









Thomas Robinson

SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS;

OR,

A PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT

OF THE

PRINCIPAL HISTORIES IN THE

Old and New Testament.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY THOMAS ROBINSON, M. A.

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THE NINTH EDITION;

CONTAINING A BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR.

VOL. IV.

GOD, WHO AT SUNDRY TIMES AND IN DIVERS MANNERS SPAKE
IN TIMES PAST UNTO THE FATHERS BY THE PROPHETS,
HATH IN THESE LAST DAYS SPOKEN UNTO US BY
HIS SON.—THEREFORE WE OUGHT TO GIVE
THE MORE EARNEST NEED.—
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THE HISTORY OF THE
CIVILIZATION OF THE
INDIANS OF THE
NORTH AMERICAN CONTINENT
BY
BARON DE LA PERRONNIERE

BY
M. DE LA PERRONNIERE
AND
M. DE LA PERRONNIERE

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SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS:

VOLUME THE FOURTH.

CONTAINING

THE SECOND PART OF THE PRINCIPAL HISTORIES

IN THE

NEW TESTAMENT.

SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 33.

Jesus delivered the parable of the marriage feast—replied to the Pharisees and Herodians, on the payment of tribute—confounded the Sadducees, by proving the resurrection—answered a Scribe, respecting the first and great commandment—baffled the Pharisees, by proposing a question about the Messiah—warned his disciples against the Scribes and Pharisees, whom he reprov'd and condemn'd in the most awful language.

“**WHERE** is the wise? where is the Scribe? where is the disputer of this world *?” Such were the opponents of our Lord; and in their proud and malicious contentions with him they were completely vanquished and confounded. Towards the close of his life, especially, they assailed him with all their subtlety, in order to insnare him; but their best-concerted plans were baffled. We know, also, that all his adversaries, who object to his Gospel, though they may be thought to possess an uncommon degree of sagacity and learning, shall finally be convicted of the grossest folly, be silenced and overcome. “All that are incensed against him shall be ashamed †.”

* 1 Cor. i. 20.

† Isa. xlv. 42.

Tuesday in
Passion week. Part of his audience had withdrawn, being enraged by his faithful admonitions; but he proceeded to instruct the rest by a very interesting parable*. In language something similar to what he had used on a former occasion †, he represented the great blessings of the Gospel under the description of a feast. Plenteous provisions, and such as are most exquisite in their nature, are here exhibited. They are sufficient for the supply of every guest, and capable of yielding inexpressible delight. This is more than a common entertainment: it is a royal banquet; what the King of heaven has prepared for the accommodation of his creatures upon earth. It is, also, designed for the celebration of a marriage, the union of his own Son with the church: for Jesus is the Bridegroom of his people, having espoused them to himself. What extensive and unparalleled grace does this display!

A numerous company had been desired to give their attendance; but at the proper season, when reminded of their sovereign's expectations, they refused to obey his summons. Yet such was his condescension, that after this insult he renewed the invitation, and sent one message upon another, assuring them that his table was richly furnished for their reception, and requesting their presence without delay. Even then his kindness was rejected with disdain, being considered as a matter not worth regarding: for "they made light of it," and turned their attention to their common occupations. Is this a natural description? Are men, in general, backward to partake of a sumptuous entertainment? Do they shun the opportunity of gratifying their sensual appetites? No: but the feast here exhibited is spiritual; and the contempt with which its blessings are usually refused is a decisive proof of our extreme depravity: there is scarcely any thing in life which is not preferred to grace and salvation.

The parable further declares that the servants, who

* Matt. xxii. 1—14.

† Sect. 26.

carried their lord's messages, were treated with scorn and violence; and that some of them suffered death. This was exactly what the holy Prophets and Apostles met with from the Jewish nation. Jesus, therefore, held up to his hearers a true picture of the persecuting spirit by which both they and their fathers were distinguished; and while he represented the king as utterly destroying his murderous subjects, and reducing their city to ashes, he virtually predicted the divine judgments coming upon them for their rejection of the Gospel. Their fall, however, has contributed to the exaltation of others: we "have obtained mercy through their unbelief*."

The invitation to the marriage was enlarged. The sovereign, determined that his preparations should not be ineffectual, called in the strangers and miserable outcasts upon the highways, till the feast was furnished with guests. Thus the Lord God has sent the glad tidings of salvation to sinners of the Gentiles, even to those, who, through their ignorance and profaneness, seem at the greatest distance, and in a state the most deplorably wretched. The ministers of the Gospel are now commissioned to "bid to the marriage as many as they shall find." Whatever, then, may have been your character or condition, we entreat your attendance, and assure you that the Lord will graciously receive you. O refuse not, as others have done to their perdition!

But, if you accept the invitation, you must comply with the rules prescribed, and be properly habited, while you sit down to this entertainment: for "a wedding garment" is provided for the guests. God himself proposes to "cover you with the robe of righteousness," which will render you beautiful in his sight: you cannot, indeed, stand in his presence without it. He will minutely survey the persons who profess a readiness to partake of his feast. Let all the outward members of his church attentively consider that scrutiny which He makes. One is re-

* Rom. xi. 30.

presented as singled out from the rest, being destitute of the vestment required on the occasion, and commanded by the lord of the assembly. He was called forth and examined concerning his pretensions to be admitted to that high banquet, and, having nothing to urge in his own defence, was cast out with extreme disgrace. The all-piercing eye of God will detect every hypocrite who may be numbered among his people. It is not enough to join the assemblies of the saints: have we "put on Christ?" If we are unwilling to appear in his righteousness, and presume upon our own worthiness, we cannot be acceptable guests: nor can we escape conviction. "How camest thou in hither?" is a question which will confound thousands, who seem to pay a respect to the Gospel. What, then, is our habit? Are we "clothed with the garment of salvation?" If otherwise, an awful condemnation awaits us; we must be excluded from God and happiness, and consigned to a place of endless and inexpressible torment, anguish, and despair. Ah! what "searchings of heart" become us, since few, in comparison, obtain the efficacious influence of that grace which is tendered to them in the Gospel.

These solemn admonitions of Jesus did not conciliate, but rather the more exasperate, his enemies. Yet they were afraid to take away his life by force, and, therefore, by various schemes, endeavoured to find some plausible pretext for doing it. Accordingly they proposed subtle questions, merely that they might draw from him such answers as would furnish them with a heavy charge against him. The Pharisees left him, and, having consulted together on the best method of effecting their design, joined the Herodians in laying a snare for him*. These men were of different parties and principles, and yet they could agree in the same diabolical purpose. They came with fair, but feigned, professions of regard, and requested our Lord's decision as to the lawfulness of paying tribute to Cæsar the Roman emperor.

* Matt. xxii. 15—22. Mark xii. 13—17. Luke xx. 20—26.

Probably they were confident of involving him in a very serious difficulty: if he had dissuaded them from submitting to the tax, they might have accused him as an enemy to the government; or, if he had commanded it, they might have incensed the people against him, as hostile to their liberties.

But how vain are all human devices in opposition to God! Jesus perceived their malevolent intentions, and sharply reproved their hypocrisy. He replied with peculiar wisdom, so as to make them judge and condemn themselves in their own cause. They were forced to confess their subjection to Cæsar, so long as they received the current coin, which was stamped with that emperor's image. He inferred, therefore, without entering into political debates, that they should "render to Cæsar the things which were Cæsar's." A conclusion undeniably just: and equally just was the caution which he subjoined, that God also has demands upon us, which ought, at least, to be as much regarded and complied with as those of our earthly governors. They were astonished at the prudence and propriety of this answer, and obliged for that time to abandon their purpose.

Let us, then, attend to our Lord's decision, and seriously consider what we owe both to God and the king. These duties are not incompatible with each other: we cannot plead that we truly "fear God," if we do not "honour the king." Are we giving him that reverence and support which are due to his station and authority? Do we utter contemptuous speeches against the magistrate? Do we listen with pleasure to the debates of sedition? Do we study fraudulent methods of evading the taxes which are imposed, or pay them with a peevish discontent? Surely such a conduct is as repugnant as disgraceful to the profession of religion. But, though we have maintained our loyalty and submission to the reigning powers, have we not neglected the God of heaven? Has he no rights, no claims upon us? Or shall we presume

presume that he will not assert them? "Will a man rob God?" Would not the attempt imply consummate ignorance, pride, and fool-hardiness? Yet we all have done it. We have not admired his perfections, honoured his government, obeyed his law, or believed in his Gospel, as we ought. We have not rendered all proper reverence and attention to his name, his sabbaths, his house, or ministers. "Enter not into judgment with thy servants, O Lord!"

On the same day a different set of men attacked the Saviour*. The Sadducees, who denied a future state, came and started a difficulty against the resurrection of the body, which they ridiculed. They urged that seven brethren, having been married in succession to the same woman, could not all claim her as their wife in the world to come. But Jesus declared that their opinions evinced an ignorance of the Scriptures, and of the mighty power of God; since that power can easily restore life to the dead, however improbable the event may seem, and the Scriptures expressly assert that they shall rise. He argued, that all the distinctions and relations, which subsist among us on earth, will have no place hereafter. There may be a knowledge of those to whom we are now closely united; but all those partial attachments and connexions, which bind us to one another, will then be done away, as inconsistent with the perfection of the heavenly state. Their objection, therefore, fell to the ground. He showed also, even from the books of Moses, which they professed to receive, that Jehovah had evidently given intimations of a future state, by calling himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, long after those patriarchs were deceased: we may thence conclude that departed saints are not perished; but that, as God is their God, their spirits are now with him, and their dust shall awake again, to live in his presence for ever. Thus they were completely vanquished, and dared not to renew their attack.

* Matt. xxii. 23—33. Mark xii. 18—27. Luke xx. 27—40.

Do not modern free-thinkers, like the ancient Sadducees, betray their ignorance and perverseness by the difficulties which they start on the subject of religion? We would, therefore, address them in the words of Jesus, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God." We entreat you to relinquish your speculations, which will certainly turn to your confusion. To be possessed of a captious disposition, and a fondness for dispute, is accounted, in the estimate of reason, no mark of wisdom or humility. It is easy to propose what the most intelligent cannot resolve, and to perplex what human ingenuity cannot unravel. Such cavilling may furnish amusement to your fancy, and adulation to your pride. But, while you refuse to hear the simple declarations of God's word, and oppose to them your own arrogant decisions, you exalt yourselves above your Maker, and (such will ever be the doom of the proud deceiver) you will perish in your vain imaginations.

But, though the Sadducees declined the contest with Jesus, the Pharisees still renewed it, as if they were confident of succeeding better*. One of their learned doctors came forward with a question, intending to try his knowledge of divine revelation. It seems to have been disputed among them which was the most important and necessary precept: some preferred ceremonies, and other sacrifices, while the generality paid little regard to that extensive holiness which is indispensably required. Upon this point, therefore, the Scribe appealed to Jesus, and obtained a decisive answer. The Saviour discovered at once a complete understanding of the sacred law, in its full import, while he declared that its grand demand is love; love, the most ardent of which we are capable, to the one supreme Jehovah, and love for the whole human species, as sincere as that which we feel for ourselves. The Jewish doctor perceived and acknowledged the excellence of this

* Matt. xxii. 34, &c. Mark xii. 28—37. Luke xx. 41—44.

reply, and joined in asserting that the principle of obedience, which our Lord laid down, was far more valuable and acceptable to God than all ceremonial observances or expensive sacrifices. It appeared, then, that the Scribe, though he had come with an improper temper, possessed more consistent sentiments of divine truth than were usually found among the Pharisees, and such as tended to lead him to an unfeigned acceptance of the Gospel. On this ground Jesus commended the solidity of his judgment, and considered him as promising fair for the kingdom of God. What the event was we are not told.

The subject here proposed is highly interesting: have we attended to it? Do we understand what is of main importance in religion? Are we aware of the extensive and spiritual nature of God's moral law? Do we approve and admire its precepts, as "holy, and just, and good?" Do we live under the influence of that sacred principle of love, which is required in preference to every thing besides, and without which nothing can be pleasing to God? It is, indeed, the sum and substance of all those duties which the inspired writers have inculcated, and is properly called "the fulfilling of the law*." Every transgression shows a defect of this disposition; for, if it maintained an entire and constant ascendancy, it would certainly lead to the full perfection of obedience. But our failure is continual, and of lamentable obliquity. Our desires and affections, if examined by this test, will every day convict us of guilt. We come far short of that regard which we owe both to God and man; and nothing which we can possibly plead will compensate the want of it.

The Pharisees still surrounded our Lord, and probably meditated a fresh attack. But he, the more completely to baffle and confound them, proposed a question, and called upon them to declare their opinion of the extraction of Messiah, whom they professed to look for. He started a difficulty from their

* Rom. xiii. 10.

own Scriptures, which they could not resolve. They were agreed that the Christ, the promised Saviour, must be "the Son of David;" and they could not deny that David, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, speaks of him as his Lord*. When urged, therefore, to explain in what sense he could be the Son, and yet the Lord, of David, they could not reply. They felt themselves overpowered, and relinquished their vain disputations, though they still retained all their malevolence.

To us, also, the inquiry may be addressed, and an important one it is, "What think ye of Christ?" Have you formed consistent and scriptural sentiments of his person and descent? Or, how do you remove the difficulty, as it is here stated? If it be admitted that Christ is very God, as well as very man, the seeming absurdity and contradiction is done away. In his human nature he is "the Son of David, according to the flesh;" but, by a divine nature only, he is "David's Lord." Thus he styles himself "The Root and the Offspring of David †." But if we represent him as no more than a creature like ourselves, and as having no higher original than earthly parents, the whole is strange and incongruous. The question will still recur, and cannot be answered, "How doth David in spirit call him Lord?" If we abide by the plain and express declarations of the Bible, we shall readily allow that Jesus is "Immanuel," "God manifested in the flesh:" no other doctrine will reconcile the various passages which relate to him. And this important position being established, we may rejoice and triumph, as it lays a secure and immovable foundation for our hope towards God.

Jesus continued through the day to teach, admonish, and reprove. Addressing himself to his disciples, in the audience of all the people, he solemnly warned them to beware of the pride and hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, whom he severely condemned. The sentence and the language were similar

* Psal. cx. 1.

† Rev. xxii. 16.

to those on a former occasion, of awful and impressive import *: "As far as they speak to you in God's name, and agreeably to his word, they demand your respect and obedience. But their conduct is inconsistent with their own instructions: be therefore afraid of being misled by their pernicious examples. They assume an appearance of great sanctity, and scrupulously practise many religious ceremonies; but they act, throughout, from the basest principles; their only aim is to gain the notice and applause of men. Their ostentation and vain glory are detestable, while they affect such distinctions and titles as lead the people to compliment their piety and learning. But you, my disciples, must be far different, not taking to yourselves any state, or courting appellations of honour and precedence. You must live as brethren, who have but one Father and one Master, and be willing to submit to the meanest office, exhibiting a pattern of lowliness and self-abasement. Such a temper is indispensably requisite, since God will confound the man who shall dare to exalt himself, and He will favour none but the humble."

Have we, then, attended to the exhortation, which equally concerns all the followers of Jesus? Do we possess that meekness of spirit, so essential to the Christian character? Are there no proud contentions among us for superiority of rank? And do we cheerfully condescend and stoop to our inferiors, for their benefit? Or again, while we pay a due respect to those in higher life, do we reverence God and our conscience above all? Do we remember, as we ought, that we are accountable, not to men, but to God, who "searcheth the heart," and that "One is our Master, even Christ?"

When Jesus had delivered these cautions, he turned himself to the Scribes and Pharisees, who still, probably, expected to find some ground of accusation against him. He then addressed them with peculiar

* Matt. xxiii. 1, &c. Mark xii. 38—40. Luke xx. 4, 5, &c. See Sect. 24.

majesty, and as one invested with sovereign authority. In the capacity of their Judge, he arraigned, he convicted them, and, for their secret iniquity, pronounced upon them the heaviest condemnation. From one sentence to another, each containing a discovery of their wickedness and a memorial of their folly, we hear, in awful and prophetic repetition, the word of warning and tremendous denunciation breaking forth from his lips. Yet who shall blame the intimations of judgment? Who shall wonder that the cry was "Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees?" Let us read the long black roll of their offences: let us mark the charges brought by their unprejudiced accuser.

