational method of decision; adequate and suitable to the point in controversy: and therefore what the people could not but approve. The proposal being thus assented to, the priests of Baal prepared their sacrifice; “and called on the name of their god from morning even until noon—nay until the evening: but there was no voice,

^o 1 Kings xviii, 21.

^p Ibid. ver. 24.

nor any that answered, nor any that regarded ⁹."

Then Elijah, having so disposed and ordered his sacrifice, as to prevent all suspicion of deceit ^r, came up to the altar, which he had just erected, and prayed unto the Lord, that he would now, for the conviction of this deluded people, manifest himself to be the only great and true God: which he had no sooner done, but "a *fire* fell down from heaven, and consumed the victim, wood and stones; and dried up all the water in the trench. When the people saw it, they fell on their faces, and cried out—Jehovah, he is the God! Jehovah, he is the God ^s!" And so fully were they convinced of this truth, that they instantly seized the prophets of Baal; and, at the command of Elijah, "put them all to death ^t."

Now,

⁹ 1 Kings xviii. 29.

^r JOSEPH. Ant. Jud. lib. viii. c. xiii. § 5.

^s 1 Kings xviii. 38—40.

^t As the times of Elijah and Elisha were particularly troublesome and distressful both to the prophets and people of the Lord, we meet with many more particular and detached miracles
under

Now, as this miracle had so powerful an effect on the conduct of the people; it is hardly to be supposed, that the king re-

under their administration, than in any other similar period of the Old Testament. But these distinct and particular miracles, being founded on the particular occasions of the times, may easily be explained from the nature of the circumstances under which they were exhibited. They were principally intended either, for a proof of the prophet's mission, as when Elisha divided Jordan. 2 Kings ii. 13, 15. Or—for the prophet's support, security, and protection. 1 Kings xvii. 2, 16. xix. 5, 8. 2 Kings i. 9, 12. vi. 13, 24. Or,—as an honourable testimony of God's approbation of the prophet's character. 2 Kings ii. 8, 11. xiii. 21. Or—for the relief, comfort, and encouragement of the faithful, 1 Kings xvii. 9, 16, 24. 2 Kings ii. 19, 22. iv. 1, 7. Ibid. 16, 17. Ibid. 32, 37. Ibid. 40, 41. Ibid. 42, 44. vi. 4, 7.

These particular miracles, at the same time that they answered these particular purposes, served also to demonstrate both the power and providence of God; and consequently to strengthen the faith and confidence of his people:—and so far therefore conspired to promote the design of the general dispensation. This is more especially observable of the two last miracles, that respectively concerned these two eminent and zealous prophets: for the hope of *immortality* was strongly confirmed by the ascent of Elijah into heaven; and the doctrine of the *resurrection* by Elisha's bones raising up a dead man to life—which being done publicly, was a farther confirmation of that private miracle of his raising the son of the good Shunammite. 2 Kings viii. 1---6. And the like had been done by Elijah. 1 Kings xvii. 17, 23.

mained

remained altogether uninfluenced by it. He continued, it is true, to act wickedly : but not with the same obstinacy. His heart repented. For, when he heard his doom, “ he humbled himself ;” and began to be sorry for the evils he had done. This repentance God was graciously pleased to encourage by a marvellous deliverance now vouchsafed to him, and his people. Benhadad, the king of Syria, invaded Israel with a large army ; and imperiously threatened to demolish their capital ; and lay it at once level with the ground. But his insolence was soon repressed. For the Lord animated and strengthened the Israelites ; who, by making a sudden attack on their enemies, put them all to flight ; and obtained over them a complete victory*.

This victory was gained in so extraordinary a manner, that the Syrians themselves could not but ascribe it to the power and agency of the God of Israel. But this God they fancied, according to the common superstition of the times, to be only a local

* 1 Kings 32. 10—21.

tutelary deity—a god of the hills, but not of the vallies^x :” and therefore determined to try their fortune another year in a different and lower situation. His omnipotence being thus disputed, God judged it necessary to shew them, on their own principles, that his power was not confined to the mountains, but extended equally to the plains. With this view he placed the Israelites in the plain of Aphek ; where they fought the Syrians again ; and, though amazingly inferior in number^y, overthrew them with a dreadful slaughter ; for an hundred thousand fell together in the field of battle. And of those who fled into the city, twenty-seven thousand perished in so strange and singular a manner, as visibly demonstrated, that the hand of God was extended against them, and immediately concerned in their fall and destruction^z.

A similar deliverance, from the power and oppression of the same king, was again

^x 1 Kings xx. 23.

^y “The children of Israel were numbered, and were all present, and pitched before them, like two little flocks of kids ; but the Syrians filled the country.” Ibid. ver. 27.

^z Ibid. ver. 28—30.

vouchsafed them in the next reign, by means equally marvellous ^a.

But, notwithstanding these, and many other favourable interpositions, exercised towards them at various times ; yet, so degenerate were the Israelites grown, that they perversely continued their impious practices ; and, forgetful of that “ goodness which should have led them to repentance,” indulged themselves in all kinds of wickedness. This depraved and perverse conduct exposed them to numberless calamities ;—to the depredations of the sword, pestilence, and famine : calamities, which served, as well to correct, as to punish, their iniquities.

For if they were led to the worship of idols in hopes of securing their help and favour ^b ; how clearly must they perceive, that “ there was no help in them,” when they found themselves labouring under the hand of the oppressor ? Or, if they engaged in their service, as they often did, from a fond conceit, that the fertility of the earth, the salu-

^a 2 Kings vi. 24---vii. 7.

^b See 2 Chron. xxviii. 23.

brity of the seasons, and the prosperity of human affairs, depended on their benign influence^c; how plainly must the falshood of this persuasion appear, when they experienced their idolatries to be constantly attended with effects directly the reverse! For we never read of their following idols, but we likewise read of the heaven's becoming dry, the earth unfruitful, the seasons unhealthy, or the state unsuccessful^d.

Such was now the condition of Israel: a condition, one would imagine, sufficient to deter any people from adopting and imitating their manners. But idolatry is contagious. And so from Israel the contagion spread; and unhappily infected the house of Judah.

The kings of the two tribes had hitherto, in general, maintained a pious regard for God, and dutiful obedience to all his laws; and had consequently enjoyed, through his

^c See Jer. xliv. 17. Hos. ii. 5, 12.

^d Lev. xxvi. 14---20. Deut. xi. 17.—xxviii. 24, 25. 1 Kings viii. 35. Jer. xliv. 15---23. Ezek. vi. 11—14. Maimor. Mor. Nevoch. p. iii. c. xxx.

good providence, great success, prosperity, and happiness—which was particularly the case of those pious princes, Aśa and Jehoshaphat^e. But Jehoram, having married into the family of Ahab, soon deserted the way of his fathers; soon neglected the worship and service of the true God; and, at the instigation of his wife, introduced into the kingdom foreign customs, to the increase and propagation of the most horrid impieties, and the utter ruin of the institutions of his country. For “he made high places in the mountains of Judah; and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication;” that is, idolatry—“and compelled all Judah and Benjamin to do the same^f,” which proved the source of great and lasting misery to himself, and of bitter afflictions to all his people.

The next reign was equally wicked; and was therefore involved in equal misfortunes.

^e 2 Chron. xiv, xvii, xix, xx.

^f 2 Chron. xxi, 11, 14, 15.

And henceforth again, as both kings and people went on, in succession, for a series of years, provoking the Lord by their abominable doings; so were they punished with various sorts of oppressive calamities; and rendered proportionably wretched in condition, as they were vile and perverse in their actions ^g.

Some lucid intervals, indeed, of piety shone out in Judah at particular periods; which gave them some little respite from their sufferings; some little taste of peace and happiness; and retarded the progress of that final judgement, which had often been denounced against their wickedness.

But the children of Israel were incorrigibly hardened; and, notwithstanding the repeated admonitions they received, and the repeated punishments they suffered, could never be brought by any of these means to a proper degree of penitence or reflection. They proceeded from the beginning, without intermission, in one impious course of

^g 2 Chron. xxiv. 23. 25—xxv. 14. 24. xxviii. 5. 8. 16. 21.

apostasy ; advancing continually, for two hundred and sixty years, from one stage of wickedness to another—from bad to worse—till they “ filled up at last the measure of their iniquities ;” and made the land to groan with the burden of their sins.

When “ they had left all the commandments of the Lord,” and gone thus “ into the ways of the heathen^h ;” God determined to drive them out, as he had driven the nations before them. He called up therefore the king of Assyria, “ who came to Samaria, and took it ; and carried Israel away into Assyria ; and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medesⁱ. ”

To be carried captive into any country, is, doubtless, a circumstance of deep distress ; but that the Israelites should be carried into this country, had something in it, that was peculiarly fore. “ It is well known, how they were first in bondage in the land of Goshen, and the city Abaris, in Egypt ; and

^h 2 Kings xvii. 15, 16.

ⁱ Ib. ver. 5, 6.

how they were conducted thence into the land of Canaan ; which they enjoyed above seven hundred years. Upon their repeated rebellion and idolatry, they were now carried into a second bondage : and what is remarkable, many of them went to another land of Goshen ; but not like that of old : to another city Abaris or Habor ; and in succession to the same people, to whom their fathers had succeeded in Egypt, even the Cuseans. Their captivity was attended with this cruel circumstance, that they went now to a wild and uncultivated country : and had the mortification to see the people, who had quitted it, occupy the pleasant fields of Israel. For “ the king of Affyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria : and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof^k.” Here was every additional circumstance, to aggravate their misfortune, and embitter their servi-

^k 2 Kings xvii. 24.

tude : to bring to their memory continually what they had been, and what they now were : to point out visibly the finger of God in the peculiar sufferings of such a reprobate people : and at the same time to alarm the remaining tribes ; that they might take warning at the sight of such particular judgments, and recollect themselves in good time¹.”

And at this time indeed, the two remaining tribes did thoroughly recollect themselves ; and with diligence apply to the great and necessary work of reformation. The high places were removed ; the images were broken ; the groves cut down ; and every abomination cleared away. The temple of the Lord was opened and purified ; the public worship was restored ; and the solemn festivals were again celebrated^m. In short, true religion revived in Jerusalem, and flourished throughout the land : And hap-

¹ BRYANT'S Observations on the ancient Hist. of Egypt, p. 240, &c.

^m 2 Kings xviii. 4, &c. 2 Chron. xxxi. 1—4.

piness,

piness; the inseparable attendant of piety, smiled upon every condition. As “they drew nigh to God, so God drew nigh to them;” guarded and protected them in all their enterprizes; “and prospered them whithersoever they wentⁿ.”

The prosperous events they had experienced, which were visible tokens of God’s favourable presence among them, emboldened them now to throw off the yoke of the king of Assyria. This king’s father, on a revolt made by the Israelites, had before taken and destroyed Samaria; and carried away the inhabitants captive. The son, who now governed Assyria, thought likewise, on this occasion, to treat Jerusalem in the same manner. Flushed therefore with his former victories, and breathing destruction against the kingdom of Judah, he sent a most opprobrious message to Hezekiah and his subjects—charged with bold and bitter invectives, not only against the Jews, but even against God. Read his own words:

2 Kings xviii. 7.

“ This

“This saith the great king, the king of Assyria: What confidence is this wherein ye trust? If ye trust in God, and say unto me, the Lord will deliver us: then I would ask you, hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad?—the gods of Sepharvaim, Henah, and Ivah? Have they delivered Samaria out of mine hand? Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand °?”

Here, you see, he brings down the great God of Israel to the contemptible level of the gods of the nations; puts him to open defiance; and charges him with impotence to his face. This then was the time for the Lord to assert and vindicate his honour; to shew forth the greatness of his majesty and power; and to punish the arrogance of this

~* 2 Kings xviii. 19, 30, 33—35.

haughty

haughty king, who had thus vainly exalted himself, and impiously “contended with his maker.” Accordingly, the bold and blasphemous tyrant had scarce advanced to the holy city, but his forces were entirely destroyed. “For it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand men^p.” An event, which rendered it manifest to the nations, that Jehovah was a God “mighty in power, and tremendous in judgment^q.” And which also served as a proof to the Jews, that their enemies would never prevail against them, unless their iniquities should provoke the Lord to withhold his favour and protection from them.

And soon, alas ! was he forced by their impieties to yield them up to the punishments

^p 2 Kings xix. 35. Some suppose this havock to have been made by a *plague*, or perhaps by *lightning*, or a *fiery wind*, which blows sometimes in those parts, and is very destructive. See Sir I. NEWTON’S Chron. p. 282. PRIDEAUX’S Connect. p. I. b. I. p. 24.

^q 2 Chron. xxxii. 23. JOSEPH. Ant. Jud. lib. x. c. i. § 4.

they

they deserved. For in the succeeding reigns, regardless of the deliverance now vouchsafed them, they basely and ungratefully forsook the Lord; polluted his temple by the introduction of idols; ran “into all the abominations of the heathen^r ;” and, notwithstanding the endeavours of good Josiah, and the earnest admonitions of holy prophets, obstinately persisted in their wicked ways; and even advanced to as detestable a degree of profaneness and iniquity, as ever their brethren of the house of Israel were known to have been guilty of.

When the offences of Judah vied thus with the transgressions of Israel; then the Lord determined invengeance “to stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria^s ;” that is, to overthrow the one, as he had overthrown the other: and to consume its inhabitants in like manner—some of them by famine, others by the sword; and to drive the rest into hard captivity. “Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who besieged

^r 2 Kings xxi. 2—9. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 1—9.

^s 2 Kings xxi. 13.

the city," and drove them by famine to wretched straights. "When the city was broken up, he slew their young men with the sword, in the house of their sanctuary; and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small; and the treasures of the house of the Lord; and the treasures of the king and his princes: all these he brought to Babylon. And they burnt the house of God; and brake down the wall of Jerusalem; and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire; and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. And them that escaped from the sword, carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons^t."

Thus "the Lord removed Judah, as he had removed Israel, out of his sight;" and, since they had both been guilty of the same crimes, made them partakers of the same punishment. And if we consider only what has been already said, it must doubtless appear,

^t 2 Chron. xxxvi. 17---20.

that it was not without sufficient cause, that he exercised this great, this lasting severity upon them.

But there are other considerations, not yet particularly mentioned, which serve to vindicate the proceedings of Providence, in the same degree that they aggravate the perverseness and obstinacy of the Jews. To this purpose then, we are farther to observe,

That their calamities came on them by slow advances ; and increased in weight, as their sins were multiplied—that they had constant warnings of the several judgments before they came ; and constant exhortations to amend their lives, as the only means of escaping them—that they had the benefit of prophets to set them right ; whose mission was supported by appropriate miracles, and whose denunciations were daily verified by repeated and woful experience—that when they despised the admonitions of the prophets, and hardened themselves against their reproofs ; yet God would not reject them at once ; but sent them off into captivity by degrees ; each kingdom at *three* different periods ;

periods^u; in hopes that the remainder would take warning from what was past; and avoid, by repentance, the fate of their brethren. But when repentance found no place among them; when, “the more they were stricken, they revolted the more;” in a word, when all these diversified methods of reformation could have no effect upon them; it was surely but fitting, that they, who *would* continue slaves to their sins, *should*, in consequence, be made slaves to their enemies; and be taught at last by the miseries they felt, to “know” the difference between “the service of God, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries*.” A difference, which *might* induce them; a difference indeed, which *did*

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|--|--|
| ^u Israel was carried captive : | Judah was carried captive : |
| 1. by Tiglath-Pileser, 2 Kings xv. 29. Years before Christ, 740. | 1. by Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. i. 1, 6. Years before Christ, 606. |
| 2. By Shalmaneser, 2 Kings xvii. 6. Years before Christ, 721. | 2. By Nebuchadnezzar, Esth. ii. 5, 6. Ezek. i. 1, 2. Years before Christ, 599. |
| 3. By Esarhaddon, Ezra iv. 2, 10. Years before Christ, 677. | 3. By Nebuchadnezzar, 2 Kings xxv. 2. &c. Years before Christ, 588. |

* 2 Chron. xii. 8.

induce

induce them, “to turn again to the Lord their God.” For at last they considered, that when they served him, “it was then much better with them than now—” that their former condition was infinitely preferable to that which was their lot at present.

Now, whilst the Jews were learning in their captivity this salutary lesson, divine Providence was graciously employed in correcting the various superstitions of the Cushites; and leading them to a truer notion of things: When these mixed people introduced into Samaria the several deities of their own countries; and worshiped them according to their own manner; the Lord, jealous of his honour; and concerned to maintain the sanctity of his land, was highly provoked at such prophanation; and sent among them a number of lions, by which they were grievously harassed and destroyed. Why he made choice of these animals to annoy them, may not, perhaps, be accounted for with any degree of certainty or precision. But, if we suppose, as we have some reason

2 Kings xvii. 25, 26.

to suppose, that Arioch or Ariel, that is, the Lion-god, was their chief and general deity²; then the sending lions among them, was a kind of judgment, the most appropriate that we can well conceive: as it served to convince them in the most affecting manner, that “wherewithal a man sinneth, by the same also shall he be punished.” But whatever might be the reason, for which the punishment was particularly inflicted in this form; yet certain it is, that it produced upon them its desired effect. For it brought them to the acknowledgement of the true God; and to a respectful compliance with his laws and worship. And though they continued, for a time, to join their own gods with the Lord God of Israel; yet did they gradually

² The principal deity of the Assyrians was “*Aghs*” or Mars (See HYDR de Rel. vet. Pers. cap. ii. p. 62;) whose symbol was a *lion*. JOSEPHUS says, Ant. Jud. lib. ix. c. xiv. § 3.—xii. c. v. § 5.) that these Cuseans were destroyed by *plagues*, and not by *lions*. How he came by this reading I cannot conceive; unless he translated the Heb. מַּלְאָכָא by “*Aghs*,” which he found to be sometimes used in a sense equivalent to *λοιμός*, *pestis* or *plague*—and then adopted this word as the most common, and best understood. Though, in truth, I suspect it proceeded from a worse cause.

to advance in knowledge, and ultimately to improve in piety, as to forsake all their false deities, and confine themselves to the worship of the Lord:—and to the worship of Him only ^a.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour, glory, adoration, and praise, both now, and for ever-more. *Amen.*

^a See PATRICK'S Commentary on 2 Kings xvii. 41.

S E R M O N XVI.

J E R. xxiv. 5—7.

Thus saith the Lord the God of Israel—I will acknowledge them, that are carried away captive of Judah; whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good.

For I will set mine eyes upon them for good; and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up.

And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be

my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.

IT is natural to infer from the perfections of the Deity, that all his dispensations of every kind, even those which seem the most severe, are founded in mercy, and calculated for the benefit of mankind. Among those of the severer sort, the captivity of the Jews stands nearly in the foremost rank. And yet this dispensation, however distressful, the text assures us, was designed, “for their good;” for the correction of their base idolatry and wickedness; and for their future improvement in piety and virtue. And indeed, if we duly consider its natural influence and moral tendency, we shall find it adapted, with exquisite propriety, to promote that beneficent and gracious end.

The whole Jewish nation, both Judah and Israel, had, as we have seen, so strong and strange a propension to idolatry, that the former dispensations, with all their efficacy, could neither correct nor abate it. Now, if
this

this propensity was either excited or confirmed by that high opinion, which they always entertained of the deities of conquering nations, and particularly those of the Assyrians; then their captivity under that nation must necessarily contribute to open their eyes; and to point out the extreme folly of placing their dependance on such deities.

If they prided themselves in their high privileges; if they imagined, as they certainly did, that, being the peculiar people of God, and inhabiting the city which he had made choice of for his peculiar residence, they must needs in consequence, let their moral character stand as it would, be always secure of his favour and protection^b; how fully must they be convinced of the emptiness of this sophistry, when they found their temple and city destroyed; and themselves cast out into a heathen land; not only stripped of all their honours, but rendered objects of contempt and reproach!

^b See Jer. vii. 4, 14. Mic. iii. 11.

When the grand foundation of their pride and confidence was thus clearly removed away, they began to “think more soberly of themselves;” and beheld their conduct in a different light, from that, in which they had seen it before, through the medium of their former prejudices. For now in their captive, disconsolate state, they had sufficient leisure to “think on their ways.” And the calamities they suffered in that state, would naturally dispose them to reflect with concern on that long series of iniquity and perverseness, which had brought them under the pressure of this heavy judgment. Now “their own wickedness corrected them, and their backslidings reproved them; now they must needs know and see, that it was an evil thing, and bitter, that they had forsaken the Lord their God; and that his fear had not been in them ^m.” And how amazingly must the bitterness of this affliction be increased, when they considered, that it was owing to their own obstinacy! that their prophets had frequently warned them of it, and strenuously

^m Jer. ii. 19.

urged

urged them to guard against it! These remonstrances, however neglected and despised before, were not now without their effect. For in the land of their captivity, all that the prophets had formerly urged against their profane and detestable practices, revived afresh in their minds, and sounded again in their ears; and their present abject, wretched condition (the predicted consequence of such practices) sunk them deep into their hearts. And hence must arise an utter detestation of those shameful idolatries and their concomitant vices, which they well knew was the cause of their sufferings.

Knowing then the cause of their sufferings, they had nothing to do, but to quit their idolatries; and endeavour to regain the favour of him, who alone was able to relieve their distresses. But his favour they were sensible could only be regained by making him their sole God; and conducting their lives according to the tenour of that Law, which he had anciently given them. Upon these considerations then, it seems, they repented

pented themselves ; returned to the Lord ; and vowed obedience to all his commands.

To guide and encourage them in the performance of their vows, God continued his prophets among them ; and authorized them to declare, that, if they carefully avoided the manifold abominations, which they saw practised in the land of their captivity ; and kept themselves faithful and steady in the service of their God ; he would then become “ a sanctuary to them” in the place they were in ; and, at length, “ bring them back to the land of Israelⁿ ;” where they should flourish again in peace and righteousness, as in former times. And this surely was a motive of no small efficacy to preserve them fixed and attentive to their duty. For, as the hardships they felt continually prompted them to wish for the return of those former days, wherein they lived in ease and prosperity ; so the conditions on which that return depended, must necessarily keep their thoughts awake, and their endeavours bent on the accomplishment of them.

ⁿ Ezek. xi. 16, 17.

