

**FEMALE**  
**SCRIPTURE BIOGRAPHY:**

**INCLUDING**

**An Essay**

**ON**

**WHAT CHRISTIANITY HAS DONE FOR**  
**W O M E N.**



**BY**

**FRANCIS AUGUSTUS COX, A.M.**

11



“ It is a necessary charity to the (female) sex to acquaint them with their own value, to animate them to some higher thoughts of themselves; not to yield their suffrage to those injurious estimates the world hath made of them, and from a supposed incapacity of nobler things, to neglect the pursuit of them; from which God and nature have no more precluded the feminine than the masculine part of mankind.”

*The Ladies' Calling, Pref.*



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**ESSAY**  
**ON**  
**WHAT CHRISTIANITY HAS DONE**  
**FOR**  
**WOMEN.**



**A**T this distance of time, and possessing only the very brief information with which it has pleased Infinite Wisdom to furnish us in the commencing chapters of the book of Genesis, it is impossible to ascertain with precision, the nature of that disparity which originally subsisted between the first parents of mankind. The evidence does not seem to be decisive, whether their characteristic differences were merely corporeal or mental, exterior or internal, natural and essential, or accidental. It is questionable whether the superiority of Adam arose out of the revelations he received, and the priority of his existence to his "fair partner Eve," or from an innate pre-eminence which marked him, not only as the head of the inferior creation, but as the appointed lord of the woman. A close examination of the subject, perhaps, would lead us to infer, that an equality subsisted in all those respects which are not strictly classed under the epithet *constitutional*; and that the authority which revelation has conceded to the man, results from his present fallen condition.

It is indeed observable, that when God determined upon the creation of the woman, because it was not deemed good that the man should be alone, she is represented as the intended “*help meet for him;*” but this expression is not perhaps to be understood, as referring so much to subserviency as to suitability. The capacity of one being to promote the happiness of another, depends on its adaptation. The virtuous and the vicious, the feeble and the strong, the majestic and the mean, cannot be associated together to any advantage, and a general equality appears requisite, to render any being capable of becoming the *help meet* to a perfect creature. This idea of his new-formed companion pervades the language of Adam, when she was first brought to him by her Almighty Creator: “*This,*” said he, “*is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.*”\*

To this it may be added, that subjection to the man is expressly enjoined as a part of the original curse upon the female. This infliction necessarily implies a previous equality in rank and station. There was evidently before, no competition, no struggle for dominion, and no sense of inferiority or pre-eminence. The language of Jehovah in denouncing the respective destinies of these transgressors, unquestionably conferred a power or claim upon man, which he did not originally possess, and which was intended as a perpetual memento of the woman having been the first to disobey her Maker. “*Unto the woman*” he said, “*I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth*

\* Gen. ii. 18, 23, 24.

children ; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and *he shall rule over thee.*"\*

But, whatever were the original equalities or inequalities of the human race, this, at least, is certain, that the influence of depraved passions since the fall, is sufficiently conspicuous in rendering the claims and duties of both sexes more and more ambiguous, and disarranging the harmonies of the first creation. In proportion to the degree in which society is corrupt, power will assume an authority over weakness, and they who ought to be help meets will become competitors. Opposition generates dislike, and dislike, when associated with power, will produce oppression. It is in vain to plead the principle of right, to solicit attention to the voice of reason, or to attempt to define the boundaries of influence, when no means exist of enforcing the attention of him who can command obedience. There is no alternative but submission or punishment. Upon this principle, the female sex may be expected to become the sport of human caprice, folly, and guilt. But Christianity tends to rectify the disorders which sin has introduced into the universe, and both in a natural and moral sense, to restore a lost paradise. Like that mighty Spirit, which in the beginning moved upon the surface of the waters, when the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, it corrects the confusion of the moral system, pervades and reorganizes the formless mass of depraved society, and pacifies the turbulence of human passions. With a majesty that overawes, a voice that will be heard, an influence that cannot be resisted, it renews the world, and will eventually diffuse its unsetting glory through every part of the habitable globe.

\* Gen. iii. 16.

The subject before us presents a large field of research, and it would well repay the labour to walk with a deliberate step around its spacious borders and throughout its ample extent ; but we must content ourselves with tracing out some of its principal varieties, and collecting comparatively a few of its productions.

Our plan will require the induction of *facts*, as the necessary basis of argument or illustration ; and these refer to the state of women, in countries and during periods in which the religion of the Bible was wholly unknown, as in the nations of Pagan antiquity, in Greece and Rome ; in savage, superstitious, and Mahometan regions ; and their condition previously to the establishment of Christianity, in patriarchal times and places, or during the Jewish theocracy.

I. The PAGAN NATIONS OF ANTIQUITY demand the first consideration.

Our knowledge of the *ancient Egyptians* is extremely limited, being derived from the Greek writers, whose accounts are often contradictory. Their testimony, however, is sufficiently precise respecting the prevalence of domestic servitude. The Egyptians were a people remarkable for jealousy, which was carried to such an extreme, that after the death of their wives, they even entertained apprehensions respecting the embalmers.\* Having decreed it to be indecent in women to go abroad without shoes, they deprived them of the means of wearing them, by threatening with death any one who should make shoes for a woman. They were forbidden music, probably with a view of preventing their possessing so dangerous an attraction as that of an elegant accomplishment.

\* HEROD. Euterpe.

With regard to the *Celtic nations*, it is true, that the Romans were surprised at the degree of estimation in which these barbarous tribes held their women, and the privileges which they conceded to them; and it must be admitted that certain stern virtues characterized those who were addicted to military achievements, resulting partly from their incessant occupation as warriors, and partly from some indefinite but splendid ideas of fame and glory. Seduction and adultery were vices of rare occurrence; the bridegroom bestowed a dowry upon the bride, consisting of flocks, a horse ready bridled and saddled, a shield, a lance, and a sword;\* and they were often stimulated by their presence and excitement in their warlike expeditions. But though generally contented with one wife, the nobles were allowed a plurality, either for *pleasure* or *show*; the labours of the field, as well as domestic toil, devolved on the women; which, though practised in very ancient times, even by females of the most exalted rank, evidently originated in the general impression of their inferiority in the scale of existence. Their great Odin, or Odinus, excluded from his paradise all who did not by some violent death follow their deceased husbands; and in time they were so degraded, that by an old Saxon law, he that hurt or killed a woman was to pay only half the fine exacted for injuring or killing a man. But the argument in favour of Christianity, as assigning women their *proper place* in society, is corroborated by observing the extremes of oppression and adulation, to which the Scandinavian nations alternately veered. While polygamy and infanticide prevailed, the practice of raising into heroines, prophetesses, and goddesses, some of their women, was no less indi-

\* TACIT. de Moribus Germanorum, chap. xviii. xix.

cative of a very imperfect sense of the true character of the female sex.\*

The public and domestic life of the *Greeks* exhibit unquestionable evidences of barbarity in the treatment of women. Homer, and all their subsequent writers, show that they were subjected to those restrictions which infallibly indicate their being regarded only as the property of men, to be disposed of according to their will. Hence they were bought and sold, made to perform the most menial offices, and exposed to all the miseries and degradation of concubinage. The daughters, even of persons of distinction, were married without any consultation of their wishes, to men whom, frequently, they had never seen, and at the early age of fourteen or fifteen; previous to which period, the Athenian females were kept in a state of as great seclusion as possible. Their study was dress; and slaves, their mothers excepted, were their only companions. The duties of a good wife were, in the opinion of the wisest of the Greeks, comprised in going abroad to expose herself as little as possible to strangers, taking care of what her husband acquired, superintending the younger children, and maintaining a perpetual vigilance over the adult daughters. After marriage, some time elapsed before they ventured to speak to their husbands, or the latter entered into conversation with them. At no time were wives intrusted with any knowledge of their husbands' affairs, much less was their opinion or advice solicited; and they were totally excluded from mixed society. One of the most excellent of the Athenians admitted, there were few friends with whom he conversed so seldom as with his wife.†

Solon, in his laws, is silent with regard to the education of girls, though he gave very precise regulations

\* TACIT. HIST.

† XENOPHON.

for that of boys. That legislator imagined that women were not sufficiently secluded, and therefore directed that they should not go abroad in the daytime, except it were in full dress ; or at night, but with torches and in a chariot. He prohibited their taking eatables out of the houses of their husbands of more value than an obolus, or carrying a basket more than a cubit in length.\* The Athenians had previously possessed the power of selling their children and sisters ; and even Solon allowed fathers, brothers, and guardians, this right, if their daughters, sisters, and wards, had lost their innocence. From various enactments, it appears that adultery was extremely common, and female modesty could not be preserved even by legislative restraint. Most of the Greeks, and even their philosophers, concurred with the Eastern nations in general in associating with courtezans ; who were, indeed, honoured with the highest distinctions. The Corinthians ascribed their deliverance, and that of the rest of Greece, from the power of Xerxes, to the intercession of the priestess of Venus, and the protection of the goddess. At all the festivals of Venus, the people applied to the courtezans as the most efficacious intercessors ; and Solon deemed it advantageous to Athens, to introduce the worship of that goddess, and to constitute them her priestesses. In the age of Pericles, and still more afterward, prostitution, thus yoked with superstition, and sanctioned by its solemnities, produced the most baneful effects upon public morals. From idolatrous temples, the great reservoirs of pollution, a thousand streams poured into every condition of life, and rolling over the whole of this cultivated region, deposited the black sediment of impurity upon the once

\* PLUT. in Solone.

polished surface of society, despoiling its beauty, discolouring its character, and ruining its glory.

The Athenians did not hesitate to take their wives and daughters to visit the notorious Aspasia in the house of Pericles, though she was the teacher of intrigue and the destroyer of morals. The most celebrated men lived in celibacy, only to secure the better opportunities of practising vice, which however did not conceal her hideous deformity in the shades, but stalked forth at noonday, emblazoned by the eloquence of a Demosthenes, and enriched by treasuries of opulence.

In many respects the Spartans differed from the other Greeks in their treatment of the female sex. The women were as shamefully exposed as those of the other states were secluded; being introduced to all the exercises of the public gymnasium at an early age, no less than the other sex, and taught the most shameless practices. The laws of Lycurgus were in many instances utterly subversive of morality, and too outrageous for citation. The depravity of the sex was extreme even at an early period, and Xenophon, Plutarch, and Aristotle, impute to this cause the ultimate subversion of the Spartan state.

*The Romans* differed materially from the Greeks and the oriental nations in one point with regard to their treatment of women; namely, in never keeping them in a state of seclusion from the society of men: but the husbands were very incommunicative; and it seems at least to have been an *understood*, if not a written law, that they should avoid all inquisitiveness, and speak only in the presence of their husbands. In the second Punic war, the Oppian law prohibited the women from riding in carriages and wearing certain articles of dress; which was, however, afterward repealed. The ancient laws considered children as slaves, and women as children who

ought to remain in a state of perpetual tutelage. According to the laws of Romulus and Numa, a husband's authority over his wife was equal to that of a father over his children, excepting only that he could not sell her. The wife was stated to be in servitude, though she had in name the rights of a Roman citizen. From the moment of her marriage she was looked upon as the daughter of her husband and heir of his property, if he had no children: otherwise she was considered as his sister, and shared an equal portion with the children. Wives had no right to make wills, nor durst they prefer complaints against their husbands; and the power of the latter over them was as unrestricted as that which they possessed over their children: in fact, the husband could even put his wife to death, not only for gross immoralities, but for excess in wine.\*

Considerable changes took place in the laws after the period of the destruction of Carthage, some of which allowed greater privileges to females; but as divorces became more frequent, crimes multiplied. In the latter periods of the republic women had the principal share in public plots and private assassinations, and practised the worst of sins with the most barefaced audacity.

The morals of women are indicative of the state of society in general, and of the estimation in which they are held in particular. If the other sex treat them as slaves, they will become servile and contemptible, a certain degree of self-respect being essential to the preservation of real dignity of character. The way to render human beings of any class despicable is to undervalue them; for disesteem will superinduce degeneracy. If this be the case, then the state of women in any age or country is a

\* DIONYSIUS HALICARN. ii. c. 25.

criterion of public opinion, since the vices of their lives indicate their condition: upon which principle, Greece and Rome exhibit wretched specimens of female degradation.

But there is one circumstance in the history of the Romans which must not be wholly overlooked. Their conduct was marked by *capriciousness*. Though the usual treatment of their women resembled that of other Pagan nations in barbarity, like some of them, too, they frequently rendered them extraordinary honours. On some occasions they even transferred to their principal slaves the right of chastising their wives; and yet, on others, they paid them distinguished deference: as in the case of vestals, and the privileges conceded to them after the negotiation between the Romans and Sabines. Various individual exceptions to a barbarous usage might be adduced; sufficient, however, only to evince the general debasement of the female sex, and the total absence of all fixed principles of moral action in unchristianized man.

II. Next to the nations of antiquity, the state of women in SAVAGE, SUPERSTITIOUS, AND MAHOMETAN COUNTRIES, comes under review.

In treating this part of the subject, it will be necessary to make a rapid circumnavigation of the globe, touching at least at the most remarkable places.

## EUROPE.

**GREENLAND.** The situation of females in this country might well justify the exclamation of an ancient philosopher, who thanked God that *he was born a man and not a woman*. The only employment of girls, till their fourteenth year, is singing, dancing, amusements, attending on

children, and fetching water;\* after which they are taught, by their mothers, to sew, cook, tan the skins of animals, construct houses, and navigate boats. It is common for the men to stand by as idle spectators, while the women are carrying the heaviest materials for building; the former never attempting to do any thing but the carpenter's work. Parents frequently betroth their daughters in infancy, and never consult their wishes respecting marriage; if no previous pledge be given, they are disposed of to the first suiter that chances to make the application. From their twentieth year, the usual period of marriage, the lives of the women, says Cranz, are a continued series of hardships and misery. The occupations of the men solely consist in hunting and fishing; but so far from giving themselves the trouble to carry home the fish they have caught, they would think themselves eternally disgraced by such a condescension.

The Greenlanders have two kinds of boats, adapted to procure their subsistence. One of them is the great woman's boat, called the *umiak*, from twelve to eighteen yards in length, and four or five in width. These boats are rowed by four women, and steered by a fifth, without any assistance from the men, excepting in cases of emergency. If the coast will not allow them to pass, six or eight women take the boat upon their heads, and carry it over land to a navigable place.

Mothers-in-law are absolute mistresses in the houses of their married sons, who frequently ill-treat them; and the poor women are sometimes obliged to live with quarrelsome favourites, and may be corrected or divorced at pleasure. Widows who have no friends, are commonly robbed of a considerable portion of their property by those who come to sympathize with them by an affected

\* CRANZ'S Greenland.

condolence; and can obtain no redress,—on the contrary, they are obliged to conciliate their kindness by the utmost obsequiousness. After a precarious subsistence in different families, and being driven from one hut to another, they are suffered to expire without help and without notice. When widows have grown-up sons, their condition is much superior to that in which they formerly lived with their husbands. When aged women pretend to practise, or are suspected of witchcraft—if the wife or child of a Greenlander happen to die—if his fowlingpiece miss fire, or his arrow the mark at which it was shot—the supposed sorceress is instantly stoned, thrown into the sea, or cut in pieces by the *angekoks* or male magicians. There have even been instances of sons killing their mothers, and brothers their sisters. The infirmities of age expose women to violent deaths, being sometimes with their own consent, and sometimes forcibly, interred alive by their own offspring.

**RUSSIA.** Over this extensive empire, including sixteen different nations, the condition of women is such as equally to evince the degraded character of the men. Among the Siberians, an opinion is entertained that they are impure beings, and odious to the gods; in consequence of which, they are not permitted to approach the sacred fire, or the places of sacrifice. In the eastern islands, in particular, there exist tribes to whom the nuptial ceremony is unknown; and in cases where daughters are purchased by goods, money, or services, their fathers never consult their children, and their husbands treat them as slaves or beasts of burden. In Siberia, conjugal fidelity is bartered for gain, or sacrificed at the shrine of an imaginary hospitality. The sale of their wives is by no means uncommon, for a little train oil, or other paltry consideration. To this the women offer no

objection, and at an advanced age frequently seek younger wives for their husbands, and devote themselves to domestic drudgery.\* The same degrading facts apply to the Tungusians and other tribes. In some respects the Kamtschadales differ from the rest, but the extreme debasement arising from their libidinous brutality must not be described, and can scarcely be credited.†

Among all the Slavon nations of Europe, wives and daughters have ever been kept in a state of exclusion. Brides are purchased, and instantly become slaves. Formerly sons were compelled by blows to marry, and daughters dragged by their hair to the altars; and the paternal authority is still unbounded. The lower classes are doomed to incessant labour, and are obliged to submit to the utmost indignities.‡

“The picture of Russian manners varies little with reference to the prince or the peasant. . . . They are all, high and low, rich and poor, alike servile to superiors; haughty and cruel to their dependents, ignorant, superstitious, cunning, brutal, barbarous, dirty, mean. The emperor canes the first of his grandees; princes and nobles cane their slaves; and the slaves their wives and daughters.”§

ITALY AND SPAIN. These two countries may be classed together, because the condition of the female sex is very similar—in both: the education of women is totally neglected, and they are not ashamed of committing the grossest blunders in common conversation. Such is their situation, that they cannot intermeddle with the concerns of their husbands, without exciting their jealousy. Girls are, in early years, left to the care of servants, who are

\* GEORGI'S Description of the Russian Nations. WEBER'S Russia.

† Consult STELLER.

‡ WEBER and GEORGI.

§ CLARKE'S Travels, part i. p. 35, 4to.

both ill educated and immoral ; the same may be said of their mothers, whose conversation and public conduct tend to perfect the growth of licentiousness in their uncultivated children.

**PORTUGAL.** Young women in this kingdom are not instructed in any thing truly useful or ornamental ; and even those who belong to respectable families, are often ignorant of reading and writing. Parents keep their daughters in the most rigid confinement, frequently not allowing them even to go abroad to church to hear mass, and never unattended. They are secluded from all young persons of the other sex, who are not permitted to visit families where there are unmarried females. The consequence of this austerity is an extended system of intrigue, for the purpose of evading all this circumspection—by which means they are full of cunning and deceit.

**TURKEY.** Women, in Constantinople, are confined in seraglios for life, or shut up in their apartments. They are not permitted to appear in public without a veil, and can only obtain their freedom by devoting themselves to prostitution.

“The slave-market,” says Mr. Thornton, “is a quadrangle, surrounded by a covered gallery, and ranges of small and separate apartments. The manner of purchasing slaves is described in the plain and unaffected narrative of a German merchant, which, as I have been able to ascertain its general authenticity, may be relied on as correct in this particular. He arrived at Kaffa, in the Crimea, which was formerly the principal mart of slaves ; and hearing that an Armenian had a Georgian and two Circassian girls to dispose of, feigned an intention of purchasing them, in order to gratify his curiosity, and to ascertain the mode of conducting such bargains. A Circassian maiden, eighteen years old, was the first who pre-

presented herself; she was well dressed, and her face was covered with a veil. She advanced towards the German, bowed down, and kissed his hand: by order of her master, she walked backwards and forwards in the chamber to show her shape, and the easiness of her gait and carriage: her foot was small, and her gesture agreeable. When she took off her veil, she displayed a bust of the most attractive beauty. She rubbed her cheeks with a wet napkin, to prove that she had not used art to heighten her complexion; and she opened her inviting lips, to show a regular set of teeth of pearly whiteness. The German was permitted to feel her pulse, that he might be convinced of the good state of her health and constitution. She was then ordered to retire, while the merchants deliberated upon the bargain. The price of this beautiful girl was four thousand piastres, [equal to four thousand five hundred florins of Vienna.]\*]

GREECE. The condition of females, in Modern Greece, may be inferred from an anecdote or two related by *Lieutenant Collins*. He and his friends were approaching *Macri*, on the coast of Asia Minor. "Encouraged to proceed," he remarks, "we approached the second groupe, which we passed in a similar manner; but some women, who were near them, appeared to fly at our approach, and view us at a distance with astonishment and fear. But no sooner had we advanced, than, as with general consent, they all caught their children in their arms, and with the fears of a mother apprehensive for the safety of a beloved child, flew to their houses, and shut themselves in, and we saw no more of them till our return.

"Our company during dinner consisted of Greeks only—it was served up by the woman, attended by one of her

\* *Thornton's Present State of Turkey*, (1807) 4to. p. 376.

children, who with all the family appeared in an abject state ; for on offering her a little of the wine, which they so kindly furnished us with, she shrunk back, with an expression of surprise at our condescension, which excited ours also ; and the man understanding a little Italian, we inquired the reason ; ‘ Such,’ says he, ‘ is the inferiority and oppression we labour under, that it is in general thought too great an honour for a Turk to present a person of this description with any token of respect, and forward in her to accept it, which is the reason of her timidity, in not accepting the wine from you.’ ”\*

In Greece, the women are closely confined at home ; they do not even appear at church till they are married. The female slaves are not Greeks, but such as are either taken in war or stolen by the Tartars from Russia, Circassia, or Georgia. Many thousands were formerly taken in the Morea, but most of them have been redeemed by the charitable contributions of the Christians, or ransomed by their own relations. The fine slaves that wait upon great ladies, are bought at the age of eight or nine years, and educated with great care to accomplish them in singing, dancing, embroidery, &c. They are commonly Circassian, and their patron rarely ever sells them, but if they grow weary of them, they either present them to a friend, or give them their freedom.

## ASIA.

**TARTARY.** This immense country, in its utmost limits, reaches from the Eastern Ocean to the Caspian Sea ; and from Corea, China, Thibet, Hindoostan, and Persia, to Russia and Siberia ; including a space of three thou-

\* COLLINS'S Voyages, 1807, p. 152.

sand six hundred miles in length, and nine hundred and sixty in width, and comprehending all the middle region of Asia. Its two great divisions are into Eastern and Western; the former chiefly belongs to the emperor of China; the latter to Russia.

The Mahometan Tartars are continually waging war against their neighbours for the purpose of procuring slaves: When they cannot obtain adults, they steal children to sell, and even make no scruple of selling their own, especially daughters. In case of any disgust, their wives share a similar fate. Among the pagan Tartars incestuous practices are prevalent, and their wives are generally dismissed at, or previous to, the age of forty. The mothers of sultans, among the Crim Tartars, neither eat with their sons, nor sit in their presence. They are, in fact, the slaves of their caprice, often ill-treated by them, and sometimes even put to death.\*

The *Calmuks* are considered as remarkably lenient in their conduct to the women: but fathers dispose of their daughters without their consent, and even antecedently to their birth. Their chiefs and princes have, besides, large harems or seraglios, where domestic rivalry imbitters existence. They are, moreover, regarded in general as servants, and infidelity is compensated by a trifling offering to their mercenary rapacity.

The *Georgians and Circassians* are celebrated for their surpassing beauty, and their young women are brought up to some industrious habits. The daughters of slaves receive a similar education, and are sold according to their beauty, at from twenty to a hundred pounds each, or upwards. They consider all their children in the

\* PUYSSONEL II. p. 246.

light of property, exposing them to sale as they would their cattle, and too often obtain large sums from the agents of despotism and depravity.

**CHINA.** In this, and almost all the countries of Southern Asia, the condition of women is truly deplorable. Forced marriages and sales are universal, and the Chinese are so excessively jealous that they do not permit their wives to receive any visitors of the other sex, and transport them from place to place in vehicles secured by iron bars. Their concubines are not only treated with the most degrading inhumanity, but are slaves to the wives, who never fail to sway a despotic sceptre; they are besides liable at any time to be sold. The children of concubines are regarded as the offspring of the legitimate wife; hence they manifest no affection for their real mothers, but often treat them with the most marked disrespect. The laws of China and Siam allow the lawful wives and sons, after the death of their husbands and fathers, to exclude concubines and their children from all share in the property of the deceased, and to dispose of their persons by public or private sale.

The wives of people of rank are always confined to their apartments from motives of jealousy; those of a middle class are a kind of upper servants, deprived of liberty; and the wives of the lower orders are mere domestic drudges. The handsomest women are usually purchased for the courts and principal mandarines.

“We can readily,” says a respectable writer, “give credit to the custom of a landlord taking the wife of a ryat or peasant, as a pledge for rent, and keeping her till the debt is discharged (in the kingdom of Nepaul;) since we know, on the best authority, that their wise polished neighbours, the Chinese, have found it neces-

ary to enact a prohibitory statute against lending wives and daughters on hire.”\*

Another writer observes, “ Since the philosophical inquiry into the condition of the weaker sex, in the different stages of society, published by Millar,† it has been universally considered as an infallible criterion of barbarous society, to find the women in a state of great degradation. Scarcely among savages themselves is the condition of women more wretched and humiliating than among the Chinese. A very striking picture of the slavery and oppression to which they are doomed, but too long for insertion in this place, is drawn by M. Vanbraam.‡ Mr. Barrow informs us, that among the rich, the women are imprisoned slaves; among the poor, drudges; ‘ many being,’ says he, ‘ compelled to work with an infant upon the back, while the husband, in all probability, is gaming,—I have frequently seen women,’ he adds, ‘ assisting to drag a sort of light plough, and the harrow. The easier task, that of directing the machine, is left to the husband.’§ The Chinese value their daughters so little, that when they have more children than they can easily maintain, they hire the midwives to stifle the females in a basin of water as soon as they are born.|| Nothing can exceed the contempt towards women which the maxims of the most celebrated of their lawgivers express. ‘ It is very difficult,’ said Confucius himself, ‘ to govern women and servants; for if you treat them with gentleness and familiarity, they lose

\* *Quart. Rev.* May, 1811, p. 330.

† *Inquiry into the Origin of Ranks.*

‡ *Voyage en Chine de l’Ambassade Hollandaise*, vol. ii. p. 116, *et seq.*

§ *BARROW’S China*, p. 141, 541.

|| *P. DU HALDE*, vol. i. 278.

all respect ; if with rigour, you will have continual disturbance.’

“ Women are debarred almost entirely from the rights of property ; and they never inherit. Among the worst savage nations, their daughters are sold to their husbands, and are received and treated as slaves.\* When society has made a little progress, the purchase-money is received only as a present, and the wife, nominally at least, is not received as a slave. Among the Chinese, the daughter, with whom no dowry is given, is uniformly exchanged for a present ; and so little is the transaction, even on a purchase, disguised, that Mr. Barrow has no scruple to say, ‘ the daughters may be said to be invariably sold.’† He assures us, that it is even a common practice among the Chinese to sell their daughters, that they may be brought up as prostitutes.‡”§

**BIRMAN EMPIRE.** This extensive dominion comprehends the states of Pegu, Ava, Arracan, and Siam. Women are not secluded from the society of men, but they are held in great contempt. Their evidence is undervalued in judicial proceedings. The lower classes sell their women to strangers, who do not, however, seem to feel themselves degraded. In Pegu, Siam, Cochin China, and other districts, adultery is regarded as honourable. Herodotus mentions a people called Mendanes, where the debasement of the female character is such, that their misconduct is an occasion of boasting and a source of distinction.

**HINDOOSTAN.** The following extracts, from the letters of the Baptist missionaries in India, will speak volumes,

\* P. DU HALDE, vol. iii. p. 211.

† BARROWS'S China, p. 145. † Ibid. p. 518.

‡ Edinburgh Rev. July, 1809, p. 428, 429.

and might, if it were necessary, be corroborated by a thousand similar citations.

At an early period of the Baptist mission to India, Dr. Carey communicated the following interesting account to a friend:—"As the burning of women with their husbands is one of the most singular and striking customs of this people, and also very ancient, as you will see by the *Reek Bede*, which contains a law relating to it, I shall begin with this. Having just read a Shanscrit book, called *Soordhee Sungraha*, which is a collection of laws from the various Shasters, arranged under their proper heads, I shall give you an extract from it, omitting some sentences, which are mere verbal repetitions. Otherwise, the translation may be depended on as exact. The words prefixed to some of the sentences are the names of the original books from which the extracts are made.

‘*Angeera*. After the husband’s death, the virtuous wife who burns herself with him,\* is like an Asoondhatee,† and will go to bliss.—If she be within one day’s journey of the place where he dies, and indeed virtuous, the burning of his corpse shall be deferred one day for her arrival.

‘*Brahma Pooran*. If the husband die in another country, the virtuous wife shall take any of his effects; for instance, a sandal, and binding it on her thigh, shall enter the fire with it.‡

\* It may be proper to observe, that the Hindoos never bury their dead; but, if they can afford it, always burn them. If they be too poor, or the person be rendered unclean by some incurable disease, they are either thrown into a river or left on the ground to be devoured.

† A kind of celestial beings, which are fabled by the Hindoos.

‡ It is not generally known, that women, in certain cases, burn themselves with any part of their husbands’ effects, as a substitute for him; but on inquiry of my Pundit, whether this be now practised, he assured me it was, and that he had himself seen many instances of it.

‘ *Reek Bede*. If a wife thus burn with her husband, it is not suicide ; and her relations shall observe three days’ uncleanness for her ; after which her *Shraddha*\* must be properly performed.—If she cannot come to the place, or does not receive an account of her husband’s death, she shall wait the appointed ten days of uncleanness,† and may afterward die in a separate fire.—If she die in a separate fire, three days’ uncleanness will be observed ; after which the *Pinda* must be performed.—After the uncleanness on account of the husband is over, the *Shraddha* must be performed according to the commandment.—Three days after his death, the *Dospinda*‡ must be made, and after ten days the regular *Shraddha*.

‘ *Goutam*. A *Bràhmànèe* can only die with her husband, on which account she cannot burn in another fire. When a woman dies with her husband, the eldest son, or nearest relation, shall set fire to the pile ; whose office also it is to perform the *Dospinda*, and all the obsequies. He who kindles the fire shall perform the *Dospinda* :§ but her own son, or nearest relations, must perform the *Shraddha*.—If a woman burn separately, only three days’

\* *Shraddha*, or *Pinda*, is an offering made to the manes of any deceased person, on an appointed day after his or her death. It consists of rice, and other articles, often made into cakes, and is continued annually for seven generations by all his or her descendants, called *Sapinda*, and in some cases to fourteen generations by all the descendants, who, when beyond the seventh generation, are called *Sakoolya*.

† The following law, from the same book, will show how uncleanness for death or birth must be observed in the different casts : viz. If a person die, or if a child be born, the *Sapindas* shall be unclean ten days for a *Brahmman*, twelve for a *Kshetra*, fifteen for a *Bysha*, and one month for a *Soodra* : during which time they can make no offering to their ancestors or the gods.

‡ *Dospinda*, an inferior offering made to the manes.

§ This may happen if her own son be an infant, or very far off, or if she have no son.

uncleanness will be observed for her; but if in the same fire, ten days.

‘ *Asouch Shunkar*. If another person die before the last day of uncleanness for a death or birth, then the uncleanness on account of the second person’s death will be included in the first, and the time not lengthened out.

‘ *Bishnoo Pooran*. If the husband die in war, only present uncleanness, or till bathing, will be observed for him: if, therefore, the wife burn with him, only one night’s uncleanness will be observed for her; but, if in a separate fire, three days; and in that case the husband’s *Pinda* will be at the end of three days.—If the husband and wife burn in one fire, they will obtain separate offerings of the *Siraddha*.—If a woman die with her husband voluntarily, the offerings to her, and all her obsequies will be equal to his.—If they die within a *Titi-ee*, or lunar day, the offerings will be made to both at the same time.—If the person be *Potect*, or sinful; that is, has killed a *Bràhmân*, or drinks spirituous liquors, or has committed some sin in his former life, on account of which he is afflicted with elephantiasis, consumption, leprosy, &c.\* all will be blotted out by his wife burning with him, after proper atonement has been made.†—A woman with a young child, or being pregnant, cannot burn with her husband.—If there be a proper person to educate the infant,

\* The Hindoos believe the metempsychosis, and say that certain diseases, as mahabhead, consumptions, and some others; also dreadful accidents, such as being killed by a *Brahmman*: and great sins, such as killing a *Brahmman*, are the fruit of sins committed in a former life.

† A person with such diseases, accidents, or sins, cannot have the rite of burning his body performed till an offering of atonement has been made, which qualifies him for having his obsequies performed; viz. *Dahon*, or burning (in which case the wife may die with him,) and the *Shraddha*, or *Pinda*. This, however, does not gain such an one admission into bliss, which is only done by the *Sahemoron*, or the wife’s dying with him.

she may be permitted to burn.—If any woman ascend the pile, and should afterward decline to burn, through love of life or earthly things, she shall perform the penance *Prazapatya*, and will then be free from sin.’ ”\*

The following statement is taken from the more recent communication of another of the Baptist missionaries to India :—

“ Jan. 9, 1807. A person informing us that a woman was about to be burnt with the corpse of her husband near our house, I, with several of our brethren, hastened to the place ; but, before we could arrive, the pile was in flames. It was a horrible sight. The most shocking indifference and levity appeared among those who were present : I never saw any thing more brutal than their behaviour. The dreadful scene had not the least appearance of a religious ceremony. It resembled an abandoned rabble of boys in England, collected for the purpose of worrying to death a cat or a dog. A bamboo, perhaps twenty feet long, had been fastened at one end to a stake driven in the ground, and held down over the fire by men at the other. Such were the confusion, the levity, the bursts of brutal laughter, while the poor woman was burning alive before their eyes, that it seemed as if every spark of humanity was extinguished by this cruel superstition. That which added to the cruelty was, the smallness of the fire. It did not consist of so much wood as we consume in dressing a dinner : no, not this fire that was to consume the living and the dead ! I saw the legs of the poor creature hanging out of the fire, while her body was in flames. After a while, they took a bamboo, ten or twelve feet long, and stirred it, pushing and beating the half-consumed corpse, as you would repair a fire

† BAPT. PERIOD. ACCOUNTS, vol. i. No. 6, p. 473—476.

of green wood, by throwing the unconsumed pieces into the middle. Perceiving the legs hanging out, they beat them with the bamboo for some time, in order to break the ligatures which fastened them at the knees ; (for they would not have come near to touch them for the world.) At length, they succeeded in binding them upwards into the fire ; the skin and muscles giving way, and discovering the knee-sockets bare, with the balls of the leg bones : a sight this, which, I need not say, made me thrill with horror ; especially when I recollected that this hopeless victim of superstition was alive but a few minutes before. To have seen savage wolves thus tearing a human body limb from limb, would have been shocking ; but to see relations and neighbours do this to one with whom they had familiarly conversed not an hour before, and to do it with an air of levity, was almost too much for me to bear ! Turning to the Brahmman, who was the chief actor in this horrid tragedy, a young fellow of about twenty-two, and one of the most hardened that ever I accosted, I told him that the system which allowed of these cruelties, could no more proceed from God than darkness from the sun ; and warned him, that he must appear at the judgment-seat of God, to answer for this murder. He, with a grin, full of savage contempt, told me that ‘ he gloried in it, and felt the highest pleasure in performing the deed.’ I replied, ‘ that his pleasure might be less than that of his Master ; but seeing it was in vain to reason with him, I turned to the people, and expostulated with them. One of them answered, that ‘ the woman had burnt herself of her own free choice, and that she went to the pile as a matter of pleasure.’—‘ Why, then, did you confine her down with that large bamboo ?’—‘ If we had not, she would have run away.’—‘ What, run away from pleasure !’ I then addressed the poor lad, who had been thus induced

to set fire to his mother. He appeared about nineteen. ‘ You have murdered your mother ! your sin is great. The sin of the Brahmman, who urged you to it, is greater ; but yours is very great.’—‘ What could I do ? It is the custom.’—‘ True, but this custom is not of God ; but proceedeth from the devil, who wishes to destroy mankind. How will you bear the reflection that you have murdered your only surviving parent ?’ He seemed to feel what was said to him ; but, just at this instant, that hardened wretch, the Brahmman, rushed in, and drew him away, while the tears were standing in his eyes. After reasoning with some others, and telling them of the Saviour of the world, I returned home with a mind full of horror and disgust.

“ You expect, perhaps, to hear that this unhappy victim was the wife of some Brahmman of high cast. She was the wife of a barber who dwelt at Serampore, and had died that morning, leaving the son I have mentioned, and a daughter about eleven years of age. Thus has this infernal superstition aggravated the common miseries of life, and left these children stripped of both their parents in one day ! Nor is this an uncommon case. It often happens to children far more helpless than these ; sometimes to children possessed of property, which is then left, as well as themselves, to the mercy of those who have decoyed their mother to their father’s funeral pile.”\*

CEYLON. “ Idolatrous procession. Each carriage has four wheels of solid wood, and requires two hundred men to draw it. When they are dragged along the streets, on occasions of great solemnity, women, in the phrensy of false devotion, throw themselves down before the

\* BAPT. PERIOD. ACCOUNTS, No. xvii. p. 324.

wheels and are crushed to death by their tremendous weight; the same superstitious madness preventing the ignorant crowd from making any attempt to save them.”\*

SUMATRA. “The modes of marriage,” says Mr. Marsden, “according to the original institutions of these people, are by *jujur*, by *arnbei anak*, or by *Semando*. The *jujur* is a certain sum of money, given by one man to another, as a consideration for the person of his daughter, whose situation, in this case, differs not much from that of a slave to the man she marries, and to his family; his absolute property in her depends, however, upon some nice circumstances. Besides the *botang jupu*, (or main sum,) there are certain appendages, or branches, one of which, the *tali kulo*, of five dollars, is usually, from motives of delicacy or friendship, left unpaid; and so long as that is the case, a relationship is understood to subsist between the two families, and the parents of the woman have a right to interfere on occasions of ill treatment: the husband is also liable to be fined for wounding her; with other limitations of absolute right. When that sum is finally paid, which seldom happens but in cases of violent quarrel, the *tali kulo*, (tie of relationship,) is said to be *putus*, (broken,) and the woman becomes to all intents the slave of her lord. She has then no title to claim a divorce in any predicament; and he may sell her, making only the first offer to her relations.”

Speaking of another part of the *country*, (Batta,) he says, “the men are allowed to marry as many wives as they please or can afford, and to have half a dozen is not uncommon. The condition of the women appears to be no other than that of slaves, the husbands having the power of selling their wives and children.”†

\* CORDINER'S Description of Ceylon, vol. ii. p. 16.

† History of Sumatra, 4to 1811, p. 257, 381, 382.

**JAVA.** At Bantam, and in other parts of the island, fathers betroth their children at a very early age, lest they should be taken from them to supply the harems of kings, or be sold for slaves on the death of the fathers by the monarch, who is heir of all his subjects.\*

Among all the nations of Southern Asia, and the East Indian and South Sea Islands, the women are despised and oppressed; the wives and daughters of every class are offered to strangers, and compelled to prostitute themselves. They are moreover used with the utmost cruelty by their husbands, and not permitted to eat, or even to sit down, in the presence of the men; and yet, with marvellous inconsistency, many nations allow themselves to be governed by women, who sometimes reign with despotic authority.

**NEW HOLLAND.** “The aboriginal inhabitants of this distant region are, indeed, beyond comparison, the most barbarous on the surface of the globe. The residence of Europeans has been wholly ineffectual; the natives are still in the same state as at our first settlement. Every day are men and women to be seen in the streets of Sydney and Paramatta naked as in the moment of their birth. In vain have the more humane of the officers of the colony endeavoured to improve their condition: they still persist in the enjoyment of their ease and liberty in their own way, and turn a deaf ear to any advice upon this subject.”†

“They observe no particular ceremony in their marriages, though their mode of courtship is not without its singularity. When a young man sees a female to his fancy, he informs her she must accompany him home; the lady refuses; he not only enforces compliance with

\* VOGEL, p. 649. Voyages des Hollandois, i. 349.

† TURNBULL'S Voyage round the World, p. 6.

threats, but blows: thus the gallant, according to the custom, never fails to gain the victory, and bears off the willing, though struggling pugilist. The colonists, for some time, entertained the idea that the women were compelled, and forced away against their inclinations; but the young ladies informed them, that this mode of gallantry was the custom, and perfectly to their taste.\*

**PERSIA.** “ Women are not allowed to join in the public prayers at the mosques. They are directed to offer up their devotions at home, or if they attend the place of public worship, it must be at a period when the male sex are not there. This practice is founded upon the authority of the traditionary sayings of the prophet, and is calculated to confirm that inferiority and seclusion, to which the female sex are doomed by the laws of Mahomed.

“ In Persia, women are seldom publicly executed; nor can their crimes, from their condition in society, be often of a nature to demand such examples; but they are exposed to all the violence and injustice of domestic tyranny; and innocent females are too often included in the punishment of their husbands and fathers, particularly where those are of high rank. Instances frequently occur where women are tortured, to make them reveal the concealed wealth of which they are supposed to have a knowledge; and when a nobleman or minister is put to death, it is not unusual to give away his wives and daughters as slaves; and sometimes (though rarely) they are bestowed on the lowest classes in the community. There are instances of the wives of men of high rank being given to mule-drivers.”†

**ARABIA.** The ancient Arabs considered the birth of a daughter as a misfortune, and they frequently buried

\* Turnbull, p. 11.

† MALCOLM'S History of Persia, vol. ii. p. 333, 454, 455, 4to. 1815.

daughters alive as soon as they were born, lest they should be impoverished by having to provide for them, or should suffer disgrace on their account.\*

“ The horrid practice of female infanticide has been an usage of many nations. Among the ancient Arabs, as among the Rajpoots of the present day, it proceeded as much from a jealous sense of honour, as the pressure of want.”†

Of eastern manners, in general, it has been remarked, that “ excepting the Chinese and Javanese, all the nations of the south of Asia, and all the inhabitants of the East Indian and South Sea islands, offer the Europeans their wives and daughters, or compel them to prostitute themselves to strangers.”‡

“ A man, in the East, dares not inquire concerning the health of the wife or daughter of his most intimate friend, because this would instantly excite suspicion of illicit views and connexions; neither does etiquette permit him to make mention himself of his own wife or daughter. They are included among the domestic animals, or comprehended in the general denomination of the house or the family. When, however, an Oriental is obliged to mention his wife or his daughter, in conversation with a physician, or any other person whom he wishes to treat with deference and respect, he always introduces the subject with some such apology as we make in Europe, when we are obliged to speak of things which are regarded as disgusting or obscene. Conformably with this Asiatic prejudice, Tamerlane was highly affronted with the vanquished Turkish emperor Bajazet, for mentioning,

\* SALE'S KORAN, vol. ii. p. 75, n. and 472, n.