They discovered an obstinate and malevolent opposition to the Gospel, not only rejecting it themselves, but, with a furious bigotry, preventing others from receiving it. They practised the most cruel oppressions, even upon the widow and the fatherless, and yet covered their injustice with a show of uncommon ardour in devotion. Their pretences to religion rendered their extortion the more detestable; and therefore Jesus declared that their boasted prayers would aggravate their damnation. They showed great zeal to gain proselytes, not for the glory of God, but their own reputation; and they were so earnest to confirm each convert in error and hatred of the truth, as to make his case more deplorable and hopeless than that of his seducer. They endeavoured, by specious arguments and curious distinctions, to justify their profane use of oaths, as if they might be allowed to swear in certain forms of speech, and contracted not any high degree of guilt by falsifying their solemn affirmations. But Jesus convicted them of horrid impiety and perjury, while he asserted that such appeals to the temple and the altar as they pleaded for were no other than appeals to God himself.

They paid a scrupulous attention to some trifles, which exalted their reputation; but neglected the
most

most important and necessary duties. Their religious zeal was confined to external observances: they sought not real purity of heart. They were satisfied with so much of the appearance of sanctity as would procure them admiration among the people, while their vile affections exposed them to the contempt and indignation of that righteous God, to whom all their secret iniquity lay open.

They pretended a high veneration for those holy men whom their fathers had murdered. But, though they professed to honour deceased saints by building and adorning their sepulchres, they persecuted the living, and thus proved that they inherited the same violent hatred of genuine piety as their ancestors. Jesus therefore declared, that, by their continued progress in wickedness, they would soon fill up their measure, and be ripe for destruction. So obdurate were they, that he considered them as on the brink of final perdition, ready to sink down into "the damnation of hell." Yet further means were to be tried with them. Apostles and other ministers were to be sent among them, to bear witness of the truth: but our Lord predicted, that, by their cruel and sanguinary opposition to those his honoured servants, they would provoke God more and more, till at length he should arise to take exemplary vengeance upon that very generation, and reckon with them for all the righteous blood which had been shed from the beginning of the world.

How deplorable was their case! Jesus, being deeply affected at the prospect of their approaching miseries, broke forth into a pathetic lamentation. They were the same accents of pity by which he had twice before expressed the yearnings of his bowels*. From this part of his conduct it appears, that, though he pronounced the most tremendous woes, judgment is "his strange work." He bewailed the murderous city, which had long been the seat of persecution, and which had scornfully resisted all his efforts of

* Sect. 25 and 31.

love for the salvation of her children. He would have cherished and protected them, as a hen her tender brood; but they had obstinately rejected his gracious proposals. At last, therefore, insulted mercy was about to be withdrawn, and give place to unrelenting justice: and that hand, which had been long stretched out with offers of richest blessings, was soon to be lifted up with a rod of indignation to desolate their country, and destroy them for ever. Thus Jesus took a solemn farewell of the temple, to return no more: he warned the impenitent sinners around him, and predicted that at his future advent they would acknowledge his divine character, and be glad to join in those acclamations of praise which had lately been forbidden in that house, saying, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord."

What solemn things are these! Surely, if they are seriously regarded, they must leave a deep impression upon our minds. Let us, then, make the application to ourselves, rather than to the ancient Pharisees.

1. A striking exhibition is here given of the character of Jesus. Behold, how tender his compassion, how extensive his grace! He seeks after those who are ready to perish, and, with repeated and importunate solicitations, entreats them to hide themselves "under the shadow of his wings," where alone they can be safe and happy. O, why are we unwilling to accept his offers? Let us also remark how strict are his proceedings, when "he lays judgment to the line." How terrible the effects of his anger! Who, then, shall presume to contend with Him? If we refuse to honour him by our unfeigned compliance, he will glorify himself in our everlasting destruction.

2. Let not the faithful ministers of Christ be reproached for endeavouring, like their Lord and Master, to admonish and reprove their careless hearers. In performing that painful part of their office, they do not assume the authority of a judge:

but

but if, as the mouth of God, they should declare his whole will without reserve, they must denounce vengeance as well as proclaim mercy. From the example of Jesus we see that this is consistent with the exercise of perfect compassion and meekness. And shall you charge with uncharitableness and pride those who "watch for your souls," because they think themselves bound to address the wicked, even in the very strong language of the Saviour, "How can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

3. Let us seriously examine our own character. What is our state? What our expectation? Do we not, in some respect or other, betray a temper or conduct similar to that of the Pharisees? Much we have heard of their hypocrisy: let us fear to put on, as they did, a profession of piety "for a cloak of maliciousness;" this would be more detestable than avowed infidelity. Yet let not pure religion be laid aside because we abhor the vile dissimulation of those who have nothing but a fair appearance. Some are vehement in their invectives against the men who "for a pretence make long prayers," while they themselves never pray at all. These persons may not come under the condemnation of Pharisees, but they shall not escape the judgment of God for their impiety; and, if they perish for ever, it will be no comfort to them that others are suffering a still greater degree of torment.

O, let us welcome the Saviour, while we adopt that expressive acclamation, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord;" that, "when he shall appear" the second time, "we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming *!" Amen.

* 1 John ii. 28.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 34.

Jesus commended the liberality of a poor widow—predicted the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the various signs and circumstances attending it—foretold, also, his coming to judgment, and exhorted to watchfulness.

JESUS, having pronounced a tremendous sentence upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and declared that “their house was left unto them desolate,” withdrew from that beautiful edifice, in which they gloried as their brightest ornament and surest defence. He departed from the temple to return no more.

Yet, before he went out, he paused, and remarked the readiness with which the various worshippers cast their money into the treasury, for the necessary expenses of the divine service*. Many opulent persons contributed much; but he fixed his eyes upon a poor widow, while she was throwing in her two mites, and pointed her out to his disciples as an object of his peculiar regard. He knew her straitened circumstances; he saw and approved the inward principle of her heart. The value of her oblation was trifling, but it included the whole of her little property. Our Lord, therefore, represented her liberality as more enlarged and more acceptable to God than the costly offerings of the wealthy, who had given up only a small part of their superfluity, and still retained every enjoyment as before. We learn from this short narration that it is incumbent upon all to communicate, according to their ability, for the advancement of religion, as well as for the relief of the afflicted; that such as are in-

* Mark xii. 41, &c. Luke xxi. 1—4.

digent are not excused from the duty; and that He, "by whom actions are weighed," will commend and recompence the least donations which spring from faith and love.

Jesus was leaving the temple, when his disciples took the opportunity of remarking to him the extent and magnificence of the building, supposing probably that he would express his admiration*. But he turned off their attention from the consideration of its grandeur to that of its approaching demolition, when not one stone should remain upon another. He then retired to the mount of Olives, which afforded him a prospect of the sacred edifice; and while he sat there, perhaps contemplating the destruction which he had foretold, some of his Apostles inquired privately how soon his prophecies would be fulfilled, and what particular signals would precede the great events. His reply to the question contains various circumstantial predictions, which, when compared with their exact accomplishment, furnish the strongest evidence in support of the Gospel, and stand as an impregnable barrier against the assaults of infidelity. He addressed his disciples to the following purpose:—

"It is necessary for you to be upon your guard against vain pretenders; for many impostors shall arise, assuming the name and character of the Messiah, and affecting to set up his kingdom. Dreadful commotions and distresses, also, shall be permitted, before the appointed desolation of the Jews; but you ought not, on that account, to be terrified or surprised. You will hear of the alarms of war, seditions, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes; and tremendous appearances shall be seen in the air; yet, awful as these may be, they are intended only as presages of far severer calamities."

"You, my beloved friends, will stand in need of a peculiar degree of courage. For, previous to those national judgments, the most violent persecutions shall be raised against you; so that you may expect,

* Matt. xxiv. 1, &c. Mark xiii. 1, &c. Luke xxi. 5, &c.

in my service, universal hatred, stripes, imprisonment, and death itself. Hereby, indeed, an honour will be conferred upon you. While you are called to answer for yourselves, you will have the opportunity of bearing witness to the truth before kings and rulers of the earth, and evincing the excellence of your principles. You may tremble, perhaps, under an apprehension, that, because you are destitute of learning and eloquence, you shall not be able to vindicate my Gospel as you ought, and may therefore be confounded in the presence of your judges. But you need not be anxious on this account, since the Holy Ghost will support you, and furnish you with proper arguments and words; and I pledge myself to give you such utterance and wisdom as shall render you superior to all the subtlety and power of your enemies."

"This fierce opposition to my cause will stagger many of its professed friends, and induce them to desert it. Through the fear of persecution, they will apostatize from the truth, and betray their nearest relations, who steadfastly maintain it; so that one brother shall treacherously deliver up another to the hand of violence, the father his son, the children their parents. What then have you to look for but general contempt and abhorrence? Yet a peculiar protection, extending even to your minutest concerns, shall be afforded you; in dependence upon which, you may possess an unshaken firmness and composure of mind."

"Many false teachers, also, shall arise, and spread destructive errors: and, through the prevalence of iniquity, not a few of those, who have shown much love for my name, shall decline from their spirituality and zeal. In the midst of such difficulties, you may be perplexed, and ready to abandon my service: but I exhort you to persevere through all extremities, having respect to the glorious recompense of reward which is set before you. For your encouragement, I assure you that your word shall not be ineffectual; and that, by your means, weak as you are, the Gospel
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of my grace shall be promulgated from kingdom to kingdom, and make its way against all opposition to every nation of the known world. After that event the end shall come; the Jewish state shall be concluded, the city and temple laid in ruins, and both the civil and ecclesiastical polity totally destroyed."

"There are, likewise, nearer signs, and certain attendant circumstances of this approaching devastation, which you will carefully remark. According to Daniel's prophecy*, you will see the Roman armies (properly called "the abomination of desolation," as being detestable for their idolatry, and as laying waste all before them) erecting their standards upon the holy ground, and investing Jerusalem. Let this be considered as a signal that you must immediately quit the place, which is about to be demolished, and retreat to the mountainous part of the country, for the preservation of your lives. Without regarding your substance, or even your apparel, fly upon the very first notice, with the utmost haste, or you will perish in the general calamity. These troubles will be peculiarly distressing; they will be fraught with wo to pregnant women, and to the mother, whose tender infant still hangs upon her breast. Do you, also, pray that your departure may not happen in the winter, and that the day of your flight may not be the sabbath. The former would add new hazards to your escape, and new horrors to your banishment; whilst the latter, in its necessity, would disturb that sacred invaluable rest, and aggravate the griefs of the fugitive from Zion and Jerusalem."

"As to this unhappy people, who are devoted to destruction, their case will be most deplorable indeed; for the afflictions which await them will be extreme, far surpassing every instance that has yet been known, or that shall occur again. A most tremendous slaughter shall take place among them; and those who escape the edge of the sword shall be dispersed, in a state of wretched captivity, among all the nations of the world.

* Dan. ix. 26.

Their well-fortified city shall be razed to its very foundations, and remain in the possession of the Gentiles till God's appointed time for the triumph of the Gentiles shall be completed. Should the horrid carnage and devastation continue long, the whole Jewish race would be quite extirpated. But God, who still retains a purpose of mercy towards them, will preserve them as a separate people; agreeably to that declaration, "Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it*."

"During these troubles many deceivers will arise, and, under the assumed character of the Messiah, promise deliverance. By specious arts and uncommon operations they will obtain much credit; and, if the grace of God did not prevent, they would even pervert from the truth my chosen followers. But you are required to take heed; and these my predictions may be the means of your security. Be not, therefore, induced to join any vain pretenders; for the calamities which I have foretold are unavoidable. The Son of man will come, as he hath said, like the lightning, which is sudden and terrible in its appearance, and irresistible in its effects. He will come, as in flaming fire, to plead the cause of his Gospel, and to inflict exemplary vengeance on his enemies. Under his commission, the Roman soldiers, bearing the eagle on their standards, shall fly to the destruction of this devoted nation, as the devouring eagles to their prey. The awful desolation shall also be attended, even as my final advent, with many surprising sights in the heavens, and with great commotions, anguish, and terror, upon the earth."

Before we proceed further with our Lord's solemn admonitions, let us pause awhile, and seriously meditate on these prophecies, so express and circumstantial as to deserve our most earnest regard. They are so strong, as to be sufficient of themselves, were there no other evidence, to prove the truth of the Gospel. If the events have not answered these de-

* Isa. lxxv. 6.

scriptions, then may Jesus be rejected as a base impostor, and his whole system of doctrine derided, as no better than an artful fiction. But if, indeed, what he minutely foretold has been exactly accomplished, what shall we say? Can there a doubt remain concerning his mission, or the respect which is due to him?

It is generally allowed that those effects, which are clearly and undeniably miraculous, when produced in support of any position, are a full and incontestable confirmation of it. Now prophecies are no other than miracles, perhaps the most striking which can possibly be exhibited. To predict future events, which lie beyond the reach of conjecture, and which at the time appear highly improbable; to do this in a circumstantial manner, is as wonderful, and as plainly shows a divine interposition, as opening the eyes of the blind, or raising the dead to life. Yet this is what the Saviour has done. Nay, he has delivered such prophecies as yet continue to be fulfilled among ourselves. These, therefore, are like a standing miracle, and afford us a stronger attestation of his Gospel than even those were favoured with who both saw and heard him.

He declared, as we have remarked upon the subject before us, many things which were unlikely to take place, and which he could not have pointed out by any human acuteness or penetration. They were, also, most offensive to the people around him, and such, therefore, as impostors, whose grand aim is to conciliate favour, would never have asserted. Nor is the application of his words doubtful: they are so express and particular, as to seem more like a history of the past than a prediction of the future. In confirmation of this remark, we appeal to those who have related the facts as they really happened. Josephus, a Jewish writer, is in this view one of the strongest advocates for Christianity. He was present in the Roman camp at the destruction of Jerusalem, an eye-witness of the desolations of the siege and the capture;

capture; and his account so exactly verifies our Lord's declarations, as to furnish the best comment upon them. We might conclude that the historian himself was raised up and preserved by the providence of God on purpose to attest the truth of the Gospel, even contrary to his own intentions.

It would be unsuitable to our contracted plan to produce large extracts from different authors in support of the words of Christ, or to give a distinct exposition of the Evangelists. But it may be proper to fix our regard on a few remarkable particulars, which correspond to the predictions before us.

The temple of Jerusalem has been destroyed by the very people whom our Lord mentioned. Yet that event was unlikely, considering the peace which then subsisted, and the strength of the fortress, which was generally thought impregnable. The Romans did not wish to demolish the holy citadel: the commander issued out his orders and laboured earnestly to preserve it; and when he found his own schemes baffled, he was so struck as to declare that the Jews must be under the avenging hand of God. All the preceding and attendant circumstances also fell out as Jesus had described; such as seditions, famines, earthquakes, eclipses, meteors, a comet, which resembled a flaming sword, hanging over Jerusalem, and contending armies in the air: such also were the immense slaughter of the Jews, and the entire subjection of those who survived the massacre. The bare relation of the extreme distress and anguish universally felt on that melancholy occasion would be enough to draw tears of compassion from the most obdurate enemy.

The remarkable deliverance of the Christians, likewise, fulfilled our Lord's words; for many of them, observing the appointed signal, fled from the devoted city, and were rescued from destruction. They were separated, as the Israelites from the midst of the Egyptians; and "their lives were given unto them for a prey."

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The very rapid propagation of the Gospel, which was preached in all the principal nations of the known world before Jerusalem was taken, is another striking fact, which proves that Jesus is a true Prophet. Christian churches were very early planted in various kingdoms upon the ruins of idolatry; which must have previously appeared utterly improbable, and can be ascribed only to the divine interposition. A doctrine very opposite to men's carnal affections, and striking at the root of all the religions then established, made its way with surprising energy, in spite of all human wisdom and power, which were employed to oppose it. The instruments also of accomplishing this work were in themselves so weak and contemptible, as to show that their success was miraculous. They were indeed, as their Lord foretold, universally hated and persecuted, beyond any other people, for their system of faith; yet they prevailed. What, then, shall we say? Does not such a victory, such a completion of an express prophecy, furnish a strong argument for the truth and authority of the Gospel?

In the same view we appeal to the dispersion of the Jews. Their city and temple were laid in ruins, and their frequent attempts to rebuild them have turned to their greater confusion. Julian, the Roman emperor, encouraging them to it, was several times baffled in his profane purpose by the eruption of balls of fire from the earth, which consumed the artificers and their materials. No other reason can be given than this, that God will not suffer the declaration of his Son to fail, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles" for a determined season. We see the Jews unable to recover the holy land, scattered over the face of the earth, and for above seventeen hundred years deprived of the true exercise of their ancient religion. Even now, in their best circumstances, they enjoy but the precarious toleration of that which remains, and are united in no form of civil government. Contemplating their destitute condition, and
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their want of almost all the common bonds of union, we wonder that they are still a separate people, and still preserved. Most other ancient nations are long since extinct, their posterity being mixed, and lost in the general mass of mankind. But the Jews incorporate with no others; they remain perfectly unconnected with the various communities where they are permitted to dwell, and are as so many witnesses of the truth both of the Old and New Testament, for they have fulfilled the prophecies of both.

