

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 40.

Jesus was examined before Pontius Pilate and Herod, scourged, derided, condemned, and crucified.

WE are now called to behold the most stupendous and distressful sight ever exhibited: the highest greatness in the lowest state of abasement; perfect innocence overwhelmed with extreme suffering; the most transcendent excellence treated with general contempt and abhorrence. It is Jesus, "the Lord of glory," who was crucified for us men, and for our salvation. "The Holy One of God" submitted to be ranked with infamous malefactors, to endure excruciating tortures, and to be cut off by a violent death, as unworthy to live. This is a sight, which angels, probably, viewed with astonishment. To Satan the transaction might seem to furnish matter of exultation for the moment; but it will certainly turn to his entire and everlasting confusion. With what affections shall we regard it? A serious contemplation of the subject will excite in us emotions of godly sorrow and genuine repentance, and inflame our hearts with holy love and zeal. It is not a tragical fiction, designed merely to move the passions, but an awful reality, which is of unspeakably greater importance than any other occurrence in the history of mankind. We shall relate the facts simply as they are recorded, deducing only those practical reflections which naturally offer themselves to our consideration.

Jesus, we have seen, had been already tried and condemned by the high-priest and the grand council of the sanhedrim. We might have expected, therefore, that they would proceed to stone him, accord-

ing to their law, and as they had frequently attempted to do in the violence of their rage. But how then would the Scriptures have been fulfilled? They foretold that the Messiah should suffer a particular kind of death, different from that which the Jewish statutes appointed, a death of peculiar ignominy and excessive torture. And it is worthy of remark, that, as the Jews were at this time in subjection to a foreign yoke, and the privilege of inflicting capital punishments was vested in their conquerors, so the code of the Roman power had annexed to the crimes of the basest of mankind the pains of crucifixion. The slave alone was condemned to be suspended on the cross; and to this was the Saviour reserved.

Accordingly, in the morning, after all the Good Friday, or the Day sanhedrim had consulted together by what of our Lord's means they might most effectually accomplish their wishes in the destruction of

Crucifixion. Jesus, they commanded him again to be bound, conducted him to the judgment-hall of Pontius Pilate, the governor, or vicegerent, of the Roman emperor, and there requested the immediate trial of the prisoner*. The Jews themselves, however, under the pretence of a religious scruple, refused to enter the hall, lest they should contract ceremonial uncleanness from a place which belonged to the Gentiles, and be unfitted for a participation of the sacrifices offered at the passover. Nothing could more strongly mark their hypocrisy. At the very time they were filled with malignant rage, and intent on shedding innocent blood, they were unwilling to omit the outward forms of devotion, and dreaded a ritual defilement. To what purpose, we ask, are men exact in external observances, while the vilest affections maintain an ascendancy in their hearts? Is the Lord God, who trieth the reins, thus to be imposed on by an empty show, or the mere professions of regard to his service?

Pilate condescended to comply with their scruples,

* Matt. xxvii. 1, 2, 11—23. Mark xv. 1—14. Luke xxiii. 1—23. John xviii. 28, &c.

and instituted his examination of the prisoner in the open air. He inquired, therefore, what charge they urged against him: they replied, that he had been convicted before them as a notorious malefactor. But, not choosing to proceed upon so general a declaration, or solicitous to be rid of the disagreeable business, he desired them to take the matter into their own hands, and manage the prosecution according to their law. They pleaded, however, that they could not inflict a capital punishment without his express warrant. They said, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death;" confessing on this occasion with readiness, what they were generally unwilling to do, their subjection to the Roman power. But all these circumstances were so ordered, that the Scriptures might have their completion, by the particular mode in which Jesus suffered. The Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and renders all events subservient to his own purposes.

To incense the Romans against the prisoner, the Jews alleged that he had been guilty of seditious practices, having opposed the payment of the emperor's tribute, and claimed regal honours to himself. Many other charges they preferred, endeavouring to traduce his character by the basest insinuations. To all these he made no reply, being content to bear reproach for our sakes; and his patient silence struck even Pilate with astonishment.

The governor then returned into the hall, and examined him more privately respecting those treasonable designs of which he was accused. Jesus argued, that the peaceable deportment of himself and his followers sufficiently proved that he aimed not at temporal dominion: yet he maintained that he came into the world on purpose to establish another sort of kingdom, and concluded with a solemn admonition to his judge, to attend to the important truth, which he then witnessed before him. Pilate, probably being affected with this declaration, put the question, "What is truth?" but he waited not, perhaps
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wished not, for an answer. Ah! how many begin, but soon give up, the momentous inquiry, being drawn aside to some other object, before they obtain any satisfactory information!

Pilate, however, being convinced of the innocence of Jesus, went out again, and bore an honourable testimony in his favour before his accusers, asserting that he had found no fault in him. But this very attestation enraged them the more; and immediately, with still greater vehemence, they charged him as the author of tumult and sedition throughout the country, from Galilee to Jerusalem. From the mention of Galilee, it appeared that the prisoner properly belonged to the jurisdiction of Herod, the tetrarch of that district, who was then at Jerusalem: accordingly Pilate referred the matter to his decision, desirous to gain his favour, and to relieve himself from trouble.

Herod was the man who had beheaded the Baptist. He rejoiced to see Jesus, probably from the motive of mere curiosity, as he had heard so much of this famous worker of miracles. Here also Jesus underwent a trial; but to the many questions which the king proposed he made no reply. The Jewish doctors, in their great zeal, followed him, and urged their malicious accusations: yet no proofs of guilt were produced. Herod and his soldiers treated him with the utmost scorn, as a poor contemptible creature, unworthy of any notice. Having clothed him with some splendid vestment, in derision of his pretensions to royalty, he sent him back again to Pilate.

Was the matter then determined? No: further insults and cruelties were still in reserve. Had the Roman governor been upright, he would instantly have dismissed the prisoner. He was convinced of his innocence, and the more so from Herod's examination. Having therefore again summoned his opponents, he declared his belief that their charges were groundless, and proposed to release him, though not without scourging. Probably he thought that a slight

slight kind of punishment would pacify their minds, and that something must be conceded to their rage. Through the whole of his conduct you observe the character of a mean time-serving man, resisting and at last stifling the dictates of his conscience, merely to conciliate the Jews, whom he had incensed by his former austerities. If, as he declared, he found no fault in the person accused, why did he not firmly maintain his cause against his malevolent persecutors? And especially, why did he offer to chastise an innocent man? It was a decisive proof of his want of integrity that he had not courage to act agreeably to his own convictions.

At the passover, the people were usually gratified by the Roman governor with the discharge of some one prisoner, whom they desired. Pilate therefore requested that Jesus might be set at liberty on that occasion. But Barabbas, a robber and a murderer, was preferred before the Saviour and the Prince of life. Three times together the whole body of the populace, urged on by their rulers, with great vehemence opposed his release, and cried out, "Away with him, crucify him, crucify him." To these tumultuous clamours, after some faint resistance, the weak, the unrighteous judge submitted, probably considering it as a matter of necessity that their rage must be appeased, even by the sacrifice of the guiltless.

Yet sentence was not immediately pronounced. Pilate still endeavoured to save the life of Jesus, and, it is supposed, with that view proceeded to scourge him, hoping that his enemies would then be satisfied, and no further acts of violence called for*. This, of itself, was a vile indignity; but more ignominious usage and far greater cruelties succeeded. The Roman soldiers concluded that he was now delivered into their power, and began to treat him with insolent contempt, as if he were an object for sport. They

* Matt. xxvii. 24—31. Mark xv. 15—20. Luke xxii. 24, 25. John xix. 1—16.

derided his claims of majesty, and clothed him with purple and scarlet; they crowned him with thorns (which pierced into his temples, and occasioned extreme anguish), put a reed into his right hand in resemblance of a sceptre, and then with bended knees paid their homage to him as King of the Jews. Nor did their scornful abuses stop here. With shameless wantonness and barbarity they spit upon him, and smote him on the head, that his crown of thorns might give him more excruciating pain.

Even this did not suffice. Pilate brought him forth again before the people, bearing the marks of that contempt and cruelty with which he had been treated, arrayed in mock majesty, and having his face defiled and covered with blood. Probably he supposed that their compassion might at length be excited; and therefore, having once more declared that Jesus had not been convicted of any guilt, he exclaimed, "Behold the man;" as if he had said, "While you view the wretchedness of the prisoner, upon whom no fault is proved, let your resentment be appeased, and all further persecution cease." But, to prevent lenient measures, their very teachers and leaders cried out, with the same acrimonious spirit as before, "Crucify him, crucify him." In vain did the judge continue to assert his innocence: they now varied their accusation, and insisted that he ought to die as a blasphemer, because he had claimed divine perfections in maintaining that he was the Son of God. This gave a fresh alarm to Pilate, who therefore withdrew from the multitude, and demanded of Jesus what was his original. Our Lord, however, refused to answer the inquiries of a man who would not act according to his conscience. This silence the governor considered as a contempt of his authority: but he was then reminded that his boasted power to save or to destroy was to be ascribed to a peculiar permission of Providence, and that he, though guilty, was less culpable than the promoters of the iniquitous persecution.

Pilate,

Pilate, being now more than ever convinced of the prisoner's innocence, endeavoured to obtain his discharge. But fresh and stronger accusations were urged, and he himself was threatened, as being a traitor, an enemy to Cæsar, if he should acquit the Person who claimed regal honours. Intimidated by such a representation, he placed himself on the seat of judgment, and prepared to pass the solemn sentence. Yet, probably in derision of those fears which the Jews seemed to entertain for the established government from such an opponent, he brought him forth again, and cried, "Behold your King!" They rejected him, as before, with expressions of the utmost disdain, and demanded his crucifixion.

What, then, remained to be done? Pilate found that all his endeavours to quiet the rage of the people were ineffectual; and, as he was determined to gratify them at any rate, he consented to the death of Jesus. But how shall his own conscience be pacified? As a wretched expedient for the removal of his scruples, he washed his hands in the presence of the multitude, declaring, in a solemn manner, that they, and not he, must answer for the blood of this innocent Person, whom they forced him to condemn. Unhappy Pilate! how much better would it have been for thee to have maintained a firm and inviolable regard to righteousness and justice, and consulted thy own convictions rather than the clamours of a mob! What availed thy temporizing schemes! They betrayed the baseness of thy character, increased thy guilt, and hastened thy destruction*.

The case of the Jews was still more deplorable. Determined to hazard every consequence, if only their resentment might be gratified by the death of Jesus, they replied, "His blood be on us, and on our children." Thus they entailed the divine curse upon themselves and their posterity, for the murder

* Pilate was soon afterwards deposed from his government, through the accusations of the Jews, whom he had so studied to please: and it is said that he perished miserably, by his own hands.

of the Son of God. And we know that the vengeance of Heaven has fallen in a remarkable manner upon that miserable people, and continues to pursue them to this day, for the part they took in that horrid transaction.

At length the unrighteous judge pronounced the awful sentence, that the holy Jesus, whom he had repeatedly declared to be a blameless character, should be delivered to the will of the enraged multitude, to expire under the very severe tortures of crucifixion.

Here let us pause, that we may indulge our serious meditations on the whole of this amazing transaction. "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself*." Recollect the high dignity of the Sufferer, and the cause of his voluntary humiliation; and then every circumstance here related will excite your devout astonishment. While you view with terror the obstinate and malignant rage of his enemies, you will admire and praise the condescensions of his love. Fix your regard upon him in this state of deep abasement. "Behold the man!" He is indeed "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief†;" yet he is no other than "the man, who is the fellow of the Lord of hosts ‡." He submitted to be an object of sport and derision to those who were the creatures of his hands. He endured the vilest indignities from them, when he might have consigned them to destruction. He stood with silence and forbearance before his accusers, and resisted not the violence of such as buffeted and scourged him. We are ready to wonder that he did not strike dumb the tongue of the slanderer and busy mocker, and that he did not unnerve the injurious arm that was lifted up against him. But we learn from him "to take it patiently," whenever "for conscience toward God we endure grief, suffering wrongfully;" "because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his

* Heb. xii. 3.

† Isa. liii. 3.

‡ Zech. xiii. 7.

steps: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously*.”

In all these various circumstances, likewise, we mark the exact completion of ancient prophecies. Thus Messiah speaks, “The mouth of the wicked, and the mouth of the deceitful, are opened against me; they have spoken against me with a lying tongue. They compassed me about also with words of hatred; and fought against me without a cause †.” “But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man, that openeth not his mouth ‡.” “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting §.” We are, therefore, to regard the divine purpose in these minute events. The Jews and Romans, while they were left to the influence of their own passions, became the instruments of accomplishing the Scriptures and the decrees of God. Thus the Apostles interpreted the matter, when they said, “Of a truth, against thy holy Child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done ||.” Such a view of the government of God, as overruling even the vilest designs of his enemies for his own glory, may tend to give us composure, confidence, and joy, under the darkest dispensations.

The promoters of this malicious prosecution carried their point, and triumphed in the victory. The very sentence was passed which they had so eagerly desired; and immediately, after some fresh insults offered to the prisoner, they proceeded to the execution ¶. A cross, the instrument of torture and death, was prepared; and, part of the cumbrous load being laid upon him, he was compelled to bear it, so long

* 1 Pet. ii. 19—23. † Psal. cix. 2, 3. ‡ xxxviii. 13.
§ Isa. l. 6. || Acts iv. 27, 28. ¶ Matt. xxvii. 31—35.
Mark xv. 20—24. Luke xxiii. 26—33. John xix. 16—18.

as his fainting body could support the burden. Thus oppressed, he was led forth through the streets of the city towards Golgotha, that, according to the typical representations of the Jewish sacrifices, he might "suffer without the gate *."

What an awful procession was this! Jesus, the Son of God and the Saviour of men, whose whole life had been spent in works of mercy, conducted, amidst the general execrations of the people, as an atrocious criminal, "appointed to die!" Did not his opposers relent at the sight of his misery? The most notorious offenders in our country, when cut off from society by the sentence of the law, are pitied and prayed for by the surrounding multitudes. There are few spectators, on such an occasion, whose cheeks are not bedewed with tears of compassion. But Jesus was treated with insult and disdain, even in this last tremendous scene.

At length he was relieved from the pressure of his burden, probably because he fainted. His attendants, not from benevolence, but to preserve his life for public execution, compelled Simon, a Cyrenean, whom they met by the way, and perhaps suspected of being a disciple, to bear the cross in his stead.

Immense crowds of people joined the procession, and among the rest were some females, who, being deeply affected by the view of his sufferings, dared to express their tender commiseration. To them the compassionate Saviour looked with kind regard, and, declaring his own readiness to endure the utmost extremity, exhorted them to reserve their tears for other purposes, and bewail the miseries which were then about to fall upon themselves, their families, and their devoted country. He predicted that such would be the general desolation of the land, and such the distresses of mothers for their children, that barrenness would be accounted a peculiar happiness; and that his exulting enemies would shortly be so oppressed by terror and despair,

* Heb. xiii. 11, 12.

as to long for an immediate dissolution, even by the most violent means. He added, that, considering the difference of their character from his, they could not look for the supports which he experienced, and that they were as dry fuel prepared for the burning. How solemn the admonition! And how needful is it still to weep for the multitudes who remain in avowed opposition to Christ! Miseries, inconceivably more dreadful than any temporal calamities, are coming upon them; so that, in the horror of their souls, they will wish for utter annihilation, and say to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand*?"

Having arrived at the appointed place, they offered him a cup to drink, not to alleviate, but increase, his distress. It was a bitter potion, and he refused it. Some have supposed that a different draught of a pleasant and generous cordial was prepared by his friends; and that, as he did not wish for any mitigation of his pain, he would not avail himself of their kindness.

The execution immediately followed. His hands being stretched out upon the transverse beam, and his feet fixed to the upright part of the cross, those tender and sensible members of the body were pierced through and nailed to the wood. The cross was then erected, and fastened in the ground; and the holy Sufferer remained suspended in extreme anguish. Such was the situation of Jesus when he "made his soul an offering for sin."

And here, while we pause, that we may indulge our devout meditations, the inquiry almost forces itself upon us, Why was all this permitted? We are lost in wonder: yet, mysterious as the plan may be, God fulfilled his own purposes in the whole of this singular transaction, Thus it had been de-

* Rev. vi. 16, 17,

terminated in the counsels of infinite wisdom; and therefore "thus it behoved Christ to suffer." The Scriptures of the Old Testament had predicted the grand event, with all its various circumstances: and it could not be otherwise but that every type and prophecy must have its full accomplishment.

It seemed unlikely that Jesus should die by crucifixion, because this was a Roman, not a Jewish, punishment; and it might have been expected, from the fury of the people, that they would have despatched him suddenly, without waiting for a formal trial or judicial process. But, amidst all the commotions which may arise from human machinations, "the Lord reigneth," and "the wrath of man shall praise him*." While the enemies of Jesus followed their own devices, their passions were overruled, in order that the great Antitype might answer to all the ancient figures by the manner of his death.

Isaac was directed to be offered as an oblation to God, and himself carried the wood which was designed to consume his body: and thus he represented the Redeemer, the appointed Victim for the expiation of our guilt, bearing his cross to Calvary. By the paschal lamb intimation had been given to the church for many preceding ages that "the Lamb of God" should be slain to take away the sins of the world, and yet be so remarkably preserved by the divine Providence, even in his extreme sufferings, that not a bone should be broken †. The cross of Christ, as the means of our deliverance, was still more clearly exhibited by the brazen serpent lifted up on a pole for the cure of the wounded Israelites in the wilderness ‡. From the history before us it appears that each of these signs has received an exact completion.

Some express predictions, also, rendered this particular kind of death expedient and necessary. Thus the Messiah speaks by David, "They pierced my

* Psal. lxxvi. 10. † Exod. xii. 46. John xix. 36.

‡ John' iii. 14, 15.

hands and my feet*;" and by Zechariah, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced †." The **PIERCING** of the body, especially in the parts here specified, evidently denoted crucifixion. Now, suppose, for a moment, that Jesus had suffered in any other way, these prophecies would have failed, and he himself been found an impostor and deceiver; for he had declared that he should be delivered to the Gentiles, to be mocked, and scourged, and **CRUCIFIED ‡.**

But, in contemplating this subject, let us not rest in speculation. If "before our eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among us," we ought to be filled with admiration of his grace, with gratitude, love, and zeal. To behold such a sight even with indifference betrays a lamentable stupor of the mind, and an alienation of the soul from the life of God. A proper view of the Saviour "suffering for sins, the just for the unjust," will command our attention, and inspire us with all holy affections. If we understand the nature and value of the object here proposed, the whole world, with all its boasted enjoyments, will appear little in our estimation. We shall determine to know nothing, and glory in nothing, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified §. We shall perceive sin to be "exceeding sinful," resolve that "our old man," and all his corrupt members, shall be mortified with Christ, and dread the thought of "crucifying the Son of God afresh, and putting him to an open shame." The cross, when apprehended by faith, will appear to contain a complete remedy for the necessities of our guilty souls; and while, through this expedient, we approach to God with confidence and joy, we shall burn with eager desire that the blessed mystery may be proclaimed throughout the earth, and sinners of every description persuaded "to confess the faith of Christ crucified ||." We shall feel our obligations more

* Psal. xxii. 16. † Zech. xii. 10. ‡ Matt. xx. 19.