If they were tempted at any time to fall off from their allegiance to God; if they were threatened with danger, in case they refused to join the idolatrous worship of the nations; yet, they could not but perceive, that it was as much their interest, as it was their duty, to resist unto the end; and hold fast their confidence without wavering.

They had early evidence before them, that “God was still faithful” to his promises, “and would not suffer them to be tempted above that they were able; but would with the temptation or danger, “either make a way” for them “to escape,” or endow them with strength sufficient “to bear it.” For the miraculous deliverance of the three confessors from the fiery furnace^p, was not only a proof of God’s attention to his faithful servants; but also a pledge that he would never forsake them, in the trials they suffered on his account.

And since the instant terrours of persecution and death were most likely to over-

^a 1 Cor. x. 13.

^p Dan. iii. 16—28.

come the weakness of nature, and betray them into sinful compliance; God therefore, in compassion to their infirmities, and for the confirmation of their faith, vouchsafed them a second instance of his regard, in the wonderful protection of the prophet Daniel from the rage and power of the lions⁹.

Now all these seasonable and marvellous exertions manifestly contributed, not only to fix the Jews in a more steady dependance on God and his providence; but also to rouse and awaken the Gentiles into a lively sense of his majesty and power^r. This sense of his greatness naturally excited in their minds some degree of veneration for him; and perhaps disposed them to permit his people to worship him in their own way, with less molestation, and without reproach. Nay, perhaps, they happily obtained, by the mediation of Daniel, some farther indulgences. For when he advised Nebuchadnezzar, at the close of the interpretation of one of his

⁹ Dan. vi. 18---23.

^r Ibid. iii. 29. iv. 37. vi. 26, 27.

dreams,

dreams, to “break off his sins by righteousness,” as a means of “lengthening his tranquillity;” he adds, “and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor:” not to the poor of his own people, as it is commonly understood; but to the emphatically poor and afflicted Jews. And if we consider the regard, which he constantly paid to his faithful counsellor; it is not improbable, that he took his advice; at least when he came to his right mind; and granted them the favour of a free toleration: which must tend of course to promote their religion.

But the cause of religion was farther strengthened, at this period, by many other concurring incidents: and more particularly, by those remarkable judgments, which the prophets foretold should befall, and which God accordingly inflicted upon, the kings of Babylon and other countries, who arrogantly exalted themselves against him, and impiously despised his salutary admonitions. “For if God did not spare” these stubborn,

* Dan. iv. 27. Chald. 𐤏𐤃𐤁 Comp. Psal. xxxv. 10.—lxxiv. 21, &c.

refractory Gentiles, “that sinned; but cast them down” ignobly from their thrones: the Jews, who were peculiarly bound to obey him, could not but conclude, that he would make a most dreadful example of them, if they should still be so base as to “live ungodly.” And this conclusion must now stand the more confirmed, must operate on their minds with more force, when they recollected the fate of their brethren in Egypt; who, by rejecting the counsel of the prophet Jeremiah, and obstinately persisting in the idolatries of that nation, miserably perished in the fall thereof¹.

And since they well knew, that the kingdom, which themselves were then subject to, was likewise to undergo great revolutions; it behoved them to attend the more strictly to their conduct, lest their vices should involve them in its approaching calamities. Repentance and obedience were their only security. Nor is there any room to doubt, (for even the principle of self-pre-

¹ Jer. xlv. 11—28. PRIDEAUX's Connect. p. i. b. iii. An. 573.

servation would effectually lead them to it) that they laboured by obedience to make good their title to that gracious promise, which assured them of protection in those perilous times. “Fear thou not, O Jacob, my servant; and be not dismayed, O Israel, saith the Lord: for I am with thee: though I make a full end of all the nations, whither I have driven thee; yet I will not make a full end of thee: I will not leave thee however wholly unpunished; but will correct thee in” such “measure,” as is necessary to reform thee”.

And hence arose another and very powerful motive, to induce them to proceed with diligence and vigour, according to the intent of this merciful dispensation, in the improvement of their heart and lives. For surely they could not but correct their misdoings, and shew themselves “zealous of good works;” when they understood that their afflictions and distresses were to abate, in proportion as they advanced in the ways of piety.

“ Jer. xlii. 27, 28.

But

But these were not the only encouragements, which God, in his goodness, proposed to their obedience. Higher motives were placed in their view. “There were given unto them exceeding great and precious promises^x :” the promise of restoration into their own land ; the promise of plenty, happiness, and security in that land ; and the promise of a glorious state and settled government under their own king, the Messiah^y. “Having therefore these great and precious promises,” that by them they might be persuaded to reform their lives ; they must needs be solicitous to “escape the corruption that was then in the world, through” the prevailing influence of “lust^z” and idolatry : they must needs be solicitous to “cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit ; perfecting holiness in the fear of God^a,” and in gratitude for his abundant mercies.

^x 2 Pet. i. 4.

^y Jer. xxiii. 3---6. Ezek. xxxiv. 12—31.

^z 1 Pet. i. 4.

^a 2 Cor. vii. 1.

And

And though several occurrences intervened, which, to those who judged according to the ordinary course of things, might seem to obstruct these promised blessings; yet, to this people they all appeared, by the light of prophecy, to be “working together for their good.” For every revolution that threw the nations down in the world, was a prelude to the future advancement of Judah. And they had the comfort to see, under all revolutions, that some persons of their own body were surprisingly advanced into power and authority, to patronize and defend their cause: which, as it shewed, on God’s part, great attention to the welfare of the Jews; must naturally excite on theirs a proportionable regard for his honour and glory.

Such was the dispensation of the captivity in Babylon: and such were the measures which God employed, under that dispensation, for the recovery and reformation of his people. And as both Judah and Israel were to be reunited, and reformed together; so the means concerted for their conversion

and improvement were equally applied to both. To forward their union the more readily, and to make the application to them the more easy; God had previously and wisely ordained, that both of them should be thrown, in great numbers, into the same countries: where, losing their former distinction^b, and mixing together as one people, they enjoyed the benefit of the same discipline, and the same means of instruction in righteousness.

How well these means were adapted to correct their errors, to improve their manners, and to engage them in the service of the true God, is apparent from what has been already delivered. And how effectually they operated to this glorious end, is now become a matter of admiration. Idolatry ceased among them; their attachment to God grew strong and inviolable; and their zeal for his honour active and permanent. In consequence hereof, when they were

^b Of their reconciliation and union we have this remarkable proof: viz. that in the expiatory sacrifices made at Jerusalem upon their return, "twelve he-goats are said to have been offered, according to the twelve tribes of Israel." Ezr. vi. 16, 17.

restored again to their own land, they thought it not sufficient, merely to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem; but, in the warmth of their piety, proceeded farther; and erected synagogues in different cities, where the law was read on every sabbath, and other acts of devotion were performed. Hereby the true knowledge of God and his religion was improved and confirmed among them; the practice of their duty was impressed and enforced upon them; and their abhorrence and detestation of idolatry became more fixed, resolute, and determined.

Now, while those, who returned to Judea, were thus zealous in the service of God; and setting forth the honour of his majesty, in their own land; the others, who remained behind, were busied in reforming the neighbouring nations; and improving in their minds, those exalted sentiments of the supreme Being, which his late extraordinary and marvellous interpositions had raised, and excited among them.

Being now properly qualified for the work, both these bodies of Jews were appointed a kind of priests—preachers of righteousness, and publishers of the true religion—to the four rising monarchies. For the readier discharge of this high office, and the furtherance of the end designed, they were occasionally intermixed with the several nations; and providentially dispersed through all the provinces of these mighty kingdoms: where, being often distinguished by eminent favours, they were enabled to convey and spread their instructions with greater effect and advantage.

During the Babylonian and Medo Persian empires, they not only made a considerable improvement in the religion of the people, who were more immediately their fellow subjects; but also communicated their notions and customs to those inquisitive philosophers and renowned legislators, who frequently travelled through these flourishing states for the acquisition of higher knowledge; and who, it is plain,

3

adopted

adopted many of their doctrines and practices themselves^c, and then recommended them to the notice of others, when they returned into their own countries. }

Under the Grecian empire again, as the Jews were favoured with some extraordinary privileges, and often placed in a very conspicuous point of view, so their religion and manners became of course more observed, and more accurately enquired into, especially by the curious and learned; who were then numerous in most parts of the world, and more particularly in Greece and Egypt.

And about this time, that is, in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus, their curiosity and improvement were most remarkably provided for, by a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, or at least of the five books of Moses, into the Greek language. And as it appeared, when they were translated

^c See GALE's Court of the Gent. p. I. b. III. c. ix. &c. WITSIU Egyptiac. lib. iii. c. xiii. ARTH. YOUNG's Dissert. vol. I. p. 292.

into that language, that these books of Moses and the Prophets “ contained not only obscure things, and what particularly concerned the Jewish state; but also things of a more splendid nature, and descriptive of the fortunes of diverse kingdoms “ ;” so is there no doubt to be made, but that these matters rendered them valuable in the eyes of the world; caused them to be read with diligence and attention; and to be sometimes, perhaps, consulted with reverence by those several nations, who found themselves interested in their contents.

And finally, when it was the fate of Judea to be reduced at length to a Roman province; this people and their religion became no less known to the subjects of that mighty empire, than they had been before to other states. For the indulgence, which they every where obtained, of living according to their own laws, and using their own rites and ceremonies, speedily con-

* See ALLIX's *Refl.* on the Old Test. b. ii. p. 41.

veyed

veyed a general knowledge of their tenets, customs, and institutions, to all the people around them.

Thus then were the Jews, under the four great successive monarchies, eminently instrumental in reforming, enlightning, and improving the world. And though they were never able to convert a whole nation together to their church, and make their religion the particular established religion of the country ; yet they gained every where an infinite number of profelytes to their law ; and many more to the belief and acknowledgment of the one supreme and true God ; which was the principal thing then required.

Nay, even the nations, who still continued slaves to idolatry, were highly indebted, though they knew it not, to the benign influence of this salutary dispensation. For what were those exalted improvements, which were made, through the course of this period, in civil and religious knowledge ; and which, by the application of phi-

losohers, amazingly thinned the darkness of heathenism ; but lucid emanations, conveyed by tradition, or perhaps derived by a nearer way, from this full and copious fountain of light^e ? And what were those refined institutes of morality, planned by the most renowned legislators, and established in several heathen countries, but chiefly transcripts from the Mosaic laws^f ? So that this glorious dispensation, like the sun, while it shone on one country with meridian rays, and on others in proportion to their distance from it ; threw forth moreover some beams of light, that bent below the horizon ; and thereby cheered that thick gloom, in which those people were involved, who had not yet the happiness to behold its orb.

Hence we see, that the most distant nations were far from being neglected or disregarded by the Lord ; though he was pe-

^e Vide MARSHAM. Canon. Chron. Secul. ix. Tit. Lex. Mosaic. p. 150, &c. et authores ibi laudatos.

^f Vide HUET. Demonstr. Evang. Proposit. iv. cap. xi. p. 153, &c. PETIT. Com. in Leg. Attic. GROTIUS. in Matth. v. 28. et de Verit. Christ. lib. i. § 15.

culiarly

culiarly attentive and favourable to the Jews. Indeed the favours conferred on them, were properly favours to the whole world. They were chiefly means to instruct and to improve the Jews, that they might be qualified to instruct and to improve others; that they might become fit instruments in the hand of God, for the propagation of the religion they had in trust: the benefit of which other nations reaped almost in an equal degree, whether this people stood faithful to their trust, or fell for their neglect and violation of it. Nay their fall, in truth, that is, their perverseness and apostasies, contributed rather to the speedier accomplishment of this design, than could well have been expected even from their steadiness. For to what did their defections ultimately tend; but to supply the Deity with more frequent occasions to exert himself, in the correction of their predominant errors and vices? But *their* errors and vices were the errors and vices of *all* mankind. And therefore those wonderful exertions, which
God

God employed for the reformation of the Jews, were equally adapted to the conversion of the Gentiles, among whom they lived. Nor did they fail of their intended effect. For hereby, “the name of the Lord became extensively known among the heathen; and his greatness acknowledged by many people.”

From what has been advanced it appears, I hope—that God, as the common father of all, made ample provision for the instruction of all; so far as either their necessities required, or their capacities would admit. It is true indeed, that, throughout these various dispensations of his providence, he acted with a special regard to the Jews; and interested himself remarkably in their welfare. But nevertheless, it is undeniably manifest, from the tenour of his proceedings, that he was not unmindful of other nations. Several instances have already occurred of his general concern for all mankind; and several more might easily be produced of his particular regard to the Gentiles.

tiles. What are all the exhortations and warnings delivered by the prophets to the surrounding nations, but so many instances of this truth? But why do I mention these? For what was there done, of any moment, towards the conviction and recovery of the Jews, that did not extend, and proportionably contribute to the reformation and improvement of the Gentiles? The miracles wrought in Egypt were such as the whole world had a concern in; and such as the whole world either beheld or heard of. The wonders afterwards performed in Canaan “declared the glory of God to the heathen; and manifested his power to numerous people^g.” He discovered himself to the Syrians both by goodness^h and severityⁱ; and the Assyrians were likewise eye-witnesses of his majesty^k. Lastly, the miracles displayed in Babylon made him known, not only throughout that province; but even

^g Psal xcvi. 3.

^h 2 Kings v. 8—19.

ⁱ Ibid. xx. 28, 29.

^k Ib. xxi. 35,

through

through the extent of the Babylonish empire¹. These miracles, it is granted, were principally performed in favour of the Jews; and to engage them in the service of their mighty protector. But then it must be allowed, that they were also adapted, as they were farther intended, to correct the idolatrous notions of the Gentiles; to convince them, that the God, who could do such wonders, must be far superior to all gods; and consequently, that it was their interest to join his people, in order to share his favour and blessing. Upon these principles, the best disposed and most considerate among them gradually forsook their idols; and came in to the Lord from all quarters of the universe. For thus we are assured by those, who were themselves eye-witnesses of the fact—"that devout men," i. e. worshippers of the God of Israel, met together at Jerusalem, "out of every nation under heaven^m."

This was the great and glorious end, which the Almighty had always in view,

¹ Dan. iii. 29. vi. 25—27.

^m Acts ii. 5.

in his several transactions with mankind. And therefore, when he had finally accomplished this gracious end ; when he had acquired a people out of every nation ; had redeemed them from their “ bondage to the elements of the world ;” and had brought them to the obedience and acknowledgement of himself ; he then with-held his hand for a time, and closed up this stupendous dispensation.

And now,

“ Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who alone could do such wondrous things ; and blessed be the name of his majesty for ever : May all the earth be filled with his majesty ! Amen, Amen ⁿ.”

^a Psal. lxx. 18, 19.

S E R-

S E R M O N XVII.

JOHN iii. 2.

Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

I Have endeavoured, in the course of the preceding Lectures, to illustrate the nature, intent and propriety of that vast and extensive chain of miracles, which runs through the Old Testament. If we pursue the progress of divine administration, and enter into the New Testament; we shall there discover another remarkable chain of
miracles;

miracles ; different indeed from the former in their genius and complexion ; but equally suited to answer the end they were intended to serve. For those, which we have already considered, were not more properly adapted to prove, that Jehovah is the one true God, the CREATOR and GOVERNOR of the world ; than these, which now come to be discussed, are to demonstrate, that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah, the Redeemer and Saviour of mankind.

But we must not advance too abruptly :— For since the propriety of the miracles depends, in a great measure, on the nature of the doctrines, which they were wrought to attest ; and since those doctrines have likewise a manifest reference to the moral state and condition of the world ; it is hence previously requisite, that we should take a distinct and particular view of the real situation of mankind, at the time of the commencement of this new dispensation—that we may be able to judge what was fit and necessary to be done for the promotion and accomplishment of that design, which is the professed purpose

purpose of its institution: that is, what was proper and necessary to be done, for the spiritual improvement of mankind; for their present virtue and comfort, and for their future perfection and happiness.

Now, though the preceding dispensation of providence, as it reclaimed the Jews, and enlightened the Gentiles, was of great and signal advantage to the world; and actually lessened, in a good degree, the baseness and misery of mankind; yet was it defective in several particulars necessary to the perfection and completion of their felicity. As it was originally adapted to the distinct circumstances, and principally calculated for the special benefit, of one particular people; it must therefore be, of course, unsuitable and inadequate to the general necessities of all: even supposing, that all had been so wise, attentive, and industrious, as to make the best and most proper use of it, that it was capable of being applied to. But the truth of the case is; that both parties, Jews as well as Gentiles, were highly blamable in this respect. They wilfully neglected, debased

and corrupted those salutary doctrines and instructions they had received; and consequently sunk, both in knowledge and practice, far below that measure of improvement, whereunto the dispensation, under which they lived, was intended and adapted to advance them.

For the Jews, notwithstanding their industry in making profelytes, and consequently in extending the knowledge and worship of the true God, yet grossly perverted the wise and pious intentions of his law; and rendered it in a manner void and useless. They laid the principal stress upon, and confined their observance chiefly to, the external, showy, and less momentous parts of it; whilst they neglected the internal, weighty, and substantial, to an astonishing and shameful degree. In support of these proceedings they ran out into vain speculations; and thence formed such delusive comments on the divine commands, as quite enervated their force and efficacy: and at length confirmed this mode of interpretation by groundless traditions, and the authority of the Rabbins.

bins. “ Thus they made the commandments of God of none,” or almost “ none effect, by their foolish speculations and “ traditions ° :” And, though they retained “ the form of godliness, were generally strangers to the power of it P.”

In the mean time, the Gentiles, though improved in civil knowledge, and advanced in the cultivation of social virtues, were yet involved in dangerous errors with regard to religion and a moral life. Nay indeed, when civil knowledge increased among them, religious knowledge (which is something strange) declined, abated, and lost ground ². During the simplicity of remoter times, men thought it their duty, and made it their practice, to adhere to those venerable and renowned principles, which had been carefully inculcated by their ancestors ; and were looked upon as of divine

° Matth. xv. 6. Mark vii. 13.

P 2. Tim. iii. 5. See more in Bp. LAW's Theory of Rel. Part II. p. 166. Note (²).

² See this proved at large in LELAND's Advantage of the Christian Religion; vol. I. chap. xx. p. 417, &c. 8vo.

original. But when learning and philosophy began to flourish ; it made them captious, vain, and arrogant—ready to dispute every point, and to call in question all former positions. When “ they became thus sceptical and “ vain in their imaginations,” they either despised those genuine and truly sublime doctrines, which had passed down from ancient ages ; or corrupted them by false and base mixtures. So, “ professing themselves wise, they became fools^r—” extravagant in theory, and degenerate in practice^s.

Not that I would be thought to intimate, as if all good principles were extinct among them, and no traces of virtue to be found : For that would be injurious to their real character, and contradictory to the truth of things. Some general notions, relating to the existence and attributes of the Deity ; some general ideas of a governing providence, constantly inspecting the behaviour

^r Rom. i. 22.

^s Vide CLERIC. Prol. Ecc. Hist. Sect. II. MOSHEM. de rebus Christianis ante Constantinum. cap. i. § 21.

and conduct of mankind, still remained unextinguished among them. And these notions, however obscured, or however debased, failed not to produce some laudable effects, in laying restraints on vice and wickedness; and keeping up the face of order and regularity in every state. But the point I would inculcate is this—that what passed for religion among the heathens, had no reference to the true God; and no farther regard to good morals than the interest of the state required. And therefore, as Seneca well observes, “that man must fall infinitely short of the perfection of virtue, who measured his goodness by legal right, and the public institutions of his country †.”

And though it should be remembered, to the lasting honour of human nature, that there are several instances recorded of men,

† Quam angusta innocentia est, ad legem bonum esse? Quanto latius officiorum patet, quam juris regula? Quam multa pietas, humanitas, liberalitas, iustitia, fides exigunt, quæ omnia extra publicas tabulas sunt? SENECA. de Ira, lib. ii. cap. xxvii.

who, prompted by a happy disposition of temper, and guided by the dictates of superior reason, practised higher and more exalted virtues, than ever were prescribed by the laws of the state; yet it must still be confessed, that these instances are comparatively few; and that the bulk of the people did not live up even to that standard of moral goodness, which was erected and established for the rule of their actions. And had they advanced to its full height, how very low would they have then stood on the scale or ascent of virtue! For the laws and institutions of every community, however excellent in some respects, were extremely defective in others. They were all fundamentally wrong in that main branch of moral duty, which regards the service, worship, and adoration, that we owe to the great and true God. They were also wrong in the excessive indulgence, which they freely allowed to the sensual and vicious passions. And they were no less wrong in providing rather for the interest

terest of the state, than for the improvement of human nature.

Nor was philosophy, with all its admired excellencies^a, ever able, either to supply the manifold defects of these laws, or to correct their pernicious errors. It had time enough to try its strength; and to exert, to the full, its boasted powers. But it tried and laboured in vain—For, after all its efforts, it “was found wanting:” being often dubious about several points of importance to be settled; and always too weak to enforce even those, which it judged and knew to be right.

Since it appears then, that the Mosaic institution was so far perverted and depraved by the Jews, as to have lost nearly its whole effect on their sentiments, dispositions, and manners: and that the laws and instructions delivered to the Gentiles, were insufficient to lead them to the right knowledge and practice of their duty: how needful was it for the reformation and improvement of man-

^a Vide CICERON. Tuscul. Disput. lib. ii. cap. iv. et v. lib. iix. cap. iiii. lib. iv. cap. xxxviii. lib. v. cap. ii.

kind, that some higher, more perfect, and more powerful dispensation should be at length introduced and established in the world! And how extremely gracious must it be in the Deity, to support the serious, contemplative, and faithful, by clear and repeated assurances, known to the Gentiles * as well as the Jews, that he had compassionately determined, at a proper season, to send one from heaven to promulgate and establish such a dispensation among them?—A dispensation that should extend to the whole human race; that should correct the mistakes, errors, and prejudices, under which they laboured; that should supply the defects of the former institutions; and convey to the world every thing requisite to life and godliness.

What these requisites were, may easily be deduced from the situation and circumstances that we find the world to have been now in. And here it is obvious to remark, that when mankind forsook their idols, and

* PLATON. Alcibiad. 2. in fine. JAMBLIC. de Vit. PYTHAGORÆ, cap. xxviii. p. 124, &c. Ed. Kuster.

became

became acquainted with the true God, they became likewise sensible of the manifold offences they had committed against him ; and consequently sensible of the great and absolute need they had, of obtaining his pardon and forgiveness of them. But the assurance of his pardon they could no otherwise obtain than by an express declaration from himself. And, as no declaration of that kind, no general promise of pardon on repentance, had been made to the world at large before ; it was therefore manifestly the first thing, which the state and condition of mankind now required to be done for them. But then it was only the first.