† MALCOLM'S History of Persia, vol. i. p. 173, n.

‡ DAMPIER, ii. p. 6, 86. FORSTER'S Voyage, i. p. 212. ii. p. 71. MESSNERS, vol. i. p. 80.

in his presence, such impure creatures as women are considered by the Orientals.”\*

## AMERICA.

### NORTHERN INDIANS.

Here all the gentle morals, such as play  
Through life's more cultur'd walks, and charm the way ;  
These far dispers'd, on tim'rous pinions fly,  
To sport and flutter in a kinder sky.

GOLDSMITH.

The women cook the victuals, but though of the highest rank, they are never permitted to partake of it, till all the males, even the servants, have eaten what they think proper ; and in times of scarcity, it is frequently their lot to be left without a single morsel ; and should they be detected in helping themselves during the business of cookery, they would be subject to a severe beating ; and be considered afterward, through life, as having forfeited their character.

“ The accounts we have had of the effects of the small-pox on that nation (the Maha Indians) are most distressing ; it is not known in what way it was first communicated to them, though probably by some war party. They had been a military and powerful people ; but when these warriors saw their strength wasting before a malady which they could not resist, their phrensy was extreme ; they burnt their village, and many of them put to death their *wives* and *children*, to save them from so cruel an affliction, and that all might go together to some better country.”†

WEST INDIES. *Hayti* (late St. Domingo.) Extract of a letter, dated Nov. 1810. “ The Indigenes, or natives of

\* ARVIEUX, i. p. 229, 230. MEINERS, vol. i. p. 96.

† LEWIS and CLARKE'S Travels up the Missouri, p. 33, 34. 4to. 1814.

Hayti, are extremely ignorant ; but few can read : their religion is Catholic ; but neither it, or its priests, are much respected. That they are in a most awful state of darkness, is but too evident : mothers are actually panders to their own daughters, and reap the fruit of their prostitution. The endearing name of father is scarcely ever heard, as the children but rarely know to whom they are indebted for existence.”\*

**SOUTH AMERICA.** In this region there are whole nations of cannibals, who devour their captives. Sometimes they slay their own wives, and invite their neighbours to the repast.

**NEW ZEALAND.** “ Tippechu, the chieftain,” says Mr. Savage, “ has a well-constructed dwelling on this island, and a large collection of spears, war-mail, and other valuables. A short distance from the residence of the chief is an edifice, every way similar to a dove-cote, standing upon a single post, and not larger than dove-cotes usually are. In this Tippechu confined one of his daughters several years ; we understood she had fallen in love with a person of inferior condition, and that these means were adopted to prevent her from bringing disgrace upon her family. The space allotted to the lady would neither allow of her standing up, or stretching at her length ; she had a trough, in which her food was deposited as often as was thought necessary, during her confinement ; and I could not find that she was allowed any other accommodation. These privations, and all converse being denied her, proves that Tippechu was determined to exhibit a severe example to his subjects ; at least to such of the young ladies of this part of New Zealand, as might be inclined to degrade themselves and their families by unsuitable alliances. The long confinement, with all its

\* Seventh Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society, 1811, p. 59.

inconveniences, produced the desired effect, in rendering the princess obedient to the wishes of her royal parent. This barbarous case, which is ornamented with much grotesque carving, still remains as a memento in *terrorem* to all the young ladies under Tippechu's government."\*

## AFRICA.

**TUNIS.** "The Tunisines have a curious custom of fattening up their young ladies for marriage. A girl, after she is betrothed, is cooped up in a small room; shackles of silver and gold are put upon her ankles and wrists, as a piece of dress. If she is to be married to a man who has discharged, despatched, or lost a former wife, the shackles which the former wife wore, are put upon the new bride's limbs; and she is fed, until they are filled up to the proper thickness. This is sometimes no easy matter, particularly if the former wife was fat, and the present should be of a slender form. The food used for this custom, worthy of barbarians, is a seed called *drough*: which is of an extraordinary fattening quality, and also famous for rendering the milk of nurses rich and abundant. With this seed, and their national dish "*cuscusu*," the bride is literally crammed, and many actually die under the spoon."†

**MOROCCO.** "When an ill-disposed husband becomes jealous or discontented with his wife, he has too many opportunities of treating her cruelly: he may tyrannize over her without control; no one can go to her assistance, for no one is authorized to enter his harem without permission. Jealousy or hatred rises so high in the breast of a Moor, that death is often the consequence to the wretched female, who has excited, perhaps innocent-

\* Some Account of New Zealand, 1807, p. 13.

† MAGGILL'S Account of Tunis, p. 92.

ly, the anger of her husband. A father, however fond of his daughter, cannot assist her even if informed of the ill treatment she suffers ; the husband alone is lord paramount : if, however, he should be convicted of murdering his wife, he would suffer death ; but this is difficult to ascertain, even should she bear the marks of his cruelty or dastardly conduct, for who is to detect it ? Instances have been known, when the woman has been cruelly beaten and put to death, and the parents have been informed of her decease as if it had been occasioned by sickness, and she has been buried accordingly : but this difficulty of bringing the men to justice, holds only among the powerful bashaws, and persons in the highest stations : and these, to avoid a retaliation of similar practices on *their* children, sometimes prefer giving their daughters in marriage to men of an inferior station in life, who are more amenable to justice.”\*

This writer informs us also, that “ in Morocco, slaves are placed in the public market-place, and there turned about and examined, in order to ascertain their value.” p. 249. “ A young girl of ROUSSA, of exquisite beauty, was once sold at Morocco, whilst I was there, for four hundred ducats [of 3s. 8d. sterling,] whilst the average price of slaves is about one hundred ; so much depends on the fancy or the imagination of the purchaser.” p. 247.

DARFUR. “ Slaves indeed, both male and female, rarely draw near their master, if he be seated, except creeping on their knees. A man, who is possessed of several women, rarely enters the apartments of any of them, but sends for one or more of them at a time to his own. Whether free or slaves, they enter it on their knees, and with indications of timidity and respect. . . . The slaves are rarely allowed to wear any covering on

\* JACKSON'S Account of the Empire of Morocco, 4to. 1809, p. 152.

their feet. Free women, on the contrary, are ordinarily distinguished by a kind of sandal; which, however, is always taken off when they come into the presence of, or have occasion to pass, a person of any consideration of the other sex. It is not uncommon to see a man on a journey, mounted idly on an ass, whilst his wife is pacing many a weary step on foot behind him; and moreover, perhaps, carrying a supply of provisions or culinary utensils. Yet it is not to be supposed, that the man is despotic in his house; the voice of the female has its full weight.”\*

**MANDINGOES.** “About noon,” says Mr. Park, “I arrived at Kolor, a considerable town; near the entrance into which I observed, hanging upon a tree, a sort of masquerade habit, made of the bark of trees; which, I was told on inquiry, belonged to Mumbo Jumbo. This is a strange bugbear, common to all the Mandingo towns, and much employed by the Pagan natives in keeping their women in subjection; for as the Kafas are not restricted in the number of their wives, every one marries as many as he can conveniently maintain; and as it frequently happens that the ladies disagree among themselves, family quarrels sometimes rise to such a height, that the authority of the husband can no longer preserve peace in his household. In such cases, the interposition of Mumbo Jumbo is called in, and is always decisive.

“This strange minister of justice (who is supposed to be either the husband himself, or some person instructed by him,) disguised in the dress that has been mentioned, and armed with the rod of public authority, announces his coming (whenever his services are required) by loud and dismal screams in the woods near the town. He

\* **BROWN'S Travels in Africa, &c.** 2d ed. 4to. 1806, p. 335, 339.

begins the pantomime at the approach of night ; and, as soon as it is dark, he enters the town, and proceeds to the Bentang, at which all the inhabitants immediately assemble.

“ It may easily be supposed, that this exhibition is not much relished by the women ; for as the person in disguise is entirely unknown to them, every married female suspects that the visit may possibly be intended for herself : but they dare not refuse to appear, when they are summoned ; and the ceremony commences with songs and dances, which continue till midnight, about which time Mumbo fixes on the offender. This unfortunate victim being thereupon immediately seized, is stripped naked, tied to a post, and severely scourged with Mumbo’s rod, amidst the shouts and derision of the whole assembly ; and it is remarkable, that the rest of the women are the loudest in their exclamations on this occasion against their unhappy sister. Daylight puts an end to this indecent and unmanly revel.”\*

“ In the Mandingo countries,” says Durand, “ there is a mosque in every town, from the steeple of which the people are called to prayers, the same as in Turkey. Polygamy is practised in these regions in its utmost latitude. The women are frequently hostages for alliance and peace ; and the chiefs of two tribes, who have been at war, cement their treaties by an exchange of their daughters : private individuals do the same ; and this circumstance may be the reason why the chiefs, in particular, have such a great number of women. A girl is frequently betrothed to a man as soon as she is born. On the day agreed on for the marriage, the bridegroom places on the road which the bride has to pass, several

\* PARK’S Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa, &c. 4to. 1799, p. 39.

of his people at different distances, with brandy and other refreshments; for if these articles be not furnished in abundance, the conductors of the bride will not advance a step further, though they may have got three parts of the way on their journey. On approaching the town, they stop, and are joined by the friends of the bridegroom, who testify their joy by shouting, drinking, and letting off their pieces.”\*

**MOORS OF BENORON, &c.** “The education of the girls is neglected altogether: mental accomplishments are but little attended to by the women; nor is the want of them considered, by the men, as a defect in the female character. They are regarded, I believe, as an inferior species of animals; and seem to be brought up for no other purpose, than that of administering to the sensual pleasures of their imperious masters. Voluptuousness is, therefore, considered as their chief accomplishment, and slavish submission as their indispensable duty.”†

**KAMALIA.** “If a man takes a fancy to any one [of the young women,] it is not considered as absolutely necessary, that he should make an overture to the girl herself. The first object is to agree with the parents, concerning the recompense to be given them for the loss of the company and services of their daughter. The value of two slaves is a common price, unless the girl is thought very handsome; in which case, the parents will raise their demand very considerably. If the lover is rich enough and willing to give the sum demanded, he then communicates his wishes to the damsel; but her consent is, by no means, necessary to the match; for if the parents agree to it, and eat a few kolla-nuts, which are presented by the suiter as an earnest of the bargain, the

\* DURAND'S Voyage to Senegal, p. 104, 105.

† PARK'S Travels, p. 157.

young lady must either have the man of their choice or continue unmarried, for she cannot after be given to another. If the parents should attempt it, the lover is then authorized, by the laws of the country, to seize upon the girl as his slave.

“ The negroes, whether Mahomedan or Pagan, allow a plurality of wives. The Mahomedans alone are, by their religion, confined to four ; and as the husband commonly pays a great price for each, he requires from all of them the utmost deference and submission, and beats them more like hired servants than companions.”\*

BANISERILE. “ One of our slatus was a native of this place, from which he had been absent three years. This man invited me to go with him to his house ; at the gate of which his friends met him, with many expressions of joy ; shaking hands with him, embracing him, and singing and dancing before him. As soon as he had seated himself upon a mat by the threshold of his door, a young woman (h’s intended bride) brought a little water in a calabash, and kneeling down before him, desired him to wash his hands ; when he had done this, the girl, with a tear of joy sparkling in her eyes, drank the water ; this being considered as the greatest proof she could possibly give him of her fidelity and attachment.”†

THE KAFFERS. The principal article of their trade with the Tambookié nation, is the exchange of cattle for their young women. Almost every chief has Tambookié wives, though they pay much dearer for them than for those of their own people. Polygamy is allowed in its fullest extent, and without any inconvenience resulting from the practice, as it is confined nearly to the chiefs. The circumstances of the common people will

\* PARK’S Travels, p. 266, 267.

† PARK’S Travels, p. 347.

rarely allow them the indulgence of more than one wife, as women are not to be obtained without purchase. The females being considered as the property of their parents, are invariably disposed of by sale. The common price of a wife is an ox, or a couple of cows. Love with them is a very confined passion, taking but little hold on the mind. When an offer is made for the purchase of a daughter, she feels little inclination to refuse; she considers herself as an article in the market, and is neither surprised, nor unhappy, nor interested, on being told that she is about to be disposed of. There is no previous courtship, no exchange of fine sentiments, no nice feelings, nor little kind attentions, which catch the affections and attach the heart.”\*

THE PEOPLE OF SNEUWBERG, GRAAFF REGNET. “The only grievance of which I ever heard them complain,” says Mr. Barrow, “and which appears to be a real inconvenience to all who inhabit the remote parts of the colony, is a ridiculous and absurd law respecting marriage; and as it seems to have no foundation in reason, and little in policy, except indeed, like the marriage-acts in other countries, it be intended as a check to population, it ought to be repealed. By this law, the parties are both obliged to be present at the Cape, in order to answer certain interrogatories, and pass the forms of office there, the chief intention of which seems to be that of preventing improper marriages from being contracted; as if the commissaries appointed to this office, at the distance of five or six hundred miles, should be better acquainted with the connexions and other circumstances regarding the parties, than the landrost, the clergyman, and the members of the council residing upon the spot. The

\* BARROW'S Travels in Southern Africa, second edit. 1806, vol. i. p. 159.

expense of the journey to the young couple is greater than they can frequently well afford. For decency's sake they must set out in two wagons, though in the course of a month's journey across a desert country, it is said they generally make one serve the purpose; the consequence of which is, that nine times out of ten the consummation of the marriage precedes the ceremony. This naturally produces another bad effect. The poor girl, after the familiarities of a long journey, lies entirely at the mercy of the man, who, having satisfied his curiosity or his passion, sometimes deserts her before their arrival at the altar; and it has sometimes happened, that the lady has repented of her choice in the course of the journey, and driven home again in her own wagon. Though, in our own country, a trip to Scotland be sometimes taken, when obstacles at a nearer distance could not safely be surmounted, yet it would be considered as a very ridiculous, as well as vexatious law, that should oblige the parties intending to marry, to proceed from the Land's End to London to carry their purpose into execution. The inhabitants of Graaff Regnet must travel twice that distance, in order to be married."\*

NEGRO NATIONS. "It is a practice equally, nay, perhaps still more common among the negroes than among the Americans, to offer their wives and daughters to Europeans."† "Parents sell their daughters not only to lovers, but to suiters of any kind, without doubting or even asking their consent. The negroes in general, receive for their daughters a few bottles of brandy, and, at the furthest, a few articles of wearing apparel; and when these prices are paid, the fathers conduct their

\* BARROW'S Travels, vol. i. p. 206.

† DAMPIER, ii. p. 86.

willing children to the huts of the purchasers.”\* “A negro may love his wife with all the affection that it is possible for a negro to possess, but he never permits her to eat with him, because he would imagine himself contaminated, or his dignity lessened, by such a condescension; and at this degrading distance, the very negro-slaves in the West Indies keep their wives, though it might be presumed that the hardships of their common lot would have tended to unite them in the closest manner.”† “The poorest and meanest negro, even though he be a slave, is generally waited upon by his wife as by a subordinate being, on her knees. On their knees the negro women are obliged to present to their husbands tobacco and drink; on their knees they salute them when they return from hunting, or any other expedition; lastly, on their knees, they drive away the flies from their lords and masters while they sleep.”‡

**GAGERS.** Various writers of credit and veracity report, that in the southern portion of Africa, many princes and chieftains keep great numbers of young girls, not merely to gratify their passions, but to satiate their tiger-like appetite for human flesh. In order to convince ourselves, that the fate of the black women of Africa is not less severe than the condition of the brown females of the American continent, it is sufficient to state, that among the negro-women, to whom Cavazzi administered baptism, some acknowledged with tears, that they had killed five, others seven, and others again ten children, with their own hands. Notwithstanding the despotic authority of the legislatrix of the Gagers, she was unable, even by the strictest prohibition, to restrain her warriors

\* DES MARCHAIS, ii. p. 178.

† LABAT, ii. p. 299. ADANSON, p. 32. OLDENDORP, i. p. 376.

‡ MEINERS, i. p. 52—54.

from regaling themselves with the flesh of women. Rich and powerful chieftains continued to keep whole flocks of young girls, as they would of lambs, calves, or any other animals, and had some of them daily slaughtered for the table; for the Gagers prefer human flesh to every other species of animal food, and among the different classes of human kind, they hold that of young females in particular estimation.\*

III. PATRIARCHAL TIMES, AND THE PERIOD OF THE JEWISH THEOCRACY, require a brief examination, as a necessary means of elucidating the general subject.

Having already, in the preceding inquiries, ascended to an early date, and traced the condition of women through a long series of historic record to the present age, it may seem an imperfection in the plan to conduct the reader back to a still more remote antiquity than has hitherto been noticed; but this arrangement will be allowed, perhaps, to be founded in propriety, upon observing that the design was first to exhibit a complete series of illustrations, derived from a view of the circumstances of mankind as *destitute of the light of revelation*, and then to compare the condition of the female sex under the influence of a precursory and imperfect system of the *true religion*, with their actual state, or with the privileges secured to them by the nobler manifestations of CHRISTIANITY. By this mode of conducting the argument we trace the great epochs in the history of female amelioration: the glory of woman appears at first eclipsed, as behind a dark cloud, which the passions of a degenerate race had interposed to hide

\* CAVAZZI, ii. p. 123. MEINERS, i. p. 59, 69. See also REES's Cyclopædie, and Encyclop. Brit. under the words *Ansiko*, *Anthropophagi*, *Batta*. MARSDEN's Hist. of Sumatra, 3d ed. 4to. 1811, p. 390—395, & 463.

and debase her : she then emerges, though partially, to view, through the mists and obscurities of a temporary dispensation, adapting itself to the circumstances of mankind as they then existed, but unsuited to what they were destined to become—till at length, “ fair as the moon,” ascending to the noon of her glory, and tinging with the mildness of her beam every earthly object, woman attains her undisputed eminence, and diffuses her benignant influence in society.

Were we to attach entire credit to the pleasing descriptions of the muses, we must admit, that the earliest ages of the world deserved the epithet of “ golden,” as exhibiting man devoid of those artificial wants which refinement and luxury have superinduced, and divested of those violent prejudices, that selfishness and that arrogance, which have filled the cup of human woe to the brim : we should see him inhabiting a tent of the simplest construction, furnishing himself with necessary subsistence with his own hands, sharing with his companion the services of domestic life, breathing the very soul of hospitality, and adorned with the most attractive manners : we should even see princes and princesses devoting themselves to what we are accustomed to denominate the menial offices both of husbandry and house-keeping, but without any sense of degradation in the one sex, or any tyrannical assumption in the other.

The authority of the sacred writings also upon this point is express and decisive. The most distinguished of the human race were, in patriarchal times, devoted to rural occupations and to plain habits ; and it is not easy, nor is it altogether desirable, to divest oneself of those feelings of enchantment which the view of such scenes and manners naturally inspires. Who can remain unaffected at the recital of the story of an Abraham.

running to the herd and fetching a young and tender calf to refresh his angelic visitors ;\* or at the various memorable instances of simplicity that occur in the stories of Isaac, Jacob, and their contemporaries ?

But the question is, whether the actual condition of women did or did not indicate the lordly views of their husbands, and a general state of slavish subordination ? What can be said to the practices of polygamy and concubinage, which prevailed even in these golden times and in pious families ? Do they evince any proper estimate of the character of women ? or have they not an evident tendency to degrade them ? Does not their very institution assert the subserviency of the one sex to the will and pleasure of the other ? † The state of women may not only be inferred under such circumstances, but is clearly seen. Wives possessed no other advantages over concubines than the right of inheriting ; and domestic unions were formed without any reference to the nobler felicities of social intercourse. Hence infertility not only excited dislike, but was held to justify repudiation. In the earliest ages, marriage was not only very unceremonious with regard to the mode in which it was conducted, but this important union was arranged without any previous agreement between the parties, and wives were often purchased. Men had the right of annulling all the oaths and engagements of their daughters and wives, if they had not been present when they were contracted. “ We can discover,” says Segur, “ in these first ages, nothing worthy of the title of ‘ golden,’ which has been applied to them. Abraham and Isaac were continually afraid of being assassinated for their wives ; and the

\* Gen. xviii.

† This subject has been already more than once remarked upon in this work. See vol. i. p. 12 and 224.

oath which they enacted from their neighbours not to attempt their lives savoured little of a *golden age*.”

Under the Jewish theocracy the Levitical law appointed a variety of regulations which evinced their imperfect emancipation from a state of inferiority. They were in particular subjected to the trial of the waters of jealousy, not only in cases of real departure from conjugal fidelity, but when a suspicion existed in the mind of the husband, even though it were without any foundation :\* and there were cases in which misconduct of a similar nature exposed them to be stoned to death.† The doctrine of vows also, in the cases of daughters, wives, and widows, corroborates the general argument, by evincing the marked subordination of the woman to the man. “ If a woman also vow a vow unto the Lord, and bind herself by a bond, being in her father’s house in her youth ; and her father hear her vow, and her bond wherewith she hath bound her soul, and her father shall hold his peace at her : then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she hath bound her soul shall stand. But if her father disallow her in the day that he heareth ; not any of her vows, or of her bonds, wherewith she hath bound her soul, shall stand : and the Lord shall forgive her, because her father disallowed her. And if she had at all an husband, when she vowed, or uttered aught out of her lips, wherewith she bound her soul ; and her husband heard it, and held his peace at her in the day that he heard it : then her vows shall stand, and her bonds wherewith she bound her soul shall stand. But if her husband disallowed her on the day that he heard it ; then he shall make her vow which she vowed, and that which she uttered with her lips, wherewith she bound her soul, of none effect : and the Lord shall for-

\* Numb. v. 12, &c.

† Deut. xxii. 20, 21.

give her. But every vow of a widow, and of her that is divorced, wherewith they have bound their souls, shall stand against her. And if she vowed in her husband's house, or bound her soul by a bond with an oath; and her husband heard it, and held his peace at her, and disallowed her not: then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she bound her soul shall stand. But if her husband hath utterly made them void on the day he heard them; then whatsoever proceeded out of her lips concerning her vows, or concerning the bond of her soul, shall not stand: her husband hath made them void; and the Lord shall forgive her. Every vow, and every binding oath to afflict the soul, her husband may establish it, or her husband may make it void. But if her husband altogether hold his peace at her from day to day; then he establisheth all her vows, or all her bonds, which are upon her: he confirmeth them, because he held his peace at her in the day that he heard them. But if he shall any ways make them void after that he hath heard them; then he shall bear her iniquity.”\*

From the dark and deeply shaded back-ground of the picture of female degradation, formed by the facts which have now been adduced, and which might easily be corroborated by an immense accumulation of evidence, Christianity is brought forward with conspicuous prominence, and in all her gracefulness. The contrast is at once striking and affecting: the moral scene brightens upon the view as we contemplate this attractive figure, combining majesty and mildness—fascination in her smiles and heaven in her eye.

The superiority which the religion of Jesus has secured to women above the state of barbaric degradation.

\* Num.b. xxx. 3—15.

**Mahometan slavery, and Jewish subjection, proclaims the glory of that system, which has already ameliorated society to its minutest subdivisions, and will eventually transform the moral desert of human being into a paradise of beauty and bliss. The argument, however, will be seen with more distinctness, by the following brief detail.**

1. *The personal conduct of the divine Author of Christianity, tended to elevate the female sex to a degree of consideration in society before unknown.* During the life of our Lord, women were admitted to a holy familiarity with him, attended his public labours, ministered to his wants, and adhered to him with heroic zeal, when their attachment exposed them to insult, danger, and death.

Immediately after the marriage of Cana in Galilee, where he attended with his mother, he accompanied her with his brethren and disciples to Capernaum.\* That excellent spirit, for which he was remarkable from his earliest years, continued to influence his mind in maturer life, and taught him justly to appreciate and perfectly to exemplify the domestic and social duties. He did not scruple to converse with a Samaritan woman, who came to draw water at Jacob's well, though his disciples, in whose minds Jewish prejudices continued to prevail, expressed their astonishment at his condescension.† Never was there so fine a specimen of patience, gentleness, and humility, blended with true dignity, as upon that remarkable occasion. He instructed her ignorance, endured her petulance, corrected her mistakes, awakened her conscience, converted her heart, and eventually honoured her as a messenger of mercy and salvation to her Samaritan friends. At another time, when the disciples rebuked those who brought their little children to him, that he might put his hands on them and pray, he kindly in-

\* John ii. 12.

† John iv. 27.

terposed ; and evincing the most sympathetic tenderness towards the solitudes which, on such an occasion, would necessarily pervade the maternal bosom, he said, “ Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me ; for of such is the kingdom of heaven : and he laid his hands on them.”\* On various occasions, when he performed some of his most illustrious miracles, females were personally concerned, and shared his distinguished notice and condolence. Such particularly was the case when he met the funeral procession at Nain : it was that of a young man, represented in the simple and affecting language of the evangelist, as “ the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.” The meeting was apparently casual ; but Jesus was instantly and deeply impressed with the circumstances : he in particular felt compassion for the weeping parent—addressed her in kind and gentle terms—remanded the spirit from its eternal flight, to inhabit again for a season the body from which it had so lately departed, and delivered the reanimated youth to *his mother*.† He blended his tears with those of Martha and Mary, at the sepulchre of their brother ; and after instructing them upon the subject of the resurrection from the dead, restored him to their wishes and affections.‡ Women “ ministered unto Jesus of their substance,”—“ the daughters of Jerusalem” bewailed him when he was led to crucifixion—and the “ women that followed him from Galilee were deeply interested spectators of his sufferings, observed his sepulchre, and prepared spices and ointments.§ It was Mary Magdalene who enjoyed the honour and happiness of a first manifestation after Jesus was risen from the dead, and she was commissioned to go and inform the rest of his

\* Matt. ix. 13—15. † Luke vii. 11—15. ‡ John xi. 25—27.

§ Luke viii. 2, 3. xxiii. 27, 28, 49, 55, 56. Matt. xxvii. 55, 56.

sorrowing disciples.\* “ The frequent mention,” says Doddridge, “ which is made in the evangelists of the generous and courageous zeal of some *pious women* in the service of Christ, and especially of the faithful and resolute constancy with which they attended him in those last scenes of his suffering, might very possibly be intended to obviate that haughty and senseless contempt, which the pride of men, often irritated by those vexations to which their own irregular passions have exposed them, has in all ages affected to throw on that sex, which probably, in the sight of God, constitute by far the better half of mankind; and to whose care and tenderness the wisest and best of men generally owe and ascribe much of the daily comfort and enjoyment of their lives.”

2. *As the conduct of Christ naturally induced his disciples to imitate the example of their illustrious Master, the subsequent admission of women to all the privileges of the Christian Church, tended exceedingly to confirm their elevation, and evince their importance in society.* When the primitive converts to the Christian faith wished publicly to avow their dereliction of heathen idolatry, and their emancipation from the bondage of Judaism, by being baptized in water, *both sexes* were admitted without distinction to this solemn rite. At a very early period of the primitive church, when the city of Samaria received the word of God by the preaching of Philip, which, with its accompanying miracles, diffused an universal joy, “ they were baptized, both **MEN** and **WOMEN**; † and the apostle Paul, in writing to the Galatians, expresses himself in this triumphant strain: “ For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free,

\* Mark xvi. 9, 10.

† Acts viii. 12.

there is neither MALE NOR FEMALE, for ye are ALL ONE in Christ Jesus.”\*

Sentiments like these, combined with the practice of an institution so expressive and so remarkable, tended to circulate among the primitive Christians those feelings of respect and affection for women, which, by elevating them to their proper rank in society, must necessarily purify the public morals, ameliorate individual character, and ennoble the intercourse of life. Admitted to an equal participation of the privileges of God’s house, where every minor distinction is annihilated by the predominance of a diffusive charity, and feeling that their present joys and future destinies were blended with those of the “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling;”† the female part of the community rose into importance as rational, but especially as immortal beings.

After the ascension of Christ, the historian of the Acts of the Apostles informs us, that “the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus,” assembled with the apostles to worship in the upper room at Jerusalem;‡ being equally interested in the great events which had recently occurred, and in the devotional services in which they now engaged. Paul directs Timothy to treat “the elder women as mothers, the younger as sisters, with all purity.”§ He also desires him to “honour widows that are widows indeed,” and to afford them all proper relief by charitable contributions, a practice for which the first Christians were highly distinguished.|| Women are represented by an apostle himself as *fellow-labourers* in the Gospel,\*\* assisting them, not only by their example, to which he willingly pointed the attention of the churches, but by their prayers, their visits of mercy, and other si-

\* Gal. iii. 26—28.

† Heb. iii. 1.

‡ Acts i. 14.

§ 1 Tim. v. 2.

|| Comp. Acts vi. 1, &c.

\*\* I Phil. iv. 3.

milar methods of co-operating in the propagation of the truth, and the promotion of individual happiness.

As the *immediate* effects of original transgression upon the woman were most obvious and most deplorable, and as her debasement from the eminence assigned her by the Creator has been *completed* by the misrule of passion, and the gradual advancement of human degeneracy; so the *direct* operation of Christianity is apparent, according to the degree of its prevalence, in elevating her to a state which was known before only in the garden of Eden—a state in which she again assumes a rank, which regenerated man cheerfully concedes, wherein she regains the lost paradise of love and tenderness; while the more *remote* influence of this system is discernible in the recognition of her rights, wherever its benign dominion extends. Now she ascends to the glory of an intelligent creature, gladdens by her presence the solitary hours of existence, beguiles by her converse and sympathy the rough and tedious paths of life, and not only acquires personal dignity and importance, but in some measure new modifies, purifies, and exalts the character of man. If we cannot but weep over the affecting representation of the departure of Adam and Eve from the scene of innocence and of celestial manifestation, when

“ The brandish'd sword of God before them blaz'd  
Fierce as a comet: which with terrid heat  
And vapours, as the Libyan air adust,  
Begun to parch that temperate clime; whercat,  
In either hand the hast'ning angel caught  
Our iing'ring parents, and to the eastern gate  
Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast  
To the subjected plain——”

and when, taking a hasty retrospect of their lost felicity, in consequence of transgression, and cherishing gloomy

forebodings of that melancholy futurity, which seemed already to pour from its dark clouds the deluging rain of grief and misery—

“ Some natural tears they dropp’d, but wip’d them soon ;  
 The world was all before them, where to choose  
 Their place of rest, and Providence their guide ;  
 They hand in hand, with wand’ring steps and slow  
 Through Eden took their solitary way ;——”

—if we must mourn over so sad a scene, Christianity awakens sympathies of an opposite description, by exhibiting a goodly number of their descendants as inhabitants of the CHRISTIAN CHURCH—the grand repository of heavenly blessings, and the dwelling-place of peace—at whose holy altar of truth souls are wedded, and at whose sacramental board they celebrate an everlasting union. Nothing can present a scene more worthy the attention of mankind, or more attractive to the eyes of witnessing angels, than this association of persons in pious fellowship, without distinction of birth or country, age or sex ; participators in equal proportions of the same happiness, children of one common parent, and heirs of one rich inheritance !

3. *The great principles asserted by the religion of Jesus, secure to women, as an unquestionable right, that exaltation in society, which his conduct, and that of his followers, conferred. These principles may be traced in the New Testament, either as necessarily comprehending, by their generality, a proper treatment of the female sex, or as developing themselves in particular regulations and enactments.*

Christianity breathes a spirit of the most diffusive charity and good will ; and wherever its “ power ” is felt, it moulds the character into the image of benevolence.

Love is the beauty and the strength of this "spiritual building;" a love, at once comprehensive in its range, and minute in its ramifications: adjusting the diversified claims of society and religion with perfect exactness, and directing the exercise of all the social affections. The fountain being purified, the streams become pure; the heart, which is the centre and spring of moral action, being renewed, the conduct will be distinguished by a corresponding degree of virtue, goodness, and sanctity. But as Christianity produces a general transformation of character, by subduing the ferocious and brutal propensities of man; clearing away the rank and noxious weeds that overspread human nature, and sowing the seeds of moral excellence, the effect must be discernible in the whole intercourse of life. Immorality trembles, domestic tyranny retires abashed before the majesty of religion, and peace pervades that dwelling where power was law, and woman a slave. In fact, every precept of the Gospel that inculcates kindness, sympathy, gentleness, meekness, courtesy, and all the other graces that bloom in the garden of the Lord—indirectly, and by no unintelligible or forced application, provides for the honour and glory of the female sex. If the most effectual method of degrading woman be to barbarize man, the certain means of dignifying her is to christianize him.

It is to be noticed also, that there is no sex in conscience, and that for the discharge of the duties of piety, each is equally capacitated, and therefore equally responsible. If men were to give an account at the tribunal of heaven, not only for their personal actions and principles, but for those of women, to whom they are related by the ties of consanguinity, or with whom they are connected by circumstances, there would be some reason in assuming a jurisdiction over their faith, and disputing their

claims to rationality and to respectful treatment ; but not to insist upon the moral constitution of the female sex, and the whole drift of divine revelation, the very terms of the initiatory ordinance of the Christian church, to which they are equally entitled, illustrates and secures their prerogatives—*sc.* it is “ the answer of a good conscience towards God.”\* When men impose fetters upon other men, condemning, imprisoning, fining, scourging, burning, and anathematizing them, merely because they dare to think for themselves in matters which can only concern God and their own souls, and will not have their faith decreed by arbitrary power and exasperated ignorance, it need not excite surprise, that they should assume the right of behaving to the weaker sex with all the capriciousness of despotism ; and no authority but that of Scripture, which maintains the privileges of *all thinking beings*, can effectually restrain the wickedness of man’s **UNMANLY** usurpation.

The precepts of Christianity bespeak its characteristic regard to the reciprocal duties and respective rank of the sexes, adjusting their claims with a nicety that precludes disputation, and an authority that commands assent. They are not arbitrary enactments ; but being founded in the highest reason, and connected with individual felicity, approve themselves to every well-regulated mind. In our behaviour to others, we are not only prohibited from indulging the vindictive and malignant passions, but exhorted to do them good by the employment of our pecuniary resources, social opportunities, and moral means, to advance both their temporal and eternal interests. While these principles necessarily comprise the discharge of all relative duties, these are besides specifically enumerated and enforced. Husbands, in whose hands barbarism had

\* 1 Pet. iii. 21.

placed a tyrannic sceptre, are required by the religion of Jesus to renounce their unjust domination, and to descend to the regulated and affectionate intercourse of the domestic hearth. It is expressly enjoined upon them to "love their wives," and not to be "bitter against them." "Let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself: so ought men to love their wives as their own bodies."—"Ye husbands, dwell with your wives according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life."\* "Let every one of you in particular so love his wife as himself, and the wife see that she reverence her husband."†

Christianity also expressly abolishes, at least by necessary implication, polygamy and the power of divorce, as they existed among barbarous nations, perpetuating the degradation of women, and spreading confusion in society. "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away, doth commit adultery."‡ "Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband."§ And, "Let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband."|| Paley remarks, "The manners of different countries have varied in nothing more than in their domestic constitutions. Less polished and more luxurious nations have either not perceived the bad effects of polygamy, or, if they did perceive

\* Col. iii. 19. 1 Pet. iii. 7.

† Eph. v. 33.

‡ Matt. xix. 9.

§ Rom. vii. 1, 2.

|| 1 Cor. vii. 2.

them, they who in such countries possessed the power of reforming the laws have been unwilling to resign their own gratifications. Polygamy is retained at this day among the Turks, and throughout every part of Asia in which Christianity is not professed. In Christian countries it is universally prohibited. In Sweden it is punished with death. In England, besides the nullity of the second marriage, it subjects the offender to transportation, or imprisonment and branding, for the first offence, and to capital punishment for the second. And whatever may be said in behalf of polygamy when it is authorized by the law of the land, the marriage of a second wife during the lifetime of the first, in countries where such a second marriage is void, must be ranked with the most dangerous and cruel of those frauds by which a woman is cheated out of her fortune, her person, and her happiness.

“The ancient Medes compelled their citizens, in one canton, to take seven wives; in another, each woman to receive five husbands; according as war had made, in one quarter of their country, an extraordinary havoc among the men, or the women had been carried away by an enemy from another. This regulation, so far as it was adapted to the proportion which subsisted between the number of males and females, was founded in the reason upon which the most improved nations of Europe proceed at present.

“Cæsar found among the inhabitants of this island a species of polygamy, if it may be so called, which was perfectly singular. *Uxores, says he, habent deni ducdenique inter se communes; et maximè fratres cum fratribus, parentesque cum liberis: sed si qui sint ex his nati, eorum habentur liberi, quo primum virgo quæque deducta est.*”

The same perspicuous writer adds, upon the subject of divorce, "The Scriptures seem to have drawn the obligation tighter than the law of nature left it. "Who-soever," saith Christ, "shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery : and whoso marrieth her which is put away, doth commit adultery."\* The law of Moses, for reasons of local expediency, permitted the Jewish husband to put away his wife ; but whether for every cause, or for what causes, appears to have been controverted amongst the interpreters of those times. Christ, the precepts of whose religion were calculated for more general use and observation, revokes this permission, (as given to the Jews "for the hardness of their hearts,") and promulgates a law which was thenceforward to confine divorces to the single cause of adultery in the wife. And I see no sufficient reason to depart from the plain and strict meaning of Christ's words. The rule was new. It both surprised and offended his disciples, yet Christ added nothing to relax or explain it.

"Inferior causes may justify the separation of husband and wife, although they will not authorize such a dissolution of the marriage contract, as would leave either party at liberty to marry again ; for it is that liberty, in which the danger and mischief of divorces principally consist. If the care of children does not require that they should live together, and it is become, in the serious judgment of both, necessary for their mutual happiness that they should separate, let them separate by consent. Nevertheless, this necessity can hardly exist, without guilt and misconduct on one side or on both. Moreover, cruelty, ill usage, extreme violence, or moroseness of temper, or other great and continual provo-

\* Matt. xix. 9.

cations, make it lawful for the party aggrieved to withdraw from the society of the offender, without his or her consent. The law which imposes the marriage vow, whereby the parties promise to 'keep to each other,' or in other words to live together, must be understood to impose it with a silent reservation of these cases; because the same law has constituted a judicial relief from the tyranny of her husband, by the divorce *à mensa et toro*, and by the provision which it makes for the separate maintenance of the injured wife. St. Paul, likewise, distinguishes between a wife merely separating herself from the family of her husband, and her marrying again: 'Let not the wife depart from her husband; but, and if she do depart, let her remain unmarried.'\*\*

Notwithstanding the survey we have taken of the general degradation of the female sex, where the benign influences of Christianity have been unfelt, the argument may be confronted by a formidable array of plausible objections. It may be said, that amidst the barbarity of the SCANDINAVIAN NATIONS, they treated their women with extraordinary respect. The Scythians exempted the daughter from the punishment in which the son was obliged to partake with the father, and the German women even inherited the throne. Some of the laws, among the Goths, respecting illicit intercourse, were highly reasonable and just, and our remote ancestors may be cited as examples of treating women with the utmost veneration. It may seem indicative also of the prevalence of similar sentiments, that the ancient mythologies abound in female divinities: the Phœnicians worshipped the goddess *Astarte*, the Scythians, *Appia*, the Scandinavians, *Friggia*, the wife of Odin. It may be further urged, with regard to the GREEKS and ROMANS, that

\* FALRY'S *Mor. Philos.* vol. i. b. 3. p. 3. ch. vi. & vii.

though the melancholy picture we have already drawn of their conduct be true, yet their history presents some remarkable evidences of the elevated condition of their women, and the honourable regard which they obtained. Among the former, indeed, few instances can be adduced, in addition to that of Areta, the daughter of Aristippus, who fixed upon her son the surname of *Μητροδιδακτος*, or *disciple of his mother*, in consequence of her having been his instructor in the sciences and philosophy. The Romans, at some periods of their history, paid extraordinary respect to their women; the institution of the vestals is a memorial of the estimation in which female virtue was held, and the emperor Heliogabalus was desirous that his wife should have a voice in the senate. They allowed their women to celebrate an annual feast, to commemorate the reconciliation between them and the Sabines, by means of their wives; and they erected an equestrian statue to Clœlia, and a temple to Fortune, in honour of the sex; because the mother and wife of Coriolanus had caused that hero to retire weeping from his native country, when he was irresistible by arms.\* But the most plausible objection to the general argument seems derivable from the history of CHIVALRY, under whose influence it is allèged that women were not only not degraded, but were actually advanced to the highest condition, and possessed the most commanding influence. The knights, at their installation, took solemn vows of self-devotement to the cause of female honour; and ladies were constantly engaged as umpires at tournaments, took off the armour of the conquerors, and invested them with magnificent robes. The middle ages witnessed the extraordinary sight of knight-errants wandering over distant countries, with their sword and lance in hand, to

\* PLUTARCH in Rom. I. p. 123. LIVY II. p. 13, 40.

contest the point of the beauty and virtue of their ladies, with all who ventured to intimate the slightest doubt or suspicion on the subject. Their expeditions were usually made in consequence of some requisition on the part of their mistresses, or to fulfil a vow voluntarily incurred in a moment of intoxication and excitement. ❧

The reply to these general objections has been in part anticipated.\* Christianity assigns to women their proper place in society, neither admitting of their being tyrannized over by despotic authority, nor impiously honoured by a ridiculous adulation. They are to be viewed as help meets, not as slaves ; to be respected and loved, but not deified. While the religion of Jesus raises them to great consideration in the scale of society, it imposes a salutary restraint upon human passions, and checks every approach to the assumption of an unnatural superiority. It bestows a rank which secures them from contempt or disregard, while it equally prevents a senseless adoration : so that its principles disallow the barbaric treatment of uncivilized nations and the follies of the chivalrous ages.

In the different periods and places to which the objection refers, the conduct of mankind was marked with inconsistency. Greece and Rome exhibit ample specimens of this nature ; and the times of chivalry afford illustrations equally remarkable. The knights of the order were not distinguished by fidelity to their wives, or by a concern for the education of their daughters : their devotion to the female sex was, in fact, without principle and without love : they fought, from vanity and fashion, for persons whom they had basely dishonoured and secretly despised ; and while their flattery and folly were sufficiently discreditable to their own under-

standings and hearts, they tended in a deplorable degree to corrupt the principles of those whom they professed to value.