§ 1 Cor. ii. 2. Gal. vi. 14. || Office of Baptism.

forcibly

forcibly than words can express, and our constant inquiry will be, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits *?"

Has the subject produced in us such effects as these? It is allowed that even sincere and eminent believers are shamefully defective in love to the Redeemer. But, we fear, there are thousands among us, who have never been brought under the influence of this divine principle. "The preaching of the cross" is to some "a stumbling-block," and to others "foolishness †." Through ignorance, pride, and unbelief, they presumptuously cavil at and deride it; but may we thankfully and joyfully receive it, as bringing the highest glory to God, no less than complete salvation to man! May it be made effectual to subdue in us all haughtiness of spirit, the love of sin and of the world! May it establish us in peace and confidence toward God, and give us the victory over death! Then, having gained an admission into heaven, we shall sing for ever, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his own blood." Amen.

* Psal. cxvi. 12. † 1 Cor. i. 23.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 41.

Jesus, hanging on the cross, prayed for his murderers—was reviled—comforted the penitent thief—complained of desertion—expired—was pierced—taken down and buried.

THE glory of the Saviour broke forth at various times throughout his humiliation, to the astonishment of many beholders. Even at the last, his dignity, when most obscured, was illustriously displayed. There were certain circumstances attending his deepest abasement, which in a peculiar manner command our reverence, and conciliate our esteem. While these are proposed to our serious contemplation, we shall look beyond the meanness of his appearance, and, perceiving the real excellency of his character, we shall be constrained to admire, love, and praise him.

We have already accompanied our Lord to Calvary, where his sacred body was stretched out with extreme anguish, pierced in its tenderest parts, fastened to the wood, and exhibited as a spectacle of infamy and contempt to all the people. We now return to the painful, though most instructive, sight, and follow him in our meditations from the cross to the grave. May we be made conformable to him in his sufferings, and “our old man be crucified with him, that the body of sin may be destroyed *!” As “by thy cross and passion,” so “by thy precious death and burial, good Lord, deliver us †!”

If we advert to the circumstances of his crucifixion, what do we behold in the conduct of his

* Rom. vi. 6. † Litany.

enemies but insatiable rage and cruelty? What do we see in him but unexampled meekness, patience, and compassion? He offered no resistance to their violence, but calmly resigned himself, "as a lamb to the slaughter*." He was solicitous for the salvation of his murderers, rather than for his own personal ease and deliverance. While he commended them to the divine mercy, he manifested the riches of his grace. Even in his dying moments "he made intercession for the transgressors †." He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do ‡."

What an eminent pattern is this! He not only taught, but practised, gentleness, forbearance, and love, to the most malicious persecutors: he poured out his heart in fervent supplication for them. He had frequently discovered the same disposition on former occasions; but no instance can be compared to this. After the vilest indignities put upon him, at the very time when his bloodthirsty enemies were exerting the utmost efforts of their rage, and he was bleeding under their hands, he pitied their blindness; for they understood not the sinfulness and danger of their conduct: he grieved for their miserable state, and prayed that they might not come into final condemnation. How few even attempt to imitate the bright example! It must, however, be allowed, that the proud, the implacable, and revengeful, who constitute a numerous company, bear no resemblance to Jesus.

Here the Redeemer has afforded us a representation of his gracious intercession in behalf of sinners: as Mediator between God and man, he is continually offering up a similar petition in heaven. There may be those, who show the most decided and contemptuous opposition both to him and his people, for whom he pleads the merit of his blood as an adequate atonement, and may still be considered as speaking to the same effect, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

* Isa. liii. 7.

† 12.

‡ Luke xxiii. 34.

The soldiers who nailed him to the cross, having stripped him of his garments, divided them among themselves *; yet, even in that division, their minds were so overruled by a divine influence, that they fulfilled an express prophecy, and gave further evidence that Jesus was indeed the Christ. For thus had Messiah spoken by David his progenitor, "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture †." After this they continued to watch him, that none might attempt a rescue.

Probably with the view of exposing him to ridicule, an inscription, in the three languages generally used and understood, was fixed over his head, deriding his claims of majesty: "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." The chief priests, indeed, were disgusted that they should be represented as the subjects of so contemptible a King, and petitioned that the writing might be altered. But Pilate refused to comply with their wishes; and that very title, intended to reproach the Saviour, was so ordered, under the divine direction, as to express the honourable character and office which he sustains for the benefit of the true Israel.

Was not the rage of the people at length satiated? Were no tokens of compassion shown to the holy Sufferer? No: quite the contrary. All ranks seemed to unite and vie with each other, while they insulted him by the most scornful and opprobrious speeches. The mob surrounded and reviled him. Even those who were passing on the road stopped to amuse themselves with his misery; ridiculed the absurdity of his pretending to be the Son of God, and to rebuild the temple; and with virulent abuse called upon him to make good his claims, by escaping out of the hands of justice. But shall we wonder at the foolish sneers of a thoughtless multitude, when their superiors set the example? In this case, persons of

* Matt. xxvii. 35—44. Mark xv. 24—32. Luke xxiii. 34—43.
John xix. 19—24. † Psal. xxii. 18.

authority,

authority, and of the sacred function, led the way, and "were chief in the trespass." They laid aside their dignity, and mixed in the tumultuous crowd, that they might promote the general outcry against the Saviour, and deride his helpless situation. As it had been alleged that he had saved so many others by miracles, they now, in a disdainful manner, required him to save himself, and promised that they would believe him to be the Christ of God, if he would prove his divine power by coming down from the cross.

How weak, as well as wicked, were these speeches! To have rescued himself would have been inconsistent with the great design of his incarnation. We rejoice, that, in order to accomplish salvation for others, he would not accept deliverance. It would have been easy for him, by one single exertion, to have obtained his release; nor would this have exceeded, in strength of evidence, many of those works which he had performed in their presence. Had their presumptuous demands been granted, such were the pride and obstinacy of their hearts, there had still been no hope that they would have acknowledged him in his proper character. Men are deceived when they suppose that some striking appearance or interposition, as an additional proof of revelation, would remove their unbelief. They, who arrogantly reject what is offered, would not be convinced by any demonstration whatever.

The soldiers, also, joined in the same blasphemous reproaches, calling on the Redeemer to assert his pretended royalty by escaping out of their hands, which they foolishly thought impossible. Thus that prophetic declaration was remarkably accomplished; "All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him *." How

* Psal. xxii. 7, 8.

astonishing,

astonishing, that, in their profane sneers, they applied the very words, and in the exact sense, which had been predicted!

Two atrocious malefactors were crucified with Jesus: He was placed between them, that he might lie under the greater odium, being exhibited to the public view as a person of the same description. But this circumstance fulfilled the Scripture, which said, "He was numbered with the transgressors *." No reproaches, it should seem, were cast upon them; so that he was accounted the vilest of the three. One, at least, of the thieves themselves, joined in the general ridicule, and, while dying in his sins, strove to forget his own misery, that he might insult and deride the Saviour. A state of more confirmed and obdurate wickedness is scarcely to be conceived.

But though, in this criminal, we lament the extreme degeneracy of our nature, we are called to admire the sovereignty, freeness, and efficacy of divine grace, in the pardon and conversion of his fellow-sufferer. An astonishing, and, as it should seem, a sudden change, was produced in the man, who appeared equally depraved, and equally near to the brink of destruction. At the latest moment he obtained an assurance of his acceptance and salvation. Possibly he had never felt real impressions of religion before that awful season, or offered a sincere prayer to God. It is certain, at least, that he was expiring by the hand of justice for his iniquities, and could not plead any previous goodness of his own. But at this hour his heart was softened and renewed: he repented, believed, and received the full forgiveness of his sins. Thus one was taken, and another left. Who shall presume to find fault? For who has any claim upon God? or who shall dare to say, that He may not extend his pardoning mercy to what objects, and in what circumstances, He pleases?

Many attempts have been made to obscure the glory of divine grace in the conversion of the dying

* Isa. liii. 12.

thief;

thief; as if the example were of a dangerous tendency. But, if we attend to it with godly simplicity, we shall find it replete with instruction. It is a striking exhibition of the character of the Saviour, and of the triumph of his cross. It confirms and illustrates the peculiar doctrine of the Gospel, that men are justified in the sight of God, not by their own obedience, but freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The case is recorded for the encouragement of those "who are ready to perish," and stands as an incontestable proof that none need despair of acceptance who look unto Jesus, even though life itself be drawing to a close. If any will abuse it, this must be to themselves; and doubtless by such a conduct they will aggravate their guilt and condemnation.

The penitence and faith of this malefactor were conspicuous. The grace of God changed and sanctified his heart, while the blood of Christ, then streaming from the cross, expiated all his guilt. He reproved his fellow-criminal for his daring contempt of the Saviour, and warned him to consider his danger: he frankly confessed his own iniquity, and the justice of that sentence by which he suffered: he vindicated the character of Jesus, when there were none to plead his cause: he believed on him for pardon and salvation, in that lowest degree of abasement: he prayed to him as the Lord of life, who was about to take his seat on the throne of glory, and who had heaven itself at his disposal: he said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!" Good evidence, then, was given of this dying convert's sincerity; and, though his religion was of a sudden growth, it was solid and vigorous; and, had he been spared, doubtless the most excellent fruits would have been seen in his future obedience. Our gracious Lord listened to his cry, immediately testified his own favourable acceptance, and assured him that he should be with him, that very day, in an exalted state of purity and happiness.

How rich and extensive is the mercy of our God in Christ! The case before us will furnish us with a strong argument against despair: but let it not be abused for the purposes of vain confidence and presumption. Though one of these malefactors was, indeed, "a brand plucked out of the fire*," yet it should be remembered that the other, who appeared equally within reach of salvation, perished for ever. O, fear, lest, while Jesus comes nigh to you in the ministry of his word, and many experience its inestimable benefit, you yourselves should be destroyed in unbelief!

The cross was surrounded by an insulting multitude: but there were, also, some friends, and certain pious women, especially, who stood near our Lord †. These attracted his notice in the midst of his sufferings, and, as he remarked among them his dear mother, he now paid to her the last tribute of filial duty and affection. Not having worldly possessions to leave, he committed her to the care and protection of John, his beloved disciple, who was likewise present. How tender the address to her, "Woman, behold thy son!" How honourable the charge to him, "Behold thy mother!"

Whilst Jesus remained on the cross, in a state of extreme torture, a miraculous darkness commenced, about mid-day, which continued for three hours, and extended over the whole land. Such an event must have produced a general consternation; and it was descriptive of the inexpressible horror which almost overwhelmed the Son of God. How astonishing, on that occasion, the complaint of the holy Sufferer! The agony of his mind, it should seem, exceeded the sharpest pains which he felt from the piercing of his body. The light of his Father's countenance being withdrawn, he lost all inward consolation, and was oppressed, even as in Gethsemane, with anguish and terror beyond conception. In consequence of this he

* Zech. iii. 2. † Matt. xxvii. 45, &c. Mark xv. 33, &c. Luke xxiii. 44, &c. John xix. 25, &c.

uttered

uttered that loud and bitter cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Yet, strange as the exclamation was, we know it was expressly predicted*.

It were absurd to ascribe this effect to any groundless apprehensions, weakness, or timidity of spirit, or to seek for any other cause than the office which Jesus then sustained as our High-Priest, making atonement for our transgressions. We behold, therefore, the deep malignity of sin, in the desertion here spoken of, as well as in every other part of his passion. How great his distress was we pretend not to calculate. Those who lie down in absolute despair, or the miserable souls who are shut up in a state of darkness and horror for ever, can best tell what it is to be forsaken of God. But, since we all are exposed to the attacks of Satan, and may at any moment be filled with anguish and dismay, under a sense of the divine displeasure, it will be proper to pray that the great God may not thus leave us to be terrified and confounded, especially at the solemn season of our departure. How suitable is that petition in our Burial Service, "Spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not at our last hour for any pains of death to fall from thee!"

Did not the expressions of our Lord's distress move the compassion of his enemies? No: they turned his lamentation into ridicule; as if, when he cried "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani," he had been calling for Elijah. It was therefore proposed, with a contemptuous sneer, that he might wait for that Prophet to deliver him. Such were the blindness and obduracy of their hearts!

One more prophecy remained to be fulfilled; and, with a view to its completion, Jesus exclaimed, "I thirst." Let us hear what the Psalmist wrote of the distress and anguish of his Lord and Antitype, and mark the circumstantial prediction, in which he described a method of insult, and a practice of cruelty,

* Psal. xxii. 1.

unusual and unheard of. " My strength is dried up like a potsherd ; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws ; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death." " They gave me gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink *." The Gospel narrative proves that this was exactly fulfilled in the history of the Saviour. When he complained of the burning feverish heat, with which he was parched through the excess of his anguish, no refreshing draught was offered him, to assuage his pain ; but the nauseous potion, which had been foretold, was administered. He was denied the common succour, which is never refused to an enemy in distress : though racked with torture, he was treated with every species of insult.

We hasten to the close of his sufferings, and proceed to consider the manner in which he expired. Death was not the necessary consequence of crucifixion. He might have come down from the cross, or even retained his life there. No strength or violence of his enemies could have prevailed against his own choice. " No man," said he, " taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again †." But it had been appointed and declared from the beginning that Messiah should redeem the church by the sacrifice of himself. The typical oblations, as well as various prophecies, had given intimations that " without shedding of blood is no remission ‡." Jesus, therefore, assumed our nature for this end, that he might die, and " bear our sins in his own body on the tree §."

Anxiously attentive to the completion of the sacred oracles, in all things pertaining to himself, he would not be released from that state of anguish till he knew that every tittle was fulfilled : and thus he has laid a sure foundation for our hope and comfort. This object being attained, he cried, as if exulting

* Psal. xxii. 15. lxix. 1. † John x. 18. ‡ Heb. ix. 22.
§ 1 Pet. ii. 24.

in the great work he had accomplished, "It is finished;"—"all the important purposes of my incarnation are now answered; the glory of God and the salvation of my people are secured; and here I close my sufferings."

His strength was not even then exhausted: his voice, in his last departing words, was as one in full tone and vigour. That he might teach us to leave the world, maintaining faith and joy in God, he said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my Spirit"—"I intrust it to thy care, in cheerful dependence on thy truth and love, and in confident expectation of its reunion with the body." Having thus spoken, he bowed his head, and surrendered the life which he had the power of retaining. Such a power, indeed, we do not possess. Our breath will be taken from us; whereas he resigned up his. In the act of quitting his abode on earth, as well as during the whole of his continuance here, he yielded a pure and unconstrained obedience to God.

What a momentous event was this! Such as had never before occurred. The Lord God, therefore, that he might glorify his Son Jesus, rendered his departure memorable by a train of miracles, and, as it were, arrested the attention of a careless world. All nature appeared in consternation when the Lord of nature died. The sun withdrew his light, and thus afforded an emblem that the grand Luminary of mankind was removed. The vail of the temple, or the sacred curtain which separated the holy of holies, and forbad the access of common worshippers, was instantly torn asunder, intimating that the Mosaic dispensation was abolished, that heaven itself was opened, and liberty obtained to approach into the immediate presence of God. The earth shook by a violent convulsion, and the massy rocks were cleft by a supernatural force; and were not these prodigies suited to excite an alarm on account of the atrocious deed which had been perpetrated? The neighbouring sepulchres, also, suddenly disclosed

closed their gloomy mansions to the public view : from the graves, then opened, the bodies of many departed saints arose, after the resurrection of Jesus, and appeared in Jerusalem. In such a signal manner it was proclaimed that our crucified Lord had vanquished death, and ransomed his people from the power of the grave.

Notwithstanding these surprising miracles, many remained thoughtless and obdurate. But there were others of the spectators, whose minds were deeply impressed with grief and terror. The centurion, especially, who attended with his band of soldiers to guard the execution, felt and acknowledged a strong conviction that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. Ah! why does not that conviction force itself upon us all? And why does not this astonishing narration produce in us better and more lasting effects?

The reality of the death of Christ, on which our hopes are grounded, was proved indisputably by his enemies. The Jews, from their pretended regard to the sabbath, which was then approaching, requested of Pilate that the bodies hanging on the cross might be removed, and that their legs might be broken, for the purpose of despatching them the sooner. But, Jesus having already expired, that act of violence was not committed upon him. Thus the divine wisdom had appointed, according to the typical representation of the paschal lamb, that a bone of him should not be broken*.

The important fact was further evinced by the brutal rage of one of the soldiers, who struck a spear into his side, and pierced him to the very heart. Had life remained, that wound must have been mortal; for immediately there issued out blood and water, which flowed from the vital parts. This circumstance, on which the Evangelist strongly insists, was not only a proof of the Saviour's death, but an emblem of the blessings which we derive from that event. He "came by water and blood †;" the

* Exod. xii. 46.

† 1 John v. 6.

water denoting the purifying grace of his Spirit, and the blood the expiation of our guilt. The two must be united, "not water only, but water and blood;" and both are communicated from the crucified Redeemer. You, who perceive your defilement, behold with gratitude and joy the remedy provided. See that stream which proceeds from the pierced side of Jesus, and pray that you may experience its full efficacy. It is "the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness *."

Jesus, then, is "set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood †;" and by this expedient God determined to display his own righteous character, and vindicate the honour of his government. Now it appears that he is "just," and yet "the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus ‡." The atonement here exhibited furnishes the awakened penitent with such a plea as may encourage him to approach to God with confidence and joy §. At the same time it will subdue in his heart the love and power of sin, and teach him to live in all holy obedience ||. The cross of Christ, therefore, produces the most blessed consequences, and constitutes the very essence of our religion. Whoever may oppose or deride, it must be continually held up to view; and those who understand its worth, and feel its efficacy, will always contemplate the object with wonder, love, and praise. To them it will ever appear as "the power of God, and the wisdom of God ¶." It will impress their minds with a sense of their high obligations, and excite them to active exertions in the service of God. They will say, with the Apostle, "We thus judge, that, if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them **."

The sequel of the history directs our attention to the lifeless body of our Redeemer. He had been de-

* Zech. xiii. 11.

† Rom. iii. 25.

‡ 26.

§ v. 11.

|| Col. i. 21, 22.

¶ 1 Cor. i. 24.

** 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

livered to the Romans to be crucified, and according to their custom, probably, would not have been interred. But how then would the Scriptures have been fulfilled? For our Lord himself had predicted, that, by his sepulture "in the heart of the earth," he should exactly correspond to the type exhibited in Jonas*. The same thing, also, was implied in that declaration of Messiah by the royal Psalmist, "My flesh shall rest in hope †." Now, the Jews were the means of giving this additional evidence to the character of Jesus, by petitioning for his burial. Yet, in order to complete a particular prophecy, another difficulty was to be removed. For, if buried at all, why should he not lie with the two thieves, in the place appropriated to the interment of malefactors? This, it should seem, was designed. But Isaiah had foretold, that, though "his grave was appointed with the wicked, with the rich man should be his tomb ‡."

Here, then, we perceive and admire the sovereign providence of God, accomplishing his own purposes. A person of opulence, rank, and reputation, Joseph of Arimathea, was not afraid or ashamed to appear as an advocate for Jesus in that state of greatest infamy, though he never before had the courage to avow the attachment which he felt. He requested of Pilate that the body might be left to his care; which being granted, he took it down from the cross, and bound it up in clean linen. Nicodemus, also, of the same honourable situation in life, and of a similar disposition, having prepared spices and ointments for embalming the corpse, came and assisted in the pious work. These two, therefore, with all suitable respect and solemnity, committed Jesus to a tomb, which was Joseph's property, a perfectly new sepulchre, hewn out of the rock, and not far from the place of crucifixion. Thus "He, who was

* Matt. xii. 40.