From these Scriptures we are likewise led to expect their future restoration, which is as clearly foretold as their dispersion. We have every reason, therefore, to believe, that it shall certainly be accomplished, when "the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." Indeed the Jews seem to be preserved in their present distinct state for that very end: and, whenever their return shall take place, it will introduce a greater enlargement of the church than has ever yet been known. "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead *?"

Yet, while we mourn for the present blindness of Israel, let us be solicitous for ourselves, that we may not despise and reject the Saviour as they have done. We trace the whole of their unparalleled calamities to that one sin: and is it not as offensive to God in us as in the Jews? Will it not infallibly bring down upon us his fierce indignation? Can we be so infatuated as to show a contempt for the Gospel, while we behold that devoted nation marked out by the curse of God for this very reason? And may we not fear that many readers, with an external profession of Christianity, do not pay a serious regard to the great Prophet of our God, but make light of all his gracious proposals? Shall you, then, escape for your iniquity? He "whom man despiseth, whom the nation abhorreth," cometh to devour his adversaries, by a destruction infinitely more tremendous than

* Rom. xi. 15.

that of Jerusalem. And if you continue to resist him, how will you "abide the day of his coming? How will you stand when he appeareth?"

Of that his final advent, and the awful solemnities attending it, our Lord proceeded to warn his disciples, after having described his appearance to take vengeance of the Jewish nation. He was evidently led from the consideration of one event to that of the other; and, many of the concomitant circumstances being exactly similar, we may be the less surprised at the difficulty of deciding to which some of his expressions are to be referred. They may be true of both; or they may be applicable to one in a lower, and to the other in a more exalted, meaning. Nor should this be objected to, as it is perfectly agreeable to the language of prophecy, especially when any occurrence is represented as the sign or earnest of something more remote*. In such cases the transition is frequently made before we are aware; and the former subject resumed, which seemed for a while to be dropped.

The destruction of Jerusalem is a pledge to us of the future judgment. As the Jewish polity was totally subverted, immediately after the calamities mentioned above, so Jesus reminds us that he will come quickly, to put an end to the present frame and system of things. When all those preceding dispensations which are predicted shall be fully accomplished, the whole fabric of this visible creation shall be shaken, and He will appear in the clouds of heaven with glorious majesty. While every eye shall see him, an inexpressible consternation shall take place among all the families of the earth, and ten thousand times ten thousand shall be confounded at his presence. A separation shall then be made. As he rescued his faithful disciples from the Jewish devastation, so he will be mindful of all his chosen people,

* "Una eademque oratio, dispari sensu accepta, plures simul eventus, disjunctos tempore, natura dissimiles, designat."

Lowth *De Sacra Poesi Hebr. Prælect. xi.* See also Bp. Hurd's Introduction to the Study of the Prophecies.

and preserve them amidst the terrors of the last day. He will commission his angels to gather them together, and conduct them to glory. O, joyful hour to them, who are redeemed to God from the earth! You, who have fled for refuge to the Saviour, may welcome his approach, and rejoice at those awful events, which will hasten the consummation of your bliss. In the prospect of it, you may look up with triumphant exultation, for it will not be long delayed.

Jesus observed to his disciples, that, as they considered the first budding of the trees an intimation of the return of summer, so they might judge, from the hints which he gave them, when the important change was drawing nigh. He assured them that the holy city should be destroyed before that generation should be extinct; and accordingly, in about forty years, it was totally demolished. He declared, also, that, though the whole frame of the material world shall perish, not one particle of his prophecies shall fail. The final dissolution, then, of all things, will certainly take place; but the precise time is not revealed, for it remains a deep and unsearchable secret in the mind of the eternal Father. Yet, though no such particular warnings be afforded us of the last day, as of the desolation of *Judea*, we should be continually looking forwards to it, with the utmost awe and solemnity of mind.

According to our Lord's admonition, his appearance, whensoever it shall be, will be sudden and terrible: as the flood swept away the generation of Noah, he will surprise and destroy many in the midst of their worldly occupations and sensual enjoyments. The sinners, who are at ease, shall instantly be overwhelmed with confusion and horror; and an awful distinction shall be made between many of those, who may then be in the same house or field, engaged together in the same employment. They, who are most intimately united upon earth, may hereafter be parted asunder, and unalterably appointed to different

states, as they may differ in their characters. "One shall be taken" to the presence, the glory, and the throne of God; "and the other left" to receive the due reward of his deeds, and endure the fierceness of divine wrath.

What a tremendous subject is this! Can we forget it, or treat it with levity? Why are we not more affected by the thought that "the Judge standeth before the door?" He will summon us to his bar; and we must "give account of ourselves to him." How shall we abide the scrutiny of that strict and impartial trial? We hear that some shall be separated from their dearest connexions in life, and consigned to a place of misery. Does not this excite in us a holy jealousy for ourselves, and rouse us to inquire what is to be done? Let us listen to our Lord's application, in which he exhorts us to a serious and continual preparation for his coming.

Is it an unquestionable truth that "He will judge the world in righteousness?" And is the time uncertain? How proper is the inference, "Watch ye therefore—take heed to yourselves—and pray always—be ye ready!" Keep at a distance from every thing which would expose you to his displeasure, or be inconsistent with an habitual expectation of his advent. Beware, lest on any occasion your hearts be oppressed by intemperance, or an inordinate attention to secular affairs; for these would bring a stupor upon you, and prevent you from possessing, as you ought, a constant readiness to meet your Lord. Ah! how many will be found in such a thoughtless state, that they will be surprised and overwhelmed with horror at his appearance! It is necessary, therefore, that you exercise an unceasing vigilance and circumspection, if you would escape the confusion and misery which they will endure.

How carefully do you guard your habitations against designs of violence in the night season! If you had any reason to apprehend an assault from robbers, you would not dare to compose yourselves
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to sleep. Though you know not the particular hour when the attack may be made, you will provide for the security of your persons, families, and property, and take every previous measure to defeat the invader's purposes. O, be wise for eternity! Should your Lord come upon you unawares, the consequence would be infinitely more terrible than the ransacking of your houses by the midnight plunderer. Be therefore jealous guardians, where negligence must be followed by destruction.

Your present situation in the church of Christ is like that of servants and stewards, to whom their master, upon his departure, hath intrusted the affairs of his family, and assigned their proper employment. It should be your concern, then, to be faithful and diligent, attending to your appointed work, that, when your Lord returns, he may find you occupied in your place, and you may give up your accounts with joy. If such be your readiness to meet him, you will be inconceivably blessed. Marks of distinguished honour, and the possession of an everlasting kingdom, will be conferred upon you. Will not the prospect of that glory support and comfort you in all your difficulties, and animate you to greater exertions of zeal and self-denial?

How strange is that indifference which men discover about their eternal state! Many, evidently, resemble the treacherous and wicked servant, who, presuming upon his master's longer absence, neglects and abuses his trust by oppression and intemperance.

Being surprised in his folly, and unexpectedly called to account, he will be punished with severest vengeance. O, do not thus flatter yourselves, that, because death and judgment may be far distant, you may safely indulge in sensual excesses! Your Lord may come when you are least aware, while you are totally engrossed with pleasurable schemes: and then what terror and anguish will seize and rend your guilty souls! As he will be inexorable, "he will cut you asunder, and appoint you your portion with

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the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

But were these solemn exhortations of Jesus designed for you? Yes: he himself has made the universal application; for he declares "What I say unto you, I say unto all, WATCH." O, live in a constant mindfulness of that word! Fly to him for mercy, before he come to execute judgment; and seek for the renewing influence of his Spirit, that "you may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." Then shall you be able to meet him at the last with that triumphant acclamation, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation*." Amen.

* Isa. xxv. 9.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 35.

Jesus inculcated a serious preparation for his coming, by the parables of the ten virgins, and of the talents, and then gave a particular description of the last judgment.

THE Son of man will come again, but not as in the days of his humiliation. He will come, not as "a man of sorrows," but as "the Lord of glory;" not to offer himself a sacrifice, but to execute judgment; not to contend with the opposition of sinners, but to manifest the character, and determine the everlasting condition, of each individual in the whole human race. He himself has told us that he will return for these very purposes, and we profess to expect it. "What manner of persons," then, "ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God *!"

We have already contemplated the Saviour, as he sat upon the mount of Olives, foretelling his final advent, and exhorting his disciples to make a suitable preparation. We shall now consider the conclusion of his solemn address on the same occasion, in which he gives stronger and sublimer representations of that grand event, and enforces the duty of constant watchfulness and diligent application to our proper work. May we proceed to the interesting subject with true seriousness of mind, and with fervent prayer that it may produce its due influence upon us!

* 2 Pet. iii. 11, 12.

By an affecting parable Jesus exhibited the present state of things in his visible church, the different characters of its members, and the different reception they will meet with from him at the last day*. Ten virgins are described as attending at the celebration of a marriage, and preparing to meet the bridegroom, that they may conduct his bride by the light of their lamps, according to the ancient custom of nuptials in the east. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Bridegroom here signified, who will shortly come to complete the union with his illustrious spouse, and receive her to his own glorious kingdom. In the mean time, all those, who profess the Gospel, are required to hold themselves in a state of readiness, that they may obey his summons, and accompany him on that occasion to his heavenly mansions. Such was the office of the virgins: ah! how widely did they differ from each other! "Five of them were wise, and five were foolish." Yet this difference was not easily discernible till the closing scene. They all took their lamps, as if they were properly prepared to attend upon the bridegroom, and waited for his appearance. But the wise only were furnished with oil sufficient to supply their lamps when their original stock should be exhausted. The foolish provided not for a future hour; they were satisfied with just so much as would afford them light for the present.

An apt resemblance is here exhibited of an awful distinction which really subsists among the professed followers of Christ, however it may now be concealed from us by specious disguises. Such as are evidently careless, and have not even the show of piety, come not under the description of the parable. Their danger is too manifest to be doubted. But of those, who seem to be strictly religious, and warmly attached to the service of Christ, all possess not the same holy principle in their hearts. Some only are truly "wise unto salvation," being inwardly what their external profession imports. They have re-

* Matt. xxv. 1, &c.

ceived forgiveness of their sins, and are renewed in righteousness, so that, whenever their Lord shall come, they will be found an acceptable people in his sight. The vital and operative influence of divine grace dwells within them, and is their security for a future day: by this they persevere to the end, and therefore will be saved.

Others, alas! with fair appearances deceive both themselves and the church around them. They "have a form of godliness," which procures them esteem; and with this they are content. They may be regular in their conduct, and blameless before men; they may be zealous for right doctrines, and strict in all ritual observance of religion. Yet they are "foolish," in neglecting to look forward and provide for death and judgment. They may make a glittering show for the present; but, possessing not "the new heart and the new spirit," nor being truly united to Christ, they cannot endure the approaching trial, or be "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." The Lord alone can infallibly discern this great difference between persons whose professions and appearances are the same: but it becomes us to search ourselves, for our character and state will soon be determined for ever.

Through the delay of the bridegroom, the painfulness of watching overcame the virgins: the protracted duty of a sentinel wearied their spirits, and they were all tempted to indulge themselves in sleep. Ah! what remissness and stupor do we perceive among real as well as nominal Christians! While death and judgment are thought to be at a distance, do we not sink down into a spiritual languor and supineness? Have not worldly cares and sensual gratifications a tendency to deprive our souls of their proper vigour and activity? We sleep when we ought to be awake, and, instead of waiting to meet our Lord, have need to be roused from our lethargy. That this should be the case with those who possess
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not the power of godliness, is no wonder. But it is strange indeed that true believers should fall into such a torpor: and yet few even of them preserve that heavenly frame of mind which consists in an habitual looking for the Saviour.

The approach of the bridegroom was at length announced. The solemn summons was proclaimed at midnight, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." The virgins arose, and immediately endeavoured to put themselves in a state of readiness. And now the foolish discovered their own negligence and deficiency; but it was too late to find a remedy. Their lamps were entirely gone out. In vain they implored a supply of oil from the wise, who had no more than was absolutely necessary for themselves. In vain they attempted to purchase. The warning was too short: the bridegroom was at hand. They only, who were wise, were prepared to meet him, and admitted to partake of the marriage-feast. "The door was shut," to the exclusion of all others: though the foolish earnestly solicited to be received, they were rejected with abhorrence.

How awful will be the notice of death and judgment! Must it not effectually rouse and awaken every soul of man? "The hypocrites in Zion" will be thrown into the utmost consternation and horror when they perceive their real state, and find that their former light of false profession and false hope is entirely extinguished, and that it will then profit them nothing. When they are about to be summoned to the bar of God, they may try, perhaps, to make preparation, and call on all around to help them. But in vain: their day of grace is expired, and no further mercy is to be obtained. They must be taken away as they are, nor can they be admitted into the heavenly kingdom, however they may "cry with a great and exceeding bitter cry." Alas! to what purpose had they maintained a profession of religion so long? Their formal services, their cold
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and hypocritical attendance upon religious ordinances, will then appear utterly unavailing. No such petition as "Lord, Lord, open to us," will be accepted: they are excluded for ever.

But those who have been "found in the faith" will be unspeakably blessed. They may be overtaken in a state of very culpable negligence; yet it is not the sleep of the insincere. Notwithstanding their failures and declensions, they preserve a supreme love to God, and an habitual union with Christ. They are, therefore, actually "ready," though they may be surprised in a frame of mind not so lively and spiritual as they ought at all times to possess. Upon the first intimations of their Lord's approach they may be perplexed; but they are safe: they shall enter with him into his kingdom, and sit down at his table. And "blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb*."

Jesus has taught us to make a proper application of the parable. As we know not at what hour we shall be summoned to meet him, he enjoins us to maintain a constant vigilance, and to wait with unclosed eyelids the signals of his appearance. Let us seek for his pardoning and renewing grace, through the merit of his blood, and the influence of the Holy Ghost: and, being thus reconciled to God, "let us watch and be sober." If we expect the coming of our Lord, what have we to do with self-indulgence? O, "let us not sleep as do others," nor be content merely to escape condemnation; but "give diligence, that an entrance may be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ †."

He continued to warn his disciples of the last judgment; and by another parable urged the necessity of activity in his service, as, in that which we have just considered, he had inculcated a holy watchfulness. One of a similar nature and tendency.

* Rev. xix. 9.

† 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

had been delivered before* ; but we need not be anxious to avoid a repetition of instructions so important.

A person of rank and property is represented as departing to a distant country, and previously committing the care of his substance to his servants, that they may improve it for his use. He distributed his effects among them in shares of different value; to one five talents, to another two, and to another one, according to their respective ability. Thus, also, Jesus deals with his church. He is the great Lord and Proprietor of all; and, as every thing is derived from him, every thing should be employed with a view to his glory. He is gone into heaven; but those, who are called by his name, are required, in his absence, to manage his concerns. All our possessions, advantages, and opportunities, our natural capacities, and the gifts of Providence which we enjoy, are granted to us, not as our own absolute right, but as a temporary trust. We are enjoined to turn them to the best account, to make them our commercial store, for the diffusion and interchange of blessings, that we may promote the honour of God, and the advancement of true religion. This, however, cannot be effected without great exertions and unwearied assiduity.

What, then, was the conduct of these servants? The two, who had received most, improved, and even doubled their stock, by a diligent application: but the man to whom the one talent was committed, being secretly disaffected to his master, refused to make any use of it whatever. Our Lord meant not to intimate that those who are placed in the most eminent situations are most faithful and laborious in doing his work; for fact and experience often prove the contrary. But the representation was rather intended to teach us, that they, who enjoy the fewest advantages, are accountable to him. Blessed be God, there are those in his church, who move in

* Luke xix. 12—27. See Sect. 30.

the highest and most enlarged sphere, with credit to their profession, and extensive benefit to others. They who are truly devoted to him, and live under the influence of his grace, cannot allow themselves in habitual indolence. Their heart's desire is to embrace every opportunity, and exert all their faculties, that they may render themselves of real use in their generation. Do we answer this description? Are there not many among us, who, with peculiar gifts, are doing nothing, or nothing to the purpose? And is it not disgraceful to be as drones, an incumbrance, instead of a blessing, to society? Or is no danger to be apprehended from such a conduct? Let us attend to the issue.