It is further obvious, that in the very best periods of Greek and Roman history there existed no security against a change in the treatment of women, arising from the general recognition of any of those great principles of moral conduct which constitute the basis of good government and of well-regulated society. Passion predominated above reason, and received its impulse solely from casual circumstances. It was, in fact, accidental, whether it should operate amiably or malignantly; and the felicity of one half of the human species depended upon the precarious and ever vacillating humour of the other. Virtue was scarcely seen upon the earth, except at occasional and often distant visitations, or as she shed a fitful and flickering light into the retreats of systematic philosophy. Woman was at the mercy of every wind—to-day honoured—to-morrow despised—now a goddess—and anon a slave!

Viewing heathen countries in the most favourable aspect in which history presents them, and admitting to the fullest extent the correctness of those details of virtue and valour which she has transmitted to us, the conduct of the Celtic and Scandinavian nations, and instances deduced from cultivated and classic regions, or from modern times, can only be considered as *exceptions* which do not impugn the general argument, corroborated as it has been by a historical and geographical delineation of society in every age of the world, and every quarter of the globe.

Behold Christianity, then, walking forth in her purity and greatness to bless the earth, diffusing her light in every direction, distributing her charites on either hand,

quenching the flames of lust and the fires of ambition, silencing discord, spreading peace, and creating all things new ! Angels watch her progress, celebrate her influence, and anticipate her final triumphs ! The moral creation brightens beneath her smiles, and owns her renovating power ; at her approach man loses his fierceness and woman her chains ; each becomes blessed in the other, and God glorified in both !

# FEMALE

## SCRIPTURE BIOGRAPHY.



### THE VIRGIN MARY.

#### CHAPTER I.—SECTION I.

Congratulation of the angel Gabriel—advantages of the Christian dispensation—Eve and Mary compared—state of Mary's family at the incarnation—she receives an angelic visit—his promise to her of a son, and prediction of his future greatness—Mary goes to Elizabeth—their meeting—Mary's holy enthusiasm and remarkable language—Joseph informed of the miraculous conception by an angel—general remarks.

“**HAIL, THOU THAT ART HIGHLY FAVOURED, THE LORD IS WITH THEE! BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN!**”

Such was the congratulatory language in which the commissioned angel addressed the virgin of Nazareth, when about to announce the intention of Heaven, that she should become the mother of Jesus; and such the strain which we cannot help feeling disposed to adopt, while recording her illustrious name, and contemplating this wonderful transaction.

On Mary devolved the blessing which the most pious of women had for a long succession of ages so eagerly desired, and which had often created such an impatience for the birth of children, in some of whom they indulged the sublime hope of seeing the promised Messiah. In her offspring was accomplished the long series of prophecy which commenced even at the moment when the justice of God pronounced a sentence of condemnation upon rebellious man; and which, like a bright track extending through the moral night, and shining amidst

the typical shadows of the Mosaic dispensation, fixed the attention of patriarchs, and prophets, and saints, for four thousand years :—and upon this otherwise obscure and insignificant female beamed the first ray of that evangelical morning which rose upon the world with such blissful radiance, and is increasing to the “ perfect day.”

Infidels may contemplate the manifestation with unholy ridicule or vain indifference ; but we will neither consent to renounce the evidence afforded to the historic fact, nor cease to celebrate the mysterious miracle. We will unite with the impassioned angel, at least in the sentiment and spirit of his address ; and join the high praises of the midnight anthem, sung by descending spirits in the fields of Bethlehem : “ GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARDS MEN !”\*

In the course of Scripture history, we are now advanced to that period which the apostle emphatically denominates “ the last days,” in which “ God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past, unto the fathers by the prophets,” speaks to us “ by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.”† Let us hear his voice, admit his claims, and bow to his dictates. As truth arises upon us with greater splendour, we shall find that character is formed to greater maturity under the immediate influence of “ the ministration of righteousness” which “ exceeds in glory.”‡ By the unparalleled transactions of this age we shall see the whole energy of the human mind drawn forth, and furnished with ample scope for exercise ; all the faculties become ennobled and purified ; and the female sex especially, from the days of Elizabeth and Mary to the close of the sacred record, becomes marked with a holy singularity. By the starlight of the former dispensation, we have discovered many women of superior excellence, availing themselves of all the means

\* Luke ii. 14.

† Heb. i. 1, 2

‡ 2 Cor. iii. 9.

they enjoyed, and presenting a pre-eminence of character proportioned to their comparatively few advantages and imperfect revelation ; but amidst the splendours of the “Sun of Righteousness” we shall witness, in the females who adorned this new era, a greater elevation of mind and advancement in knowledge.

Still it must be recollected, that the day only dawned, the shadows were not at first entirely dispersed ; and, although the favoured inhabitants of Judea and its vicinity saw the age of Christ, not like Abraham, “afar off,” but in its commencing glory, their prejudices and prepossessions did but slowly melt away. Some degree of dimness remained upon the moral sight ; and we are called to observe, not so much the accuracy of their conceptions as the fervour of their love.

The two most extraordinary women that ever appeared in this world were unquestionably EVE, “the mother of all living,” and MARY, “the mother of Jesus Christ.” They occupied respectively the highest stations and the most critical points of time that ever fell to the lot of mortals ; and they exhibit an instructive contrast. EVE lived at the beginning, and MARY at the “fulness of time.”—EVE saw the glories of the new-made world after creative wisdom had pronounced it all “very good,” and before sin had tarnished its beauty and disarranged its harmonies.—MARY beheld it rising from the ruins of the fall, at the moment of its renovation and in the dawn of its happiest day.—EVE was placed in the most glorious and conspicuous situation, and fell into a state of meanness and degradation.—MARY was of obscure origin and lowly station, but was raised, by a signal appointment of Providence, to the highest eminence.—EVE was accessory to the ruin of man—MARY instrumental in the birth of him who came as the Restorer and Saviour of mankind.—EVE beheld the fatal curse first take effect, in overcasting the heavens with clouds, in withering the blossoms of paradise, envenoming the spirit of the animal

creation, disordering the human frame, and ultimately destroying it, and introducing all the nameless diversities of wo which fill up the tragedy of human life.—**MARY** witnessed the beginning of that long series of blessings which divine love has for ages dispensed to man “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” and which will eventually replenish the cup of existence with unmingled sweetness and perfect joy.—**EVE** witnessed, with a trembling consciousness of guilt, the awful descent of those mighty “cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life,” and which were placed “at the east end of the garden of Eden.”—**MARY**, with feelings of ecstatic rapture, beheld the angel Gabriel standing before her, with the smiles of heaven upon his countenance, heard his benedictions, and held “communion sweet” with the holy messenger. Wretched, wretched Eve! Happy, happy **MARY**!

The Jews have been always celebrated for their care in preserving their genealogies : in consequence of which it providentially happened, that the evangelists were able, from their own authenticated records, to verify the ancient predictions of the birth of Jesus Christ. Two of the inspired historians have given a statement of his ancestry ; the one tracing it from Abraham, and the other ascending to Adam ; the one pursuing the line of Joseph, his reputed father, the other the line of Mary, his real mother ; both concurring in the most decisive evidence of his being the Son of David and of Abraham, and the true Messiah of the prophets.\*

Although in her distant ancestry Mary may justly be considered as of an illustrious descent, yet, at the period of the incarnation, this family was in a very reduced state : the genealogical tree of David was cut down to its very roots, when the ancient prediction was accomplished respecting that great Personage who is represented “as a

\* Comp. Ps. cxxxii. 11. Isa. xi. 1. Jerem. xxiii. 5. & xxxiii. 15. Gen. xii. 3. & xxii. 18. & xxvi. 4. & xxviii. 14.

slender twig shooting out from the trunk of an old tree, cut down, lopped to the very root, and decayed ; which tender plant, so weak in appearance, should nevertheless become fruitful and prosper.”

“ But there shall spring forth from the trunk of Jesse  
And a cion from his roots shall become fruitful.  
And the spirit of JEHOVAH shall rest upon him :  
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The spirit of counsel and strength,  
The spirit of knowledge, and the fear of JEHOVAH.\*

But vain is the “boast of heraldry.” It can avail nothing to elevate an insignificant character to eminence, or screen a guilty one from contempt. The evangelists have not recorded the lineage of Joseph and of Mary for the purpose of emblazoning their names, but solely to authenticate the prophetic declarations respecting Christ, to be connected with whom is real honour and solid glory. Of past generations, how many names, great in human estimation, have descended into oblivion, while those only will obtain an imperishable memorial who are “written in the Lamb’s book of life.”†

It must ever be deemed a noble distinction to have stood related to Christ “according to the flesh ;” more so than to have been the sons and daughters of the mighty princes of mankind ; but to have been his MOTHER was the sole honour of one happy female ; still, however, less happy on this account than because of the genuine humility with which she adorned her lowly sphere, and the lively faith with which she recognized the character of her Son.

In reference to the genealogical tables of Matthew and Luke, it has been admirably remarked, “We observe, among these ancestors of Christ, some that were *Heathens* ; and others that, on different accounts, were of

\* LOWTH’S Isaiah, ch. xi. translation and notes.

† Rev. xxi. 27.

*infamous characters* : and, perhaps, it might be the design of Providence that we should learn from it, or at least should on reading it take occasion to reflect, that persons of all nations, and even the *chief of sinners* amongst them, are encouraged to trust in him as their Saviour. To him, therefore, let us look even from the ends of the earth ; yea, from the depths of guilt and distress ; and the consequence will be happy beyond all expression or conception.”\*

In the apostolic epistle to the Hebrews, it is intimated as a fact, of pleasing notoriety, in the history of the church of God, that angels are “ ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.”† When appointed by the great Supreme to this service, they usually adopted a human form and appearance, probably for the purpose of securing that degree of familiarity which the nature of their communications required, and which a more splendid manifestation would have precluded ; in the scriptural accounts, however, of these remarkable visits to eminent saints in early ages, whether they appeared in numbers, as to Abraham, or individually, as on other occasions, no distinct mention is made of their names or order. But to impress a character of majesty and dignity upon the message, and upon all the circumstances of the divine communication to Mary, when an angel is commissioned to announce that she was selected by the wonderful providence of God as the mother of the Messiah, the name of the celestial messenger is recorded by the evangelist in a marked and solemn manner. It was the angel GABRIEL,‡ one, as we may infer, of the highest order of those intelligences that “ circle the throne rejoicing ;” and the same glorious spirit, who so many ages

\* DODDRIDGE.

† Heb. i. 14.

‡ There are, according to the Jews, four angels that surround the throne of God—Michael, Uriel, Raphael, and Gabriel. The latter they place, conformably with his expression to Zacharias, *לפניו*, before him, or in his presence

before had been sent to Daniel, to specify, in a prophetic enigma, the time of "MESSIAH THE PRINCE,"\* which he now came to announce as having actually arrived.

Never did even an angel before convey so important a message, or descend to this earth with such rapturous sensations. It must ever, indeed, be considered the felicity of an angel, as well as of a man, to do the will of God, whether this obedience involve personal difficulty, or be accompanied with circumstances of peculiar delight. It must have afforded satisfaction to the mighty spirit, who was despatched from heaven to eject the first parents of our race from the bowers of Eden; and to stretch his flaming sword across the path of access to the tree of life, as well as to that favoured angel who now hastened to the cottage of the virgin of Nazareth; because each was accomplishing a purpose in which he knew that the divine perfections were pre-eminently displayed; but as, in executing the will of God, the holiest of men must necessarily experience a different kind and degree of satisfaction, according to the nature of the service itself to which they are called; and as we have scriptural evidence that the inhabitants of the invisible world have peculiar sensations, when sinners of the fallen race are converted to God; it is not, surely, an inadmissible sentiment, that as never spirit was honoured before with such a message, GABRIEL must have felt unusual joy upon announcing the incarnation of the Son of God. His very language expresses it. His address is full of pathos and congratulation. It breathes angelic rapture. With it we commenced this subject, and in some measure participating the bliss, we cite it again: "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee! Blessed art thou among women!"

There is nothing in the narrative to induce us to think, that the angel assumed any extraordinary splendour of ap-

\* Dan. ix. 20—27.

pearance on this occasion ; and judging from the usual mode in which blessed spirits visited the sons of men in former times, as well as from a consideration of the tender age and lowly station of Mary, it is probable that he entered the room where she was, as an ordinary stranger. It is besides stated, that she was troubled at his *saying*, not at his *appearance*.

This salutation excited in the virgin's breast a sensation of astonishment mingled with apprehension. Among the Jews, it was not lawful for a man to use any salutation to a woman, not even by a messenger, or her own husband ; in addition to which, the panegyric and congratulatory terms in which she was addressed, might well lead her to " cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be."

The benevolent messenger at once relieved her from the embarrassment into which he perceived she had been thrown, by familiarly calling her by name, renewing the solemn assurances of divine favour, and predicting the future glory of that illustrious Son whom she should bear, and whose description, being like all the Jews well instructed in the prophetic Scriptures, she would immediately recognize. These were his remarkable words : " Fear not, Mary ; for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest ; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever : and of his kingdom there shall be no end."\*

Her surprise was now raised to the highest pitch ; and, incapable of comprehending by what means such a declaration could be fulfilled in her who was at present a virgin, she ventured to inquire of the angel, " How shall this be ?" It is worthy of observation, that she did not

\* Luke i. 20—33.

instantly reject the testimony of her illustrious visiter as manifestly absurd and impossible, but modestly requested an explanation of the mysterious assurance. She was evidently one of those who "waited for salvation" in Israel; and who well knew that it was the province of human reason to submit, with implicit confidence, even to the most inexplicable statements of revelation. It is true, she could not conjecture by what miraculous conception the angelic prediction would be verified; but she did not hesitate a moment to allow the apparently incongruous facts, of his being her Son, and yet the Son of the Highest, who should rise to the throne of David, and possess an everlasting kingdom. Her reason was confounded, but her faith triumphed; and though she knew not the *manner*, this was no sufficient evidence with her against the probability of the declared fact. Upon how many inferior occasions, and under far less mysterious circumstances, have we been incredulous, deeming even the plainest declarations improbable, because they were unaccountable; and presuming to introduce some arbitrary alteration into the record of heaven, or some far-fetched comment, rather than humbly bow to supreme authority.

If, however, it were admitted, that the question of Mary betrays at least a momentary incredulity, this was soon dispersed by the angel's reply: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible."\* In the exercise of lively faith and joy she answered, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her."

\* Luke i. 35-37.

Let us endeavour to imitate the spirit of Mary. She acknowledged the power of God to accomplish the greatest, and, to her, the most inconceivable designs ; and with unaffected simplicity, blended with humble and holy satisfaction, she received the divine word. Thus let us resign ourselves to the will of God, and confide in his most wonderful declarations. It is for mortals to believe, and not to cavil ; when Jehovah speaks, to hear and to obey. Let us beware of stumbling at the promises through unbelief ; and cherish increasing pleasure in the conviction, that he who sent his Son into the world to be the Saviour of men, will freely bestow upon his redeemed people all the blessings of time, and all the riches of eternity.

It is observable, that on this occasion a young woman, though at first overawed by the heavenly manifestation, at length displayed a faith which shines with peculiar brightness, when brought into comparison with the sentiments of the aged priest Zacharias, when the same angel appeared to him a few months before, to communicate a prediction of far less apparent improbability.

When this venerable man was burning incense on the golden altar before the Lord, and therefore in circumstances peculiarly favourable to the most elevated exercises of faith and devotion, Gabriel appeared to him, and gave him assurance that his frequent prayer for the redemption of Israel was heard, and that his aged partner should become, in due time, the mother of a distinguished son, to be named John, who should be “ great in the sight of the Lord,” eminently useful in converting many of the children of Israel, and preparing their minds for the speedy approach of the Messiah ; and yet it is stated, that Zacharias “ believed not his words,” in consequence of which he was smitten with dumbness till the birth of the child. But Mary, though so inferior in age, in situation, and in spiritual advantages, glorified God by a full acquiescence in his declarations ; thus exemplifying what the

grace of God can accomplish, even in the youngest persons, and the weakest sex. It must not, indeed, be overlooked, that *at first* the language of Mary indicated a certain degree of hesitation and doubt, somewhat allied to the unbelief of Zacharias, although she *eventually* triumphed over every feeling of fear or of unbelief; and yet no sign of divine displeasure was given. May we not, therefore, take occasion to admire the discriminating goodness of God; who, while he does not "willingly afflict or grieve the children of men," proportions his chastisements to the demerit of the individual, and the circumstances of the case? The omniscience of the Searcher of hearts is perfectly acquainted with the secret workings of the mind, and measures with perfect discernment the exact delinquency of every thought and deed, when we can judge only by the appearance or the words of the individual.

It is peculiarly gratifying to witness the beginnings of faith in the young, and especially in young females. It becomes their age and sex. It constitutes their best accomplishment, and their most shining ornament. Beauty is a fading flower, wealth a perishable treasure, and admiration "a puff of air;" but religion in the heart is an unfading inheritance. While so many vain and inconsiderate young women value themselves upon exterior charms and unmeaning flatteries, upon the symmetry of a face, the elegance of a form, and the decoration of a ribbon; may every female reader of these pages aspire after the nobler distinction of Mary, and by her undissembled piety afford pleasure to her parents, to her friends, to the church of God, and to those witnessing spirits, "in whose presence there is joy at the repentance of a sinner!"\*

Immediately after the visit of the angel Gabriel to Mary, perhaps on the same day,† she hastened to her cousin

\* Luke xv. 10.

† The Ethiopic version, instead of "in those days," renders the expression in the thirty-ninth verse of 1st chap. of Luke, "in that day."

Elizabeth, the wife of Zacharias, who resided in that part of Judca called the hill-country, which extended from Bethoron to Emmaus. The purpose of this visit was to congratulate her pious relative on the singular mercy which she was informed by the angel she had experienced, in the promise of a son at her advanced period of life, and to communicate an account of the heavenly intercourse with which she had herself been favoured.

“Now theirs was converse such as it behoves  
Man to maintain, and such as God approves”—

worthy of the excellent characters who met, and calculated to confirm each other's hopes, and awaken mutual gratitude :

“Christ and his character their only scope,  
Their object, and their subject, and their hope.”

If, when pious persons associate together, they have not to relate the visits of angels, or the miraculous interferences of Providence; it is surely in their power to diversify, enliven, and improve their social interviews, by some allusions to experimental religion, and some interchange of pious sentiment. The Christian world suffers incalculable loss by neglecting suitable opportunities for such communications, which might be eminently conducive to the great purposes of mutual comfort and instruction ; for

“—What are ages and the lapse of time,  
Match'd against truths, as lasting as sublime?”

\* \* \* \*

Hearts may be found, that harbour at this hour  
That love to Christ, and all its quickening power;  
And lips unstain'd by folly or by strife,  
Whose wisdom, drawn from the deep well of life,  
Tastes of its healthful origin, and flows  
A Jordan for the ablution of our woes.  
Oh days of heaven, and nights of equal praise,  
Serene and peaceful as those heavenly days,  
When souls drawn upwards, in communion sweet,  
Enjoy the stillness of some close retreat,

Discourse, as if releas'd and safe at home,  
 Of dangers past and WONDERS YET TO COME,  
 And spread the sacred treasures of the breast  
 Upon the lap of cove~~nted~~ rest."

COWPER.

As soon as Mary had reached the residence of Elizabeth, and saluted her, the babe, which the latter had conceived, leaped with unusual and supernatural emotion; and she became so filled with the Holy Spirit, as instantly to burst out in the most impassioned language, indicative of the glorious discovery, that Mary was the long-predetermined mother of Messiah. Although it seems probable that her husband, upon his return home, had informed Elizabeth (perhaps by means of writing, for he was still suffering that temporary dumbness which his unbelief had occasioned) of the vision he had seen at Jerusalem, and of the promise of the angel that he should have a son remarkably distinguished, especially as the precursor of the Saviour; yet till this moment she had no suspicion that her beloved relative was to be that illustrious mother, who should inherit the blessing of all future ages. Now a ray from heaven breaks upon the mysterious subject, and "the glory of the Lord" is risen upon this venerable matron. She pours forth unusual benedictions upon Mary, and congratulates herself upon the felicity of her own circumstances.

The generous nature of this joy is truly admirable, and worthy of imitation. Exempt from that envious spirit which is so predominant in the world, and so utterly subversive of the real interests and happiness of those who cherish it, Elizabeth congratulated her young relative upon the superior favour which Heaven had conferred upon her; and murmured not at the will of Providence, in assigning her so unexpected a pre-eminence. Her words were as follow: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.”

The same spirit which dictated the language of Elizabeth, animated the bosom of Mary with inspirations of a still higher order. Unable to restrain the vehement enthusiasm of her mind, she thus began:—

MY SOUL DOTH MAGNIFY THE LORD, AND MY SPIRIT HATH REJOICED IN GOD MY SAVIOUR.

The mother of Jesus here adopts the prophetic style, speaking of the future character of her illustrious Son as though he were already born, and had attained to that eminency to which he was predestined. She extols him as “God her Saviour,” more enraptured with the hope of salvation through his name, than with the honour of her maternal connexion with him.

We need feel no surprise at her assigning this title to her anticipated offspring, when we recollect that she was at the moment divinely inspired, and that she had been previously informed by the angel Gabriel of his being “the Son of the Highest.” This was no doubt understood by the Virgin Mary as expressive of his divine personality. He did not, indeed, *become* the Son of God by his miraculous conception; but it was the reason of his being called so. Thus he is *called* the Son of God as raised from the dead, no more to return to corruption,\* but he was not *constituted* such by these events. It was a *declaration* of what he was antecedently to his conception by the overshadowing influence of the Holy Spirit.

In Mary’s exclamation, “magnifying the Lord,” and “rejoicing in God her Saviour,” are used as convertible terms, denoting the same sentiment and source of joy. And how rational and noble was this feeling! Where

\* Acts xiii. 33, 34. Heb. i. 4, 5.

should an immortal creature seek happiness, but in God the Saviour? What are all the fleeting possessions and enjoyments of time, in comparison with the “pleasures” which are at his “right hand for evermore?” How awfully infatuated are those who aim to attain real felicity independently of the sovereign good!—Mary continues,

FOR HE HATH REGARDED THE LOW ESTATE OF HIS HANDMAIDEN: FOR, BEHOLD, FROM HENCEFORTH ALL GENERATIONS SHALL CALL ME BLESSED.

This is the language both of piety and inspiration. It implies that sense of the divine condescension which characterizes humility, intimating the unmerited nature of the mercy she had experienced, as well as her unexpected elevation from the lowest condition. She states, that it is her *happiness*, and not her *excellences*, for which she anticipated the congratulations of succeeding times. She was conscious that the honour and the glory belonged to God, and that the felicity of her circumstances, not the merit of her character, deserved admiration. It was neither the glory of her descent, nor the multitude or splendour of her virtues, that attracted the regards of Heaven, and influenced the movements of Providence in passing by the palaces of greatness to the cottage of Mary; but “so it seemed good in his sight:” and while, with impious vanity of spirit, many are flattering themselves that their imaginary virtue will recommend them to the notice, and secure the favour of Omniscience, it will be found, to their ultimate confusion, that “this” only “is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”\*

FOR HE THAT IS MIGHTY HATH DONE TO ME GREAT THINGS; AND HOLY IS HIS NAME.

There is a singular propriety, in thus introducing the sanctity of the divine nature and character. In the production of that body which was “prepared” for the Son

\* John xvii. 3.

of God, nothing of the infection of sin, which attaches to the corrupt nature of man, was suffered to stain "the holy child Jesus." He was, indeed, "in all things made like unto his brethren, yet without *sin*." Although his miraculous conception did not exempt him from human infirmities, it prevented the possibility of his being contaminated by human guilt.

The *name* of God is frequently mentioned in Scripture ; and, in general, we are to understand by it the revelation of his character, by whatever methods, to his intelligent creation ; and to *hallow* or pronounce it holy, is devoutly to adore every such discovery. His name is written on the works of nature, but shines with pre-eminent lustre in the wonders of redemption ; and the spirit of ardent devotion traces all these manifestations, in order to pay a suitable homage to them. To pronounce the name of God *holy*, is then virtually to attribute to the Supreme Being a grandeur and a majesty perfectly unique, and which distinguishes him from all other beings in the universe.

AND HIS MERCY IS ON THEM THAT FEAR HIM, FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION.

The spirit of Mary takes an elevated station, looking back upon past ages, and anticipating the glory of future times. The incarnation of Christ is represented as an act and an evidence of divine mercy, not only to her, but to all who by the fear of God are interested in this new dispensation. The promise of a Saviour was almost coeval with the world ; and during the long succession of ages which had since elapsed, and the infinite diversity of events, so perplexing to the human eye and so apparently fortuitous, the love of God was pursuing its high purpose. The frequent intimations given to the ancient patriarchs, and to the prophets of Israel, proved that the eternal Ruler of the universe was producing, by a vast series of preparatory means, the last and best days of time, when the "Sun of Righteousness" should arise up-

on the world "with healing beneath his wings." An omnipotent arm was incessantly accomplishing the determinations of an omniscient mind. No power could impede the march of his mercy to the predestined point; no casualties defeat his great design; and no lapse of years, or revolution of centuries, diminish the ardour of infinite love, to secure the felicity of his people. The Lord was never "slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness;" for it must never be forgotten, in estimating the movements of eternal Providence, that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."\*

But this language is not merely, nor, perhaps, chiefly retrospective. Those who fear God in all ages, participate the mercies dispensed to man through an incarnate Redeemer. Under the Christian dispensation in particular, they are fully communicated, and will enrich the people of God to the end of time. The thousands and myriads of the human race, that apply to "the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness," cannot diminish its efficacy or exhaust its fulness; but the last preacher that exists upon the earth previous to that final hour, when "the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible," will be able to proclaim the blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God, as "cleansing from all sin," with equal confidence to that which inspired the first herald of these "glad tidings to perishing sinners."

HE HATH SHOWED STRENGTH WITH HIS ARM; HE HATH SCATTERED THE PROUD IN THE IMAGINATION OF THEIR HEARTS.

The omnipotence of God has been manifested in many remarkable instances during past ages, but in no case so illustriously as in the birth of Christ. All the other mighty operations of Jehovah are surpassed in this unparalleled event. The haughty Jews, who fondly but foolishly cherished the expectation, that the Messiah would

\* 2 Pet. iii. 8, 9.

be born of some one of the most opulent families in Judea, and conduct them to conquest and dominion, will be inexpressibly disappointed to find him the child of an obscure virgin, betrothed to a carpenter, and an inhabitant of the contemptible town of Nazareth in Galilee. So wonderfully are "the ways of God above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts!"

HE HATH PUT DOWN THE MIGHTY FROM THEIR SEATS, AND EXALTED THEM OF LOW DEGREE. HE HATH FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS, AND THE RICH HE HATH SENT EMPTY AWAY.

The providence of God has been often displayed in the depression of the most distinguished from their temporal elevations, and in the advancement of the most despised to dignity and renown. The necessitous have been liberally supplied; while those who have been possessed of the most ample and enviable abundance, have sometimes, by unexpected reverses, become destitute. This sovereign disposal of human affairs has been apparent, both in temporal and spiritual concerns. The Virgin Mary was herself, as she intimates, a remarkable exemplification of such an interposal; while those who in Israel were "hungering and thirsting after righteousness," beheld in her infant son, that child whose name was to be called "Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace," and whose manifestation in the flesh afforded the sublimest satisfaction to their waiting spirits.

HE HATH HOLPEN HIS SEBYANT ISRAEL, IN REMEMBRANCE OF HIS MERCY; AS HE SPAKE TO OUR FATHERS, TO ABRAHAM, AND TO HIS SEED FOR EVER.

All the true Israel of God are now admitted into his paternal protection, whether Jews or Gentiles; for the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to David, of whose family was Mary, could never be forgotten by him who "rejoiced in the habitable parts of his earth, and his delights were with the sons of men." Never can the pious mind recur, without emotions of the liveliest

gratitude, to such predictions as the following, which now seemed to approach their glorious accomplishments : “ I will make of thee (Abraham) a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great ; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee ; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. . . . And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.”\*

Mary prolonged her visit to her aged friend and relative, three months ; a period of their lives to which, no doubt, each would ever after recur with peculiar satisfaction. The family of Zacharias was not dulled by the formalities of ceremony, or disturbed by the riot of folly, but delightfully animated by the cheerfulness of religion. Their time, we may readily admit, was wisely employed ; and their daily converse such as befitted those favourites of Providence, who knew the truth of God, and had enjoyed the honour of angelic visitations.

The improvement of time ought to be our great and immediate concern. To this important duty we are urged by consideration of the rapidity of its flight—the impossibility of its return—the bright examples of its proper use, which the records of inspiration furnish—the fatal consequences of squandering it away in useless, frivolous, and criminal pursuits—the voice of reason—of conscience—of Providence—of Scripture—of disappointed infidelity, and of triumphant faith—and the vast interests of eternity, with which the use of it is essentially connected. “ Lord, so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”†

During all this time, Mary was only the betrothed wife of an obscure but conscientious person, named Joseph. This was a circumstance which occasioned *him* extreme perplexity, but tended to exhibit the strength of *her* faith.

\* Gen. xii. 2, 3. xvii. 7. † Ps. xc. 12.

Joseph was fearful of her reputation, and meditated some plan of concealing what he supposed would be deemed the disgrace of his beloved partner ; for the Jews, whose laws of marriage were very precise, considered infidelity to a betrothed husband in the light of adultery, and as therefore subjecting the person to its usual punishment.\*

It does not appear that Mary explained to him the manner or occasion of her mysterious conception ; but judging, perhaps, that it would seem incredible, she leaves the whole affair in the hands of Divine Providence. " Thus," as archbishop Leighton excellently remarks, " silent innocency rests satisfied in itself, where it may be inconvenient or fruitless to plead for itself, and loses nothing by doing so, for it is always in due season vindicated and cleared by a better hand. And thus it was here ; she is silent, and God speaks for her."

This inexplicable mystery was revealed to Joseph in a dream. He was assured by an angel, that Mary should bring forth a son, and commanded to call his name Jesus, for he was to " save his people from their sins." His apprehensions being immediately dispersed, he obeyed the heavenly intimation, " to take unto him Mary his wife."

This miraculous conception has ever proved the stumbling-block of infidelity ; while, in the just convictions of Christians, it is to be regarded as one of the most glorious and indispensable peculiarities of our faith. Christianity is not answerable for those misrepresentations of this doctrine which result from the weakness or the wickedness of mankind, and which have so often exposed it to ridicule ; but let the statement of Scripture be taken simply as it is—plain, perspicuous, untangled with the perplexities of controversy—and it will approve itself to the pious mind, not only as a fact, but as one of prime importance and obvious utility.

\* Selden. Uxor. Heb. lib. ii. cap. 1.

In demanding an explication of the manner in which the divine and human natures became united, or continue to subsist in indissoluble connexion in the person of the Son of God, reason claims a prerogative to which she is by no means entitled; especially if the alternative be, either that reason shall be satisfied, or the statements of Scripture rejected. There exist facts relative to our own constitution as incomprehensible and contradictory to what, independently of experience, we should be induced to believe, as the miraculous conception and mysterious nature of Jesus Christ. The soul and body, distinguished for properties not only peculiar to each, but dissimilar, heterogeneous, and seemingly inconsistent, yet constitute one person. A man is at once material and immaterial, mortal and immortal.

It was expedient that the Son of God should become man, that he might set us an example, sympathize with our griefs, vanquish our enemies, and abolish death: and equally so that he should be coequal with God, in order to procure salvation for the lost world by the merit of his atonement; otherwise his obedience must have been imperfect, his sufferings unsatisfactory, and his mediatorial character, by which he was allied to both parties, incomplete.

This doctrine is practical, and not an abstract speculation, or an article of faith intended merely to fill up the outline of a system, and unconnected with any moral results. It is calculated to awaken our gratitude and kindle our love, by showing us the infinite goodness of God, who “spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all” — “who made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”\* It should further engage us to cultivate humility and patience. A view of the abasement of the Son of God should impress upon us a sense of the insignificance of all earthly glory, and the propriety of sustaining all the trials

\* Rom. viii. 3. 2 Cor. v. 21.

and deprivations of life with unrepining fortitude. “ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus ; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God ; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”\*

This view of the incarnation of Christ is adapted also to promote charity ; for, “ though he *was* rich, yet for our sakes he *became* poor ; that we, through his poverty, might be rich :”† and it tends to elevate us above the meanness of temporal compliances, and the degradation of worldly lusts, by pointing out the dignity to which our nature is advanced, through having been assumed, and still being retained in its purified state, by the Son of God. Let a holy ambition prevail, to live as those who possess such a relationship ; and who, though at present disguised in the dress of poverty, are born to an inheritance of which no enemy can prevent your possession—“ an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”‡

\* Phil. ii. 5—8.

† 2 Cor. viii. 9.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 4, 5

# THE VIRGIN MARY.

## SECTION II.

Nothing happens by chance—dispensations preparatory to the coming of Christ—prophecy of Micah accomplished by means of the decree of Augustus—Mary supernaturally strengthened to attend upon her new-born infant—visit of the shepherds—Mary's reflections—circumcision of the child—taken to the temple—Simeon's rapture and prediction—visit and offerings of the Arabian philosophers—general considerations.

**C**HANCE is a word which ought to be banished from the Christian vocabulary. It is utterly contradictory to reason, opposed to experience, and subversive of revelation. To suppose that he who created the world has wholly and for ever abandoned it, is improbable; and to imagine that the regular movements of nature, and the course of events—the whole train of causes, and the incalculable variety of dependent consequences, are merely fortuitous, seems absurd as well as impious. Uncertain and confused as were the opinions of the pagan nations of antiquity, few of them totally denied some kind of superintending providence; and many of their ablest writers reasoned in defence of it in the most forcible manner. “What,” said the emperor Marcus Antoninus, “would it concern me to live in a world void of God and without Providence?”

In order to form clear conceptions of this, and of every other subject connected with the peace of our minds and the immortal interests of man, we must apply to the Scriptures for information. Hope, conjecture, plausibility—all become pleasingly absorbed in the splendour of truth; which, with the brightness of a sun-beam, writes upon the inspired page the doctrine of an universal and particular providence. It appears, indeed, so fundamental to the system of Christianity, and so consonant to the wisdom and goodness of God, that if it were

possible to adduce solid objections against its reality, one of the richest sources of consolation to the human race would be for ever lost—some of our dearest hopes would be undermined, and despondency shed disastrous gloom over the whole scene of life. It is the happiness of Christians to know, that nothing can escape the eye, nothing can disarrange the schemes, or thwart the purposes, of the eternal mind ; and that the same general law which regulates the flight of an angel, or the affairs of an empire, connects even the fall of a sparrow with the plans of Heaven. It is their privilege to feel assured, that events which appear contingent or accidental to us, are equally ordained with those which seem the most orderly and regular. The arrow may be shot at a venture, but the Supreme Ruler guides it through the air. So sings the poet:

“ Through all the various shifting scene  
Of life’s mistaken ill or good,  
Thy hand, O God, conducts unseen  
The beautiful vicissitude.

All things on earth, and all in heaven,  
On thy eternal will depend ;  
And all for greater good were given,  
And all shall in thy glory end.”

These sentiments will receive additional illustration from the remarkable facts respecting the birth of Christ, which it will be now proper to notice. He who can imagine the correspondence observable between ancient predictions and the occurrences which mark the singular history before us to be mere casual or undesigned coincidences, must possess a mind strangely perverted by prejudice or mean in its conceptions—he must, in reality, believe greater miracles than he denies, and, in his zeal to be thought rational, become enthusiastic and fanatical, in admitting the most inconceivable absurdities. We hesitate not to say, that even upon the principles of reason there are more difficulties in denying a providence in all the circumstances connected with our Saviour’s in-

carnation, than in allowing its active agency; and that here, the doctrine which is most consolatory is most true. Sophistry may attempt to poison or to stop the streams of spiritual comfort, but they will nevertheless flow with undiminished sweetness and abundance.

The whole period of past time ought to be considered as a vast preparatory dispensation; every circumstance in the history of the people of Israel essentially depended on each previous occurrence, and stood connected with each succeeding one. We perceive sometimes more distinctly by a prophetic light, sometimes more obscurely through the hieroglyphical characters of the Mosaic economy of types and shadows, a wonderful series of events, that guides the devout inquirer to "God manifest in the flesh;" and, if human penetration cannot always discover the bright concatenation, we feel assured that it exists, and is regularly maintained by supreme wisdom; as we infer from observing the commencement, or discovering some parts of the course, which a mighty river pursues through provinces and empires, that, although the whole may not be accurately ascertained, yet each part, whether it traverses subterraneous passages or pathless forests, is certainly and necessarily connected.

The links of this marvellous chain of providence become more distinctly visible as we approach the last, and witness its glorious termination. Amongst other ancient prophecies, we have this very express declaration of Micah respecting the birth of Christ—a declaration which, after the lapse of seven hundred years, we are now to see verified: "Thou, *Bethlehem Ephratah*, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."\*

\* Micah v. 2.

It has been related, that at the time of the miraculous conception, Joseph and Mary lived at Nazareth in Galilee, and still continued this residence. If the predicted child had been born in Nazareth, it is obvious that either he could not be the Messiah, or the prophet was not correct. The virgin mother, however, neither disbelieved the communications of Heaven, nor took any extraordinary measures, by a removal of her dwelling-place, to aid the accomplishment of a divine oracle. How she, an inhabitant of *Nazareth*, was to be the mother of him whom so many ages had expected in *Bethlehem*, was indeed mysterious; and yet, like Abraham, she hoped against hope; allied in faith, as well as by descent, to that eminent patriarch. Nothing could be more contradictory to her anticipations than external appearances; but nothing could be more humble, more patient, or more indicative of lively faith in God, than her spirit and conduct. She believed the angel, and she left the event. What an illustrious example to her sex! what confidence in Providence! what trust in God! what a resignation of reason to revelation!

Mark the event. Augustus, at this time emperor of Rome, suddenly published an edict for the registry, or enrolment of the empire; probably with a view to ascertain the state of his dependencies, to exact an oath of fidelity, and, perhaps, to determine the amount of money which might be reasonably expected from each province in case of any future taxation. The whole empire being included in this decree, all the families were required immediately to repair to their respective cities, for the purpose of having their names distinctly recorded; and, as Joseph was lineally descended from David, he, with his espoused wife, went into Judea to Bethlehem, because it was the birthplace and residence of their illustrious ancestor.\*

\* 1 Sam. xvii. 12.

At this remarkable crisis Mary was detained by the full accomplishment of the time for her delivery ;” “ and she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling-clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”\* Here then were fulfilled the prophetic descriptions of the place and circumstances of the Redeemer’s incarnation. A virgin produces a son—a son who, by the exclusion of his parents from the accommodation of the inn, already began to realize the inspired declaration, “he is despised and rejected of men”†—a son identified as the promised Messiah by every thing connected with his birth. Augustus issues a decree which brings Mary to Bethlehem at the precise moment when this removal was requisite ; and yet Augustus, ignorant of the designs of Heaven or the condition of Mary, considers only his personal glory and the security of the imperial dominions. He has one purpose, and Providence another ; but they both concur to the predestined end. Augustus knew not that his edict was to prove the appointed means of accomplishing the most important event that had ever transpired since the commencement of time, and was, in fact, the wonderful hinge upon which the numerous and concurring prophecies of past centuries were destined to turn. He knew not that his imperial edict for an universal enrolment, was the last of a series of preparatory means by which the great purposes of infinite mercy were to be developed and displayed. Why was not the same policy pursued by the emperor, when it was determined upon seven-and-twenty years before at Tاراcon in Spain ? and why, if he were diverted at that period from the immediate execution of this project by some disturbances in the empire, was it forgotten or neglected for so many years, and revived at so critical a moment ? Let infidelity stand abashed, and listen to the voice of revelation : “ He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”‡

\* Luke ii. 7.

† Isa. liii. 3.

‡ Eph. i. 11.

How often has the supreme Disposer made use of those agents to accomplish his purposes, who were themselves the last to acknowledge his superintendence, or, perhaps, the first to oppose his will! How consolatory to the Christian to reflect, that the passions of the human mind, the madness of ambition, the rage of envy, the misrule of tyrannic power, the animosity of persecution, the decrees of princes, the events of war and of peace, the elements of nature, and the powers of the invisible worlds, are under the perfect control of God! A Pharaoh shall cause his “name to be declared throughout all the earth,” by giving occasion to the most transcendent miracles, and the most direct and indisputable interference of Omnipotence\*—a Cyrus shall pursue a wonderful career of conquest; victory after victory shall enhance his fame; nations shall be subdued, and gates of brass broken before him, for the sake of Israel the elect of God, and Jacob his servant†—an Augustus shall unconsciously fulfil a divine decree by means of an edict of his own—the Roman empire shall be enrolled, that Jesus may be born in Bethlehem.

It appears that Mary was supernaturally strengthened to perform the necessary duties to her infant charge, in the cold and comfortless situation in which she was thrown. No one seemed at hand to commiserate her sufferings, to supply her wants, or to assist her weakness. Her own life was endangered; but maternal tenderness struggled for the life of her firstborn, and a divine faith in God and his promises sustained her amidst the privations of her desolate abode. Let not his people permit despondency to becloud their days or extinguish their hopes; but, relying on his assurance, “As thy day is, so thy strength shall be”—an assurance so remarkably verified in the mother of Jesus, and so often corroborated by the experience of Christians—let them imitate the patience and faith of this illustrious woman, who was

\* Exod.

† Isa. xlv. 1—4.

at once the ornament of religion and the glory of her sex.

Every thing is marvellous in this sacred story. No sooner was this child introduced into the world, than his virgin mother received an unexpected visit in her lowly dwelling. A company of shepherds came, with unceremonious eagerness, to her asylum. Mary and Joseph were together in the stable, conversing, doubtless, upon this astonishing birth; and probably might have been alarmed at the intrusion of strangers—Were they come to remove them from this poor lodging, as they had been already excluded from the inn, and occupy their places?—were other barbarians come to pour the last drop into the cup of maternal wo, by expelling Mary, her husband, and her offspring, from their wretched, but still acceptable shelter? If this were the case—if, when the strangers obtruded, these had been the just apprehensions of the afflicted family, they knew where to find consolation; and she who held the babe in her arms, and pressed it to her bosom, was no doubt prepared to adopt a similar strain with that by which Simeon afterward proclaimed his ecstasy—“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.” But fear not, Mary! It is no ruffian band that approaches thee! These are no idle strangers, impelled by a vague curiosity; but they are the commissioned messengers of Providence and the ambassadors of peace! They have heard “glad tidings,” and they are come to verify the visions they have seen, and to renew the joys they have felt!