For suppose this necessity supplied—suppose that God, overlooking those times of ignorance and error, had declared his forgiveness of their past sins, and his readiness to accept them on their sincere repentance ; yet, what would that avail, unless they also clearly understood how to serve him acceptably for the future ? And how was it possible for them to understand this, unless he gave them
them

them such a plain, perfect and complete rule of life, as would infallibly direct them to all the duties, which he required at their hands? Such a rule then was another thing they stood in need of, as a necessary guide in the ways of godliness.

Now let us admit, that they had accordingly obtained such a rule of life; had got such a perfect system of morals actually delivered to them; yet the known and experienced weakness of their nature would have soon and sensibly convinced them, that they were far from being equal to the difficulties of their duty;—to the practice of that moral rule. And then, what signified the rule, or where was the use and benefit of the system, unless they were supplied at the same time with an addition of strength, sufficient to enable them to obey its directions? This supply of grace then, to aid and strengthen the infirmities of nature, was another thing indispensably requisite for the attainment of holiness, and consequently of eternal happiness.

But

But suppose likewise, that they were accordingly endowed with this necessary addition of strength, and enabled to act in pursuance of the precepts delivered to them; yet, as the allurements of sense led them astray, and continually prompted them to misapply their abilities; and as the sanctions of nature were too light to counter-balance the force, and to restrain the influence, of these allurements; so it hence plainly follows, that they had great need of some weightier motives to determine their choice, and keep them invariably in the road of duty:—motives sufficient, as well to deter them from the pursuit of vice under its most engaging appearances; as to animate and excite them to the practice of virtue under the most pressing, and formidable discouragements. But such motives could only be derived from the clear prospect of another state; in which they were to partake of happiness or misery to all eternity according to their temporal conduct; according as they discharged or neglected the duties, that were
here

here prescribed to them. This prospect therefore of a future state of rewards and punishments was another point, which the interest of virtue, and the security of human happiness, evidently required to be cleared up, and laid open to the view of the world.

But still, as the bulk of mankind had no conception of being either happy or miserable hereafter, but in the same bodies they possess here, which yet they observed to be destroyed by death^y; so it seems to be moreover necessary, to give these motives their full weight, that proper assurance should be conveyed to the world of a general resurrection to come—when every soul is to be clothed again with its own body, to receive

^y In terram enim cadentibus corporibus, hisque humo tectis, e quo dictum est humari, sub terra censebant reliquam vitam agi inortuorum—Tantumque valuit error—ut, corpora cremata cum scirent, tamen ea fieri apud inferos fingerent, quæ sine corporibus nec fieri possent, nec intelligi. Animos enim per seipfos viventes non poterant mente complecti; formam aliquam figuramque quærebant. CICERONIS Tuscul. Disput. lib. i. cap. xvi.

the things done in that body, whether they were good or evil.

Such then, and so many things were necessary to the reformation and improvement of the world: things, which the former dispensations either left wholly unsupplied; or, at best, supplied in so imperfect a manner, as to be of little service in the conduct of life. Whenever therefore that perfect dispensation took place in the world, which God had promised finally to establish; which was formed to supply all the deficiencies of former institutions; and to conduct mankind to the perfection of virtue, as the means of attaining the perfection of happiness: whenever, I say, that revelation appeared unto men, which was thus intended to reform and improve them; we are unavoidably led to presume, that the forementioned articles, so necessary to the accomplishment of its grand design, must make a considerable part of its contents: must be laid down therein with full precision; and proposed with authority to the belief of the world.

But

But then it is to be observed, that no authority could induce the world to accept these articles; as the declarations of God, but that which could exhibit sufficient evidence of their being really delivered by him. And since miracles alone were looked upon by mankind, as such a perfect and satisfactory evidence; it necessarily follows from the reason of things, that this revelation should be confirmed by miracles: by miracles appropriated to the doctrines it contained; and adapted to exemplify their truth and certainty. For we are by no means to esteem miracles, though I fear we are too apt to esteem them, as mere arbitrary, random acts, resulting from the divine will and pleasure; but as necessary, determinate and rational acts, directed by the counsel of wisdom, and accommodated to the nature of those several points, which they were designed to confirm and support.

Now this being the case; if any person should ever appear under the character of that prophet, that was to come into the world;

world ; under the character, I mean, of the promised Messiah ; as the end of his mission necessarily required, that he should, among other things, make a full and perfect revelation God's will to mankind, and confirm that revelation by appropriate miracles ; so the truth of his mission must of course depend on the certainty of his so doing. And therefore all claims to that title are best and soonest determined by a strict application to this simple rule.

Now, of all the persons, who assumed to themselves the character of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth is the only one, whose claim deserves our regard. This man, if it be lawful to call him a man, who was truly “ the son of God,” made a very extraordinary figure in the world. His birth was attended with many great, wonderful, and illustrious occurrences² : suitable to the dignity of the descent he claimed ; and fitted to awaken the attention of the world

² Matth. ii. 21. Luke ii. 9—14.

to what he should in time perform. At a proper season he entered on his ministry with the public and signal approbation of heaven^a: and, in the course of it, opened to the world a new and astonishing scene of things. “He went about teaching in the synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom;” the glad tidings of approaching salvation. “And,” to confirm and illustrate these tidings, he repeatedly “healed all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people^b.” In a word, he performed an infinite number of miracles; and, on the authority of those miracles, established a more perfect institution of Religion—even such as pretends to supply and fill up all the deficiencies of the preceding dispensations; and to administer every thing, in abundant measure, that is necessary to the improvement, the perfection, and the happiness of man.

^a Matth. iii. 16, 17. Mar. i. 10, 11. Luke iii. 22.

^b Matth. iv. 23.—ix. 35.

These are such weighty, and interesting pretensions, as render the Gospel highly worthy of our most serious regard, and attentive consideration. And since it appears to be so much our concern, we shall therefore make it our future business, to inspect and examine its contents ; in order to see how far it really answers all these great and mighty pretensions, to which it is continually making claim. Though the subject is wide, yet the whole of our inquiry may completely be reduced to these two heads.

1. “ Whether the doctrines of the Gospel do in fact assert, that Jesus Christ has supplied the world with all those means, which we have now specified to be necessary to salvation ? ”

And, if so,

2. “ Whether the miracles therein recorded do sufficiently prove the truth of these doctrines ; and evince to the world, that their author is able effectually to save and to bless those, who place their trust and confidence in him ? ”

If these points appear upon examination to be well grounded, and firmly supported; then will there remain not the least doubt, that Jesus Christ is the predicted Messiah; the great “prophet that should come into the world:” and that his Gospel is that last and perfect dispensation, which was designed for the recovery of all mankind: and which, in consequence of that design, “thoroughly furnishes” them with all the means, and powerfully encourages them by all reasonable motives, to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present life “;” that they may be fitted and disposed for the full enjoyment of that consummate happiness, which is reserved for the faithful in the life to come.

Now, to Him, who, as at this time, condescended to take our nature upon him; and who, in that nature, willingly performed for us every thing that was needful to redeem us from iniquity; and

* Tit. ii. 12.

make

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make us fit to be partakers of eternal glory : To Him, who so loved us, and gave himself for us, be ascribed, as is most due, all grateful praise, adoration, and honour, from henceforth and for evermore. Amen.

S E R M O N XVIII.

MATTH. IX. 2.

And behold they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.

WHEN Jesus Christ appeared in the world, he declared, in conformity to the character he had assumed, that the grand design and purpose of his coming was “to redeem and save sinners^d;” “that

^d Matth. xviii. 11. Luke ix. 56.

whosoever believed in him might not finally perish, but have or enjoy everlasting life^e.”

Now the first thing, as we have already observed, necessary to the comfort and salvation of sinners, was an assurance of pardon for their past offences: an assurance that God would accept their repentance; and be reconciled to them on the reformation of their lives. Suitably therefore to this necessity, the Gospel informs us, that John the Baptist was sent before “to prepare the way of the Lord; and to give knowledge of salvation unto his people, by the remission of their sins^f.” And we are moreover informed, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them^g.”

In pursuance of this plan, and as a proof of its divinity, when Christ entered on “the ministry of reconciliation,” he not only published a general declaration of pardon upon

^e John iii. 16.

^f Luke i. 77.

^g 2 Cor. v. 19.

the condition of repentance and amendment of life^h; but he also forgave some faithful penitents their sins in formⁱ; as an earnest or pledge of what he promised to do for all others, who were equally qualified. And that the promise was general is evident from his own words. For, at the close of his residence here on earth, he expressly told his disciples, “that” this doctrine of “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name,” not only among the Jews, but even “among ALL nations^k :” of which, indeed, he had given them frequent intimations before; by extending his regard to “strangers and foreigners^l ;” and making them objects of his mercy and beneficence; even at the time, when his ministry was confined “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” And therefore, as those disciples, who were more immediately concerned with the Jews, had it in commission

^h Mark i. 14, 15. Luke xxiv. 47. Acts xiii. 38.

ⁱ Matth. ix. 2. John v. 14.

^k Luke xxiv. 47.

^l Matth. xv. 21—28. Mar. vii. 26—30. Luke vi. 17, 18.

to teach them, that “Christ was exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins^m; and that their sins were,” on this condition, accordingly “forgiven them for his name’s sakeⁿ :” so likewise St. Paul, that great and celebrated Apostle of the Gentiles, had the very same thing in charge. For thus his commission runs. “I will send thee,” saith the Lord, far hence unto the Gentiles^o; to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God;” that is, to bring them to repentance, “that they may receive forgiveness of sins; and,” if they fulfil their duty, “an inheritance among them, who are sanctified by faith^p.” Agreeably to the tenour of this commission, “they all went forth, and preached every where:” exhorting the people “to repent and reform, that their sins might

^m Acts v. 31.

ⁿ Ephes. iv. 32.

^o Acts xxii. 21.

^p Acts xxvi. 18.

be blotted out; and that" they might happily enjoy that "divine refreshment," which inseparably attends the comfortable assurance of pardon and forgiveness.

Hence then it appears, that the first article we have specified, as necessary to the comfort and salvation of the world, is amply supplied and extended to the world by this general doctrine of grace and remission.

But here it may be urged, "that though the doctrine is full and pertinent, adequate to the wants, and suitable to the wishes, of all mankind; yet, how does it appear, that mankind could reasonably confide in it; could safely depend upon it? Had they any evidence offered them, that Jesus was possessed of the power he claimed; any security given them, that the sins he undertook to forgive were indeed forgiven?"

Evidence, you will find, and security in abundance: sufficient to remove every doubt, and to establish peace in the most anxious mind. For what is it to forgive sins? Is it not to deliver from those ill effects which sin produces,

produces, or to which it renders the sinner obnoxious? But the primary effects and consequences of sin were diseases and death. And then, what can be conceived a stronger proof, a plainer evidence, of the real and actual forgiveness of sins; than to behold sinners relieved of their diseases, and delivered from the jaws of death, at the instant they were pronounced so forgiven? Now, this proof Jesus gave them. For “he healed all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people⁹.”

And this proof, it should be remarked, must appear to the Jews peculiarly plain and appropriate. For *healing* and *forgiving* are not only connected frequently in their writings; but even stand in their language as synonymous terms. Thus the Psalmist, enumerating the manifold mercies of God, celebrates him in the same breath as “*forgiving* his sins, and *healing* his infirmities^r.” The prophet Isaiah, describing the perverseness and obstinacy of the Jews, complains,

⁹ Matth. iv. 23.

^r Psal. ciii. 3.

that

that “ they had made their heart grofs, and their ears heavy, and had clofed their eyes; left they fhould fee with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and underftand with their heart, and fhould return, and *be healed*’;” which Jonathan in his Targum on the place tranflates, “ and *be forgiven*.” This text is quoted by St. Matthew: and according to him, ends, like the prophet’s, with “ I fhould *heal* them’.” But St. Mark, attending to the thing implied, alters the phrafe, and, conformably to the paraphraft, reads at the clofe, and *their fins fhould be forgiven* them’.” So that the connection, you fee, between the cures performed and the doctrine promulged, was in a manner forced and obtruded on their obfervation by the very genius and idiom of their language;

* Ch. vi. 10.

† Ch. xii. 15.

“ Ch. iv. 12. This phrafeology enters alfo into the Epiftles, and deferves to be well attended to. Thus the perfons, whom St. Paul, Rom. v. 6. calls ἀσθενῶν, are called in the 8th verfe ἁμαρτωλῶν. Other inftances are frequent.

by the modes of expression current among them.

But this evidence may be placed in another light: and in that light, perhaps, it may to us appear stronger.

Certain diseases were looked upon by all nations*, and more especially by the Jews, as punishments inflicted for certain sins. This notion was inspired by the law, and strongly impressed on their apprehensions. It seems to have been always uppermost in their minds. For hence it was, that the disciples were so ready, when “they saw the man who had been blind from his birth,” to ask our Saviour that question—“Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he

* The Persians expelled every one that was afflicted with the leprosy out of their cities, believing such to have drawn this punishment upon themselves, by committing some offence against the SUN. HERODOT. Clio cap. cxxxviii. And the Egyptians esteemed the blindness which befel their king, Pheron, as a judgment upon him for his impiety against their great god, the river Nile. HERODOT. Euterp. cap. xi. DIODOR. SICUL. Biblioth. lib. i. cap. v.

was born blind ^y ?” And hence also it was, that our Saviour himself thought it necessary to caution some, whom he had cured of their ails, “to take care of their conduct, and sin no more ; lest a worse thing should happen unto them ^z.”

The diseases chiefly denounced by the law against all wilful and presumptuous offenders, are the leprosy, palsy, madness, and blindness ^a. And these, it is observable, are among the chief of those diseases, which our Saviour miraculously cured ^b. Now, if the accession or infliction of these diseases was a sure token, as it plainly was, of God’s displeasure against such offenders ; was not the sudden removal, or miraculous cure of

^y John ix. 1, 2.

^z John v. 14.

^a Deut. xxviii. 15, &c.

^b Lepers cleansed, Matth. viii. 2, 3. Luke xvii. 12—19.

Paralytics cured, Matth. viii. 6.—ix. 2, &c.

Lunatics or mad cured, Matth. iv. 24.—xvii. 15, &c.

Blind restored to sight, Matth. ix. 27—30. xx. 30—34.

John ix. 1—7.

them,

them, as evident a token of his forgiveness? Suppose you were to see an imprisoned malefactor eased of his chains, and set at liberty before your eyes; could you possibly doubt of his having procured or received the king's pardon? But, what the release of this prisoner would be to us, the same were the cures, which Jesus wrought on those sinners, to the Jews: visible instances of the remission of their punishments; and therefore the properest and most convincing proofs of the remission of their sins.

But still it may be urged, “that notwithstanding these sanative miracles were thus properly adapted in their constitution, yet, how does it follow, that they were destined in their intention, to prove this doctrine of the forgiveness of sins? For they are seldom, if ever, applied by Christ to this purpose.”

We grant indeed, and would have it observed to the credit of the Gospel, that Christ was very sparing in making such precise and formal applications. He judged it sufficient,

sufficient, in general, barely to exhibit the miracles; without either explaining their force, or pointing out their intention. The former he left to be determined by the judgment of those who saw them; and the latter to be inferred from the occasions on which they were wrought. In short, he suffered the miracles to speak for him in their own language. And to the candid and ingenuous they spoke plain enough. For such no sooner beheld the works, than they perceived their connection and affinity with the doctrines; and acknowledged themselves convinced. But where vices and prejudices distorted the judgment; and led men to cavil, and raise objections; there he proceeded, in vindication of himself, and for the sake of the truth, after another manner. He argued the case; confuted their cavils; and applied the miracles to the points intended.

Of this we have a remarkable instance with respect to the article now before us. When the paralytic was brought to Christ
at

at Capernaum, he said to the man, “Thy sins are forgiven thee.” This declaration the scribes and pharisees censured as blasphemous; as a bold invasion of the prerogative of God: for “who can forgive sins but God only?” In answer to this objection, and to make it apparent that he arrogated to himself no higher power than what he really possessed, he refers them at once to the miracle; and pertinently asks them—“Whether is easier? to say, Thy sins are forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk. But that ye may know, that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, Arise, (saith he to the sick of the palsy) take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house.” Here, the miracle is by our Saviour himself expressly applied to the doctrine: applied to prove, that he was divinely empowered to forgive sins. And indeed it proved it in so distinct, and so clear a manner, that the unprejudiced multitude were instantly convinced; and with joyful gratitude “glorified God,

God, who had given Him^c such power” for the benefit and consolation of men.

But this power of forgiveness which God gave to Christ, Christ also gave to his disciples; and then declared, that “whosesoever sins they should remit, were accordingly remitted to them^d.” And when “he sent them out to preach” this doctrine, he conferred upon them, as the Evangelist observes, the farther “power of healing sicknesses^e,” by way of proof and confirmation of it. And we find them in consequence “travelling through the towns, preaching the Gospel, and healing every where^f.”

But as they conceived, while their master resided here on earth, that the powers they possessed were derived from him, and therefore had recourse to him only; so, when they judged it necessary, after his departure,

^c Matth. ix. 8. Δόξα ἐξῆσάν τοιαύτη τοῖς ἀνθρώποις. fortasse τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, “to the man:” i. e. Christ Jesus—otherwise it must be construed, as above, “for the benefit, &c. of men.” See Eph. iv. 8.

^d John xx. 23.

^e Mark iii. 15.

^f Luke ix. 6.

to apply to God for the continuance of them, it is very remarkable, that the sole power, which they particularly requested, was the power of curing diseases. And they seem to have prayed, “that God would stretch forth his hand,” and enable them “to heal^ε,” not only as it was an instance, expressive of the vital and saving efficacy of the Gospel in general; but more especially so of the truth and certainty of this primary doctrine of it—the pardon and forgiveness of sins. And it is farther to be observed, that the first miracle of healing they wrought, was attended with such circumstances, as plainly shewed, that the efficacy of Christ’s name, and consequently the forgiveness to be obtained through it, extended backwards and forwards; to times past as well as future. For since “the man had been lame from his mother’s womb, and was now above forty years old, when this miracle of healing was performed upon him^h,” it is evi-

^ε Acts iv. 29, 30.

^h Acts iii. 2, 22.

dent, that the virtue of Christ's name, though displayed after he left the world, yet reached to the cure of those maladies, which had their existence, before he ever came into it. And since the Jews were taught, that "there was none other name under heaven, whereby they could be cured," and, of course, forgiven, but only the name of Jesus Christ; how highly must it concern them, to attend to the proofs, which the Apostles gave of his being the Messiah! How truly did it behove them, to cultivate those candid and ingenuous notions, that would lead them to believe on him; and to practise that repentance and holiness of life, which were the indispensable condition of their receiving pardon!

For it remains still to be considered, that the doctrine of forgiveness was not promiscuously and indiscriminately proposed to persons of all characters: but was prudently guarded, and strictly limited to certain dispositions and qualifications;—to such dispositions and qualifications as rendered it consistent with the interest of virtue, and the

advancement of that holiness, which it was the chief design of the Gospel to promote. Without this restriction, it would have been liable to be abused to the most pernicious purposes. Men of perverse minds would have “turned the grace of our God into lasciviousnessⁱ; and because mercy abounded, would have made their sins to abound the more^k.” To cut off therefore the occasion of sinning from those who would have been ready to lay hold on such an occasion; nay, to convince them of the absolute necessity of repentance, and a sincere reformation of life and manners; Christ expressly required Faith, as an indispensable qualification for obtaining either a cure of their ails, or the pardon of their iniquities.

Now Faith is a very complex term; and comprehends under it many excellent graces, noble endowments, and amiable dispositions. According to its original and primary acceptance in the Jewish theology, it may be said to denote in general, “that candid and

ⁱ Jude. 4.

^k Rom. v. 20.

ingenuous

ingenuous temper of mind, which is disposed to receive and to digest the great and important truths of religion for the benefit and improvement of the soul¹." Hence then it implies a sincere love of truth; an anxious diligence in the pursuit of it; and a steady resolution of acting always conformably to it. As referred to Christ, it manifestly implies the following particulars: a serious attention to his doctrines—an impartial examination of the truth of those doctrines; and of the proofs he gave of his divine mission—a hearty belief, grounded on those proofs, of his being the true and promised Messiah:—in consequence of this belief, a proper and worthy opinion of him; an humble trust and reliance upon him; an entire resignation to his will; and dutiful obedience to all his commands.

From this analysis of faith; this particular enumeration of the several good qualities concentrated in it; it is easy to see with what security, as well as lenity, the forgive-

¹ HEYLIN'S Lectures, vol. i.

ness of sins might be annexed to it. For where such a faith, as we have now explained, worked at the root, it could not fail of answering effectually the end of the Gospel; of producing in time “the plentiful fruits of good living.” This then was, of all qualifications, the most strictly insisted upon; and indeed the most deservedly: because it was that which gave life and vigour to all Christian virtues. Now, its value and efficacy being so momentous; so signally conducive to the advancement of piety; it is no wonder that we find it so frequently and highly celebrated in Scripture; and honoured with such mighty privileges:—No wonder, that “it was counted unto men for righteousness:” that it entitled them to the pardon of their past sins; and recommended them to the future favour of God.

To impress the world with a due sense of the meritorious efficacy of such a Belief; and consequently to engage men in the cultivation of it; Christ frequently declared to those, who made their humble applications

to him, “that it was their faith that saved them, “or made them whole:” in other words, that it was their sincere and candid disposition; their open acknowledgement of him, as the Messiah; their devout confidence in his goodness; and their firm resolution of obeying his laws; that rendered them objects of his mercy—that fitted them for the cure they then received; and moreover entitled them to that higher blessing, the pardon or release from sin, of which the cure was a proof and emblem. A declaration, as discouraging to vice, as it was favourable to virtue. For while it administered to the penitent and well-disposed all imaginable comfort; it excluded the wicked, the obstinate, and unbelieving from all hopes of benefit or advantage. And therefore a declaration that should excite them to correct and reform their tempers; to cultivate good and worthy dispositions; and to advance in the love and practice of virtue; in order to be qualified for the participation of those blessings, that were graciously tendered to them.