† Psal. xvi. 9.

‡ Isa. liii. 9. Bishop Lowth's translation.

too poor to provide a sepulchre for himself, was honourably interred at the expense of the rich *." They probably understood not the importance of this action, to which they were led by a divine influence: but we should adore that wisdom, which overrules all events, and brings to pass the most unlikely things for the completion of the Scriptures.

The entrance into the cave where Jesus lay was secured by a large massy stone. The women who attended him at the cross followed him with weeping eyes to the grave, and took particular notice of the place and manner of his burial. All these circumstances occurred on the Friday. The next day was the sabbath, or the season of holy rest: but, even then, the adversaries of Jesus ceased not from their malicious exertions. Not yet convinced by the miracles they had seen, nor satisfied with what their rage had inflicted, the Jewish leaders went to Pilate, and, having reproached the Saviour as a base impostor, desired that the sepulchre might be properly secured. They alleged that peculiar care was requisite till the third day, lest his disciples should steal the body, and assert that he had risen from the dead, according to his prediction. Their request was granted; and therefore, to prevent any such fraud as they suspected, they sealed up the door of the cave, and placed a guard upon the spot.

How malignant the tempers of these opposers of Christ, who pursued him with their virulent reproaches even to the grave! Alas! what vile affections mark and disgrace the degenerate nature of man! Their invidious precautions, however, tended to his glory and their confusion; for it appeared, from their testimony, that Jesus had expressly foretold his own resurrection: and they took the most effectual method to prove indisputably not only that he was dead and buried, but also that "he rose again the

* Bishop Chandler's Defence of Christianity. See also Bishop Pearson on the Creed.

third day, according to the Scriptures*." Thus will the subtle devices and malicious efforts of our enemies concur to promote "the furtherance of the Gospel." The faithful servants of Christ have no reason to dread "what man can do against them."

While we accompany Jesus to the grave, let us reflect on our own approaching dissolution, and the gloomy habitation to which our breathless bodies will be consigned. We must be committed to the ground; but how unlike to Jesus, who "saw no corruption!" We must turn, "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust †." Yet, if believers, we may smile under this expectation. The burial of Jesus will reconcile us to our own, and teach us to think of it with delight. We should desire to be conformed to our exalted Head; and we may conclude that our flesh, also, shall "rest in hope."

But this is an unpleasant and offensive subject to you, whose attention is fixed on present things and sensual enjoyments. Yet we entreat you to consider what will become of those delicate bodies, which you adorn and pamper with so much care and expense. Think where your pride and luxury must end, blooming and vigorous as you may now be. Pray, that, "by continually mortifying your corrupt affections, you may be buried with Christ ‡;" and then you may rejoice in confidence, that, "though after your skin worms destroy this body, yet in your flesh you shall see God, whom you shall see for yourself, and your eyes shall behold, and not another §."

* 1 Cor. xv. 3, 4. † Burial Service. ‡ Collect for Easter Even.
§ Job xix. 26, 27.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 42.

Jesus was not left in hell—that he rose on the third day is proved by the testimony of Roman soldiers, of many who examined his sepulchre, and of angels, by his own appearing to Mary Magdalene, to the other Mary and Salome, to Peter, to two disciples, and to the Apostles assembled together.

THE enemies of Jesus appeared to triumph in his crucifixion, as if they had attained their utmost wishes, and effectually ruined the schemes of the deceiver. They had secured, as they thought, their prisoner in the grave, beyond the possibility of any rescue; and with him all the hopes and expectations of his followers seemed to be buried. How dark and distressing was that season to his disciples! Such a degree of ignorance and unbelief still remained in them, that they were left in a state of extreme dejection. They had been unwilling to admit the idea of a suffering Saviour, supposing, like the other Jews, that the Messiah would establish a temporal dominion; that he would never die; and, if betrayed, would immediately effect his own release. Probably they had no conceptions that he would rise again, either totally forgetting, or grossly misunderstanding, all his declarations on that subject. We may conclude, therefore, that their minds were filled with black desponding thoughts, as if they had been deluded. "They had conceived great expectations from the persuasion that he was the Christ of God. But these were all vanished: their promised Deliverer,

verer, their expected King, was dead and buried, and no one left to call Him from the grave, as he did Lazarus *." Perhaps, too, the prospect of future difficulties oppressed and terrified their minds. What could they look for but the most violent opposition, since their rulers had now prevailed against their Master, to destroy him?

We turn our attention from the sorrowing disciples to their departed Lord. While his body remained as a lifeless corpse in the tomb, whither did his spirit retire? Or what are we to understand by that article of our creed, "He descended into hell?" The full consideration of this point would not consist with the nature and brevity of our plan. But we observe, that, as the declaration is clearly deduced from scriptural expressions, we need not scruple to use it, though different interpretations have been delivered by learned and pious men. Thus the Prophet David speaks in the person of Messiah, foretelling his resurrection, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell: neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption †." Nothing more, however, can be inferred from this passage, than that the Saviour should continue for a short season in a state of death, his soul among other departed spirits in the invisible world, which is called *Hades* or *Hell*, and his body in the grave; and that, under the divine superintendence, the latter should be revived and again animated by the former, before putrefaction could take place.

We proceed, then, to consider his return to life; and we should do it with most devout affections,

* West on the Resurrection, p. 102.—The author thinks it incumbent upon him to acknowledge the satisfaction and assistance he has received from that ingenious and valuable publication, in which the different and apparently contradictory accounts of the Evangelists respecting the resurrection are perfectly reconciled, and so arranged as to confirm each other. The reader, therefore, is apprized, that the statement of facts which is here given, in proof of that important event, has been chiefly taken from Mr. West.

† Psal. xvi. 10.

since it is an article which lies at the foundation of our faith and hope. Intimations of this event had been given to the church of old by various types and ceremonial representations. It had also been declared by several Prophets, particularly David and Isaiah. Accordingly the Apostles, in their addresses to the Jews, maintained that Jesus had exactly fulfilled their Scriptures by his resurrection from the dead. He himself, as we have noted, had frequently predicted it, and on this very circumstance risked all the credit of his mission; so that, if he be not risen, he has not answered the proper character of the Messiah, and has falsified his own assertions: the Gospel may be rejected as a fraud; "our faith is vain, and we are yet in our sins *."

It will be necessary to examine this matter with the greatest attention; and we should bless God that he has not left us in a painful uncertainty, but afforded us such clear and decisive testimony, that we know not what could be required further. We maintain that no event in ancient history is, or can be, confirmed by stronger attestations: if these be rejected, we must withhold our assent from every narration, and treat all the records of antiquity as idle tales or impositions. Infidels affect to be scrupulous, and cavil at the most unexceptionable evidence in support of the Gospel; but, on other points, they readily admit the grossest absurdities.

The fact for which we contend is, that Jesus of Nazareth, who died and was buried, did return to life, reanimate the same body which had been suspended on the cross, come out of the sepulchre on the morning of the third day from his crucifixion, and appear to many different persons at different times. Let the matter undergo a fair discussion: only let us yield to the force of argument, and not resist our convictions. If the position be proved, let it be allowed that the Christian builds his hope on a firm foundation, and may, without presumption, rejoice in the

* 1 Cor. xv. 17.

assurance of a glorious immortality. A cloud of witnesses may be produced, whose attestations should be separately considered.

1. We appeal to the Roman soldiers, who were placed as a guard over the sepulchre. It seemed unlikely that these men should deliver an evidence favourable to the cause of the Gospel. But this they have done in the most decisive manner. Very early in the morning, just as it began to dawn, after a violent shaking of the earth, an angel descended from heaven, and, rolling away the stone, broke open the tomb*. Thus an opportunity was afforded not only for the departure of Jesus (who could easily have forced his way through the rock), but also for the admission of others to examine and judge for themselves, especially as the sentinels were removed. These, notwithstanding their boasted courage, were unable to maintain their post. By the bright appearance of the Angel, whom they clearly saw, they were thrown into such consternation, that for some time they lay upon the ground as persons dead. Being a little recovered from their terror, they fled with precipitate haste into the city, where they reported the matter.

Some of them carried the account to the chief priests, who could not but be amazed and confounded by such a testimony, and yet were determined not to be convinced. A council of the elders was summoned, and it was agreed to pay no serious regard to the story, though they could not contradict it, and to endeavour to prevent its probable effect upon the minds of others. They could not deny that the stone was rolled away, and the body gone; and they perceived that these facts must soon be publicly known. But they bribed the soldiers to conceal the vision of the Angel, and put into their mouths a strange incoherent tale, as if the disciples of Jesus had opened the sepulchre, and stolen him away, while the guards themselves were asleep.

* *Matt. xxviii. 1-4, 11-15.*

This, it should seem, was the only defence ever pretended to be set up by those who denied the resurrection; a proof of the weakness of their cause which could want such a support. There is something so extremely absurd and incongruous upon the very face of this forged account, that it carries with it its own confutation. Not to mention the improbability that Roman sentinels should fall asleep upon their station, which would have made them liable to death, and especially that the whole company should be thus overtaken together, who can believe that the disciples should be able to remove the heavy stone, which alone closed up the grave, and that they should also bear off the body so silently as to give no disturbance to those who were close at hand? Or, who can credit the relation of those who had so grossly violated their duty, or allow them to vouch a matter, of which, by their own confession, they could not be witnesses? We ask further, why was not the charge brought home against the followers of Jesus? When the Apostles, a few weeks afterwards, solemnly and confidently maintained before the rulers that their Lord was risen, and that they themselves had seen him, why were they not confronted with this story? The reason is obvious; it was not only destitute of evidence, but would easily have been confuted; and, therefore, they were commanded merely to hold their peace. Their opponents, we perceive, admitted that the body, which had been secured in the sepulchre, was gone, and, by the miserable shift made use of to evade conviction, they have not disproved, but rather confirmed, the relation of the Evangelist, who has given us a consistent account of the fact. This is not the only instance in which the enemies of the Gospel have confounded themselves, and strengthened the cause which they endeavoured to subvert. How astonishing is the power and wisdom of our God, who can turn the counsels of infidels into foolishness, and get himself glory by their malicious resistance!

II. We produce the attestations of various witnesses, who carefully examined for themselves, and declared that Jesus had quitted the sepulchre. The coincidence of these several evidences adds much to their weight. Many pious women, chiefly those who followed their Lord from Galilee, and ministered to his support, had made preparations for anointing and embalming his body with spices. This last tribute of respect for him whom they so affectionately loved they intended to pay early in the morning of the first day of the week, or the third from his crucifixion. It was agreed that they should meet about sun-rising at the grave, not knowing, probably, that any guard had been fixed there. It should seem that they went in separate companies, saw different visions, and reported their observations to the Apostles at distinct times. This easy and natural supposition perfectly reconciles the Evangelists, whose accounts, when thus taken together, make up one consistent story.

Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, and Salome, set out first, before the hour appointed, that they might view the place, and consider what help might be necessary for rolling away the stone*. Just at that juncture, probably, the resurrection was effected. Upon their approach, therefore, they found that the stone was already removed. Immediately Mary Magdalene, suspecting that the body of her Lord had been carried off by enemies, left her companions, and returned to inform Peter and John what she had seen, and what were her fears on the occasion. These two Apostles, surprised at the report, ran to the sepulchre with eager haste, that from their own personal inspection they might judge for themselves. They entered the cave, and perceived that their Master was not there: yet as the burial-clothes remained, carefully folded up and laid in separate places, it appeared that there had been no disorder

* Matt. xxviii. 1. Mark xvi. 3—4. Luke xxiv. 1—3. John xx. 1—10.

or tumultuous hurry in his departure. From these circumstances, probably, John concluded that Jesus was indeed revived; though none of the other Apostles, at that time, had any such conceptions.

The incidents already mentioned excited great wonder in the minds of all the disciples. When they saw that the body was gone, and could assign no reasons for its removal either by friends or enemies, the thought of its resurrection might, possibly, be suggested to them; yet this was an event which they had not looked for, and which, even when direct evidence was offered, they were backward to admit. That evidence we now proceed to state. It pleased God, in condescension to their ignorance and unbelief, to afford them one proof upon another, and so to overrule their scruples and objections, as thereby to confirm the important fact with additional and clearer testimonies. The extreme difficulty with which they yielded their assent, so as to render these testimonies necessary, shows that they were incapable of forging the account.

III. We maintain that Jesus arose from the dead, on the express and repeated declarations of Angels. These holy spirits had been employed on former occasions in ministering to our Lord, and asserting his high character. Doubtless, at the season here referred to, they rejoiced and triumphed, and esteemed it an honour to themselves to bear witness to his return to life. Several descriptions of their appearances for this purpose are given by the Evangelists, and such as at first view may be thought contradictory. But let it only be allowed, which is a reasonable supposition, that these heavenly messengers had a power of being visible or not, at pleasure, and were seen in different forms by different persons, and the objection of inconsistency is removed.

An Angel, clothed with transcendent brightness, came down to vindicate the credit and dignity of the Saviour: this he did by breaking open his sepulchre,

chre, and confounding the guards, who were set there to prevent his escape, and to prove him an impostor.

Two of the women, also, who had arrived first at the place, "the other Mary and Salome," whom Mary Magdalene had left there, were favoured with a vision of the Angel, upon their entering into the cave. To disperse the terror into which they were thrown, he declared expressly that Jesus, whom they sought, was risen according to his own prediction, and invited them to examine the spot where he had been interred *. He charged them likewise to carry this information to his disciples, and especially to Peter, who, pained by the recollection of his fall, most needed consolation; and he assured them that their Lord would meet them in Galilee, as he had promised a little before his death †. Impressed with awful reverence by what they had seen and heard, yet at the same time filled with exceeding joy, they hastened to communicate the glad tidings, as they had been directed.

Upon their departure, Mary Magdalene, who had returned to the sepulchre with Peter and John, remained at the outside in deep distress: but, while she lamented the loss of her dear Lord, she looked in, and perceived there two Angels in a glorious form, who sat as guards over the place where Jesus had lain ‡. Mary soon afterwards retired, and then came Joanna and the rest of the women, who prepared the spices for anointing the body: and it is evident that they then knew nothing of what had happened §. They were astonished, therefore, when they found that the sepulchre had been opened, and that their Lord was gone. Their doubts and perplexities, however, were removed by the declarations of two heavenly spirits, who appeared to them in human form, and assured them that Jesus had returned to life again, in completion of his own

* Matt. xxviii. 5—8. Mark xvi. 5—8. † Mark xiv. 28.

‡ John xx. 11—13.

§ Luke xxiv. 1—11.

prophecies. This account was carried to the disciples, and probably reached them before they had been informed of the other visions; yet such was their incredulity, that they could not entertain a thought of the resurrection, and at first considered the relations as no other than the effect of fancy and illusion.

The evidence here adduced is strong and unquestionable. The persons described are credible witnesses of what they saw and heard; nor can their representations, with any consistency, be ascribed to imagination. The events which took place were such as they did not look for; and yet they were obliged by many concurrent circumstances to yield their assent. It can never be admitted that both their eyes and their ears deceived them, or that so many should be imposed upon, in the very same manner, and at the same time.

These pious women, to whom the important information was first communicated, were abundantly recompensed for their zealous attachment to the Saviour. Innumerable instances confirm the promise of our gracious God to his faithful adherents, "Them that honour me I will honour*." May we be encouraged to be more bold and active in his service, and we shall obtain more clear and distinguished marks of his approbation!

The preceding accounts left some doubt and hesitation upon the minds of the Apostles. They had been told that Angels had asserted the resurrection of their Lord; but no one had yet seen him; and, therefore, though they ought to have been convinced, a more direct evidence of the fact was necessary to overcome their incredulity, and accordingly it was afforded them, in condescension to their weakness. This is not the only instance in which human infirmity has been the cause of a blessing to mankind, and an establishment of the truth and honour of God. In the case before us it produced a record which

* 1 Sam. ii. 30

shall to eternity remain for the comfort of every believer, and for the confusion and condemnation of every infidel.

IV. We contend that Jesus incontestably demonstrated the point in question by showing himself alive to various persons, who had previously known him, and to whom he gave ample testimony of the reality and identity of his body.

1. He appeared to Mary Magdalene before he vouchsafed the same favour to any of his former acquaintance*. We admire this grace and condescension in conferring such an honour upon a woman, who had probably been of an infamous character. But she had much forgiven, and she loved much. While she remained in tears at the sepulchre, and declared to the Angels the cause of her distress, Jesus came and placed himself beside her. At the first glance she took him for the gardener; but her mistake was immediately corrected when she heard him pronounce her name in the same tone of voice, and the same affectionate manner, which he had used in his former intercourse. Convinced that it was her Lord, she flew with ardour to embrace him. This, however, he told her she must decline for the present, and intimated that he would see her again, and give her abundant proofs of the reality of his resurrection, before he finally quitted the earth. He charged her, therefore, to carry the account to his brethren without delay, and assure them in the kindest terms that he still acknowledged his relation to them, and that, being mindful of their interests and of his own express declarations, he should soon ascend, by a corporeal translation, to his Father and their Father, to his God and their God.

O, how free and abundant is his grace! What tenderness of compassion does he show even to his fallen people! His disciples had deserted him in his extremity; but, immediately on his return to life, he was anxious to inform them that they were as dear to

* Mark xvi. 9—11. John xx. 14—18.

him as ever, that he would continue to own them as children of the same Father, and plead their cause in heaven. The message was delivered; and yet their doubts were not dispersed. Possibly they argued, that, as Mary Magdalene alone pretended to have seen him, and as she had not at first recollected or been suffered to touch him, she might be under a delusion, or the vision, if real, might be no more than his spirit. But scruples of this kind were soon removed, as we observe,

2. He appeared, also, to the other Mary and Salome*. They were flying from the sepulchre, being charged by the Angels with a commission to the disciples, when Jesus met them on the road, and addressed them in words of strong consolation. He exhorted them to dismiss their fears, and, by suffering them to embrace his feet, gave them a full conviction of his resurrection. By them, too, he sent word to his brethren, that in Galilee, where they chiefly resided, he would afford them a gracious interview. From this occurrence the evidence was considerably strengthened. Yet the Apostles, being "slow of heart to believe," might ask, "If the Lord be risen indeed, why has he shown himself only to the women, and not to any of us?" It is presumptuous, we confess, to refuse our assent to fair testimony, and demand additional proofs for the removal of our unreasonable doubts. But the Lord condescended to prevent or obviate such an objection.

3. He appeared to Peter. In the message of the Angels to the disciples, particular mention had been made of Peter; but, though he had twice visited the sepulchre, once after the first report of Mary Magdalene, and again after that of Joanna †, yet he had not seen either Jesus or the Angels. At length, however, his Master favoured him with an interview, probably before any of the other Apostles. The circumstances of that interview are not recorded, but the fact is expressly declared ‡; and it stands as an

* Matt. xxviii. 9—10. † Luke xxiv. 12; ‡ 34. 1 Cor. xv. 5.

instance of his tenderness to backsliders. He will recover, and pardon and comfort. Such was his conduct to Peter, whose fall had been attended with the greatest aggravations, and to whom, even before the rest, he hastened to declare his forgiveness and love.