In the neighbouring fields these shepherds were watching their flocks by night; when suddenly an angelic messenger made his appearance in a blaze of celestial light. They were of course astonished and alarmed; but, from the first, perceived it was no illusion of the senses, since all distinctly saw, and were equally affected by the splendid reality. The benevolent spirit bade them dismiss every apprehension, and proceeded to

open his glorious commission. It consisted of an assurance, that in the city of David the long-predicted Messiah was actually born, and on that very day ;\* and that this was the sign by which they should discover the truth of this revelation, that if they went immediately to Bethlehem they should find the babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger. This angel, probably Gabriel, who had already appeared to Zacharias and Mary, was in a moment joined by a multitude of the heavenly host, whose enraptured bosoms could no longer repress the intensity of joy, and who were permitted to strike their golden harps and unite their angel voices in those ever-memorable strains, "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARDS MEN."

The shepherds instantly hastened to Bethlehem. They beheld the heaven-born babe. They explained to Joseph and the Virgin what they had seen and heard ; and then circulated the wonderful news in every direction. Astonishment filled the whole vicinity ; but it is probable a

\* This remarkable time cannot be stated with any certainty. The earliest antiquity determines nothing upon the subject. Towards the end of the second, or beginning of the third century only, was this attempted : when those who were most curious in their researches fixed it about the twentieth of May. Clemens Alexandrinus thinks that it was the twenty-eighth year after the battle of Actium ; that is, the forty-first of Augustus ; but Joseph Scaliger places it in his forty-second year, and, after a most laborious investigation, shows that Christ was born about the autumnal equinox, the latter end of September or beginning of October. SCALIG. Animad. ad Chron. Euseb. p. 174, et seq.—It was not till the fourth century that this great event was believed to have occurred on the twenty-fifth of December. They have not failed to assign what they deemed important reasons for this decision. As the sun, they say, is then beginning to rise on our hemisphere, and again to approach our pole, it is the proper period to which the rising of the Sun of Righteousness should be referred. The Romans have another reason, deduced from the preceding. At the return of the sun the feast of the Saturnalia was celebrated at Rome. It was thought proper to substitute in the place of this feast, which was distinguished by its profane rejoicings, that of our Saviour's birth, for the purpose of inducing the people to separate joy from riot. It is, however, the *event*, and not the *day*, we celebrate. Comp. SAURIN. Discours Historiques, Critiques, &c. continuez par Beausobre, tom. ix. p. 146—148, 8vo.

great diversity of opinion prevailed respecting the degree of credit due to the testimony of these witnesses; and the impression would soon vanish from those whose prejudices, whose ignorance, or whose temporal interests, prevented their immediate acknowledgment of the mighty fact. And must we not deeply lament, that to this hour similar reasons operate to produce a similar infidelity or rejection of the well-substantiated claims of the Son of God upon the affections and obedience of mankind?

In the mean time, as the evangelist states, "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."\* With a modesty and a piety so truly characteristic of this eminent woman, she left it to others to publish to the world the extraordinary manifestations of divine favour which she had received, content to observe in silence the movements of Providence, and to allow the mysterious fact to be gradually developed. As she took no measures at first to screen herself from reproach, but left the defence of her integrity to him whose wisdom was working all these wonders; so she did not avail herself of the present opportunity to extend her fame. From the astonishment or the applauses of the multitude she willingly retired into the shades; and, instead of indulging vanity, gave herself to solemn meditation. Connecting together the vision of Zacharias, the language of Elizabeth, the visitation of the celestial spirit to herself, the miraculous conception, the unexpected occasion of her removal at this crisis to Bethlehem, the recent account of the shepherds, the language of ancient prophecy respecting the lowly birthplace of the Saviour of mankind, and the peculiar accordance of its minute descriptions with her present circumstances; she perceived the amazing conclusion to be drawn, and humbly adored the God of her salvation.

We must pronounce Mary, then, a thoughtful observer and a humble inquirer, free from the levity of her age,

\* Luke ii. 19.

and superior in mental character to the poverty of her condition. She had, indeed, superior advantages, and was in a sense placed under divine discipline and instruction : but she possessed a docility of spirit which rendered these singular means so conducive to her rapid improvement in knowledge and piety. Happy for us if we make a proper use of whatever religious privileges we enjoy, so that the spiritual opportunities and blessings which enhance our responsibility, do not, by our negligence, aggravate our condemnation !

It is probable that we forfeit much enjoyment, and lose much attainable wisdom, by suffering the events of providence to pass unnoticed. The habit of investigating their connexions, and tracing their consequences, would no doubt both improve the faculty of observation, and spare us many perplexities. Diligence in this sacred study would be repaid by pleasure and profit. We should "know," if we "followed on to know the Lord."\* The deep shadows which overcast the scenes of life, and are so impervious to the human sight, would be easily penetrated by the eye of faith ; a new and glorious scene would present itself ; objects and arrangements, before unseen, would gradually become visible ; what was previously obscure in form and shape, would appear in just proportions ; and many of the sources of our present anxiety might become the means of our richest satisfaction. Let us imitate the noble examples upon record ; remembering that no place or time is unsuitable to a devout temper, or impossible to be improved to pious purposes. Isaac meditated in the *fields*, and Mary in the *stable* ; and a devout spirit will transform either into a temple of praise and prayer.

On the eighth day after his birth, this immaculate child was circumcised, both because he was a Jew, and the predicted Messiah. All the descendants of Abraham were required to submit to this institution ; and, therefore, the

\* Hosea vi. 6.

parents of **JESUS**, for so he was named on this occasion, according to the previous intimation of the angel, could not omit this service without forfeiting their privileges ; and as he was afterward to become the great preacher of righteousness to his own nation, it was necessary that he should not be exposed to the punishment of excommunication as a stranger. Thus, according to the apostle's allusion, he was "made under the law,"\* and evidently partook of flesh and blood.†

At the expiration of forty days, the parents of **JESUS** went up to **Jerusalem**, to present their infant before the Lord in the temple, conformably to the Mosaic law, to offer the sacrifices required upon such an occasion, and to pay the stipulated sum of five shekels for the eldest son.\* Led by a divine impulse, a certain venerable saint, named **Simeon**, came into the temple at this moment ; and taking the wondrous child into his aged arms, exclaimed, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word ; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people ; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people **Israel** !"

Some have, with useless curiosity, inquired into the birth, parentage, and station of this enraptured believer ; and with that mistaken prejudice so common to the world, by which greatness of character is perpetually associated with eminence of rank and nobility of birth, they have endeavoured to prove him to have been a priest, or the son of **Hillel**, who was chief of the sect of the Pharisees, and president of the sanhedrim forty years ; and he has even been represented as the father of that **Gamaliel**, who brought up the apostle **Paul**. Whereas the narrative of **Luke** introduces him as a person of no considerable notoriety, but as one who possessed an infinitely

\* Gal. iv. 4.

† Heb. ii. 14.

† Compare Lev. xii. 2, 4, 6, 8. Numb. viii. 16, 17. xviii. 15, 16. Five shekels amounted to about twelve shillings and sixpence of our money.

greater claim to distinction in the inspired page, a man of exemplary conduct and piety, who was waiting for him who was so long expected as "the consolation of Israel." He was not the favourite of princes. but the servant of God ; and this was his best distinction, that "the Holy Ghost was upon him ; and it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Growing infirmities might have awakened, in an ordinary mind, some suspicion of the reality of that assurance which he had received. Delay seemed to mock his patience, time dimmed his eyes, and suspense might well have sickened his heart—but at last the hour arrives, the ancient oracles are fulfilled—celestial revelations, after the lapse of four hundred years from the days of Malachi, relume a benighted world—Zacharias, Mary, Simeon, received the prophetic spirit ; and death becomes disarmed of his terrors, amidst the bright gleamings of approaching day.

Turning to the astonished parents, and addressing himself particularly to his virgin mother, he said, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel ; and for a sign, which shall be spoken against, (yea, and a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Anna, an aged prophetess, at the same instant joined this happy group ; and "gave thanks, likewise, unto the Lord : " the glad tidings were circulated, and the parents returned into Galilee.

The *accomplishment* of that event, which in former ages was only the subject of *prediction*, constitutes part of the happiness of gospel times. True, indeed, as those predictions proceeded from God, there existed from the beginning a certainty of their being fulfilled. It was as impossible that God should lie, as that he should cease to exist ; and having declared the decree, that his Son should "sit upon his holy hill of Zion," no human violence, no providential vicissitudes, no Satanic devices, could prevent it. No one of them, nor all of them com-

lined, could effectually obstruct the march of omnipotent goodness to the completion of its purposes. But the saints of old suffered a material disadvantage from "his day" being as yet "afar off;" a disadvantage which could not possibly be remedied. It is evident that, except in cases of immediate inspiration, a suspicion might exist in the pious mind, that the prophecy might be partially if not entirely *misunderstood*, as the most penetrating mind cannot, at this day, with the longest line of research, fathom the deeps of futurity. Time alone can, with perfect certainty, interpret the visions of prophecy.

It is also plain, that no *description*, however minute and glowing, could perfectly represent the life and the love of the Redeemer, as displayed in his own person. The imperfection of language rendered it impossible to pourtray the glorious reality. What inspired or seraphic pen, though dipped in heaven, could display all that was seen when they "beheld his glory?" Had Omnipotence remanded back the flood of ages, and recalled from the invisible state the illustrious saints that had been carried down the stream from the time of Adam, in order to have witnessed the incarnation, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus; with one voice they would have exclaimed, "The half was not told me."

In proportion to the approach of the Messiah, hope glowed with increasing ardour. Standing on the mount of prophecy, the pious Jews eagerly waited, and triumphantly hailed the rising of this bright day of grace. How many "prophets and righteous men" desired to behold this eventful period, but "died without the sight! With what sacred pleasure did Moses record the first promise, though at the distance of many centuries! What rapture thrilled through the patriarch's veins, when he spake of the coming of *Shiloh*, "unto whom the gathering of the people should be;" and how did his languid eyes brighten with new lustre in the dying hour, when he exclaimed, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord!" In what strains of holy joy did the "sweet singer of Israel" de-

clare, "My heart is inditing a good matter; I speak of the things which I have made touching the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee for ever!"\* How did Isaiah's heart glow with transport, while his lips were touched with inspiration, and triumph played on his prophetic harp, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this!"† But neither the sacred pleasure of Moses, when he recorded the first promise, nor the rapture that thrilled through the patriarch's veins, nor the holy joy of the sweet singer of Israel, nor the glow of transport that animated the heart of Isaiah, and inspired his lays, can equal the joy of the Christian church. Hope, indeed, presented to the early ages a lively *picture* of future times, and prophecy described them; but "blessed are our eyes, for they see; and our ears, for they hear. . . many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which we see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which we hear, and have not heard them."‡

The visit of the shepherds to Mary, already recited, was succeeded by another, perhaps equally remarkable. A company of Magi, or Magians,"§ probably from Arabia,

\* Ps. xlv. 1, 2.

† Is. ix. 6, 7.

‡ Mat. xiii. 16, 17.

§ "This (*wise men* from the East) is not only an indefinite, but an improper version of the term. It is indefinite, because those called *μαγοι* were a particular class, party, or profession among the Orientals, as much as Stoics, Peripatetics, and Epicureans were among the Greeks. They originated in Persia, but afterward spread into other countries, particularly into Assyria and Arabia, bordering upon Judea on the East. It is probable that the Magians here mentioned came from Arabia. Now, to employ

having seen a remarkable light, resembling a star, suspended over Bethlehem, hastened to pay suitable homage to the illustrious Personage whose birth it indicated. These philosophers, who were particularly addicted to the study of astronomy, being doubtless incited by a divine influence to repair to the country over which this new star or meteor seemed to shed its glory, immediately went to Jerusalem, where they began to make the most anxious inquiries. The news of their arrival soon reached the ears of Herod, a man whose cruelties had often exasperated his subjects, and kept him in a state of constant suspicion; so that he naturally apprehended fatal consequences to his crown, from this report of the birth of a king. Having first consulted the priests and scribes respecting the birthplace of Christ, he procured a private interview with the Magians, for the purpose of ascertaining the time of the meteoric appearance; and with all the policy of an experienced statesman, requested them to go and find out the extraordinary child, then return to bring him word, that he might come and worship him. This was a contrivance, by which he expected to accomplish, with greater certainty, the destruction of Jesus.

The Arabian philosophers instantly proceeded on their journey—the star moved before them, as the cloudy pillar once guided the marches of Israel in the wilderness; till at length it became stationary over the place where the infant lay: then, having fulfilled the design of its creation, totally and for ever disappeared.

Is it for us to question the wisdom of God in any of the productions of nature, because *we* do not perceive their

a term for specifying one sect, which may with equal propriety be applied to fifty, of totally different, or even contrary opinions, is surely a vague way of translating. It is also, in the present acceptance of the word, improper. Formerly the term *wise men* denoted philosophers, or men of science and erudition: it is hardly ever used so now, unless in burlesque. Some say *Magi*; but *Magians* is better, as having more the form of an English word." CAMPBELL'S Translation of the Four Gospels, vol. ii. notes.

utility? Shall we venture to arraign his goodness, because he has not only supplied the necessities of man, but filled the caves of ocean, and spread the pathless wilderness with a rich variety of existence, the specific purposes of which the researches of man have hitherto failed to discover? Shall we dare to say, that the impenetrable forest or the untenanted island was made in vain? or that the grass grows in the valley, the shrub sprouts on the inaccessible height, or the flower expands its beauties and diffuses its fragrance over the desert uselessly, because we have not discovered the reasons of their formation? Who, excepting the philosophers of Arabia, that had seen the new luminary shine for a few days and expire, but would have disputed the necessity or questioned the design of such a phenomenon? The ignorant vulgar, and even the rest of the sages of Arabia, might have surveyed it with idle wonder or incurious eye; very few followed the splendour, or knew the intention, of its appearance. And may not other beings be acquainted with many of those mysteries of nature which we fail to penetrate? or may not secret connexions and combinations, both in the animate and inanimate creation, exist, which, however important, it is not necessary for us to know? In reference both to nature and providence—

“One part, one *little* part, we dimly scan,  
Through the dark medium of life’s feverish dream;  
Yet dare arraign the whole stupendous plan,  
If, but that little part incongruous seem.”

BEATTIE.

The figure of Balaam, in predicting the birth of a Saviour, probably contained a prophetic allusion to the phenomenon in question; “There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel;”\* and, with similar reference, we read in the apocalyptic vision, “I am the bright and morning star.”†

As soon as the Magians saw the young child, with Mary

\* Numb. xxiv. 17.

† Rev. xxi. 16.

his mother, they “ fell down and worshipped him : and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts ; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.”\*

This narrative suggests many instructive considerations, some of which we shall briefly notice.

1. Many of those, who have possessed the fewest means of moral and spiritual improvement, will appear in judgment against multitudes who enjoy the greatest variety of religious advantages. These Arabian sages acted up to what they knew, and followed the light which was afforded them ; in consequence of which they made discoveries of the most valuable description, such as could have been attained by no other proceeding, and such as were totally concealed from the unobservant mass of mankind. It was, indeed, a small “ star” that first attracted their notice, but it led to the “ Sun of Righteousness.” O that we were equally wise and diligent in the use of our opportunities and privileges—we should then be equally successful!

2. A specimen is here presented to us of the discriminating proceedings of the grace of God. Those who were “ far off” were “ brought nigh,” while those who were “ nigh” really were placed “ far off.” These Pagans were conducted to Jesus ; while the infatuated Jews, unaffected by his appearance and subsequent miracles, opposed his influence, and gloried in their shame. Thus was fulfilled the ancient oracle, “ I am found of them that sought me not.”† The star which failed to excite attention in Judea, darted an attractive and effectual splendour into Arabia.

3. It is truly deplorable, that those signs and wonders of Almighty mercy, which will fill eternity with praise, should be so little observed or appreciated by the great

\* Matt. ii. 11, 12.

† Isai. lxy. 1.

proportion of mankind. How different were the engagements that occupied the inhabitants of Jerusalem, from those of the Arabian philosophers! The star of Bethlehem excited the respectful attention only of a few strangers, who saw and followed it, and "found the Messiah." The Saviour they sought was despised and rejected of men, when emerging from the obscurity of his early life he dwelt amongst them, distributing blessings and imparting salvation.

Is not this the case to the present hour? Where are the travellers to Zion? Where are the followers of Christ? Where are those happy individuals to be found, who, renouncing the speculations of philosophy, and the suggestions of a depraved and perverted mind, are led by the star of divine revelation to Jesus? Where are those who forsake ALL for him? Where the company of inquirers, whom no frowns and no flatteries can induce to relinquish the pursuit? Alas, how thinly scattered! The multitude, attracted by the glare of worldly glory, can see, indeed, the glitter of gold, and hear with approving readiness the accents of pleasure; but are unable to discern the excellences of Christ, and will not listen to his voice! They are enchanted by other charms, and lulled into dangerous repose by other music!

4. Though the star of Bethlehem, which guided the Arabian sages to the Son of God, be extinguished; the clear light of truth still shines as in a dark place, and points us to the same object. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."\* Whoever follows this light will be led to Jesus; whoever neglects it must wander in the wilderness of error and perplexity. It sheds the clearest radiance on the path of the traveller, who is pressing to the "Prince of Peace."† Let us not pay attention to those deceptive lights, which the world holds out to allure and destroy. This only is from heaven, and will guide the inquirer thither, where the illumination it has diffused over the path of life will be lost amidst the splendours of eternal day.

\* Ps. cxix. 105.

† Isai. ix. 6.

# THE VIRGIN MARY.

## SECTION III.

The flight into Egypt—Herod's cruel proceedings—and death—Mary goes to Jerusalem with Joseph—on their return their child is missing—they find him among the doctors—he returns with them—the feast of Cana—Christ's treatment of his mother when she desired to speak to him—his behaviour at the crucifixion—she is committed to the care of John—valuable lessons to be derived from this touching scene.

**C**HRISTIANS, in their times of trial, are usually favoured with adequate supplies from heaven ; so that if they have been overtaken suddenly, or attacked fiercely, their afflictions have neither found them unprepared, nor left them overwhelmed. It seems to have been the design of God, in some of his most painful dispensations, not only to purify the individual character, but to evince in general, by means of the sufferer's patience, humility, and other virtues, the reality of religion, and the power of faith ; and thus to furnish an example for the imitation of mankind. This consideration may serve to explain a part of that *mysteriousness* which has characterized many instances of remarkable tribulation, and to prevent those hasty decisions upon the conduct of Providence which we are too apt to adopt. On all occasions, we may safely conclude, that whatever be the nature of our affliction, the goodness of our Father in heaven will both proportion it to the necessity of the case, and enable us to sustain it, by preparatory consolations.

The story of Mary and her family illustrates this representation. The balance of her lot, so to speak, was poised by a divine hand ; and the equilibrium was mercifully and almost constantly preserved, by a proportionate share of joy and sorrow. The danger of reproach and proscription by the Jewish law, was compensated by

the circumstances of the miraculous conception ; the meanness and misery of her condition in the stable at Bethlehem, were counterbalanced by the visit of the shepherds, and the equally wonderful journey of the eastern Magi ; and the whole train of previous manifestations, tended to prepare her for the new distresses which were destined to attend the flight into Egypt.

Herod was arranging his plans with malicious skill, and, as he imagined, with secrecy : but there was an eye that watched his movements with unsleeping vigilance, and a wisdom invisibly operating to counteract his purposes. The Magi were forewarned, by a heavenly vision, not to return to this foe of the holy Jesus ; and an angel appeared to Joseph, directing him to escape with the mother and child into Egypt ; and thus did Herod himself unconsciously fulfil the ancient oracle, “ Out of Egypt have I called my Son.” The cruel archer shot at the Saviour’s life, but the arrow rebounded and took his own.

Behold, then, Mary and Joseph, with their infant charge, hastening, in obedience to the divine command, to a distance from the persecutor’s fury ! See them under the covert of darkness, and amidst the silence of night, flying to their appointed place of exile ; still under the guidance of that hand which regulated all the events of their lives, with no less wisdom and constancy than it directed the movements and fixed the positions of the planetary and starry orbs, which glittered upon their adventurous path. Observe them trembling with human fears, but sustained by spiritual consolations ! Mary presses the infant fugitive to her maternal breast, still “ keeping all these things, and pondering them in her heart ;” incapable of fully penetrating the cloud that obscures their present destiny, but looking through the tears of anguish to her divine Protector and Guide, believing that the light of Israel cannot be extinguished. In some respects, they “ knew not whither they went ;” but each was, no doubt, inspired by the devout sentiment of the poet :

“ I hold by nothing here below,  
 Appoint my journey and I go ;  
 Though pierced by scorn, oppress'd by pride.  
 I feel thee good—feel nought beside.

No frowns of men can hurtful prove  
 To souls on fire with heav'nly love ;  
 Though men and devils both condemn,  
 No gloomy days arise for them.

While place we seek, or place we shun,  
 The soul finds happiness in none ;  
 But with a God to guide our way,  
 'Tis equal joy to go or stay.

Could I be cast where thou art not,  
 That were indeed a dreadful lot ;  
 But regions none remote I call,  
 Secure of finding God in all.”\*

Herod, whose cruelty and duplicity were equally conspicuous, finding that the young child had by some means eluded his grasp, meditated the deepest revenge, which, like a smothered flame, the longer it is confined the more violently at last it blazes. For a time he concealed his feelings, with a view of the better securing ultimate success ; but, on perceiving that his secret intentions were frustrated, he resolved on open war. Animated with a tyrant's spirit and a demon's rage, he determined on the destruction of Jesus, though the accomplishment of his purpose should deluge Judea with blood. He issued his murderous decree, and despatched his executioners to Bethlehem and “all the coasts thereof,” to slay “all the children from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.”†

What language can express the barbarity of this conduct! The most savage of mankind have spared children, even when their parents have been guilty. The innocence and weakness of their age have preserved them

\* MAD. GUION'S Poems, translated by Cowper, vol. ii. cant. 108.

† Matt. ii. 16.

from the sword, even of a victorious and exasperated enemy; and yet these little innocents, whose parents were not implicated in any plot to deceive the tyrant, whose yoke was endured with extraordinary patience, were given to the murderous sword, and Bethlehem suddenly converted into one vast slaughter-house. "Then," remarks the evangelist, "was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not."

"The innocents were martyrs in deed, but not in will, by reason of their tender age. Of these, however, it pleased the Prince of martyrs to have his train composed, when he made his entry into the world, as at this season; a train of infants, suited to an infant Saviour; a train of innocents, meet to follow the spotless Lamb, who came to convince the world of sin, and to redeem it in righteousness. They were the first-fruits offered to the Son of God after his incarnation, and their blood the first that flowed on his account. They appeared as so many champions in the field, clad in the King's coat of armour, to intercept the blows directed against him.

"The Christian Poet, *PREBENTIVS*, in one of his hymns, has an elegant and beautiful address to these young sufferers for their Redeemer:\* Hail, ye first flowers of the evangelical spring, cut off by the sword of persecution, ere yet you had unfolded your leaves to the morning, as the early rose droops before the withering blast. Driven, like a flock of lambs to the slaughter, you have the honour to compose the first sacrifice offered at

\* "Salvete, flores Martyrum,  
Quos, lucis ipso in limine,  
Christi insecutor sustulit,  
Ceu turbo nascentes rosas.

Vos, prima Christi victima,  
Grex immolatorum tener,  
Aram ante ipsam, simplices,  
Palmâ et coronis luditis."

the altar of Christ ; before which methinks I see your innocent simplicity sporting with the palms and the crowns held out to you from above.”\*

The parents of the infant Saviour remained in Egypt until the death of Herod,† an event which was announced to Joseph in a dream, who was directed to return with Mary and her child into the land of Israel. When he heard that Archelaus, a prince no less sanguinary in his disposition than his infamous predecessor, reigned over Judah in the room of his father, he was afraid of returning ; but being again divinely admonished, withdrew into Galilee, under the government of Herod Antipas. He took up his residence at Nazareth, a small city where he had formerly lived ; by which the ancient oracle was fulfilled, “ He shall be called a Nazarene.”

We may be allowed a momentary interruption of the narrative, by one observation on the death of Herod. How easily God can remove out of the way whatever opposes the designs of his wisdom ! He lays his finger on the tyrant’s head, and he sinks into the dust ! Thus it has been, and thus it ever must be, with the adversaries of Christ. Every Herod must die. On the banners of the church is inscribed, “ If God be for us, who can be against us ?” Where are the Neros, and Domitians, and Caligulas, that have sought the life of Christianity ?—They are *dead* ! but his cause survives. “ He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet.” The Gospel, in pursuing its course through the world, resembles a mighty river, here and there meeting with powerful obstructions ; but not prevented by these, it takes a circuitous course, and leaves them to be gradually overflowed or undermined, and buried in the stream. Thus superstition, idolatry, infidelity, Popery, Mahometanism, constitute so many obstructions to this celestial stream ; but while it makes glad the city of God, it is gradually diffusing itself

\* BISHOP HORNE.

† Josephus has given an affecting account of this awful death. Vide JOSEPH. Antiq. lib. xvii. cap. 6. and Bell. Jud. lib. i. cap. 33.

around, and sapping by degrees the foundation of these impediments, till, being broken down and forgotten, an angel shall proclaim, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen!" Then shall "the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever." Then all that "sought the young child's life," all that opposed the interests of Jesus, being dead and vanquished, "the whole earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

The law of Moses commanded all the adult males of Israel to go up to Jerusalem three times in a year, to celebrate the feasts of the passover, pentecost, and tabernacles.\* Women were under no obligation to undertake these journeys; † but it was not unusual for such as were eminent for piety, to accompany their husbands and friends upon annual occasions. Mary, who set the highest value upon the ordinances of God, and who would not be disparaged by a comparison with the greatest characters of Israel, went up with Joseph year after year. In the exemption by which the law permitted the females to remain at home, the weakness of their sex was regarded; but the strength of Mary's piety surmounted every obstacle, and, like her illustrious ancestor, she was "glad when they said, Let us go up to the house of the Lord." ‡ How dissimilar was her spirit to that of multitudes, whose reluctance renders religious duties so irksome and so formal; who call the Sabbath a weariness, and who, instead of hailing the hour of sacred solemnities, are eager to escape from spiritual restraints to replunge into the cares,—perhaps into the dissipations, of the world!

The original constitution of the woman was that of a help meet for man; and it should be her pleasure to prompt to holy duties, and to associate with her beloved

\* Deut. xvi. 16.

† So say the Jews, פסחן של נשים רשית, *the passover of women is arbitrary.*

‡ Ps. cxxii. 1.

partner and children in them. Never does she appear so lovely, as when occupied in this pious service, avoiding all those needless cares which might preclude her own attendance upon appointed means.

The passover was intended as a commemoration of the deliverance wrought for the people of Israel when they were brought out of Egyptian slavery, and the destroying angel, who inflicted death upon the first-born of their oppressors, passed over untouched the blood-besprinkled doors of the people of God :”\* but, under the Christian dispensation, we are invited with our households to celebrate a more glorious release from a more tremendous bondage. The sacramental festival of the church of Christ records our emancipation from sin, both from its consequences and its dominion, through the atoning blood of the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” sprinkled upon the consciences of all believers. Mary, while keeping the typical feast, embraced the real Lamb, and devoutly enjoyed the festival of faith. So let us hasten to this institution, and participate this divine joy.

It is probable that the parents of Jesus were in the habit of taking their son with them every year to Jerusalem, that they might, as it became religious characters, “train him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ;” we are at least certain that he accompanied them at the age of twelve, when a memorable and instructive incident occurred.

At the expiration of the seven days of unleavened bread, they began their return homeward ; but the child Jesus staid behind in Jerusalem, to make inquiries, and to listen to the instructions of those who publicly explained the sense of Scripture, and the traditions of the elders. His mother and Joseph were ignorant of this delay, till the end of the first day’s journey ; for as it was customary on these occasions to travel in very large companies, and these perhaps often separated into groups at consi-

\* Exod. xii. 21—27.

derable intervals, they took it for granted that he was with some of his friends or kindred, who were no doubt often charmed with his lovely company, and expected him to rejoin them in the evening.

The day closed, the different parties assembled—but to the inexpressible concern of Mary and Joseph, Jesus was not to be found! They searched and searched again, but in vain! The anxious father, but the still more anxious mother, flew to every friend, to every fellow-traveller—no tidings were to be heard! Ah, Simeon, thy sword is beginning to pierce this maternal breast! What a night of sleepless anxiety passed, and with what haste did they retrace their steps to Jerusalem! What could they imagine, but that some evil beast had taken their Joseph! The weeping mother chides her negligence, stops every passing stranger, fancies perhaps that some emissary of persecution had seized him, and that Archelaus had accomplished what Herod had begun, searches every house where they had visited or lodged—O what must the mother feel—*such* a mother—and of *such* a child!

But—he is found! On the third day, he was seen in one of the courts of the temple appropriated to the Jewish doctors, where they were accustomed to lecture to their disciples. It might be, perhaps, in the room of the great sanhedrim, where they assembled in a semi-circular form. In front of them were three rows of the scholars, containing each three-and-twenty. It is probable, that Christ sat in one of these rows; and, perhaps, the questions he put, and the answers he gave, excited so much notice amongst the doctors, that they called him into the midst of them, which was occasionally done. Thus the Jews state, that “if one of the disciples or scholars say, I have something to say in favour of him (one that is on his trial) they bring him up and *cause him to sit in the midst of them*; and he does not go down from thence the whole day.”\*

\* *Mish. Sanhedrin, c. v. sec. 4. ap. GILL in loc.*

At the moment when his parents discovered the holy child Jesus, he was hearing and asking questions of the doctors, in which he displayed so much understanding, that they and their disciples were astonished. This is a lesson to youth, who should gladly and submissively receive instruction, and may with respectful eagerness question their superiors. Let them avoid all offensive forwardness and conceit of their knowledge and attainments; remembering that he who could have taught the wisest of the Jewish doctors, sat at their feet *listening and asking them questions!*

Feeling as a mother, but ignorant of the cause of this singular proceeding, Mary ventured, as soon as opportunity permitted, to remonstrate in these words, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing!" We are to consider this language as rather expressive of anxiety, than of anger; yet, perhaps, it may be admitted to contain a mixture of both. His mysterious and unauthorized disappearance might seem to her contrary to the obedience he owed, and was so uniformly accustomed to manifest to his parents. Why did he tarry? Why did he not, at least, *inform them* of his wishes to remain, and thus spare them the wretchedness which they had suffered during the past three days? Did he not know the tender love of his maternal parent? Did he know the bitter tears she would shed, and the agonies she would suffer? Did he not feel the claim which she had upon his early years, and the reverence due to her character and piety?

Yes: these were considerations which he never overlooked; but he was absorbed in sublimer thoughts. Jesus was an extraordinary being, and the whole of this transaction ought to be viewed in connexion with the subsequent developement of his designs, and the glory of his future actions. In it we have a glimpse of his superiority as the Son of God, and it was, doubtless, intended to attract the attention of his thoughtful mother, and to renew those meditations in which she had formerly exercised

her mind, during the miracles of his nativity. His reply, “How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business,” or, at my Father’s <sup>†</sup> would, upon any other supposition, seem strange and unintelligible; and, accordingly, his parents did not comprehend him, being at present imperfectly versed in the mysteries of his kingdom. It was, however, perfectly in point, and full of meaning. Mary complained of having been so troubled to find him, and at the same time called Joseph his father. To which he replies, that she might surely have recollected that the temple was the most proper place to inquire for him, who, she knew, though a child, was already consecrated to so divine a work; that he was, in fact, where he ought to be, and about the proper business to which his life was to be devoted; and that, although Joseph were his reputed father, he possessed a higher relationship, and a nobler character than could distinguish mere morals. God was his Father—this was his house—and nothing must impede his purposes. Still, however, he instantly complied with the wishes of his parents, went with them to Nazareth, and during many succeeding years veiled the splendours of his character in the obedience and concealment of his childhood. Mary, in the meantime, “kept all these sayings in her heart.”

In detailing the life of Christ, the inspired evangelists do not often introduce his mother; and whenever she is mentioned, it is rather to illustrate *his* character than *hers*; but we feel pleasure in collecting even the smallest fragments of this divine record, that nothing may be lost; and while searching for MARY, let us rejoice that we are, at the same time, conducted to JESUS.

\* *At my Father’s*, ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου. Syriac ܕܒܝܬܐ ܕܐܒܝ, in *donto patris mei*. The Armenian version renders the words in the same manner. It has been justly observed, that τὰ τοῦ πατρὸς is a Greek idiom, not only with classical writers, but with the sacred penmen, for denoting the house of such a person.—CAMPBELL.

The next circumstance that demands our notice, is the history of the wedding-feast at Cana in Galilee. Here the Saviour and his mother appear as the most conspicuous characters. These, with the disciples of Christ, at present few in number, were expressly invited; whence it has, with sufficient probability, been thought that it was the marriage of one of his own relations.

It seems highly becoming the dignity of the Saviour to sanction, by his holy presence, the institution of marriage in general, and to sanctify its observance on the present occasion in particular. Its utility, in reference to individual comfort and to the interests of society at large, renders "marriage honourable in all;" and while it would be ungrateful to Providence, not to accept with suitable emotions of cheerfulness the blessing which has been so long and so eagerly sought, it must always be injurious to character to indulge in extravagant merriment or indecorous festivity. Let persons forming such a connexion aim to chastise their mirth with a solid piety, recollecting that while they are allowed to be cheerful, they must not be intemperate.

At the feast of Cana, the wine failed. The poverty of the family might not admit of a very liberal supply, or a larger number of visitors might come than had been expected. Mary immediately informed her Son. She saw that this circumstance occasioned confusion, she knew the power of Jesus, and she wished to spare the feelings of the new-married pair, who might have been exposed to censure for the scantiness of the supply. If these were her real sentiments, they were worthy of her character and sex. Let this example of amiable concern for the reputation of another, and the general comfort of the guests at this nuptial feast, stimulate us to an imitation of her kindness. How common is it for persons to depreciate and ridicule each other, availing themselves of trifling mistakes or unimportant oversights, to awaken prejudices and to exasperate dislikes! Envy is so prevalent in the world, so natural to the human heart, and so in-

conceivably diversified in its methods of operation, that we cannot be too much warned against it, especially as its venom lies concealed, but often works effectually.

The female sex, of which we have before us so fine a specimen, are naturally attentive and kind, skilful to discern, quick to feel, and prompt to relieve the wants of others. They seem endowed with a generosity, in which it is their honour to excel, while it is their duty to cultivate and indulge it. Are comforts needed? Their ready hands will supply them. Is pain suffered? Their tender hearts will sympathize and aim to alleviate it. They are officious to replenish the cup of joy, and no less prompt to sweeten and mitigate the bitter draughts of sorrow. To them we look to increase our pleasures in the days of prosperity—for them we do not ask in vain to sustain our aching head, and to smooth the pillow of sickness and of death!

But if the views we have imputed to Mary really dictated the intimation which she gave to Jesus, respecting the deficiency of wine, it may be asked, how came she to meet with so austere a reply, as, “Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.” This requires some attention.

In the first place, notwithstanding the feeling of kindness which dictated this interference, Christ might have thought it necessary to assert his divine prerogative. It is evident, from her immediately directing the servants to do whatever he commanded them, she expected some miracle; for she was, no doubt, fully persuaded by this time of his being the Messiah. But, though endowed with maternal authority, it was not her province to point out the course of his proceeding as Lord of all. He was willing, however, to grant her wishes; but, by this language, imposed secrecy. He would choose the moment and the proper manner of imparting the necessary supply. One would almost infer from the injunction of Mary to the servants, that he had informed her of his inten-

tions ; and that while he felt no displeasure at her request, it was necessary to wait his divine will.

In the next place, the words were, probably, not so disrespectful as they at first appear. Some have thought the original phrase might be rendered, "What is that to thee and me?" meaning, "What concern have we in this want of wine? it is the duty of others to provide, and not ours." It must be admitted, however, that this interpretation is not so honourable to the benevolent character of Christ, nor so natural, under all the circumstances, since Mary was evidently and properly concerning herself, as a relative in this affair, and the use of similar expressions in other parts of Scripture imply some degree of reproof.\* Considering the divine character of our Lord, this phraseology was not improper, because in what concerned his office she had no authority over him ; and Mary, impressed with a sense of his extraordinary character, which was every day increasingly developing himself, withdrew in reverential silence to enjoin the necessary obedience upon the servants. She felt, and let us never forget, that the endearments of friendship and the tender ties of consanguinity must not interfere with the superior claims of religion and of Christ.

The greatest objection seems to attach to the use of the abrupt and disrespectful term "woman;" but the usages of antiquity prove that this mode of address was quite different in meaning from what it appears in English. The politest writers, and most accomplished princes, adopted it in addressing ladies of quality ; and even servants sometimes spoke to their mistresses in this manner. †

\* Judg. xi. 12. 2 Sam. xvi. 10. 1 Kings xvii. 18. 2 Kings iii. 13. and 4x. 19. *Sept. translation.*

† Blackwall observes, "'Tis the opinion of some learned men, that the holy Jesus, the most tender and dutiful Son that ever was born, when he called his mother plainly *woman*, declared against those idolatrous honours which he foresaw would be paid her in latter ages, which is no improbable guess. But in the more plain and unceremonious times it was a title applied to ladies of the greatest quality and merit by people of the greatest humanity and exactness of behaviour. So Cyrus the Great says to the queen of the Armenians, Ἀλλὰ σὺ αἶ γύναι: and servants addressed

In the last and tender scene of the cross, it is not to be imagined that the dying Son should intentionally, or even inadvertently, wound the feelings of a weeping mother, and at the very moment too when affectionately commending her to the care of his surviving friend and disciple ; and yet his address is precisely similar : “ *woman*, behold thy Son !”

JESUS soon issued his orders to the servants to fill six water-pots of stone, which were at hand, and were commonly used for washing cups and other vessels, and the hands and feet of the guests, according to the Jewish custom of purifying.\* The water, to the astonishment of all present, he turned into wine of so excellent a flavour as to excite particular notice. This was the beginning of his public miracles, a wonderful display of his glory, and a means of confirming the minds of his disciples.

“ There is a marriage whereto we are invited ; yea, wherein we are already interested ; not as the guests only, but as the bride ; in which there shall be no want of the wine of gladness. It is marvel if in these earthly banquets there be not some lack. ‘ In thy presence, O Saviour, there is fulness of joy, and at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.’ Blessed are they that are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb.”†

As the extraordinary character of Christ became from this moment increasingly apparent, it is easy to believe that the strong feelings of maternal tenderness in the bosom of Mary blended themselves more and more with a spiritual affection. She was indeed, in one sense, the mother of our Lord, but she was also his disciple—she had been the guide of his childhood, but she sat at the feet of his maturity. As he ascended to an immeasurable elevation above every other being of the human race, she

queens and their mistresses in the same language.” BLACKWALL'S Sacred Classics, V. ii. p. 206. *second edit.*

\* These water-pots contained two or three *baths* apiece. A bath was about seven gallons and a half.

† BISHOP HALL.

must feel that the authority of the earthly parent, although it were never disregarded or disavowed, but, on the contrary, must have impressed a peculiarity both upon his affection and hers, was, however, absorbed in the superiority of his heavenly commission. He obeyed her as a child, but she submitted to him as the Lord.

Does the observant eye of a mother watch with unutterable solicitude the progress of her beloved offspring, tracing the improvement of his mind, the developement of his faculties, the career of his life, sympathizing with his sorrows and participating with his joys, taking a fond share in all that concerns him—his prospects, his pursuits, his whole character;—does the maternal heart, even in ordinary cases, feel so much and so long, cherishing such undiminished interest in every vicissitude that affects the son of her love? With what lively sensibility must Mary have contemplated the rising glory of the inimitable Jesus! What a track of majesty must have marked his footsteps! What a winning singularity must have distinguished his actions! What a purity must have adorned his conduct! What “grace was poured into his lips!” Who can express the deep interest that his thoughtful mother must have felt in the discourses she heard, the wisdom with which he silenced gainsayers, penetrated human hearts, exposed secret motives and purposes, confounded the most wise and artful, and communicated the sublimest truths in the most commanding and lucid manner! How must she have felt to have been the witness of his astonishing miracles, to have seen the flashes of unearthly dignity breaking through the concealment of a human exterior, and to have traced the accomplishment of all that prophets had foretold and angels announced! O, what an honour to have been the *mother*, but still more so to be the *disciple* of him who was predicted by prophets, prefigured by types, attended by ministering angels, celebrated by the most eminent of the Jewish church, obeyed by all the elements of nature, the principalities of darkness, and the powers of heaven;—who, “being

in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God ; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men !”\*

The sacred history, which is chiefly occupied in the life of Christ himself, and the detail of his actions, does not explain how often his mother accompanied him. The incidental mention of her and his brethren upon one occasion shows, however, what we cannot but infer, that she was one of his frequent attendants. He was “ talking to the people” in a private house, with the instructive familiarity for which he was so remarkable, when “ his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.” They had something of importance to communicate, otherwise it cannot be supposed they would have interrupted his conversation ; but, being unable to reach him on account of the multitude, their wishes were conveyed from one to another, till the person who stood by him intimated that his mother and brethren were waiting to speak with him. Availing himself of the circumstance to impress his admonitions upon the assembled crowd, he said to the person who informed him, “ Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?” Then addressing the people as he pointed to the disciples, he exclaimed, “ Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother.”†

Did he then intend to pour contempt upon these near relatives? Did he disclaim the ties of kindred? Did he exclude Mary, and James, and Joses, Simeon, and Judas, from the honour and the happiness of participating those spiritual blessings which he so liberally dispensed to others?—Surely not. Applying to this the same principle of interpretation which was adopted in explaining his words at the feast of Cana, we infer that he meant to intimate that they who called him brother according to

\* Phil. ii. 6, 7.