For where there was no faith; that is, where the forementioned qualifications were wanting; there Christ could perform no cures. Though “the power of the Lord was present to heal^m,” yet such faithless persons were not adapted to receive its virtue. Thus it is particularly recorded by St. Matthew, that, “when our Saviour came to his own city Nazareth,” and found the inhabitants obstinate and malicious, “he wrought not,” or rather, “could not work many miracles there, because of their unbeliefⁿ.” But to make it, however, the more clearly appear, that the defect was entirely their own; St. Mark observes, that “he laid his hands on a few sick folks,” whose sufferings had probably rendered them better disposed than others, “and they all recovered^o.”

On such terms did our Lord, in the days of his flesh, extend his mercy to those in Palestine, who resorted to him for relief:—

^m Luke v. 17.

ⁿ Ch. xiii. 58.

^o Ch. vi. 5.

On such terms did he heal their diseases, and pardon their sins. Now we have also our sins and maladies ; which can only be cured, can only be forgiven, on the same conditions. If we mean that our sins should be blotted out, and our spiritual infirmities strengthened ; we must apply to Christ with a deep and penitent sense of our guilt ; and with a sincere desire of being delivered from it. We must approach him with an humble confidence, that he will, according to his promise, make up what is wanting in our nature by the succours of his heavenly grace. And if we approach him with these proper dispositions, we may rest assured, that “ his grace will be sufficient for us : ” sufficient to deliver us from our past offences ; and to strengthen our weakness for future and better services. For he is no less powerful, now he is in heaven ; than he formerly was, when he lived on earth. “ The fulness of the Godhead dwells in him ” for our use. And in the power of the divinity “ he is always ” and every where “ present ” with
us ;

us ; ready to communicate all the assistance, that our necessities can want or require. Though he does not now, as in time past, “ travel about” in a visible form “ through all the cities and villages, healing those that have need of healing^p ;” yet nevertheless, he has established the true religion and its ordinances in every city and village ; and if the inhabitants of these cities and villages would duly attend the worship of God, and join with pious and devout affections in the established ordinances of religion ; they would experience, to their comfort, such divine influence to be derived therefrom, as would effectually cure all the maladies and disorders of their souls ; and raise their powers to the measure of their duty. But then they should be careful to employ these powers in the discharge of their duties—in “ adding to their faith the virtues” of an useful and holy conversation. For then only when we begin to “ have our fruit

^p Matth. ix. 35. Mark vi. 6. Luke xiii. 22.

unto holiness," can we hope that "the end will be everlasting life^a."

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour and glory, &c. Amen.

^a Rom. vi. 22.

S E R M O N XIX.

R O M. xii. 2.

—That ye may prove, what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

IT has been already shewn, in a former Discourse, how amply and effectually the first thing, requisite to the salvation of sinners, was provided for in the Gospel of Christ: that is, how fully and clearly the doctrine of forgiveness was, according to the necessity of their case, promulged and confirmed to the whole world.

But

But this doctrine of the forgiveness of past sins, however clearly proved, could afford mankind but little comfort, unless they practised for the future what was “lawful and right.” But alas! they were not able, in many and important instances, to discover what the right was. The institutions of the Gentiles, being loose and erroneous, perpetually led them to act amiss. And the law of the Jews, though meant and adapted to promote the practice of virtue and goodness; was yet so vilely and abominably corrupted by the false glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees, that it often became an instrument of sin.

Hence then it is evident, that both the one and the other, Jews as well as Gentiles, stood in need of some farther instructions for the better regulation of their moral conduct: that they stood in need of such a perfect and complete rule of life, as would faithfully direct them, in all occurrences, what to do, and what to avoid, in order to secure the favour of God, and render themselves acceptable to him.

Now

Now such a rule the Gospel supplies ; not only as it “ teaches men in general, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, “ they should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world :” but also as it lays down particular precepts for the discharge of those several duties, to which we are bound in our several relations ; and consequently exhibits a clear and comprehensive system of morals, founded on the highest authority, and enforced by the most weighty sanctions.

Now, the whole system of morality is usually, and not improperly, divided into three capital branches ; respecting the various duties, which we owe to God, to our fellow-creatures, and to ourselves :—and which are distinctly represented in the sacred writings.

Of these duties the first, as well in order as dignity, are those which we owe to God. But, as all the duties we owe to God derive their origin from his nature and attributes, and from the various relations which he

† Tt. ii. 12.

stands

stands in to us ; so the Scripture represents those attributes and relations in the truest, sublimest, and most affecting manner ; and sets forth the Deity in an amiable and glorious light.

His nature is no longer debased by such mean and gross ideas, as the ignorant heathens entertained of him ; but is exalted to a proper dignity, and described in becoming characters. We no longer view him under the ignoble images of corruptible things ; but know him now according to his divine and spiritual nature : know him to be the one self-existent, and absolutely perfect Being ; incorporeal, invisible, eternal : the Being, who at first created, and still governs, the world ; and who, though “ he hath his dwelling so high in heaven, yet humbleth himself to behold the things that are done on earth : ” and beholds them not as an idle, indifferent spectator ; but, as an all-powerful agent, orders and disposes them according to the measure of his

* Pſal. cxiii. 5, 6.

righteous will, and the dictates of consummate wisdom.

In the government and disposal of things, he is represented as acting for the general benefit of all his creatures. Nothing is beneath his notice : his providence, care, and mercy extend over all his works. But he is more especially attentive to the concerns of the human race. He looks upon them as his children ; and, with a kind of paternal tenderness, pities their infirmities ; relieves their distresses ; and, on their sincere repentance, pardons their sins. As the great father of all, he is equally gracious to all. “ He is the God, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles^s. For with him there is no respect of persons ; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him^t.” But then righteousness must be carefully practised. For though God is infinitely gracious, yet is he likewise infinitely just and holy ; “ of purer eyes than

^s Rom. iii. 29.

^t Ibid. ii. 11. Acts x. 34, 35.

to behold iniquity;" and of higher resentment against it, than to suffer it to go unpunished. And that he may reward or punish according to equity, the Scripture describes him, as constantly inspecting our behaviour and conduct; and searching into the inmost recesses of our souls. And in consequence of this inspection, it farther assures us, that "he will judge the world hereafter in righteousness; and render to every man according to his deeds^u;" not only according to his outward actions, but according to the inward dispositions of his heart.

Such is the general idea, which the Scripture gives us of God. An idea that is not only august and awful; but also lovely, engaging and delightful: not only suitable to the majesty of the Supreme; but also productive of the most worthy affections, and most grateful resentments towards him—the surest and most powerful incentives to the faithful discharge of those duties we owe him.

^u Ps. ix. 8. Rom. ii. 6.

For when we consider the excellency of his nature and attributes; how great and good he is in himself, and how kind and beneficent to us; we find ourselves strongly, though sweetly, moved to love, adore, and revere him. And the more we contemplate his wonderful perfections, the more convinced we become, that it is our duty to love him in the degree we are commanded; that is, “with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our minds^x.” Herein, indeed, it is much to be wished that “our hearts were daily enlarged.” For “this is the first and great commandment;” that which supports, and which insures obedience to all the rest. Where the love of God presides in the heart, there must be a desire and determination to please him; to regard him in every action; and to “do all to the glory of his name^y :” there must be a determination to avoid every thing that may grieve or offend him; to resign every interest, and to suppress every inclination, that may inter-

^x Matth. xxii. 37. Mark xii. 30.

^y 1 Cor. x. 31.

fere with our obligations to him. Persuaded of his infinite wisdom and power, and of his goodness in applying them to the welfare of his creatures, we shall exercise, as we are enjoined, a firm trust and confidence in him²; commit ourselves wholly to his divine disposal; and acquiesce, with thankfulness, in the allotments of his providence: solicitous only, that our conduct in every state may be always such as becometh those, who are finally to give an account.

But farther; when we consider God as our creator and preserver, “the author and giver of all good things;” from whom we have received all we enjoy; and to whom we look for all we want; conscious of our absolute dependance upon him, we are naturally led, as we are justly required, to make our requests and acknowledgements to him, in the solemn acts of worship and devotion³. But how mean, imperfect, and unworthy were these acts of devotion, as performed in ancient times! And how much

² Phil. iv. 6. 1 Tim. vi. 17. 1 Pet. v. 7.

³ Matth. vi. 6—13. vii. 7---11. Phil. iv. 6.

are we indebted to the instructions of the Gospel for the noble refinement they have since undergone? For as we are there taught that “God is a spirit;” so, suitably to the nature of such a Being, we are commanded to “worship him in spirit and in truth^b :” to worship him, not merely with external rites, and bodily service; but with inwardly pure and holy affections—with sincerity of heart, and the devout application of our mental powers. This is the only acceptable service; nor will this service be accepted but in the name, and through the mediation, of Jesus Christ. A mode of worship highly conducive to the great purposes of genuine piety; not only as it tends to preserve in our minds a due sense of our unworthiness as sinners, and of the perfect holiness of that God against whom we sin; but also as it serves to dispel our dark and guilty fears, and to inspire us with an ingenuous trust and affiance—sure, if we strive to obey him from the heart, of finding in the end acceptance

^b John iv. 24.

with him, through the merits and intercession of “his beloved son, in whom he is well pleased^c.”

Pass we now to the duties we owe to our fellow-creatures: “which are all comprehended in this saying; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself^d.” A saying, which, observed, must be of truly great and signal use in abating the miseries that distressed the world; when men of all persuasions “lived in continual malice and envy; hateful, and hating one another^e.” And as so much depended, and still depends, on the due observance of this precept, our Saviour has been careful to ascertain its meaning; and to guard it from those false and confined interpretations, which the perverseness of men might put upon it. He has often inculcated, that our benevolence should extend to all; and that, whenever we are blessed with an opportunity of serving the interests of mankind, we should always

^c Matt. iii. 17. xvii. 5.

^d Rom xiii. 9.

^e Tit. iii. 3.

embrace it with chearfulness and alacrity; accounting every person “our neighbour,” who stands within our reach and influence. In consequence of this principle, we are enjoined, as it is meet; “to act by others in every circumstance, as we would have others to act by us^f” that is, we are enjoined to make our own reasonable wishes and expectations the rules of our conduct towards other men. And if we proceed by these rules, we shall never wrong or injure any man; but shall “render to all their dues^g,” and to the utmost of our power promote both their spiritual and temporal welfare. We shall never be rash in our judgment of others; but rather disposed to put a favourable construction on all their actions. We shall be ready, as we are required, to assist them in their necessities, and to sympathize with them in their afflictions; as well as to rejoice in the good that befalls them^h—espe-

^f Matth. vii. 12.

^g Rom. xiii. 7.

^h Rom. xii. 13—15.

cially when it concerns the prosperity of their souls.

Now, as we are directed to these things by the Gospel-rules, so are we carried to the performance of them by the natural impulse of those beneyolent affections, which God has implanted in our constitution. But in the intercourse of life these affections are liable to be obstructed. The violence of enemies, and the insolence of oppressors, are apt to suspend their course, if not to excite different resentments. And therefore our Saviour has been particularly solicitous to open them a passage through these obstructions, and to teach them, notwithstanding, to flow on the world. To this end, he shewed his disciples, not only the mischief of retaliating injuries; but the baseness of acting so far beneath their character. “If ye love them that love you, what thanks have ye? for sinners also love those who love them: And if ye do good to them only who do good to you, what thanks have ye? for sinners also do even the sameⁱ.” When

ⁱ Luke vi. 32, 33.

he had thus represented the incongruity of acting on such low principles, he then exhorts them to cultivate and exert the most liberal sentiments ; to aspire after the highest perfection ; and make their own benevolence to resemble that of God himself. “ But love ye your enemies : bless them that curse you ; do good to them that hate you ; and pray for them, who despitefully use you, and persecute you ; that ye may be the children of your Father, who is in heaven : for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good ; and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust^k. ” And to shew how absolutely necessary it is, that we should be truly possessed of this forgiving temper ; of the disposition to return good for evil ; he has not only required us to insert it in our prayers, that “ God would forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive others ” the offences committed against ourselves ; but has also forewarned us in express terms, that “ if we

^k Matth. v. 44, 45.

forgive not men their trespasses, neither will our heavenly Father forgive us¹.”

But besides the duties of general benevolence, which we equally owe to all; there are others again, of a more contracted nature, arising from certain relations in life, which are highly conducive to the enjoyments of it, and therefore deserve our particular regard. Such are the duties of magistrates and subjects, husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, and the like. And for the discharge of these duties the Scripture affords us very excellent precepts, and most accurate directions: such precepts and directions, as, duly attended to, cannot fail of preserving the order and welfare of society; and of making nations, families, and individuals happy.

But to render this happiness complete, we are bound moreover to observe and practise the various duties, that relate to ourselves. Now, in order to lay a proper foundation for this branch of our conduct, the Scripture en-

¹ Matth. vi. 15. xviii. 35.

joins us to regulate and improve our tempers; to govern all our affections and appetites; “and to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ^m.” In consequence of this, we are directed “to live soberly^p,” that is, to cultivate and practise that universal sobriety, which regards the whole of our composition. We are to acquire that meekness, modesty, and humility, which are the sobriety of the mind; and that temperance, chastity, and purity, which are the sobriety of the body: and which serve, when united, to support the sovereignty of reason and conscience; and to maintain the dignity of human nature.

These virtues and graces are frequently and earnestly recommended to us, as essential ingredients of the christian character. And indeed with great propriety. For what can be more becoming such imperfect and sinful creatures as we are, than a modest, meek, and humble deportment? And what,

^m 2 Cor. x. 5.

^p Tit. ii. 2, 4, 6, 12.

in general, can contribute more, than these are known to do, to the undisturbed enjoyments, and real advantages, of life? In this sense it is true, that “bleſſed are the meek: for they ſhall inherit the earth °.” And it is no leſs true, that “he who humbleth himſelf” is in the ready way to “be exalted †:” if not to the dignities and emoluments of the world; yet to an high degree of eſteem and reſpect among the wiſe and the worthy.

And then again, as to the virtues of purity and temperance, how fit and congruous is it, that the worſhippers of a pure and holy God ſhould be careful and conſtant in the exerciſe of them! nay indeed, how neceſſary is it, that they ſhould keep themſelves from all the pollutions both of fleſh and ſpirit: ſince we are well aſſured; that, “without holineſs” and purity of heart, “no man ſhall ſee the Lord ‡.”

° Matth. v. 5.

† Matth. xxiii. 12.

‡ Heb. xii. 14.

Hence

Hence therefore, the Scripture represents it, as the chief and continual business of a Christian, to watch the various emotions of concupiscence; and to preserve a close and strict guard over all his passions: to maintain, by all means, that self-government and discipline, which is necessary to suppress the irregularities of his desires; and to form daily such virtuous resolutions, as may dispose him to “abstain from those fleshly lusts, which war against,” and tend to destroy, “the soul.”

Now these are the great lines of that moral system, which is delivered in the New Testament. And from these main lines it evidently appears, that the author of it entered into the true spirit of morality; and proceeded in the justest form. He laid the foundation of it at the heart; and erected the superstructure according to conscience. And whoever is so wise as to observe his directions, will gradually attain to the utmost perfection, that human nature is capable

1 Pet. ii. 11.

of

of. For here, “whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, virtuous, and of good report^s—” these are all not only pointed to our view, but strongly recommended to our practice: and recommended not merely, according to the mode of the ancient philosophers, from the considerations of prudence, profit, pleasure, decency, or reputation; but pressed upon us as the will and command of that God, who is the sovereign Lord of the universe; who knoweth our most secret thoughts; and who will bring us to answer, not only for the things we do, but for the principles from which we do them.

Precepts and instructions of this stamp, so worthy of “a teacher come from God,” so conformable to the dictates of right reason, and so conducive to the reformation and improvement of the world, carry with them their own evidence. They stand in need of no foreign proofs, of no signs or miracles to

^s Philip. iv. 8.

support them. They manifest at once their own truth and excellence; and approve themselves to every man's conscience, as of perfectly pure and divine original.

And accordingly, it is observable, that our Saviour performed no mighty works, no particular miracles, to confirm either the fitness or the binding force of his moral, practical precepts^c; but left them to stand on their own bottom, and to justify themselves to the common sense of mankind: well assured, from their exact conformity to the suggestions of conscience, that they must needs gain the approbation of the world; especially when exemplified in life and practice.

This was the only evidence, this the only recommendation they wanted. And

^c Though our Saviour performed no particular miracles to prove the fitness of his moral precepts; yet the miracles, which he performed on other accounts, contributed to give them weight and authority. For as they shewed he was a teacher that deserved to be attended to; so they roused and excited his hearers to pay a proper and becoming regard to what he taught and preached—and were so far of use to enforce all his moral lessons and practical instructions.

this

this evidence, this recommendation, our Saviour displayed and urged on their behalf, in the most perfect and affecting manner. What he taught, he practised. He not only shewed us the way, wherein we should walk; but walked himself before us in it. He suffered us not to be guided merely by the dead letter; but enlivened his precepts by correspondent actions: “leaving us an example, that we might follow his steps”. In him we may behold a most complete pattern of the conduct that is required of us. For his life, as it is set before us, was one continued course of the most substantial, and most excellent virtues. A life of singular piety, benevolence, purity, patience, meekness, and resignation; and of every thing good and praise-worthy: and consequently a life, that necessarily must, and actually did, by its amiableness and excellency, engage the unprejudiced and well-disposed to form their behaviour according to it. For it is sufficiently known, how soon, and how readily,

“ 1 Pet. ii. 21,

the

the primitive disciples “renounced,” under the influence of their master’s example, all “the hidden things of dishonesty; and with what simplicity and godly sincerity they planned and conducted their whole conversation, amidst a crooked and perverse generation, among whom they shone as lights in the world*.”

And hence we are furnished with a full and determinate answer to a question, that has often been proposed to the disparagement of the Christian scheme. The question I mean is this: “Why was the institution of our holy religion laid down in the way of history; and not rather in some more methodical or systematic form?” And the answer to it is, that the form, in which our religion now appears, is attended with some great and peculiar advantages, which could not be obtained in any other way†. Mere

* 2 Cor. iv. 2.—i. 12. Phil. ii. 15.

† See Bp. LAW’s Theory of Relig. part ii. p. 108, ed. 5th. JEFFERY’S Commencement Sermon. among his Discourses, vol. II. p. 431.

dogmatical institutes are dry and unaffecting. Subtile discourses on the nature, tendencies, and effects of virtue, are too refined for common understandings. And a methodical system of divinity would afford us, at best, but an ideal, unanimated knowledge of duty. Whereas, on the contrary, in the history of our Saviour's life, we have the most perfect representation of true religion, accommodated to all capacities; and the most powerful inducements to obedience, adapted to work on all constitutions. Here we see it visibly demonstrated, that the things taught are not merely speculative, but rather practical, truths: were not intended only to amuse and entertain the mind; but to regulate and improve the manners. Here we also see, that the things required are not beyond the reach of our abilities. However weak we are in ourselves, "we may nevertheless accomplish all through Christ, who strengthens us^z." The apostles and first disciples are witnesses to the world of what human nature

^z Phil. iv. 13.

is able to perform under the influence of the divine spirit. And since “they were men of like passions with ourselves^a,” and yet ran a course of such consummate virtue; their conduct is a call and encouragement to us; to become in our degrees “followers of them, as they were of Christ Jesus^b.”

From what has been said it is obvious to infer, of what infinite service such a pure and excellent system of morals must needs be to a corrupted world, over-run with the abominations of vice and idolatry. Wherever it was adopted, and heartily embraced, it wrought a most wonderful and happy change. True piety, gentle dispositions, and purity of manners succeeded into the place of blind superstition, brutal passions, and inordinate lusts. Under the benign aspect of this noble institution, all kinds of virtue sprung up apace: all kinds of virtue continued to flourish; while men continued to attend, as they ought; to the sacred injunctions

^a Acts xiv. 15.

^b 1 Cor. xi. 1.

tions delivered to them. If Christians have abated of their former zeal; if their virtues are now fewer, and of a lower stile, than they were before; the misfortune is chiefly owing, to their having too little regard and respect to the life and conduct of our blessed Master. Nor is there any method more likely to recover them to the practice of genuine piety and goodness; than to endeavour, if possible, to engage their studies to the laws of the Gospel; and to fix their meditations on the character of Christ. For our studies, so directed, will improve us greatly in the knowledge of our duty; and our meditations, so employed, will naturally incite us to the faithful discharge of it. “While we are musing” on the charms of so lovely a character as that of our Saviour, “the fire” of admiration “will kindle” in our breasts, and quicken our powers to attempt its resemblance.

Let us therefore be persuaded to “set the Lord always before us;” directing our course by the light, and taking courage from the influence, of his example; till, being first

made like to him in holiness, we be finally made like to him in glory ; and from treading in his steps below, be admitted to the honour of filling up his train above—
“ following the Lamb whither soever he goeth ^b :”

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour, adoration, and praise, &c. *Amen.*

^b Rev. xiv. 4.

S E R M O N XX.

ROM. vii. 22—25.

For I delight in the law of God after the inward man.

But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members.

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

IN my last Discourse, I laid before you, according to the order of the method proposed, a brief summary of that system of

morals, which is delivered in the New Testament. A system that appears, even from such a general and imperfect representation, to be highly reasonable, just, and good; worthy of a teacher come from God; and manifestly conducive to the improvement and perfection of human nature: and consequently a system, which men must need heartily approve; must need embrace with warm complacency; as what they could rejoice to be conformed to in the completest manner, and in the highest degree.

But, whatever esteem they mentally entertained for, and whatever delight, as actuated merely by the principle of reason, they might take in, this revealed law; yet no sooner did they attempt to follow its directions, and act up to the measure of its obligations, but they “found another,” and quite opposite “law in their members; warring against the law of their minds, and bringing them into captivity to that law of sin, which is seated in the fleshly appetites.”

^c Rom. vii. 22, 23.