Still it might be argued that all the preceding manifestations of the risen Saviour had been an appeal to the senses rather than the understanding. They had been bright and dazzling, sudden, and of short continuance, leaving little or no time for cool reflection and a deliberate examination of the Scriptures. That there might be no ground for such an objection,

4. He appeared the same day to two other disciples, as they were going to Emmaus, about seven or eight miles from Jerusalem*. These persons were discoursing together, with an evident dejection of mind, on the late astonishing events, which engrossed their thoughts, when the Lord himself drew near, and with great familiarity joined their conversation, though he concealed his real character. It was his gracious purpose at this time not to excite their wonder by any splendid vision, but to convince them, by cool and solid reasoning from the sacred oracles, that they ought to have expected his death and return to life, since these things had been expressly predicted. They were prevented, therefore, by a miraculous agency, from recollecting and discovering him, till he had discussed the important topic by a particular explanation of the types and prophecies relating to it, and reproved them for their ignorance and unbelief. When they came to Emmaus, he went into the same house, through their earnest request, and sat down with them to table. At this repast he blessed and distributed the bread, according to his former manner, perhaps with the solemnity of the sacramental supper; and immediately the dimness which had been cast over their eyes was removed, and they recognised the person of their

* Luke xxiv. 13—35.

beloved Master. But, the end of his appearance being answered, he instantly withdrew from their sight.

As they reviewed this singular occurrence, they wondered at their own stupidity, remarking that they might have known him from the extraordinary energy of his words, and the effect produced in their minds. They said one to another, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?" Their doubts were all removed; they felt a rational conviction of their Lord's resurrection, and perceived that every thing had happened in perfect consistence with God's declarations. That same evening they returned to Jerusalem, where they found the Apostles assembled together, and exulting in the thought that their Lord was risen indeed, and had shown himself to Peter. The different accounts were then compared; and yet, decisive as these testimonies were, some at least in the company withheld their assent, or, perhaps, allowing the accounts, concluded that his spirit only had been seen, and that his body, if revived, was carried up to heaven*. How gracious and condescending was the Saviour to these weak, doubting, and incredulous disciples! To satisfy their scruples, and prove incontestably that his re-animated body yet remained upon earth, he manifested himself again that very hour.—We add, therefore,

5. He appeared to the Apostles, then assembled together †. He entered the room in a miraculous manner; we need not explain or inquire by what particular method. He stood in the midst, with expressions of love in his countenance, and addressed them with words of consolation. Surprise and terror overpowered them; and still, it should seem, they were unwilling to admit that the vision was any thing more than that of his spirit. But he, in tender

* Mark xvi. 13.

† Mark xvi. 14. Luke xxiv. 36—43. John xx. 19—23.

compassion, dispersed their fears, and banished their suspicions.

At length, then, the evidence was full and complete. Not the women only, but the Apostles themselves, were witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus. He was seen, not merely by one or two, but by many together. Nor did he suddenly withdraw, like an airy phantom; for he now gave them decisive proofs of the reality and sameness of his body. "Here," said he, "behold my wounded hands, and feet, and side, which retain the marks of what I suffered on the cross. It is Jesus, your Lord and Master, who stands before you. Take full satisfaction, and, by touching and embracing me, be convinced that this is not a spectre, but a real corporeal substance."

O, what transports of joy must have filled their hearts! Surely they felt the most ardent affections of gratitude, love, and zeal. Yet perhaps, for a moment, the whole transaction might appear too wonderful to be true. He remained, however, in their presence for some time, upbraiding them with their perverse and obstinate incredulity, and evincing by further arguments the certainty of his resurrection. He condescended to eat, in their company, the very food which they themselves offered him. Again he expressed his earnest desires for their happiness, pronounced his benediction, and renewed their apostolical commission. While he breathed on them, he gave them assurances of large communications of the Spirit, and engaged to ratify their sentence when they should declare to whom remission of sins should be extended, and from whom withheld.

Here we pause, and thus close the evidence exhibited on the day in which our Lord rose from the dead. This subject requires a more full and particular application than the present section will admit. Let us meditate upon it, for our own spiritual improvement. These numerous attestations were intended for our conviction as well as for that of the
Apostles.

Apostles. Even the pertinacity of their unbelief has eventually proved a blessing, as confirming more abundantly the truth of the Scriptures. We see, then, on how firm a basis our faith and hope are built, and how guilty, how inexcusable, those are who reject or despise the Gospel. The fact, which is here maintained, constitutes an essential article of our creed; the whole system of Christianity must stand or fall with it. But so decisive are these testimonies, that we may defy the most powerful and malevolent attacks of infidels; all their attempts to subvert the foundation of our religion will turn to their own confusion.

In the resurrection of Jesus we perceive a never-failing source of consolation. We rejoice in the sufficiency of that ransom which he paid down, and in the complete victory which he has obtained for us over all our spiritual enemies. With peculiar exultation, therefore, we sing, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*:" and "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead †." But does this song of triumph properly belong to us? What are the advantages which we have derived from the Saviour? By our own experience of his ability to save, can we stand forth as his witnesses, maintaining that "the Lord is risen indeed?"

Let us not forget that he will appear again, in the very same body which was crucified on Mount Calvary, and came forth from the sepulchre on the third day. His faithful people shall then meet him "with joy unspeakable and full of glory:" he will raise them up by his mighty power, and admit them to a state of delightful intercourse with himself for evermore. But how will those behold him, "who have

* 1 Cor. xv. 57.

† 1 Pet. i. 3.

crucified him afresh," and continued to pierce him by their contemptuous unbelief? He will be their Judge; and such will be his manifestation as to overwhelm them with confusion, horror, and despair. May we obtain redemption through his blood, and "know the power of his resurrection," so that, "when He, who is our life, shall appear, we also may appear with him in glory *!" Amen.

* Col. iii. 4.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 43.

Jesus appeared at Jerusalem, for the conviction of Thomas—at the sea of Tiberias—on a mountain in Galilee—and again at Jerusalem, a little before his ascension.

NEVER was there an event of greater importance to mankind than the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and never was any fact so well attested. One evidence was added to another, to prevent or remove every doubt. Jesus “showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs*,” till he had convinced the most unbelieving, and satisfied the most scrupulous, of his disciples. He appeared to them not merely once, but frequently, and gave them full liberty to examine, by such trials as they desired, whether he had risen with a real body, the very same which they had formerly known, and which they had beheld suspended on the cross. He came to them in different places, continued long in their company, did eat and drink with them, and delivered particular instructions and commandments, “being seen of them forty days, speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”

These visits of the Saviour to his Apostles were intended, not only to assure them of his high regard, and promote their particular comfort, but to qualify them for the important office of attesting his resurrection, and proclaiming his salvation to the various kingdoms of the world. Accordingly, in due time, they went forth and avowed themselves his wit-

* Acts i. 3.

nesses, in the face of the most malignant and powerful opposers. They have given a clear, decided, and indubitable testimony of the fact which we are considering; and their declarations ought to be seriously regarded. They could not be deceived by the united report of so many of their senses, for they heard, and saw, and handled, their beloved Master; nor would they have concerted such a plan for deceiving mankind, when they had nothing to expect from it but the most violent persecution, even unto death itself.

We have already mentioned our Lord's appearances on the day of his resurrection, and shall now advert to those which occurred from that time to his ascension. May our contemplations on this subject promote in us all holy affections! May we not merely assent to the doctrine proposed, but derive from it an increase of faith, hope, love, and joy.

I. He appeared with a particular view to the conviction of Thomas*. Evidence sufficient had been given to all the other Apostles; and accordingly they were satisfied. Indeed they ought to have yielded their assent much sooner than they did; and therefore Jesus reprehended them for their unbelief. But when he first showed himself to them, as they were assembled together, Thomas was not present, and, upon the report being carried to him, he refused to credit their testimony. He presumptuously required the conviction of his own senses before he would allow the appearance to be the very body of his Lord. He declared that he would see, and put his finger into, the print of the nails which had been used in the crucifixion, and thrust his hand into the side which had been pierced by the soldier's spear, or else that he would reject all other evidence.

Thomas, it seems, remained in this state of darkness and unbelief for a whole week. During that time we do not find that Jesus visited any of his disciples; perhaps he designed that in the interval

* John xx. 24—29.

they

they might be more at leisure for a deliberate examination of the Scriptures, and the attestations already given. But on the eighth day following, or the next return of the first day of the week*, he came, in the same miraculous manner as before, into the midst of their assembly. Having declared an affectionate regard for them all, he condescended to address the incredulous Apostle, who was then present, and for his full satisfaction offered him the very proofs which his presumption had demanded.

What further objection could remain? Thomas was ashamed and humbled: convinced by such undeniable evidence, he acknowledged not the resurrection only, but the Godhead, of his Saviour, and worshipped him with profound reverence and adoration, crying out, "MY LORD, AND MY GOD!" His former weakness was now pardoned, and his faith, though it rested on sensible demonstration, was graciously accepted. Jesus rebuked him, but with tenderness, for having so long refused his credit, and pronounced a peculiar blessing on those, who, with real humility of mind, yield an unfeigned assent and submission to the Gospel, even though such strong testimonies should be withheld as a sceptical and arrogant caviller might require.

This occurrence should warn us to beware of unbelief, which may probably attack us in various degrees, and in different shapes. How many around us are perplexed with unreasonable doubts and scruples about the doctrines, and even the truth, of revelation! Do you complain that sufficient evidence is not afforded you? But do you not indulge a very blamable disposition, as Thomas did, whilst you are unwilling to admit that light which might produce conviction? Have you fairly studied the

* It is likely that the first day of the week, from that time, became the stated season of the solemn meetings in the church, and was celebrated as the Christian sabbath, being distinguished by the high and honourable appellation of the Lord's Day. Acts xx. 7. 1 Cor. xvi. 2. Rev. i. 10.

subject, and diligently examined the proofs and arguments in which others acquiesce? It is not for you to prescribe to God by what particular means he ought to confirm his word. There is no need of further information, if only your hearts were right. "Be not faithless, but believing." You should not expect or ask for such kind of demonstration as Thomas received; but learn with him to bow with real subjection to the Saviour, acknowledging his essential glory, and his indubitable right to your love, reverence, and obedience, while you say from the heart, "My Lord, and my God."

II. He appeared at the sea of Tiberias*. The disciples, having remained the full time at Jerusalem for the celebration of the passover, returned to Galilee, where the chief part of them resided. Thither the angels directed them to go, and there Jesus himself promised to meet them. It is probable that his most frequent visits were made in that country, where his interviews with friends might be more convenient, and less likely to excite notice and resentment, than at Jerusalem. A minute account of these interviews is not given us; nor is it necessary, as they were designed, not for the proof of his resurrection, which was then sufficiently established, but for the private instruction and comfort of his dear followers. In every fresh conference he confirmed their faith, displayed his own power and grace, and manifested the most tender affection for them. This we cannot but remark in the instance now before us.

Several of his disciples were engaged in fishing, which had once been their common occupation; and probably they were still obliged to have recourse to it for their support. When they had laboured a whole night in vain, Jesus presented himself to them on the sea-shore, and directed them where to cast their net. A miraculous draught immediately convinced them that it was their Lord who was at hand, and had given them such success. They hastened

* John xxi. 1, &c.

to him; and upon their arrival, having prepared a fire and provisions, he condescended to eat with them.

Perhaps by that large capture he intended to afford them a seasonable relief for their necessities, and to encourage their dependence upon him, as the Lord of providence and grace. They were appointed to be fishers of men; and, though in their office they might seem for a long time to labour with no good effect, they were now taught that, under his direction and influence, they might hope to enclose immense multitudes in the net of the Gospel. Blessed Jesus, compassionate the ignorance and weakness of thy ministers in our day! While they lament that they weary themselves in vain, do thou graciously instruct them where and how they should cast the net, so that many may be taken!

In discoursing with his disciples on that occasion, Jesus paid a particular regard to Peter, probably on account of his late fall, not only to reprove, but to restore and comfort him. After dinner our Lord proposed a solemn inquiry to the Apostle, whether, as he had once professed, he loved him more than all his brethren did. Peter replied, with great firmness, that he felt the most sincere affection for his Lord, and appealed to Him, as the Searcher of hearts, for the truth of the declaration: but, remembering his own perfidious conduct, he dared not to boast, as he had done before, that his attachment was stronger than that of others. Jesus then required him to prove his regard by faithfully performing the pastoral office, feeding the lambs of his flock. Thrice did he renew the question, "Lovest thou me?"—and thrice repeat the charge, "Feed my sheep."

Let each one consider himself as addressed by the Saviour in the same solemn manner, "Lovest thou me?" What answer could we return? Some with humble confidence might maintain, even in his presence, that their hearts glow with the warmest affection for him. But many, whose minds are attracted
by

by different objects, notwithstanding their profession of serious desires, can come to no satisfactory determination about the real state of their souls, and therefore remain in a very painful suspense. Others surely, if thus interrogated, must be confounded; since their habitual dispositions and general practices declare an avowed disregard, and even an insolent contempt, of Jesus. It will be soon decided whether we have a real attachment to his name; and "if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ," a tremendous "anathema" rests upon his head*.

Peter was then informed that in his old age he should be called to glorify God by suffering the same kind of death as his divine Master had done, and he was immediately charged to follow Him. A vain and foolish curiosity tempted the Apostle to inquire what should become of John, the beloved disciple, who, it should seem, proceeded with silent meekness to attend his Lord. But curiosity is seldom gratified. In the present instance it met with a reproof: for Jesus replied, "What is that to thee? Follow thou me."

Possibly we may wish to propose a thousand questions more absurd and impertinent than Peter's was. But let us learn to check our eagerness for information in matters which do not concern us. Why are we so anxious about events with which neither our happiness nor duty is at all connected? One thing is of unspeakable importance and absolute necessity; nor should any other subject occupy the mind to the neglect of this: it is that we obey the Saviour's call, and go forth at his command. Are we willing to comply with the injunction, as the Apostles did, though contempt and poverty, imprisonment and death, await us? How many shrink at the appearance of danger! May the love of Christ constrain us; and under that influence, leaving all idle speculations, and fearless of the severest calamities, we shall follow him cheerfully, counting nothing

* 1 Cor. xiv. 22.

of any real value but his favour, his service, and glory!

III. He appeared to a large body of his disciples upon a mountain in Galilee*. It should seem that many, perhaps the most, of those who professed an affectionate regard to him in that country, met there by his appointment. Probably he had fixed the time and place, that a great number might more conveniently come together. It is supposed that St. Paul refers to that assembly when he says, "He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once †;" and we learn that the chief part of these persons survived for several years, and attested the fact, of which they were eye-witnesses.

Upon a particular mountain, to which they had been directed, Jesus presented himself in the midst of them. Some had been disposed to doubt his resurrection; but they were then convinced. They saw, believed, and worshipped him. May we, also, confess his glory, and bow before him with humble adoration! It is as incumbent upon us to do it as it was upon the disciples in Galilee, though we are not favoured with the same discoveries which they had. Our faith is supported by unquestionable evidence. May the Saviour manifest himself to us by the power of his Spirit; and then we shall join our testimony with that of the ancient church, and we shall say, "The Lord is risen indeed!"

Afterwards he appeared to James, but no particulars of that visit are recorded; and once again to all the Apostles, as we shall soon remark ‡. He did not show himself alive in a more public manner, either to the whole body of the people, or to the chief priests and rulers§. Such an exhibition was not necessary to prove the truth of his resurrection, which is established by the testimony of a sufficient number of indubitable witnesses. That peculiar favour could not be due to those who had rejected

* Matt. xxviii. 16, 17. † 1 Cor. xv. 6. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 7.
§ Acts x. 41. See Bishop Atterbury's Sermon on this subject.

him with so much contempt and violence. Besides, if it had been granted, it was not likely to produce any good effect, since they refused to be convinced by all that he had said or done, and ascribed his miracles, illustrious as they were, to the power of magic, or the agency of Satan. God is usually pleased to withhold an increase of spiritual means and privileges from them who abuse or despise what they possess, and to bestow greater advantages upon such as highly value and diligently improve what they have already received. Let us fear for ourselves, lest, by shutting our eyes against the light of his truth, we provoke him to withdraw it from us.

IV. He appeared, also, to the Apostles, on their return to Jerusalem. As the feast of Pentecost, one of their grand solemnities, was approaching, their presence was required by the law. They arrived in that city some days before the festival, and were there favoured, as in Galilee, with the gracious visits of their Master, previous to his ascension*. Upon these occasions he renewed to them some of his former instructions, and confirmed their apostolic commission. He directed their attention to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, that they might see the glorious plan of salvation to have been the same from the beginning, and be convinced that every thing had happened to him in perfect agreement with the ancient prophecies. These they had overlooked, or grossly misconceived. But now he opened their understandings, and gave them clearer and more consistent views of what the sacred oracles had asserted concerning his death and resurrection. He taught them, that, in consequence of what he had done, sinners should be called upon to repent, and assured of the forgiveness of their sins through faith

* Matt. xxviii. 18—20. Mark xvi. 15—18. Luke xxiv. 44—49. It is not clear how often these visits were repeated, or whether the whole of the addresses here mentioned were delivered to the disciples at one time.

in his name. The necessity of conversion, and the offer of pardon through his blood, were some of the grand doctrines which he commanded them to preach among all nations; and these doctrines are evidently founded on the supposition that all men, without exception, are involved in a state of depravity and condemnation.

We remark, in an especial manner, that they were directed to open their proclamation of mercy at Jerusalem, that iniquitous and murderous city, where the Lord of glory had been crucified and slain. This was a wise appointment; because their bold defence of the Gospel, in the place where it might and must have been confuted, if it had been a mere fable, has clearly confirmed its truth. We admire, also, the grace of Jesus here exhibited, in sending the first message of peace to his bloody persecutors, who but a few days before had cried out, with malicious rage, "Away with him, crucify him." Who now can despair of obtaining forgiveness, when offenders, under a load of such aggravated guilt, are invited and entreated to return and live? Let those who have sinned the most heinously, and with the greatest obduracy, be encouraged to listen to the publication of the Gospel, which has opened a way for their reconciliation and acceptance with God. Behold! "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*."

Jesus charged his Apostles to bear a faithful testimony of these things, wherever they should go, and assured them that they should be qualified for their office by the influence of the Holy Ghost, which they were directed to wait for in Jerusalem a few days longer. He reminded them that he now possessed absolute and supreme authority, and that both heaven and earth were subjected to his dominion. As universal Lord, he sent them forth to the uttermost parts of the world, to preach the Gospel to the whole human species. He instructed them to en-

* Rom. v. 20.

deavour, among all nations, to make proselytes to his religion, and to baptize all who professed submission, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost *." He declared that every one conforming to this sacramental rite, and maintaining real faith in him, should be admitted to a state of eternal bliss and glory; but at the same time he denounced the divine vengeance, in its most terrible effects of everlasting misery, against every unbelieving sinner. To confirm the message of his Apostles, he promised to endue them with various miraculous powers: and, after enjoining them to inculcate upon their converts a sincere regard to the principles and duties of the Gospel, he added a gracious assurance of his own continual presence with them, and with his church, even till the consummation of all things.

Thus far he has proved himself true to his word. The Apostles, to whom he delivered this important commission, were fitted for their office by the abundant influence of his Spirit. By an extraordinary measure of wisdom, zeal, and courage, they were enabled to preach and propagate Christianity from kingdom to kingdom, to the extremities of the earth; and at the same time the many signs and wonders which they wrought have given a weight and validity to their doctrines.