† Matt. xii. 46—50.

the flesh, and even she who bore him, need not be envied by those whom he admitted to the intimacy and happiness of a spiritual relationship ; and that whatever of love and kindness could be supposed to arise from the natural connexion, was enjoyed in a nobler sense by virtue of a spiritual union. Every thing that can consummate the happiness of man, every thing that can secure the most glorious and permanent distinction, arises from being the disciple of the blessed Jesus, and “ doing the will of his Father.” Let such an one envy no more the possessions of time, for he is heir to the inheritance of heaven ; let him not value at too high a price any human honour, title, or relationship, for he is a member of the “ household of God.”\*

We now hasten to a scene calculated at once to excite our liveliest sensibilities and our warmest gratitude—a scene upon which the eyes of the remotest ages were fixed with holy anticipation, and which all future generations will contemplate with retrospective joy—a scene distinguished by the most affecting incidents—in one of which, not the least remarkable, the mother of our Lord appears conspicuous.

It is observable, that whenever he alluded to the circumstances of his own death, Christ adopted a mode of speaking which is expressive of the most dignified composure of mind, united with an irresistible firmness of purpose. He advanced to the cross of martyrdom like one who, “ for the joy that was set before him, despised the shame.”† His love to man annihilated the terror of death, and rendered him solicitous to shed his blood. “ I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished.”‡ In the hour of previous conflict he intimated that this was the tragical but necessary design of his coming into the world. From his radiant throne in glory, he saw, in awful perspective, the afflictions which were destined for his incarnate state ;

\* Eph. ii. 19.

† Heb. xii. 2.

‡ Luke xii. 50.

and, instead of a train of angels, he prepared to be attended by a retinue of sorrows, during his abode in the world. Above all, he beheld the cross, surrounded with awful clouds, raised amidst the scorn of human and the triumph of infernal enemies. He saw the full tide of misery set in against him ; but, with unabating love to man, and perfect obedience of spirit to the Father—melting with pity and glowing with zeal—he prepared to encounter the billows and the storms of death. He was not overtaken by a calamity which he neither foresaw nor could prevent, for ten thousand angels at his word would have hastened to pluck him from the waves ; but in fulfilment of the everlasting covenant, to glorify the Father and to redeem a perishing world, he was “ led to the slaughter.”

At this period all Judea was present to celebrate the paschal festival ; the great council of the nation was convened ; Herod, the governor of Judea, and Pilate, the tetrarch of Galilee, with their attending armies, displayed the grandeur of the empire ; and on the mount of crucifixion a vast concourse of people assembled to witness this tragical scene. What must have been their sensations when nature became convulsed—when darkness veiled the sun—and the inhabitants of the invisible world burst through the trembling earth, and reappeared to many in Jerusalem ! Never did an hour revolve since the beginning of time that laboured with such great events. The fate of the moral creation was now weighing in the scales—the happiness of millions was at stake—the interests of eternity were deciding—and the victory over sin, death, and hell, was proclaimed by the expiring Redeemer, when he said, “ IT IS FINISHED.”

Amidst this scene of wonders, behold a group of females, no less similar in character than in name ; Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene. Many women are honourably conspicuous in the records of the New Testament, but never did they appear with greater advantage than at this moment. All

the disciples were fled, with the single exception of John, who had overcome his temporary apprehensions, and was returned to the field of danger. These pious heroines, although incapable of affording the glorious Sufferer any assistance, and although surrounded by an infuriated enemy, rose superior to the fears of their sex, and pierced through the crowd, to testify their sympathy, to listen to his dying words, and to watch the expiring flame of life to the moment of its extinction.

What a scene was this for his MOTHER ! How could she sustain the horrible spectacle ? How could she survive this fiery trial ? What inconceivable anguish must it have occasioned to witness the death of her Son ! Say, ye mothers who have watched the infant days and progressive maturity of a first-born, what distress ye have felt at his early loss ! The flower perhaps had just expanded to the day, when the pestilential wind blew from the desert of death and withered its beauties ! It is gone—but has left behind a sense of unspeakable desolation. How were your most delightful hopes annihilated in a moment, and ye were ready to adopt the language of David in his agony, “ O my son Absalom ! my son, my son Absalom ! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom ! my son, my son ! ”\*

But this was a death of the most ignominious and painful description. Mary beheld her Son suffering the shame of a *public execution* and the torment of a *cross*. She saw him suspended between heaven and earth, as if unworthy of either, crucified between two malefactors, and insulted by an outrageous mob. She heard the revengeful speeches of that infatuated multitude, and the mutual congratulations of those by whom they were instigated, and who ridiculously imagined they had obtained a decisive victory ! The terror of this hour and power of darkness pervaded her own spirit, and she

\* 2 Sam. xviii. 33.

lived to feel a greater horror than it is in the power even of the king of terrors himself to inflict.

This was the crucifixion of an *innocent Son*! He had experienced indeed the mockery of a judicial proceeding, but had been sacrificed to the ravings of a despicable and infatuated mob, the asseverations of perjured witnesses, the timidity of Pilate, and the hatred of every class of Jews. No guile was found in his mouth, no recrimination in his language, no impatience in his conduct. Conscious of perfect innocency, he yet submitted to condemnation and death as a notorious offender; and, with all things under his control, he did not lift a finger to stop the career of injustice or arrest the course of infernal rage. If the mothers of his two associates in suffering were present on this occasion, whatever bitterness of anguish they had felt to see the mournful end of their own offspring, they could not but admit that public crime demanded public punishment, and sentiments of commiseration must have blended themselves with those of censure when they viewed their fate. But the mother of Jesus saw her beloved Son condemned without reason, and suffering in defiance of justice. In proportion as she knew his innocency she must have felt his loss.

But his character was more than innocent; this, as the astonished centurion exclaimed, “Truly, this man was the *Son of God*!” Well might she wonder that no angel appeared to rescue the expiring Redeemer, and that he who had saved others did not save himself! Well might she have been confounded at the mysterious circumstance, that he whom winds and waves obeyed, and whose presence on earth was felt by universal nature, should die in apparent disgrace, exposed to the raillery of his inveterate enemies!

This afflicted mother was also a *widow*! Long since the evangelical narrative has dropped the name of her husband, doubtless because Joseph was no more; but Jesus survived to console her amidst domestic misfor-

tunes, to cheer her declining days, to prop her falling house, to pour the wine of consolation into her cup of sorrow, and the light of celestial truth into her mind. He was all goodness, all perfection, who could never forget a mother—a *widowed* mother, wherever “he went about doing good”—was to this awful hour her staff and comfort. How keen was the edge of that piercing sword of which Simeon spake, and what unparalleled grief was hers when she saw the cross, and the tortures, and the blood of her Son!

Notwithstanding all, Mary is not seen wringing her hands and tearing her hair in distraction; nor is she heard to utter intemperate language against his persecutors, or to manifest resentment at the dispensations of Heaven: she neither curses man nor blasphemes God; nor do we observe her fainting beneath the pressure of accumulated woes; but she stands near the cross, in solemn silence, pondering, in an attitude of profound meditation, and submitting to the purposes of Providence.

Let us admire the power of that “grace” which is promised to Christians, “to help them in time of need,” and of the efficacy of which the present scene furnishes so substantial an evidence. Is it possible that after such a record as this we should ever doubt or forget the divine assurances—“My grace is sufficient for thee”—“When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee?”\* Should thy desponding heart be ready to distrust the wisdom or deny the goodness of thy “Father who is in heaven,” when sorrows, diversified and oppressive, burden thy spirit, think of the mother of Jesus at the cross of her Son!

If the sublime sympathy of Mary prevented the recollection of her personal condition, Jesus was not so over-

\* 2 Cor. xii 9. Is. xliii. 2.

whelmed with affliction as to be unmindful of the future lot of his poor, penniless, helpless, widowed, and weeping mother; but committed her to the care of his disciple JOHN, directing him to regard her henceforward as a mother, and her to consider him as a son. *Woman, behold thy son*—"My beloved disciple will fulfil every office of filial tenderness, and at my request he will receive and provide for my destitute parent." *Behold*, said he, addressing John, *behold thy mother*; "take her to thy house, allow her to share thy means, respect and supply her as the most endeared relative of thy dying Lord. I have no property to leave, no silver or gold to distribute: this is my fond and my only bequest. I have confidence in thy attachment, and when thou dost minister to *her* thou wilt remember *me*."

From this exquisitely touching and instructive scene we must take a lesson of *dependence on the providence of God*. If he inflict unexpected trials, he affords unexpected supplies. His resources are numberless; and he who raised up John to supply the place of an endeared Son to Mary, can never be at a loss for expedients when his people are in distress. One prop is removed, another is substituted. "O fear the Lord, all ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him."\* Earthly cisterns may indeed be broken, and temporal streams of enjoyment may cease, but "the fountain of living waters" is inexhaustible.

Take a lesson of *filial piety*. Children are under an indispensable obligation to succour their aged parents. If amidst the agonies of crucifixion, Jesus so carefully provided for the future comfort of his maternal parent, be assured "he has set an *example* wherein we should follow his steps;" and disrespect to such claims is a dereliction of our character, and a forfeiture of our profession as the disciples of Christ.

Learn to be *prompt in your obedience to every requisition of your Lord*. It is an honour to be employed by him in any service, whatever it may cost us. John did

\* Ps. **cxiv.** 9.

not hesitate, or indulge in surmisings; he did not think of the trouble, the expense, or the possible danger of harbouring the mother of one who was executed as an enemy to Cesar; but "from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." If the sacred history had followed him to his lowly habitation, where our imaginations are ready to accompany John and his venerable charge, it would doubtless have exhibited a specimen of tender friendship and unwearied assiduity. What could John deny to the mother of his Lord? How eagerly would he promote her comfort! What "sweet converse" would they "hold together" upon the life, the miracles, the doctrines, the precepts, the death of Jesus! What a gleam of light and joy would the remembrance of one so dear throw upon the darkest scene of their lives, and how would the glory of his subsequent ascension, and dignity in the invisible world, occupy their daily intercourse and their most devotional moments! "The sweet hour of prime," and the serenity of "evening mild," and "twilight gray," would still find them amidst the wonders of the cross or the triumphs of the resurrection.

Nothing more is said of Mary till we come to the Acts of the Apostles, where a brief but honourable notice closes her history. In an upper room at Jerusalem "abode Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and *Mary the mother of Jesus*, and with his brethren."\*

It is supposed that John took her with him to Ephesus, where she died in an extreme old age. There is a letter of the œcumenical council of Ephesus, importing, that in the fifth century it was believed she was buried there; but some authors think she was buried at Jerusalem.

\* Acts i. 13, 14.

# THE VIRGIN MARY.

## SECTION IV.

Brief account of the extravagant regard which has been paid to the Virgin Mary at different periods—the names by which she has been addressed, and the festivals instituted to honour her memory—general remarks on the nature and character of superstition, particularly that of the Catholics.

**A**FTER reviewing, as we have done in the preceding pages, the *facts* which are stated by the evangelists respecting the life of the mother of Jesus, the reader perhaps will not be displeased if he be presented with some of the *fictions* with which the fancy and the folly of the human race have combined to embellish her history. That she has a claim upon the respect of every age and nation, will not be disputed: but we must condemn as well as compassionate that weakness which has exalted her into an object of worship, and filled the temples, which ought to have been devoted to the service of God, with unauthorized addresses, unscriptural rites, and idolatrous disfigurements.

The first notice we have in history of undue honour being rendered to the Virgin Mary is about the close of the fourth century, when the *Collyridians* adored her as a goddess, and by various libations and sacrifices sought her protection, and hoped to avert her displeasure.

Soon after this period corruptions multiplied in the church to an extravagant degree, and mankind departed more and more from the simplicity of religion. A disposition to pomp and parade usually marks a decline in piety; for wherever “the beauty of holiness” is preserved, gaudy decorations and splendid formalities will be deemed unnecessary. Surely God is not honoured by a service which he has never instituted, and which is only

calculated to divert the mind from the proper business of devotion and the supreme object of religious homage! In the fifth century, therefore, as piety languished, magnificence, with all her costly train, obtruded into notice. The riches of the church increased to an amazing extent; the altars, and chests for the preservation of relics, were made of silver; images adorned, or rather defiled, every niche; and the Virgin Mary, holding the child Jesus in her arms, every where occupied a conspicuous place. She had, besides, universally acquired the title of Θεοτόκος, or *mother of God*, which occasioned the Nestorian controversy.

The idolatrous service of Mary assumed, in the tenth century, new forms of extravagance and absurdity. Among the Latin churches, masses were celebrated every sabbath; and afterward, what is termed the *lesser office* was performed in honour of St. Mary. There are also indications of the institution of the *Rosary* and *Crown*, by which her worshippers were to calculate the number of prayers offered: the former consisted of fifteen repetitions of the Lord's prayer, and a hundred and fifty salutations of the Virgin; the latter, of six or seven repetitions of the Lord's prayer, and six or seven times ten salutations, or Ave Marias.

About the year 1138 a solemn festival was instituted to celebrate the immaculate conception of the Virgin, of whom it was pretended, that her own birth partook of a similar purity to that which attached to her divine offspring. This doctrine was opposed by St. Bernard; but the French churches adopted it, and the superstition of the people contributed to its establishment. The subject was again debated with extreme virulence in the seventeenth century, between the Franciscans and Dominicans, in which the pope interposed a mediatorial power. The opinion of the former, who maintained the doctrine, was declared to have a high degree of probability in its favour, and the latter were required not to oppose it pub-

licly ; while the Franciscans were prohibited from treating the Dominican doctrine as erroneous.\*

It is lamentable to see the profusion of eloquence and ingenuity which some of the most penetrating minds have expended upon this subject. In all the Catholic writings we meet with impassioned addresses to the Virgin, appeals on her behalf to the feelings of piety, and a frequent celebration of her matchless perfections. The theological oracle of the French church distinctly states, that “as the innocence of Jesus Christ is the life and salvation of sinners, so, through the innocence of the holy Virgin, he obtains pardon for the guilty,” exhorting his hearers to “cleanse away their sins in the glorious splendour of her incorruptible purity,” and adding, that “to undertake to describe the perfections of Mary would be to fathom a bottomless abyss.”

After representing the Saviour as making particular choice of Mary for himself, Bossuet bestows upon her the epithets of *beloved creature*, *extraordinary creature*, *unique and privileged creature*; and continues thus: “The Saviour imparted to his apostles and ministers whatever was most adapted to promote the salvation of mankind ; but he communicated to his holy mother whatever was most pleasing, most glorious, and most delightful to himself ; consequently, I doubt not that he made Mary innocent. She is his unique, and he is hers. *Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi* (my beloved is mine and I am his.†) I have only him, and he has only me.” I know well that innocence ought not to be easily lavished on our corrupt nature, but it is no profuse expenditure to bestow it upon his mother only ; while to refuse it to her would surely be too great a reserve.

“No, my brethren, this is not my Saviour’s conduct : on Mary, from the moment of her birth, I behold the innocence of Jesus Christ shining and adorning her head.

\* MOSHEIM’S Eccles. Hist. vol. i. p. 432. ii. 56, 71.

† Cant. ii. 16.

O honour this new ray of light which her divine Son already sheds upon her! ‘The night is far spent, the day is at hand;’ Jesus will quickly bring this day by his own blessed presence. O happy day! O day without cloud! O day, which the innocence of the divine Jesus will render so serene and pure, when wilt thou come to illuminate the world?—Christians, it approaches; let us rejoice in already discovering its dawn in the birth of the holy Virgin—*Natâ Virgine surrexit aurora*, says the pious father Damien. Can you be astonished after this, if I assert that Mary was without spot from the first moment of her appearance in the world? As the great day of Christ was to be so clear and splendid, was it not proper that even its commencement should be beautiful, and that the serenity of the morning should indicate that of the day? ‘It is on this account,’ as father Damien observes, ‘that Mary, who introduced this illustrious day, diffused a brightness over the morning by her nativity—*Maria, veri prævia luminis, nativitate suâ mane clarissimum serenavit.*’ Hasten then, brethren, hasten with joy to behold the beginnings of this new day: we shall see it shine in the attractive light of an untarnished purity!”\*

Bossuet had sufficient ingenuity to construct a plausible defence of a sentiment which, however adapted to supply a theme for eloquent declamation, is not to be found in Scripture. “It must be admitted,” says he, “that Mary would have been involved in the general ruin of mankind, had not the merciful Physician who heals our diseases determined to imbue her beforehand with his preventing grace. Sin, which like a torrent overflowed the world, would have polluted this holy Virgin with its poisonous waves; but Omnipotence can stop, whenever he pleases, the most impetuous force. Observe with what ardour the sun pursues the vast circuit which Providence has assigned him; and yet you cannot be ignorant that God once caused him to stand still in the midst of heaven at the voice of a man. Those who inhabit the vicinity

\* BOSSUET, Sermon pour le Jour de la Nativité de la Sainte Vierge.

of Jordan, the celebrated river of Palestine, know with what rapidity it discharges itself into the Dead Sea, if I am correct as to the place: nevertheless, the whole Israelitish army saw it roll back to its source to form a passage for the ark, where their omnipotent Sovereign resided. Is any thing more natural than the consuming effect of heat in fire issuing out of a furnace? And yet was not the impious Nebuchadnezzar surprised with the sight of three happy individuals rejoicing in the midst of the flames which his merciless minions had kindled—but kindled in vain? But notwithstanding all these examples, may we not truly say, that there is no fire which does not burn, that the sun performs his course with unceasing progress, and that no river flows back to its source? We are accustomed to a similar mode of speaking every day, without being checked by these extraordinary occurrences, of which no one is ignorant. Whence does this arise, Christians? Doubtless from the habit of conversing according to the ordinary course of things; though God chooses sometimes to act conformably to the dictates of his own omnipotence, independently of human notions.

“ I am not astonished, therefore, that the apostle Paul has expressed himself in such general terms respecting the sin of our first parents having occasioned the death of all their posterity. According to the natural course of things, which the apostle is stating in that place, to be born of the race of Adam necessarily includes, in the ordinary sense of the word, being born in sin. It is not more natural for fire to burn than for this cursed depravity to infect every one it touches with corruption and death. No poison is more active, no plague more powerful and penetrating. But I maintain, that this curse, however universal, that all these propositions, however general they may be, do not preclude the exceptions which may be made by the Supreme Disposer, or particular interpositions of his authority. And on what occasion, great God, could thine unlimited power, which

itself is law, be more properly employed than in conferring peculiar favour upon Mary ?”\*

In the Litanies the Virgin is denominated “ the Mother of God, the Queen of Angels, the Refuge of Sinners, the Mother of Mercy, the Gate of Heaven, the Mystic Rose, the Virgin of Virgins,” &c.†

Father Barry, in his “ Paradise opened to Phœragia by a hundred Devotions to the Mother of God, of easy performance,” says, “ It is open to such as confine themselves to their chambers, or carry about them an image of the Virgin, and look steadfastly upon it—who, night and morning beg her benediction, standing near some of the churches dedicated to her, or contribute to the relief of the poor for her sake—who, out of a pious regard for her, avoid pronouncing the name of Mary when they read, but make use of some other instead of it—who beg of the angels to salute the mother of God in their name, who give honourable appellations to her images, and cast amorous glances at them,” &c.

In this work it is expressly stated, that “ as many separate devotions to the mother of God as you find in

\* BOSSUET, *Serm. pour la Fête de la Conception.*

† The bishop of Meaux, who has been already quoted, does not fail to suggest some delectable additions to her titles. He speaks in one of his discourses of her “ sacred body, the throne of chastity, the temple of incarnate wisdom,” &c.: but the whole paragraph shall be introduced, though perhaps it had better remain untranslated:—“ *Le corps sacré de Marie, le trône de la chastité, le temple de la sagesse incarnée, l'organe du Saint-Esprit, et le siège de la vertu du Très-Haut, n'a pas dû demeurer dans le tombeau; et le triomphe de Marie seroit imparfait, s'il s'accomplissoit sans sa sainte chair, qui a été comme la source de sa gloire. Venez donc, Vierges de Jésus Christ, chastes épouses du Sauveur des ames, venez admirer les beautés de cette chair virginale, et contempler trois merveilles que la sainte virginité opère sur elle. La sainte virginité la préserve de corruption; et ainsi elle lui conserve l'être: la sainte virginité lui attire une influence céleste, qui la fait ressusciter avant le temps; ainsi elle lui rend la vie: la sainte virginité répand sur elle de toutes parts une lumière divine; et ainsi elle lui donne la gloire. C'est ce qu'il nous faut expliquer par ordre:*” and he *does* explain these *trois merveilles* in a manner well calculated to satisfy every Papist, and to sicken every Protestant. *Vide Serm. pour l'Assompt. de la Vierge, P. 2.*

this book, are so many keys of heaven, which will open all paradise to you, provided you only practise them ;” and afterward it is added, that “ any one of them is sufficient.” Take the following specimen : “ Salute the holy Virgins wherever you meet her image ; repeat the little chaplet of the ten pleasures of the Virgin ; often pronounce the name of *Mary* ; commission the angels to give your duty to her ; cherish a desire to build more churches to her than all the kings of the world put together ; wish her a good day every morning, and a good night every evening ; say the *Ave Maria* every day, in honour of the heart of *Mary*.”\*

In the earliest ages she was called Queen of angels and Mother of God ; afterward, the spirit of controversy induced her advocates to adopt every possible device to make her considerable among heretics, and to accustom her devotees to extravagant expressions. She has been represented as the *disposer and depository of God’s favours, the treasurer and queen of heaven, the spring and fountain of salvation and life, the mother of light, the intercessor between God and man, the hope of mankind, the ocean of the Deity!* Almost an absolute and sovereign power over her Son our Saviour has been ascribed to her. The psalter, nay the whole bible, has been applied to her, and proofs by miracles and apparitions furnished, that the Virgin appeases the wrath of Christ against sinners, and possesses the power of absolving, binding, and loosening. Temples and altars have been erected, and invocations addressed to her.

The Jesuit, who published the Psalter of our Lady, in French, exhorts the devout Christian who pronounces these words in the introduction, *Holy Lady, open thou my lips, &c.* “ to make two signs of the cross when he repeats them, one upon his lips with his thumb, and the other upon himself with his hand, as the priests do when

\* Quoted by M. PASCAL, in the ninth of his “ *Lettres Provinciales*.” Consult also “ *The Life of Melancthon*,” by the author of this work, chap. iii.

they begin their canonical hours." This method, he assures us, will procure the devotee the honour and happiness of being canon or canoness of heaven; and our lady, to reward so conspicuous and instructive an act of devotion, will admit him into paradise. He gives a pattern of the vows which the devotee is to make "for Jesus and Mary's sake, and for all the lovers of them both, whether male or female." He describes the alliance to be made by him with the *most amiable and honourable mother of all mothers*, the act of repentance and contrition for the reconciliation of himself with her, and all the ceremonies, great and small, by which he may devote himself to the blessed Virgin.

Whoever hopes to obtain the benedictions of the Virgin, must salute her every day, both at his going out and coming in. The legends have transmitted several remarkable instances of the advantages arising from the repetition of the *Ave Maria*—not to mention a thousand days' indulgence granted by some of the popes (Leo X. and Paul V.) to those who shall repeat it at the hour of the *Angelus*.

St. Margarite, of Hungary, said an Ave kneeling before every image of the Virgin she met in her way—St. Catharine, of Sienna, repeated as many Aves as she went up steps to her house.

Fasting on *Saturday*, in honour of the Virgin, is looked upon as a treasure of indulgences and delights, and as an excellent preservative against eternal damnation.

Various festivals are instituted to commemorate her, such as the Purification, the Annunciation, the Visitation, and others.

The fifth of August is the festival of *our Lady of the Snow*. We are informed that the solemnization of it was owing to a miracle. When Liberius was pontiff, a patrician or Roman nobleman finding himself old and childless, resolved, with his wife's approbation, to make the blessed Virgin his sole heiress. The vow being made with great devotion, their principal concern, in the next place, was

to employ their inheritance conformably to our Lady's will; and accordingly they applied themselves to fasting, praying, giving alms to the poor, and visiting the sick, to know her pleasure. The Virgin at length appeared to each of them in a dream, and told them "it was her and her Son's will, that they should employ their effects in erecting a church for her on a particular part of the *Mons Esquilinus*, which they should find covered with snow." The pious husband first communicated the revelation to his wife, who told him, with great surprise, that she had had the same revelation that very night. But, supposing the two dreams had not proved alike, an excess of zeal would have been sufficient to have given them all the conformity that was requisite. These two devotees went immediately and declared their dreams to the pope, who perceived that he was a third man in the revelation; for his holiness had been favoured with the same vision. It was no longer questioned, but that heaven was engaged in this affair. The pontiff assembled the clergy together, and there was a solemn procession to Mount Esquiline, on purpose to find out whether the miracle were real or not; when the place specified in the dream was found covered with snow. The ground was exactly of a suitable extent to erect a church upon, which was afterward called *Liberius's Basilica*, and *St. Mary ad præcepe*, (because the manger, which was used as a cradle for our Lady, was brought thither from Bethlehem,) and is now called *St. Mary Major*. Every festival day, the commemoration of this miracle is revived, by letting fall white jessamine leaves, after so artificial a manner, as to imitate the falling of snow upon the ground.\*

It has even been asserted, that the apostle Peter consecrated a chapel to the Virgin, a story which accords perfectly well with other absurdities. The Spaniards attribute a similar act of devotion to James at *Saragossa*; and some add, that the angels were the architects of the

\* PICART, *Ceremonies et Coutumes de tous les Peuples du Monde*, tom. i:

chapel. It is decorated in the most costly manner with silver angels, lamps, and other furniture, with the Virgin magnificently dressed on a marble pillar. The walls are hung with feet, arms, hands, and other parts of the human body, as grateful oblations to the Virgin, for the miraculous cures she is supposed to have performed upon these members.

At *Madrid*, our lady of Atocha resides in a chapel which blazes with a hundred lamps made of gold and silver, and is celebrated for as many miracles as at Lore'to and other places. The history of her first settlement at *Liesse*, in Picardy, is thus related. During the crusades, an Egyptian princess, resolving to have an image of the Virgin, addressed herself to three gentlemen of Picardy, who were prisoners at Cairo, one of whom made an attempt to paint her, though ignorant of the art. Having failed, he and his companions presented earnest supplications to the Virgin, after which they fell asleep. As soon as they awoke, they found an image of our Lady, accurately performed, which they transmitted to the princess; who, in return, set them at liberty. She was, of course, converted to the Christian faith by this image; and the three gentlemen miraculously escaped out of Egypt, and on a sudden found themselves, by a continuation of the miracle, in Picardy, on the very spot where the church of *our Lady of Liesse* is now erected.

Her devotees carry representations of the Virgin about them, deck her images with flowers, dress them in silks or other costly ornaments, burn tapers before them, kiss and look upon them with a languishing eye, touch them with their chaplets, rub their handkerchiefs upon them, and salute them with the profoundest veneration.

Her relics are innumerable—such as her wedding-ring, handkerchiefs, combs, slippers, and goods of every description, as kitchen furniture, toilette, earthenware, lamps; and even, as it is pretended, her gloves, bed, chair, head-clothes, with other rarities.

“Surely,” says archbishop Tillotson, “if this *blessed*,

among women, the mother of our Lord, (for I keep to the titles which the Scripture gives her.) have any sense of what we do here below, she cannot but look down with the greatest disdain upon that sacrilegious and idolatrous worship which is paid to her, to the high dishonour of the great God and our Saviour, and the infinite scandal of his religion. How can she, without indignation, behold how they play the fool in the church of Rome about her; what an idol they make of her image, and with what sottishness they give divine honour to it; how they place her in their idolatrous pictures in equal rank with the blessed Trinity, and turn the salutation of the angel, *Ave Maria, hail Mary, full of grace*, into a kind of prayer; and, in their bead-roll of devotion, repeat it ten times, for once that they say the Lord's prayer, as of greater virtue and efficacy? And, indeed, they almost justify out the devotion due to Almighty God and our blessed Saviour, by their endless idolatry to her.

“So that the greater part of their religion, both public and private, is made up of that which was no part at all of the religion of the apostles and primitive Christians; nay, which plainly contradicts it: for that expressly teacheth us, that there is but one object of our prayers, and one Mediator by whom we are to make our addresses to God. ‘There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus,’ says St. Paul, when he gives a standing rule concerning prayer in the Christian church. And yet, notwithstanding all the care that our blessed Saviour and his apostles could take to prevent gross idolatry of the blessed mother of our Lord, how blindly and wilfully have the church of Rome run into it! and, in despite of the clearest evidence and conviction, do obstinately and impudently persist in it, and justify themselves in so abominable a practice.”

In the homage rendered to the Virgin Mary by the Catholics, the servility of superstition appears blended with the zeal of enthusiasm. Having departed from Scripture. that only light which shines upon the path of obedience.

and conducts to God, they naturally lose themselves amidst the perplexities of error and the mazes of falsehood; it need not, therefore, occasion surprise though their course should be eccentric, or their conduct preposterous. The passions being chiefly engaged in this service, and kept in exercise by fear or fondness, reason retires; and imagination, supported by these auxiliaries, sways the sceptre.

The absurdities, however, to which under such circumstances the human mind becomes addicted, would seem utterly unaccountable, were it not for the gradual manner of their influence. The victory over judgment and common sense is not secured at a blow, but by perpetual insinuation. The hopes or fears of mankind are wrought upon *individually* from the period of infancy, long previous to the age when reason attains its vigour and maturity,—and *nationally* by a slow and almost insensible accumulation of frivolous or ridiculous observances from century to century. A natural consciousness of weakness renders man the dupe of deception, and an equal sense of guilt makes him the slave of terror. Hence he readily avails himself of every means which he fancies capable of alleviating his anxieties, and in his eagerness to escape the wretchedness of apprehension or the suffering of evil, flies to unscriptural resources.

The pre-eminence of man over the brute creation arises chiefly from his capacity of knowing God, and serving him in the appointed exercises of religion; and yet the perversion of this capacity, by the invention of superstitious ceremonies, has rendered him utterly contemptible. In the services of real piety, he appears elevated to the summit of creation, his nature seems ennobled, and his character encircled with glory; but, in the practices of superstition, he is degraded to the lowest depth of meanness of which an intellectual and immortal being is capable. By the former he soars to “glory, honour, and immortality;” by the latter he sinks to wretchedness and ruin. In the one case he is useful and happy; in the

other, inactive, isolated, and full of disquietude ; and thus either rises into grandeur or falls into littleness,—is an angel or a brute !

Whoever reviews the several religious errors of the Pagan, Jewish, and Christian communities, will admit, that the history of superstition constitutes one of the most offensive pages in the annals of mankind ; he will see the object of worship misrepresented, the universe partitioned into petty sovereignties, and Deity divided, contracted, and localized ; religion turned into mockery, and mockery into religion.

It is somewhat difficult to trace the operations and to ascertain the true character of superstition, although it has prevailed so extensively in the world, and produced such extraordinary effects. Amongst other anomalies, this is observable, that it not only has led captive weak and ignorant minds, which being unable to detect a specious sophism, or to depart from a general practice, may easily be supposed incapable of resisting its fascination ; but it has been known to seduce and enchain some of the noblest orders of intellect, and the most cultivated of human understandings. Whole nations and successive generations have been subjected to its influence, furnishing ample evidence of that statement, which, if it be not repeated in every page of Scripture, lies at the foundation of all its truths ; and into which many of the peculiarities of this principle may be resolved : “The world by wisdom knew not God.”\*

Superstition is unquestionably founded in mean and absurd ideas of the moral attributes of the Deity, which produce corresponding actions, and in assigning to him an arbitrary character, deriving pleasure from what has no connexion with the happiness of the worshipper. A consistent and dignified conduct can only result from a just estimate of the divine perfections, and a correct view of moral obligation. The worship we render to a supe-

\* 1 Cor. i. 21.

rior being, must necessarily be shaped and regulated by our conceptions of the nature of God; consequently, mankind will degenerate into error and folly, proportionate to their departure from the representations of Scripture respecting the spirituality of his essence.

To this source may be traced especially the principles and practices of the Romish church, in which reason is outraged, religion caricatured, and God dishonoured. Transubstantiation is a doctrine manifestly absurd and impious; and the practice of presenting those supplications to dead saints, which the Supreme Being alone can hear and answer, is no less ridiculous, as well as subversive of true piety. Perhaps, however, no deviation from common sense is more remarkable than those extravagancies of the Catholics which respect the Virgin Mary; and yet these have not only been practised by the multitude, but defended by men of learning with the utmost subtlety and the warmest zeal. In fact, she has been praised by every Catholic pen for ages; and every term that language could supply, has been put in requisition to extol her merits.

Let the view we have given of these misstatements excite us to self-examination, in order that we may discover any incorrectness or deficiency in our own apprehensions of religion, and become vigilant over those errors into which we may be apt to deviate. It will be studying man to some purpose, if the better we are acquainted with the history of the human mind, the greater the circumspection we exercise over ourselves. We shall then be less imposed upon by the speciousness of falsehood, and less betrayed by the weakness of our passions; we shall be led to "present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God," and feel that it is our "reasonable service."

# **ELIZABETH.**

## **CHAPTER II.**

The angelic appearance to Zacharias—birth of John—characters of Elizabeth and Zacharias—importance of domestic union being founded on religion, shown in them—their venerable age—the characteristic features of their piety—the happiness of a life like theirs—the effect it is calculated to produce on others—the perpetuation of holy friendship through immortal ages—the miserable condition of the irreligious.

**O**BSCURE as were the circumstances in which Christ appeared, Infinite Wisdom saw fit to furnish miraculous attestations to his character and mission. This evidence attended him during the whole of his career, investing him with a heavenly glory, and rendering his pre-eminence distinctly visible to the eye of faith, notwithstanding his assumed inferiority.

It was in unison with this scheme of Providence to send the most exalted of angelic beings to announce the birth of Messiah, and to prepare the minds of Mary his mother, of the shepherds who were to circulate the intelligence, and of others more nearly or more remotely interested in the event, by celestial visitations. For similar reasons, it comported with the nature of this wonderful event, to attach something peculiar and even miraculous to the birth of his precursor, whose destined office it should be to “prepare the way of the Lord,” by uttering his “voice in the wilderness,” and intimating to mankind the mighty transformations about to be effected in the moral state of the world. Six months, therefore, previously to the annunciation to Mary, the angel Gabriel descended to proclaim “glad tidings” to Zacharias. In the performance of his customary service as a priest, he had gone into the temple to burn incense, while the people were praying without the holy place. On a sudden, he perceived an angel standing on the right side of the altar.

and became exceedingly agitated, till the benevolent spirit addressed him in affectionate and congratulatory terms. Ah! *they* have no reason to dread a message from the world of spirits, or to be filled with apprehensions at the sight of other orders of beings than those with which they are conversant, who are engaged in the discharge of their duties, and live under the influence of religion! However new or extraordinary such revelations, they never could have been real causes of alarm to the servants of God; and were they not at present suspended, in consequence of the completion of the intended communications of truth to mankind, piety ought rather to welcome than to dread them.

Zacharias was assured that his prayer was heard, and that his wife Elizabeth should have a son, to be named John. As a sign of the accomplishment of this prediction, and as a chastisement of the doubt with which the message was at first received, he was struck with dumbness, which continued only till the birth of his child.

The interview between Elizabeth and Mary, the mother of our Lord, has been already adverted to in the preceding narrative, where the salutations of these favoured relatives were recited. At the expiration of the appointed time, Elizabeth bare a son, whom they would have called after the name of Zacharias, but his mother interposed; and the affair being finally referred to his father, he wrote, to the general astonishment of their neighbours and relatives, who had remonstrated in vain, "His name is John." Immediately his speech was restored, and he broke out in impassioned strains of praise: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he swore

to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”\*

Reverting to the commencement of this history by the evangelist Luke, we shall be led to notice the domestic characters of Zacharias and Elizabeth, particularly as they illustrate the excellence of a life of piety. While religion adorns every station, it teaches us to fulfil every relative duty; and acting under its influence, a person becomes a light in the world, diffusing through the family, the social circle; and the more extended sphere of busy life, a mild and beneficent radiance.

Our attention is first directed to the office of Zacharias, and the descent of his wife. He was a *priest*, and she “of the daughters of Aaron.” The world affords too many evidences, that piety is neither created by station, nor hereditary in its transmission. As Zacharias was a minister of the sanctuary, it was both to be *desired* and *expected* that he should not approach the altar with a hardened and unsanctified heart. “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? and who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lift up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.”† Yet, alas! it is not always to be presumed that real religion accompanies either the brightest profession or the most dignified of-

\* Luke i. 69—73.

† Ps. xxiv. 3—5.

nice ! Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, offered “strange fire,” Judas betrayed the Son of God, and Paul expresses an apprehension “lest, having preached to others,” he should himself “be a cast away.”\* The admonition, therefore, of God by Isaiah is appropriate and striking : “Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.”† It is possible to be a preacher of righteousness and yet a child of Satan—a priest, and yet a demon—a worker of miracles, and yet a “worker of iniquity :”‡ but a pleasing exception to this remark occurs in the history of Zacharias; who was “a priest, and righteous before God.” His office and his character accorded, and the light of his example shone with unclouded brightness and attractive glory.

It is observable, that Elizabeth, the wife of this holy priest, was equally distinguished with himself for a sincere and active piety. “They were BOTH righteous before God ;”§ and it was their privilege to live at that eventful moment when the clouds that obscured the past dispensations of Providence were tinged with the rising glory of the day which was just breaking upon the nations of the earth, and which lighted these pilgrims home to their eternal rest. They were some of the last of the Jewish and the first of the Christian economy, and their life seemed to form the bright line which bordered the typical ages and those of unshadowed truth and Christian revelation.

Zacharias and Elizabeth exhibit an attractive picture of union both natural and religious ; the hymeneal tie was intertwined with celestial roses, which diffused a fragrance over domestic life : their love to each other was strengthened and sanctified by their love to God.

The perfection of conjugal felicity with every good man depends upon the existence of similar religious principles and feelings with those which influence himself in the partner of his life ; consequently, it will ever be his

\* 1 Cor. ix. 27.

† Is. lii. 11.

‡ Luke xiii. 24—27.

§ Luke i. 6.

concern "to marry in the Lord." No language can express the bitterness of that pang which rends his heart when a dissimilarity of taste prevails in so important an affair. It is a worm for ever gnawing the root of his peace, and will prevent its growth even under the brightest sun of worldly prosperity. Let those especially who are forming connexions in life, and who "love Christ in sincerity," reflect on the fatal consequences of devoting their affections to such as can never accompany them to the house of God but with reluctance, or to the throne of grace but with weariness and aversion. If the object of your fondest regard be an unbeliever, what a cloud will darken your serenest days, what unutterable grief disturb your otherwise peaceful sabbaths! Your pleasures and your pains of a religious kind, which are the most intense, will be equally unparticipated. You must walk alone in those ways of pleasantness which would be still more endeared by such sweet society; and you must suffer the keenest sorrows of the heart—*perhaps* without daring to name them, and *certainly* without one tear, one word, one look of soothing sympathy. How could you endure it that the very wife of your bosom should manifest the temper of those assassins that murdered your Lord, while in the exercise of a lively faith you hailed him as "the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely?" Would it not agonize your heart that she should be *indifferent* only, not to say inimical, towards him in whom you daily "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory?"

In proportion to the wretchedness of such circumstances must be the felicity of the reverse, of which this narrative furnishes a pleasing exemplification. Zacharias and Elizabeth were *both* righteous, and this union of spirit diffused a holy and gladdening radiance over all the scenes of life. In the family, in the social circle, in the house of God, they were *one*. Together they could bow the knee at the throne of grace, together go up to the temple! The grief or the joy of one was the grief or the joy of both; they could sing the same song, unite in the

same prayer, feast on the same spiritual food! This was the perfection of love—this was the triumph of friendship! No contrary current of feeling on either side ruffled the pure stream of domestic and religious pleasure, but it flowed along in a clear, noiseless, and perpetual course. In this case the language of David might be applied with emphatic propriety: “Behold, how good and pleasant a thing it is to dwell together in unity.”

Elizabeth and her partner were “both well stricken in years.” There is something venerable in hoary age, especially when adorned with the graces of the Spirit. The mind reposes with peculiar complacency on those who, having long “adorned the doctrines of God their Saviour in all things,” are waiting quietly and confidently for their admission to heaven. They can see the shadows of the evening deepen upon them, without a sigh; and, while death is unlocking the doors of their appointed house, can sing, “Thanks be to God, that giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” While the mind of a wicked man, in the near prospect of dissolution, is filled with distraction, and “a fearful looking for of judgment—while his

“ ———frantic soul  
Raves round the walls of her clay tenement,  
Flies to each avenue, and cries for help—  
But cries in vain; ———”

conscious that he is the enemy of God, the abhorrence of saints, the confederate, and will soon become the companion, of evil spirits; the dying Christian looks beyond the confines of mortality into the eternal world, without one sensation but that “of a desire to depart and to be with Christ.” In quitting the present world, he expects a transition from sorrow to joy—from the region of shadows to that of realities—from the habitations of sin to the abodes of purity. Embracing Jesus by faith, he exclaims with Simeon, “Now lettest thou thy servant depart in

peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation ;” or with Paul, “ I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith : henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me in that day.”\*

It is pleasing to see the youthful mind impressed with the concerns of religion, devoting its powers to the Saviour, and despising the solicitations of sinful pleasure ; but ah ! how many cloudless mornings are succeeded by gloomy days—how many false and fruitless blossoms adorn the smiling spring—how many seeds spring up, but perish because they have “ no depth of earth !” Early piety, therefore, however gratifying, cannot be contemplated without anxiety, if not suspicion ; the force of temptation has not yet been endured—the world has not half exhausted its quiver of poisoned arrows—Satan has not yet tried all his arts and machinations—the race is not run !—but in those who, “ like Zacharias and Elizabeth, are “ well stricken in years,” we witness the stability of principle, the triumph of perseverance, and the reign of grace. Dear and venerable companions in the ways of God, ye have borne the burden and heat of the day ! Like a shock of corn, ye shall soon be “ gathered in your season ; ye shall soon drop the infirmities of humanity, and be clothed in the robes of light ! “ Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.”†

The brief, but comprehensive notice of these venerable saints, in the commencement of the Gospel according to Luke, exhibits at once the characteristic features of their piety.