Hence

Hence then it became necessary to their welfare and happiness, that “this body of sin,” this strong prevalency of the sensual appetites, should be abolished and destroyed; that men, “being delivered from the bondage of corruption,” might be placed at liberty to prosecute the works of truth and righteousness. In the prosecution of these works, they would find themselves feeble and weak; whilst the temptations of the world pressed against them with force and vigour. And therefore, to make good their way, it became farther necessary, that they should be supplied and endowed with such an addition of strength, as might enable them to withstand all opposing difficulties; and to subdue every irregular passion to the strict obedience of the divine commands. In a word, as the “law of God is spiritual, and men are carnal,” prone and addicted to sin; it was absolutely necessary, that a new principle of life and holiness should be infused into their hearts—to correct their depravity, to sanctify their affections, and to invigorate their powers for nobler and more perfect

perfect services: that, “being made free from sin, and become servants to God, they might have at present their fruit unto holiness, and in the end attain to everlasting life^d.”

Now this grand requisite, the basis of all moral improvement, Jesus Christ, as the author of salvation, supplied in the most abundant measure. For to those who believe in him he promised the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to help their infirmities, and carry them forwards in the ways of godliness^e. By the grace and influence of this spirit “they are delivered from the slavery of sin and Satan into the glorious liberty, and illustrious privileges, of the sons of God^f—.” They are quickned into a new life, and renovated in the temper and disposition of their mind. The decayed frame of their soul is not only repaired and reformed; but its powers are improved and enlarged. The more readily they submit

^d Rom. vi. 22.

^e Rom. viii. 26. Ephes. iii. 16.

^f Rom. viii. 21.

to the guidance of the spirit, the more perfect they become. They are thence endowed with higher faculties, with quicker apprehensions, with better judgments, with purer inclinations, and with nobler affections, than they were possessed of before : so that, in the language of Scripture, they are said to be “ new men,” and “ new creatures ;” “ born again, and formed according to the image of God in righteousness and true holiness^g :” that is, “ they are so strengthened with might by the Holy Spirit in the inner man^h,” as to be able to live in a stricter conformity to the divine commands ; and to resemble their Maker in higher degrees, and more worthy respects, than they could have done in their natural state. In short, “ they are, or may be, complete in him ; being thoroughly furnished unto all good worksⁱ.” “ And therefore there is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.

^g 2 Cor. v. 17. Ephes. iv. 24.

^h Ephes. iii. 16.

ⁱ Col. ii. 10. 2 Tim. iii. 17.

For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made them free from the law of sin and death^k.”

Such were the supplies, aids, and assistances, which Christ promised and engaged to provide for the moral wants and infirmities of his disciples. And what he so promised, he gave them full and undoubted proof he could likewise perform. For could they doubt, whether he, who delivered men continually from the possession of Satan, could also defend them against his assaults? Could they doubt, whether he, who miraculously supplied the necessities of nature, could impart the requisite succours of grace? Could they doubt, whether he, who cured the maladies, defects, and infirmities of the body, could also cure the wrong dispositions and diseases of the mind?

But these arguments, obvious as they are, may yet, perhaps, leave the point in some obscurity. Let us therefore bring it into a clearer light. And to this purpose be it here

^k Rom. viii. 1, 2.

premised, that all the wiser moralists, Gentiles as well as Jews¹, commonly described the human nature under a two-fold distinction—that of the *inward* and the *outward* man; and spoke of the one as a type or representation of the other. Hence then the diseases of the body present themselves in another view; quite different from that in which they were seen before, considered as the consequences, and the chastisements of sin. They appear now to be natural emblems of the several disorders and depravations of the soul. And therefore every miraculous cure of any particular distemper of the body became, of course, a significant emblem of the power of Christ to remove the correspondent depravation of the mind. Frequent intimations of this sort the attentive reader will find dispersed through various parts of the Gospel. Nor are there some instances wanting, where the application is made in direct and express terms.

¹ PLAT. de Rep. lib. iv. PLOTIN. Ennead. lib. i. HIEROCL. in Aur. Carm. Pythag. Rom. vii. 22. 2 Cor. iv. 16.

Christ often declared, that he was come into the world to remove the ignorance, and to enlighten the understanding, of mankind^m. To prove this, he restored sight to those who were blind. To make it appear, that he was able, as he affirmed, to remove the blindness, the spiritual blindness, of error and ignorance; he frequently cured that corporeal blindness, which is the most natural emblem or image of it. And that such cures were peculiarly designed, as they were exquisitely adapted, to confirm the truth of this doctrine; is evident from the reflection which our Saviour makes, previous to his cure of the blind man, recorded in the IXth of John. As long, says he, as “I am in the world, I am the light of the worldⁿ.” By this he turned their thoughts to himself, as to the fountain of light and knowledge; and led them to consider the miracle he was about to perform, as a direct evidence of what he had asserted. He restored, or ra-

^m John viii. 12. xii. 35, 36. 46.

ⁿ Ver. 5.

ther reformed ° the man's eyes to the perception of light; and thereby shewed he could also restore, or reform the mind to the perception of knowledge. And it was plainly with the same view, when he observed how the malice and perverseness of the Jews with-held them from admitting this necessary consequence, that he afterwards subjoined, in allusion to the miraculous cure he had wrought, that “for judgment he was come into this world; that they who see not, might see; and that they who see, might be made blind^F.”

The Scripture informs us, that “the Son of God was for this purpose manifested, that he might utterly destroy the works of the devil^G; and redeem us from the power of Satan to himself.” Now to convince the world of his ability to accomplish this arduous undertaking, he frequently d flodged

° As the person was born blind, and never had his eye-sight, our Saviour not only *recovered* but *made* his eyes. Hence St. Cyprian, speaking of this cure, says, Oculos formasset. De Patient. § 4.

^F John ix. 39.

^G 1 John iii. 8.

or cast out devils; and delivered the possessed from their tormenting power^r. And his casting them out in so wonderful a manner, was a proof by example of his being come to overturn the kingdom of darkness; and of his being endowed with authority to check and controul the usurped dominion of our grand enemy. This application is our Saviour's own. For when the seventy rejoiced, that "the devils, through his name, were subject unto them; he answered and said, "I beheld Satan, as lightning, fall from heaven", &c."—his power is broken; his dominion, destroyed: and the superiority, which you have now shewn in miraculously dispossessing dæmons, is a proof and a pledge of the spiritual conquest, which you, and all my faithful disciples, shall finally obtain over them and their prince^t."

So our Saviour directs us to conclude. But in these and other instances, the con-

^r Matth. viii. 28. ix. 32, &c. xii. 22, xvii. 18. Mark i. 23, &c. iii. 11. v. 2—15. vii. 25; &c. xi. 17, &c. Luke iv. 33, &c. viii. 26, &c. ix. 38—42. xi. 14.

^s Luke x. 17, 18.

^t Ibid. ver. 19.

nection between the miracles and doctrines is so very natural, so close and discernible, that it could hardly have been overlooked, though Christ had never pointed it out. His having, however, pointed it out, is of singular use and service. It serves to shew, that what infidels urge concerning the disparity of miracles and doctrines^u, is entirely false and frivolous. It serves to shew, that there is the same strict relation, the same inviolable connection, between the miracles and doctrines of Christ, as there is between experiments in natural philosophy and the conclusions that result from them. And hence it likewise serves to shew, after what manner we may safely apply those other miracles, which are not applied by Christ himself. We may consider, for example, his restoring the lame, weak, and palsied members of the body, as a specimen of his power to restore the enfeebled, benumbed, and distorted faculties of the mind. His cures of

^u This is SPINOSA's boasted argument: but what little reason he had to boast of it, is, I trust, now apparent.

leprogies and all other loathsome diseases, we may consider as tokens of the power he possessed to cleanse the soul from the pollutions of sin. In fine, we may consider his making men, however diseased, all on a sudden vigorous and healthy; as an earnest of his making them, provided they followed his moral instructions, eminently good, virtuous, and happy.

But his ability in this respect was not only evidenced by these remoter analogous instances; it was moreover exemplified in the actual manifestation of the genuine promised effects. For his disciples, in consequence of their master's promise, were endowed with such "wisdom, as their adversaries could neither gainsay or resist*." They were inspired with such a love of truth, as rendered them indefatigable in the propagation of it. They were totally altered in the temper of their minds; and transformed into new creatures. The power of the spirit was visible in the improvements which they made by

* Luke xxi. 15.

his assistance. For they no longer lived the rest of their time in the evil customs and vicious practices of the world; but, ever attentive to that which was good, “walked in the commandments of the Lord, blameless.” Hence then they abounded in all the fruits of truth and righteousness, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom they shone as bright and glorious lights.” And though they laboured under peculiar difficulties, and were obliged to “wrestle not only against flesh and blood, but also against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual wickedness in high places; yet in all these things they were more than conquerors, through him that strengthened them.”

And, as the promise was not solely made to them; but also, in consideration of the like necessity, “to their children after them; and to all that were afar off, even as many as

¹ Luke i. 6.

² Philip. ii. 15.

³ Ephes. vi. 12,

the Lord our God should call^b ;” for the life and conversation of every sincere and pious Christian exhibits a clear and sensible demonstration, that Christ still abides with his church ; and that he continues to impart such spiritual succours to all her members, as are suitable to their circumstances, and adequate to their wants.

Having then such promises of super-natural grace, and such assurances given us for the accomplishment of them ; how thankful ought we to be to God for this marvellous instance of his regard and kindness ! He might justly have left us in that low, weak, and wretched condition, to which we had per-versely reduced ourselves. But “ when we were thus without strength^c,” oppressed by guilt, and quite unequal to the practice of holiness, “ he mercifully saved us,” cleansed us from our sins, strengthened our infirmities, and exalted our powers to the measure of our duty ; “ by the washing of regenera-

^b Acts ii. 39.

^c Rom. v. 6.

fion,

tion, and renewing of the Holy Ghost^d.” If we are now sufficient for that which is good, “it is not of ourselves, as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God^e.” And therefore with what grateful praise should we celebrate his mercy, in that he condescends to dwell in our hearts by his spirit; and so to operate on our minds and wills, as to repair that image of his, in which he at first created us, by “creating us again in Christ Jesus unto good works^f,” and fitting us for the enjoyment of that eternal happiness for which he originally designed us.

But then it should be remembered, that “this spirit of promise,” however necessary to our improvement and happiness, will not be conferred but on certain conditions. For as it is well known, that, with regard to the diseases of the body, they only obtained a cure, and happily experienced the return of health, who applied themselves to Christ in

^d Tit. iii. 5.

^e 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^f Ephes. ii. 10.

faith, and punctually observed his directions; so it is no less manifest, that, with regard to the diseases of the soul, they only can hope to receive the salutary influences of the Holy Spirit, who are fervent in their prayers for the divine assistance; and diligent in the use of those appointed means, whereby God has engaged to dispense it. A consideration that may justly alarm those, who neglect or despise the ordinances of religion. Their conscience tells them they are not so good as they ought to be; and yet, while they continue to neglect the proper means, it is impossible they should grow better. For by such neglects they do, as it were, break down the conduits of all heavenly influences; and stop the current of divine grace from flowing in upon their souls.

But when we have used the appointed means, and are consequently blessed with the invaluable gift of the Holy Spirit; let us still be careful to comply with his secret, pious suggestions; and be ready to co-operate with his gracious motions. The advantage of having God's help, far from rendering it unnecessary

unnecessary to help ourselves, obliges us to it in a peculiar manner. We are therefore to “work out our own salvation, because he worketh in us both to will and to do, of his good pleasure^g.” For it is a great aggravation of every sin, that, by running into the commission of it, we quench and stifle all the good and pious motions, excited by the spirit of God in our hearts. And it is a great incitement to our endeavours of performing every duty, that with such aids we may be sure of success. For “greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world^h.” And the almighty power of this divine assistant seems to be in Scripture so particularly set before us, with a view to animate us in our Christian warfare. And to this end it is nobly adapted. For what farther encouragement can we need, to engage us in the vigorous prosecution of our duty ; than to be well assured, as we are assured, that, let

^g Philip ii. 12, 13.

^h John iv. 4.

our difficulties be what they will, “ we may be more than conquerors, through him that strengthens,” guides, and supports “ us !”

If this, which was intended to inspire us with courage, should unhappily render us careless and presumptuous ; then are we, on the other hand, frequently and forcibly admonished to consider, that, how powerful soever our assistant is, yet we must not expect he should perform the whole that is incumbent upon us. We have our part to act ; and, having prepared us for it, it is his only to help our endeavours. And therefore it behoves us to take heed to ourselves, “ that we receive not the grace of God in vain ^k—” to take heed to ourselves, “ that we work out our salvation with fear and trembling ^l :” for if we fail, we fail at last by our own remissness.

ⁱ Phil. iv. 13.

^k 2 Cor. vi. 1.

^l Phil. ii. 12.

Were we inclined to humour the vein of curiosity, several questions might here be agitated, concerning the *mode* of the divine operation, and its consistency with *free will*. But—to speak the truth, and obviate the impertinence of such questions—in what manner the Holy Spirit acts upon, and influences our minds, it is no more our concern to know; than it was the concern of the diseased in Israel to know how Christ cured their bodies. Both operations seem to be analogous; and are both perhaps equally inexplicable. It was sufficient for the diseased, that they obtained relief: and it is sufficient for us, that we are vouchsafed assistance. The power of Christ to heal, was manifest from the cures he wrought: and the power of the Spirit to sanctify, is manifest from the reformation of sinners. The reality ~~both~~ of the one and the other operation stands attested by the consequent effects. They that were cured and restored to health, proved that they were so, by performing
all

all the functions and actions of a sound and healthy body; by discharging the offices of the animal life. And they that are sanctified, prove themselves, in like manner, to be under the government and influence of the Holy Spirit, by exercising all the virtues and graces of a religious and spiritual life; by forming their temper, and adjusting their conduct, to the precepts and example of Christ.

This proof then we should be solicitous to exhibit, for the benefit of the world, and our own comfort. All pretences to the Spirit, grounded on any other bottom, are vain and delusive. For “as many as are led by the Spirit of God^m,” are careful to obey the commandments of God; and to bring forth fruits worthy of the Spirit. Now “the fruits of the Spirit are in all goodness, righteousness, and truthⁿ :” that is, consist in the practice of

^m Rom. viii. 14.

ⁿ Ephes. v. 9.

all moral virtues; and more especially in the exercise of benevolence, justice, sincerity, purity, temperance and peace. “If these things be in us, and abound^o,” they shew, undeniably shew, that we are actuated by a divine principle. A principle that “will not permit us to be either inactive, or unfruitful, in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ^e.” “But he that lacketh these things, is blind” to his own advantage; “sees not” the heinousness of resisting the motions of the Holy Spirit; “and is strangely forgetful” of his baptismal engagements; and of that “purification from sin⁹,” which, if he had not been wanting to himself, he might certainly have obtained in virtue of that ordinance, by which he was initiated into the Christian church.

And since it must prove of the most fatal consequence, to fall from those bright views

^o 2 Pet. i. 1.

^e Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. ver. 9; and the Commentators on the place.

and

and exalted privileges, which Christianity sets before us; let us “therefore, my brethren, endeavour with so much the more diligence to make our calling and election sure.” Let us strive, by the divine assistance, to answer the good purpose of God concerning us. Let us labour faithfully in our vocation and ministry: and study to fulfil, as far as we are able, all the obligations of duty. “If we do these things, we shall never fall.” God will support us with communications of grace, suitable to our state and necessities: will render us equal to the difficulties of our warfare; and bring it at last to a glorious issue. “For so an entrance shall be richly and abundantly ministered unto us,” to admit us “into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” We shall not only be secure of obtaining happiness there; but shall be received into it with circumstances of distinguished honour. For those graces, which

2 Pet. i. 10.

Ibid.

Ibid. ver. 11, See DODRIDGE'S Fam. Exp.

adorned our profession here on earth, will attend us at last, in a radiant train, to those heavenly mansions of bliss and glory, which the divine mercy shall then assign us, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour, adoration, and praise, both now and for ever-more. *Amen.*

S E R M O N XXI.

2 TIM. i. 10.

*And hath brought life and immortality to light,
through the Gospel.*

WE have already seen, what a perfect and complete rule of life Jesus Christ has delivered in the Gospel for the moral improvement of mankind. And we have also seen, what powerful assistances he has graciously vouchsafed to enable them to obey its directions.

But, notwithstanding mankind were thus enlightned with the knowledge of their duty,
and

and strengthened likewise with abilities to perform it; yet, as they found themselves obliged to refrain from many things which appeared desirable, and to embrace as many that were very grievous, to flesh and blood; so was it moreover necessary, that some weighty and affecting motives should be proposed and laid before them, to dispose and determine them to act accordingly:—motives sufficient, as well to restrain them from the pursuit of vice under its most engaging appearance; as to urge them forwards in the practice of virtue against the most pressing discouragements.

But such motives could not be drawn from any thing that occurred in the present state. The arguments founded on the dignity, amiableness, and advantages of virtue, how clearly soever and elegantly displayed, had but little effect on the general conduct of mankind; and were much too weak to withstand the violence of strong temptations, and the terrors of severe and alarming trials. To men, whose views were confined to this world, that conduct must necessarily appear by far
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the wisest and most advantageous, which was most likely to ease them of the pains and troubles, and to procure them the pleasures, of the present life. And since the pleasures and pains, or the happiness and misery of the present life, are by no means regularly connected with the moral character of mankind; but rather dispensed in a seemingly promiscuous and indiscriminate manner; it is obvious to conclude, that persons, actuated by the foregoing principles, would naturally be led to sacrifice the interest of distressed virtue to the engaging allurements of more prosperous vice.

But, though the appetites and passions generally prevailed, and inclined them to low and unworthy pursuits; yet there still subsisted in every man's breast an indelible sense of the manifest difference between good and evil; and the dictates of conscience, felt within^u, forcibly pressed them to avoid the one, and to embrace the other. Hence they perceived themselves to be as well moral, as rational, agents; and consequently account-

^u Dominans ille in nobis deus. Cicero.

able for all their actions. And since they clearly saw, from the present unequal dispensations of providence, that a proper account of human actions was not taken in this world; the wisest and most considerate of them reasonably inferred, or rather feelingly presaged, that there must be of necessity a future state; in which all these things would be finally settled, and every one should receive the just and due reward of his deeds.

Such notice did nature suggest concerning the reality of another life. And upon this notice, strengthened perhaps by traditionary accounts, the world entertained some confused belief of a future invisible state, throughout all ages. But this belief, however universal, was so weak and languid, that it could never support the cause of virtue; especially when struggling with difficulties and distress. In that case, men stood in need of fuller evidence; and seem in truth to have occasionally obtained it, in a degree and manner suited to their peculiar conditions and capacities. In general however, mankind

kind were left entirely to themselves, and to their own reasonings. And the effect was, that they soon sunk into doubts and uncertainties, which they knew not how to dispel.

When common sense was thus at a stand, some assistance, perhaps, might be expected from philosophy. But the philosophers, instead of clearing it up, involved the subject in greater obscurity; and perplexed the world with their various and contradictory opinions about it. Some affirmed, that the soul died and perished with the body: others maintained, that it was incorruptible and immortal: but the far greater part of them fluctuated perpetually in their sentiments, unable to determine where to fix^{*}.

While it laboured therefore under such inconsistencies, the doctrine of immortality

^{*} Sunt, qui discessum animi a corpore putent esse mortem. Sunt, qui nullum consent fieri discessum, sed una animum et corpus occidere, animumque in corpore extinguere. Qui discedere animum consent, alii statim dissipari, alii diu permanere, alii semper. Cicero. Tuscul. Disp. l. i. c. ix. Harum sententiarum quæ vera sit deus aliquis viderit: quæ verissimilima magna quæstio est. Ibid. c. xi.

and a future state could be of little or no service to the real purposes of virtue and godliness. Of this indeed its most strenuous advocates seem to have been fully sensible. For it is very remarkable, that, though they treated so largely and so frequently of the rewards and punishments of another life ; yet, they seldom or never attempted to apply them to any of those pious and noble ends, which they were excellently fitted to answer. They seldom or never applied them to the suppression of vice, or the encouragement of virtue. They never applied them, either to restrain the giddy career of the thoughtless and abandoned ; or to comfort the well-disposed under the various troubles of this mortal life, and raise them above the fear of death. The arguments they used for these purposes were drawn from other topics : from the baseness and infamy of an evil course ; and from the credit and reputation that attended a good one : from the sufficiency of virtue for the completion of its own happiness : and from the consideration that things, which cannot
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be avoided, should be cheerfully and courageously endured^y. Arguments of infinitely weaker force than those which are suggested by the hopes and fears, that nature has implanted in every mind, with regard to the allotments of futurity.

But this, alas! was not the worst. Philosophy, at length, did greater mischief. It even deadened the influence of these natural passions; and deprived virtue of its strongest guards. For, as by representing Hades (the place of departed, but virtuous, souls) to be a gloomy and disconsolate region^z, it damped

^y Vide Ciceron. Tuscul. Disputationes, lib. ii. & iv. et alibi passim.

^z Thus HOMER, the great divine of the heathen world, represents the souls in Hades as disconsolate, and lamenting their condition. See

Iliad xvi. 856. Ψυχὴ δ' ἐκ ῥεθέων, &c.

Odyss. xi. 488. Βυλαίμην κ' ἐπάρεργον, &c.

— xxiv. 6. Ὡς δ' ὅτε νυκτερίδες, &c.

And though PLATO, in the beginning of his *third Republic*, censures these passages, and would have them expunged, as injurious to the welfare of society; since they tend to weaken the courage of men, and make them afraid of death: yet is he obliged to acknowledge in his *Cratylus*, that the sentiments contained therein were so deeply fixed in the minds of the common people,

damped the hopes of good men ; and checked that ardour of desire, with which they naturally panted after some future, unexperienced joys, that would make amends for their present sufferings ; so, by divesting the deity of punitive justice^a, of the will and capacity of doing any hurt, it freed the wicked from the terrours of vengeance ; and set them loose to pursue the bent of their vicious inclinations without controul. The consequence was just what might be expected. Probity and virtue declined apace ; while vice and dissoluteness gathered strength ; and spread their baneful, destructive influence, through all orders and degrees of people.

Nor was this the state of the Gentiles only. The Jews, attached to the temporal promises, and infected, many of them, with

that they could by no means be persuaded to think otherwise of Hades, than of a region uncomfortable, gloomy, and dismal—and therefore greatly dreaded by them,

^a Hoc quidem commune est omnium philosophorum---nunquam nec irasci deum, nec nocere. CICERO De Officiis, lib. iij. cap. xxviii. See more in Bp. WARBURTON'S Div. Legat. vol. II. b. iij. § 6.

the principles of Sadducism, were nearly in as bad a condition. For though we should allow, that the doctrine of immortality and a future state was most prevalent among them; yet they seem to have been but little attentive to the vast and important consequences of it. They advanced no higher in the practice of virtue, than the others did, who had no hopes; and were guilty of as many and great vices, as the worst of them, who had nothing to fear beyond the grave.