The servants were continued in their trust for a considerable time; but at length their master returned, and called them to a strict account. Thus, in due season, Jesus will be revealed from heaven, and it will be one great end of his appearance to reckon with us. Yes: he will demand of us, and it will be publicly declared, what has been our plan of life, in what manner we employed the deposit which he left under our care.

The diligent and faithful servants were distinguished by their lord's approbation, and received a large recompense. They represented, with humble gratitude, what he had enabled them to do. They owned his goodness, and gave him the praise. With kind condescension, he instantly applauded their fidelity, and rewarded their exertions with a proportionable share of preferment. Such will be the favourable acceptance which believers, who have lived not unto themselves, but unto Jesus their exalted Master, shall meet with from him at his final advent. They are indebted to him for their whole salvation, and they will acknowledge their best obedience to be the fruit of his love. This, however, he determines to exhibit before the assembled universe, for his own honour, as well as for their happiness. He will declare himself well pleased in
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their upright and zealous endeavours to promote his glory, and assign them a portion of the felicities of his kingdom. It should also be remarked, as an instance and proof of his mercy, no less than of his righteousness, that he will approve in his people those very works, which they performed only by the influence of his Spirit; and that he will bestow upon them rewards adjusted to the various degrees of their faithfulness and assiduity.

What, then, became of the slothful servant? He seems to have flattered himself that he was safe, at least, if not worthy of commendation, because he had not squandered away the money committed to him. He presumed even to vindicate his conduct by the most injurious representations of his master, as requiring what was severe, unreasonable, unjust, or impossible. But his very pleas were urged against him, and formed the ground of his condemnation; for they showed his baseness, inconsistency, and malignant disposition towards his lord. He was, accordingly, turned out with disgrace from the trust which he had abused, and sentenced to a state of endless imprisonment and consummate wretchedness.

This is an awful description of the present character and final doom of those who are "idle and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Possibly they may have the most confident expectations of escaping punishment, because their behaviour is inoffensive; and they may not be undeceived till they are called to give up their accounts. But on that occasion no one will be excused merely because he has done no harm, even if such a pretence were true. It will be inquired how much real and positive good has been effected. Do any dare to hope that the great difficulties of a religious life, for which their strength is unequal, will justify their indolence? They should be reminded, that, the more arduous their work appears, the more strenuous exertions are necessary, and that the weak-

ness of which they complain is not to be charged upon God, as it is no other than their own extreme depravity, a confirmed hatred of God and holiness. Their notions that the obedience which God requires is unpleasant, impracticable, and a tyrannical imposition, are false, and evince a deep malignity of mind. These, therefore, will be produced against them to their entire confusion. Even on their own principles, their conduct should be far different; and, whatever they may talk of their inability, they will be condemned for their negligence. To be "slothful," in the language of the parable, is to be "wicked;" and those who are "unprofitable," that is, useless in their place and generation, shall be finally excluded from God and happiness, and consigned to everlasting torment and despair, where they may for ever bewail their folly, but must continue to feel its effects in a state of unutterable anguish.

The proper conclusion, then, is, that the present life is not a time for loitering. You must expect the return of your Lord to reckon with you; and, therefore, you must not only wait for him, but diligently apply to his work. It is not enough that you avoid gross and scandalous offences, or be harmless in society. If no fruits of righteousness are produced, no glory brought to God, no benefit accrue to his church, through your labours of faith and love, you must hear that tremendous sentence, "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Jesus proceeded to enforce these awful admonitions in the most explicit terms, without the obscurity of a parable, describing his future advent, and the manner in which the last judgment will be conducted. The passage, as it stands in the Evangelist, is singularly sublime and affecting. It sets before us a scene the most grand and interesting which can possibly be conceived. All in heaven and all on earth are convened together, (an immense and
innumerable

innumerable company!) while their Creator and their Governor, taking his seat upon a throne of glorious majesty, enters into a strict examination of every human character, and appoints to all the children of Adam their proper places, either in happiness or misery, for ever. We are here, then; obliged to consider ourselves before the great tribunal, in the midst of the assembled universe.

Every eye is fixed upon the person of the Judge. It is "the Son of man," who assumed our nature, and once dwelt among us in a state of profound humiliation. How different from the first is this his second advent! He comes with supreme authority, and displays the brightness and perfections of Deity. It is the time of his public manifestation, when the dignity and excellency of his character, which were obscured during his residence on the earth, are known and confessed by all. And are we not constrained, from the very description before us, to own that Jesus is "the Lord of glory," "over all, God blessed for ever?" Considering the grandeur of his appearance, and his illustrious retinue, attended as he is by all the holy angels; considering, too, the nature of his office, which implies that he possesses no less than omniscience and a sovereign power of determining the final state of all mankind, and of closing the gates of heaven and hell for ever; we cannot hesitate to conclude that he is Jehovah. O, let us give him, what he is worthy to receive, our unfeigned and supreme reverence, confidence, and love! Let "every knee bow at his name, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

The whole human race are gathered together before him, and stand to take their trial at his bar. But his all-discerning eye separates them into two classes, according to their characters; and in this division the one need fear no mistake, nor the other presumptuously expect it. His faithful people, who have owned him as their Shepherd, and who were redeemed and defended by him as the sheep of his flock,

flock, are placed on his right hand ; and on his left are all those who have continued in opposition to him, in the uncleanness of their natural corruption, and who are therefore hateful in his sight.

With a solemnity and majesty, which no words can describe, he proceeds to pass the irrevocable sentence. The King of glory speaks, declaring his affectionate regard for those on his right hand, as being dear to his Father, and distinguished by his grace. He welcomes them to his presence, and commands them to enter into the immediate possession of that inheritance which had been originally appointed for them in the divine counsels. Yet, as that is "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God," he justifies his favour to them, and proves undeniably the equity of his dispensations. To this end he produces to public view the works of righteousness which they have performed through faith, and from love to his name. Their acts of kindness, in relieving and comforting his afflicted and oppressed people, he exhibits as an evidence that they are the very persons to whom the promises are made. They themselves, it should seem, would not presume to mention their best exertions in his service ; these do not constitute the ground of their dependence. Nay, they express their wonder, that he should speak in terms of such honourable regard and approbation of their obedience and zeal, which they had scarcely been conscious of, and knew to be unworthy of his notice. But he confirms the sentence, and graciously declares, that he accepts and recompences what they have done for the meanest member of his church, as if it were done to himself.

In the mean time, the impenitent and unbelieving are filled with horror and dismay, waiting to receive their doom. The King omnipotent turns to them, and, to evince his holy indignation at the baseness of their conduct, bids them to depart from him, under
the

the weight of his curse, into a state of endless torment. There they must be companions of those apostate spirits, the devil and his angels, with whom they were confederate in rebellion. Nor is this the decree of a merciless tyrant, but the appointment of a righteous Judge. Accordingly, he proceeds to bring forth the strongest evidence against them, and proves, from their disobedience, unbelief, and contempt of his name, that they deserve this heavy condemnation. Their neglect of those duties of mercy, which he indispensably requires as the fruits of faith and love, clearly manifests their character, and justifies his decision. Many of them in this life appear not to be sensible of their guilt, and even rise up in their own vindication: but if, at that day, they should presume to deny the charge, it will be substantiated from the unerring testimony of the King himself, to their entire confusion. He will convict them of falsehood and hypocrisy, in pretending a regard to him, when they have despised his poor members; and therefore he will declare that his sentence against them shall stand.

It remains only that the determination of the Judge be carried into effect. Accordingly, those who come under his condemnation are driven away from his presence, and consigned to that tremendous punishment, from which there can be no release: and those who are justified before him immediately receive the consummation of their bliss and glory, which will be durable as the existence of God himself.

This important description leads us to observe,

1. That good works will obtain an honourable notice at the last day. God forbid, therefore, that we should not now give them their proper consequence and attention. The inquiry at the tribunal of Christ, as here represented, will be instituted concerning the evidences of our faith. Our obedience will be produced to prove the sincerity of our religious

gious professions, and the strength, as well as reality, of our principles. This testimony will be required, not for the information or satisfaction of the Judge, who is intimately acquainted with every case, and with the very secrets of all hearts, but for the exhibition of his own righteous character before the universe. We perceive, too, that a special regard will be paid to acts of Christian kindness and liberality. Much stress is laid upon love, as peculiarly pleasing to God: upon that love, which shows itself in vigorous exertions for the support and consolation of those who belong to the family of Christ. This, which is the necessary fruit of faith, maintains, in all its efforts, a continual respect to the Saviour; on which account it is honoured with so high a commendation. But this is essentially different from that vain indiscriminate generosity, which proceeds not from right motives, and which, though admired by the world, is offensive to God. We observe, also,

2. That the sins of unbelievers will be publicly declared in the day of judgment. We cannot be concealed from the piercing eye of God. Every instance of our misconduct is noted down in his book; and, if we do not now obtain remission through the blood of the cross, all will be produced against us at that solemn reckoning. No man will be condemned without evidence; and the evidence against sinners will be so strong and incontestable, as to silence their pleas, and confound them before their Judge. The habitual neglect of known duties, no less than the actual commission of gross iniquity, will exclude us from heaven; since the former, as well as the latter, will prove the heart unsound. This is, indeed, a most alarming consideration; and yet it necessarily follows from our Lord's description. Those, who are destitute of love, or not actuated by a supreme regard to Christ to lay themselves out for the benefit of his church, shall hear the tremendous sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed."

What,

What, then, is to be done? Let us be solicitous to obtain that faith, which "worketh by love." Let us pray to be united to Jesus, as living branches of the true vine; that we may be "filled with the fruits of righteousness," and "have boldness in the day of judgment." Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 36.

*Jesus celebrated the passover—washed his disciples' feet
—instituted the eucharist—declared the treachery of
Judas, and the approaching fall of Peter.*

It was love which brought down the Saviour from heaven; a love which must astonish those who seriously contemplate its inexpressible dimensions; a love which is constant, immutable, and everlasting. This principle appeared to actuate him during the whole of his abode on earth; and, especially toward the close of his life, every minute circumstance was so ordered, as to show the strength and tenderness of his affection for the dear followers whom he had chosen to himself. He retained his little family about him, all of whom, except one, had been sincerely attached to him; and now, though he was about to depart from them, his kindness was undiminished: he continued most ardently desirous of promoting their happiness, even to the latest moment*. We also may rejoice that He is "the Lord, who changeth not;" and that he has expressly declared to every believer, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

A general account is given us of the manner in which he spent the few days immediately preceding his death. He constantly attended the temple, where he taught the people with unwearied assiduity, and retired each evening to the mount of Olives, probably for the purposes of devotion †. On

* John xiii. 1.

† Luke xxi. 37, 38. Bethany lay at the foot of this mount, and perhaps our Lord spent some part of his evenings with his beloved friends in that town. See Sect. 32. Matt. xxi. 17.

the Tuesday, after delivering the instructions which we have considered, he warned his disciples that he should be betrayed and crucified at the approaching festival*. Then, also, as it should seem, while the rulers were consulting how they might destroy him without raising a public commotion, Judas went and bargained with them for a paltry sum of money, the common price of a slave, treacherously to surrender up his Master into their hands.

Thursday in
Passion week. On the morning of Thursday, Jesus commanded two of his disciples to make the necessary preparations for celebrating the passover†. But, as they were destitute of a habitation of their own, where could they assemble together for the purpose? This difficulty was soon removed; and the manner of its removal proved that Jesus possessed a clear knowledge of all events, and exercised a full authority over every heart. He described to his chosen messengers the place and circumstances in which they should meet the servant of one, who would be immediately disposed to receive them into his house. There they provided the paschal lamb; and thither he repaired with the twelve, at the proper hour of the evening, for the observation of the holy solemnity. When they were set down together, he addressed them with peculiar tenderness, assuring them that he had felt an earnest desire to partake of that passover with them before he quitted the world. He then directed that they should divide the cup of wine among themselves (which was an usual ceremony at the beginning of the paschal supper), and declared that he would no more drink of the fruit of the vine till God should introduce his kingdom, and the object of that ordinance should be fulfilled.

The Jewish sacrament here mentioned exhibited in a typical manner some of the grand blessings of the Gospel. It was appointed to preserve a remembrance

* Matt. xxvi. 1—5, 14—16. Mark xiv. 1, 2, 10, 11. Luke xxii. 1—6.

† Matt. xxvi. 17—20. Mark xiv. 12—17. Luke xxii. 7—19.

of the deliverance of the Israelites, when the destroying angel slew all the first-born of the Egyptians *, and at the same time to represent the security which the true Israel shall receive through the shedding of the blood of Jesus. He is the end and substance of the ordinance; and for that very reason it was designed that he should be betrayed at the particular season, and on the very night, when the paschal lamb was killed, that he might more exactly answer to the type. "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast †," not the Jewish, but the Christian festival; and let us be solicitous that the blood of this Lamb of God may be sprinkled upon our hearts by faith; for without this we shall stand exposed to the "fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."

It is not easy, nor is it of consequence to our plan, to settle precisely the order of the various circumstances which occurred at the last supper. At that time probably, but in which part of the entertainment we do not determine, Jesus submitted to assume the habit and employment of a servant, and wash the feet of his disciples ‡. This transaction was conducted, not in a light and trifling manner, but with a serious solemnity; and we perceive an inexpressible grandeur as well as condescension in the Saviour's deportment. Knowing that Judas had formed the scheme of betraying him, and that his own departure was near, he was desirous of improving the few remaining hours in delivering all necessary instructions to his dear disciples. For this purpose, though conscious of his great dignity, as the supreme Almighty Lord, who came down from the throne of glory in the highest heavens, and was about to return thither, he deigned to exhibit a further instance of his deep humiliation. He rose up from supper, and put himself into the habit of a menial servant, that he might minister to his poor followers; and He, who was Lord of all, stooped to

* Exod. xii.

† 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

‡ John xiii. 1—17.

the very lowest office, while with his own hands he washed their feet.

We cannot but wonder at his conduct, and ask what end it was designed to answer. It appears to have been a significant action, intended to represent the nature and efficacy of that grace by which he purifies his people from their natural pollution. This is his own explanation. When Peter objected the unsuitableness of his exalted Master's performing so mean a service for him, Jesus replied, that this, as well as his other dispensations, would be more clearly understood hereafter; and added, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Are we, then, sensible of our great defilement? It is declared that "we are all as an unclean thing*," "altogether become filthy †." Were this properly understood, it would produce in us a deep abhorrence of ourselves, and a cordial esteem for the Saviour, whose office it is to deliver us from corruption, and communicate spiritual purity. Then we should rejoice in that gracious promise, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you ‡." Then we should pray, as Peter, "Lord, wash not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Those indeed, who are the faithful disciples of Jesus, are clean already, as he testified: but it is still necessary, even for them, to renew their application to him, that they may be freed from those pollutions which they are daily contracting.

The action was designed likewise as a lesson of humility to all his people. He had frequently inculcated poverty of spirit, self-denial, meekness, and lowliness of mind; and now, to confirm the instructions he had given, he stooped to this service. He therefore called upon the twelve to be consistent with their professions of regarding him as their Master and Lord, and to follow his example by a readiness to submit to mean and painful employments, for the benefit and

* Isa. lxiv. 6.

† Psal. liii. 3.

‡ Ezek. xxxvi. 25.

comfort of others. He reminded them that a similar conduct would be no disparagement to them, who were only his attendants and messengers, and that their religious knowledge would be a blessing no further than it produced a suitable practice.

The solemn admonition probably had a peculiar reference to the state of their minds. It was at that time when a strange and unseasonable contention had arisen among them about the chief preferment in the temporal dominion, which they still expected him to establish*. This ambitious spirit, these carnal views and affections, he reproved. He argued, that though a fondness for power prevailed in the Gentile world, it was inconsistent with their character and engagements, who were required to show their eminence by condescension and meekness. He himself had appeared among them in the form of a servant. He assured them that he did not forget their faithful and steadfast attachment through his various afflictions, and that he would recompence it by conducting them to a state of exaltation far superior to that which they had so eagerly desired. He solemnly promised them that they should partake of that bliss and glory which he was going to possess, that they should there enjoy the most intimate communion with him, and even sit, like his assessors in the judgment, with marks of peculiar dignity, approving and confirming the sentence which should be pronounced upon the twelve tribes of Israel.