1. It was of a quality approved by God himself : for they are represented as “ righteous *before God*,” that is, in the divine estimation. It is this only which can determine our genuine character ; for, however “ outwardly

\* 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

† Rev. xxii. 14.

virtuous *before men*," the internal spirit and character may be marked by moral deformities which the eye of Omniscience cannot but view with detestation. The most eminent Christians, indeed, are aware that perfection in righteousness is not attainable in the present state, and that when "weighed in the balances," they are in many respects "found wanting:" but while they look for acceptance through the righteousness of Christ, instead of "going about to establish their own,"\* they possess a rectitude of *principle*, though the *degree* of holiness be imperfect. They are sincere, habitual in their aim to please God, cherishing a supreme attachment to his name and character, and determined in their resistance of every influence that would seduce them from his service or impel them to commit sin.

2. Elizabeth and her venerable partner regulated their conduct by divine authority, irrespective of the opinions of men. They are said to "have walked in the *commandments and ordinances of the Lord*." The Jews were accustomed to blend the traditions of the elders with their religious services; but these believers consulted and obeyed the oracles of Heaven. They repaired at once to the spring-head of wisdom, deriving their faith and obtaining direction with regard to their practice from him who alone possesses the authority of a master.

This was a very decisive evidence of their religion, and is a test which is capable of being applied to every case and to every sphere of life. If the only certain evidence of true piety consisted in becoming martyrs, few could have an opportunity of evincing it, through not being called to this high and holy service; or, if the test were the distribution of ample charities, or self-devotement to the labour of the Christian ministry, the poor, and the ungifted, and ineloquent, would be excluded from the prescribed means of testifying their love to God:

\* Rom. xii. 1.

but obedience to his commands may be practised in the humblest circumstances, in the lowliest station, and by the most obscure individual. Any where and every where it is possible to “take up our cross,” to “deny ourselves,” to “mortify the flesh,” to “walk in the Spirit.”

3. The obedience of Elizabeth and Zacharias was universal—not partial or restricted; for they “walked in *all* the commandments and ordinances of the Lord.” An insincere profession will be distinguished by partiality in its observances. It will practise some duties and reject others, believe some doctrines and hesitate to admit others. Influenced by many subordinate considerations, it will select those requirements which are most easily performed, most calculated to attract public attention, or most conformable to natural prepossessions. It will dispense with some things as difficult, and with others as unnecessary or unimportant. “Then,” exclaimed the Psalmist, “shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto *all* thy commandments.”\*

4. Elizabeth and her aged companion were distinguished also for a piety which was *blameless*. It is possible to merit blame even in our very acts of religious obedience. How seldom do we attain that purity of *motive*, that unostentatious simplicity of *manner*, that *uniformity* of conduct, which constitute a *blameless* piety! In this respect we have daily reason, at the footstool of mercy, to deplore our deficiency, our languor, our lukewarmness of spirit, our unprofitableness, and vileness. “If thou, Lord, wert strict to mark iniquity, O Lord, who could stand?” There is not a prayer we utter but would be rejected, were it not for the prevalence of the Redeemer’s intercession, nor a service we perform but is so defiled with guilt that it would be an abominable offering, but for the efficacy of that blood which “cleanseth us from all sin.” Nor, indeed, was the piety of Zacharias and Elizabeth in itself “*blameless*,” irrespective of this

\* Ps. cxix, 6.

atonement ; nor were they “ *righteous,*” but as accepted and justified “ through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” To a lively faith they however united a holy conversation and an habitual obedience : their life was a perpetual sacrifice to God, and diffused around a sweet savour of piety.

Let us contemplate the *happiness of such a life.* It is common to represent religion as incompatible with true enjoyment, and to describe those who are under its influence as gloomy fanatics, dragging out a miserable existence—the dupes of prejudice and the slaves of melancholy. If a perpetual sense of the divine presence, a well-founded confidence of pardoned sin, free access to the throne of mercy, abundant communications of spiritual good, and lively anticipations of a felicity beyond the grave, commensurate with the capacities of an immortal spirit and with the everlasting ages of eternity ; if these produce wretchedness, then, and in no other case, is religion a source of misery. Be not deceived ; such allegations result from ignorance and depravity. Zacharias and Elizabeth, joined together by the dear bonds of mutual affection, and the still dearer ties of grace, present a picture of happiness unrivalled in the gay and thoughtless world. We appeal to them, and to those who resemble them, as “ *epistles*” of God, that teach the efficacy of genuine religion. Read them, ye profane, and blush for your impieties ! Read them, ye sons and daughters of strife, and banish discord from your houses : Read them, ye fearful, hesitating, lukewarm professors, and learn to walk in “ *all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord !*” Read them, ye worldly wise, ye ambitious, ye “ *lovers of pleasure,*” and confess ye have mistaken the true means of happiness, and have “ *forsaken your own mercies !*”

It is a supereminent excellence of the religion of Jesus, that “ *the peace and joy in believing*” which it inspires do not depend on external circumstances. As no worldly condition can create, so neither can it destroy

the Christian's felicity ; it is firm and immoveable amidst the changes and revolutions of human affairs—in the bright or cloudy day. Like the mariner's compass, which continually points in the same direction amidst changing seasons and varying climes, the most extraordinary vicissitudes of the "present evil world," cannot "move" the mind of a believer from the "hope of the Gospel."

Reflect further, on the *effect which such a life is calculated to produce on others.*

A holy life is a powerful argument for the "truth as it is in Jesus ;" and that suspicious eagerness with which the wicked watch the conduct of professors, that patient malignity with which they wait for their halting, and that Satanic joy with which they exult over their misconduct, prove their own convictions of the strength of such an argument. Let us then be concerned to falsify their predictions and disappoint their enmity by "walking in *all* the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." Consider the impressive appeal of the apostle : "Only let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ."\* Shine, ye professing Christians, for "ye are the lights of the world"—shine with a holy and steady radiance in the church of God, and pray for daily supplies of the oil of grace, that your light may not degenerate into a feeble glimmering or totally expire ; otherwise you may become accessory to the fall and ruin of others, and "their blood may be upon you!"

Such a pious union, such holy friendship as that of Elizabeth and Zacharias, will be *perpetuated through infinite ages.* It is not a transient but an everlasting union ; it shall survive the grave and defy the stroke of mortality. They who "sleep in Jesus" will God bring with him. The sepulchre, to such as die in the faith of Christ and in a state of holy friendship with each other, only resembles a vast prison, in which dearest friends are separated

\* Philip. i. 27.

only for a time in different cells, and from which they shall be released when the gloomy keeper resigns his keys, when "death is swallowed up in victory." Those humble and affectionate disciples who have "walked together in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord" here, shall take sweet counsel above, and walk together in the fields of immortality. In a nobler sense than the original application of the words, it may be said of all Christian friends, "they were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their deaths they were not divided."

This perpetuation of Christian society and love is intimated in the most striking manner by our Redeemer when on the point of departure from his disciples, whom he called his "*friends*." "I will not henceforth drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."\* Who can describe the joys of that "marriage-feast," the felicities of that endeared spiritual and eternal intercourse, that union of hearts, that concourse of affections, that flow and mingling of souls! These are some of "the mysteries of godliness"—this is what "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive."

Let these glorious expectations revive our failing courage amidst the conflicts of life. Let us not despair, though we may weep over the companions of our pilgrimage, slain at our side by the irresistible stroke of death. The separation is transitory—the reunion will be eternal. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the

\* Matt. xxvi. 29.

voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God : and the dead in Christ shall rise first : then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air : and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”\*

Such as are opposite in character to Zacharias and Elizabeth, and who are “walking in *none* of the commandments and ordinances of the Lord,” should reflect on the misery of their condition, as utterly destitute of all those hopes and privileges which have been described. Who instituted these ordinances?—who gave these commandments?—whose authority is it you dare despise?—or who has released you from your obligations to this authority?—what madness induces you to fly in the face of God—to measure your power against the sword of Omnipotence? O, remember—“the wages of sin is death!”

\* 1 Thess. iv. 13—18.

# ANNA.

## CHAPTER III.

Introduction of Anna into the sacred story—inspired description of her—the aged apt to be unduly attached to life—Anna probably religious at an early period—Religion the most substantial support amidst the infirmities of age—the most effectual guard against its vices—and the best preparation for its end.

**T**WO illustrious women have already been presented to the reader as adorning the era of our Saviour's incarnation; the one, the mother of his humanity, the witness of his miracles, and the weeping attendant upon his crucifixion; the other, her venerable relative, the wife of Zacharias, and the parent of John, who was the destined precursor of the "Desire of all nations." We are now to contemplate another female, whose age superadds a charm to her excellences, and whose privilege also it was to witness the commencing brightness of the evangelical day. Like Elizabeth, her "memorial" is short, but it does not "perish with her."\* She has a place in the chronicles of the redeemed, a name before which that of heroes and heroines fades away, and which it requires no "storied urn nor animated bust" to perpetuate.

Anna is introduced to our notice on the memorable occasion which has been already mentioned, when the parents of Jesus took him after his circumcision to Jerusalem, to "present him to the Lord." Then it was that Simeon broke forth in eloquent and prophetic congratulations, expressive at once of his own triumph over death, in consequence of having witnessed the accomplishment of those prophecies which had so long and so often filled him with delightful anticipations, and of the "glory"

\* Ps. ix. 6

which he foresaw would irradiate Israel and enlighten the Gentiles. Scarcely had he finished his address, when Anna, a prophetess, remarkable for her extreme age and exemplary piety, entered the temple, and not only united with Simeon and the rest of the interesting group in "giving thanks unto the Lord," but "spoke of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem."

It was benefitting the majesty of the event which had occurred that the spirit of prophecy should revive after being dormant for about four hundred years. Since the days of Malachi no such inspiration had been afforded; but the new and glorious period commencing with the incarnation was marked by this as well as other signs and wonders. When Simeon held the infant Saviour in his arms, the Spirit of God touched his tongue with a live coal from the altar; and when the aged "daughter of Phanuel" approached, she caught the glow of kindling rapture, and blended with his her praises and predictions.

This eminent woman is represented as "of a great age," as having "lived with a husband seven years from her virginity," and as being "a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day."\* This form of expression does not seem to furnish decisive evidence whether her entire age was eighty-four, or whether she was a widow during that period; if the latter, the seven years in which she lived with a husband, together with the probable number which constituted her age at the time of her marriage, must be added to the calculation, which would produce considerably more than a hundred years; in either case she must be allowed to occupy a conspicuous place in the records of longevity.

It has been observed of the aged, that although existence, when extended beyond the usual period of "threescore years and ten," is nothing but "labour and sorrow," they still adhere to life with the utmost tenacity,

\* Luke ii. 36, 37.

and are even less disposed to relinquish it than those whose more vigorous powers and undecayed youth capacitate them for its enjoyment. But however surprised we may be to witness this anxiety to live in those who are bending beneath the pressure of years and the load of decrepitude, and to see that this anxiety rather increases than diminishes, there is something in it by no means unnatural. In addition to the love of life which is implanted in every human bosom for the wisest purposes, the aged person cannot but feel that he is nearer than others to that hour of separation from all the connexions and interests of time than the multitude around him—an hour at which nature instinctively shudders, and which is always regarded as painful, whatever may be the result. Corporeal suffering may be considerable; and that change of being which the mortal stroke produces has always something about it awful, mysterious, and terrific. There are few instances in which it can be approached without some degree of dread, some shrinking of mind, whatever be the state of detachment from the present world, and whatever pleasing anticipations may exist with regard to another: as the patient, however assured of the necessity of the measure, and the importance of the result, trembles while preparations are making to amputate his disordered limb. It may be observed also of the young, that while they compassionate their aged friends as the prey of a thousand imbecilities both of body and mind, and lament over a state in which man is reduced to a second childhood, there is scarcely an individual who does not harbour in secret the wish to attain an age equal at least, if not superior, to any of his contemporaries. The reason is similar to that which influences persons at an advanced period of life: the thought of death, with all its concomitant evils, is unwelcome at any time, and consequently it is grateful to the mind to place it at the greatest conceivable distance; so that, were it now within the appointments of Providence or the bounds of probability, little doubt can be entertained that the

great proportion of mankind would readily accept as a blessing a patriarchal or antediluvian age.

Anna is particularly noticed as the daughter of Phanuel, of whom we have no other information; and as belonging to the tribe of Asher, which was situated in Galilee. This, whether recorded for that purpose or not, might serve to refute the charge, that "out of Galilee ariseth no prophet," since from that quarter proceeded the very first inspirations upon the revival of the prophetic spirit. Asher was a very inferior tribe, and one of the ten carried captive by the Assyrians, having departed from the worship of the true God, and from the house of David, under Jeroboam. But notwithstanding this general defection, there were individuals who returned and reunited themselves with Judah, that they might enjoy the ancient privileges of the people of God. Thus even in the worst of times, and amidst the least favourable circumstances, some portion of true religion has always been preserved in the earth. Though the watchful eye of Providence has occasionally suffered the flame of devotion to languish and almost expire, yet its total extinction has been prevented, and unexpected coincidences have frequently excited it into new and more vigorous action.

We have in the history before us a specimen of a pious old age, remarkable in itself, and calculated to suggest a variety of useful considerations. This holy woman probably lodged in the immediate vicinity, if not in some of the outward apartments of the temple, which gave her an opportunity of indulging in those constant devotions which accorded with her wishes and comported with her age. On every occasion she was present at appointed services, and so entire was her self-devotement to religion, that she was incessantly engaged in fasting and prayers. The world had no claims upon her, being alike unfitted for any of its avocations and indisposed to any of its pleasures: she had bid it a final farewell, and had withdrawn behind the scenes of this vast theatre, which are so artfully painted as to allure and deceive the imaginations of

mankind, into the secrecy of devotion and the sanctuary of her God. Peace was the companion of her retirement, and piety shed its serenest ray upon the evening of her mortal existence.

It may be presumed that the religion of Anna was by no means of a recent date, but that the seeds of so rich a harvest were sown in "the fields of youth." Whatever is great or eminent is usually the work of time. *Nature* does not produce the oak, with its spreading branches and solid trunk, in a day or a twelvemonth; and, in general, a rapid luxuriance is connected with corresponding weakness and a quick decay. The plans of *Providence* require the lapse of years or ages to accomplish: events of importance seldom burst suddenly upon the world, and without a previous course of preparatory dispensations, tending to point out the purposes of such occurrences, and to awaken human expectations. Nor can *excellence of character* be formed without the use of means, opportunities of progressive improvement, and that experience which must be slowly gained.

Far be it from us to limit the operations of divine grace: it *can*, indeed, and in some instances *has*, produced effects of a nature to which no general rules and principles are applicable: it has instantaneously converted a furious persecutor into a faithful, laborious, and eminent preacher of "the faith which once he destroyed;"\* it has transformed a malefactor into a saint, and in one hour raised the criminal from the depths of infamy and the agonies of crucifixion to the dignity of a believer in Christ and the joys of paradise.† But these surely ought not to be regarded as the ordinary methods of its operation, but rather as miraculous interferences. In general, religious ordinances are to be constantly and perseveringly attended, in order to the acquisition of eminence in religion: holy vigilance must concur with devout and fervent prayer, day by day, to check and finally vanquish the

\* Gal. i. 23.

† Luke xxiii. 43.

power of depravity, to elevate the mind above the world, and prepare the Christian for his future bliss; as the child must commonly be "*trained up* in the way he should go," if we hope that "when he is old he will not depart from it."\* Impressions deepen and acquire the force of principles by degrees, knowledge is obtained by perpetual accumulation, and faith is increased by constant exercise. It would be as vain to look for the wrinkles of age in the face of youth, or the strength of maturity in the arm of an infant, as to expect the experience which can only result from the witness of changes and the operation of circumstances, with its corresponding stability of character, in him who has but just commenced a life of piety. As "the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruits of the earth, and hath long patience for it until he receive the early and the latter rain,"† so we must in general look for a slow and gradual formation of the character to eminence and spiritual luxuriance. The account given of Anna would therefore lead us to infer that she had been many years, and in all probability from her youth, devoted to the service of God. She had not to regret that her best days were spent in riot and dissipation, in opposition or indifference to religion, by which so many debase their nature, offend their Maker, and ruin their souls: but while she contemplated the future without alarm, and perhaps with joy, she could review the past with satisfaction.

As memory predominates over the other faculties of the mind in declining life, and as so much of our happiness or misery at that period must necessarily result from its exercise, it is of the utmost importance to lay up in store a good provision in the "sacred treasure of the past." Nothing can be more desirable than to leave the mind filled with pleasing recollections; and this can arise only from a life of holiness and purity. How awful is it to think that the last hours should be disturbed by images of crime unrepented of, the intrusion of which into the

\* Prov. xxii. 6.

† James v. 7

dying chamber no force can prevent! How lamentable to see the terrors of death aggravated by the remorse and horrors of retrospection! "Life," says a profound writer,\* "in which nothing has been done or suffered to distinguish one day from another, is to him that has passed it as if it had never been, except that he is conscious how ill he has husbanded the great deposit of his Creator. Life, made memorable by crimes, and diversified through its several periods by wickedness, is indeed easily reviewed, but reviewed only with horror and remorse.

"The great consideration which ought to influence us in the use of the present moment, is to arise from the effect which, as well or ill applied, it must have upon the time to come; for, though its actual existence be inconceivably short, yet its effects are unlimited, and there is not the smallest point of time but may extend its consequences, either to our hurt or our advantage, through all eternity, and give us reason to remember it for ever, with anguish or exultation."

We may take occasion from the account of Anna to remark, that true religion is the most substantial support amidst the INFIRMITIES of age. This is emphatically the period of "evil days," when diseases prey upon the constitution, and the faculties both of body and mind decay. Then "the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened;" the greatest change takes place in the outward circumstances of gladness and prosperity, the countenance of the man is altered, his complexion faded, and his intellectual faculties, as the understanding and the fancy, weakened. It is at this time "the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves; the grinders cease, because they are few, and those that look out of the windows are darkened;" the strongest members of the body fail, the limbs bend beneath the weight of decrepitude and the effects of paralytic distempers, the teeth drop away, while the eyes grow dim and

languid ; “ the doors are shut in the streets when the sound of the grinding is low,” the mouth becoming sunken and closed ; they “ rise up at the voice of the bird,” awakened from imperfect slumber when the cock crows or the birds begin their early songs ; and “ all the daughters of music,” the tongue that expresses and the ears that are charmed with it, are “ brought low ;” they are “ afraid of that which is high, and fears are in the way,” alarmed at every step they take, lest they should stumble at the slightest obstacle, and especially apprehensive of the difficulties of any ascent. At that age their gray hairs thicken like the white flowers of the “ almond tree” when it “ flourishes,” and even the very “ grasshopper is a burden,” for they cannot bear the slightest inconvenience, not even the weight of an insect, and “ desire fails ;” then is the “ silver cord loosed, the golden bowl broken ; the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel is broken at the cistern ;” all the animal and vital functions at length cease, and every essential organ of life decays ; “ then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”\*

Reduced to the state of feebleness and incapacity which the sacred penman so beautifully describes, man becomes an object of compassion ; and it is affecting to see him struggling amidst the ruins of his former self. The sight becomes increasingly painful from the consideration that this is one day to be our own condition ; that we too are destined to grow old, to quit the busy scene and the social circle for the solitude of age, and in our turn to be pitied—perhaps forsaken ! But there is one thing capable not only of preserving the old from contempt, but of raising them to grandeur and diffusing lustre over their years of decrepitude. In contemplating Anna we do not think of her infirmities when we observe her piety : the meanness of the woman—tottering, crippled, dying—is

\* Eccles. xii. 2—7

lost amidst the majesty of the *saint*, incessantly serving God in his temple, and advancing to the grave “in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season.”\* The dawning of a heavenly day seems to arise upon her “hoary head ;” which, “being found in the way of righteousness,” is a “crown of glory.”†

Anna’s history further suggests, that religion is the most effectual guard against the vices of advanced age. One of these is a spirit of *querulousness*. It is the common practice of those who believe themselves entitled to veneration on account of their years, to complain of the arrogant disregard of their counsels, which they impute to the rising generation. Cherishing the highest opinion of their own sentiments, to which they attribute a kind of infallibility, as being founded upon experience, they naturally expect implicit submission to their dictates and an exact conformity to their views : they require not only to be heard but obeyed, and are impatient at the folly of those who rebel against their wisdom. Hence originate the often repeated tales of the degeneracy of the present times, and the growing insolence of the young. It may, indeed, be admitted, that, other things being equal, the aged have a just claim upon the attention of the young, whom they are sometimes qualified to instruct ; but surely they are not always entitled to the same reverence, and age does not necessarily confer wisdom. Genuine humility, however, tends to correct the spirit of dictation, while it combines with an affectionate concern for the interests of those who are newly come into life ; and genuine humility is the product of religion, which supplies motives to give advice with kindness, and to endure the rejection of it without anger.

Another fault of age, is the indulgence of *useless regrets for the past*. In reviewing life, it is easy to discover instances of our own incaution or negligence, which have possibly influenced our affairs, and been connected with

\* Job v. 26.

† Prov. xvi. 31

many subsequent disappointments. We have not availed ourselves of fortunate conjunctures, or we have rejected profitable offers ; one scheme has failed by our precipitancy, another by our procrastination—some persons, perhaps, have been foolishly trusted, and others as foolishly suspected—we have occasionally listened to advice which should not have been taken, or rejected what would have proved advantageous ; and the consequence has been some diminution of fortune, some disappointment of our expectations, some failure in the crop of earthly enjoyment which we had anticipated. If it were possible to recall the years which have for ever rolled away, or if the felicity of a rational and immortal being consisted in the possession of temporal abundance, worldly honour, or corporeal gratification, these regrets would have some show of propriety, and might at least secure a patient hearing ; but, it is certain, they only betray a weak or a wicked mind ; it is perhaps equally certain, they will generally continue to occupy the thoughts of the aged. There is, in fact, but one remedy, “ pure and undefiled religion.” It is this alone which can fix in the mind a full persuasion of the *nothingness* of terrestrial pleasures and possessions. This only can console us after our ineffectual efforts to “ gain the whole world,” or amidst the loss of riches which have “ taken to themselves wings,” and long since “ fled away,” by the assurance, that nothing we ever possessed was adequate to render us happy, without other and better enjoyments—that upon a fair estimate, it is questionable whether the perplexities it occasioned did not counterbalance the advantages it either bestowed or promised—and that could we *now* call our own whatever we have most valued or desired of worldly good, it would prove incapable of making us substantially happy. He need not wish to renew life, who has the hope of a better existence—nor regret the loss of temporal advantages, if he have immortal good. He who “ lays up for himself treasures in heaven,” may defy the storms of time, and

adopt the triumphant language of the apostle, amidst the wreck of earthly good, "having nothing, yet possessing all things."\*

Similar views and principles alone can correct a third error of age, namely, the aim to *prolong juvenility to an unnatural period*. "To secure to the old that influence which they are willing to claim, and which might so much contribute to the improvement of the arts of life, it is absolutely necessary that they give themselves up to the duties of declining years; and contentedly resign to youth its levity, its pleasures, its frolics, and its fopperies. It is a hopeless endeavour to unite the contrarieties of spring and winter; it is unjust to claim the privileges of age, and retain the playthings of childhood. The young always form magnificent ideas of the wisdom and gravity of men whom they consider as placed at a distance from them in the ranks of existence, and naturally look on those whom they find trifling with long beards, with contempt and indignation, like that which women feel at the effeminacy of men. If dotards will contend with boys in those performances in which boys must always excel them, if they will dress crippled limbs in embroidery, endeavour at gayety with faltering voices, and darken assemblies of pleasure with the ghastliness of disease, — they may well expect those who find their diversions obstructed will hoot them away; and that if they descend to competition with youth, they must bear the insolence of successful rivals."†

Religion also must be regarded as the best preparation for that END of life, with which old age is so closely connected. However proper it may be to realize this eventful time, at *every* period from our earliest to our latest day, it cannot but be regarded as more certainly and evidently near at an advanced age. Anna, after the lapse of a century, had greater reason, surely, to apprehend her dissolution, than in the bloom of youth, or at the com-

\* 2 Cor. vi. 10.

† Dr. JOHNSON.

mencement of her widowhood : and how appalling the prospect !

It would diminish the impression we have of the terror of death, if his dominion were limited to a part of the world, or to any ascertainable extent of years ; but, while his authority continues unimpaired and his stroke irresistible, the power he is permitted to exercise over humankind is universal. In visiting the repositories of the dead, it is calculated to awaken our liveliest sensibilities to trace the reign of the “king of terrors” upon the sepulchral stone, or the marble monument. In characters which time has almost erased, we read the records of the past, and by a more than probable analogy penetrate some of the mysteries of the future. Here and there occur the names of those who were venerable for age, remarkable for their exploits, conspicuous by their station, rank, or talent—**GREAT** by the consent of their contemporaries—who once figured upon a stage which is now decayed, or were illustrious in an empire which is now passed away. Some have been smitten by death’s withering hand at an earlier, some at a later period of life. Adjoining the grave of age is the tomb of youth. There you see the stone half buried in accumulating heaps of earth, and the inscriptions of love and tenderness obscured by collecting moss ; while the hand that wrote them has long since become motionless, and the heart that dictated them ceased to beat.

It is affecting to visit places of public resort, under the full influence of the consideration, that this busy and anxious crowd will soon disappear—their race will be run, and the immortal prize gained—or—lost ! These possessors of the soil will, in a little time, be disinherited—these tenants of a day exchanged—the funeral pall will cover the most ambitious and the most active of them all, and the motley multitude be succeeded by others equally busy, equally anxious, equally thoughtless of another state of being—and equally *mortal* !

But these sentiments, however calculated to fill irreligious persons with dread and melancholy, can produce no despondency in those who, like Anna, are accustomed to the truths of religion, and derive the chief pleasure both of their youthful and decrepit age from the services of religion. With regard to *death itself*, they are taught that his power is limited to the body, and that it is restricted even to a short period over this inferior part of our nature ; and as to its *consequences*, they cannot incessantly frequent the temple, and be occupied in devotion, without learning the value, as well as the reality, of those considerations which are drawn from eternity. They know that “ this corruptible shall put on incorruption, this mortal put on immortality,” and that then “ there shall be no more death.”\* And what do these expressions imply, but, *the entire renovation of our nature?*—Man is mortal, because he is sinful ; and, consequently, the removal of sin will prove the extinction of death. It is only by the introduction of moral evil that the earth has been converted into a vast cemetery, and life become a short and rugged passage to the sepulchre ; but, when it shall no longer prevail, our sanctified nature will inherit the abodes of purity and undecaying existence.

It is this consideration which endears celestial felicity. Exemption from death implies deliverance from sin, and the Christian wishes to possess a character which God shall approve, and to be cleansed from those stains of guilt which infect his present being, and render him offensive to his Father in heaven. Were he destined always to be unholy, he would scarcely contemplate immortality as a blessing ; but because he has reason to anticipate “ awaking” from the sleep of the grave, in the divine “ likeness,”† he realizes a period in the bright annals of his future being, when he shall no longer have occasion to exclaim, “ O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?‡

\* 1 Cor. xv. 54. Rev xxi. 4. † Ps. xvii. 15. ‡ Rom. vii. 24.

The pains of *separation* too, which afflict this mortal state, cannot exist in that "better country." Society will unquestionably prove one considerable source of the happiness of heaven, where immortal beings will be so circumstanced and capacitated, as both to receive and impart enjoyment. The very nature of man is constituted social: and though our circumstances in this life often render temporary separations unavoidable, in a perfect state of society they must be needless; consequently they will not be suffered to impair the joys of paradise.

The most afflictive of all separations, is that which is occasioned by death. In all other cases, a lingering hope may exist of a reunion at some period however distant; at least the *possibility* of it is cheering: but, even if there be no reasonable expectation of this, the very consciousness that our friend is still alive, still on earth, still capable of receiving and performing acts of kindness, still able to communicate with us by letter or by message, to participate our pleasures, to sympathize with our sorrows, and to pray for our welfare, is consoling in every vicissitude;—but when death sets his awful seal upon our companion, relative, or friend, we cherish a deeper feeling of grief, and cannot look to any *earthly* means of consolation—but we *can* look to a *heavenly* one! Whatever resource fails, the religion of the Bible supplies inexhaustible springs of comfort. God is on high—Jesus "ever lives"—Christians know they shall soon pass into a world where the happy circle will never be broken, the communion of kindred spirits never cease, the day of blessedness never decline, the sabbath of immortality never terminate.

It is in the temple also, that those who like Anna receive just impressions from its services, and live in a state of holy intercourse with God, learn to appreciate the capacities of a spiritual mind for progression in wisdom and felicity, and by consequence to cherish the noblest anticipations of their own future possible elevation of character. How many unfinished schemes are frustra-

ted by death ! Our plans of futurity, our purposes of gain, or our resolves of usefulness, may be ended in one short hour. Here the labours of the industrious, the studies of the learned, the investigations of the philosopher, and the career of the pious, close. The grave silences the voice of the preacher, and paralyzes the hand of the charitable. Here the arguments of a Paul end—here the silver tongue of an Apollos is speechless—here the hands of a Dorcas cease to manufacture for the poor, whose unavailing tears cannot recall departed piety.

But who will define the limits of possible attainment in knowledge and excellence in a state of deathless existence ? Society is always improving, even in the present world, amidst all its imperfections. The researches of past ages have transmitted a vast stock of wisdom to their successors, both in reference to natural science and religious truth. Who can tell what discoveries a Newton might have made, had he possessed a terrestrial immortality ? or who can conceive what heights and depths of divine knowledge might have been disclosed, had the apostles of Christ been permitted to live to the present period, and had it been the will of God that they should have received a constant succession of revelations ?

In both these cases, not only has death terminated this series of bright discovery, but this earth is not the destined place, nor time the destined period, for those manifestations of eternal wisdom, which we have reason to believe will take place in another world. Those impediments to knowledge, and those reasons for concealment, which at present exist, will be removed, and truth open all her treasures to immortalized and sanctified spirits.

The consequence of the progressive disclosure of spiritual things, of the works and ways of God, will be progressive improvement : and, as in consequence of the clearer developement of truth in the Gospel, “ he who is least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than John the Baptist ;” so, when all the shadows and clouds that bedim our present existence shall have disappeared, and a ray of heaven pours its glorious illumination upon the mys-

series of time, the least in the paradise of God will be greater than the most distinguished in his church on earth. And as we shall never cease to improve in knowledge—for there will be no termination to our spiritual researches—there will probably arrive a period in eternity, when he who at the resurrection will be least in the heavenly world in capacity and glory, will become greater in consequence of ever new discoveries, than at that moment will be the greatest of the redeemed universe. And the meanest Christian on earth may indulge the hope that at a future age, even he may become superior in knowledge, in love, in capacity, and in glory, to what the brightest seraph or the tallest archangel, is at present in the heaven of heavens: for who can tell what God may do for beatified souls? who dare limit the operations of his mercy, or who can imagine to what an elevation of wisdom and felicity an emparadised believer may attain?

Progression is the law of a thinking being. And why should it not operate upon holy intelligences in the future state, as well as in the present? and why not when “there shall be no more death,”\* to an incalculably greater extent? Why should not every new idea acquired in that world become a seed of truth in the mind, that shall spring up and bear fruit, multiply and expand, without restriction and without end?—

There is not in religion a nobler or a more animating sentiment, than this perpetual advancement of the soul towards perfection. Life has its maturity and decline, nature its boundaries of beauty, human affairs their zenith of glory; but, in “the new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness,”† every thing will be eternally upon the advance—there will be no end to the path of knowledge—present acquisitions will be the basis of subsequent acquirements—we shall be continually outshining ourselves, by making nearer approaches to infinite goodness—and the whole moral creation will be for ever beautifying in the eyes of God.

\* Rev. xxi. 4.

† 2 Pet. iii. 13.

# THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.

## CHAPTER IV.

Account of Christ's journey through Samaria—he arrives at Jacob's well—enters into conversation with a woman of the country—her misapprehensions—the discovery of his character to her as a prophet—her convictions—her admission of his claim as the true Messiah, which she reports in the city—the great and good effect—reflections.

**E**VERY incident in the life of Christ is illustrative of the evangelical testimony, "he went about doing good." His efforts were not partial, nor confined to particular occasions; but, availing himself of all the opportunities which occurred, either in public or in private, to promote the welfare of mankind, time never measured out an idle hour—the sun never set upon a useless day!

It may be truly said, with regard to those who imbibe the spirit of their Master, "no man liveth to himself." Nothing can be more remote from genuine Christianity, than that selfishness which is characteristic of a worldly disposition, and which, with an uniform and undeviating assiduity, seeks its own interests and purposes; while nothing can so fully comport with its nature, and evince its prevalence, as that charity which is limited only by the period of human life, the extent of means, and the boundaries of creation.

"When the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John . . . he left Judea, and departed again into Galilee."\*

The jealousy of his enemies induced them to become narrow observers of all the proceedings of Christ; and, knowing their spirit, he removed to some distance: not, however, through fear—nor (as some expositors have stated) lest they should put him to death; for his hour was not yet come—and it would have been impossible to

\* John iv. 1, 3.

counteract the purposes of Heaven. He could easily have eluded their utmost vigilance and malignity, as on a certain occasion, when "passing through the midst of them, he went his way."<sup>\*</sup> But our Lord did not think proper to disclose himself at once, and in a very public manner. It was not his intention to astonish, but gradually to excite the attention of the Jewish nation, to furnish evidences of his mission to humble and contrite minds, and to lay the foundation of a future work, rather than to operate on a very extended scale himself. In this manner was accomplished the prophecy of Isaiah, "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth."<sup>†</sup>

His route lay through Samaria; any other way to Galilee would have been very circuitous: and this is mentioned, because of the directions to his disciples, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."<sup>‡</sup> The hour for that enlarged operation of mercy amongst the Gentiles, which had been so long predicted, was not yet arrived, though it was now approaching with desirable rapidity. The dispensations of God are inscrutable to mortals, to whom it seems profoundly mysterious, that the purposes of love to man should first be delayed for so many ages, and then manifested by the work of Christ to so limited an extent. Here we must "walk by faith, not by sight;" while, upon every leaf in the great volume of providence, it is legibly written, "My thoughts are not your thoughts. neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."<sup>§</sup>

It has been piously remarked, that the evangelist refers, by the expression "he must needs go through Samaria,"

<sup>\*</sup> Luke iv. 30.

<sup>†</sup> Is. xlii. 2, 3.

<sup>‡</sup> Matt. x. 5, 6.

<sup>§</sup> Is. lv. 8, 9.

to our Saviour's purposes of mercy to that vicinity ; and undoubtedly it is true, that he was powerfully impelled and irresistibly guided, wherever he went. Nothing could obstruct his designs of mercy, or his labours of love. No force could prevent his benevolent progress : as well might human or diabolical agency attempt to arrest the sun in his course, or stop the march of time.—“ My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” “ I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day ; the night cometh, when no man can work.”\*

In his journey, Jesus came to a city of Samaria called *Sychar*, which appears to have been the same with the *Sichem* or *Shechem* of the Old Testament ; † where was a well, to which tradition had assigned the name of Jacob, as having been originally dug by that patriarch. It was now about the sixth hour, or noon, and the climate being exceedingly sultry, Jesus, under the pressure of fatigue, sat down by the well.

Let us for a moment turn aside, like Moses, to “ see this great sight.” Jesus “ sat thus on the well,” as the weary traveller seeks a renewal of his strength by temporary repose. What majesty and mystery surround the spot, when we recall the ancient oracles to mind, which represent him as “ the Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace ;” and compare descriptions of this nature with the evangelical record of his own words, “ The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests ; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” ‡

What a scene for ministering spirits, who had been accustomed to behold and adore him, but who now witnessed

\* John v. 17. ix. 4.

† Gen. xxxiii. 18, 19. Josn. xxiv. 32. This place was the metropolis of the tribe of Ephraim. It was destroyed by Abimelech, but rebuilt by Jeroboam, who made it the seat of the kingdom of Israel. It was afterward called *Neapolis* ; and Vespasian or Domitian having established a colony there, it received the Roman appellation of *Flavia Cesarea*. Herod gave it the name of *Sebaste*.

‡ Mat. viii. 20.

his abasement ! What a contrast between “the Lamb in the midst of the throne,” and Jesus sitting on a well, and afterward suspended on a cross—between “the King of glory ;” and the weary traveller—the “Lord of lords,” and the “man of sorrows !”

Let us derive instruction, as well as consolation, from this scene. “We have not a high-priest, who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; but was in all points tempted, like as we are, yet without sin.”\* If the Saviour had appeared upon earth in external splendour, and in a manner which to human apprehension would have comported better with the majesty of his nature and the pre-eminence of his celestial glory, our insignificance would have created a sense of unapproachable distance : we should have been more *astonished* than *attracted*—more *confounded* than *conciliated*. But he disrobed himself of ineffable brightness to bring us nigh, and to produce a just and holy familiarity, saying to his disciples, “I have called you *friends*.”†

Let us be reconciled to the infirmities, pains, and poverty we may suffer ; for it is “sufficient for the servant to be as his master.” More elevated stations in life would be attended with more danger to our spiritual character, and expose us to more afflictions ; as mountains in proportion to their height attract clouds and tempests. The present is a state of trial for the righteous ; but however distressing or obscure our way, Jesus has trod it before us—sanctifying the path of sorrow by his presence, and plucking up many of its thorns. Place his example before your eyes—observe his humble life—his assumed poverty—his unaffected condescension ! To the poor he preached—with the poor he lived—their dress he wore—and their lowly sphere he chose and honoured !

How many of the most important events of our lives may be traced to trifling circumstances ! A single step may have a remote, but very obvious connexion with

\* Heb. iv. 15.

† John xv. 15.

the greatest results. A single turn in the journey of life may influence the happiness, and direct the course of years! "There cometh a woman of Samaria, to draw water." Nothing could be more apparently incidental; and yet he who thinks rightly will perceive it to be a link in the great chain of Providence, which was absolutely essential to the completion of the whole. It was in the purpose of God, that many of the Samaritans of that city should believe—that this conviction should be wrought by that woman, who herself should be forcibly impressed by the proofs with which she was furnished in the relation of her most private domestic concerns. Had she come earlier or later, Jesus had not been there!

We must trace the links of this chain further. The malignity of the Pharisees induced Jesus to leave Judea; and both convenience, and perhaps a moral necessity, impelled him here. His arrival at that hour—his stay—the opportunity occasioned by the absence of his disciples—were all appointed by superintending wisdom. Who knows what a day or an hour may bring forth? Little did this Samaritan woman expect such a meeting, such a traveller, or such a conversation! So wisely and so wonderfully are the plans of Providence arranged!

How often has the promise been accomplished, "I was found of them that sought me not!" To some unforeseen occurrence—some accidental meeting—some trifling coincidence, Christians may often trace their first conversion, and their best impressions. A stranger—a word, a casualty, has proved the means of spiritual illumination; and while the recollection of these circumstances often solace them in the vale of tears, we doubt not but they will furnish a subject of pleasing contemplation and adoring gratitude, when they shall have attained the perfection of their being on the heights of immortality.

"Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink:" a very natural request from a weary stranger, and one with

which, from the common hospitality of the times, he might expect a ready compliance. The evil effect of luxury is, that it has multiplied our artificial necessities, and diminished our benevolent feelings; in a simpler state of society, the wants of mankind are fewer and more easily supplied.

The woman paused and inquired, "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans."\* Alas! where rancorous animosity exists, how frequently the laws of hospitality, and the principles even of humanity, are sacrificed! The Sanhedrim interdicted any friendly intercourse with the Samaritans, and the Jews cursed them by the secret name of God; and as this mutual animosity existed, the woman received our Saviour's request with a reproachful sneer.

The enmity subsisting between the Jews and Samaritans was very ancient in its origin, and exceedingly inveterate in its character. It had also been aggravated by different incidents. When the ten tribes revolted in the time of Jeroboam, the calves were set up in Dan and Bethel, with a view to seduce the people from worshipping at Jerusalem, which was of course highly offensive to Judah and Benjamin; and when Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, carried away the ten tribes into captivity, he colonized the cities of Samaria with the Babylonians and others, who carried their false religion with them; in consequence of which they became odious to the Jews. At first, the providence of God punished these idolatrous settlers, by permitting lions to infest the country, whose ravages induced Shalmaneser to send one of the priests "to teach them the manner of the God of the land;" when they united the worship of the Jehovah with that of their own idols.† These people very much discouraged the Jews in the erection of the second temple, after their return from captivity.

\* John iv. 9.

† 2 Kings xvii. 24-41.

After this, when Alexander had conquered Syria and Palestine, Sanballat, who governed the province of Samaria for Darius, submitted to the conqueror; and having married his daughter to Manasseh, the brother of Jaddua the high-priest, he obtained permission from Alexander to build a temple on mount Gerizzim, in imitation of that which was built at Jerusalem.\* Manasseh was constituted the high-priest, a multitude of Jews mixed with the Samaritans, and a distinct service, after the Jewish mode of worship, was conducted. This occasioned great contentions, and suspended all intercourse between the rival nations. The Samaritans are generally said to have admitted little more of the Old Testament than the Pentateuch; but Justin Martyr, who was a native of Sichem, affirms that they received all the prophetic writings.†

Drop a pitying tear over human weakness, folly, and crime. What divisions separate the human race, and exasperate men against each other! But of all others, they are the most inveterate, which are produced on account of religion. The Samaritan appoints Gerizzim as the place of worship, in opposition to Jerusalem—the fires of persecution are instantly kindled, and the victims of intolerance suffer martyrdom!

To the reproachful insinuation of the woman, Christ returned no answer, for it kindled no resentment. “When he was reviled, he reviled not again:” but with his characteristic condescension and eagerness to instruct the ignorant, he said, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.” This language was expressive of his readiness and ability to supply the necessities of the destitute, to console the afflicted, and to save the lost. By the “gift of God,” he intended divine bounty in general;

\* It stood two hundred years. JOSEPH. Antiq. lib. xiii. cap. 18.