At such a crisis, it is obvious to infer, what great need there was of a divine revelation to strengthen and confirm the dictates of nature; and to ascertain the reality of a future state: to inculcate and impress on mankind the lasting importance of true religion, by awakening their minds to a proper sense of the divine justice; which is equally concerned to punish the wicked, as to reward the good.

Accordingly at this period, Christ recommended, after a signal manner, his love and kindness to us—in that he “brought life and immortality to light through the Gos-

pel:" in that he established the sentiments and expectations of nature; and improved the intimations given by the law: in that he illustrated the doctrine of a future state; and cleared it of all the doubts and difficulties, under which it had before laboured. For the Gospel not only assures us of the world to come; but lays it open to our view in the plainest and the fullest manner: describes it with such particular circumstances, and delineates it by such affecting representations, as are most admirably fitted to promote the ends of true religion:—admirably fitted, to reclaim us from the practice of the most alluring vice; and to animate us in the discharge of the most hazardous duty.

To this purpose we are informed, that “as it is appointed, for all men, once to die, so after that, there will come a judgment^b; when we shall all appear at the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of the things we have done; and to receive for those things

^b Heb. ix. 27.

accordingly^c.” For “when the son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations^d. When they stand before him, both small and great, then shall the books be opened; and all shall be judged according to the things written in those books^e. And as there is nothing covered which shall not be revealed, and nothing hid that shall not be known^f;” so there is nothing, which shall not receive a just recompence of reward, suitable to its nature, whether good or evil.

When judgment is passed, a proper discrimination will take place; and every one shall inherit his destined and deserved portion. “To them, who, by patient continuance in well doing, sought,” and prepared themselves for, a state of “immortal honour and glory;” Christ will at last graciously

^c 2 Cor. v. 10.

^d Matth. xxv. 31, 32.

^e Rev. xx. 12.

^f Matth. x. 26.

render the great prize they so ardently pursued—even “eternal life^s” and eternal happiness. “But to the” perverse and ungrateful “children of contention, who pertinaciously dispute against the truth; and, instead of obeying its righteous dictates, obstinately follow their own wicked ways, and prejudicate opinions;” he will render a quite different portion. For them is reserved all that can be imagined most dreadful and tremendous: “Indignation” is conceived, and “wrath” shall break forth against them: the sharpest “tribulation,” the most hopeless and inextricable “anguish,” will burst out in a torrent of unmingled misery on their hapless and guilty souls^h; and will continue to torment them for ever and ever.

Such are the motives, that is, the promises and threatnings, which Christ disclosed, in order to influence our moral conduct. And though these promises and threatnings refer to a future and distant world; yet, that he

^s Rom. ii. 7.

^h Ibid. ver, 8, 9. See DODDRIDGE in loc.

affirmed nothing but what was true; that he promised or threatened no more, than what he can, and, in due time, will certainly perform; we have all the evidence imaginable to believe.

For what can be more evident, than that we are destined, though mortal, to live again; “when Christ, our head,” rose from the grave; and visibly ascended to resume his glory in that state, from whence he had come down to reveal it unto us?

And since an eternal state awaits us, what can be more evident, than that he, who was able to blast and destroy by the word of his mouthⁱ, to strike offenders dead by the ministry of his servants^k, in this present world; must be likewise able to afflict and take vengeance on them in that future world, of which he is equally the lord and governor? What can be more evident, than that he, who was able to support the weary multitudes, and to relieve their hunger with food,

ⁱ Matth. xxi. 19. Mark xi. 14, 20.

^k Acts v. 5, 10. xiii. 11.

in the wilderness¹; must be able also to satisfy the righteous to the extent of their desires, and fill them with all spiritual comforts, in heaven?

But evident as it is, yet this point may receive some farther illustration; or at least, the propriety of the miracles by which it is supported may become more conspicuous; if we particularly consider the nature of those emblems, under which the enjoyments of another life are in Scripture represented to us.

Now, as the foundation of happiness is laid in freedom from pain and sufferings; so heaven is accordingly described as a place of perfect ease and security: where “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain: for Christ shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.^m” And what plainer proof, what surer pledge could he give, that he will here-

¹ Matth. xiv. 15, &c. xv. 32, &c. Mark vi. 35, &c. vii. 1, &c. Luke ix. 12, &c. John vi. 5, &c.

^m Rev. xxi. 4.

after preserve his faithful servants in perfect ease; and defend them from every thing hurtful and annoying; than his having already wrought, for their comfort and relief, so many salutary and ease-dispensing miracles?—than his having raised some particular persons from the dead; and his having removed from others those maladies and torments, which were the cause of their sorrows, troubles, and afflictions?

If we advance now from ease to enjoyment; the same observation will hold good. The blessings of another life are often represented by the comforts of this. When we are given to understand, how completely happy the righteous shall be in the world to come; it is expressly said, that “they shall hunger no more, nor thirst any more; for Christ shall feed them, and lead them unto fountains of living watersⁿ.” If then the felicities of the spiritual world stand thus described under the veil or covering of temporal enjoyments; what more significant in-

ⁿ Rev. vii. 16, 17.

stance, what more appropriate example could our Saviour produce, of his ability to supply all the longings and desires of the soul; than his satisfying to the full the analogous cravings and appetites of the body?—which he more than once miraculously did°.

But whatever rewards on the one hand, or whatever punishments on the other, may be reserved for men in a future state; yet manifest it is, that they can only take place in consequence of the final judgment. That there is a judgment to come, nature dictates, and revelation confirms. In compassion to mankind, this judgment, we are informed, is committed to Christ. And that this information is true, who can now possibly dispute, when his power to judge the world was so visibly displayed; and the form of his proceedings so circumstantially represented, in the fate of the Jewish nation?

He told them, before his death, that, as sure as the Jewish polity should be destroyed, and the inhabitants of Judea be visited for

° See the passages referred to in p. 220.

their iniquities ; so surely should the frame of the universe be dissolved ; and the inhabitants of the earth be summoned to judgment^p. One part of this prediction has been already fulfilled ; and that in so extraordinary a manner, as plainly shewed it to be the work of Christ^q. The other therefore will be fulfilled in its season ; at the time determined by the Father. And when that determined time is come, can it ever be doubted, that he, who, in this judicial manifestation, made such an apparent difference between the believing and unbelieving Jews ; will also, in that future determination, of which this was the emblem, make again the like distinction between the righteous and the wicked ; between them that served him in fear and reverence, and them that despised and transgressed his laws ?

^p Matth. ch. xxiv. 29--31. Dr. JACKSON'S Works, vol. I. b. i. ch. xxiv.

^q The interposition of a divine power was so clearly visible in the overthrow of Jerusalem, that TITUS himself ascribed his taking that city to the assistance of God. JOSEPH. de Bello Jud. lib. vi. c. ix. § 1.

There

There are some passages in the Gospels, nearly allied to this subject, which, as they have been grossly perverted to the base purposes of infidelity, it may be proper to recall to their destined use. The passages I mean are those, which give us an account of the repeated demands made by the Jews, that our Saviour would shew them “a sign from heaven.” The sign they referred to, is thus described by the prophet Daniel. “I saw in the night visions, and behold one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven: and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him^r.” Now the dominion of Christ was then to be established, when the Jewish polity was destroyed. Our Saviour therefore, perceiving that they knew not what they asked, “fighed deeply in his spirit; and said, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. For as Jonas

^r Ch. vii. 13, 14.

^s Mark viii. 12.

was three days and three nights in the whale's belly ; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth ^c."

Thus far he draws the parallel in plain and explicit terms : farther he could not openly advance without danger of exciting their resentment. But from this intimation, connected with the sequel of the history of Jonah, the serious and contemplative might easily perceive the full force and purport of the answer : which was indeed most pertinently adapted to their urgent, though fatal, demand.

The history informs us, that Jonah was sent by Almighty God to preach repentance to the sinful Ninevites. He preached accordingly ; and enforced his exhortations with this argument—"yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown ^d." Christ was sent in like manner to work the conversion of the sinful Jews ; and he urged it upon them by the very same argument. For substitute now a year for a day, ac-

^c Matth. xii. 39, 40.

^d Jonah iii. 4.

according to the stile of the prophetic language; and the sum of his reasoning will plainly appear from the tenour of the parallel, to issue at last in this—"Yet forty years, unless ye repent, and Jerusalem shall be destroyed." And as they repented not, destroyed it was, exactly at the end of that predicted period *.

That our Saviour had this event in view, and alluded to it in his several answers; is not only evident from the foregoing reasons; but receives still additional confirmation from his subsequent, and more open declarations. When the disciples shewed him the buildings of the temple, he plainly told them, that, "there should not be left one stone upon another, that should not be thrown down;" and that this

* Here it deserves to be noted, as it makes our Saviour's reference still more striking, that Nineveh had undergone this threatened fate. For though upon their repentance at Jonah's preaching, "God also repented of the evil he had said he would do unto them;" yet *forty years* after, when they relapsed again, Nineveh was destroyed: as plainly appears from the last chapter of the book of Tobit, ver. 8. and 15. And must therefore have been known to the Jews.

† Matth. xxiv. 2.

should

should happen within the short and narrow limit of that present generation. This was clear and precise enough. But in his final answer to the high priest he was still more explicit; and seems to have purposely adjusted his reply to the circumstances of the case before us.

When the high priest adjured him, that he would inform the council, “Whether he was the Christ, the Son of God; Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said²:” that is, he answered them to this effect—“You have all the reason in the world to conclude, that I am the promised Messiah. I have given you the fullest and most incontestable proofs of it. I have shewed you all the signs, and performed all the miracles, which the prophets had foretold the Messiah should perform: and yet ye will not believe. There is one sign indeed, mentioned by the prophet Daniel, which you have frequently demanded to see; and which I have hitherto, in mercy, forbore to display; though I have as frequently

² Matth. xxvi. 63, 64.

reminded you both of the certainty and dreadfulneſs of it. Nevertheless, as the meaſure of your iniquities is growing to the full, this ſign ſhall alſo be ſhortly exhibited. For “hereafter,” and at no long diſtance, “ye ſhall ſee the Son of Man, ſitting on the right hand of power; and coming in the clouds of heaven^a,” to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Goſpel^b.”

Such was our Saviour’s conduct; and ſuch the mode of reaſoning he uſed on theſe critical occaſions. And who, but the moſt inveterately prejudiced, could poſſibly cenſure this conduct? could poſſibly infer from this mode of reaſoning, that Chriſt diſcouraged all rational inquiry, as conſcious that he could not, with reſpect to the evidence of his divine miſſion, ſatisfy the underſtandings of diſcerning men^c? But this inſinuation is as falſe, as it is impious. He was always forward to promote their inquiry; al-

^a Matth. xxvi. 64.

^b 2 Theſſ. i. 8.

^c Chriſtianity not founded on argument.

ways ready to clear up their doubts. He urged them with proofs upon proofs, and miracles upon miracles; and therefore left them without excuse. Whatever our modern infidels may think, even “the men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with that generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas^d,” which was supported at most but by one miracle; whereas these perversely withstood the most salutary admonitions, supported by the strength of repeated proofs, and the united force of numberless miracles. And since their behaviour was so incorrigibly vile; how justly did they fall under the weighty rigour of that sign, which they had so often imperiously demanded,

Dreadful were the things which befel the infidels of that age. “But all those things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come^e;” and to

^d Matth. xii. 41.

^e 1 Cor. x. 11.

whom is committed the last dispensation of grace and mercy. Let us therefore be admonished by them; and be especially careful that we “tempt not Christ,” who has graciously been pleased to take us under his conduct and protection; and who has honoured his church with so many demonstrative tokens of his presence. Let us “take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God^f,” and rejecting the Gospel-revelation. For sore will be their “condemnation,” if, “when light is come into the world, men” will perversely shut their eyes; and still continue to “love darkness rather than light,” for fear “their deeds should be reproved^g.” But whether they are reproved in this world or not; yet, there is now opened another scene, in which, we are sure, they shall finally meet with condign punishment. For “the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all; and” more

^f Heb. iii. 12.

^g John iii. 19, 20.

especially

especially “to convict those who have lived ungodly, of all the impious deeds, which they have impiously committed, and of all the hard, irreligious speeches, which ungodly sinners have spoken against him ^h.”

How we shall be brought, though subject to death, to stand up at the future judgment; and what will be the particular consequences of it; I shall have occasion to consider more largely hereafter.

In the mean time, “blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope—unto the hope of life—by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ⁱ.” *Amen.*

^h Jude, ver. 14, 15.

ⁱ 1 Pet. i. 3.

S E R M O N XXII.

2 TIM. i. 10.

Who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light, through the Gospel.

IN my last Discourse I represented to you, in how clear a light the Gospel of Christ had placed the doctrine of a future state; and what evident proofs it gave to the world of the certainty of a future retribution.

But the doctrine of retribution in a future state, however clearly proved, was yet attended with certain difficulties, which mere
reason

reason could never resolve; and which therefore called for the aid and assistance of some farther discovery than could possibly be obtained on the principles of nature. That men should be accountable in another state for the things they had done in this, reason allowed to be fit and right; but then the difficulty in the eye of reason was, how they could be brought into that state to render the account required. Mankind are mortal; destined to perish by the stroke of death before the judgment comes. By this intervening destruction the scene is in all appearance closed; and judgment entirely excluded. For though it be acknowledged that our souls survive; yet, these alone cannot in equity be answerable for our actions. For our actions are not the actions of pure spirits or souls; but the actions of men; that is, of souls and bodies united. And therefore it follows, that, in order to be restored to the integrity of our nature, and put in a condition to answer for ourselves; our souls should again be united to our bodies, and the same individuals recalled to life. But of
such

such a restoration or resurrection to life nature afforded no examples. For “ what is there in the whole compass of beings that yields a similitude of dust and ashes rising up again into regular bodies, and to a state of perpetual immortality * ? ” According then to the conclusions of nature, mankind, it should seem, must for ever continue under the power of death, without any hope of being delivered from it. And their continuance in that state must necessarily cut them off from all connections with the concerns of futurity.

On this view of things, death, you see, stands as a perpetual bar to judgment; and throws such difficulties in the way of future rewards and punishments, as render the exertion of them void and impracticable. But as death had originally no place in nature, if you suppose it again removed; or, which is the same thing, suppose that our bodies should hereafter be rescued from the power of the grave; and raised up again to a state

* Bp. SHERLOCK, vol. I. disc. vi. p. 205.

of incorruptibility; then all the difficulties vanish at once—and leave us, as in a perfect capacity, so in full expectation, of being finally called to give an account.

Now, what we have here delivered by way of supposition, the Gospel has advanced to clear reality. For it assures us that Christ “has abolished death”—“and will raise us up at the last day¹!” “that the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth^m.” And need I prove that the voice of Christ is such a powerful voice—adequate to this mighty performance? The dead have proved it long ago: who felt its quickening energy in the grave, and rose up to attest its efficacyⁿ. His own resurrection placed it farther out of doubt; as it exhibited, with the rest, not only a proof, but also an example, of the very doctrine.

¹ John vi. 44.

^m John v. 28, 29.

ⁿ Matth. ix. 24, 25. xxvii. 52, 53. Mark v. 35—43. Luke vii. 11---15. viii. 49---56. John xi. 43, 44.

Since

Since Christ then has already given us such convincing proofs of his power to deliver from the dominion of death, both by raising himself and others; we may rest assured, on the strength of this pledge, that “his wonders shall again be once more shewed in the grave, and his faithfulness in destruction^o. And although the worms destroy these bodies, yet, as we know, that our Redeemer liveth, we may still be confident, that in our flesh we shall see God^p:” that we shall stand before him, every man in his own body: “for these eyes shall behold him, and not another.”

But this is not the whole. For Christ has not only abolished death, and entitled us to the privilege of a future resurrection, but he “has also brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel:” that is, he has revealed and described to us the nature and circumstances of that eternal state—whether of happiness or misery—to which we shall be consigned at the final judgment. For, as

^o Psal. lxxxviii. 11.

^p Job xix. 25—27.

the judge of the earth must then do right; so will he diversify our fate and condition, according as our works shall be. And therefore eternal life must be supposed to include, as well the punishments of the base and wicked, as the rewards of the virtuous and good.

Now, since the righteous shall be advanced to complete happiness in another life, their nature will be improved, in both parts of its composition, to a degree suitable to such a heavenly state. They shall no longer be subject to death and corruption; but “shall be equal to the angels, and the children of God, being the children of the resurrection^a.” Their bodies shall no longer appear base, vile, and contemptible; but “shall be fashioned by the power of Christ into the form and likeness of his own glorious body^r :” shall be arrayed with the same splendor that his own assumed at the transfiguration^s; and then continue “to shine

^a Luke xx. 36.

^r Philip. iii. 21.

^s Matth. xvii. 2.

forth for ever, as the sun, in the kingdom of the Father^t." Their souls in like manner shall partake of great and marvellous improvement: for every faculty shall be strengthened, and every power increased. They shall advance, and be made perfect in all the excellencies of rational nature: in wisdom, knowledge, holiness, and purity: and shall press on continually to higher and higher eminence.

And as they are thus improved, ennobled, and refined; so is the place of their residence adapted to their exalted natures. It is represented as a place of inconceivable splendor, dignity, and magnificence:—"A city that hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it: for the glory of God illuminates it, and the Lamb is the light thereof^u."

Nor are the mansions more splendid, than the company is venerable. For in the other world the righteous shall be admitted to the blisful and improving "society of angels;

^t Matth. xiii. 43.

^u Rev. xxi. 23.

to the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven ; and to the spirits of just men made perfect before them* :” All united in consummate peace, love, and friendship ; giving and receiving mutual joy, and ineffable satisfaction.

But, though the happiness resulting from the lively enjoyment of so glorious a company must be very great, yet will it receive a still farther addition from those holy exercises and beatific employments in which the blessed are continually engaged. To live in the reviving presence of God, and to behold the transcendent glory of his majesty ; to contemplate the perfections of the great Author and Preserver of the universe ; to consider his power in the creation of things, and his wisdom in the marvellous adjustment of them ; to reflect on his goodness displayed in the ends they are intended to serve, and on his faithfulness in the execution of his benevolent purposes ; to medi-

* Heb. xii. 22, 23.

tate on the nature of his righteous laws, and to trace out the excellency of his manifold dispensations: these are acts that will fill their minds with sublime delights, and raise in their souls the devoutest admiration. In the ardour of this admiration, and in a grateful sense of the blessings they enjoy; they will continually be carried on to praise and adore their God with all the energy of their exalted powers. They will constantly be led, in an uniform tenour of serene delight, to extol the wonders of his creating love; to magnify the mercies of his redeeming grace; and to celebrate the triumphs of their victorious Saviour. Thus are the saints perpetually employed: thus do they “always rejoice in the Lord;” and improve in bliss as they rise in thanksgivings.

And at the same time that they are enjoying the happiness of their present state, they can also look forwards to still higher pleasures. “For in God’s presence there is” not only, at any given period, “a fulness of joy;” but “at his right hand there are pleasures,” that will issue forth “for ever-
Vol. II. R more.”

more y." A circumstance that crowns and dignifies the whole; since it shews the happiness of another life to be as lasting as it is exquisite: to be indeed permanent, unchangeable, and eternal. They who are once admitted into that heavenly state, are admitted into a state of perpetual security. They shall be raised for ever above all fear of change. No hazards shall befall them: no new trials assault them: the arm of omnipotence will protect them: and the presence of the Lord will constantly refresh them. They shall never be weary of their condition: never be fatiated with the tiresome circulation of the same objects; for some new glory will everlastingly break out upon them, to perpetuate their comforts, and to improve their delights.

Such is the account of that future happiness, discovered to us by the revelation of Jesus Christ. And who sees not, from this account, what mighty reasons we have, to praise and adore the divine goodness, which

y Psal. xvi. 11.

has

has favoured us with such glorious discoveries? Discoveries, not more illustrious and magnificent in themselves, than advantageous to the interests of virtue. Discoveries, which manifestly tend to elevate and ennoble our nature; to inspire us with a superlative greatness of mind; and to form us to a godlike temper. When we look, through the medium of the Gospel-revelation, into the true state and real felicities of the other world; when we consider what exalted spiritual joys, what refined enravishing delights, we are sure hereafter to be partakers of: when these things are the subject of our serious thoughts, the world and its enjoyments lessen to our view; the pleasures of sense grow sick to the taste; and the allurements that surround us lose their power. Earthly grandeur, pomp, and splendor, the usual objects of our admiration, will then shine with diminished lustre: will then indeed appear “to have no glory” in this

² 2 Cor. iii. 10.

R 2 respect,

respect, by reason of the glory that infinitely excelleth it."

And when we consider farther, that the happiness of the other life is the portion only of the "pure in heart;" the peculiar "inheritance of them that are sanctified^a;" how forcibly must this consideration move us, to "purify ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit; and to perfect holiness in the fear of God^b!" And though we may be subject in this religious course to reproaches, distresses, persecutions, and death; yet how noble and animating is the encouragement we have to "patient continuance in well-doing!"—when we are certain, "that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory, which shall be revealed in us^c:" when we are certain, that they are the very means, appointed by providence, of "working out

^a Acts xxvi 18.

^b 2 Cor. vii: 1.

^c Rom. viii. 18.

for us a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory ^d.”

And when we reflect moreover, that these great and precious promises are not confined to any particular nation, or to a number of men of distinguished eminence; but are graciously extended and freely offered to the whole race of mankind; what winning obligations do they lay upon us to serve God, in our several stations, with all readiness of mind, and sincerity of affection; and to press forwards in the ways of virtue with ardour, diligence, and assiduity! Sure at last of being rewarded for our pains, with a degree of happiness, proportioned to the measure and increase of our holiness. This happiness indeed is distant; and promised to our fidelity, only in heaven. But however, that we might have at present sufficient proof of the reality and existence of such a place; our Saviour miraculously ascended thither, in open day, and before many witnesses. And this ascension of Christ, as our head, is both

^d 2 Cor. iv. 17.

a pledge and assurance to us, that we also, as members of his body, shall finally ascend after him ; partake of his promises ; and share the felicities of that blessed place.