We also, who follow the Saviour, should be instructed to look for our preferment in the world above. Being "faithful unto death," we shall receive "a crown of life." The meanest of his servants shall hereafter obtain "a kingdom which cannot be moved." A distinguished honour, doubtless, is reserved for the Apostles at the last day. Yet believers of a lower order may exult in the prospect of their future advancement. "Do ye not know that the

* Luke xxii. 24—30.

saints shall judge the world *?" Jesus himself hath declared, without respect to persons, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne †." But, for the present, this is our direction, "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate ‡." We are forbidden to cherish ambition and avarice, envy and contention. We are strictly enjoined to forego our own interest, ease, and reputation, whenever we can thereby render ourselves more extensively useful in life. With this view we must frequently submit to such services as may seem to diminish our consequence, and require painful and laborious exertions. This will show that we imitate our great Exemplar; and those only can claim an interest in his promises who are willing to tread in his steps.

Where, then, shall we find those, who maintain the Christian character with consistency? Many there are, who compliment Jesus with the appellation of Lord and Master: but we ask, Do you possess the mind which was in Him? Is he the pattern which you propose to yourselves for the regulation of your own spirit and practice? Are you living under the habitual influence of humility? The appearance and the language you may easily assume; but does the disposition itself abide in you, and govern your conduct? What means that selfishness, that pride, and eagerness for advancement, which we so frequently discover under a religious profession? How unsuitable for you, who should be dead to the world, are all contentions about honour and precedence! Do not the various commotions, by which even the church itself is divided, prove that there is little of real Christianity among us, because there is little conformity to Christ? Why do you decline this or the other office to which you are called? Possibly it may seem low and degrading in the estimation of men; it may be grating to corrupt nature, or it may obstruct your secular views. But, while you contem-

* 1 Cor. vi. 2.

† Rev. iii. 21.

‡ Rom. xii. 16.

plate the Lord of glory washing the feet of his disciples, be ashamed of paying so much regard to your own convenience. Surely it is not beneath you to copy after him; and, to do this, you must be "as one that serveth."

Upon the same occasion, also, Jesus instituted the eucharist, probably before they rose from the table, since it is said to be done "as they were eating." While he fulfilled in himself the ancient passover, and abolished its observance, he embraced that opportunity to ordain a new sacrament, which succeeded to it, as baptism did to circumcision. This is a rite of peculiar importance under the Gospel dispensation; and it is not difficult to ascertain its nature and design, from the clear account which is given of its original appointment*.

Jesus took bread, and, looking up with devout affections to God for his blessing, he divided it into several shares. He then distributed it among his disciples, commanding them to receive it as an emblem of his suffering body, and in commemoration of his death. In like manner, also, he delivered to them a cup of wine, which he directed them all to partake of, as a representation of his precious blood, whereby the new covenant is confirmed to us, and remission of sins obtained. He further declared that he should no more join with them in that solemnity upon earth, but that they should hereafter celebrate together the sacred mysteries therein exhibited.

Such was the institution: nor can we doubt that the observance of it is binding upon us, since an Apostle has taught us that hereby we are to "show the Lord's death TILL HE COME †." It is also manifest, from the plain and simple description before us, for what purposes, and with what temper of mind, we should communicate in this divine ordinance. Jesus himself is the grand object which it is intended to display. He is set forth before us as our spiritual food

* Matt. xxvi. 26—30. Mark xiv. 22—26. Luke xxii. 19, 20.

† 1 Cor. xi. 26.

and sustenance. Those visible elements, bread and wine, which afford peculiar nourishment to our bodies, very fitly represent Him, who alone can maintain the life and vigour of our souls. Yet, as he does this only in consequence of his sufferings, he is here proposed to our view as wounded, bleeding, dying, for us. His body, like the bread, was broken; his blood, like the wine, was poured out. Thus, we observe, by virtue of his sacrifice, "his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed*."

The participation of this sacrament shows the necessity of receiving Christ by faith. The bread and wine must be taken before they can yield any nutriment: and "except we eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, we have no life in us †." Then especially, when we approach to his table, we should exercise a fixed and strong dependence upon him. Let us attend to his own injunction, "Do this in remembrance of me." Let us bear in mind the dignity of his person, the glory which he originally possessed, and the humiliation to which he stooped. We are to regard him, not only as a bright example, or a kind benefactor, but as our High-Priest, offering up himself as an atonement to God, to make reconciliation for us. Thus, while we remember the agonies which he endured, we should "look upon him whom we have pierced, and mourn for him ‡." The recollection of his cross will constrain us to "abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes."

Yet, as a holy festival, it affords a proper occasion for the exercise of lively joy. What can be so calculated to revive and gladden the heart as the view of those inestimable benefits which are here exhibited? What can tend more to inspire us with hope, confidence, love, and zeal? Nay, it is the appointed method in which God is pleased to strengthen, quicken, and comfort his people; and as our wants return upon us, so, by a frequent attendance on this ordinance, we should seek fresh communications of grace. We

* John vi. 55. † vi. 53. ‡ Zech. xiii. 10.

are encouraged to expect his presence and blessing, and thus are enabled to maintain a freedom of intercourse with him. Such an attendance, also, will be the means of uniting us together in the bonds of Christian fellowship, and of rendering us "kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love." What a source of happiness is this! Yet does not the general neglect of the Lord's table prove that the Saviour has but a small share in our remembrances?

We do not invite sinners who are living in ignorance and contempt of God. We warn them not to profane the solemnity by their formality and irreverence. If you feel not your need of Jesus, nor desire to please him, insult him not by presuming to "eat of his bread, and to drink of the wine which he hath mingled." But you, who are bowed down with a sense of guilt and depravity, who earnestly wish to accept salvation on the terms of the Gospel, may approach with humble hope. Only devote your souls and your all to Jesus, and bind yourselves by a vow to serve him with all your faculties, to the last moment of your lives, and here you may expect to receive the tokens of his love, and the gracious supplies of his spirit.

Judas was present when our Lord declared in the strongest terms his high regard for his disciples; and it is probable that even the traitor himself participated of the holy eucharist. But, though he had acted his part in so subtle a manner as not to be suspected by the other Apostles, neither his character nor his designs were concealed from Jesus. At length it appeared expedient that the rest also should be apprized of the diabolical plan of treachery, then ripe for execution. While, therefore, they were all at table together, the Saviour intimated his perfect knowledge of it: and this he did, that his chosen followers might not be staggered when they should see one from among themselves so scandalously desert his post, but be confirmed in the faith, by observing a completion of the Scriptures in that event. He exhorted

them, also, to persevere in their zealous exertions for his cause, assuring them that both he and his Father were concerned for their favourable reception in the world*.

In the view of this sad case Jesus felt a keen anguish of spirit. He then declared more explicitly, "One of you shall betray me;" "the hand of the traitor is with me on the table;" and by certain express tokens he marked out Judas as the man, denouncing the most tremendous wo against him, though he should be the instrument of fulfilling the divine counsels. An awful consternation seized the company, and every one, suspecting himself rather than Judas, cried out, "Lord, is it I?" But that monster of iniquity remained unaffected by the solemn warning. We might have supposed that he would have been deterred from his purpose: but he was the more enraged, and went out immediately, under a violent instigation of the devil, in the darkness of the night, to accomplish his infernal scheme.

Our Lord then exulted in the prospect of those blessed consequences, which would result from the treachery of Judas, as the means of completing the grand work of redemption†. He reminded his disciples that the hour was approaching when he himself should enter on a state of high exaltation, and bring glory to God in saving sinners by his death. Looking upon his dear followers with a tenderness of affection, like an indulgent father upon his little children, from whom he was on the point of being separated, he pressed it upon them, as his dying request, that they would continue firmly and warmly attached to one another. This he enjoined as a new command, not unknown, indeed, in former dispensations, but now enforced by fresh motives, and by an example altogether singular in its kind: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another;

* John xiii. 18—30. Matt. xxvi. 21—25. Mark xiv. 18—21. Luke xxii. 21—23.

† John xiii. 31, &c. Luke xxii. 31—38.

as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." His love to us, then, is to be the cause, the measure, and the pattern, of our kindness and regard to all the members of his church. He recommended, also, this reciprocal cordial affection, as the strongest proof of our union with him, and the most honourable badge of our profession.

If we understand the full import of our Lord's declaration, "I have loved you," its influence will be irresistible. We shall not only abhor the treachery of Judas, but dread the thought of displeasing Him, who has shown such compassion and favour toward us. Let us examine our religion on this ground: Do we scrupulously avoid all those practices and tempers which he condemns, and endeavour to express our gratitude by our diligence and fervour in his service? Do we cultivate that principle, on which he has laid such peculiar stress, unfeigned love to his people for his sake? How excellent would be the fruits of this disposition! What peace and happiness would it produce; and how strongly would it recommend our system of faith! But we are all lamentably defective in this grace. Do not our peevishness, envy, and contention, our censoriousness, bigotry, and resentment, disgrace our profession, and betray our insincerity? Surely it cannot now be said, as it was of the primitive church, "See how these Christians love one another."

Jesus had intimated his approaching departure; on which Peter, though admonished that he could not follow him for the present, declared his readiness to attend him through all dangers, even to death itself. Alas! little do we know how we shall be able to stand in the hour of trial. The boasting Apostle was reprov'd, and informed that before the morning light his strong confidence should be so shaken, that he would deny in the most shameful manner all connexion and acquaintance with his Lord and Master. That very night, he was told, would be a time of peculiar temptation, as Satan

was

was desirous to practise his wiles upon them all. He was assured that his principles would be severely assaulted, and his soul preserved from total apostacy only through the gracious intercession of the Saviour. He was further charged to confirm the faith of his weak brethren, after his own recovery.

Such was the solemn caution given to Peter: Jesus also subjoined ^{an affecting} address to the whole company. He bade them ^{prepare} for a sore conflict, and arm themselves for the fight. ^{They} had been, ^{in their} abundantly supplied with necessary provisions when they went out to preach the Gospel. But he reminded them that they would soon be so entirely destitute as to stand in need of a purse furnished with money, a scrip with food, and a sword for their defence. He informed them further, that, as all the ancient prophecies concerning him should be exactly fulfilled, so in particular, agreeably to Isaiah's declaration, he was about to be "numbered with the transgressors," and to die as a malefactor*. Probably they misunderstood him, as if he wished them to resist their enemies with violence. He intended only to lead their minds to the expectation of a severe opposition; and they ought to have known that "the weapons of their warfare were not carnal †."

But, leaving for the present the case of the Apostles, let us remember for ourselves, that we also are required to "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ ‡." Let us be solicitous to maintain his cause, which, as a sacred deposit intrusted to us, must be kept at the hazard of our dearest temporal interests. We should look for a fierce onset, and be prepared to make a vigorous defence. But the cautions now before us will teach us not to depend on our own resolution and ability; for, if we be self-confident, we shall, probably, fall like Peter, and taste the bitter punishment of pride. Then be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."—

* Isa. liii. 12. † 2 Cor. x. 4. ‡ 2 Tim. ii. 3.

“ Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand *.”

We see our calling; we must follow the Saviour not to wordly honour and preferment, but to shame, contempt, and many secular disadvantages. Are we willing to hazard all consequences in his service? Let us boldly declare ourselves on his side, and entreat him so to pray for us, while Satan is sifting us as wheat, that our faith may not fail. Let us attend him to the cross, and then we shall participate of his glory. Whatever dangers may threaten, or enemies assault us, may each of us be able to say, “ None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy †!” Amen.

* Eph. vi. 10, 13.

† Acts xx. 24.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 37.

Jesus, before he quitted the guest-chamber, exhorted and comforted his Apostles—represented himself as the true Vine—enforced obedience and mutual love—and predicted persecution.

THE solemn celebration of the last passover could not but make a deep impression on the minds of the disciples; and the warnings then addressed to them probably excited much perplexity. Their beloved Master had declared that he should very soon be separated from them by the hand of violence, his death be accomplished through the treachery of one in their own company, and they themselves exposed to a severe assault both from men and Satan. The removal of their Lord, so justly dear to them, was in itself a distressing circumstance: and foreseeing further dangers and difficulties, when deprived of their Head, they felt increasing anguish, and were oppressed with painful apprehensions. Jesus was sensibly affected for them, and, as it should seem, more solicitous on their account than his own. Before, therefore, they retired from the guest-chamber, he renewed his exhortations, with a view to alleviate their sorrows, and inspire them with hope, confidence, and joy*.

How tender and compassionate does the Saviour appear, while instructing and comforting his mourning disciples, “as a father does his children!” How exactly calculated to revive their spirits were the considerations here suggested! The benefit of these

* John xiv. 1, &c.

his last solemn addresses was designed to reach likewise even unto us. How many things do we meet with which have a tendency to cause grief, confusion, and terror! Observing in what a world of sin and disorder we are placed, what calamities frequently occur in human life, and how depraved and helpless we ourselves are, we shall, probably, be disposed to indulge a timorous and dejected frame of mind. What, then, is to be done? What can support and animate our souls, when dangers and distresses threaten us on every side? Let us hear the Saviour's words, and learn to apply them to our own case.

Thus he spoke:—" Endeavour to lay aside your anxieties and fears, and show the excellence of your religious principles by your composure and courage. You must, therefore, not only possess a due regard to God as the Maker, Preserver, and Governor of the world, but also fix your attention and reliance upon Me, as the Mediator, through whom alone you can entertain any solid hope of the divine favour, any just expectation of being safely conducted to the heavenly state. In that glorious abode, where my Father displays the lustre of his majesty, are sufficient accommodations for the whole church, numerous as it is; and there you will not be disappointed of a peaceable habitation. If this had not been infallibly secure, I would not have encouraged or permitted you to look for it. I am going to that kingdom on your behalf, to prepare the way for your admission: and, as I shall enter upon the possession in your name, I will not be unmindful of you, but return for the express purpose of receiving you to my own immediate presence, that you may dwell for ever near me, in that blissful inheritance, where even now I already am. After such clear declarations, you cannot mistake the place of which I speak, or the road which will lead you to it."

Thomas, probably understanding him as intending to erect a temporal dominion in some particular spot,

desired further information. Jesus replied, "I myself have opened an access for sinners unto God; in me the divine promises and engagements are sure and immutable; through me eternal life is secured: nor can any one, whatever be his pleas or attainments, approach to the Father, but by means of my mediation. If, therefore, you had known my character and offices, you could not have been ignorant of Him: but now I have revealed him to you, and in me you behold the express image of his person *."

Philip professed an ardent desire to be favoured with an outward manifestation of the Father's glory. On this our Lord reproved him for not having better understood the nature and dignity of the Master, with whom he had been so long conversant; and then declared, "In seeing me, you have in effect seen the Father. Do you not credit my solemn assertions, that I am one with him? My words demand your regard, as proceeding from Him; but, if these be rejected, the miraculous operations which I perform by virtue of my union with Him prove incontestably the mysterious truth which I affirm."

Let us weigh the important doctrines here advanced. The question proposed to Philip may furnish a reproof to each of us, "Hast thou not known me?" Considering the information we have had, may we not justly be ashamed that we have not better learned the principles of our religion? Have we properly understood who the Saviour is, and what the purposes for which he came into the world? Have we beheld the glory of the Father so displayed in the person of the Son as to be convinced that their nature and perfections are the same? And is not this a firm foundation for our hopes, a source of strong consolation? For do we not now perceive that our concerns may be safely intrusted in the hands of Jesus?

But have we indeed approached unto God, through the mediation of Christ? Or shall we presume to

* Heb. i. 3.

draw near to him in any other way? Who shall open the kingdom of heaven for us? Shall we plead our own obedience, as if this would procure us admission? The door would be barred against us; nor can any entrance be obtained but through the sacrifice and intercession of Him, who has returned to those blissful mansions from which he came down. He is gone to prepare a place, not for his Apostles only, but for all who believe in his name. You, therefore, who have fixed your whole dependence upon him, are encouraged to rejoice in his exalted dignity, and the certainty of final salvation. It is your privilege, though you are now despised and afflicted, to look forward with exultation "to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you*." For yet a little while, and He, in whom you trust, shall appear in his glory, and take you up with great triumph to his beatific presence, where you shall admire, and love, and praise Him for ever.

The Saviour proceeded to comfort his disciples: "Distressed as you may be at my departure, I solemnly assure you that in consequence thereof you will obtain peculiar advantages. By virtue of my intercession, while you exercise a firm dependence upon me, you shall be enabled to perform miraculous operations, equal or superior to those which I myself have wrought †. Nor is this too much for you to

* 1 Pet. i. 4.