We enjoy the benefit of their instructions and labours: and we bless God, that, though the supernatural operations which they performed are now ceased, the same Gospel is published among ourselves. It is the will of Jesus that the light of his truth should still shine upon the world; and the

* This form of words, appointed to be used in Christian baptism, is generally urged, and with great propriety, as a decisive proof of the doctrine of the Trinity, and will, probably, be the means of supporting that doctrine to the end of time. For here not only are the three Persons distinctly mentioned, but divine honour and worship are ascribed to each; since all who are baptized are dedicated to the service of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and taught to depend upon them, and give glory to them, for the blessings of redemption.

ministers, who go forth under his direction, maintain no other principles than what he commanded to be taught. They preach repentance and remission of sins through faith in his blood. They declare, as absolutely as the Apostles could, "He, who believeth and is baptized, shall be saved;" and they are also constrained to add, on the same authority, that most offensive enunciation, "He who believeth not shall be damned."

We have been received into his church by baptism, and are his professed disciples. We should be reminded, then, that we are solemnly devoted to God in his covenant, and laid under the strongest obligations to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, whose name is named upon us. Are we walking consistently with these engagements? Let us not depend upon the mere initiatory rite of the sacramental water, as if this would ensure salvation, but inquire if we are joined to Christ by a true and lively faith, the want of which must expose us to everlasting destruction. Let us search and judge ourselves impartially. The matter to be examined is of unspeakable importance: it is no less than this, whether we shall be saved, or perish for ever.

The ministers of Christ are called to an arduous employment, even as the Apostles were; and a sense of their own insufficiency would totally discourage them, if their exalted Master had not pledged himself for their support. But, confiding in his promise, "I am with you always," they may cheerfully expect all needful assistance, and rejoice in the hope that they shall not labour in vain. The violence of persecution, or the prevalence of corrupt doctrine, may sometimes excite their fears, as if the very existence of the church was endangered. But let them remember that Jesus is engaged to secure its continuance "even unto the end of the world." The vessel may be tossed upon a tempestuous sea, but He sitteth at the helm; and we should be satisfied to leave it under his care. Whatever opposition

he may be pleased to permit, his truth shall remain and prosper in the earth: "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it *." The same gracious declaration may likewise animate and enliven private Christians. He, whom they serve, will stand by them and save them; for though his bodily presence be removed, he hath said to every believer, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee †." O trust in him, and dismiss your fears! He will guide you through the intricate mazes of life, protect you from the assaults of your strongest enemies, and comfort your drooping spirits in seasons of severest affliction.

How many important consequences follow from the resurrection of Jesus! Let us briefly advert to some of those advantages which result to his faithful people.

1. If Jesus be risen indeed, then the sacrifice which he has offered is accepted; justice is satisfied; and nothing further is required for the expiation of our guilt. "He was delivered for our offences," and, when he was discharged from his confinement in the grave, the Lord God declared, in effect, that every demand was answered, that the ransom was sufficient, and that pardon and peace were fully procured by this atonement. Therefore "he was raised again for our justification ‡." In dependence on the blood of the cross, we may take up that song of holy exultation, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again §."

2. By the resurrection of Jesus we perceive that he is able to supply the necessities of his people. Let us hear his own exalted declaration, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore ||:" and let us remember, that the life, which he now possesses, he employs for the benefit of his

* Matt. xvi. 18. † Heb. xiii. 5. ‡ Rom. iv. 25. § viii. 33, 34.
|| Rev. i. 18.

church. What strong consolation does this administer! In that state of glorious existence, to which he is restored, what cannot he effect or bestow? This subject will be resumed; but, for the present, let us rejoice that, "being reconciled to God by the death of his Son, we shall be saved by his life*." He has power "to strengthen such as do stand, and to comfort and help the weak-hearted, and to raise up them that fall, and finally to beat down Satan under our feet.†." Let us humbly solicit, and thankfully receive, that grace which he waits to communicate to them that ask him.

3. Since Jesus is revived, it appears undeniably that he has overcome death and the grave, and will make us partakers of his victory. He rose like a mighty conqueror, and proved himself superior to those formidable opponents. But he rose, also, in the name and as the representative of his people. The pains of dissolution await them, and their bodies must be consigned to the dust; but he will bring them up with triumph and great glory, and they shall reign with him for ever and ever. How should this prospect animate and enliven your souls, if you have "known the power of his resurrection," and believed in his name!

How different will be your portion who remain in ignorance and contempt of him! You, also, shall be raised; but you will "awake to shame and everlasting contempt‡." You shall come forth, however reluctantly, and feel the vengeance of that Almighty Saviour, whose counsels of mercy you rejected: for then nothing shall "hide you from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb§." May you now hear his voice, calling you to repentance; and by the grace of his Spirit may you, who are "dead in sins," be "quickened together with Christ!" So shall you be "raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus||." Amen.

* Rom. v. 10. † Litany. ‡ Dan. xii. 2. § Rev. vi. 16. || Eph. ii. 5, 6.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 44.

Jesus ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God, as our High-Priest, Benefactor, and King.

AFTER considering the whole of our Lord's continuance upon earth, his holy conduct, miracles, and doctrines, his sufferings, death, burial, and resurrection, we might be expected to close the account of this astonishing Character. But it may tend to increase the hope and joy of our souls to inquire in what state he now dwells, and in what momentous concerns his reassumed life is occupied. This opens a fresh and extensive subject, which may enlarge our conceptions of his glory and grace. He is removed to the bright world above, but he has not relinquished the object for which he became incarnate. There are those even here below who yet maintain spiritual communion with him, and who receive constant proofs of his affectionate regard and watchful care. May every reader be so acquainted with the Saviour, as to be a witness of his power, faithfulness, and love, and recommend him to the notice and admiration of others! We observe,

I. He ascended into heaven. Various types and prophecies referred to this event. The entrance of the Jewish high-priest into the holy of holies on the solemn day of atonement was a striking representation of the Messiah's going up to appear in the immediate presence of God*. The exaltation of the ark upon the hill of Zion prefigured the same thing. David therefore, in many of his psalms, is led from

* Heb. ix. 7, 11, 12.

this

this very circumstance to speak in such elevated language as can be applied only to the important subject before us *.

Jesus himself, also, both before and after his resurrection, foretold his own assumption. "In my Father's house," said he, "are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you:"—"I leave the world, and go to the Father:"—"I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God †." The event, which answered to these declarations, is recorded with great exactness.

The Apostles returned to Jerusalem a little before the feast of Pentecost, and, being there assembled together, were favoured with the presence of their divine Master ‡. He conducted them out of the city to the mount of Olives, even to the confines of Bethany, the place which he had so frequently visited. In this interview, doubtless, they received many important instructions.

He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem till they had obtained the promised influence of the Holy Ghost. They inquired whether he intended at that time to restore the kingdom to Israel; for they concluded that he was about to accomplish some great object, and still entertained the expectation of temporal grandeur and dominion, as annexed to the reign of the Messiah. But, to restrain their curiosity about the state in which his church should be fixed, he observed, that they were not permitted to know the secret purposes of God. He exhorted them to attend to their proper duty, and assured them, that, as they were appointed to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth, they should soon be qualified for the arduous work by the assistance of the Spirit.

He then lifted up his hands with great solemnity, as did the Jewish high-priest over the people §, and blessed them, commending them to the divine pro-

* Psal. xxiv. xlvii. lxxviii. † John xiv. 2. xvi. 28. xx. 17.
‡ Mark xvi. 19, &c. Luke xxiv. 50, &c. Acts i. 4—12.
§ Lev. ix. 22.

tection. In that posture, so expressive of his dignity, and with words of kindness in his mouth, he was separated from them, and ascended up to heaven in a slow majestic manner. They beheld him rising, in a splendid form, till at length their eyes could follow him no longer: a bright cloud received him; and he entered with a numerous retinue, and amidst the joyful acclamations of angels, into his Father's courts above.

His disciples, filled with devout admiration, remained fixed, probably in prayer and praise, worshipping their exalted Lord and Master, till two of his bright attendants came to inform them that Jesus, who was then taken up to glory, would return to the earth again at the end of time, with the same marks of dignity and triumph. Nothing more could be wanted to confirm their faith, or gladden their hearts. According to the Lord's command, they took up their abode at Jerusalem, where they continued to be engaged in all religious exercises, till the Holy Ghost descended, and by his miraculous powers enabled them to go forth, to preach and propagate the Gospel throughout the world.

Such is the authentic relation which is given us, and with this account the history of the four Evangelists is closed. The beloved disciple assures us, that, out of the numerous transactions of the Saviour, a few only are selected, and that the sole design of this sacred narrative is to induce men to believe on Jesus for their eternal salvation*. Ah! how great is their perverseness and stupidity, who, while they can eagerly attend to every trifling occurrence, disregard these matters, so astonishing, and so infinitely momentous! This is worse than absurdity; it is the basest wickedness, the highest contempt of God. All those, therefore, who despise and reject his mercy, tendered to them in the Gospel of his Son, will be left without excuse. Every article of this well-attested record will rise up in judgment to condemn them.

* John xx. 30, 31. xxi. 24, 25.

But

I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also *." He assured his disciples that his immortality would be their security; and therefore his reception into glory is a pledge that they shall not be cast out: "Because I live ye shall live also †." He also declared, long after his ascension, for the encouragement of all who fight under the banner of his cross, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne ‡."

What, then, should damp your joy, or shake your confidence, if you have believed in his name? Look up to the highest heavens, and there see your elder Brother, who holds the kingdom for you, till you arrive at the proper age to take possession in your own persons. You are the members of his body, and you shall shortly be with your exalted Head. Jesus, "the Forerunner, is for you entered into that within the veil." Can you want any further assurance that you and all his redeemed company shall follow him, and attain the glorious abode to which he is gone before?

II. He now sitteth at the right hand of God. This is an important article of our creed, from which we may derive strong consolation. David predicted that his Lord Messiah should be fixed in that state of high advancement till all opposition be effectually subdued ||; and, in various places of the New Testament, this prophecy is declared to be fulfilled in Jesus ¶. He himself foretold it, even in his deepest abasement, when he stood before the Jewish council, arraigned as a criminal: "Hereafter," said he, "shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God **." This was not a vain boast: the fact is sufficiently attested, by those to whom it was revealed by the Spirit, that "he is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels, and authorities, and powers, being made subject unto him ††."

* John xiv. 2, 3. † 29. ‡ Rev. iii. 21. § Heb. vi. 19, 20.
 || Psal cx. 1. ¶ Matt. xxii. 44. Acts ii. 24, 35. 1 Cor. xv. 25.
 Heb. i. 13. ** Luke xxii. 69. †† 1 Pet. iii. 22.

We attempt not to describe the glory of the celestial world, which is so far beyond our comprehension that we should soon be lost in the sublimity of the subject. Yet it is not difficult to understand something of what is meant to be conveyed in the account of our Lord's present situation. "The right hand of God" does not imply that He has any corporeal substance or parts of a body. But, as with us the right hand is the chief instrument of action, generally put forth when our strength is exerted, and therefore used to denote power, so this phrase expresses the absolute and uncontrollable dominion of Jehovah. The right hand also, with men, is the place of honour and distinction: there cannot be a seat of higher exaltation than that which is nearest to the king, the right hand of majesty. So far, then, is clear, that the state which our Lord possesses in heaven is that of supreme authority and most elevated dignity. In that state "he sits," by which his continuance in it is evidently represented. But as this is the posture only of Him, who is "King of kings and Lord of lords," the words may also be intended to suggest the idea of his sovereign greatness.

If it be said that Stephen, when he beheld "the heavens opened," saw Jesus "STANDING on the right hand of God*," it is replied that the Saviour might probably, on that solemn occasion, "appear standing to Stephen, as ready to assist him, as ready to plead for him, as ready to receive him †."

We inquire further, What is the grand distinction, what the peculiar employment, of Jesus in his exaltation? This is an interesting subject; but it involves so many things, which are too high for us, that "we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness." Yet we may advance a little. It is clearly declared that he is the object of worship to all the celestial host: they fall upon their faces before his

* Acts vii. 56.

† Bishop Pearson on the Creed.

throne

throne with profound adoration. We need not fear then, to imitate their example, or to ascribe to him "the kingdom, the power, and the glory." O that all the inhabitants of the earth may be filled with admiration of his divine perfections, and join with the angelic choir in singing "Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth *."

The attention of Jesus is not confined to heaven: still "his delights are with the sons of men †." His heart is fixed on accomplishing the work of love, for which he assumed our nature. His church is the object of his care: for its enlargement, protection, and prosperity, he is anxious; and he will continue to manage its concerns till the consummation of all things, when the grand scheme will be completed. If we belong to this favoured society, we shall have business of importance to transact with him every day. The great art of the Christian life is to maintain suitable affections towards this exalted Personage, who "sitteth on the right hand of God." For this purpose we should remember,

1. He is our High-Priest. As such, he undertook to expiate our guilt by his atoning sacrifice; and procure us free access unto the Father by the prevalency of his intercession. The Jewish high-priests were types of Jesus. As they went within the vail of the temple before the mercy-seat, on behalf of the people, and were required to present there the blood of various offerings; so Jesus hath "entered into the holy place by his own blood ‡." He has no need to repeat the oblation which he made; but he pleads its efficacy, and prays that as many as believe, in the utmost parts of the earth, and to the end of time, may receive all its benefits. The voice of the Prophets and Apostles is full and loud on this subject. He, in particular, whose pen was most employed for the defence and promulgation of the Gospel, has left a record which affords the

* Rev. xix. 6.

† Prov. viii. 31.

‡ Heb. ix. 12.

strongest proofs and clearest illustrations of the Saviour's sacerdotal character*.

In what manner his mediation in heaven is conducted we do not pretend to explain. He asks, he claims, the blessings for which he died: he exhibits his crucified body as an offering, and "a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour †." A consideration this which must prevail: and let us rejoice that it is urged in behalf of all those who by faith call upon his name.

The description is a little varied when Jesus is spoken of as our Advocate; for this representation refers to judicial proceedings. We are summoned to appear in court, and arraigned before the supreme tribunal. We are put upon our trial, and found guilty. What, then, shall prevent our condemnation, and the execution of the sentence? Jesus undertakes our cause, and offers a plea in our favour, alleging what he himself endured on the cross. Thus the arm of justice, ready to fall upon us, is arrested: and pardon, peace, and salvation, are procured.

We shall never perceive any value or suitableness in the character of the Saviour, as here given, till we are deeply impressed with a sense of our guilt, and convinced of our unfitness to stand before the holy Lord God. If, however, we are thus touched with shame and fear, we shall rejoice in having such an One to mediate for us, through whom we may be confident of obtaining acceptance. This will encourage us to say, both to ourselves and our fellow-sinners, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,—and having an High-Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith ‡." We may defy every enemy, and challenge every accuser, depending on the gracious interposition of our Redeemer. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.

* St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews.

† Eph. v. 2.

‡ Heb. x. 19—22.

Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, y rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us *

2. He is our great Benefactor, the source of spiritual blessings, "the Author and Finisher of our faith." He sits upon a throne of grace, and exercises the most enlarged munificence. When he "ascended on high," he "received gifts for men †," the abundant influences of the Holy Spirit, which would not otherwise have been communicated to us. These were bestowed on the Apostles in an extraordinary measure: but, in every age of the church, all the light, strength, and comfort, which any of his people possess, are derived from him. For "unto every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ ‡." He is the Vine, we are the branches §; and therefore he alone can minister nourishment for the purposes of our spiritual support, growth, and fruitfulness. He is the Head, we are the members ||; and therefore to him we must look for guidance, vigour, and protection. His faithful followers will all join their grateful attestations, and say, "Of his fulness have all we received ¶." O let us love, and praise, and serve him, with our warmest affections! "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation **." Those only can treat his character with contempt or indifference, who suppose that they are "rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and know not that they are wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked ††."

3. He is our King. To establish a government in the world was the great object of his incarnation. Yet he appeared in a state of extreme weakness, and was treated with scornful insolence. How different his situation now! "All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth ‡‡." He reigns enthroned in

* Rom. viii. 33, 34.

§ John xv. 5.

** Psal. lxxviii. 19.

† Psal. lxxviii. 18.

|| Col. ii. 19.

†† Rev. iii. 17.

† Eph. iv. 7.

¶ John i. 16.

‡‡ Matt. xxviii. 18.

glorious

glorious majesty, "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come*." The administration of the affairs of universal nature is committed to Jesus. The dispensations of Providence are all ordered according to his sovereign pleasure. But the principal consideration is, that he continues to carry on the plan for establishing a kingdom of grace among men.

The human race are universally engaged in a system of rebellion against Heaven. Jesus sends to entreat their submission, and persuade them to lay down their arms. His ministers are continually calling to sinners, in his name, "Be ye reconciled to God †;" and those to whom the Gospel proves effectual are "made willing in the day of his power ‡." Then they are ashamed of their past opposition, and yield themselves with unfeigned subjection to his disposal. They acknowledge the justice of his claims to their obedience, approve of his laws as "holy, just, and good," and promise to regulate their conduct by a regard to his will. These are his "peculiar people," rescued from the tyranny of Satan, and translated into the kingdom of Jesus §.

Happy, happy those, who thus resign themselves to the government of "the Prince of peace!" Like a gracious sovereign, he dispenses to them a free pardon; without any exception of persons, he receives them under his care, provides for all their necessities, and defends them from all hostile assaults. In consequence of their fidelity to him, they will be attacked by various enemies; and their conflict may be sharp. But, as they fight under his banner, he will secure to them the final conquest, and not suffer himself to be deprived of the meanest of his faithful subjects. You, therefore, who have vowed allegiance, be of good courage, trust and rejoice in his power, truth, and love.

* Eph. i. 21. † 2 Cor. v. 20. ‡ Psal. cx. 3. § Col. i. 13.

“He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet*.” This expression is taken from the custom of ancient warriors, who, exulting over their vanquished adversaries, commanded them to be in chains, and then trode upon their necks †. Thus will Jesus triumph in the end, and prove the completeness of his victory. All opposition to his grand design shall be entirely subdued. The contest, which his people maintain against Satan, shall soon be concluded to their honour and unspeakable felicity ‡. Their inward depravity, that “body of death” under which they groan, shall be purged away, and its painful assaults experienced no more for ever §. Death also, the last of their enemies, shall be finally destroyed ||. While their bodies are confined in the grave, they appear to be under its dominion; but Jesus has pledged himself for their rescue. He will raise them from the dust, and clothe them with immortality. “Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory ¶.”

As many as refuse submission to his government shall display his power and justice in their everlasting punishment. As the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers **.” Thus even the wretched inhabitants of hell will remain an eternal monument of the absolute and uncontrollable dominion of Jesus. The very devils shall feel the weight of his arm, and receive an increase of torment for their opposition to his kingdom. It is his determination “to subdue all things unto himself:” and therefore it will be our wisdom, as it is our bounden duty, to bow to his sceptre, and live in cheerful obedience to his precepts. O, “kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little! Blessed are all they that put their trust in him ††.”

* 1 Cor. xv. 25.

† Josh. x. 24.

‡ Rom. xvi. 20.

§ vii. 24, 25.

|| 1 Cor. xv. 26.

¶ xv. 54.