Hence then it appears, that these promises, as they were intended, are excellently adapted, to work on men of ingenuous minds : to promote and secure their escape from the pollutions and vices that are generally prevalent in this world ; and to advance those pious dispositions in their souls, which may fit and prepare them for the kingdom of heaven.

But all men have not the ingenuity to be worked upon by these milder encouragements. The stubborn, the vicious, and the profligate, stand in need of more awakening motives : such as may check the violence of their passions ; and awe them into a sober, serious sense of their folly, and their danger. The Gospel therefore, adapting its discoveries to our several dispositions, at the same time that it promulges the most glorious rewards to the sincerely pious, faithful, and obedient ; denounces likewise the most awful
punish-

punishments against all presumptuous and impenitent offenders.

As “the righteous shall inherit eternal life, and eternal happiness; so the wicked shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power^c.” “They shall lie down for ever in tribulation and anguish; in a place of perpetual torment^f;” “where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched^g.” The expressions are strong and pungent; fitted to rouse the apprehensions of men; and to make them attentive to the consequence of their actions. Our very nature starts, and draws back from misery; and how then must we be affected with the dreadful assurance of misery everlasting? “If we are afraid of them who can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; how much rather should we fear him, who, after he hath killed;

^c 2 Thess. i. 9.

^f Rom. ii. 9. Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

^g Mark ix. 44, 46, 48.

hath power to cast both soul and body into hell-fire^h ?”

This general determination, though it seems to include all the wicked in one common fate; does yet in reality by no means imply, that they shall all be punished with equal severity. On the contrary, we are assured, that their punishments will be exactly proportioned to their crimes: and as some “shall be beaten with fewer,” so others shall feel more numerous, “stripesⁱ ;” according to the measure of their different offences.

But perhaps it may be thought, “that even the lowest degree of punishment; continued through the ages of eternity, is more than adequate to the just demerit of the most heinous crimes, that we can possibly commit in the short compass of this mortal life: and that it is, consequently, repugnant both to the justice and goodness of

^h Luke xii. 4, 5.

ⁱ Ibid. ver. 47, 48.

God, that such punishments should be inflicted."

Now, should this be our mode of thinking; it would be but right to think again, whether the sufferings of another life be not founded in the nature of things; and are as much the result, the necessary consequences, of our sinful proceedings, as positive inflictions of the Deity for them? In this world we know that sin and misery are closely connected: that one momentary wrong action often exposes us to a train of evils, that will continue to afflict us as long as we live. And since this world and the next are but two parts of one moral system; why may not the same constitution, that we find to be established here, equally proceed, and take place hereafter? Why may there not be the same close connection between vice and misery in a future state, as there is between them now in the present! And if so, since death makes no change in our moral principles; but we pass into the other world with the tempers and dispositions

tions we had formed in this; must not the same vicious passions, the same irregular desires, the same evil habits, and the same wicked actions, that rendered us miserable through the course of this life, continue to keep us in that wretched state through the whole extent of our being?—that is, must not wicked men be for ever subject to the natural consequences of their own wickedness? For what reason have we to think, that the goodness of God should be more concerned to prevent or suspend those eternal sufferings, which attend our vices in another world; than to prevent or suspend those temporal sufferings, which are the present effects of the same causes? All that his goodness could oblige him to do, was to put us on our guard, by giving us warning of these distant evils: and that he has done in the most effectual manner. He has informed us by positive laws how completely miserable our condition must be, if we indulge ourselves in evil actions: and has promulged

mulged them by way of punishments denounced, rather than by simple predictions, that they might enter more deeply into our minds, and more powerfully influence our practice^k. But if men, notwithstanding these forcible admonitions, will yet indulge wrong choice, and pursue the bent of their vicious inclinations; is it not evidently just and reasonable, that they should suffer the consequences of these proceedings; and be left to feel the eternal weight of that misery, which they would not be persuaded to avoid?

Nor is the infliction of such misery either less just or less reasonable, considered as the positive punishment of sin, dispensed immediately by the hand of the Almighty. The laws of God, or the rules of divine government, are graciously adjusted to the welfare and happiness of mankind. And these laws, as all others, require to

^k KING's Orig. of Evi', App. § ii. p. 498.

be enforced by proper and suitable sanctions: that is, by such measures of rewards and punishments as are fitted to produce obedience to them. And if it appears, as it is indeed but too apparent, that nothing less than the positive denunciation of *eternal* misery is sufficient to answer that end and purpose; then is it so far from being repugnant, that it is entirely conformable both to the wisdom and goodness of God, to place such terrours before us, in order to prevent us from ruining ourselves.

And if it be consistent with the goodness of God to threaten us with such punishments, in order to deter us from sin and ruin; it cannot surely be inconsistent either with that, or any other attribute, to execute those punishments on the daring and impenitent; and to continue the infliction so long upon them, as there are beings in existence, that need to be deterred and restrained from vice, or confirmed and improved in virtue. But such there will al-

ways be. And therefore there will be always a reason for the eternal continuance of those punishments, which are threatened to the wicked in another life.

And should it here be objected, that this reason cannot be true, because it is manifestly founded on cruelty; and represents them to be kept in misery merely for the benefit of others; then let it be remarked with regard to themselves, that, since they are immortal, and continue wicked through the ages of eternity, the punishment of that wickedness, whether resulting from the constitution of things, or positively inflicted by the hand of God, must necessarily continue full as long, as they continue to deserve it:—and consequently, that immortal beings of eternal malignity justly deserve to suffer eternally.

Such then are the motives, which the Christian religion lays before us, to counterbalance the influence of those allurements that would engage us in a wrong course;

course; and to encourage our progress, notwithstanding all the difficulties that may oppose us, in the ways of truth and righteousness. And what can prevail, if these cannot? Weightier motives can never be proposed to the understanding of men, than everlasting punishment and life eternal; than the greatest and most durable happiness, and the most intolerable and lasting misery that human nature is capable of. In this discovery the Gospel seems to triumph; and to rest thereupon all its power. By means of this discovery, and the concurring influence of divine grace, how powerful did it formerly appear! In consequence of the prospect it opened to their view, “what manner of persons” did its first and earliest professors become, “in all holy conversation and godliness of living!” How “piously, justly, and unblameably did they behave themselves; in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation, among

¹ 2 Pet. iii. 11.

whom

whom they shone as lights in the world^m! They well considered, how fearful a thing it is to fall under the vengeance of an angry God; and therefore laboured with all their power to avoid it. They well considered, how joyful and happy a thing it is to attain the favour of an approving Deity; and therefore strove, by a careful observance of his righteous laws, to secure their title to it. With what awful caution did they endeavour to guard against every sin, for fear of incurring the threatened punishment! And with what ardent zeal did they aspire after every degree of virtue, in hopes of obtaining that glorious reward, which God has promised to all them, who give such proof of their love to him?

But we have also the same rewards, and the same punishments placed before us. And “it is” the highest instance of “our wisdom and our understanding,” seriously

...

^m Phil. ii. 15.

to attend to them; and in consequence, to act as becometh those, who are so deeply concerned in them. “If we would enter into life, we must keep the commandmentsⁿ;” and be ourselves, “as the commandments are, holy, righteous, just and good^o.” For these dispositions, and these only, can “make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light^p.” Vicious passions, and vicious practices, will inevitably make us miserable: will lead us into mischiefs and distresses here; and expose us to eternal punishment hereafter.

Let us therefore take heed to ourselves: and, if we mean to secure our happiness, be careful to regulate and adjust our conduct to the standard of the divine laws. For we must “become servants to God, and bring forth fruit unto holiness,” if we

ⁿ Matth. xix. 17.

^o Rom. vii. 12.

^p Col. i. 12.

expect that “the end shall be everlasting life ⁹.”

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

⁹ Rom: vi. 22.

S E R M O N XXIII.

MARK. xvi. 20.

*And they went forth, and preached every where;
the Lord working with them, and confirming
the word with signs following.*

IT appears, I hope, from what has been delivered in the foregoing Discourses, that the Gospel of Christ has fully supplied all the deficiencies of the former dispensations; and made ample provision for the improvement and happiness of mankind. It has laid, as we have seen, “the foundation of repentance from dead works” on

the assurance of pardon, purchased for us by our Saviour's merits : it points out to us the ways of truth and righteousness by a perfect rule of piety and morals, exemplified in the life of its divine Author: it helps our infirmities, and renders us equal to the difficulties of our duty, by the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit : and it animates us to the performance of that duty, by a clear discovery of a future state of rewards and punishments, to be dispensed according as our works deserve : all which it exhibits to us under the seal and confirmation of adequate and appropriate miracles.

Hence then it follows, that the Gospel has justified all its pretensions, as a complete institution for the recovery of man : since, by thus ministering “all those things, which are necessary to life and godliness;” it has put it in our power to free ourselves from the dominion of sin, and to “work out our own salvation.”

Now this Gospel, or the religion it contains, though calculated and designed for the benefit of all ; was at first communicated
only

only to a few: who were afterwards appointed to spread and convey it to the rest of the world.

But, notwithstanding their appointment to this work, yet so conscious were the disciples of their own weakness, and so fearful of giving offence to the Jews^r; that they could not, for a time, prevail on themselves, even to attempt the execution of it; but seemingly threw it up, as a difficult, or rather impracticable scheme; and returned again to their former employment. “Peter went a fishing;” and six more of the same occupation joined themselves to him^s.

When they had thus returned to their secular employ, and were in danger of being immerfed in the concerns of the world; something, it is plain, was necessary to be done; to revive their attention to their spiritual charge; and render them mindful of their religious engagements. Our Saviour therefore, as he had engaged their attendance at first by a striking miracle, founded in their

^r John xx. 19.

^s Ibid xxi. 2, 3.

occupation, and adapted to their capacities—I mean, by a miraculous draught of fishes, and the assurance that “he would make them fishers of men[†] ;” so now, having invested them with that commission, and appointed them to convert the nations; he gave them a pledge of their future success by a repetition of the same miracle[‡]. For the draught which they had now made, was a significant emblem of what they should be farther enabled to do, when they came, under the influence and direction of Christ, to fish for men (if I may so speak) with the net of the Gospel. But then they were admonished by him, that if they meant to go on to any good purpose, and execute their commission in a proper manner; they must prefer his service to all worldly concerns, and be thoroughly disposed to “feed his sheep[×] ;” to instruct those that were ready to hear

[†] Luke v. 2---11.

[‡] John xxi, 6.

[×] Ibid. ver. 19. *Ἀπαρῶς με πλεῖον τέτων*; If the words *πλεῖον τέτων* made originally a part of the question, which, I confess, I much doubt; then must they refer to the *vessels* and *nets*, in the manage-

hear them, with affectionate and incessant care. For such I take to be the real import of that conversation, which he held with them, at the close of this miracle^y.

But though their inclinations were ever so good, and their concern to propagate the doctrine of their master ever so great; yet was there no likelihood, that they should make any considerable progress in the work by the mere force of their natural abilities. The task was evidently too arduous for the common powers of humanity to effect. And therefore they were commanded to “continue at Jerusalem, till they were endued with extraordinary power from on high^z,” adequate to the weight and mightiness of the

management of which Peter was occupied; and the meaning must be—“Art thou more truly devoted to *my service*, than to thy own *worldly concerns*?” A meaning in no wise so flat and cold as some critics have suggested. The question, in this sense, naturally sprung from Peter’s conduct. He was the first that returned to his former occupation, and carried the others with him---which betrayed an anxious concern for the world; and might therefore give rise to our Saviour’s interrogations.

^y John xxi. 15---19.

^z Luke xxiv. 49.

undertaking. Accordingly, when the appointed time was come, God sent down his spirit upon them; and thereby endowed them with the necessary qualifications. He furnished them with the power of working miracles; and with such other “gifts of the Holy Ghost,” as were requisite for the accomplishment of the divine purpose: requisite for the propagation of Christ’s religion; and for the growth and establishment of his kingdom in the world.

Now, since the special nature of these marvellous gifts, and the propriety of their application, depended in a great measure, on the nature of those peculiar exigences, which called for their exertion; we must previously consider the circumstances of things, as they stood at that time, before we can well know how properly these gifts were suited and adjusted to them.

Here then let it be observed, that, as the religion of Christ was manifestly intended for the common benefit of all nations; so the first thing requisite plainly was, that it should be accordingly conveyed to the
3
knowledge

knowledge of the nations. Now this could never be done, in any reasonable time; nor indeed with any considerable efficacy; but by conferring on the teachers of it, the gift of languages, to qualify them to instruct the nations. Conformably therefore to the exigence of the case, when the Holy Ghost fell on the apostles, he ushered his administration with this very gift. For “they all spake with other tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance^a.”

Being thus endowed with the gift of languages, and qualified to instruct the nations; the next thing requisite seems to have been, that the doctrines, which Christ had delivered to them, and which they had now in charge to publish to the world, should be so treasured up, or at least revived again, in their memory, that none of them might be forgotten and lost. But this was more than their natural abilities could possibly insure. And therefore it was another part of the Spirit's office, to strengthen their

^a Acts ii. 4.

faculties; “and bring all things again to their remembrance, whatsoever their master had said unto them ^b.”

But then, as it was not sufficient merely to remember the doctrines of our Saviour, but necessary likewise to understand their true and proper meaning; to prove their divinity by suitable arguments; and to obviate the objections, which ignorance or malice might form against them; so the Holy Spirit did not only secure the apostles from error, by “guiding them into all truth ^c,” and enlightning their understandings to judge unerringly of matters of faith; but “he gave them also a mouth and wisdom—” such knowledge of things, and such powers of expression—“as all their adversaries were not able to gainsay or resist ^d.”

Furnished, however, as they were for the work; yet was there still required an uncommon zeal to undertake it; an undaunted courage to pursue it; and unparalleled pa-

^b John xiv. 26.

^c Ibid xvi. 13.

^d Luke xxi. 15.

tience to bear up against the severe and constant hardships, which every where attended the prosecution of it. “But in all these things the apostles were more than conquerors^e.” For the Holy Ghost inspired and strengthened them with such a degree of courage and firmness, that they declined no difficulties, dreaded no dangers, shrunk at no trials, in the discharge of their duty; but even “rejoiced, that they were thought worthy to suffer for the name of Christ^f.”

But notwithstanding the constancy, courage and assiduity of its first teachers; a religion, so contrary to the prevailing dispositions of mankind, could, doubtless, make but a slow progress in a sensual world by its own force. Men, immersed in the pleasures of sense, are with difficulty brought to attend to reason. Such can only be instructed by being first astonished; and are scarcely led to obey, till they see it is in vain to withstand. Suitably therefore to this occasion, the Holy Ghost, as was farther necessary, armed the

^e Rom. viii. 37.

^f Acts v. 41.

apostles and first converts with the power of working miracles : which, at the same time that they proved and confirmed the truth of their doctrines ; awakened the attention, and subdued the reluctance and stubbornness of their hearers.

But as all their hearers might not be equally candid and sincere ; as some of them might hold the Gospel in hypocrisy ; and by a vicious conversation (the natural effect of base principles) might bring a reproach and scandal upon it ; and thereby obstruct it in its first rise ; so the apostles were moreover endowed, as the nature of the case required they should, with the faculty of discerning the hearts of men ; and with the power of inflicting punishments upon them, whenever they practised such vile deceits. And this power they had occasion miraculously to exert, as we read in the account of Ananias and Sapphira^g, almost as soon as Christianity appeared. An exertion no less gracious than severe : not only as it exhibited a ge-

^g Acts v. 1—10.

neral proof of the certainty of their divine mission; but as it particularly served to check the daringness of fraud and impiety, and to deter all base and hypocritical pretenders from presuming to disgrace their company. And accordingly we are told, that “great fear came upon all: and of the rest,” who were not sincere in their profession, “no man durst afterwards join himself to them^b.”

Such were the manifestations, the wonderful manifestations, displayed in favour of the religion of Christ, at its first publication and appearance in the world. And what now was the result? what was the consequence of these wonderful manifestations? Why confessedly this. A religion, that had nothing in it of external charms, nothing in it of pompous allurements; that was quite repugnant to the carnal inclinations, and totally subversive of the settled practices and worldly interests, of mankind: a religion, whose principal article was, to believe in a

^b Acts v. 11, 13.

despised and crucified Saviour: a religion, that proposed nothing to its professors, on earth, but tribulation, affliction, persecution, and death: a religion, preached only by a set of poor, illiterate, contemptible mechanics; and at the same time opposed, virulently opposed, by the rich, the learned, and the honourable of the world: yet *this* religion, by the mighty operations and powerful assistances of the Holy Spirit, broke through all restraints and impediments; spread itself with surprising rapidity; and bore down all the powers in its way—till kings after kings became obedient to it; and nations after nations did, and do it, service.

Now this rapid and amazing progress of our religion, as it was made, by our account, in consequence of the miracles said to have been wrought and displayed in its favour; so does it manifest our account to be true, and prove those miracles to have been actually exerted. The fact, the surprising success of the Gospel, is acknowledged on all hands: and yet, at its first setting out,
there

there did not appear, humanly speaking, the least probability of its ever succeeding. It had none of those advantages on its side, which are known to have contributed to the growth and propagation of other doctrines. It contained no soothing, no complying tenets, adapted to the passions and interests of those among whom it was to make its way. It had no support, no encouragement, from the civil power: no countenance, no recommendation, from men of learning, eminence, or repute. It had no force, no cunning, to uphold it; but shewed itself to the world in the meekest and most artless manner; submitting its pretences to the strict examination of the curious and inquisitive, through all that prying and enlightened age: yet nevertheless, though utterly destitute of these advantages; and pressed with various accidental incumbrances; it “grew mightily” in a short time; “and prevailed,” in the compass of a few years, over the greatest part of the known world.

And now, by what possible means could a religion, so weak and defenceless in itself; a religion,

ligion, so contrary to the prevailing customs of the world; and so vigorously opposed by all the power and authority of it; be thus propagated, embraced, and established; but by such testimonies and “demonstrations of the spirit,” as the first Christians unanimously affirm to have attended and promoted its progress? These indeed afford us a clear and complete account of the wonderful change it made in the world: and nothing else can rationally account for it. If we attempt to solve it in a natural way, we shall soon find, that the course of nature never exhibited any thing like it. In all natural transactions, the event is proportionable to the power of the agent. But here, there is no manner of proportion between the effect and its supposed cause: between the work wrought and the instruments which wrought it. So that were we acquainted with nothing more, than what we read in the former part of the text—that “the Apostles went forth, and preached every where;” and wherever they preached made a prodigious number of converts; we must necessarily conclude,

conclude, according to what is moreover asserted in the latter part of it—that “the Lord worked most powerfully with them, and confirmed their words with signs following.” Had “this counsel or this work been of men” only, “it must have come to nought^k.” And therefore that it prevailed, and wrought the conversion of so many nations; is entirely owing to the power of God, which operated so marvelously in its favour. Such an extraordinary change, such a general revolution, brought about, in so short a time, by such weak and disproportionate instruments; is itself a miracle; and the greatest of miracles; and does still as evidently assure us, that the preaching of the apostles was attended with the manifestation of divine power; as if we had seen it ourselves exerted by them, in proof and confirmation of what they preached.

How long a time these miraculous powers continued in the church; is a question that

^k Acts v. 28.

cannot easily, and needs not critically, be determined. Thus much, however, the nature of the thing itself will suggest: that, as miracles were conferred, in order to evince the truth of the Gospel; and to promote its reception, at its first setting out; so were they continued for as long a time, as it stood in need of such credentials. When the prejudices of mankind began to abate, these extraordinary manifestations, which were designed to conquer them, we may well suppose, abated likewise; and at length totally ceased, when Christianity was thoroughly established. Miracles were then of no farther use. For when human learning undertook to display the reasonableness of christianity, and to illustrate the beauties and excellences of its doctrines; when the civil power came in to its support, and honoured the church with its protection and encouragement; these were means sufficiently able of themselves, without the help and concurrence of miracles, to vanquish all the remaining opposition, and to render the Gospel completely victorious.

Accord-

Accordingly, for a century or more, after the accession of the civil power, it throve and flourished at an exceeding rate; and was in a fair way of making wider and farther advances. But its career was unhappily stopped. The lukewarmness of its professors soon brought it to a stand; and their subsequent ambition, luxury, and dissensions caused it gradually to lose ground. And what wonder then, if God, in vengeance on the flagrant sins of that degenerate age, suffered Mahometanism, with its pestilential train, to make large incroachments on the Christian world; and to tear off at once several provinces from the profession of that Gospel, which they had so generally and shamefully abused; and of which they had discovered themselves to be no longer worthy?

This, however, appears to have been evidently the defect of men and times, and by no means the defect of the Gospel. The Gospel had long before shewed itself able to make its way, provided its professors acted their part, and were careful to discharge their

duty. They discharged it not. On the contrary, they disgraced and vilified their profession by the immorality of their lives: and thereby furnished the enemies of our Faith with all manner of advantages against it. These advantages they strenuously embraced; and brought, in consequence, many countries under gross darkness, which had once enjoyed the pure and cherishing light of the Gospel.—An event, though seemingly detrimental to our religion, yet, doubtless, permitted for good ends; and probably serviceable to its interest at last. It served as a warning, a seasonable warning, to all other christians, not to neglect the practice of the Gospel, for fear it should be judicially withdrawn from them. It might also serve to divert its course from a wavering people, unable “to retain it in the love thereof;” and to make it rebound to other nations, better disposed to cultivate it with steadiness, and to “bring forth fruit with patience¹.”

¹ Luke viii. 15.

Several princes, indiscreetly pious, have made attempts to regain the ground, which christianity had lost, by the force of their arms; and to replant the Gospel, in the regions it had left, with the points of their swords. But alas! that great work is to be accomplished, not by such *holy wars* as these; but by conflicts of another kind, which we must maintain with our own corrupt habits, and vicious inclinations: not by foreign acquisitions; but by domestic victories over those impieties, which at first stopped the growth, and will ever retard the progress, of our holy religion^m.