† The Apostles not only expelled demons, healed the sick, raised the dead, as Jesus had done, but dispensed spiritual gifts to immense numbers, spake various languages, which they had never learned, and preached the Gospel with a success amazingly rapid and extensive. These were, in some sense, more illustrious effects than attended the ministry of our Lord: and yet this consideration does not weaken the argument for his divinity taken from his works, but rather strengthens it; for these very things were accomplished, as appears in the passage before us, by the power of the Saviour: and accordingly, the Apostles, in the miracles which they performed, confessed their dependence upon him, and ascribed the whole glory to him. They could not speak as he did, "I say unto thee, Arise," but "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk;" and again, "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole." Luke vii. 14. viii. 54. Acts iii. 6. ix. 34.

expect:

expect: only present your supplications to God in faith, and, by the energy of my own power, I will bestow the blessings which you ask, that the glory of the Father may be displayed in the mediation of the Son."

We, also, may rejoice, that Jesus, who is gone into heaven, continues mindful of his church on earth, and is incessantly pouring down his benefits upon it. We should be thankful for those extraordinary communications vouchsafed to the Apostles, whereby the Gospel was first propagated, and confirmed with unquestionable evidence. Let us likewise be encouraged, by the prevalence of the intercession of our exalted High-Priest, to offer up our requests with humble boldness; for the promise reaches even unto us, "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." Ah! why are we so backward to pray, as if we had no Advocate with the Father, or as if this Advocate had no merit to plead, possessed no influence, and could exert no power on our behalf? Let us not so dishonour him, but, crediting his declarations, let us surround the throne of grace with our importunate petitions, and spread our wants before him. He is able, and he is equally willing, to supply all our necessities.

It is probable that the Apostles expressed a peculiar warmth of affection for their dear Lord, who was about to be taken from them, and that with a reference to their professions of regard he thus continued his discourse: "Let your love appear in your uniform obedience to my injunctions; and, though I shall withdraw from you, I will entreat the Father that you may enjoy the consolations of his Spirit, and that for ever. The men of the world, with such carnal sentiments and dispositions as predominate in their minds, cannot admit this divine Visitant; but you are already acquainted with his influences, and shall receive more abundant communications from him. I will not, therefore, totally and finally desert you, but will return to you in the power of the Holy Ghost,

Ghost. My bodily presence will be soon removed from the earth, but, through faith, you may still behold me ever near you; and as I am possessed of endless life, so, by virtue of your union with me, you shall maintain a state of spiritual vigour, and be conducted to the everlasting felicities of heaven. That promised effusion of the Spirit will convince you more fully that I am joined not only to my Father, but to yourselves also, by an indissoluble bond. You must be reminded, however, that he only, who shows a constant desire and endeavour to perform whatever I have commanded, is acknowledged to give a decisive proof of his regard. He is the person who shall obtain unequivocal marks of my Father's favour, as well as of my warmest attachment, and who, likewise, shall receive from me a clear discovery of my glorious character."

Judas, one of the twelve, but not the traitor, expressed his astonishment that such a discovery should be designed for them, and not extended to the world at large. He inquired how it could be; when Jesus immediately resumed his affectionate address: "The man who is influenced by a sincere love to me will necessarily yield an unfeigned submission to my authority; and, as he will be the object of my Father's complacency and delight, we will together visit him, and take up our residence within him. An enmity of heart, indeed, would lead to an entire rejection of my words: but, as I declare the will of Jehovah, the God of hosts, every contemptuous unbeliever will be left without excuse. Such are the instructions which I have delivered during my personal ministry among you. And now, though I am departing, the Holy Ghost shall be sent to supply my place: he shall give you a clear conception of divine truth, and revive in your memories every doctrine which you have heard from me."

"Here, then, I take my leave, with a declaration of my best wishes for you. Peace, the most valuable blessing, I bequeath to you: peace, which I have
procured

procured by my blood, and which can be communicated only by my grace, I bestow upon you. This is what the world cannot impart: their professions of good will are, in general, empty flatteries and compliments; they confer no real satisfaction, and are extremely changeable. Far different is my solemn benediction, which I pronounce in the sincerity of my heart, which carries an efficacy with it to promote your happiness, and which I will never revoke. On these grounds your fears may be dispersed, and your minds composed and comforted."

"You will, therefore, receive the most ample benefits from my departure; and on my account, as well as your own, you may be glad at my removal, since I am quitting my present state of humiliation and distress, and returning to my Father, who is exalted in bliss and glory, far beyond what I possess in this life. I have warned you of the events which are about to take place, that you may not be staggered by them, but rather confirmed in the faith. I shall not have time to add much more; for I am just entering upon a painful conflict with Satan, who has usurped the dominion of the world. But I dread not his malice, as there is nothing in my nature which can favour his assaults, or give him an advantage over me. I submit to this opposition, that I may publicly testify my regard to the Father, and my readiness to fulfil all my engagements with him: and now I hasten to do my last work upon earth."

And what do we learn from this affecting discourse? Does it not excite in us the most fervent love to the Saviour? Let us not forget that he requires obedience as the test of our love. Do we not perceive the excellence and happiness of his service? Do we not long for the manifestation of the divine favour, which he promises to his faithful people? Surely it ought to afford us the strongest consolation that Jesus, who was dead, is alive again, and that he is gone into heaven, to carry on his designs of mercy for us. Nay, he is still ever present with his church, and

and pledges himself for the security of every true believer. The light, and strength, and joy of his Spirit, are vouchsafed to all his sincere disciples, even to the end of time: the Comforter will "abide with us for ever." Let us plead with him these gracious declarations: let us implore that peace, which is his own most valuable legacy; and request, that, since he hath overcome Satan, he would enable us to sustain the conflict, and bring us off "more than conquerors," to the praise of his great name.

After the solemn address which we have considered our Lord proposed to retire; but, probably making a pause before he quitted the room, he renewed his exhortations to the Apostles. To show them the necessity of continual dependence on him, he represented himself and his church under the similitude of a vine, planted and cultivated by a wise and careful husbandman*. He is the root and stock of the tree, and his professing people are its branches. Some, which are beautifully adorned with leaves, produce no fruit. These are cut off, and consigned to the flames, as fit only to be used for fuel. Such is the state and character of merely nominal Christians, and such will be their final destruction. They are members of the visible church; their appearances are fair and promising, but their barrenness witnesses against them; and therefore they are "nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned †."

There are, however, branches of another sort, truly excellent and valuable, which, in consequence of nourishment derived from the root, bear a large increase. Such, our Lord testified, were all the Apostles, after Judas had withdrawn from the company. Such, likewise, are all true believers: by faith they are joined to the Saviour, and from that union they receive an influence, which renders them, though in different degrees, "fruitful in every good work." To Him, therefore, all their attainments and usefulness are ascribed: left to themselves, or

* John xv. 1, &c.

† Heb. vi. 8.

separated from him, they are no more productive of good than the branches of the vine when cut off from the stock. But, whilst they maintain a constant regard to Jesus, they preserve their spiritual life, and make advancement in holiness.

Yet even these valuable branches stand in need of being pruned; for, unless the luxuriant parts be taken off, the fruit will degenerate. For this very purpose, therefore, the care of the husbandman is exercised. O, what sharp operations does it require to lop off those excrescences, which shoot forth even from eminent believers! The Lord, who loves them, will not spare them, but appoint the heaviest afflictions, with no other design than to render them more pure, and, of consequence, more honourable and useful members of his church.

Do we perceive our own character exhibited in this parable? Have we any thing more than an external profession of Christianity? Are we "filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God *?" Or how do we expect to do good? Is there any other way than through a vital union with the Saviour? No: he himself declared our utter inability when he said, "Without me ye can do nothing." Let us confess our weakness, and implore his help. May he attach our hearts to himself, and communicate such supplies of grace as may enable us to adorn our holy calling! Be it our concern to maintain our faith, and cultivate an intercourse with him day by day. Yet, even then, severe trials may be necessary for us. Let us not shrink from them, but pray only that they may accomplish in us the desired effects. How blessed will be the consequences of such an adherence to Christ! We shall be emboldened to approach him with confidence; for he has engaged to answer our petitions. By our consistent and honourable deportment the God whom we serve will be glorified, since it will appear from us not only

* Phil. i. 11.

that he is "rich in mercy," but that he "loveth righteousness." This also will contribute essentially to our own comfort, as affording the strongest evidence that we are the disciples of Jesus.

Our Lord, therefore, earnestly pressed upon his Apostles such a practical regard to duty: "As I am the object of my Father's complacency and delight, so do I feel the most affectionate attachment to you. It should be your aim and endeavour to walk in a state of holy intimacy with me; which can be effected only by your ready compliance with all my injunctions, even as I have yielded a constant and universal obedience to the injunctions of my Father. In these exhortations I am the more urgent, that I may receive continual satisfaction from you, and that your happiness in me may be completed."

"One commandment, in particular, I again enforce upon you; which is that you bear the most fervent love one towards another. In this you have only to imitate that kindness which I have shown to you. No higher instance of benevolence can be produced than a man's offering up himself to die on behalf of his friends. As my friends I shall regard you while you pay a due deference to my authority, and obey my precepts. I treat you not as inferior domestics, who are to be kept at a distance, but as the partners of my counsels, to whom I have communicated whatever I have received in charge from my Father. To this honourable situation you have been called, not by your previous choice of me; but by my free and sovereign mercy towards you: and I have appointed you to your sacred function, that you may be extensively useful, and that the benefits of your ministry may reach through many generations. Such also are my gracious engagements with you, that you may expect an answer to your largest petitions in my name. I require only that you show your gratitude and obedience by maintaining a mutual and ardent affection for one another."

And is it of no concern to us what the Saviour pressed

pressed upon his Apostles? Were they strictly enjoined to continue in the love of their Master; and are we at liberty to neglect and despise him? Should not his unparalleled kindness in dying for us, as well as for them, excite us to admire, and praise, and serve him? We had deserved the divine indignation and wrath; but, by virtue of his oblation, we may now be admitted to the most honourable privileges. We also, like the Apostles, are received into a state of holy friendship with our Lord, if, indeed, we believe in his name; and to us he condescends to make known the mysteries of his kingdom. Surely we shall not hesitate to say, The Lord hath done it, not for our righteousness, but of his own abundant grace. Yet we should remember that the end of our election and separation from the world is, that we may produce the fruits of righteousness. Is this our aim and desire? To instance in the particular duty so much insisted on, do we possess and cultivate brotherly love? If otherwise, where is our religion; where our knowledge and imitation of Christ? Can it be allowable for us, any more than for the first Christians, to "bite and devour one another?" You, therefore, who "have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth*," for you are strangers to the power of the Gospel.

Jesus proceeded in his exhortation to his Apostles, that he might prepare them for the opposition which awaited them: "However unexceptionable and benevolent your spirit and conduct may be, you need not wonder if you be marked out as objects of general detestation, since you have seen me treated in the same manner. If, indeed, you were conformed to the principles and practices of the world, you might conciliate their favour; but, as you differ from them so widely, in consequence of your being separated by my grace, you will excite their disgust. Still you should not complain, but be satisfied when

* James iii. 14.

you recollect that you meet with no worse reception than your great Master did. Persecutions will be raised against you on my account, through an ignorance of God and of his Christ. Be not tempted to comply with your enemies, or envy them their triumph; for their case is deplorably wretched. As I have so long preached amongst them, and confirmed my doctrines with unparalleled miracles, they can set up no plea in their own defence. For now it appears, that, in rejecting me, they resist the God of heaven, who hath borne his testimony to me. Yet, even by this unreasonable and base opposition, they raise their own Scriptures, which have foretold it*."

"My cause, however, shall prosper, notwithstanding the violence of adversaries. The abundant effusion of the Spirit, whom I will send down from the Father, upon my return to him, shall afford the most convincing evidence of the truth of the Gospel. You also, my chosen witnesses, whom I have trained up for the ministry, shall be so strengthened and emboldened to preach the faith, that your enemies will be confounded, and multitudes of converts added to my church."

What inference, then, do we draw from this part of the exhortation? If the religion of Jesus be the same as in primitive times, may not similar consequences be expected? The external profession, indeed, as it is general among us, exposes no man to contempt; but the life and power of it would still render us unfashionable, and offensive to those who are governed by the maxims and customs of the world. This is not to be avoided even by the most prudent and exemplary Christians. The zealous followers of Jesus will be hated, in a measure, as he was, and for that very reason, because they resemble Him. Does this discourage us? Or do we complain of the terms? Are we, then, inclined to join the society of those who scoff at all serious attention

* Psal. xxxv. 19.

to spiritual things, or, at least, who care not for them? Let us deliberate well. What will the issue be? Would not such a conduct imply a decided opposition to the Saviour? And, considering the instructions and admonitions given us, would not our sin be unpardonable? Let us rather, therefore, meet the frowns of men, than provoke the vengeance of Almighty God.

The promulgation of the Gospel, through the effusion of the Holy Ghost and the labours of the Apostles, has been answerable to the prediction. But are we ourselves brought under its influence? Every true disciple, even now, will be able to bear testimony for Christ: what, then, is our testimony concerning him? Can we tell of his power, faithfulness, and love, from our own experience, and recommend his service to all, from what we have known of its blessedness? Attestations of this nature, from private and obscure Christians, might have the happiest effects in silencing the objections of infidels, and reconciling many to the principles which they despise. May Jesus, our exalted Lord, send down a more abundant measure of his Spirit upon us, that his cause may be revived, his church enlarged, and his people animated with increasing confidence and joy in his ways, to the glory of his own name here and hereafter to all eternity! Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 38.

Jesus concluded his address to his Apostles with a prediction of their sufferings, a promise of the Spirit, and an assurance of his own return—offered up a fervent prayer for himself, his Apostles, and all believers.

WHATEVER the Saviour felt on his own account, in the view of his approaching sufferings, he was most deeply affected, as we have seen, for the distressed state in which we was about to leave his beloved Apostles. The paschal supper, of which they had been partakers together, was the last meal in which they were to enjoy the communion of the same table before his death, and afforded the last opportunity for exhortation and counsel. A farewell at the moment of final separation is always attended, where the bonds of union in life have been dear and sacred, with peculiar circumstances of solemnity, tenderness, and grief. It was now that the love of the Saviour broke forth, resembling that which a parent expresses for his children, who are soon to be exposed as helpless orphans to extreme calamities and dangers. He proceeded, like such a counsellor, to instruct, warn, and comfort them*.

“ I have given you, my faithful followers, previous intimations of the formidable opposition which you will have to encounter, in order that, being prepared, you may not be shaken in your minds, or induced to desert my cause, when you enter upon the sharp con-

* John xvi. 1, &c.

flict. Your enemies will persecute you with a rage so blind and furious, that, while they excommunicate you, and even put you to death, they will consider themselves as performing a religious service, and bringing glory to God. This will arise from their ignorance of the righteous character of my Father, as well as of my peculiar office and dignity. In your deep distresses you will recollect my predictions, and find in them a confirmation of your faith. It was the less necessary to give you these notices before, as I have hitherto been your constant companion, ready to suggest all proper counsel and direction, as circumstances occurred."

Such was the prophecy of Jesus, and we learn from the history of the Apostles that it was exactly verified. They who ought to have been received "as an angel of God" met with general scorn and detestation, as if they were unworthy to live; and many of them suffered death in its most dreadful forms, while their persecutors pleaded a regard to conscience and religion. We read of similar events in other ages of the church; and at the present day, though violence is restrained, and loud professions of candour and liberality are made, it is obvious that fervent zeal for the honour of our Redeemer would expose us to contempt. And do not many among us, through the fear of difficulties, decline those pious exertions, which we acknowledge to be requisite? Or, if we "suffer for righteousness' sake," are we not offended, and almost induced to desert the service? Have we, then, forgotten the declarations of Jesus? Or have they not taught us to expect the enmity of the world, if we would be the friends of God? If real godliness produced no opposition, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled? But matter of fact abundantly confirms their truth, and should establish us in the belief and love of the Gospel.

The Apostles were too much oppressed by the intimations of their Lord's departure to propose any further inquiries upon the subject. But he proceeded

to suggest such considerations as might relieve and comfort them. "However painful my removal may be to you, it is highly requisite on your own account; for you could not otherwise obtain the influences of the Holy Ghost. But now, in consequence of my death, this divine Agent shall descend upon you, and give an amazing efficacy to your ministrations. By his mighty operations the world will be convinced of the guilt which consists in unbelief and rejection of me. He will teach men the nature and sufficiency of my righteousness, from my return to my Father at the completion of my work, and in the overthrow and dethronement of Satan exhibit a proof of the judgment with which I am intrusted."

"Many things yet remain to be more clearly unfolded to you; but for the present, through the erroneous sentiments and strong prejudices which possess your minds, you are indisposed to receive them. The Spirit, who will be your Guide and Teacher, will effectually dispel the darkness from your minds, and reveal the whole system of divine truth: and his declarations should be regarded as coming with authority from Heaven. He will discover future events; but his peculiar office will be to give you clearer and more honourable conceptions of my character and salvation, by exhibiting to your view those glorious perfections, which I possess in the same extent as the Father."