** Rev. ii. 27.

†† Psal. ii. 12.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 45.

Jesus will return in his glory—judge the world with righteousness—and then resign his mediatorial kingdom.

JESUS, who ascended into heaven, and now sitteth at the right hand of God, is occupied in carrying on, from age to age, a plan of extensive mercy; a plan of which we can form no adequate conceptions, but which, even from our present imperfect views, should excite us continually to the exercise of holy admiration, gratitude, and love. This plan will soon be completed, and we shall be called upon to contemplate it, in its various parts, with a degree of light and information which we are now incapable of receiving.

We forbear to enlarge upon the grand scheme of Providence, by which the government of Jesus will be supported and advanced, till all opposition be subdued, and his empire be universal. Suffice it to observe that "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ *." We forbear to inquire what will be the state of things at that glorious period, when Jesus, together with his saints, shall reign upon the earth for a thousand years †. Let us endeavour to look beyond all the transactions, which are yet to take place in the present system, to the solemn close and final consummation. Let us direct our attention to the second advent of our Redeemer, the conflagration of this terrestrial globe, the general resurrection, the universal

* Rev. xi. 15.

† xx. 6.

judgment,

judgment, and the appointment of men to heaven or to hell, according to their characters. What awful subjects are these! Who can read or think of them, without the most serious impressions and earnest prayers. "O, Lord Jesus Christ, grant that, at thy second coming to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight *!"

Jesus is already possessed of unspeakable glory being exalted "far above all principality and power," and worshipped by the angels, which surround his throne. But we have remarked, that, though he be "Lord of all," his majesty is not yet publicly exhibited on earth. At his promised return, however, his triumph will be celebrated, and his dignity universally acknowledged. The holy Scriptures make frequent mention of that season. It is called "the great day," for the events of every other are comparatively trifling. It is "the day of God," because Jehovah will no longer leave sinners to their own ways, but vindicate his sovereign authority. It is "the day of Christ," since his character will then be displayed. "His enemies shall lick the dust †." "Every knee shall bow at his name, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father ‡."

This, therefore, is styled "the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ §." The descriptions of it are the most august and exalted which can be conceived. Language fails to give us any adequate ideas of the divine majesty, which will then be exhibited in the Person of Jesus Christ. Moses could not behold the brightness of his presence upon Mount Sinai: but his manifestation, at the last day, will be inconceivably more splendid and magnificent. Thus he himself speaks of it: "The Son of man shall come in the clouds of heaven, in his glory, and in the glory of his Father, and all the holy angels with him: then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory;

* Collect for the third Sunday in Advent. † Psal. lxxii. 9.

‡ Phil. ii. 10, 11.

§ Tit. ii. 13.

and before him shall be gathered all nations *." Such, also, are the declarations of his Apostles, "The Lord shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God." "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen †."

What a grandeur will be displayed in his retinue! The celestial world shall pour forth its inhabitants, to accompany their King; and, from the number and splendour of his attendants, we shall then be convinced of the greatness of his majesty. Those "ministering spirits," who are as "a flaming fire," surpass in strength and brightness all the conceptions we can form. Even one of this host has been enough to confound some of the most holy men upon earth. What an appearance, then, will be exhibited by the thousands and millions, who shall grace the triumph of the Saviour! "They do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word ‡." By his direction they will proclaim the summons for all mankind to stand before him. "He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect §." "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,—the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised ||." "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation ¶." "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up **." "A great white throne" appears, and "the Ancient of days" sits upon it, "from whose face the earth and the heaven fly away, and there is found no place for them. The

* Matt. xvi. 27. xxiv. 30. xxv. 31, 32. † 1 Thess. iv. 16. Rev. i. 7.

‡ Psal. ciii. 20.

§ Matt. xxxiv. 31.

|| 1 Cor. xv. 52.

¶ John v. 28, 29.

** 2 Pet. iii. 10.

dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books are opened *."

Thus all in that numerous assembly shall be witnesses of the honour of Christ; but with how different affections will they meet him! There are those, who, with holy exultation, will then sing, "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 †." Others, confounded and terrified at his presence, shall say to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand ‡?"

The Lord Jesus then, at his glorious advent, will proceed "to judge the world with righteousness §." To this high office he is expressly appointed by the covenant. It is committed to him, in order that the dignity of his character may appear; "that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father ||." It properly belongs to him, as the sovereign universal King. Judgement, being a part of executive government, appertains to majesty; and, therefore, Jesus, who is "Lord of all," possesses the right of exercising judicature over the subjects of his dominion.

It will be one of the important objects of that day to exhibit the perfections of God, which are now obscured, and to vindicate his present dispensations, the equity and wisdom of which are frequently disputed and denied. Such is his amazing condescension, that he will submit his general proceedings to our inspection, and call on us to declare our approbation. The reasons of his dealings with us in this world are often concealed. "His way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known ¶." We foolishly presume

* Dan. vii. 9, 10. Rev. xx. 11, 12. † Isa. xxv. 9. ‡ Rev. vi. 16, 17.
§ Psal. xcvi. 12. || John v. 23. ¶ Psal. lxxvii. 19.

to speculate, cavil, and find fault; when we ought to acquiesce, with patience and thankfulness, in his disposal. We may consider him as saying to each one of us, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter*." Every thing, even then, may not be perfectly explained; but so much, at least, of the divine conduct will be laid before us, as to convince us that in all its parts it has uniformly been "holy, and just, and good." It is expressly asserted, That will be "the day of revelation of the righteous judgment of God †." Under dark dispensations, therefore, when our minds are perplexed with doubts and fears, let us learn to wait for clearer information. Our difficulties will soon be removed, and our objections answered. The severest calamities which believers endure will appear to have been appointed in wisdom, faithfulness, and love. They will all with one voice cry out, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints ‡."

Another purpose to be effected in the judgment, and what our plan leads us chiefly to insist on, is the manifestation of the wonderful scheme of redemption, in its various connexions and dependencies, and the public display of the dignity, the work, and offices of the Saviour. Jesus will then be acknowledged "over all, God blessed for ever §." Indeed the perfections which he must necessarily possess, as supreme and universal Judge, evidently prove that he is superior to the most exalted creatures. At the same time the contrast will be most astonishing, when his humiliation and grace are viewed in conjunction with his glory. He will be seen, not only as "King of kings and Lord of lords," but as "the Lamb that was slain:" nor will he be ashamed to bear the marks of his sufferings. His body still retains the print of the nails in his hands and feet, and the hole in his pierced side, as the memorials of his crucifixion.

* John xiii. 7. † Rom. ii. 5. ‡ Rev. xv. 3. § Rom. ix. 5.

The nature and consequences of the trial which will then be instituted, and the qualifications of Jesus for his high function, will appear from the following considerations.

1. He is wise. A clear discernment of the demands of the law, and of the different cases of the persons arraigned, is of peculiar importance in a judge; and this is what Jesus possesses without any defect. He cannot be ignorant of the rule of duty which he himself came to enforce and explain; nor can he possibly be mistaken in the characters or conduct of those who are summoned before him. Every disguise which might blind the eyes of men is removed in his presence. No vain pretences, however specious, can deceive him; no false attestations obtain credit at his bar: for "He searcheth the reins and hearts*." He may be pleased to admit the testimony of others, yet he stands in no need of their information. He might convict or acquit, on the ground of his own unerring observation; every secret thing is noted down in his book, and he knows "every man's work, of what sort it is." How different are human courts of judicature, where the evidence may be so defective, or such shameful impositions practised, that the guilty may escape, and the innocent suffer!

It will be allowed that judgment properly belongs to Jesus, if we observe,

2. He is just. However clearly men understand the cases which are submitted to their decision, they may determine under the influence of corrupt motives, so as to "condemn the innocent blood," and "accept the persons of the wicked †." But it is not possible that Jesus should feel any prejudice or partiality, or be misled by wrong affections. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ‡?" "Justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne §." He is "faithful and true, and in righteousness he

* Rev. ii. 23. † Psal. lxxxii. 2. xciv. 21. ‡ Gen. xviii. 25.

§ Psal. lxxxix. 14.

doth judge*." "There is no respect of persons with him †." Accordingly, in classing the numerous assembly at his tribunal, he pays no regard to any other consideration than that of their characters; for "he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left ‡."

A different sentence awaits these different descriptions of men; but, even in that decision, he will manifest his own holiness, truth, and equity. He will condescend to declare the reasons for which he admits some to his blissful presence in heaven, and dooms others to a state of everlasting punishment. Such as have believed in his name are completely justified through his obedience; yet he will prove that they are saved consistently with his eternal love of righteousness. It will appear that they were renewed after his image "through sanctification of the Spirit," and that they had evinced the change by their habitual regard to his will, and by their pious labours. He will, therefore, produce their good works for his own glory, as well as the vindication of their characters. The impenitent will be confounded by the horrors of an accusing conscience, and by the sight of the Judge, who is privy to all their secret transactions of iniquity, and malignant dispositions. But he will also demonstrate the justice of their condemnation before the assembled universe, by publicly exhibiting their evil deeds, their neglect and contempt of every thing truly excellent; so that, however tremendous that state may be to which they are appointed, none will presume to say, "My punishment is greater than I deserve."

We consider, further, the qualifications of Jesus for his office, while we observe,

3. He is powerful. The whole proceedings of our courts of judicature would be trifling and absurd, if the judge possessed no authority to execute his

* Rev. xix. 11. † Rom. ii. 11. ‡ Matt. xxv. 32, 33.

sentence.

sentence. The Lord Christ bears the sword: He "the Almighty *;" "Strong is his hand, and big is his right hand †." Whoever may be disposed to arraign the equity of his decision, it must be carried into effect. What his lips pronounce, he will instantly perform. Vain would be all resistance: for who shall dare to contend with Him? The gates of heaven shall be opened at his command, and admit his redeemed people: not one of that society can possibly be excluded. If he should say to us, "Enter ye into the joy of your Lord," the united force of the whole creation would be unable to prevent it. His word, also, will be with power, when he shall utter that tremendous doom, "Depart from me, ye cursed." Do any complain, or refuse to obey? Alas! to what purpose? The mandate is irresistible: it is enforced by Omnipotence. Whoever, therefore, may wish or attempt to evade the sentence, it must take place. The wicked "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power ‡."

Whilst we allow and maintain that it is the prerogative of Jesus to execute judgment, let us not forget that "every one of us must give account of himself to Him §." With all seriousness and diligence, let us "prepare to meet our God ||." Let us dwell upon the awful subject, that it may leave a deeper impression upon our minds.

This judgment will be universal, as extending to the whole rational creation. The holy angels will be interested, but we presume not to explain in what particular manner. They will be gathered together, so as to become one body in Christ with all his saints, perfectly united under him, and probably confirmed and secured in their happy and glorious state for ever ¶. The fallen spirits will be brought forth for public trial and condemnation. They are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto

* Rev. i. 8.

† Psal lxxxix. 13.

‡ 2 Thess. i. 9.

§ Rom. xiv. 12.

|| Amos iv. 12.

¶ Eph. i. 10. Col. i. 20.

the judgment of the great day *." The baseness of their character, and especially their malignant opposition to Christ and his people, will then be manifested; and they will be consigned, on the clearest grounds of equity, to those mansions of horror and despair, where "there shall be weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

But the proceedings of that day are described as having a peculiar reference to our world: and it is a consideration of the utmost moment to ourselves that every individual of the human race will be summoned. "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ †." What an immense concourse! It must baffle our calculations. Adam, and his numerous progeny, even to his latest descendant, must stand together at the tribunal: nor will any one in that vast assembly pass unnoticed. How awful the thought! Each person will be examined with the same strictness and attention as if no other were present, and feel himself not less interested than if his own were the only case to be determined.

This judgment, then, will be particular, as extending to the minutest circumstance of our lives. The accuracy of such an investigation may justly excite the most serious apprehensions. Who can endure it? The whole of our actions will come under a close inspection: yes, even those, which were carefully concealed from the observation of our fellow-creatures upon earth, shall then be publicly exposed. For "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil ‡." It should be remembered, also, that the intercourse we have had with each other in conversation will be scrupitized with the same exactness. "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment §." Nay, further, Jesus, who searcheth the reins, takes notice of the thoughts, affections, desires, plans, and purposes, which have never ap-

* Jude 6. † 2 Cor. v. 10. ‡ Eccles. xii. 14. § Matt. xii. 36.
peared

peared in outward effects. He declares "There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid that shall not be known*." Considering, therefore, "with whom we have to do," let us not content ourselves with mere regularity, or an external decency of conduct. Can we bear to have all our imaginations, wishes, and schemes, unfolded to the view of the assembled world? Does not the very apprehension of it cover us with confusion, especially as the event of the trial is so momentous?

This judgment is final. The eternal states of mankind will be decided beyond the possibility of change. There can lie no appeal to any other tribunal. It is the defect of human judicatories that they frequently find it necessary or expedient to reverse the sentence which they have passed. But reasons of policy or mere compassion, which arise from our ignorance and weakness, cannot influence the proceedings of the court of heaven. No pardon, nor mitigation of the doom, can be obtained for impatient sinners, who shall be condemned by the righteous Judge of all. When he shall say to his redeemed people, "Come, ye blessed children of my Father, they will have no reason to dread an alteration in his dispositions, or a diminution of their happiness. No further probation will be appointed; but, the day of grace being closed, all mankind will be consigned to a state of bliss or misery, and that for ever. The great gulf will be fixed, so that it will be impossible to pass from one to the other †. Ah! where shall we dwell?

It remains only that we inquire briefly what shall follow the solemn transactions of the last day; and this subject will conclude our observations on the character of Jesus. "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power: for he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet ‡." The im-

* Matt. x. 26.

† Luke xvi. 26.

‡ 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25.

portant work which he undertook will be completed; his people brought home, and placed in full possession of the inheritance prepared for them; and all the opposers of his government entirely confounded and vanquished. There will, therefore, be no further occasion for the offices of Mediator, Advocate, and Intercessor: the grand intention for which they were first assumed will then be accomplished; and, the salvation being finished, they will cease. The dominion now vested in the hands of Jesus, for the attainment of a peculiar purpose, shall be again delivered to the Godhead, in the Person of the Father. The kingdom, which we call mediatorial, shall be resigned: the trust, being discharged, shall be given up.

The people of Christ, who are the objects of his care, shall possess such a perfection of purity, that his gracious agency, in representing them before the throne, will be no longer necessary. In this life we look to the Father, and he to us, only through the interposition of the Redeemer. But in heaven there will be this grand difference; we shall come to God, as it were, immediately, like the blessed angels, who stand in no need of one to introduce or plead for them. Thus, "all things being subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto Him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all*." Jesus, as Mediator, shall retire, acknowledging that the peculiar authority which he possesses in that office had been delegated; the glory of the Deity shall be seen without a veil; all worship and adoration shall be ascribed to Jehovah; and universal absolute dominion be maintained by Him alone for ever.

This is confessed to be a mysterious subject; but the difficulty arises from our inability to form clear and suitable conceptions of the divine essence, and of that union of the two natures which subsists in the Person of Jesus Christ. "We cannot order our speech by reason of darkness †:" but let us wait

* 1 Cor. xv. 28.

† Job xxxvii. 19.

awhile, and the day will declare what we presume not to explain.

No argument can properly be drawn, from the resignation of the Redeemer's kingdom, to disprove his Godhead, or original equality with the Father. This surrender, we have observed, refers to the trust invested in him as Mediator; and in that capacity, it is allowed, he is subject. But it has appeared, through the consideration of his whole character, that he possesses all the glories and perfections which we can possibly ascribe to Deity. These he cannot deliver up; and therefore, as God, he, together with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, the one self-existent Jehovah, shall reign for ever and ever; "and of his kingdom there shall be no end *."

He will, likewise, continue to enjoy throughout eternity a peculiar honour, even in his human nature. He will still be distinguished as "Immanuel," though not as Mediator. He will remain the Head of his people, and they will be considered as in Him, standing before God only by virtue of his blood, and his obedience unto death. The throne of the Lamb, as well as of the Lord God, shall be in the new Jerusalem, and his servants shall serve him †. "The Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters ‡." Thus "his name shall endure for ever §." The very man of Nazareth, who was crucified on Mount Calvary, shall possess a state of glorious exaltation, even when the plan of redemption is completed, and shall be the object of everlasting admiration, love, and praise, amongst all the hosts of heaven.

Do not our hearts burn with strong desires to participate of their bliss, and join in their song? Then let us acquaint ourselves with the character of Jesus; for "no man cometh unto the Father but by Him ||." Let us pray that we may have clearer and more

* Luke i. 33. † Rev. xxii. 3. ‡ J. vii. 17. § Psal. lxxii. 17.

|| John xiv. 6.

enlarged conceptions of his worth and excellency: for how small a part do we yet perceive! Indeed, in our highest state of advancement upon earth, our views will be obscure and contracted. O, what rich discoveries are reserved for the eternal world, to which we are hastening! Do we not exult in the confidence that the veil will be soon removed, and we shall "see the King in his beauty?" Then shall we cry out, with holy transport, as the queen of Sheba, "Behold, the half was not told me*." But, from the little which we now understand, may we be excited to love him with our warmest affections, and serve him with unwearied vigour and delight, till we be admitted into his beatific presence, to reign with him in glory, as kings and priests, for ever and ever! Amen.

HALLELUJAH!

* 1 Kings x. 7.

THE VIRGIN MARY.

CHAP. III.

*Mary, descended from David—espoused to Joseph—
informed of her miraculous conception—visited Eli-
zabeth—brought forth Jesus at Beth-lehem—attended
at the temple for her purification—went into Egypt—
expostulated with Jesus, for remaining at Jeru-
salem—met with a rebuke from him at Cana—ac-
companied him in his ministry—stood by his cross.*

AFTER considering the life of the Redeemer, we may be disposed to treat with indifference every other history, as being, comparatively, of little importance. But as, in the natural world, though we look not immediately to the sun, we behold the effects of his light in the brightness of every object around us; so we may discover the grace and glory of Jesus in those whom he illuminates, and, from the view of their excellencies, may be led to regard him with the greater admiration.

We now direct our meditations to the character of the person to whom he stood most nearly related in the flesh. We contemplate his virgin mother, who was not only "blessed among women," but honoured above all the crowned heads which were ever distinguished on the earth. We cannot, indeed, in speaking concerning her, accommodate ourselves to the superstition of Romish devotees. They dare to address her in foolish and idolatrous language, as if she had the disposal of all spiritual blessings, and even in heaven could command her Son, upon the throne of his glory, to answer their petitions. It is said that they offer as many prayers, if such they may

may be called, to the holy virgin, as to the Lord God Almighty. Abhorred be this worship of a creature!

Nor do we attend to any absurd traditionary legends, but inquire merely what we may learn from her example, as recorded in the Scriptures. A very short account is given us: perhaps this circumstance was designed to check our vain curiosity, which might lead us to propose many unprofitable questions. We know nothing of her parentage, except that she proceeded in a direct line from David: otherwise she could not have been the mother of the promised Messiah. It appears, however, by numerous proofs, that her situation in life was obscure, though she obtained the high honour of introducing the Saviour into the world, that peculiar honour to which the holy women of old most eagerly aspired.