† JUST. MART. Apol. II.

by "living water," the blessings of salvation, especially the gifts and graces of "his holy Spirit."\*

The conciliating and affectionate manner of Christ's appeal to the woman, appears to have softened her turbulent spirit, and won her respect. She uses an epithet of respect previously omitted, "Sir,"—perceiving that, though apparently a Jew, he possessed none of that rancorous enmity which characterized others, and cherished national antipathies. "A soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger."† Offences are likely to arise in the present world; but let us rather aim to disarm malignity by conciliation, than strengthen and envenom it by resistance. Soft words may in time operate on hardened hearts, as water continually dropping on the rock wears it away. Such a mode of proceeding costs us little, but tends much to dignify and exalt us. "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not

\* "Living water, *ὕδωρ ζῶν*. It may surprise an English reader, unacquainted with the Oriental idiom, that this woman, who appears by the sequel to have totally misunderstood our Lord, did not ask what he meant by *living water*, but proceeded on the supposition that she understood him perfectly; and only did not conceive how, without some vessel for drawing and containing that water, he could provide her with it to drink. The truth is, the expression is ambiguous. In the most familiar acceptance, *living water* meant no more than running water. In this sense, the water of springs and rivers would be denominated *living*, as that of cisterns and lakes would be called *dead*, because motionless. Thus, Gen. xxvi. 19. we are told, that Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. It is *living water*, both in the Hebrew and in the Greek, as marked on the margin of our Bibles. Thus also, Lev. xiv. 5. what is rendered *running water* in the English Bible, is in both these languages *living water*. Nay, this use was not unknown to the Latins, as may be proved from Virgil and Ovid. In this passage, however, our Lord uses the expression in the more sublime sense for divine teaching, but was mistaken by the woman as using it in the popular acceptance." CAMPBELL'S Trans. of the Four Gospels, vol. ii. p. 518, notes.

† Prov. xv. 1.

from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.”\*

Our Saviour's discourse was further distinguished by “exceeding great and precious promises ;” and the woman seems to have partaken of similar surprise with those who are said to have “wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.”† As a “fountain of living waters,” he was always pouring forth refreshing streams ; as the depository of wisdom and knowledge, he incessantly communicated his treasures of sacred instruction ; and as the “Sun of Righteousness,” he constantly imparted his heavenly light and healing beams. Who could approach him without feeling the benign influence, and being benefited by the rich supply ?

As the term which Christ had employed in a spiritual sense, simply denoted excellent spring water in common language, the woman at present conceived no other idea of his meaning ; and seeing he was a stranger, with no bucket, she expressed her astonishment at his promise. With some mysterious impression, probably, of his extraordinary character, blended with incredulity, she proceeded to inquire, “Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle ?”‡

This may furnish an exemplification of the fact, that the “natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God : for they are foolishness unto him : neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”§ The terms of Christianity are mysterious, because its doctrines are misunderstood, and cannot be discerned by him, the “eyes of whose understanding” are beclouded,

\* James iii. 13—18. † Luke iv. 22. ‡ John. iv. 12. § 1 Cor. ii. 14

and whose heart is sensual. How deplorable the effects of sin, which has drawn a veil over the moral perceptions of man ; in consequence of which, he cannot see the glories of truth, the charms of Jesus, the value of his soul, and the importance of its redemption ! Nothing but the glare of earthly grandeur can affect him, while eternity with all its vast concerns disappears.

Though the woman at first manifested considerable animosity, and afterward betrayed great ignorance, Jesus was neither provoked by her prejudices, nor irritated by her misconceptions. We must not unnecessarily wound the unenlightened, nor even the perverse, by reproaches ; but aim to win them by kindness and forbearance. O for more resemblance to the “ Lamb of God,” and more of the temper which the apostle inculcates ! “ And the servant of the Lord must not strive ; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves ; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth ; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.”\*

It would exceedingly conduce to the promotion of this spirit, were we frequently to recollect our own former ignorance and slowness to apprehend the “ truth as it is in Jesus ;” and the patience we have ourselves experienced, especially from “ our Master in heaven.” We should also consider, that the best and most permanent impressions are often the most gradual ; and he who advances to perfection, goes on from strength to strength. Let us not be unduly discouraged, because of our *present* ignorance and darkness of mind ; but pursuing our inquiries with a humble and teachable disposition, we may hope by copious supplies from the Source of wisdom, to increase our knowledge, and enlarge our capacities.

\* Tim. ii. 24—26.

It appears rather surprising, that instead of questioning the pretensions of Christ, this woman did not at once solicit a fulfilment of his promise, and “draw water from the wells of salvation; but her method of proceeding is illustrative of a very common case. Religious inquirers are full of doubts and prejudices; for though Jesus invites them to participate the blessings he so liberally dispenses, they imagine, *falsely* imagine, that some previous qualification is requisite to justify their approach. “Can such a sinner be saved? Am I *indeed* invited—after all my sins and broken vows? I know not whether I shall be accepted, for what claim have I upon his mercy?”

Yet the Saviour still invites—still promises—still encourages—still instructs—and will not let the weakest inquirer go, but guides his feet into the way of peace.

“Whosoever,” said he to the woman, “whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” The allusion is unquestionably to that principle in the heart which is of divine implantation, and which, however various its names, and diversified its operations, is uniform in its nature and origin. Sometimes it is represented by the cause, and sometimes the effect. It is the “*Spirit* given to them that ask him,” with regard to agency; it is *grace*, in point of character; and it is holiness or practical religion, in reference to its outward influence. Jesus Christ beautifully describes this principle in his metaphorical addresses to the woman of Samaria, by an allusion to the thirst which the water of life assuages, the inexhaustible consolation it imparts, as a “*well* of water;” and the perpetual and perfect blessedness with which it is connected, as “springing up into everlasting life.”

*Thirst* is one of the most powerful propensities of human nature, and is therefore adapted to represent the intensity of that desire with which mankind seek the wealth, the honours, and the pleasures of the world: and though

“ he that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver ; nor he that loveth abundance with increase ;\* the appetite is still insatiable, and the pursuit continued. When under the influence of violent thirst, it is not unusual for persons to avail themselves of the first supply, however unwholesome, and eagerly to drink even of a filthy stream ; with similar impatience and satisfaction, the “ carnal mind ” indulges in its sensualities, seizing forbidden, and contented with polluting joys. But the grace of God in the heart is distinguished for its purifying influence : it cleanses the spirit from guilt—sanctifies it by the “ washing of regeneration,” and imparts a new desire, a heavenly thirst, a holy ardour for spiritual communications ; so that “ as the hart pants after the water-brooks, so panteth the soul after God.” †

This woman had a considerable distance to go in order to procure the water with which it was needful to supply the necessities of her household ; and when arrived at the spot, it was a laborious service to draw from the well, and return laden into the city. Our Saviour intimates, on the contrary, the ease with which his divine blessings were attainable, as well as their unfailing abundance. There is imparted to every applicant a fund of peace, in consequence of which “ a good man is satisfied from himself.” ‡ Religion furnishes consolations of a nature precisely *adapted* to our necessities as fallen and miserable creatures ; and it affords them in circumstances, when it is obvious that no other resource remains. The supplies of this world resemble the casual streamlets of winter, cold and soon exhausted, or lost in evaporation beneath the returning beam of spring : but amidst the vicissitudes of life, and in the hour of dissolution, religion has consolations which never fail. The river of a Christian’s consolation runs throughout the wilderness of time, nor stays in its course till it expands into the boundless and fathomless ocean of eternal blessedness.

\* Eccles. v. 10.

‡ Ps. xlii. 1.

† Prov. xiv. 14.

At length, the woman in question is induced to make the request which we wonder she did not at first present; though still she misapprehends the meaning of her divine Teacher, however plain his sentiment may now appear to us; in consequence of which, he condescended to adopt another mode of conveying instruction to her mind. He had excited her attention, he now proceeds to address her conscience.

We must not overlook the circumstance that Christ was “wearyed with his journey;” but he was not wearyed with his *work*—well doing. If he had now remained silent, it would not have been wonderful; or if, intending to disclose his character to this woman, and by her means to the Samaritans, he had smitten her conscience, removed her prejudices, enlightened her mind, and won her affections, as we know he could have done, *in a moment*—as when he said to Matthew, “Follow me,” and immediately “he left all”—or as when he spake from the clouds with irresistible effect to Saul;—we should not have been astonished that he spared his words, while we must have admired the mighty operation of his grace. But lo! he entered into a long conversation, though in a weary hour, and took the utmost pains to teach her. We have here an example for our imitation. Ought not *we* to be *patient* and *laborious*? Ought not *we* to recollect the value of the soul, and strive “in season and out of season” to win it, knowing “he that converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins?”\* “The servant of the Lord must not *strive*,” nor despond; lest consulting his own advantage, he prejudice the divine service; but he must forget his infirmities, and pursue his work.

To the request, “Sir, give me this water,” Jesus does not appear to have returned any direct answer, but said, “Go, call thy husband, and come hither.” The reply *was* in one view direct, and he began *instantly* to commu-

\* James v. 20.

nicate the “living water ;” for the discourse upon which he entered, though at a superficial glance it may appear foreign to the immediate purpose of her request, and might seem to point her to a different subject, was really intended to produce deep and salutary convictions of sin, and such as were requisite in order to her reception of the *living water* of spiritual consolation. Nothing in reality could display both the *wisdom* and *goodness* of the great Teacher in a more striking manner, than this proceeding. In effect, he takes her by the hand, conducts her through the narrow path of conviction and penitential acknowledgment, to that fountain which has supplied millions, and is still inexhaustible ; and by whatever mysterious methods he brings his people to himself and to their final rest, it will ultimately be found the *right way* to the city of habitation.”

As the woman did not comprehend his metaphorical language, he determined to disclose his prophetic character. “Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband : for thou hast had five husbands ; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband : in that saidst thou truly.”\* By divine inspiration, an ordinary prophet might be supposed to have been made acquainted with the woman’s character and domestic circumstances, but we must contemplate the Saviour on this occasion as supporting his claim to a higher distinction, such as none of them could possess.†

It is a solemn consideration that we are perpetually inspected by those “eyes which are upon the ways of man,” and by *him* who “seeth all his goings,”‡ his most retired moments, most secret sins, most private affairs, and most latent thoughts. Even though we should not

\* John iv. 16—18.

† Comp. John ii. 25.

‡ Job xxxiv. 21.

live in that excess of sensuality which existed in this case, how important is the apostolic entreaty, to “abstain from fleshly lusts ;” and how just the assurance, “they war against the soul !”\*

At length the woman’s eyes were opened ; she had a glimpse of the glory of her divine Instructor through the influence of that grace which is effectual in its operations, and imparts those perceptions which cannot be otherwise possessed. Happy for us if we have been led to discern the exalted character and excellences of the Son of God ! “Sir,” said she, “I perceive that thou art a prophet ; and availing herself of the present favourable opportunity, she proposes a question much and violently agitated between the Jews and Samaritans. When the passions are inflamed by controversial discussion, how apt are we to be misled by the opinions of men rather than guided by the appointments of God ; and how frequently convenience, instead of conscience, dictates the conduct of religious professors ! The Samaritan woman pleads the authority of the fathers for worshipping at mount Gerizzim rather than repairing to Jerusalem. This has frequently proved a source of error ; and the history of mankind will furnish ample evidence, that in departing from Scripture, the only “sure word of prophecy,” we shall inevitably wander into an endless labyrinth of mistake, and be lost amidst the intricacies of delusion.

Our Lord intimates the improper proceedings of the Samaritans in consequence of being thus misled by prejudice and by the example of others, and shows that Jerusalem was certainly the ancient place of appointed worship, and the Jews the depositaries of celestial wisdom. From that illustrious people issued the word of the Lord which contained the doctrine of salvation, which descended like the dew from heaven, and was calculated to diffuse spiritual fertility through the earth, and impart

\* 1 Pet. ii. 11.

universal joy. “Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”\* In this passage Jesus points out the superior nature of the worship which was now required, and which he was about to introduce to the world. In the former controversy the Jews were certainly right; but the designs of mercy being now accomplished in the mission of the Son of God, and the “fulness of time being come,” it was determined to spread the blessings of the “everlasting Gospel” to the widest possible extent, and to render, in honour of the mediation of Christ, the whole earth an universal temple, in which the sacrifice of humble and contrite hearts should be always acceptable.

Two great effects were produced by the introduction of the Christian dispensation. The one respected the *mode of worship*. It was now no longer to be *ceremonial*, but *spiritual*: it was no longer to be conducted in *types* and *shadows*, but in *truth*. In compassion to human infirmity, numerous ceremonies were originally appointed, to impress awe, and to fill the mind of man with a sense of the majesty of God. The conceptions of a fallen creature being too grovelling at first to comprehend the invisible realities of religion, a system of service was admitted which tended to produce general impressions by an appeal to the external senses, and thus slowly to insinuate sublimer facts and prepare for more noble manifestations; but when “the Lord came to his temple,” and made “the place of his feet glorious,” darkness vanished, truth shone with effulgent brightness, and simplicity rose

\* John iv. 21—24

to the dominion which ceremony and complexity had assumed : at his presence the new creation smiled, and the Lord of the universe again descended to pronounce upon another series of wonderful works, that "all was very good."

Another effect resulting from the introduction of the Christian age concerned the *variety and number of worshippers*. The limitations which had hitherto prevailed in communicating truth to the world were to be superseded ; for, though the commissioned apostles were to deliver their message "to the Jew first," they were expressly directed to convey it "*also to the Gentiles.*" How calculated is this procedure to allay animosities and unite hearts ; and what a motive is here presented to us to dismiss every petulant and revengeful disposition from the Christian sanctuary, remembering that whether Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, bond or free, every one is accepted of God *only as he is a SPIRITUAL WORSHIPPER!*

As "God is a spirit," witnessing our movements and acquainted with our thoughts at all times and in every place, we should often consecrate our moments to his service. In the hour of seclusion and retirement, as well as on public occasions and in religious assemblies, it becomes us to direct our meditations to him by whom we are encircled. Let us contemplate God, and feel his awful presence. He is on heaven and on earth ; his eyes behold us amidst the shades of midnight as well as in the brightest noon of day ; he pervades all space, is in all time, above all creatures, before all being, and through all eternity. "Canst thou by searching find out God ? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection ?"

At the period of this conversation at Jacob's well, a very general expectation of the speedy appearance of the Messiah was prevalent, and the woman was aware of the reference in the words, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father ;"

\* Job xi. 7.

although at present "her eyes were holden," that she did not know him through the concealment of his mean attire and unstately solitariness. This, however, was wisely planned ; and while it tended to cast contempt on worldly glory, it enabled him to become a fellow-sufferer with his people, and to cherish a holy familiarity with his disciples. Hence we find him not in palaces, but in cottages—on the highways of common resort—healing the sick at the pool of Bethesda, conversing with a poor woman at Jacob's well, and in other similar situations : and never shall we be worthy to bear his name till we imitate his conduct. "The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ : when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he."\* This was the point to which all his discourse was directed, this the revelation he intended from the first to disclose ; but how wisely was it delayed ! Such an assertion at the commencement of the conversation would have kindled animosity or excited ridicule ; but that mind which was originally so prejudiced, and so resentful, is brought to receive the most glorious and spiritual discovery.

If we wonder at her ignorance, and lament her prejudices previously to this declaration, how much more criminal would she have *now* been had she persisted in unbelief ! Yet, alas, how often is Christ proclaimed, all his glories revealed, and all his truth exhibited, by the ministry of the Gospel, and nevertheless rejected !

Upon Christ's explanation of his true character, the Samaritan woman immediately left her water-pot, and went into the city, to announce her discoveries to the neighbourhood, and invite her fellow-citizens to the Messiah. Glowing with zeal for others, she said, "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did : is not this the Christ ?" And the historian records the success of her efforts ; for "they went out of the city, and came

\* John iv. 25, 26

unto him ;” and “ many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him.”\* This induced them to solicit his continuance for some time amongst them, “ and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word ; and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying : for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world ”† .

Gratitude becomes us in reflecting upon that diversity of means which divine wisdom uses to promote the circulation of his truth, and “ win souls to Christ.” The greatest beings are at his control, and are sometimes commissioned to visit the “ heirs of salvation”—“ Bless the Lord, ye his *angels*, that excel in strength, *that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word ;*”‡ while on other occasions he employs the most unlikely agents, or the feeblest instrumentality, to “ do his pleasure.” He can from the very stones “ raise up children unto Abraham,” convert an infuriated persecutor into an “ apostle of the Gentiles,” or change a Samaritan into a Christian, an infidel Gentile into a child of Abraham by faith, and a woman coming casually to draw water for her household into an instrument of dispensing the living streams of salvation to a perishing vicinity.

The early part of the narrative before us is sufficient to show, that however slow persons whom we have an opportunity of instructing in religious truth may seem in understanding, or however reluctant to obey it, we ought never either to despair of success or be weary of repeating our instructions. “ I charge thee,” says Paul in addressing Timothy, “ before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom ; preach the word ; be instant in season, out of season ; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.”§ Who can tell the

\* John iv. 29—30, 39.

† Ps ciii. 20.

‡ John iv. 40—42.

§ 2 Tim. iv. 1, 2.

favoured period? Who can calculate the extent of the benefit conferred when *one* sinner is “converted from the error of his ways?” And who would not rejoice at the thought of having his final hour cheered by the recollection of having been the means of letting in the light of an eternal day even upon an individual of the human race who was once sitting in the darkness of spiritual delusion, and pining in the dungeon of guilt, and misery, and helplessness?

Many things in religion, which we at present misunderstand, may probably become intelligible in the course of future experience, and a great variety of interesting truths now unknown will certainly be revealed in another world. The woman of Samaria could not for a considerable time comprehend the metaphorical allusions of Christ, but when she had “found the Messiah” she was no longer at a loss to ascertain the signification of the stranger’s assurance, that he could have given her, had she requested it, “living water.” The disclosure of one fact illustrated another, and in spiritual knowledge and attainment she went on doubtless with a rapidity proportioned to her extraordinary advantages.

With what deep interest, at every subsequent period of her life, would this woman recollect the conversation at Jacob’s well! Never, surely, would she repair again to that spot without presenting to her imagination the image of Jesus sitting there, like a weary traveller, asking for water to refresh his pilgrimage, incidentally adverting to topics of supreme importance, addressing her conscience, and gradually unveiling his character to her view—first as a prophet, then as the Messiah of the Jews, and the glory of the Gentiles! Never could she forget that wonderful morning—a morning which shone with such glory in the annals of her existence, and was destined to occupy a conspicuous place in the recollections of eternity! And it is our privilege as well as duty to remember the place of our spiritual birth, the instructor of our infant piety, the guide of our religious inquiries.

and all "the way in which the Lord our God has led us in the wilderness." Experience will rivet our affections to every circumstance ; life will derive a charm, in many of its future years, from such welcome reflections ; and memory will not discard, amidst the ineffable joys of paradise, the well—the stranger—the converse—the whole scene of those first impressions, which ripened into religion and were the seeds of immortality.

In a sense more important than that in which the subject of this narrative originally employed the words, each reader may feel encouraged to address the Saviour, "Give me this water, that I thirst not." Holy prophets concur with the evangelical publishers of "glad tidings" in urging you to partake of the heavenly supply, which is dispensed with perfect freeness and in undiminishing abundance. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come ye, buy, and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."\*

\* Isa. lv. 1.

THE  
**WOMAN WHO WAS A SINNER.**

CHAPTER V.

Jesus and John contrasted—the former goes to dine at the house of a Pharisee—a notorious woman introduces herself, and weeps at his feet—remarks on true repentance and faith, as exemplified in her conduct—surmises of Simon the Pharisee—the answer of Jesus—the woman assured of forgiveness—instructions deducible from the parable.

**T**HERE was a remarkable dissimilarity between Christ and his celebrated precursor. The latter was unbending in his manners, austere in his mode of living, and abrupt in his public discourses : in fact, John was distinguished by all those qualities of a great reformer which fitted him for the service assigned him by Providence ; zealous, eloquent, intrepid, inconsiderate of himself, and resolutely exposing the vices of those around him, to whom he pointed out “ a more excellent way.” The wildness of the wilderness seemed to accord with the singularity of his character ; and the rocky standing from which he might probably often address his auditors, was well adapted to the design of his preaching and the mode of his appearance. His Divine Master gave ample testimony to his excellence—“ What went ye out for to see ? a prophet ? Yea, I say unto you and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist.”\*

But the character of the “ Son of man” differed in many respects from that of his forerunner. He was familiar, affable, and ready to associate with others ; he as-

\* Matt. xi. 9—11.

sumed no austerity of manners and no reserve of behaviour. The cast of his public preaching too was of a milder and more winning strain, suited to his character as the image of the God who is love, and adapted to the merciful nature of that dispensation which he came to introduce.

It was this diversity which excited the malignant revilings of the Jews, who said of John, "he hath a devil;" and of Christ, "Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners :"\* but the success of the means has fully justified the use of them, as the prescriptions of the physician are justified by the restoration of health to the diseased, and the mode adopted by the agriculturist in cultivating his soil is effectually vindicated by its fertility. God bestows upon his church a diversity of gifts, and upon men a variety of qualities, that different stations may be occupied to the best advantage and his cause promoted in the most effectual manner. The formation of suitable instruments to accomplish his purposes is one of those arrangements of Providence which we can never sufficiently admire. Whatever peculiarities exist, they are all made to concur to the same end, and are all regulated by the same influence: the "gifts" and the "operations" are diverse, but "it is the same God which worketh all in all."†

Happily for mankind, there was a sense in which a part of the accusation preferred against Jesus Christ held true. He was indeed "a friend of publicans and sinners"—if he had not been, what would have been the situation of a Matthew, whom he called from the receipt of custom to "follow him;" or of a Zaccheus, whom he addressed in the sycamore-tree, and to whose house he "that day" conveyed "salvation;" or of a Bartimeus, "blind and sitting by the highway-side, begging," whose eyes he opened, and to whose mind he imparted faith? If he had not been a "friend of publicans and sinners," the songs

\* Matt. xi. 18, 19.

† 1 Cor. xii. 4—11.

of descending spirits would never have charmed the shepherds of Bethlehem—a church would never have been formed on earth and ultimately taken to heaven—the mansions of eternity would never have been peopled by the children of transgression—the hymns of human gratitude would never have mingled with the hallelujahs of the blessed—nor would the sacred writings have contained such a history as that before us of the penitent sinner.

It is introduced by an account of one of the Pharisees having solicited the company of Jesus to dinner, and of his having accepted his invitation. The Pharisees were amongst his bitterest enemies, and yet here is one who courteously introduces him into his house. He might have been affected by his discourses or miracles; and it is pleasing to recollect, that divine grace is not limited in its operations to one community, class, or age, but peoples the heavenly world by the redemption of sinners of every rank in life, every period of time, every degree of moral corruption, and every nation of the globe.

Our Saviour's visit to the Pharisee is related for the sake of the incident and discourse with which it was connected, and which are given in the following words: "Behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon

answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace.\*

The woman is denominated *a sinner*, because incontinency was her trade and the means of her subsistence. Her character is branded with merited infamy, but her name is mercifully veiled. She was notorious in the city; and one would have imagined, that as it could be no defamation to name her, the sacred historian need not have manifested any scrupulousness upon the point: nevertheless, as justice did not require it, and as it was the writer's purpose rather to record her penitence than to expose her crimes, she is mentioned only in general terms, as *a sinner, a woman in the city*.

What compassionate mind can help deploring the immoralities of populous towns and crowded cities! What an illustration of human depravity does it afford, that wherever mankind resort in great multitudes, vice is proportionably varied in its nature, atrocious in its character, and barefaced in its practice—as if it were thought that the numbers who perpetrated wickedness, tended to conceal from the view of Omniscience individual delinquen-

\* Luke vii. 37—50.

cy! It is common to acquire boldness by association and society, which ought rather to purify the mind, is often the means of its pollution. The facilities for secrecy in sin which exist in considerable places, the incalculable variety of forms in which temptation appears, the force of example, operating upon an extensive scale, and enhanced by a thousand tributary streams that pour into the tide of transgression flowing down the streets, concur to involve the inhabitants of populous vicinities in circumstances of great moral danger. Apart from all persuasion or direct influence, the very sight of immoralities is liable to injure that delicate sensibility to wrong which it is of the utmost importance to preserve in a pure and uncontaminated state. The nicely polished mind is susceptible of the breath of impurity; and when it once becomes dim and obscure in its perceptions, it is difficult to restore it. Many have on this account withdrawn into retirement, supposing that they should be able to secure that leisure for devotional exercises which they have believed conducive to religious eminence. But they have forgotten, that the human heart is sown with unholy principles, which will spring up in solitude as well as in society; that in avoiding dissipation they are liable to be narrowed into selfishness; and that the honourable and heroic part which Christianity requires, is not to fly from difficulties, but “in the grace that is in Christ Jesus”\* to contend with and conquer them.

In the woman whose brief but instructive history is to be reviewed, we see indications of a “repentance that needeth not to be repented of.”† It is to be traced, in the first place, in the *posture* she assumed and the *tears* she shed. When she found that Jesus was dining in the house of Simon, she went and “stood at his feet behind him weeping.” She who had known no shame, but whose unblushing impudence and obtrusive familiarities had so often scandalized the city, now avoids a look, shrinks

\* 2 Tim. ii. 1.

† 2 Cor. vii. 10.

even from respectful notice, and is overwhelmed with a consciousness of guilt.

This conduct bespeaks the most pungent and unaffected sorrow. Her sins present themselves in array before her mind, and she "abhors herself, and repents in dust and ashes."\* Though all around was festivity, her heart was sad—she wept as in secret; and those eloquent tears bespoke the Saviour's pity in a manner more powerful than the most studied language could have done! Those tears were precious in his sight—that silence expressed the depth and sincerity of her grief—and he approved it!

With what pleasure must holy angels have contemplated from their radiant spheres this impressive scene; for "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth!"† The gayeties of life, and the appearances of worldly grandeur, excite no satisfaction in them; they are not attracted by those tinsel shows and glittering nonentities, which fill the circle of human vanity, and fire the ardent wishes of mankind; the most splendid titles, the most opulent condition, the most celebrated heroes, pass before them like shadows that haste away, unregretted and in quick succession; but they bend from their thrones of light to witness the sorrows of the meanest penitent, and listen to his secret moanings.

It is to be apprehended, that many substitute an external reformation of manners for solid repentance towards God. They lay aside the filthy garments of gross immorality, and invest themselves in the decent attire of correct conduct; but the principle of genuine penitence consists in a just estimate of the perfections of that Being whom we have offended, and of the nature of sin, as violating those obligations which devolve on us as creatures. It is an humbling consideration, that God must perceive the *guilt* of sin with infinitely greater distinctness

\* Job xlii. 6.

† Luke xv. 10.

than is possible to the most self-examining penitent ; and that their *number* and *variety* must be perfectly discerned by the eyes of his purity. We are apt to throw them together, as in a confused heap ; and, instead of realizing them in detail, to contemplate them only in the aggregate and mass, by which their individual atrocity is overlooked.

The true penitent views sin in connexion with his personal obligations, and the requirements of the divine law. The Being against whom he rebels has, he knows, conferred upon him all the blessings of existence ; and has, consequently, the most indisputable claim upon his entire obedience—an obedience, however, which, in his presumption and folly, he has refused to render.

It may be remarked also of repentance, that it possesses a character of universality. Its regrets extend to *every* sin, without exception or excuse : it has no apologies to offer, and cannot hold the balance to measure with cold and calculating nicety, the respective demerits of the offences which have been committed, with a view to conciliate the mercy of Heaven, or institute a plea in mitigation of punishment. It is, besides, a deep and permanent impression, which is perpetually renewed by reflection, and by witnessing the transgressions of a degenerate world. What are “ the sacrifices of God,” but a “ broken spirit ?” verily, “ a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”\*

We observe, in the next place, if not the *words*, certainly the very *spirit* of confession in this once profligate but now penitent woman. It is impossible to imagine a finer or more complete specimen of self-abasement than that which she exhibited upon this occasion. How easily could she have avoided such an exposure of herself, and spared those lamentations ! She was under no

necessity to introduce herself into the presence of that holy man, whose looks would condemn her immoralities, and whose words, should he condescend to address her, might be expected to convey severe reproof. Surely she might have remained at home:—no—it could not be—she was unable to avoid this exposure, and to spare those lamentations; she was under a most imperious necessity to go to the house of Simon—she *could not* have remained at home: the irresistible influence of “godly sorrow” urged her into these circumstances, and her bursting heart was forced to seek relief at the feet of Jesus. Her own vileness tormented her recollections; her views of sin were of the most tragic and affecting kind; in the depths of humiliation, the waves and billows rolled over her; and her tears were confessions of guilt, which he who was perfectly acquainted with the emotions of her spirit, knew how to interpret.

How common is it for persons suffering pain of conscience, to plunge into new excesses, in order to disengage themselves from the wretchedness of remorse, and, as they hope, to divert their sorrows! This infatuation is attended with mischievous effects: it diminishes sensibility to sin, and confirms the habit. The thorns which at first grew in the path of indulgence, are trampled down by frequent passage; and a return to God becomes every day less and less probable. Familiarity with the various modes of vice weakens the impression of disgust which is originally felt; as we lose by degrees the horror with which an unsightly countenance was beheld at the first interview, till at length we can more than tolerate distortion, and even court deformity. Never was a more important maxim delivered by the Saviour for the guidance of his disciples, than that which respected their avoidance of the first step in transgression. “Watch ye and pray,” said he, “lest ye *enter* into temptation.”\*

\* Mark xiv. 38.

The fence which is placed around the forbidden fruit-tree, by the interdictions of Heaven, being once violated, the most alarming consequences ensue ; and, unless grace prevent, the transgressor must inevitably perish. Avoid then, studiously avoid, whatever leads to the way of death. Escape for thy life, O sinner, from the brink of transgression, if thou hast unhappily ventured so far ; and tremble at the yawning gulf below. If thou hast fallen, while thou hast not yet passed the boundaries of life, thou art not irrecoverably lost ; but, O let a sense of thy danger induce thee to lift up thine eyes to view the weeping penitent standing in the presence of Jesus Christ, of whom she is accepted, and open thine ears to hear the voice of kind invitation : “ Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord ; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you : for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the Lord . . . Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings . . . He that covereth his sins shall not prosper : but whose confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have mercy.”\*

Further, this woman, who went into Simon’s house at Nain, upon the occasion already mentioned, is celebrated by Jesus himself for her faith, which “ worked by love.” Addressing her in the presence of the astonished company, he said, “ Thy *faith* hath saved thee, go in peace.”

The Pharisees treated others with scornful contempt, especially those whom they deemed to be of a notorious character. Theirs was not like Christianity, the religion of *compassion*—the religion that, deriving its characteristic peculiarities from its Author, pities the deluded, sympathizes with the miserable, seeks to reclaim the criminal, and marks the tears of the penitent ; but

\* Jer. iii. 12, 13, 22. Prov. xxviii. 13.

“trusting in themselves that they were righteous, they despised others.”\* Disregardful, however, of the sneers or reproaches which she might have to encounter, this penitent woman presses to the house of the Pharisee, because Jesus was a guest. Her object was not concealment, but forgiveness; she was willing to be rebuked, so that she might be saved; and while, by obtruding in this manner into the house of Simon, she exposed herself to the insults which her dissolute habits would be likely to incur, she courageously adopted a course of proceeding which brought her under the most solemn obligations to future chastity and holiness of life. She was willing that the whole assembly or city should witness her change, and that the reality of her penitence, and the strength of her attachment to Christ, should be as notorious as her former irregularities. Her courage, then, demands notice, and deserves imitation. What might be the opinion of the motley assemblage who were the spectators of her conduct, seemed to have had no influence upon her mind; but, obeying the impulse of sorrow for sin, and hope in Jesus, she dismissed every thought of personal exposure, and with tears of undissembled grief, hastened to him who was “full of grace and truth.”†

Timorousness, arising from an undue regard to the world, is too often a hinderance to religious profession. Persons who have been awakened to some sense of the evil of sin, and have perceived the importance, while they have felt in some degree the claims of piety, frequently, alas! have been deterred from that avowal of their sentiments, which is essential to verify their convictions, and to honour God in the eyes of men. They would be the servants of Christ, if they were not slaves to human opinion: they would go to Jesus, if it were not for the observers who stand around: they would renounce the world, if they could avoid reproach: they would, in a word, be decided, but they dare not be singular.

\* Luke xviii. 9.

† John i. 14.

We are required to “*confess Christ before men,*” and it is only by such a confession we can evince the sincerity of our attachment. Jesus Christ was not ashamed to call us *brethren*, to assume our nature, to fill our humble station, to suffer our sorrows, and to die an ignominious death :—he is not ashamed to own his connexion with us, now he is ascended into the highest heavens, or to be engaged in preparing a place for us amidst the mansions of glory. Shall we be ashamed of him, or his cause? Shall we be afraid to avow our regard, if we feel it?

It is the design of Christ to establish an interest in the world which shall be universally prevalent, and this cause is rendered visible by the public profession of its adherents. In the apostolic age, therefore, to embrace Christianity, and to profess it, were considered as inseparably connected ; and why should they now be separated? “*Then they that gladly received the word were baptized.*”\* Do any circumstances now exist to render it proper to act contrary to apostolical example and precept? Is not the world the same? is not the command of Jesus the same? is not his religion the same as in primitive ages? This cause is to be now maintained as then ; not by fear, but by firmness—not by compliance with the world, but by resisting it—not by sloth, inactivity, and shrinking into a corner, but by “*putting on the whole armour of God,*” and pressing to the field of battle. Not to be for Christ, is to be against him ; *inactivity* is *enmity* ; a dread of standing in the ranks, or a refusal to enlist under the banners of Immanuel, are indications of disloyalty, rebellion, and treason. The territories of his grace are invaded by the troops of hell—the great power that “*ruleth in the children of disobedience*” is opposing the kingdom of the Redeemer, and extending his influence over the hearts of men. Not to resist his encroachments, therefore, not to withstand in our own person his dominion, and declare our cause, is, in fact, to favour his

\* Acts ii. 41.

designs, and betray him whom we profess to love. It is stated, that at the second appearance of Christ "he will be glorified *in* his saints, and admired *in* all them that believe ;"\* and it is *in* them he expects *now* to be glorified before men ; and the most effectual way to honour him is to "confess him," to avow before the world our determination to be "on the Lord's side."†

"Perfect love," remarks an apostle, "casteth out fear ;"‡ of which we have a striking exemplification in this woman of Nain. The expressions of her attachment to Jesus were such as could not be mistaken, for she not only caressed him, but made considerable sacrifices to show her love. The gifts of nature had been the instruments of dissipation. With what care had she been accustomed to adjust her smiles, to throw fascination into her countenance, to beautify her person, to arrange her dress and her hair, and to cultivate every exterior charm ! What sums of money had she lavished upon herself, with a view to attract admiration ! Behold her now at the feet of Jesus, careless of her personal attractions, and absorbed in the contemplation of her Saviour : she washes his feet with her tears, wipes them with the hairs of head, kisses his feet,§ and even expends an alabaster box of ointment, very precious and costly, in anointing them. Whatever has been the occasion or the means of transgression, becomes an object of dislike ; and, in the true spirit of penitence, she not only deserts what is obviously criminal, but detests and relinquishes whatever may tend to renew the remembrance of indulgence, or rekindle the expiring flame of desire. She renounces every superfluity, submits cheerfully to every privation,

\* 2 Thess. i. 10.

† Exod. xxxii. 26.

‡ 1 John iv. 18.

§ "It is no unusual practice with the Jews : we often have heard of it. R. Jonathan and R. Jannai were sitting together ; there came a certain man, וּנְשָׁק רַגְלוֹ, and *kissed the feet* of R. Jonathan." Again, "R. Meir stood up, and בָּרַעֲיָה נִשְׁקָה, *kissed his knees or feet*. This custom was also used by the Greeks and Romans, among their civilities and in their salutations." GILL in loc. Consult also HARMER'S Observations, vol. ii. chap. 6.

and slays at once, with unreluctant severity, the dearest lusts that twine about her heart. It is thus that a sincere Christian will abandon both the practice and principle of sin, and aware of his peculiar propensities, he will watch with a scrupulousness proportioned to his sense of danger, over those sins to which he knows himself to have been most inclined in the days of his unregeneracy. “If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee : for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee : for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”\*

Reader! examine into the state of thy mind, the propensities that reign within, and the principles that predominate in thy heart! Hast thou professed an attachment to Jesus Christ? “Dost thou *believe* in the Son of God?”† What sacrifices hast thou made, tending to evince the sincerity of thy declarations, and the ardour of thy love? Hast thou braved reproach—stood firm amidst opposition—abandoned criminal practices and guilty associates—assisted the cause of thy Lord—encouraged and supplied his disciples—and for his sake been willing even to renounce indulgences, which, if they were innocent, might have proved offensive to others, or ensnaring to thyself? Decision of character is important, both as a proof of our own sincerity, and as a means of confirming others in religion; for neutrality, which Christ himself has so pointedly condemned, is even more prejudicial than hostility.

But it is not sufficient to inquire into the *extent* of those sacrifices which may have been offered to the service of religion, the *nature* of those sacrifices must be investigated; otherwise there may be “a fair show in the flesh,”‡ while the individual is destitute of the essential

\* Matt. v. 29, 30.

† John ix. 35.

‡ Gal. vi. 12.

principles of Christianity. The love of the world, and indulgence in secret sin, may be compatible with an ostentatious religion. What is difficult to some, may prove comparatively easy to others, whose constitutional tendencies or mental prepossessions are of another description. The sacrifice, for example, of a spendthrift to religion must be of a different kind from that of a miser; otherwise the one may obtain undue credit for splendid charities, and the other for pious scrupulosity. In estimating, therefore, the characters of men, or apportioning their duties, the respective casts of mind, habits, and inclinations, are to be investigated, in order to judge of the one, or prescribe the other. To gain advantage from a course of self-inspection, it is requisite to study the peculiarities of our own mind, and to ascertain what is really a *sacrifice* to ourselves, and how far we have made it, or are prepared to offer it, to Christ. What gratifications have we relinquished? what sins have we resisted? what lusts have we overcome? Where are we in point of moral progress? Has our professed penitence led us to Christ? What degree of assimilation to him have we attained? Have we, in fact, devoted to his service our **ENTIRE BEING**—and do we feel that

“ Our lives and thousand lives of ours ”

can neither discharge our obligations, nor repay his love?

The state of the mind is often indicated by trifles, better than by what appears to be of greater magnitude and importance. There are certain actions not intended for the public, and, therefore, not dressed up for inspection, which mark the feelings of the heart, and the meaning of which no vigilant observer can mistake. There is a truth and a certainty about them sufficiently obvious; they as infallibly show the state of the man, as the index points to the hour of the day. In this history of the penitent sinner, the negligence of her dress and hair.

which had doubtless before been decorated, according to the habit of the age, with jewels, was such an indication. Some professed penitents would have given, perhaps, the costly presentation of the alabaster box of ointment, but would have found it infinitely more difficult to renounce their vanity : but here the sacrifice was complete ; her best affections were engrossed with the new object of her delight, and she virtually said, “ Perish, thou love of the world, perish, thou fond and criminal passion for show, perish, all ye ministers of iniquity at the feet of Jesus ! I willingly exchange masters ; and henceforth I shall be regardless of personal attractions, solicitous only of participating the blessings of salvation ! ”

Simon, during all this time, was an attentive observer of what passed ; but rashly concluded within himself that Jesus could not be a prophet, as he seemed ignorant of the character of the woman whom he admitted to such familiarity. He mistook both the character of the woman, and that of his divine guest. She was not, in *his* sense of the term, a *sinner*, but a *penitent* and a *believer* ; nor was Jesus capable of contamination by her touch. He knew perfectly “ who and what manner of woman it was,” though the Pharisee was too proud to see or acknowledge it. The important change which had been produced upon her, essentially altered the case. She was no longer what she had been, and what Simon supposed her. Grace had constituted her a chosen vessel, and purified her heart by the impartation of heavenly principles. The impurities of her life were rectified by the “ renewal of a right spirit ” within her. She had been snatched from the jaws of destruction ; she had resorted to the “ fountain opened for sin and uncleanness,” and proved that she was one of those “ lost sheep ” which Jesus came into the wilderness to “ seek and to save.”

Simon had not *expressed* his ideas, but the Saviour *knew* them with perfect certainty, and answered them with unerring wisdom. Having first claimed the attention of his host, which was respectfully conceded, Jesus

delivered a parable respecting a creditor having two debtors, who owed, the one five hundred, and the other fifty pence, but were both forgiven in consideration of their poverty; and he put it to the Pharisee, which of them would love him most? he properly answered, "he to whom he forgave most." Then turning to the woman—(and, O what sensations of joy must have thrilled through her agitated bosom!)—he continued to direct his discourse to Simon—"Seest thou this woman?" *q. d.* "Art thou aware of the extent and value of those sacrifices she has made to me? Hast thou observed the tears she has shed, and the love she has manifested? Has it struck thy mind, that the conduct of this woman, whom thou art despising in thy heart, is far more deserving of my approbation than thine?"

Mark, with what punctuality and detail he proceeds to enumerate every act of kindness! He mentions her tears, her caresses, the kisses, and the ointment which she had lavished upon his feet—nothing is forgotten or omitted—every thing is distinctly told—her love is extolled, and her sins are pardoned: Simon, "her sins, which are many, are forgiven"—Woman, "thy sins are forgiven." There is a beauty and a propriety in this repetition, which was well calculated to stimulate the inquiries, and to correct the errors of the Pharisee, while it ministered consolation to the weeping penitent. Ah! our secret desires, our silent tears, our meanest services are noticed by our Master and our Lord! He will "reward us *openly*:" having given the grace of penitence, he will bestow the joys of faith; our *many* sins shall be overlooked and forgiven; our *few* services remembered and recorded for his sake!

This parable is illustrative of our moral obligations, and of our total incapacity to discharge them. We are all *debtors*—to God—we are so, it is true, in different proportions—some owe five hundred and some fifty pence. A difference exists in the nature and atrocity of our respective crimes—we have run to greater or less

extravagances of iniquity—our sins are more or less notorious, more or less limited or extensive in their influence on others; more or less aggravated by knowledge, by vows, and by repetition—indulged in for a longer or a shorter period, as there was a great diversity of moral character between the Pharisee and the woman; but “*all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*”—all have incurred debt—and it is important to remark, that all are equally incapable of discharging it—of atoning for their guilt, or rescuing themselves from the pains and penalties they have incurred.