When the conversation of christians is such as becometh the purity of the Gospel; when they sincerely embrace and approve its doctrines, and conscientiously endeavour to obey its precepts; when they unanimously strive to adorn their profession by good works, and to recommend it to others by their virtuous example; then may the Gospel resume its course; recover the territories it

^m Bp. ATTERBURY, Vol. I. Sermon. IV.

unhappily lost; and extend its light, influence, and power, to the darkest and most distant regions of the globe:—Then may it go on conquering, and to conquer; “till the kingdoms of the world gradually become the kingdom of Christⁿ; and the earth be overspread with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea^o.”

This the Scripture assures us will be finally the case. And however distant the period may be, yet are there not wanting some strong presages, some lively indications, of its future access. The workings of providence manifestly tend towards it; and, in various degrees and methods, are visibly preparing the way for it. Extensive is the progress, which the Gospel has already made; and wide are the countries over which it has prevailed. And where it did prevail, it prevailed more completely than any other religion could; which is a plain proof of its superior excellency. And though it has been forced to quit some places it once pos-

^m Rev. xi. 15.

ⁿ Isaiah xi. 9.

feſſed; yet did it leave a notable quantity of “good feed” behind it: which, mixing with the other produce of the ſoil, helped to correct and improve it; and which, by a proper cultivation, and the favour of the heavens, may ſpring up hereafter in a plentiful and pure increaſe. Nay, ſo penetrating and powerful is the influence of the Goſpel, that it has often produced conſiderable effects, and brought about ſome remarkable alterations^p, even in places where it was never eſtabliſhed; nor indeed formally profeſſed.

In ſhort, it has been always, to uſe our Saviour’s compariſon, working, like leaven^p,

° This is evident from the improvement it made in the *no- tions* and *ſentiments* of thoſe heathen moralists, who flouriſhed after its promulgation; ſuch as EPICTETUS, ARRIAN, PLUTARCH, MAX. TYRIUS, MAR. ANTONINUS, HIEROCLES, and SENECA. What influence it had on their *forms of devotion* may be ſeen in Dr. JORTIN’S Diſcourſes on the Chriſtian Religion, p, 228, &c.—To which I ſhall add one remarkable inſtance not mentioned by him. It occurs in ARRIAN, lib. ii. cap. vii. and is no leſs than Κύριε, ἐλέησον, which was taken from the Chriſtian church, and adopted by the wiſer Gentiles. Τὸν Θεὸν ἐπικαλούμενοι δεόμεθα αὐτῷ, Κύριε, ἐλέησον. *Deum invocantes, precamur eum, Domine miſerere noſtri.*

^p Matth. xiii. 33. Luke xiii. 20, 21:

in the mass of mankind; assimilating to itself, in various degrees, their different principles, dispositions, and manners. And, to its honour be it spoken, it always produced the greatest effects, among those who were most highly polished. In uncultivated regions it could never thrive: their grossness could not comprehend it. This indeed our two venerable societies have had frequent and repeated occasions to lament. For their success in the conversion both of the Eastern and Western Indians, was by no means answerable, for several years, to the endeavours employed therein. But, as the one grew more civil and humane, and the other became less averse to our manners and customs, the prospect brightened upon us; and the labours of our missionaries have been equally fruitful, prosperous, and comfortable.

Of the ancient Fathers pray observe how many were philosophers.

The incorporated society "for the propagation of the Gospel in foreign parts," viz. America. And the voluntary society "for promoting Christian knowledge," who maintain six missionaries in the East Indies; and have a call for more, were they able to send them.

And, since it has pleased God, by advancing our conquests in both places at once, to open a way for propagating our religion more extensively among them; what a glorious harvest might we expect to reap, had we labourers sufficient for it! “But, alas! the labourers are few:” and we can only “pray the Lord of the harvest,” that he would dispose the hearts of those men especially, who draw their wealth from these regions, to strengthen the hands of our religious societies; that they may be able to “send forth more labourers into his harvest.” Then might we hope, that “the name of the Lord would become great among the Gentiles; and that in every place a pure offering would be offered unto him, from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same.”

But let our hopes of the future prevalence of our religion be what they may; yet still it is urged, “that many large and populous tracts lie at present in the grossest darkness: and, since the Gospel is represented to be so

† Matth. ix. 37, 38.

• Mal. i. 11.

extremely

extremely necessary to the Salvation of the world; what is to become of those unhappy people, who could never attain to its saving truths?" The answer is—They are secure in the goodness of a merciful Creator: who, "if he gave but little to them, will require in return but little of them;" and who yet, for the good use they make of that little, will crown them with an happiness, proportioned to their deeds, and equal to the extent of their moral capacities.

Instead therefore of being over-curious, and needlessly solicitous about *their* state; let us rather be careful to shew a proper concern for our *own*. We confessedly enjoy superior advantages; and should consequently labour to excel in our improvements. We are favoured with one "unspeakable gift," for which we can never be sufficiently thankful. We have the pure Gospel of Christ in our hands; and that Gospel proved to be the truth of God. As it comes to us then, supported by the clearest attestations of divinity; let us receive it with more reverence, and obey it with more diligence, for its
having

having been ratified, confirmed, and established, in so marvellous and unparalleled a manner. Scornfully to reject, or indolently to neglect it, is to ruin ourselves. “For if the word spoken by angels,” if the law of Moses, “was steadfast; and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with diverse miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost^u.”

To which blessed and glorious Trinity, thus uniting in the support and advancement of Christianity, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour, adoration, and praise, &c. *Amen.*

^u Heb. ii. 2—4.

S E R M O N XXIV.

2 COR. iv. 3.

If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.

WE have now seen the nature and design of those manifold dispensations, which God exercised towards mankind through the several ages of the world. If we consider the importance of this design, its necessity indeed, for the improvement and happiness of mankind; we shall soon perceive, and be fully satisfied, that it was in no wise unworthy of Almighty God to interpose,

interpose, by such great and extraordinary acts, for the success and accomplishment of it. And, if we consider moreover the suitability and propriety of the acts themselves, and their united tendency to that effect; we shall find sufficient reason to conclude, that they could be the product of no other agency than his, “who is excellent in counsel, as well as mighty in work.”

The foundation of this stupendous system is laid, as we have observed, in the fall of man: and the grand intention of it is, to work out his restoration and recovery. Now, as mankind, in consequence of the fall, strayed perpetually into wrong paths; and deviated from time to time into an endless variety of destructive errors; so God made use of various methods, as the exigence of the case required, to check the progress of their perverseness and disobedience; and to bring them back to truth and righteousness. But of all the errors they fell into, that was the grossest, and most extensively pernicious, which led them to renounce the true God, and to deify the several parts of
the

the universe: to pay religious homage and adoration to weak and contemptible creatures, instead of worshipping the Almighty Creator; who alone is worthy of the praise and adoration of men. This superstitious worship carried them, according to its natural bent, into the commission of the vilest and most detestable practices; which rendered them daily more and more incapable of true and rational happiness.

Now this state, so entirely foreign to all human felicity, manifestly required some proper provision to be made for its amendment, in the restoration of true religion; and the cultivation of better morals: without which it was impossible the world should become happy. With this view then, God, in the earlier ages of the world, and through all the times of the Old Testament, was graciously pleased to make several revelations to the sons of men—in order as well to remove their ignorance, and correct their errors; as to improve their religious and moral principles, and to support their hopes of a future and complete redemption.

This

This chain of revelations was attended throughout by a correspondent chain of miracles: which, at the same time that they confirmed the truth of the several doctrines; conspired likewise to prove this general, and, as the case then stood, most necessary article—that Jehovah, the author of them, was the only great and true God, the Creator and Governour of the world; and consequently, that He alone was entitled to the service and obedience of men. For this system of miracles, varying, as we have seen, with every variation of state and circumstances; and yet regularly operating to one great and beneficent design; exhibits as clear a manifestation of the agency of the Deity, as the system of nature does. Indeed, most of those amazing works, performed under the Old Testament, were so near akin to the works of the creation, that, by a just comparison, they might be known to come from the same hand^a. For who, but the author of nature, could vary and

^a Bp. SHERLOCK, Vol. I. Disc. x. p. 283.

controul the course of nature in so surprising a manner, and to so gracious an end?

If the Deist therefore, who admits the world to have been at first created, and to be still supported, by the hand of God, will be true to his principles; he must admit likewise, that the Jewish dispensation was at first planned, and all along conducted, by the same wise and powerful Being. For, upon what grounds, let me ask him, does he believe the world to be the workmanship of God? Is it because he observes such traces of wisdom in the disposition of its parts; such instances of power in the execution of the whole, as no other Being could exert or display? Then, if so, is he not bound, by the very same reasons, to believe the divinity of the Old Testament? For, if the works of nature are acknowledged to be sufficient to prove that God is the author of nature; surely the miracles of the Jewish religion, which are works of similar design, and effects of equal power, must be acknowledged as sufficient to prove God to be the author of that religion. This is a clear and

direct conclusion. And this conclusion he can no otherwise evade, than by rejecting all the miracles together, as things incredible, false, and fictitious. But the necessity of them for the accomplishment of the end designed; the probability they derive from the circumstances under which they are recorded; the general harmony that runs through them; the connection they maintain with the particular state and condition of the times; and the attestation of ancient history in their favour; not only clear them from all suspicion of that kind, but unite to establish the truth of their existence.

It is an easy matter to raise cavils, and to urge, perhaps, some plausible objections against the evidence of any thing; especially when viewed in a detached light, and considered in a disjointed manner. But let the infidel connect, as believers connect, all the acknowledged and undoubted facts, relating to the Jewish œconomy, together; and then try to solve or explain them on his own principles; and he will soon find it far beyond the extent of his abilities, not
only

only to produce a rational account, consistent with the faith of history, how they *did* happen ; but even to form any conjectural notion, how they *could* happen, that will not be clogged with infinitely greater and more perplexing difficulties, than he can ever pretend to alledge against the truth of the Scripture narration. The sum of the argument is this—Either the Jewish œconomy was carried on by the help of those miracles, for which we contend ; or its proceeding and gaining its end without them, was the most amazing miracle of all. And therefore, “ since the falshood of the Scripture-account would be more miraculous, than the events which it relates ;” we may now hope, from our adversary’s own concession, that it may venture, if not to “ command,” yet at least to lay its humble claim to, “ his belief or opinion ”.

But be the opinions of men what they will, certain however it is, that the Jewish dispensation did take effect ; that “ the word

” Hume’s Essays, ubi supra.

of the Lord, the revelation delivered to the children of Israel, “ did not return to him void ; but,” being sustained and confirmed by attendant miracles, “ accomplished that which he graciously designed ; and prospered in the thing whereto he sent it^z.” For it wrought a marvellous change in the world. It gradually dispelled the darkness of superstition ; reformed those idolatrous errors and corruptions, which had long infected his own people ; and, by their conversion, brought many others, out of all nations, to the acknowledgement and service of the true God ; and to a full expectation of some heavenly guide^a ; who should improve their understandings, purify their affections, raise them to a nobler and more perfect state, and thereby qualify them for higher happiness.

When the Mosaic œconomy had thus advanced the reformation of the world, and made men capable of a higher administra-

^z Isaiah lv. 11.

^a See Note * p. 120. of this volume ; and Dr. CLARKE’S *Ev. of Religion*, prop. vii. § 2.

tion ;

tion; when it had effectually reclaimed the Jews from idolatry, and secured their dependance on the one supreme and true God; when it had impressed on their minds such rational notions of his nature and providence, as qualified them to worship him after a purer manner;—When “the light of Israel” had reached the Gentiles, and discovered the dimness of natural reason; when it had quickened their desire of farther instruction, and properly prepared them for the reception of it; then it seems to have been the fittest time for the promised Messiah to make his appearance. For then the world was in the fittest situation to examine the evidence of his divine mission; to profit by the instructions he should deliver to them; and to convey down the whole of his religion to future and distant ages.

Accordingly, at this seasonable time, Jesus Christ appeared in the world; and brought with him “good tidings of great joy, which” belonged equally “to all people^b.” He came to be their Saviour;

^b Luke ii. 10.

that is, to reform and improve their corrupt nature, and to render them capable of enjoying their God.

To this end, he established such a complete institution of religion, as is not only perfective of the former dispensations; but also conducive to the highest improvement, and the most exalted happiness, that mankind can wish to attain.

To animate their endeavours after such improvement, this religion, as we have already shewn, assures them, in the first place, of the free pardon of their past transgressions, on the condition of repentance from such evil works, and of faithful obedience for the time to come.

To direct their obedience in a right course, it exhibits, in the next place, a most perfect and complete rule of life, adapted to all the circumstances of our stations, and illustrated by the conduct of “that righteous Person,” in whom his enemies could “find no fault”; and of whom God

• John xviii. 38.

openly

openly declared, that “in him he was well pleased ^d.”

To strengthen the infirmities of mankind, and raise their powers to the measure of this rule; it assures them moreover of the aid and assistance of the divine spirit: who is able to support them under all trials; and will, with the concurrence of their own endeavours, lead them safely through this state of probation, to that future and more important state, in which they are to receive the reward of their deeds.

To make them attentive to the suggestions of the Spirit, to deter them from the practice of vice and impiety, and to engage them in the constant, steady pursuit of all virtue and goodness; it farther lays before them the most powerful and awakening motives, that can ever be proposed to the understanding of men: it opens to their view a clear prospect of that future state, where “the wicked shall be punished with everlast-

^d Matth. xvii. 5.

ing destruction, whilst the righteous are crowned with endless felicity^e.”

. And finally, to prove “these doctrines to be of God,” and delivered to the world by his authority; they all stand attested and confirmed by such a train of apposite “miracles, as no man could” possibly “perform, except God were with him^f.”

Such is the provision which Christ has made, according to the plain, evangelical account, for the happiness and salvation of mankind. And, pray, what is there wanting in this account, to complete his character, as the promised Messiah—the reformer and redeemer of the world? Was he to make an atonement to God for us? Behold then, “he died for our sins, and rose again for our justification^g.” Was he to supply us with the necessary means of salvation? with “all things pertaining to life and godliness?” Then behold them all expressly revealed, and powerfully enforced, in the

^e Matth. xxv. 46.

^f John iii. 2.

^g Rom. iv. 25.

Gospel. Did the nations of the world stand all in equal need of these benefits? Behold then, he commissioned his disciples to propose and communicate them to all nations. And that his disciples might be able to execute and fulfil the commission they had received, behold them endowed with the gift of languages, to qualify them to instruct the nations. Thus commissioned, and thus gifted, “they went forth, and preached every where; the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by signs following^h.”

Here now let us pause a little—and then ask ourselves, “what plainer, stronger, more convincing proofs can we possibly require in confirmation of this religion, than those are, which the Gospel offers?” It is manifestly supported by all the *internal* and *external* evidences that can well be thought on. Its doctrines are not only correspondent to the necessities of human nature; but also conformable to the highest human reason; and

^h Mark xvi. 20.

are moreover attested by analogous examples and sensible demonstrations. For our Saviour (as it now, I hope, sufficiently appears) advanced no doctrines, claimed no powers, but such as he openly and repeatedly ascertained by adequate instances and proper illustrations.

Had the Gospel required of us to expect salvation by Jesus Christ, and given us no reason to think him equal to the mighty work, infidels might then have laughed with assurance; and have justly reproached our faith as credulity. But now their reproaches be to themselves. It is our boast, as it is our happiness, that “we know in whom we have believedⁱ ;” even in him, “who is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him^k”—seeing he is the Lord of life and glory; and is invested with sovereign power both in heaven and earth, as he made appear by frequent and repeated exertions of it.

ⁱ 2 Tim. i. 12.

^k Heb. vii. 25.

Since

Since Christ then has given us all reasonable proof, that he was “a teacher come from God:” since the doctrines he taught appear to be in their own nature divine; worthy of God, and beneficial to man: since he has confirmed them in every branch by the most suitable and appropriate miracles: what apology can we make for ourselves, “if we reject so great,” and at the same time so well-attested, “a salvation?”

But perhaps it will be said, several others, as well as Christ, have brought revelations into the world; and have wrought miracles in confirmation of them; and therefore, that these have an equal right to our belief and acceptance, as the Christian revelation has: since they were all raised upon the same foundation, and are supported by the same credentials.

Now, we readily grant, that various religions were formerly introduced into the heathen world under the pretence of revelation; and that several miracles are said to have been wrought by the founders of these
3
religions.

religions. But what then? Is there any comparison to be made between these religions and the Gospel of Christ? View their contents: consider their genius and constitution: what signatures of divine wisdom, what marks of divine goodness, are there to be discovered in them? What correspondence did they bear with the moral exigences of mankind? what reference had they to pure, solid, and rational happiness? Consider the proofs upon which they stand: examine the miracles alledged in their favour: how mean, trifling, ridiculous, are most of them in themselves! And how poorly are they all attested! And, lastly, consider the fate of these religions: how soon did they vanish, and sink into contempt, when the secular powers that supported them failed, or knowledge and learning advanced in the world?

With what colour of reason, then, can any man presume to set these weak, pretended revelations in competition with the Gospel of Christ, which made its way in spite of all opposing powers; and has stood the critical examination of ages?—Yea, and
ever

ever will stand it. For, could men be persuaded to lay aside their prejudices and passions; to approach the Scripture with seriousness and candour; and to weigh the merits of the Christian cause with deliberation and impartiality; there can be no doubt, but they would, to their happiness, be soon convinced, that the evidence for the truth of Christianity is as full and satisfactory, as the end it proposes is great and desirable. This evidence is likewise so plain and obvious, that any man, of the most common abilities, may easily perceive, and readily comprehend it. And therefore, “if the Gospel,” or the evidence of the Gospel, “be hid; it is to them that are lost”—blinded by some inveterate prejudice or untoward passion, which they are determined to indulge, even to their own ruin.

That this is the real state of the case, evidently appears, not only from the *general opposition*, which these men make to religion; but more especially from those *particular objections*, which they urge against it.

They

They who extol the sufficiency of reason; and cry down revelation as useless; are manifestly *lost* to a due sense of that weakness and ignorance of the human understanding, which the wisest heathens loudly deplored; and which they ardently wished might be cleared up by the accession of superior light¹.

And since the Gospel has brought such light into the world; they who shut their eyes against it, and still “love darkness rather than light;” are entirely *lost* to that proper concern they ought to have for the establishment of truth and righteousness.

They who dispute the truth of the Gospel; and demand other, and still farther, proofs of its divine authority; are evidently *lost* to the force and propriety of that sound reasoning, whereby it has been repeatedly and conclusively shewn to carry with it all the evidence, that a divine revelation can be supposed to have.

¹ CICERO, Tusc. Disp. lib. iii. in principio. PLAT. Alcib. ii. in fine.

They

They who dwell on some fancied defects; and can bring the *method* and *order*, the *language* and *style* of Scripture, as so many objections to its inspiration; are clearly *lost* to the beauties and excellencies of good writing; and plainly discover a want of taste fully equal to their want of piety.

And, finally, they who “care for none of these things;” but scornfully reject the Gospel, without either examining its contents, or inquiring into its evidence; are deplorably *lost* to that just regard, which every considerate and rational person should maintain for his own happiness.

But whether men regard it or not, certain however it is, that God may require them to take notice of some things, even at their peril; to search diligently into them; and to consider them thoroughly. The Gospel is a thing of this kind: for it was delivered under this solemn sanction. When it was proposed to the Jews, it was proposed as the effectual means of salvation, provided they embraced and obeyed it. But notwithstanding the numberless and repeated miracles,

racles,

acles, that were wrought in confirmation of it before their eyes; yet their prejudices and passions suppressed their conviction; and kept them still in a state of infidelity;—which ended, according to the threatnings denounced, in the destruction of “their place and nation.” Now *their* fate should be a warning to *others*, not to indulge “an evil heart of unbelief,” when they have such unanswerable reasons to the contrary, lest they should unhappily fall under that heavier punishment, of which this was only the emblem. For the case of the Jews was in this respect by no means peculiar. The Gospel was published to the rest of the world, under the same alternative. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not,” when he has sufficient grounds for believing, shall be damned^m”—shall be finally “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of that Lord,” whom he contemned and reviled; “and from the glory of that power, which he set at defianceⁿ.”

^m Mark xvi. 16.

ⁿ 2 Thess. i. 9.

This let the infidel reflect upon. It is a point of the utmost importance; and a point in which he is deeply concerned. However secure he may think himself at present; and whatever degree of raillery and contempt he may now be pleased to pour out on our religion and its Author; yet the time is hastning on, when he shall be forced to contemplate these weighty subjects with other, and different, resentments. With what trembling astonishment will he come forth, in the day when he shall see that despised Galilean, the meek and holy Jesus; whose name he has blasphemed, whose altars he has profaned, and whose religion and laws he has vilified and traduced; exalted now in the majesty of his kingdom, and bearing rule over every creature! With what terrour and confusion will he behold him seated on the throne of judgment; determining the fate, and adjusting the allotments, of the whole human race? What must his “searchings of heart” be, when he shall see “the heavens and the earth pass away; and every jot and every tittle of that Gospel he de-

spised, confirmed and fulfilled °!" With what agonies of guilt and despair must he and his fraternity approach the offended presence of the Lord; and submit to that terrible sentence of their judge!—"Those mine enemies who would not that I should reign over them, bring them out, and slay them before me P."

May these considerations awaken unbelievers to a due sense of their state and condition! May they prevail upon them to divest themselves of those prejudices and passions, which are not only apt to keep men in ignorance; but also contribute to superinduce an hardness of heart, and a fatal contempt of God's word! May they effectually excite them to "seek out the truth in the love thereof;" and to yield themselves up, whenever it is found, to the salutary influence of its dictates! And may they, who embrace "the truth, as it is in Jesus⁹;" and are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion;" be careful to

° Matth. v. 18. Mark xiii. 31.

P Luke xix. 27.

⁹ Epes. iv. 21.

“eschew

“ eschew all those things, that are contrary to their profession; and to follow such things, as are agreeable to the same^r !” May they labour to adorn the doctrine of our Saviour; and to recommend it to the world by the excellency of their dispositions, and the amiableness of their conduct! And if we make “ our light so to shine before men;” then will they readily perceive, and willingly acknowledge, that there is something divine, something illustrious and heavenly in it; and will thence be strongly prompted to join us in the worship of that gracious Being, who favoured his servants with such efficacious means of becoming a holy and a happy people.

That this may finally be our state on earth; and that we may all have reason to rejoice together in the hope of a glorious immortality in heaven; God, of his infinite mercy, grant, &c. *Amen.*

^r Collect for the 3d S. after Easter.

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