It had been foretold that the Redeemer should not only assume our nature, and spring from the royal family of David, in some of its reduced branches, but be born of a pure virgin *." These predictions were exactly fulfilled. The genealogy of Mary is carefully preserved, in order to show her regular descent from David: and so low had that illustrious house then sunk, that she was in a very mean condition, espoused to Joseph, a poor carpenter, who was himself also of the same extraction. She still remained immaculate, though betrothed. The marriage was not consummated when she was acquainted with the gracious designs of Heaven.

The Angel Gabriel carried her the information that the Lord God looked upon her with a special regard, and designed to distinguish her above her sex †. This extraordinary appearance and salutation excited astonishment and confusion in her mind. He, however, dispersed her fears, and encouraged her faith, while he proceeded to assure her that she should be favoured of God in conceiving and bring-

* Gen. iii. 15. Psal. cxxxii. 11. Isa. xi. 1. vii. 14.

† Luke i. 26--38.

ing forth a Son, even the divine Redeemer, who should establish the promised kingdom of grace to the world. Mary expressed a holy admiration at the message delivered, and yet objected her own virginity which seemed inconsistent with such an intention. The Angel then declared explicitly that the conception should be effected, not in a natural way, but by the immediate operation of the Holy Ghost. He observed further, that her cousin Elizabeth was in a state of pregnancy at that very time, through a miraculous influence, and referred her to the almighty power of God, which can instantly remove every difficulty and accomplish those purposes which we may conclude to be impossible. Mary presumed not to dispute with the heavenly visitant, and replied only by testifying her humble and devout acquiescence in the Lord's appointment. She resigned herself to the disposal of God, desiring that she might be subservient to his will.

What an amiable pattern of meekness, faith, and submission, is here exhibited! She credited the divine message, and expected the completion of the promise in this confidence, that God can do every thing, and will surely perform what he has said. Have we learned, in like manner, to cease from our vain objections, and depend upon his declarations with unfeigned simplicity? With what reluctance do we rest upon the word which he has spoken; and with what petulance do we demand an explanation? The many curious questions we propose, and the foolish cavils we raise, prove, to our shame, that we are "slow of heart to believe."

Though the honour conferred upon the pious virgin was great, she was called by the miraculous conception to a peculiar measure of patience and resignation. According to human probabilities, it seemed likely to expose her to severe trials and dangers. What could she expect, when her pregnancy appeared, but to be separated from the man to whom she was espoused? What, but to be reproached, perhaps

perhaps condemned to die, as a base adulteress * †
 Yet she cheerfully submitted the event to God, and
 trusted him with the care of her character and life.
 Ah! how few possess such a disposition! How few
 are willing to acquiesce in those dispensations, or
 engage in those services, which may bring them
 into difficulties! Let us inquire whether we can say
 sincerely, and without reserve, in whatever way God
 is pleased to intimate his pleasure, "Be it unto me
 according to thy word."

Soon after the conception Mary visited her cousin
 Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, whose
 case had been mentioned by Gabriel †. This long
 journey was undertaken with the view, probably, of
 receiving a confirmation of her faith, by a free com-
 munication with her devout relatives. Here we are
 admitted to a delightful interview between two affec-
 tionate and pious women, whose conversation will
 suggest some profitable instructions. They were both
 filled with the Holy Ghost, and spake in the most rap-
 turous and elevated manner, praising God, and com-
 forting one another. Elizabeth received her with joy,
 congratulated her as favoured above her sex, and ac-
 counted herself highly honoured in entertaining such
 a guest.

Mary seemed to be overpowered with admiration
 of the divine goodness, and broke forth into expres-
 sions of liveliest gratitude and adoration. Her song,
 dictated by inspiration, bears a striking resemblance
 to that of Hannah. In the comparison we see the
 same feelings, the same acknowledgment of a more
 than common blessing, of honour conferred on the
 unworthy, of unexpected grace and favour. Let us
 endeavour to study this animated passage, till we
 feel something of Mary's devout and ardent affec-
 tions, and each be constrained to cry out for himself,
 "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit
 hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." GOD MY
 SAVIOUR,—how astonishing, how delightful the
 mystery! She exulted in the hope of obtaining re-

* Deut. xxii. 23, 24.

† Luke i. 39—56.

demption through the incarnation of this divine Personage, more than in being his mother according to the flesh. She declared, indeed, her wonder and thankfulness for the honourable office to which she was appointed by the high and lofty One, whose name is Holy; and then proceeded, from the consideration of her own state, to observe, that it was God's general plan, both in his providence and grace, to exalt the lowly and abase the proud, that none may glory in his presence. She concluded, as she began, with admiring and praising him for that grand scheme of salvation, which he was about to accomplish in remembrance of his mercy, and in performance of his promises to the ancient fathers.

Let us call upon ourselves to bless the Lord for his goodness; for how great things has he done for us! We should adore him, particularly, for the gift of his dear Son, the unspeakable benefit being designed to extend unto us as well as unto Mary. But who feels any warmth of gratitude on this account? Are we properly aware of the advantages which Jesus came to bestow? If not, how shall we "magnify the Lord?" Nay, may not those, who are the favoured objects of his grace, be justly ashamed of their stupor and insensibility, even while they are taking the words of thanksgiving into their mouths?

Mary continued with Elizabeth three months, and then returned to her accustomed residence at Nazareth. Her situation, upon its discovery, must have exposed her to many ignominious censures, had not Joseph, to whom she was betrothed, been directed by a message from heaven to receive her for his wife*. He complied immediately, believing the account of the miraculous conception, and probably, on that ground, abstained from all knowledge of her till the birth of her illustrious Son.

When the time of her delivery drew near, both she and her husband removed to Beth-lehem, where

* Matt. i. 18—25.

the inheritance of their ancestors formerly lay. An express prophecy required that the Saviour should be born there *; yet they had not contrived the journey, or had any intent to fulfil the Scripture: they were called thither by the command of the Roman emperor, for the purpose of a general enrolment †. In that event we perceive and admire the overruling hand of God, who can accomplish his own designs by means the most improbable. It was so ordered, therefore, that during their continuance in that town Mary brought forth her Child. And in what circumstances of meanness and distress! She had no friend to receive or attend her, and not only was obliged to solicit accommodations at an inn, but, while others obtained a preference, she was too poor and inconsiderable to gain admission into the house. She took up her abode in the stable, and there, without assistance, or any comfortable conveniences, endured the pains of labour. But she was miraculously strengthened for the difficulties of her situation; insomuch that she herself performed the necessary offices for her new-born Son: "she wrapped him in swaddling-clothes, and laid him in a manger."

While we contemplate the situation of Mary, the mother of the Saviour, we learn never to look upon a state of indigence with contempt. Let not the great and opulent boast of the grandeur of their houses, furniture, or retinue; nor let the most necessitous complain of their mean accommodations. We perceive that some of those, who have possessed the highest excellency of character, and whom God hath most honourably distinguished, were placed in obscurity, and often suffered the deepest distress. This should abase the pride of the rich, and draw forth thankfulness and praise from those who are in the straits of poverty.

It should seem that Mary was of a contemplative disposition. When she had received the account of

* Mic. v. 2.

† Luke ii. 1-7.

the shepherds, to whom the nativity of Immanuel was announced by a messenger from heaven, she "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart *." And, while she endeavoured to derive spiritual improvement from an attentive regard to these extraordinary occurrences, doubtless her faith and hope, her gratitude and love, were enlivened and increased. Thus, also, it is incumbent upon us to treasure up in our minds the declarations of God's word, and the dispensations of his providence, which will furnish us with matter for devout and profitable meditation. Is this what we practise? Are we not strangers to religious retirement, examination, and recollection? And is it not owing to our levity and dissipation that we make little or no advancement in divine knowledge and holy principles?

After forty days Mary appeared in the temple at Jerusalem, with her infant Son, desirous to yield a punctual compliance with all sacred institutions †. She came to present her First-born to the Lord, that he might be consecrated and redeemed, according to the express injunctions of the law ‡. She came, also, for her own purification, and offered the sacrifices appointed for that purpose; one as a tribute of gratitude for safe delivery, and the other as an acknowledgment of sinfulness. But so low was her rank in life, that she could make only such oblations as were admitted in case of great poverty §. Let not an attention to the outward rites of religion be censured and condemned as superstition: it is indispensably requisite, and perfectly rational. But, alas! our age is marked by its bold contempt of divine ordinances. "Will a man rob God?" This is indeed a robbery of the most audacious kind, yet not unfrequent. How many resist the express claims of Jehovah, and refuse the service which he requires! But let these arrogant despisers of the laws of the Almighty know that he will reckon with them for

* Luke ii. 19. † 22—39. ‡ Exod. xiii. 2. Numb. xviii. 15, 16.

§ Lev. xii. 6—8.

presumptuously denying or withholding his just demands.

At the presentation of the infant Saviour in the temple, the aged Simeon delivered a remarkable prophecy. The pious mother and her husband stood with devout astonishment to hear the words, and receive the benediction of that venerable saint. But Mary was warned that her honour, in bearing so illustrious a Son, would be accompanied with painful trials, and her joy imbittered by a participation of his extreme afflictions. "A sword," said Simeon, "shall pierce through thy own soul." This, doubtless, was exactly fulfilled: so that, considering her tenderness of affection and quick sensibility, we may conclude that her relation to Jesus was the cause of inconceivable anguish to her mind. Such, in general, are all earthly advantages. They excite the envy of others, but produce very sharp distress to the possessors. O, be not anxious to obtain, and be afraid of valuing too highly, any temporal distinctions or enjoyments! That which is the object of your desires may be as a sword to pierce your souls.

Mary's troubles soon commenced. She saw, indeed, the wise men from a distant country pay their adorations to the Child upon her breast*, expressly acknowledging his high dignity. But she was immediately obliged to fly for his preservation. The tyrant Herod sought his destruction; and, to avoid his murderous jealousy, the holy family were directed by an Angel to retire into Egypt. So long and tedious a journey, in those circumstances of poverty and danger, must have been extremely painful. On this occasion Mary stood in peculiar need of faith and patience. Egypt, however, the very country in which Israel had been oppressed, now offered a refuge and a hiding-place to Israel's Redeemer. In due time, the death of the furious persecutor being announced, Mary, with her little household, was conducted from Egypt, under the immediate care

* Matt. ii. 11—23.

of Heaven, and again settled at her own city Nazareth.

We, also, may be situated in the midst of great perils, and, required to quit our accustomed residence, may feel the severe pang of hitherto unknown distress. But if we move in the path of duty, and go forth at the call of God, we may and should possess composure and confidence of mind. The Lord himself will be our Guide and Defence. Like Mary, we may be banished from the ordinances and people of God; yet, even then, He can support and comfort us, and abundantly compensate our loss by the rich communications of his Spirit. Let us wait his time, and follow his directions. He will deliver us, and call us out of exile to our home.

Mary continued to dwell at Nazareth with Joseph in a mean and obscure condition. But such was her piety, that neither the expense nor the fatigue of so long a journey prevented her from attending the annual celebration of the passover in Jerusalem*. At the age of twelve years Jesus accompanied his parents to that festival; and on the conclusion of the sacred solemnity they departed without their Son. They advanced to some distance on the road before they were apprized of his absence: they had supposed him to be with the rest of the company, amongst his relatives and acquaintance. On missing him, however, they returned to the city to seek him: and on the third day, after a painful search, they found him in the temple, in conference with the chief public teachers of religion. His mother expostulated with him on his conduct; and such were his answers, that her mind was deeply impressed by his words; she did not clearly understand them, but "she kept them in her heart." Learn, you who have the care of families, to bring them with you to the house of God. Possibly you may there receive the most serious and solemn instructions, which you do not comprehend. Yet presume not to reject or despise

* Luke ii. 41—51.

them: like Mary, keep them in your heart, till, by meditation and prayer, you obtain the knowledge of their important meaning.

When Jesus entered on his ministry it is probable that his mother usually accompanied him, and that her husband Joseph was then dead, as no further mention is made of him. Upon one occasion we find her, together with Jesus and his disciples, attending a marriage at Cana in Galilee*. Observing a deficiency of wine at the entertainment, she applied to her Son, having been a witness of his miracles in private, and expressed a wish that he would exert his power to supply the want of the table. For that hasty proposal she met with a rebuke, though it was such, whatever the language may seem to us to import, as conveyed to the mother no mark of irreverence or disrespect. Jesus intimated that it was not her part to dictate at what time or in what manner his supernatural operations should be performed. But, if she had been rash in the suggestion, she discovered an amiable meekness in submitting to the reproof, and a strength of faith, likewise, in still encouraging the expectation that he would provide for the necessity.

We do not assert that she was a perfect character; and the incident just mentioned, as well as other considerations, will serve to show the absurdity and impiety of the church of Rome. The members of that communion address their prayers to the virgin, that she would interpose her authority, and command her Son. If she was wrong in attempting to direct his works upon earth, it is preposterous to imagine that she should control the disposal of his blessings, now that he is exalted in glory. We rejoice that we stand in no need of her intercession, since we are allowed a free access to the Saviour himself. Without applying to any creature for an introduction, we may go to him immediately, and confidently look for a favourable reception.

* John ii. 1—11.

When Jesus removed to Capernaum, Mary continued with him *. It should seem, while he was preaching in that town or neighbourhood, surrounded by a large audience, she and some other of his relations, apprehending danger, probably from the excess of his zeal or the designs of his enemies, wished to call him away from such a situation. Being informed of their desire to speak to him, he took the opportunity of declaring, before the people, that he felt no stronger attachment to his mother and brethren, merely as his natural kindred, than he did on a spiritual account to all his faithful and obedient disciples. He meant not to slight so dear a parent, but to encourage and animate his followers by this lively expression of regard.

Mary appears to have valued his instructions, on which she constantly attended; and doubtless she had the same need which we ourselves have of his teaching and salvation. While, therefore, we observe her, like an humble scholar, sitting at his feet, we should learn not to despise the ministry of his word. None should willingly absent themselves, whatever be their superiority of wisdom, or attainments in piety. Though we are not favoured with his personal preaching, yet his own institutions are established among us, and in them we may expect the divine presence and blessing. O, why are we negligent, since the duty is indispensably required, and the advantages promised to every believing worshipper are great? Are we not desirous to obtain the tokens of his affectionate regard, and to be accounted as his brother, his sister, or his mother? We must remember this high privilege is granted only to those who wait upon him with unfeigned sincerity.

When our Lord celebrated his last passover at Jerusalem, Mary was his attendant; and, probably, was witness to all the ignominious treatment and excruciating tortures which he there endured. On many preceding occasions she must have experienced

* John ii. 12.

† Matt. xii. 46-50.

the most pungent distress, perceiving him to be so generally "despised and rejected of men." But the view of his last sufferings must have been painful beyond measure. She saw Him, of whom the Angel Gabriel had said to her, "He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end," bound as a prisoner, tried and condemned as an atrocious malefactor and impious blasphemer, exposed as a gazing-stock to a profane mob, and nailed to the cross, there to languish and expire amidst the shouts and insults of an immense multitude of all ranks. We know not what her conclusions were; but then, doubtless, she experienced the truth of Simeon's prophecy, and felt a sword piercing her very soul. Yet, though her grief was extreme, we read not that she staggered through unbelief. At least she did not desert the dying Saviour; nay, she adhered to him at that season, when it must have been dangerous to avow an attachment. She heard the taunts and clamours of his enemies, yet she was found at the foot of the cross*.

Some comfort, however, was administered to her in that tremendous scene of wo. The gracious Redeemer, amidst all his pains, did not forget his bereaved mother. He looked upon her with the tenderest affection, and, having no worldly property to leave, consigned her to the care and protection of his beloved Apostle. "Woman," said he, "behold thy son;" from that time she took up her abode with John, and, as if she had been his own mother, was treated with all filial regard. The Scriptures have related nothing further of her history, except that she continued to associate with the disciples, after she continued to associate with the disciples, after our Lord's ascension, and joined in their exercises of devotion †. It is thought that she died in John's house at Ephesus, and it has been believed by some that she suffered martyrdom for the faith of Jesus. But these, and other traditional accounts, are not to be depended on.

* John xix. 25—27.

† Acts i. 14

Of this there cannot remain a doubt, that she possessed an eminent degree of grace, and that, after enduring much for Him, who was her honoured Lord and Saviour as well as her dear Son, her soul was received up to his presence in heaven. There she now beholds his glory, in a brighter manner than she could have done upon earth, and there she will reign with him for ever. Yet to that blissful inheritance she is admitted, not as being the mother of Jesus, but on the very same grounds as the whole church of God, being redeemed by the blood of the Lamb and sanctified by the Holy Ghost. She will therefore rejoice in her spiritual union with Christ more than in her natural relation to him, and esteem it a higher privilege to have known him by faith than to have brought him forth into the world.

But, while we see that Mary was not ashamed or afraid to stand by the cross, let us inquire, Are we bold and steadfast in the cause of Jesus? Are we willing to hazard every thing for him? If we can indeed resign ourselves and our all to his disposal, he will provide for our temporal support, as he did for that of Mary. But, ah! how few will profess an attachment to him, when it is likely to subject them to difficulties and dangers! We mourn for the cowardice and treachery of the thousands who desert his service; and we warn all, who are called by his name, that, if they will not suffer with him, they shall not reign with him, and that, if they deny him, he also will deny them*.

There are those, perhaps, who express their admiration of the honour conferred upon the holy virgin, and say, as a certain woman did to Jesus, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked †." We would remind them of our Lord's reply upon that occasion, "Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." To you, then, who hear his word, we propose the question, Do you keep it? Does it excite your

* 2 Tim. ii. 12.

† Luke xi. 27, 28.

serious attention, or retain a place in your remembrance? What is the value you put upon it, or the influence which it produces? Does it regulate your practice, as well as enliven your hopes? Had not such been its effects with Mary, her case would have been wretched and desperate, notwithstanding all she had done or suffered for the Saviour.

It is far better, therefore, to possess a spiritual knowledge of Christ, and an obedient regard to him, than to stand the foremost among his natural kindred. You, who have believed in his name, are become the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, and shortly will be admitted into the presence of Jesus, where you shall enjoy more delightful intercourse with him than ever was, or could be, vouchsafed to his holy mother upon earth. O, rejoice and give thanks for the distinguished honour to which you are called! Determine, with Saint Paul, to "know no man after the flesh," and never more to boast of any worldly connexion. Nay, if you could claim a relation to the Saviour himself, you should place no dependence upon it*, but pray, that, being joined to him by his Spirit, you may now be conformed to his image. and finally "behold his face in righteousness." Amen.

* 2 Cor. v. 16.

JUDAS ISCARIOT.

CHAP. IV.

*Judas, appointed an Apostle—dishonest—censured
Mary for waste of ointment—warned by Jesus—be-
trayed him for money—destroyed himself.*

WE have concluded the history of the Saviour; but certain parts of this history may be resumed, in order that we may pay a more minute attention than we have yet done to some of his chief companions. Twelve persons were selected to be his intimate associates, and the partakers of his counsels, and were also, by a peculiar designation, distinct from the choice of friendship, appointed to sustain the high and important function of Apostles. All these were upright, and eminent in holiness, excepting one: an indelible mark of infamy is left upon the name of Judas Iscariot. The eleven others had their failings, but Judas possessed nothing truly good: he was vicious throughout, unsound from first to last, a finished hypocrite, who, under the cloak of religion, concealed the basest principles. Though a follower, a preacher, and an Apostle of Christ, he felt no sincere regard for him, but sought only to make gain of godliness.