Here let us pause, and contemplate the Saviour's promises, from which we may derive the strongest consolation. However we may be inclined to lament his removal from the earth, we may rejoice in those inestimable benefits which his death has procured. In particular, the influences of the Spirit are bestowed upon the church, as the fruit and purchase of his sacrifice. It is allowed that these influences were communicated to the Apostles in an extraordinary measure, and the peculiar circumstances of their situation rendered them expedient. But the Spirit

Spirit yet continues to execute his office by his common operations, according to our Lord's description. He it is who arrests the careless sinner, and fixes upon him a deep conviction of guilt, especially for his contempt of the grace of the Gospel. He gives the knowledge of salvation, by exhibiting to the view of the mind the perfect obedience of Christ. And he also directs the attention to the same exalted Personage, in the character of the Almighty Governor and universal Judge. May these effects accompany the labours of faithful ministers in the present day! For thus only "the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword *:" thus only will it "have free course, and be glorified †."

It was promised to the Apostles that their ignorance and prejudice should be removed by further degrees of illumination, particularly by larger discoveries of the dignity of the Redeemer, and of the blessings which he bestows. We also stand in need of, and are encouraged to solicit and expect, the same gracious assistance. Have we no mistakes to be corrected, no wrong affections to be subdued? Let us pray that the Holy Ghost, who is the Author of all spiritual light and life, may "guide us into all truth." We look not for infallibility, or the gift of prophecy: but we may offer up the most fervent supplications, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of our understanding being enlightened; that we may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints ‡."

Upon our Lord's intimating to his Apostles that he should soon depart and go to the Father, and return after a short interval, they were at a loss to comprehend his meaning. He declared, therefore, more explicitly, that though distress and anguish were

* Heb. iv. 12. † 2 Thess. iii. 1. ‡ Eph. i. 17, 18.

coming upon them, sharp as the pangs of childbirth, yet as these are succeeded by sensations of peculiar delight after a safe delivery, so their grief should be followed by a state of lasting joy, inasmuch as he would visit them again. Doubtless he intended to suggest, that by his appearance, upon his resurrection from the dead, he would disperse their fears, establish their hopes and comforts, and render them dauntless under future trials. Yet it is probable that he had a reference to his final advent, when all his people shall behold his glory. Then, in the highest sense of the words, they shall meet him "with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away*." What strong consolation does this administer to believers! Under your severest calamities look forwards to your Lord's return with holy exultation, for "He shall wipe away all tears from your eyes †." If he should thus intimate his intention, "Surely, I come quickly;" it is your privilege to reply, "Amen: even so come, Lord Jesus ‡."

The Saviour reminded his Apostles, that, though his bodily presence should be withdrawn from them, they should be so much more enlightened as not to stand in need of the same familiar converse with him. Some degree of obscurity rested upon his instructions during his personal continuance among them; but he promised to give them by his Spirit the most explicit declarations of the divine will. He pressed upon them the necessity of prayer, and taught them especially to maintain an entire dependence upon his merits and mediation, in all their addresses to the Father, which they had not till that time been instructed to do in so express a manner. He added, likewise, the most gracious assurances, that their petitions, being offered up through faith in his name, would certainly obtain a favourable acceptance, and ensure the completion of their wishes. This efficacy

* Isa. xxxv. 10. † Rev. vii. 17. ‡ xxii. 20.

he taught them to ascribe, not only to his intercession, but to the strong affection which the Father himself bore towards them for their warm and faithful attachment to him. He repeated it, therefore, for their encouragement, that he was then about to return to that high and glorious Personage, whose love for them was the same as his own.

The clear and precious discoveries, which the Saviour promised, the Apostles actually received; and we, at this very day, enjoy the benefits of their illumination. Let us value those authentic records, in which they have unfolded to our view the revelation of divine truth, so wonderfully communicated to them. But let us not forget our need of prayer, and the great advantages attending the right performance of this duty. We, also, are allowed a free access to God in the name of Jesus. Are we making use of the privilege? Are we imploring spiritual blessings with all that fervour which a full conviction of their value would produce? Do we exercise an unfeigned reliance upon our exalted Intercessor? And can we, through him, approach to God, as to a loving Father, with confidence and joy? This is the temper and conduct to which a firm belief of the Gospel will infallibly lead.

After these declarations of Jesus, the Apostles professed to have received entire satisfaction, and an assured persuasion of his high character and divine original. But, alas! they were not sufficiently aware of their own weakness. He warned them, that, strong as their faith might seem, the hour was at hand when they would all be so shaken in their principles as to desert him; yet, notwithstanding their treachery, he rejoiced that he should be supported by virtue of his union with the Father. It is not wrong to declare what are our views of Christ, and what affections we feel towards him; but the solemn admonition here given teaches us not to boast of the clearness of our knowledge, or the warmth of our attachment. We may soon be brought into such

trials as may stagger and confound us, and, for a season at least, be "moved away from the hope of the Gospel," as if we had found the whole system a delusion. It will be our wisdom, as well as duty, under a diffidence of ourselves, to rely upon the grace of God, which alone can preserve us, and to pray, "Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live; and let me not be ashamed of my hope*."

Yet we admire the forbearance and tenderness of Jesus, even in the view of their inconstancy. He did not frown upon them, but encouraged them by an assurance, that, through faith in his name, they should still possess a constant source of peace, and an antidote to the cup of tribulation, which the world would soon give them to drink. And, while he warned them to look for severe opposition and sharp distress from its assaults, he closed his address with exhorting them to maintain a holy cheerfulness and courage, in full dependence upon Him their victorious Leader. It is the will of Jesus, then, that his fainting people should be comforted; and even that those, who have betrayed an unsteadiness in his service, should not despond, but be induced to return, and trust in his love. O, how large are his compassions!

We ask, What are your expectations of happiness? Are you seeking it in present things? Alas! you will be miserably disappointed: Jesus alone can bestow the precious treasure, nor will you ever obtain it till you be willing to receive it at his hands. You cannot enjoy his favour and that of the world together. If you follow him with fidelity and zeal, you must prepare to meet resistance, and arm yourselves for a severe conflict. He, however, whom you serve, has already overcome your enemies; and you may rejoice in this confidence, that they shall be subdued under your feet, because they are fallen under His. O, desert not his standard, and you

* Psal. cxix, 116.

shall soon share in the honours of his triumph, and sit down with him in his kingdom!

He had concluded his farewell address to his beloved attendants, and was now on the point of departing. But, that no proof might be wanting of his paternal regards, and nothing omitted which could sooth the pangs of separation, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and with fervent intercessions commended to God the Father his adopted children*. John, who was then present, has recorded the prayer; and it remains an everlasting monument of the strong and invariable attachment of Christ to his church, and ensures the providence which shall save it from the malice of men and devils. It was also adapted to his own peculiar circumstances, who had but a few hours more to live in the world; and his conduct on that occasion teaches us to wait for our great change in the exercise of ardent devotion. It appears, indeed, as we have observed, to have been dictated by a tender regard to the situation of his Apostles, who, perplexed and tempted as they were, stood in need of all that protection, support, and comfort, which he solicited his Father to grant them. The prayer, however, may likewise be considered as a pattern of that prevailing intercession which he carries on in heaven, and which he will continue to offer to the end of time, for the benefit of every member of his church.

There are those who represent it as inconsistent with the doctrine of his Godhead that he should ever be a supplicant. But they seem willing to forget that part of the Christian's creed, which maintains that Jesus was very man as well as very God; that as man he was required to "fulfil all righteousness," and therefore among other duties to perform that of prayer. Besides, in that state of humiliation, being a partaker of our weaknesses, he had occasion to implore assistance from above, even as we ourselves; and he received that assistance in answer to his own

* John xvii. 1, &c.

petitions. Yet in his remarkable address to Heaven, which we now proceed to consider, he discovers a superior dignity. The language is such as a mere man cannot adopt; it will not suit any other than Him, who is our IMMANUEL, possessed of two natures, "God manifest in the flesh."

He began with a request for himself. He could not be unmindful of his own situation, with which such important events were connected. As he was about to close his work on earth, it was his earnest desire to be so supported, that the conclusion might be truly honourable. The grand decisive hour was at hand, on which the whole of his mediatorial undertaking depended; anxious, therefore, for the glory of God and the salvation of his people, he prayed that he might be sustained in the conflict, and crowned with victory. This he solicited and obtained. A divine power attended him in his deepest humiliation; an angel appeared to strengthen him in the garden; his enemies were struck to the ground; his very judge testified his innocence; the conversion of a dying sinner gave a lustre to his cross; the heavens were darkened, the earth shook, the vail of the temple was rent, and the graves opened, in answer to this request, that the dignity of the Saviour might be attested. Doubtless he had a view likewise to those subsequent events, his resurrection and ascension, the miraculous effusion of the Spirit, and the efficacious influence of the Gospel; and these also have signally displayed his high character.

He considered himself in possession of universal dominion, to be exercised with an especial regard to the salvation of his people, according to the divine covenant. To this end it was necessary for them to be brought to the knowledge of the true God, and of the scheme of redemption through the Son. Having invariably pursued the great plan intrusted to him, and being about to perfect his engagements by the sacrifice of himself, he petitioned that

that he might again be admitted to participate of all that splendour of Deity, which he had enjoyed from everlasting in union with the Father, and of which he had divested himself that he might take up his abode upon earth.—He is now returned to that exalted state from which he descended; and surely, according to this description, it is meet that we adore him as our Lord and our God. A mere creature, or one raised to be God, as some vainly talk, could not speak thus; since, whatever glory he now possesses in heaven, he did possess before there was any creation. The doctrine is mysterious, but we rejoice in it, as laying a firm foundation for our faith and hope.

In this address of Jesus to his Father, he bore upon his heart the case of his dear followers, and especially of his chosen Apostles. He appears, indeed, to have been more solicitous for them than for himself; so that, even in the mention of his own concerns, he had a view to their benefit. His disciples were his peculiar charge; they had been committed to him by express covenant; he had gradually trained them up for his service, and faithfully instructed them in the divine will. They, on their part, had believed his declarations, understood his character, and steadfastly attached themselves to his cause. This he represented, while he interceded for them, exclusively of others who knew him not. He pleaded that they were the objects of his Father's peculiar choice and love, as well as of his own. He argued that in this respect there could be no difference between Him and the Father, and that, as they possessed the same perfections, their counsels must accord, and the same persons be equally dear to them both. Being therefore about to depart, he solemnly commended his favoured attendants to the care of his God, and prayed, that, for the honour of his name, they might be preserved from the snares to which they were exposed, and be knit together by an indissoluble union of affection.

He had watched over them during his residence among them, and had kept them in the faith; so that Judas only had apostatized, according to the predictions of the Scripture. And now, upon returning to his Father, he offered up these petitions in their presence, that their happiness in him might be confirmed and completed. He observed, that, as they had received his doctrine, and, like him, differed so widely in conduct and spirit from the world, they were generally rejected with abhorrence, and no other treatment could be looked for. He was not solicitous that they should be immediately taken to heaven, merely to avoid the violence of persecution: he knew that it was expedient for them to remain longer upon earth; but he prayed most fervently that they might not be overcome by temptation, or betrayed into dishonourable conduct. He requested, that, while they separated from sinners, they might be continually advancing in real holiness, through the powerful energy of divine truth upon their minds. For this purpose he pleaded the importance of their office, as they were his ambassadors, appointed to promote the grand object of his own mission: and he expressed his desire, that, as he devoted himself to his work with a view to their spiritual good, they might receive more abundant grace, and feel the sanctifying influence of that Gospel which they were about to preach.

What do we learn from all this? Among other things, we cannot but remark the earnest concern of Jesus for the interest of true religion. These his dear servants, so commissioned, obtained a peculiar honour; and to the prevalency of this intercession, not to any natural excellence or superiority in them, we must ascribe their ardent zeal, their unshaken confidence, their exemplary holiness, and amazing success. Let their history, from the day of Pentecost, testify how fully his prayers were answered. We rejoice that he still sends out ministers for the enlargement and edification of his church,

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that he is solicitous to preserve and bless them by his grace, and gives efficacy to their labours. They should seriously contemplate the character of the Apostles, as here stated by their Lord, that they may judge what manner of persons they themselves ought to be. It is expedient for them, doubtless, as it was for the Apostles, to be cordially attached to the Saviour, and to possess an eminent measure of divine knowledge, faith, and holiness; and it is equally necessary to pray that they may be kept from the evil of the world, united together in love, and sanctified through the truth, which they preach. Let them, therefore, commend their cause to Jesus, who, as their Advocate in heaven, will plead for them, and they shall receive sufficient grace as the fruit of his mediation.

But private Christians, as well as ministers, may derive encouragement from this solemn intercession of Jesus. They are all dear to him; nor can he ever be unmindful of their interests. Accordingly, he extended his petitions in behalf of all those, who, in every age and country, should be induced by the doctrine of the Apostles to place their unfeigned reliance upon Him. How important to each of us is this declaration! We are favoured with an authentic account of those truths which the Apostles taught; but have we been so influenced by their word as to believe in the Saviour? If it appear that we possess this faith, then we may conclude that he pleaded for us, and that "he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying" on our behalf. Let us carefully remark the blessings which he has implored, and expect to receive them.

He prayed that all his people might be joined together as one body, partaking of the same Spirit, and dwelling in the Father and the Son, by a divine and mysterious union, even resembling that which subsists between the Persons of the Godhead. This request he urged with peculiar earnestness, observing that he bestowed his grace upon them with a view to

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that very end, and that their close and affectionate attachment to each other would afford a strong evidence to the world of the truth of his mission, and of the love of God towards them. Are we aware of the importance of maintaining this Christian concord? And do we carefully avoid whatever may prevent or interrupt it? Are peace and harmony among the different members of the church the most forcible recommendation of our religion? Alas! how much cause we have to lament that it is exposed to the scorn of infidels by the bitter contentions which have so generally prevailed! Or, how can it appear that we are the objects of the divine complacency, while we are malicious and vindictive? O, may the Saviour impart to us a more abundant measure of his Spirit, and thereby unite us to himself, and to each other, in the bonds of love, to the praise of his own grace, and our unspeakable consolation!

Jesus looked forward to the eternal world, and prayed not only for the credit of religion, and the happiness of his people in this life, but for the consummation of their bliss and glory in his immediate presence for ever. This he claimed rather than requested, even demanding their final salvation on the ground of the Father's engagements, and everlasting delight in him. Let us contemplate, with admiration, gratitude, and joy, the declaration of our Redeemer's will, as here expressed. It may justly inspire us with hope and confidence. If we are believers indeed, we shall behold his glory; for that state of exaltation has been prepared for us from the foundation of the world. Such is his counsel of mercy, which shall not be frustrated.

Jesus closed the solemn intercession by commending to the care of the Father his chosen Apostles, as distinguished from others by their knowledge of his truth; expressing at the same time an earnest desire that they might continue to be favoured with an abiding sense of the love of God, and engaging him-

self to take up his residence within them.—Through the whole of this scene the Redeemer is exhibited in the most endearing light; and, from the view of his compassion and faithfulness, we may be emboldened to trust ourselves under his care. He is “the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever*.” He, who was so solicitous for the perseverance and happiness of his ancient disciples, will not forget or neglect the least and meanest of his servants in the present day. To all of them, without exception, he has said, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee †.” Let us rejoice in the fulness of his grace, and long for the promised vision of his glory.

But does the benefit of this intercession extend to every reader? If carnal affections predominate in your hearts, and you feel no cordial attachment to the Saviour, you have “neither part nor lot in this matter.” He said, “I pray not for the world:” and does not that distinction exclude you, remaining as you are? What, then, will you do without his favour? Whatever temporal advantages you may now possess, you cannot inherit his kingdom; but, if you die in unbelief, you will be driven away with shame and everlasting contempt. As yet, however, he waits to be gracious, and commands the word of salvation to be preached. “Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts ‡.”

* Heb. xiii. 8. † xiii. 5. ‡ iiii. 7, 8.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 39.

Jesus retired to Gethsemane—warned his disciples—suffered an extreme agony—was betrayed by Judas—forsaken by the other Apostles—examined before the high-priests, condemned, and insulted.