This is a tremendous subject, and ought to excite great searchings of heart. The character before us stands as an awful admonition not to trust in any favourable appearances or reputation for sanctity. Even in a sacred function, with admired gifts, and acknowledged usefulness, we may act as traitors to the cause of Christ, and finally perish. Sooner or later the dissembler with God will be detected, and receive his just reward. "Every plant, which our heavenly

heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up*." Thus also the Saviour declares, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity †." Let us judge ourselves; and surrender up our whole hearts to God, "without partiality and without hypocrisy." So shall we be preserved from the fatal apostacy of Judas.

Though the particulars which are recorded of his life are few, yet the distinguishing features of it are clearly drawn. From the beginning he seems to have been under the influence of that base principle, "the love of money." Probably he assumed a religious profession from secular views. He might be struck with the miracles of Jesus, and led to expect considerable advantage from the service of a Master who had all nature at his command. Or, supposing that our Lord was about to erect a temporal dominion, he might indulge the hope of obtaining a large share in its honours and emoluments. A poor and sordid motive this for pretending a regard to the Gospel!

Judas was intrusted with the ministry of the word, and appointed to be an Apostle, by Christ himself. Nay, he appears to have received as full and extensive a commission as the other eleven, and to have been furnished with the same miraculous powers ‡. According to his charge, he went forth to preach the kingdom of God from town to town, and testified of that salvation, which he understood not for himself. He healed all manner of sickness, without any principle of benevolence, and even cast out devils, while he himself remained the slave of Satan.

In the designation of Judas to this sacred office our Lord was not imposed on. He well understood what were the miscreant's motives and purposes, and

* Matt. xv. 13.

† vii. 22, 23.

‡ Matt. x. 4. Mark iii. 19. Luke vi. 16.

foresaw the whole of his future conduct. It may, indeed, seem a wonder that the Searcher of all hearts should choose a known traitor. We confess those are most awful dispensations, by which hypocrites and persons of base character are brought forward to minister in holy things, and possess power in the church. Yet these cases every where occur, and the Lord does not prevent them; nay, he so orders things in his providence, that they must infallibly take place. He does not influence any man to do wickedly; but, though he continueth holy, he is pleased to allow sinners full opportunity for pursuing and accomplishing their own plans. Thus he dealt with Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and thus he deals with many, who are of the worst disposition, at this very time. He raises them to situations in which they are capable of doing extensive mischief, disgracing, opposing, or corrupting the Gospel, which they profess to patronise or preach. Yet wise ends are answered: the extreme depravity of human nature is more clearly demonstrated, the faith and patience of the saints are tried and improved, and God himself manifests both his forbearance and his justice.

Jesus and his disciples, in their various removals, had one common stock for their support. This money was committed to Judas: he carried the bag, which contained chiefly the charitable contributions of others, who ministered unto them. He was intrusted with the secular affairs of this little household, and bought their provisions. It was not much which they possessed; yet Judas took care to embezzle something for himself. Probably he had sought and obtained the office with the view of practising his dishonesty.

Out of their small fund, it should seem, a part was designed for the poor. But Judas made his advantage of the kind intentions of his Master: while he was ready to second every proposal of relieving the necessitous, he contrived to appropriate the alms to his own use. Just before the last passover, when

Mary,

Mary, Lazarus's sister, out of the warmth of her regard, anointed the feet of her dear Lord with costly perfumes, Judas raised the objection, and complained with the greatest vehemence, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor *?" We might have concluded that he was a man of extreme tenderness and liberality; but this was a base pretence. He felt not for the miseries of his fellow-creatures; he wished only for the opportunity of securing to himself the three hundred pence.

Hypocrites are generally censorious, and forward to condemn the fervour of zeal as extravagance. Many, likewise, gratify their own penurious disposition, while they allege their intentions of making a reserve for charitable purposes. They would be thought compassionate and kind, and yet they chiefly consult how they shall enrich themselves. Alas! with a heart enslaved to covetousness, it is difficult to be strictly honest. The strongest barriers are insufficient to restrain such a temper; and hence it is that the most sacred trusts are frequently betrayed. Men break through every solemn obligation, in order to obtain a paltry sum: and they hoard up gold and silver, "the rust of which shall be a witness against them, and shall eat their flesh as it were fire †."

Let not that, therefore, be censured as a sinful or needless expense, which is laid out in the cause of Christ, and from love to his name. We plead not for waste or profusion, but, on the contrary, inculcate frugality, with a view of promoting a more enlarged benevolence. Let not charity, however, be a mere pretence: it should appear in liberal exertions. There is a sense, in which we may say to every individual among us, You are intrusted with your Lord's money. Presume not to spend the whole upon yourselves, nor yet refuse to apply it to the proper uses. Remember the interpretation which the disciples put on their Master's injunction to

* John xii. 1—8. xiii. 29. † James v. 3.

Judas. Their mistake was an acknowledgment of his usual practice, and of the mercy in which he delighted. They thought that he bade the keeper of their treasure "give something to the poor*." Ah in how many ways may you prove unfaithful stewards! Though you detest robbery, yet are there no just claims which you withhold? Or do you not resemble the traitor, by acting from motives in secret, far other than those which you profess before the world?

Judas, probably, practised much caution and reserve in his behaviour, that he might conceal his real character. One sin may prevent or counteract another. A covetous man, merely through parsimony, abstains from that kind of sensuality which is expensive; and a hypocrite, through fear of detection, studies to avoid open and gross immoralities. Such an one must throw off the mask before he can associate with the profligate and profane. To maintain his reputation for sanctity, he will conform to many religious observances which he dislikes, and put himself under painful restraints. In this respect Judas acted his part so well, that he escaped the suspicion of his brethren the Apostles. Alas! we apprehend that some among ourselves may assume and retain the garb of piety with no better dispositions. Yet we allow that we are not warranted in drawing any unfavourable conclusions against individuals in whom we do not perceive any glaring inconsistency of conduct. Nay, we should cherish the most charitable hopes of each other, as far and as long as we can. But though there may be much insincerity, which is not discovered among men, "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do †."

Our Lord, being perfectly aware of the character of Judas, more than once described his case, reproved him for his base designs, and warned him of his danger. This very circumstance aggravates his

* John xiii. 29. † Heb. iv. 13.

guilt; as he sinned not in ignorance, but against solemn admonitions. When many disciples withdrew, and it seemed dubious whether even the Apostles would remain, Jesus exclaimed, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" And this, the Evangelist observes, he spake of Judas Iscariot, who had then, probably, formed the scheme of betraying his Master*.

At the last supper, when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, he declared in the hearing of them all that there was one of unsound character in their company: "Ye are clean," said he, "but not all: for he knew who should betray him †." And again he affirmed, "I speak not of you all; I know whom I have chosen: but, that the Scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lift up his heel against me." Then, with expressions of deep distress, he repeated the warning, that there was treachery among them, and that he should soon be delivered to his enemies through the base perfidy of one who sat with him at the table ‡. His information became still more particular, and his reference to Judas too clear to be doubted. At the same time he added a tremendous denunciation of divine vengeance against the wretch who should dare to perpetrate so horrible a crime.

Judas was not ignorant from the first that he was the person meant; for the diabolical plan had been previously laid, and he waited only for an opportunity to carry it into effect. But did not his Lord's admonitions terrify and confound him? Did they not, at least, divert him from his purpose? Could he be so obdurate as to persist in his resolution, and, with his eyes open, rush on to everlasting destruction? Ah! what desperate hardness of heart, what extreme madness, was here! The traitor, as if he were unmoved, and unconscious of those designs

* John vi. 70, 71.

† Matt. xxvi. 40—29.
John xiii. 21—26.

‡ xiii. 10, 11, 18.

Mark xiv. 17—25. Luke xxii. 14—23.

which were imputed to him, dared to ask, "Master is it I?" and though Jesus immediately replied that he was the man, yet even this, it should seem, produced no alteration.

His impious effrontery will appear the more astonishing if we allow what is highly probable, that Judas, as well as the rest, partook of the eucharist, or the solemn ordinance of the Lord's supper*. Being aware, however, of the extent of human depravity, we cease to wonder at human guilt, but not at the forbearance of our God, who could suffer one of so abandoned a disposition to trifle with and profane his most sacred institutions. Similar cases, indeed, occur among ourselves: nor can they be entirely prevented by any exertions of ecclesiastical discipline. The Lord, probably, permits hypocrites to proceed to such lengths, for the display of his own justice in the final issue. With hearts full of all unrighteousness, they may frequent his house and table: but at last they will have to render an awful account of these their religious performances, and "receive the greater damnation†."

If they be plainly warned by their friends or ministers, this also will aggravate their guilt, and constitute a heavy charge against them at the day of judgment. O that they would listen to the representations and entreaties of their faithful monitors; that they would pause, and consider the event, and not persevere in defiance of everlasting perdition! It is a favourable sign when men examine themselves, and pray earnestly to be delivered from all duplicity of mind and perfidious conduct. Then are they least likely to sin or to perish as the traitor did.

Our Lord having frequently declared the approach of his own death, Judas probably began to fear that all his schemes and expectations of worldly advancement would be defeated, and wished to obtain the best compensation possible for his disappointment. The infamous wretch, therefore, entered into a con-

* See Luke xxii. 20, 21.

† Matt. xxiii. 14.

fract with the Jewish rulers, to betray his Master into their hands for a trifling sum; and from that time he sought an opportunity of doing it in a private manner*. It is said that he was instigated by the devil; but this is not to be considered as any excuse. Satan, doubtless, takes advantage of our evil inclinations; and he may be permitted to assist us in contriving and executing our projects: yet the guilt is entirely our own. As it was Judas's plan and desire to procure money, Satan suggested this method of gratifying his wishes, and continued to urge him to it, till the iniquitous purpose was accomplished.

After the solemn admonitions of Christ, Judas, instead of relenting, gave himself up, without reserve, to the influence of the accursed fiend; and, perhaps indignant on being suspected and discovered, he proceeded immediately to perpetrate his base designs. According to the plot which had been laid, he consented to conduct an armed band of ruffians, in order to apprehend his Master †. He knew the garden, where Jesus had been accustomed to retire for devotion, and where he himself, probably, had frequently joined with him in prayer. O, how different the end for which he now repaired to Gethsemane! He undertook to be a guide and assistant to those who were filled with murderous rage against his Lord. With this intent he went up to Jesus, and, pretending reverence and love, saluted him. The kiss was the appointed signal for seizing his person: and thus, by the aid of a perfidious Apostle, the Saviour was betrayed into the hands of wicked men, to be crucified and slain.

We view the transaction with amazement and horror. The sin of the traitor is marked with peculiar aggravations. We are ready to ask, Is this the treatment which the benevolent and holy Jesus de-

* Matt. xxvi. 14—16. Mark xiv. 10, 11. Luke xxii. 3—6.

† John xiii. 27—30. † Matt. xxvi. 47—50. Mark xiv. 43—46. Luke xxii. 47—54. John xvii. 2—12.

served? Or shall we wonder at the opposition of the ignorant and openly profane, when one of his most intimate associates rises up against him? Do not the former professions of Judas, and the sacred function he sustained, render his conduct the more detestable? Can we conceive a more consummate hypocrite, or a baser act of treachery? How pungent the reproof addressed to him, "Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" Convinced as thou art of his high character, how canst thou favour the designs of his enemies? Or why dost thou assume the mask of friendship, in order to practise thy villany? What is the advantage proposed? Is Jesus to be bartered away for thirty pieces of silver, the price of a common slave? And is eternal life to be given up for so mean a consideration?

There are many ways in which we ourselves may act the same diabolical part. While we pretend a high regard for Christ, we may expose his cause to contempt, embolden blasphemers to vent their impiety, and even teach them to do it with success. But has he merited such a return for all his kindness? Or, shall we so insult him as to cry "Hail, Master," at the very time when we entertain the basest intentions against him? What have we found in his decided adversaries which should induce us to espouse and promote their interests? Are these the men with whom we would associate, and whose hands we would strengthen? Can we, then, prove that our former professed principles are false, or that Jesus will not make good his engagements? Or what emolument do we expect from the opposite party? Alas! it is not possible that they should offer any equivalent, any proper compensation, for the immense loss we shall incur by our perfidy.

Judas, perhaps, considered not what would follow. He might imagine that his Master would escape out of the hands of his enemies, as he had done before. But, be that as it may, when he saw him condemned, and about to be nailed to the cross, his conscience

conscience was alarmed, and he felt inexpressible horror for the atrocious deed which he had committed *. Ah! what would he then have given to have revoked his bargain? What comfort did he receive from the thirty pieces of silver, the wages of his unrighteousness? He could not bear to retain the money in his possession, but immediately restored it to the Jewish rulers, declaring his heinous guilt, and the anguish of his soul, for delivering up an innocent person to fall by their violence.

And did not those furious persecutors relent when they heard so striking a confession? Did they not tremble for themselves, and endeavour to rescue the holy Sufferer? No: they remained obdurate. But the traitor, unable to support himself under the convictions and terrors of his mind, cast down before them the bribe which he had accepted, and instantly fled away, that he might put an end to his wretched life. "He went and hanged himself." Probably the place which he chose for his own execution was on a precipice; and the rope by which he was suspended failed: for, "falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out †." In this plight he lay a miserable spectacle to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and, as the fact excited general notice, he became a public monument of God's vengeance. What an ignominious and lamentable death for a follower and an Apostle of Christ! How foolish, as well as wicked, the expedient by which he attempted to release himself from the anguish of his mind! He went "to his own place ‡," the place for which alone he was fitted by his disposition and conduct, where his accusing conscience will continue to torment him with inconceivably great and uninterrupted horrors, and where he will be exhibited as an example of divine justice for ever. "It had been good for that man if he had not been born."

But is it not said that he repented? Yes; on some

* Matt. xxvii. 3—10.

† Acts i. 18, 19.

‡ i. 25.
accounts

accounts he was sorry for what he had done. Shocked with the dread of consequences, he made confession of his guilt, and restored his impious gain. But he possessed not that "godly sorrow," which "worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of*." He discovered no proper humiliation; he offered up no petition for mercy. Under extreme misery, his heart remained full of vile affections, and rebellion against God: and this will be the case of every one who "suffers the vengeance of eternal fire." The manner of his death proved that he was not a penitent: he died in the actual commission of sin, and of that sin, which, from its nature, excludes repentance. He died as a murderer; "and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him †."

From such a precedent, will any undertake to plead for suicide? We observe that Satan generally tempts men, who are a burden and terror to themselves, to seek relief by this expedient. We therefore warn them to consider whither it will lead. You wish to fly from present pain; but you are rushing into that which is infinitely more intolerable and eternal. This the devil tries to conceal, or persuades you to disbelieve, till your ruin be unavoidable and remediless. O, listen not to his suggestions; for "he is a liar!" O, lift not up against yourselves the hand of violence, which would render your salvation impossible! Cry to God, with incessant importunity, that he would extend his mercy, and communicate peace to your souls. Though you fear it is too late, we would encourage your application: many, whose cases seemed as desperate as yours, have obtained forgiveness and comfort. Only consent to make the trial, and wait upon the Lord. At any rate, dare not to meditate your own destruction; surely it will be soon enough to enter upon a state of never-ending torment when God himself shall give you the summons.

That we may be impressed with an abhorrence of

* 2 Cor. vii. 10.

† 1 John iii. 15.

departing

departing from the faith, let us contemplate more minutely the tremendous consequences of the apostacy of Judas.

1. He involved the faithful disciples of Jesus in deep distress. Those who had been attached to the Gospel would be ready to suspect the truth of their own principles when they observed a zealous preacher totally renounce them, and even sell his Master to his enemies "for filthy lucre's sake." The circumstance, probably, staggered the Apostles themselves, and increased their confusion, when they all forsook their Lord. You, who love the Saviour, cannot but grieve for such instances as this, more than for any temporal calamities. You lament that the Saviour is "wounded in the house of his friends." You bewail the persons who thus "draw back unto perdition," and in whom all your fond hopes are disappointed. You are ready to fear that the work of God will come to nought, and "the armies of the aliens" prevail. Perhaps you tremble under an apprehension that you yourselves, also, in some evil hour of temptation, shall "fall after the same example of unbelief." But we entreat you to compose your minds. God will plead his own cause, and vindicate his honour. He is faithful, and therefore you are secure in his covenant. He will not suffer any real believer to depart and perish, as Judas did. These cases, we allow, are painful, but they ought not to shake your firmness or your hopes. We are forewarned of them in the Scriptures: even the treachery of Judas was no other than a completion of several express predictions. "It must needs be that offences come; but wo to that man by whom the offence cometh*."

2. He afforded the enemies of Jesus cause of triumph. Long had they represented the Saviour as a deceiver; and, probably, they were confirmed in that opinion by the conduct of Judas. It might then

* Matt. xvii. 7.

be asserted, with some plausibility, that the cheat was discovered, since one of the preachers of this new religion had forsaken it, and come over to their interest. Thus it is now. Apostates bring the Gospel into contempt, and increase the prejudice and obduracy of infidels. The Lord, in righteous judgment, permits such occurrences as furnish men with a pretext for opposing that truth which they hate. They exclaim, therefore, "The whole system is a delusion: there can be no real value, at least, in those principles, which so many, after long trial, have renounced. It should seem that the most zealous advocates for the faith are all actuated by sinister motives, since some of their company have betrayed their unsoundness: we may judge of the rest from these specimens."

Will you hear what may be said in reply? Ask those very persons who have deserted Christianity, ask them seriously, Who are in the right? In general they are constrained to bear a decisive testimony in favour of that religion which they have relinquished, and to condemn themselves. This Judas did. Many, also, like him, have shown the greatest horrors for their sin, and perished miserably. Their case, therefore, loudly proclaims the folly and madness of forsaking the ways of God. That some, that numbers, of those who profess the faith, have never felt its influence, we confess and lament. But still "the foundation of God standeth sure." If, indeed, it be fair to judge of a whole society from certain individuals, there is no such thing as sincerity in the world. Then all the Apostles were vile impostors: and Judas acted the most honest part when he threw off the mask. But this, we suppose, no one will venture to assert. Such a declaration would be an insult to the common sense of mankind.

Let us view the apostate once more, and observe,
 3. He brought upon himself aggravated misery and ruin. We have seen that he received no comfort

fort from the money which he so eagerly desired ; “ Riches profit not in the day of wrath * : ” when procured by unrighteousness, they frequently fill the minds of their possessors, even in this life, with anguish and dismay. Thus, also, St. Paul testified, “ The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows † . ” In various ways God can afflict and punish sinners, while he suffers them to accomplish their wishes. He can render them so much a terror to themselves, that they shall “ choose strangling and death rather than life ‡ . ” But the most tremendous display of his justice, in the perdition of ungodly men, is reserved for another world, where they shall receive, in exact proportion, “ according to their works. ” There shall every vile apostate, as well as the traitor Judas, be distinguished by peculiar marks of indignation ; for no guilt can be so heinous as theirs.

Do not these considerations alarm our fears ? Then let us watch and pray : and especially let us beware of those snares by which others have fallen. Let us be serious and upright, renouncing every carnal motive in our transactions with God. “ A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways § . ” But, taking hold of the covenant in Jesus Christ, and aiming at the divine glory with singleness of eye, we shall persevere in righteousness, and be “ kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation || . ” Amen.

* Prov. xi. 4.

† 1 Tim. vi. 10.

‡ Job vii. 15.

§ James i. 8.

|| 1 Pet. i. 5.