ALL the preceding circumstances in the life of Jesus have been preparatory, and are to be regarded as subservient to that important event which we proceed to consider. He came into the world, not merely to teach or exhibit an example of righteousness, but chiefly to suffer. Now the sharp conflict commences, now the tremendous scene is unfolded to our view. This is not a subject for amusement, or curious speculation: it calls for the vigorous exercise of holy and devout affections. While we contemplate the Son of God, bowed down under his accumulated trials, let us learn what our sins required, and what a debt of gratitude we owe. O blessed Jesus, who didst stoop so low, and endure so much for our salvation, help us to conceive, as we ought, of our own guilt and wretchedness, and the condescensions of thy love! Communicate to us the inestimable benefits which thou hast procured: "By thine agony and bloody sweat, by thy cross and passion,—Good Lord, deliver us*."

Jesus, having left the guest-chamber, departed from the city with his eleven Apostles towards the mount of Olives †. Upon the road thither he warned them, that, notwithstanding their professions of regard, they would all desert him in the hour of his

* Litany. † Matt. xxvi. 31—56. Mark xiv. 27—52.

Luke xxii. 39—53. John xviii, 1—12.

extremity.

extremity. According to an ancient prediction, the Shepherd being smitten, the sheep should be scattered abroad*. Still anxious for their encouragement, he assured them, that, though he should be put to death, he would rise again: instead of upbraiding their cowardice and unbelief, he promised to meet them after that event, and appointed a particular place in Galilee, where he would receive them, and confirm their faith and love. Behold how gracious the Lord is to his wavering and backsliding people! "Though they fall, they shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholdeth them with his hand †."

Not sufficiently aware of their own weakness, they could not credit the declaration of their dear Master, and therefore solemnly protested that they would hazard every thing, even life itself, in a fixed and resolute adherence to Him. Peter, in particular, expressed the strongest abhorrence of the deed: but Jesus, who "understandeth our thoughts afar off," told him, in reply, that that very night would witness the shaking of his confidence, his repeated perjuries, and his disgraceful denial of his Master. How often are we reminded of human depravity! By numerous instances we are instructed to take heed to ourselves, to distrust our hearts, and to seek for a better security from spiritual declension than a reliance on our own firmness and constancy.

Jesus arrived at his intended place of retirement, a garden called Gethsemane, where he had been accustomed to retreat, and had frequently passed the night in devotion. Here, probably, by prayer and meditation, he meant to prepare for the approaching sufferings, of which he had a full view. When we look for uncommon difficulties, we ought to be, in a more especial manner, frequent and fervent in our applications to the throne of grace. If we thus meet our troubles, we may expect to receive all needful support and consolation.

* Zech. xiii. 7. † Psal. xxxvii. 24.

Out of the eleven who then attended him our Lord selected three, Peter, James, and John. They had been favoured with a sight of his glorious transfiguration, and were now designed to be witnesses of his deep distress. With them, therefore, he retired to a separate part, and immediately began to feel an inexpressible anguish and terror. Very remarkable are the words of the Evangelists, when they attempt to describe the painful sensations which then came upon him through an invisible influence. They imply, says the learned Bishop Pearson, that he was "suddenly, upon a present and immediate apprehension, possessed with fear, horror, and amazement, encompassed with grief, and overwhelmed with sorrow, pressed down with consternation and dejection of mind, tormented with anxiety and disquietude of spirit*."

Probably he discovered inward perplexity and confusion by his countenance. He declared to his three chosen companions that his soul was beyond measure afflicted, and, as it were, surrounded with the very pains of death; and desired that they would continue with him in holy watchfulness, and pray for themselves, that they might not be brought into the perilous conflict. He then withdrew to a little distance, that, being quite alone, he might pour out his heart with the greater freedom before God. He kneeled down; he fell upon his face, and requested, that, if it were possible, the extreme distress, by which he was oppressed, might be removed or shortened. He cried out with expressions of sharpest anguish, and yet of unfeigned submission, "O my Father, if thus thine honour can be secured, and the salvation of thy people accomplished, let the bitter cup, from which my nature shrinks, be taken from me. But I resign myself to thy wise and sovereign will: I decline not the work in which I am engaged; and, therefore, let thy purposes be fulfilled, whatever I may suffer."

*Pearson on the Creed, p. 190.

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regarding their dear Lord, when he requested their peculiar attention, and neglecting his repeated admonitions. But, while we mourn over them, relapsing into the same fault again and again, we are reminded of our own depravity, and taught not to be confident of ourselves, however sincere and earnest we may be in right principles; for, though "the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak."

Our eyes are more especially fixed upon the Saviour, who, under his unutterable anguish, exhibits a perfect pattern of patience and meekness. Let us learn to suffer with the same disposition. There are infirmities attached to humanity which we may feel without sin, so as to shrink under the pressure, or in the prospect of calamities. We may, therefore, innocently desire the cup to pass from us. But we are instructed, from the view of Jesus in the garden, to surrender up ourselves without reserve to the divine disposal, and to consult the glory of God and the salvation of men, rather than our own present ease and comfort. Under the most painful feelings, while we spread our case before the Lord, and entreat his gracious interposition, we should possess such an entire resignation as to be able to say, "Not what I will, but what thou wilt." Have we attained this temper? How far otherwise! Do not our trials draw forth our corruption, and prove that we are very opposite to the mind of Christ? Ah! what pride and petulance, what unbelief and discontent, do we betray in sharp afflictions! We are ready to quarrel with Jehovah for appointing us so arduous a post: we entertain hard thoughts of him if deliverance be not instantly vouchsafed; and it should seem, from our vehement impatience, that we could wish every consideration to be sacrificed to our own ease and convenience. If this be the case, surely we do not watch and pray: we are not prepared for the conflict, and a defeat may be expected.

It is inquired, What could be the occasion of the Saviour's extreme distress and remarkable agony? There

There was no visible external cause of that perplexity and horror which he discovered. He appears not to have suffered through excessive pain of body: nor ought we to suppose that he was terrified, merely under the apprehensions of approaching dangers, or that he repented of his undertaking. Never did he show more distinguished courage, or more clearly manifest his desire of saving sinners at any expense to himself. Yet, consistently with this assertion, it may be allowed, that human nature, even in the holy Jesus, might shudder at the prospect of such severe calamities.

It is said, that many martyrs have possessed greater composure and intrepidity of mind, when they were meeting death in its most dreadful forms. But the comparison ought not to be admitted, as the circumstances are so widely different. Jesus was afflicted in a way, and from causes, peculiar to himself: nor is it possible that any other man could endure what was laid upon him. He stood as "the Repairer of the breach," to turn away from us the vengeance of our offended God, interposing himself between us and the stroke of justice. Therefore "it pleased the Lord to bruise him: He hath put him to grief*." In that view, his mind suffered much more than his body; and before he came to the cross he felt inexpressible agonies, not merely in the prospect of his passion, but from the immediate hand of God pressing his spirit. In Gethsemane, then, while we accompany the Saviour bowed down under "the terrors of God," we behold the deep malignity of sin, and perceive, that, if we should answer for our own offences, the burden would be heavier than we could bear.

It should seem, also, that Satan had considerable influence in producing or increasing the distress on this remarkable occasion. Jesus had just before declared that the malicious adversary was preparing to attack him, and probably the fiend was then permitted to

* Isa. liii. 10.

vent his utmost rage, and make his fiercest onset. But, however he might harass, he could not overcome; and this very conflict turned to his greater confusion. Jesus obtained the victory, and, as "the Captain of our salvation," is able to deliver those who are tempted. Only let us follow his standard, and we may exult in the hope of sharing his glorious conquest.

At the close of his agony, Jesus had announced to his disciples the approach of the traitor; and at that instant Judas came upon them with an armed company. This infamous Apostle had previously sold his Master; and, as he knew the place of his retirement, he now took the opportunity of conducting a large and mixed multitude of persons, for the express purpose of seizing him by force. Judas went up to address him with that vile hypocrisy which marked his character, endeavouring to conceal the basest designs under the guise of friendship. Still professing respect and affection, he saluted his Lord, and with a kiss betrayed him into the hands of his enemies.

Was no resistance made, or escape attempted? No: a cutting reproof was given to the traitor, for being the leader in such a business, and with such dissimulation: but Jesus fled not from the danger. Though he had a clear view of all his sufferings, he advanced with amazing fortitude towards the very men who wished to apprehend him. Having declared himself the Person whom they sought, he displayed his majesty through an invisible influence, by which they were instantly confounded, and struck to the ground, in his presence. After so remarkable a proof of his power, it was a signal evidence of their obduracy to resume and prosecute their scheme. He might have eluded their pursuit; but he cheerfully surrendered himself, insisting only one condition, that his disciples might be dismissed in safety. How kind and tender was his concern for his dear and affectionate attendants even to the last!

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Jesus, the high and exalted Personage, whose name is, "King of kings and Lord of lords," submitted to be taken into custody, and even to be bound. Amazing sight indeed! Those who accompanied him proposed to resist: and Peter, with his usual forwardness, actually drew a sword in his Master's defence, and cut off the ear of the high-priest's servant. This was a hasty and imprudent step, for which Jesus rebuked him, observing that such means of protection were improper in their case, and generally proved destructive. He added, that, if it had been expedient, he could easily have obtained the assistance of numerous armies of angels; but that, with a view to fulfil the Scriptures, he cheerfully acquiesced in the Father's appointment, though painful to himself.

To prevent the bad effects of Peter's rashness, Jesus immediately exerted his miraculous power, and healed the wounded person. He graciously interfered to allay the resentment of the armed company, and correct the mistake, which might have been fatal to his disciples. He inquired of his enemies why they came against him with such a formidable force, as they had no reason to expect opposition; and why they had not seized him before, when he gave them the fairest opportunities. But, as he remarked, their malice, which had been restrained, was then let loose upon him, and the infernal spirits were permitted to employ their utmost influence: yet their united efforts could prevail no further than to fulfil the prophecies of Scripture.

The sight of Jesus as a prisoner in the hands of the wicked was more than any of the Apostles could bear. They were staggered, as if they had been deluded; and terrified, as being left defenceless. Forgetful, therefore, of their late protestations, they all forsook him, and consulted only how they might secure themselves by flight. Oh! the base ingratitude and treachery of their conduct! This defection must have been more painful to Jesus than all the violence

violence of his opposers. It furnishes, however, some useful lessons: it teaches us not to glory in men; not to depend on the firmness of the most eminent characters; nor to confide in any wisdom, strength, or goodness of our own, as sufficient to preserve us in the hour of temptation. May God of his mercy keep us from falling; or else "the fiery trial," which may possibly come upon us, will prove our weakness in a still more awful manner! They neglected to improve the season of retirement allowed them; and from the same causes, indulgence of sloth, and omission of watchfulness and prayer, many have forsaken and dishonoured Christ. How forcible an argument for attention to duty!

But, turning our eyes to Jesus, we behold an inexpressible majesty and meekness in his department. The splendour of his divinity broke forth, even in this low state of meanness and abasement. His power and grace were both wonderfully exhibited; and in the union of the two the security of our salvation consists. The Redeemer stood alone, being deserted of all his adherents, even those who had seemed most faithful, and who had vowed that they would die with him. Yet he expressed no resentment; nor did he, in any measure, depart from his purpose. He went through his work "in the greatness of his strength," actuated by an ardent desire to accomplish the will of God, and make reconciliation for his people, whatever he might endure. O, look unto Jesus, and consider for what ends this amazing transaction was designed! Do you not feel a cordial regard to him for his voluntary submission to so much contempt and suffering? Does it not confirm your hope, and inspire you with an expectation of pardon, peace, and heaven?

Jesus was hurried away as a criminal from Gethsemane to Jerusalem, and there dragged from one part of the city to another. He was taken first to the house of Annas, and then to the palace of Caiaphas, the high-priest, where, it should seem, though

in the dead of night, the principal members of the sanhedrim were assembled, waiting to receive their prisoner*. Here he underwent an examination before his malicious and enraged enemies. They questioned him concerning his followers and doctrine. He meekly replied, that he had said nothing in a covert manner; and appealed to those who had heard his instructions, as the proper witnesses to be interrogated on the subject. For this gentle answer he received a blow, accompanied with marks of disdain, from an officer who stood near him. It is no slight provocation for an innocent person, when unjustly apprehended and brought to trial, to meet with indignities from the guard who attends him, or the inferior ministers of justice. Jesus, however, with astonishing patience, sought no vindication, but desired only to know whether what he had spoken deserved such treatment.

The holy Jesus was arraigned: but what accusation was brought against him? Pains were taken to furnish, if possible, the least shadow of a charge, on which his condemnation might be grounded. Rewards were offered to any who would perjure themselves, and deliver such a testimony as might afford his judges a plausible pretext for putting him to death; a measure on which they had determined. But persons of that description, and whose aid seemed necessary, could not readily be found. So strong a restraint does God impose upon the minds even of the dissolute and abandoned, that they are afraid to affirm what their inclinations would dictate. Were not this the case, there would be but poor security in society either for property or life; and the righteous especially would be so attacked by the lying tongue, that they could no longer maintain their place in the world.

At length two witnesses arose, who gave some incoherent accounts and gross misrepresentations of

* Matt. xxvi. 57, &c. Mark xiv. 53, &c. Luke xxii. 54, &c. John xviii. 13—27.

what Jesus had said above three years before, concerning the destruction and rebuilding of the temple *. Weak and absurd as the charge was, his enemies endeavoured to make it of consequence. On this ground they determined to try their prisoner, and accordingly, at the approach of day, they removed him to the grand chamber of the sanhedrim, where they sat in full council, and put him upon his defence. He, however, replied not to the accusation. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth †." They were surprised at his silence; but he still refused to enter on his vindication, knowing that it could answer no purpose before those who had resolved to destroy him.

The high-priest then required him, by the most solemn form of adjuration, to declare upon oath whether he was indeed the promised Messiah. Immediately he replied, in the most explicit terms, that he was; and maintained, that, notwithstanding his mean appearance, and their contempt of him, they should one day behold him in a state of the highest exaltation and glory, descending from heaven with divine majesty, as the supreme and universal Judge. This bold and open avowal of his character incensed them the more. They considered him as guilty of the most shocking impiety in claiming so high a dignity, and agreed that he ought to suffer death as a blasphemer.

Did no one, then, arise to plead his cause, and wipe off the aspersion? No: the opportunity, generally allowed to criminals, of producing any favourable testimonies, was denied to Jesus; a circumstance which had itself been predicted ‡. Two of the sanhedrim

* John ii. 19.

† Isa. liii. 7.

‡ Isa. liii. 8. "By an oppressive judgment he was taken off; And his manner of life who would declare?"

Bishop Lowth on this passage observes, that no one was punished for a capital crime till proclamation had been made before the pri-
soner,

hedrim dissented from the rest; but it does not appear that they stood forth in his defence*. His own disciples had deserted him. Peter and John, indeed, seemed to have recovered themselves from their flight, but they followed him only at a distance, and dared not to speak in his defence. Nay, Peter, with profane imprecations, denied that he had ever known him.

The trial being ended, fresh insults were offered to Jesus. He was treated by the lowest of the servants with insolent and cruel indignities, mocked, spit upon, buffeted, blindfolded, and beaten on the face; and at the same time the most vile blasphemies were uttered in derision and contempt. In various instances he fulfilled the prophetic description: He was "a reproach of men, and despised of the people;"—"he hid not his face from shame and spitting †." How wonderful were his condescension and meekness! how detestable the injustice and malevolence of his persecutors!

What is the treatment which the Saviour receives from us? It is generally allowed that the conduct of the Jews was wrong; but is ours defensible? It is possible that we may inveigh loudly and bitterly against their iniquitous proceedings, and yet be actuated by similar dispositions. This, at least, we know; neglect and hatred of Christ prevail among ourselves. "He is despised and rejected of men ‡." There are those who turn away from him with disdain, and refuse to hear his character and truth vindicated. There are those, likewise, who seek for objections, and vent their rage in profane and blasphemous speeches against him. All such we warn and exhort. O, consider whom you scorn and op-

soner, allowing those who knew him to give evidence in his favour. But, in the trial and condemnation of Jesus, the usual rule was not observed: no proclamation was made for any person to bear witness to his innocence, nor did any one voluntarily step forth to give such an attestation.

* Luke xxiii. 50, 51. John xix. 38, 39.

† Psal. xxii. 6. Isa. l. 6.

‡ Isa. liii. 3.

pose! It is no other than "the Christ, the Son of the blessed God." And will you take part with his enemies? What, then, can you expect the consequence to be? He does not, indeed, instantly confound you, but for the present allows you to triumph and to show what is in your hearts. Yet, "hereafter you shall see him sitting on the right hand of the power of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven." You must stand at his bar, answer for your insolent contempt of his Gospel, and receive your final sentence from his mouth, O turn to him now, while he waits to be gracious, that you may have confidence and joy before him at the great day of his appearing! Amen.