However plain this statement, and however frequently repeated, it is but little believed and felt. If it were—if mankind were actually convinced of the utter inefficiency of every attempt to recommend themselves to God, and regain his forfeited favour; whence is it that they are perpetually “going about to establish their own righteousness?” Why do they endeavour to persuade themselves that sin is a trifling concern, or that at least *their* sins are trivial and excusable? It is obvious, that they form very low and inadequate ideas of the greatness of their debt, and the utter worthlessness of their own merit—they do not realize their ruined and bankrupt condition, nor are they sufficiently persuaded that they have “*nothing to pay,*” not an atom of righteousness, not a grain of inherent goodness, not a particle of real virtue!

Sinner, come to the test. Hear the indictment, and see if thou hast any defence, if thou hast any plea, or if thou canst put in any just demurrer to stay the proceedings of eternal justice and equity. But how shall human language express the debt? Thou hast violated every divine precept, pursued a course diametrically opposite to the commandments of God, trampled on his authority, and lived to thyself. Every action, word, and thought has augmented the already incalculable debt. God has called, but thou hast refused,

his providence has warned thee, but thou hast despised it, and made a covenant with hell. While thy personal transgressions have abounded like the drops of the ocean, or the sands upon the shore, thy example has perniciously influenced others. Thou owest thy whole existence and all thy faculties, thy entire obedience and constant affection, to God. He is thy *Father*—thy *Creator*—thy *Benefactor*, and what hast thou to pay? what are thy resources? *Future* obedience, supposing it *perfect*, could not expiate *past* offences. Pains, prostrations, pilgrimages, penances, and mortifications, can be of no avail. Hecatombs of animals would not suffice, or ten thousand rivers of oil; but, if they would, the treasures are not *thine*; “for every beast of the forest is *mine*, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?”\* What then hast thou to pay?—*Nothing! absolutely nothing!*

But the parable in question represents the free pardon, which it is the privilege of the vilest transgressors to participate upon their return to God. And we should mark the *sovereignty*, blended with the mercy of this procedure. It is not supposed that the recipients of divine bounty and blessing have any claim upon such favours; nor, indeed, that they can plead any extenuating circumstance to conciliate offended justice. The debtors had “nothing to pay,” and their impoverished condition was a sufficient excitement to their creditor to remit his dues. He “remembered them in their low estate;”† and, with a liberality characteristic of him to whom we are so deeply indebted in a moral sense, he discharged them from every obligation. There is not the slightest intimation of any urgency or solicitation on their part; but he “*frankly* forgave them.” If sinners had any just conception of

\* Ps. l. 10—13

† Ps. cxxxvi. 24

their state, they would indeed seek mercy with the utmost importunity, and relinquish their present courses with the most fixed resolution of mind; but the grace of God operates in *calling* men to repentance, as well as in *constraining* their attention and acquiescence. They are “made willing” in “the day of his power;”<sup>\*</sup> and, like a gale that rises upon a vessel drifting to a rocky shore, and bears it from destruction, this influence effectually propels them to “the hope set before them”<sup>†</sup> in the Gospel.

The exercise of mercy is distinguished also for its *extensive and diversified application*. Simon the Pharisee, and the woman who was a sinner, differed in the nature and proportion of their guilt. He was as much condemned for self-righteousness, as she for impurity—he transgressed by pride, and she by rebellion: but “he frankly forgave them *both*.” “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy! He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”<sup>‡</sup>

If, reader, thou art impressed with a sense of guilt, and ready to exclaim, “What must I do to be saved?” it is with unspeakable satisfaction and confidence we point to “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.”<sup>§</sup> That heart which was melted by the tears of this woman, is not closed against *thee*! That Saviour who was all pity and benevolence in the days of his humiliation, still waits to be gracious now he is exalted to his throne!

Hast thou experienced the efficacy of his grace, and the joys of his salvation? Be stimulated to *love him much*. What sins, what rebellions, what broken vows, what in-

\* Ps. cx. 3.

† Micah vii. 18, 19.

‡ Heb. vi. 18.

§ John i. 29.

gratitude has he forgiven thee! All are obliterated from the book of his remembrance; all are lost and buried in the ocean of his grace; and he has fixed thy name amongst a thousand promises, and in a page which his eye never peruses but with ineffable complacency!

The *plan* upon which forgiveness is dispensed to a sinful world, and which is now more fully developed, demands our admiration, as it glorifies God, exalts the sinner, and harmonizes the universe.

It *glorifies God*. The work of redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ is the central point, where all the perfections of Deity assemble and meet. Every attribute of God pointing to Calvary, seems to devout believers to say, as Jesus did to his disciples, with reference to their last interview on a mountain in Galilee, "There shall ye see me." His perfections had hitherto appeared in the world in their distinct forms.—Justice in its inflexible decisions, Truth in its firm decrees, Holiness in its terrible inflictions, operated powerfully, but often separately—as in the destruction of Pharaoh, and the deliverance of Israel—in the earthquake that devoured the rebels who presented strange fire—in the deluge that overwhelmed the world—in the burning tempest that descended upon Sodom, and the sword that scattered the nations of Canaan; but round the brink of that "fountain which was opened" on Calvary for "sin and uncleanness," they seem to unite and say, "Glory to God in the highest." This is the common and sacred ground, on which "mercy and truth can meet together." Inflexible justice does not remit her claims, but "the Lamb that was slain" satisfies them—she still demands *blood*—and blood is shed—she demands the *life* of the guilty, and the guilty are furnished with a victim who can endure the curse and suffer the chastisement—she requires a recompense for the violated law; and "he hath magnified the law and made it honourable," by becoming "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."\*

\* Ps. lxxxv. 10. Rev. v. 12. Is. xlii. 21. Phil. ii. 8.

This plan of mercy *exalts the sinner*. If the requisitions of justice were strictly personal, and the economy of Heaven such as to admit of no substitute, the sinner's salvation would have been impossible ; because his individual sufferings, though the just consequence of his guilt, could never become the meritorious means of its removal. Suffering, extreme in its nature, and perpetual in its duration, was the desert of transgression ; but it could neither repair the injury which sin had done, nor constitute a claim upon divine forgiveness ; or, if it *could*—by the very supposition there would be no possibility of any period arriving when that mercy could be enjoyed, because the suffering must be *eternal*. Such, however, was the infinite merit of the Saviour, that in the plan of forgiving mercy, his death was accepted as an equivalent for the sufferings of creatures. By exercising faith in his name, we transfer the burden of our debt, and he liquidates it : we confess we have nothing to pay, and wholly confide in his ability to discharge on our behalf every obligation ; in consequence of which the transgressor is treated as innocent ; he is released—the door is opened, his chains are broken off, and he is exalted to the favour and friendship of God ; and “ Who,” he inquires, “ 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, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”\*

This plan of mercy *harmonizes the universe*. Sin has separated chief friends—it has divided man from God, man from angels, and man from his neighbour. It has introduced a general war, and generated universal anarchy and strife. But redemption is the great work that restores order and promotes concord. It is on Calvary the terms are made, and the great treaty ratified—divided interests are reunited, and peace on earth proclaimed. It is there

\* Rom. viii. 33. 34.

“ God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself ;” and there, realizing the efficacy of atoning blood, and weeping over the follies and criminality of past rebellion, the penitent exclaims, “ Abba, Father !” Thus God and man are united. It is there holy angels, instead of being executioners of vengeance, become “ ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation ;” while every Lazarus begins to anticipate the period of “ absence from the body,” when “ he shall be carried by *angels* to Abraham’s bosom,” and be “ ever present with the Lord.” Thus men and angels become one. It is there also before the cross, having “ tasted that the Lord is gracious,” “ the brother of low degree rejoices in that he is exalted, and the rich in that he is made low.” There the murderer Saul meets his victim Stephen, with “ all who in every place call on the name of the Lord ;” and (O happy change !) embraces as a brother him whom he believed a foe ! There the turbulence of passion is allayed—the violence of animosity ceases—the battle of conflicting interests and petty selfishness rages no more. Those who were enemies in the world, become friends at the cross. The barbarian, Scythian, bond, and free, drink together the cup of blessing, partake the “ common salvation,” and imbibe the fraternal spirit. Thus man and man unite, while “ Christ is all and in all.”

“ Religion, in all its parts, requires the exercise of forgiveness. It is required by its precepts, its spirit, and its prospects. Its *precepts*—we are not to render evil for evil, but contrariwise blessing : we are to love our enemies, to forgive our brother as often as he returns acknowledging his misconduct, and saying, ‘ I repent.’ Its *spirit* ; the Gospel, or the religion of Jesus, is emphatically styled ‘ the ministry of *reconciliation*.’ Its *prospects* ; we are members of the same family, heirs of the same kingdom, and going to the same heaven. Heaven is a state of perfect and universal harmony and love. Nothing must enter there, either to defile or disturb. There must be no little disputes, no rising resentment, no

shadow of reserve. All must be of one heart and of one soul. Yes, if we both be Christians indeed, there we must meet our brother, with whom we have been angry, and towards whom we have even indulged our anger : an anger upon which not only the 'sun went down,' but over which life itself passed. Yes, happy necessity ! there we *must* meet him ! There will be no passing by on the other side, no refusing to go into his company ! Countenance must sparkle to countenance, thought must meet thought, bosom must expand to bosom, and heart bound to heart for ever."

# THE SYROPHENICIAN:

OR,

## CANAANITISH WOMAN.

### CHAPTER VI.

Introductory observation—Christ could not be concealed—the Syrophenician woman goes to him on account of her daughter—her humility—earnestness—faith—the silence of Christ upon her application to him—the disciples repulsed—the woman's renewed importunity—the apparent scorn with which it is treated—her admission of the contemptuous insinuation—her persevering ardour—her ultimate success—the necessity of being importunate in prayer—remarks on the woman's national character—present state of the Jews—the hope of their final restoration.

**T**HE facts and incidents of the New Testament furnish the best exposition of its doctrines. Owing to the imperfection of human language, as a medium of communicating truth, and the very limited capacities of the human mind, as well as the numerous prejudices that darken our understandings in the present state, some obscurities will always attend even the clearest revelations of Heaven. "Touched with a feeling of our infirmities," our blessed Saviour often adopted a parabolic method of instruction, which was calculated to awaken attention and to stimulate inquiry, as well as to simplify the great principles he was perpetually inculcating; and he has caused those frequent conversations into which he entered with different individuals during his personal ministry, to be transmitted to succeeding times for their instruction. We have by this means an opportunity of witnessing the diversified modes in which truth operates on men; we see the various workings of the passions, the progress of conviction, the developement of character, and the designs of Infinite Mercy. The sublimest doctrines and

the finest precepts are taught by example : and we are shown what they *are*, by seeing what they *accomplish*. The sacred history introduces us to persons of like passions with ourselves, and, by its interesting details, gives us a participation of their hopes and fears, their joys and sorrows, their difficulties and their successes. We are not introduced into the school of Socrates, the academy of Plato, or the Lyceum of Aristotle, where some wise maxims were undoubtedly dictated to the respective admirers of these eminent men ; but we are conducted from the region of abstractions to real life. Christianity is taught, by showing us Christians—humility by holding up to view the humble—repentance by exhibiting the penitent—charity by pointing out the benevolent—faith by displaying, as in the narrative before us, the true believer.

The case was this. Jesus went into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, where, having entered into a house, he intimated his wish for privacy and concealment, “ but he could not be hid ;” upon which an ingenious writer\* observes : “ I think I see three principal reasons for the conduct of our Saviour ; ‘ He would have no man know it.’ Why ? because he would fulfil the prophecy—explain his own character—and leave us an example of virtue. Once, ‘ when great multitudes followed him and he healed them all, he charged them that they should not make him known ; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold, my servant shall not cause his voice to be heard in the streets ;’† that is, he shall not affect popularity, nor stoop to use any artifice to make proselytes. Most likely this was one reason of our Lord’s desiring to be concealed on this occasion. Probably, he intended also to explain his own character to the family where he was. Jesus was a person of singular modesty, and a high degree of every virtue that can adorn a man, was a charac-

\* ROBINSON.

† Mal. xii. 15, &amp;c

ier of the promised Messiah. It was necessary to give frequent proofs by his actions of the frame and temper of his heart, and he discovered the tenderness of a friend to the family where he was, and to his disciples, who were along with him, just as he had done before, when there were so many coming and going, that they had no leisure so much as to eat.' Then 'he said unto his apostles, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately.\* Further, in the case before us we have a fine example of the conduct proper for men exalted above their fellows. They ought not to make a public show of themselves, nor to display their abilities in vain ostentation. All their abilities should scent of piety and the fear of God. The apostle Paul reprov'd the Corinthians for abusing extraordinary gifts to make the people think them prophets and spiritual persons, while they ought to have applied them to the 'edifying of the Church.' 'God,' adds this apostle, 'is not the author of confusion, but of peace.† For such reasons we suppose our blessed Saviour desired concealment in this house; and so much right had he to rest after a journey, to refresh himself with food and sleep, to retire from the malice of his enemies, and to enjoy all the uninterrupted sweets of privacy, that had not his presence been indispensably necessary to the relief and happiness of mankind, one would have wished to have hushed every breath, and to have banished every foot, lest he should have been disturbed; but he could not be hid."

Having heard of the miracles which Christ performed, for long since his fame had gone throughout all Syria,‡ a woman of Canaan, a Syrophenician by birth, and a Greek by religion,§ repaired to the house with haste,

\* Mark vi. 31, &c. † 1 Cor. xiv. 33. ‡ Matt. iv. 24.

§ "There is in these denominations no inconsistency. By birth she was of *Syrophenicia*, so the country about Tyre and Sidon was denominated, by descent of *Canaan*, as most of the Tyrians and Sidonians originally were; and by religion a *Greek*, according to the Jewish manner of distin-

under the pressure of a severe domestic calamity. Her young daughter had an unclean spirit, or, as she expressed it, was "grievously vexed with a devil." There was something peculiarly awful and mysterious in the nature of this affliction, which was very prevalent in the days of Christ, and is frequently mentioned by the historians of the New Testament. It does not appear any longer to afflict mankind, and if the reason be inquired, perhaps it is that the victorious power of Messiah might be displayed in the expulsion of evil spirits, by his presence upon the earth.

This Syrophenician woman then was induced to hasten to Jesus, in consequence of the distressing situation of her poor possessed daughter.\* How often has affliction proved the successful messenger of Providence, when every other failed! It has gone out into the "highways and hedges," and "compelled them to come in," when no entreaty or remonstrance could overcome the obduracy of sinners, and thus has replenished the table of mercy with thankful guests. It cannot be doubted, that a part of the felicity of glorified spirits in eternity will consist in tracing the mysterious goodness of God in

guishing between themselves and idolaters. Ever since the Macedonian conquests, Greek became a common name for idolater, or at least one uncircumcised, and was held equivalent to Gentile. Of this we have many examples in Paul's epistles, and in the Acts. *Jews and Greeks*, 'ΕΛΛΗΝΕΣ, are the same with *Jews and Gentiles*." CAMPBELL'S Transl. of the Gospels, in loc. notes.

\* The question has been often agitated, whether the possessions of the New Testament are to be ascribed to demoniacal influence, or whether they are so represented in conformity to the popular prejudices of the age, being in reality nothing more than diseases? Surely a distinct existence must be attributed to these, as evil spirits, when we consider their number, the actions particularly ascribed to them, the conversations which they held respecting themselves, the Son of God, and their own destiny, the desires and passions they are represented as manifesting, and various other circumstances of their history. Is it credible, that a mere *disease* should be said to have addressed Christ in such language as the following: "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" Comp. Matt. viii. 29. and the succeeding verses.

conducting them through a variety of painful dispensations in the present world; and it is by no means improbable, that the very events of life, which once occasioned the greatest perplexity, and filled the mind with the most overwhelming anxieties, will hereafter prove the noblest sources of gratitude, and the strongest incentives to praise. A personal or a relative affliction, which agonizes the soul by the suddenness of its occurrence, or by its dreadful nature, which imbitters life, distracts the mind, confuses every scheme, and confounds every hope, has often proved the real, though perhaps unknown or unacknowledged means of turning the feet of the transgressor into the way of peace. It has led the wayward mind to reflection, and the wandering heart to its rest. It has proved the first effectual means of exciting attention to religion; it has subdued and softened the mind, and subjected it to divine teachings; and the once untractable rebel has become tamed into submission, penitence, and obedience. In this manner affliction is often essentially connected with salvation, and the apostolic statement pleasingly realized; “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, *worketh for us* a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”\*

When this poor woman came to Jesus, she fell at his feet, explained her situation, and earnestly entreated his kind interposal. Disregarding every spectator, waiting for no formal introduction, and convinced of his mighty power, she rushed into his presence, and with all the vehemence of maternal agony, urged her suit.

Her conduct evinced great *humility*. She not only assumed the attitude, but felt the spirit of a suppliant. It does not appear that the external appearance of Jesus was in any respect remarkable, for on some occasions where he was unknown, he was equally unnoticed. When he sat over against the treasury *glorifying* the poor widow, he attracted no particular attention—when he visit-

\* 2 Cor. iv. 17.

ed the sick and dying at the pool of Bethesda, he was not at first recognized as any extraordinary personage, and the prophet intimates that he possessed “no form nor comeliness; but his visage was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.”\* It was before the majesty of his character this Syro-phenician woman bowed with holy reverence and humble admiration. Conscious of having no claim upon his notice, but such as her affliction conferred—and this indeed was to him, who “went about doing good,” no insignificant recommendation—and overawed by a deep sense both of her own unworthiness, and his greatness and goodness, she “fell at his feet.” O, that with genuine prostration of spirit, we always presented ourselves before the Lord! This is essential to success in all our applications to the “throne of grace.” Divested of this quality, our best services will prove but religious mockery and useless parade; for “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”†

The language of this woman is highly impassioned, and indicative of extreme *earnestness*. She “besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter;” she “cried out,” like one overwhelmed with grief, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David!” The case is completely her own. The precious life for which she pleads is dear as her own existence. But who can realize, or what language can express her feelings? The affectionate mother alone, who has watched over the sick or dying bed of a languishing daughter, or the agonized parent who has seen some mighty and incurable disorder befall his child—some member withered—some essential faculty enfeebled or destroyed—perhaps reason distracted; can imagine the emotions of that moment when the woman exclaimed, “Have mercy on *me!*!” What reason have we to be grateful for domestic health, while many are afflicted by the severest trials!

\* Is. lii. 14. liii. 2.

† 1 Pet. v. 5.

We have here a remarkable specimen of *faith*. When the father of the young man who had a dumb spirit brought him to Jesus, “*If*,” said he, after describing his case, “*if thou canst* do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.” This was an implication derogatory to the glory, and disparaging to the power of the Son of God. It implied at least a doubt of his capacity to afford the requisite assistance, and consequently occasioned the remonstrance; “*If thou canst believe*, all things are possible to him that believeth.”\* *q. d.* “The question is not whether I possess power, but whether you can exercise faith. Nothing obstructs my benevolent exertion but human infidelity. This, and this only, is the great barrier, the insurmountable impediment to the more universal display of my character, and the multiplication of my wonderful works.” This woman, however, expressed no suspicion, intimated no doubt; but, with unhesitating confidence, addressed him as the “Lord, the Son of David.”

“O blessed Syrophenician, who taught thee this abstract of divinity? What can we Christians confess more than the deity, the humanity, and the Messiahship of our glorious Saviour? His deity as Lord, his humanity as a son, his Messiahship as the Son of David. Of all the famous progenitors of Christ, two are singled out by way of eminence, David and Abraham, a king and a patriarch; and though the patriarch was first in time, yet the king is first in place; not so much for the dignity of his person, as the excellence of the promise, which, as it was both later and fresher in memory, so more honourable. To Abraham was promised multitude and blessing of seed, to David perpetuity of dominion. So as, when God promiseth not to destroy his people, it is for Abraham’s sake; when not to extinguish the kingdom, it is for David’s sake. Had she said, ‘the Son of Abraham,’ she had not come home to this acknowledgment. Abraham is the father

\* Mark ix. 22, 23

of the faithful, David of the kings of Judah and Israel ; there are many faithful, there is but one king ; so as in this title she doth proclaim him the perpetual king of his church, the rod or flower which should come from the root of Jesse, the true and only Saviour of the world. Whoso shall come unto Christ to purpose, must come in the right style ; apprehending a true God, a true man, a true God and man : any of these severed from other, makes Christ an idol, and our prayers sin.\*

The disadvantageous circumstances of this woman illustrate the *superiority* of her faith. There is no evidence of her having seen the Saviour before, much less of her having been a witness of his miraculous works. She had only heard the report of them in her distant residence, and yet, under the guidance of that Spirit who wrought conviction in her mind, hastened to cast herself at his feet. Hers was the blessedness of those who have “not seen, and yet have believed.” What a fine contrast do her faith and zeal exhibit to the conduct of the Scribes and Pharisees of the Jewish nation, who, in defiance of evidence, of signs and wonders daily performed before their eyes, persisted not only in rejecting Christ as the Messiah, but in plotting against his life. She beheld the rising brightness of the Sun of Righteousness, and was attracted by his glory, though at a distance ; whilst they who were near shut their eyes against his heavenly light. She was, therefore, not only distinguished from her fellow-countrywomen, but from the mass of the Jewish people, who voluntarily forfeited their noblest privileges ; and, under the influence of the basest prejudice, eventually completed the long train of their iniquities in rejecting and stoning the prophets, by crucifying the Son of God.

Happy would it be for the best interests of mankind, did the annals of succeeding ages present no other specimens of the same infatuation ! But, alas ! similar

follies are reacted every day. Amidst the most favourable circumstances for spiritual improvement, what awful degeneracy of character exists! Multitudes who have enjoyed the best means, who have been religiously educated, repeatedly admonished, and carefully superintended; who have been taught the holy Scriptures from their youth—who have been led to the house of God, and had “line upon line, and precept upon precept”—on whose behalf a thousand supplications have been presented to heaven, and over whom ten thousand thousand tears have been shed—have continued to manifest an aversion against the claims of truth, and a disobedience of spirit to the commands of Christ. Like the barren fig-tree, they have remained unproductive of any good fruits, notwithstanding unusual cultivation; and have been unsightly as well as useless “cumberers of the ground;”—on the other hand, some whose early habits and irreligious connexions were singularly unfavourable to piety, have nevertheless been “brought out of darkness into marvellous light.”\* Our privileges enhance our responsibility: let us, therefore, anxiously avoid the misconduct of the Jews, and beware lest those who have fewer means of improvement, advance, through a better use of them, to higher degrees of spiritual attainment and excellence.

The humility, the earnestness, and the faith we have been contemplating, it is natural to expect, met with a welcome reception. It is true that mankind often repay confidence with coldness, and shut the hand and the heart against the most importunate entreaties. It is true there are wolves in sheep’s clothing, monsters in human form, who aggravate by unkindness the wounds which Providence has inflicted, and who tear and devour as their prey those whom they should supply as their pensioners; but Jesus was “the *Lamb of God*”—he was “touched with the feeling of our infirmities”—he “went

\* 1 Pet. ii. 9.

about doing good"—he pronounced blessings on "the merciful"—he was no stranger to personal suffering—it was his nature to sympathize—his element to relieve—the grand predicted feature of his gentle character: that he should "come down like rain upon the mown grass," and should: "*spare the poor and needy.*"\* Who can express the tenderness of that spirit which cherished "pity for us in our low estate" while surrounded by the glories of his Father's throne, and charmed with the harps of heaven, voluntarily descending into this vale of affliction to dry up the tears that flow so copiously from the mourner's eye! We are prepared then, to witness the overflowings of tenderness in his reception of this afflicted mother! But, lo! "he answered her not a word." Mysterious silence! And what were thy feelings, O thou agonized stranger, in these moments of sad suspense? And what explanation can be offered for this extraordinary conduct? Had she escaped his notice amidst the crowd? Had she fallen unobserved at his feet? Did he not then hear that piercing cry—that powerful appeal—that humble entreaty—those words of agony and of faith?—Yes—but he answered her *not a word!*"

This is not, indeed, a solitary instance. When the adulterous transgressor was brought into his presence by the Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus "stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground as though he heard them not;"† but this was to disappoint their malice, whose sole purpose was to obtain some materials for his accusation. When he was attacked by reiterated calumnies in the presence of Pilate, "he answered nothing;"‡ because he would manifest a holy indignation against their unreasonable and exasperating conduct. The railing of the impenitent malefactor, who was his fellow-sufferer on the cross, could provoke no reply; although this dignified reserve was instantly changed into the language of

\* Ps. lxxii. 6, 13.

† John viii. 6.

‡ Matt. xxvii. 12.

gracious promise, when the other entreated his mercy.\* He could not remain a moment inattentive to the penitent's petition, and far exceeded his desires; for he requested only a place in his *memory*, but he gave him a place in his *kingdom*. Delightful pledge, that "he will do for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think."†

If we were unable to discover any satisfactory reason for his silence, when in the most supplicating attitude and with the profoundest humility the Syrophenician woman besought him to restore her daughter, it would be the height of imprudence to impeach his benevolence. His general conduct, the kindness of all his other actions, the gentleness of his words, the universal benignity of his deportment, would forbid our imputing this apparent deviation from his general goodness to any other than some latent cause, which it might not have been necessary or proper to disclose, or the statement of which the brevity of the inspired narrative precluded. But too frequently we misjudge, and even murmur against the divine proceedings, because our limited capacities cannot trace their ultimate design, or even their present connexions and combinations. With a characteristic presumption we act as if we expected that the plans of Heaven ought to be submitted to our inspection, or stopped in their progress to await our approval; whereas it is neither proper nor possible to disclose to us more than "parts of his ways!"

Many reasons, however, might be assigned for this remarkable silence. The principal one was probably the purpose of proving her character, and encouraging a perseverance, which from the strength of her faith he knew would be the result, and which would eventually illustrate both her character and his own. How many, had they even advanced to this point of submission, would have withdrawn in disgust, and misrepresented the conduct they could not comprehend! But she is not

\* Luke xiii. 39, &c

† Eph. iii. 20.

offended at this seeming neglect. She does not exclaim, with the sarcastic vehemence of disappointed hope, "Is this the Son of David—the wonder-worker of Israel—the meek, the compassionate, the condescending person of whom we have heard such extraordinary reports?—Am I to be neglected while others are relieved?"—but patiently waits the result, still persevering in her suit. "O woman, great is thy faith!"\* Of this we may be fully assured on every occasion of supplicating the throne of mercy, that if the "cry of the humble" be deferred, it is not "forgotten,"† and that the trials to which we are exposed always bear a well-adjusted proportion both to the necessity of the case and to our capacity of endurance.

In this interval the disciples interceded for her dismissal with the answer she requested. They pleaded her vehement importunity; and, as Christ had expressed a wish for concealment, they probably supposed her cries would excite an unwelcome degree of popular observation. To this he answered, "I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." As this was said in the hearing of this distressed woman, it was not only calculated to silence the disciples, but to discourage the suppliant. A mere inattention to her urgent plea might have been imputed to some deep abstraction of mind, which we know sometimes renders a person in the full exercise of his faculties as indifferent and insensible to external objects or sounds as if he were in a profound sleep; or he might have been supposed to be occupied in meditating upon the woman's distress, and devising means to afford her an effectual and speedy assistance: but his language is an argument to justify his disregard, rather than to solicit time for consideration. His commission was to Israel; he was a "minister of the circumcision;"‡ and that period was not yet arrived when "the Gentiles were to be brought to his light, and kings

\* Matt. xv. 28.

† Ps. ix. 12.

‡ Rom. xv. 8.

to the brightness of his rising.\* That favoured people, who were for so many ages distinguished by celestial visitations, were destined, notwithstanding their ingratitude, to receive the first communications of the Son of God. Amongst them he came to labour, to preach, and to die!

The solicitude of the disciples on this occasion was highly laudable. It becomes the fellow-members of the great mystical body to sympathize with each other. By this we fulfil the law of nature, but especially "the law of Christ:" and in nothing can this sentiment be better expressed than in fervent available prayers. "As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. . . . And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it, or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular."†

Driven perhaps to the very borders of despondency, and yet unwilling to relinquish every hope, this agonizing mother again rushed forward, prostrated herself at the Saviour's feet, and with impetuous zeal earnestly cried out, "Lord, help me!" She seemed reduced to the last extremity; and yet, like Esther, who resolved to go in to the king, whether she perished or not,‡ and like Jonah, tossing about amongst the waves of the ocean, determining "to look again towards the holy temple of Jehovah,"§ she ventured to renew her application, and in language implying her conviction of his ability, and a glimmering hope of his willingness, she does not merely say, "Lord, deign some answer—even if it be a refusal," but "Lord, *help me!*" She was vigorous in faith. She "laid hold of the horns of the altar"—she "cleaved to

\* Is. lx. 3.

† 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13, 26, 27.

‡ Esth. ix. 16.

§ Jon. ii. 1.

the Lord with full purpose of heart." Reader, what shall we say?—"Go thou and do likewise."

Her entreaties obtain an answer. Jesus turns to address the suppliant. He is no longer deaf to her petitions or blind to her tears. Her throbbing heart beats with unutterable emotion, and at that glad moment she is all ear to the long-sought reply. "Who now can expect other than a fair and yielding answer to so humble, so faithful, so patient a suppliant? What can speed well, if a prayer of faith from the knees of humility succeeds not? And yet behold, the further she goes the worse she fares: her discouragement is doubled with her suit. 'It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs.' First, his silence implied a contempt, then his answer defended his silence; now his speech expresses and defends his contempt. Lo, he hath turned her from a woman to a dog, and, as it were, spurns her from his feet with a harsh repulse. What shall we say?—Is the Lamb of God turned lion? Doth that clear fountain of mercy run blood? O Saviour, did ever so hard a word fall from those mild lips? Thou calledst Herod fox—most worthily, he was crafty and wicked; the Scribes and Pharisees a generation of vipers, they were venomous and cruel; Judas a devil, he was both covetous and treacherous. But here was a woman in distress, and distress challenges mercy; a good woman, a faithful suppliant, a Canaanitish disciple, a Christian Canaanite, yet rated and whipped out for a dog by thee who wert all goodness and mercy! How different are thy ways from ours! Even thy severity argues favour. The trial had not been so sharp if thou hadst not found the faith so strong, if thou hadst not meant the issue so happy. Thou hadst not driven her away as a dog, if thou hadst not intended to admit her for a saint; and to advance her so much for a pattern of faith, as thou depressedst her for a spectacle of contempt."\*

In nothing is the preposterous arrogance of mankind more apparent than in the violence of their national antipa-

\* BISHOP HALL.

thies. Did not the history of all ages and countries furnish an ample catalogue of opprobrious epithets, which they have not scrupled to bestow upon each other, we might wonder that the Jews should have accustomed themselves to speak so contemptuously of others as to call them *dogs*. Owing to the natural propensity of human nature to villify and degrade, the vocabularies of all languages have been swelled with such odious terms; and till the principles of the Gospel have been universally disseminated, we cannot indulge the hope of seeing the animosities of mankind removed. Then only will they love their neighbours as themselves. It is to be most deeply lamented, that even where Christianity has taken root in the mind, this unholy leaven does not seem to be entirely purged away; and mutual jealousies, bickerings, and recriminations exist, where love should be the ruling principle and bond of union. O, when will the reign of perfect charity, that "thinketh no evil," commence! When will "the whole earth be filled with the *glory of the Lord!*" When will men of every rank and class associate as Christians, and Christians of every order unite as brethren!

The term *dog* in the mouth of our Saviour, and as applied to this distressed supplicant, must not, however, be considered as used in conformity to the vulgar prejudices of his countrymen, but for the double purpose of a sarcastic allusion to the unreasonableness of their degrading views of others, who were Gentiles by birth, and to try still further a faith which he knew would endure the test, and display this persevering woman to the greatest advantage. Jesus Christ must necessarily, in point of personal feeling, have been infinitely superior to all those unworthy littlenesses which were conspicuous in the multitude around him; and as he was acting for the moment, to answer an important purpose, in an assumed character, we cannot be surprised that he should personate a Jew elated with self-conscious superiority, by saying, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to

dogs.” We are reminded of Joseph, an eminent antitype of Christ, who, though he knew his brethren, and was overflowing with fraternal tenderness, “made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them;”<sup>\*</sup> and we are led to reflect also on the impenetrable darkness which, to the human eye, sometimes envelopes the dispensations of Heaven; when, as a pious poet represents it,

Behind a frowning Providence  
He hides a smiling face.

The woman at once acknowledges the charge, but instantly extracts an argument from her very discouragements. “Truth, Lord—the dogs ought not to be fed with the supply designed for the children. I own the general fact, and humbly submit to the painful but obvious application. It is not from any conviction of meriting thy interposing mercy, that I have ventured to solicit it, and to reiterate my plea. I am indeed a sinner—a Gentile—a dog. ‘And yet,’ if I may pursue the allusion, ‘the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.’ One act of kindness I entreat amidst thy boundless liberalities—one word of consolation from thy lips, which drop as the honey and the honeycomb—one, only one supply from thine inexhaustible plenitude of grace and power—one fragment from the table!”

It is done!—Joseph unveils himself! Jesus reassumes his proper character! The stern air and attitude of repulsion is dismissed—he smiles with ineffable affection—commends her faith, and with commanding authority bestows the wished-for blessing; and, though at so great a distance, expels the demon from the afflicted daughter. “Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.”

Such was the result of persevering *importunity*, which must ever characterize successful prayer, and will neces-

\* Gen. xlii. 7.

sarily spring from a genuine and deep-rooted faith. We have been contemplating one of the finest specimens of it that ever occurred in the world; and we are solemnly exhorted to the practice of it in the introductory passage to one of our Lord's parables—"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."\*

Sometimes people are under the influence of very needless discouragements. They "grow weary and faint in their minds," because they do not meet with *immediate* success; though this consideration constitutes no essential part of the divine promises, would in many cases be injurious to our best interests, and is by no means characteristic of some of the most remarkable examples of successful prayer. At other times impatience arises from observing that "the Father of lights," to whose wisdom it becomes us to refer every petition, does not answer our requests in the *manner* which we had anticipated, and, perhaps, dared presumptuously to prescribe. But while in this, or in any other way, we approach God in the spirit of dictation, rather than of faith and submission; we virtually renounce the blessing even whilst we solicit it. From the history of the Syrophenician woman we may learn, that our applications for mercy must be sincere, fervent, and incessant. Whatever delays may occur, it is our happiness to be assured that the ear of Infinite Goodness is always open; "the throne of grace," to which we may approach "boldly," is always accessible. The petitions of faith cannot escape the notice, or be obliterated from the memory, of him to whom they are presented, but will prove ultimately effectual; and, as prayer is the appointed means of divine communication, it is *necessary* to obtain the blessings of Heaven. "Whosoever *asketh*, receiveth."

The value of the mercies we are required to seek is such as ought to excite our utmost importunity. If the Syrophenician woman were so eager and so persevering

\* Luke xviii. 1.

in order to obtain a temporal blessing, surely it becomes us to manifest at least an equal zeal for spiritual good. She entreated the cure of her possessed daughter ; we are assured that “ ALL things whatsoever we ask in prayer, believing, we shall receive.”\* At the voice of prayer the treasures of grace are unlocked, the windows of heaven opened, the riches of eternity dispensed. The language of *petition* ascends above the language of *praise*, and is heard amidst the songs of angels. “ O thou that hearest *prayer*, unto thee shall all flesh come.”†

The interesting consideration, that this woman was a *Canaanite*, ought not to be overlooked. This people was particularly denounced by Noah in the person of their guilty progenitor, and in the following terms : “ Cursed be Canaan ; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.”‡ The descendants of Canaan, that is, primarily of Ham, were remarkably wicked and idolatrous. “ Their religion,” as bishop Newton observes, “ was bad, and their morality, if possible, worse ; for corrupt religion and corrupt morals usually generate each other, and go hand in hand together.” Some centuries after their predicted subjugation to the yoke of Shem and Japheth, the Israelites, under the command of Joshua, smote thirty of their kings, and Solomon made such as were not before extirpated or enslaved his tributaries. The Greeks and Romans afterward subdued Syria and Palestine, and conquered the Tyrians and Carthaginians. Subsequently to this period, the Saracens, and finally the Turks, fastened upon them the iron yoke of servitude.

Behold, then, from among the accursed Canaanites, a woman outstrips in zeal and faith thousands, and tens of thousands, who were her superiors in birth and privilege : and Jesus withholds not his blessing from this insignificant Gentile ! What an encouragement to the meanest, the obscurest, and the most unworthy, to apply with

\* Matt. xxi. 22.

† Ps. lxxv. 2.

‡ Gen. ix. 25.

instant haste to this Almighty Saviour! His free and abundant salvation is dispensed to penitents irrespectively of national distinctions or individual demerit; and, instead of its being derogatory to his dignity to condescend to persons of low estate, he chose to publish his Gospel to the poor, and to "save the children of the needy." "His blood cleanseth from *all* sin." He came "not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."\*

We have here a specimen and pledge of the influence of Christ and his salvation. He is become the centre of universal attraction, the powerful magnet of the world, pervading by his influence the moral creation, and gradually drawing all unto himself. The designs of mercy were now enlarging, the scale of its operations extending, and the ancient lines of demarcation between Jew and Gentile were overstepped by the zeal of the Lord of Hosts. In the person of this Canaanite we witness the first "lively stone" brought from the Gentile quarry, and placed on the chief corner-stone of the great spiritual edifice of the Christian church. "They shall come," said our Saviour, "from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south."†

The present condition of the Jews forms an awful contrast to those days of boasted pre-eminence. How are they, who once regarded all other nations as dogs, become contemptible in consequence of their treatment of the Son of God, while the cordial reception given him by many Gentile nations has elevated them into the dignity of children! For nearly eighteen centuries the once honoured people of the Jews have been dispersed in every direction upon the surface of the globe. They furnish an example of one of those dreadful recriminations of Providence which have sometimes been inflicted on atrocious sinners in their collective and national capacities. Never did the universe before witness so astonishing a

\* Matt. ix. 13.

† Luke xiii. 29.

spectacle, as a nation destroyed as a nation, but preserved as individuals—preserved to suffer, and to be accounted the offscouring of all things. At this moment they are destitute of a temple, a priest, a sacrifice, a country, and a king. The temporal dominion of their rulers and the succession of their priests have ceased since the destruction of Jerusalem. No oblations and sacrifices now exist. The fire burns no longer on the holy altar—the incense ascends no more from the demolished temple—the flood of ages has swept away the sacred edifices, and Desolation sits enthroned upon their ruins. The house of Israel is, in consequence of the rejection of Christ, become a spectacle to angels and to men—a melancholy monument of wo, on which the hand of recriminating justice has inscribed in legible characters a condemnatory sentence, which is read with silent awe by the inhabitants of heaven, and by every king, and people, and nation of the globe,—But the period of Jewish dispersion is hasting to its close. Party names and ancient prejudices shall soon disappear, and mankind of every class and country be eternally united in one blessed fraternity. “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinah, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim.”—“Other sheep,” said Christ, “I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.”\*

\* Is. xi. 11—13. John x. 16.

# MARTHA AND MARY.

## CHAPTER VII.

Bethany distinguished as the residence of a pious family, which consisted of Lazarus and his two sisters—their diversity of character—the faults of Martha, domestic vanity and fretfulness of temper—her counterbalancing excellences—Mary's choice and Christ's commendation—decease of Lazarus—his restoration to life at the voice of Jesus—remarks on death being inflicted upon the people of God as well as others—the triumph which Christianity affords over this terrible evil—account of Mary's anointing the feet of Jesus, and his vindication of her conduct.

**ALMOST** every spot in the vicinity of Jerusalem may be regarded as “holy ground.” The enraptured imagination cannot traverse this district without recalling the many wonderful transactions that occurred there in different periods of the Jewish history, but especially during the personal residence of the Son of God upon the earth. Within the small circumference of a few miles round the city, what a multitude of great events have taken place! What miracles have been wrought! What mercies have been distributed! What doctrines have been revealed! What characters have appeared! What a developement has been made of human nature! What a surprising display of the perfections of the blessed God! What an exhibition of the love of the incarnate Redeemer! Who, then, can think without emotion, of Bethlehem—of Bethpage—of Bethany—of Mount Olivet—of the brook Kedron—of Emmaus—and of Calvary?

Excepting only that mountain where Jesus “suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God,” and where “once in the end of the world” he “put away sin by the sacrifice of himself,”\* the village of BETHANY may, perhaps, be considered as the most in-

\* Pet. iii 18. Heb. ix. 26.

interesting point in this all-attractive scene. It is situated at the foot of the Mount of Olives, on the way to Jericho. To this neighbourhood the Son of God frequently retired for meditation and prayer; thence he began to ride in triumph to Jerusalem; thither he repaired after eating the last supper with his disciples, and there they witnessed his ascending glory and heard his last benediction—for “he led them out as far as to Bethany; and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.”\*

Bethany, however, claims our present attention chiefly as being the residence of one of the “households of faith,” with whom our Saviour was particularly intimate, and with whose history some remarkable circumstances are connected. It was a small but happy family, consisting of only three members, Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. The two sisters, though united by the ties of nature, and the still dearer bond of grace, were distinguished by a considerable dissimilarity of character, which will furnish us with some instruction. While charmed into an effort to imitate remarkable persons by a description of their excellences, it is of great importance to notice their defects, not only for the purpose of avoiding them, but that we may not be overawed into despondency and paralyzed into inaction by their superiority. Biography, to be useful, must be brought to our level, capacities, and circumstances. We must see excellence that is *attainable*, and view the same infirmities which are incident to our nature, acting in our sphere, and struggling with perplexities, resistance, vicissitude, and trial, similar to what we ourselves experience. The appeal is powerful when we are called upon to be “followers of them who,” though circumstanced as we are, “through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

\* Luke xxiv. 50—53

“Once they were mourners here below,  
 And wet their couch with tears;  
 They wrestled hard, as we do now,  
 With sins, and doubts, and fears.”

A history of angels might, indeed, excite our admiration, but would conduce less to our real improvement than a history of our fellow-creatures. We wish to witness the actions, and to be admitted into the secret feelings, of those who, whatever elevation they may have since obtained, were once in the same probationary state with ourselves, and subjected to the same course of moral discipline. In this view it is desirable to be introduced into the privacies of domestic life. It is in the family and at the fireside we all occupy some station, and have some appropriate duties to discharge; and on this account the narrative before us is pre-eminently attractive. We are led to the native village—the chosen residence—the family—the fireside—the *home*—of Martha and Mary. We see them in all the undisguised reality of private life, and participate at once their pleasures and their pains. We join the social circle. We hear the Saviour conversing with them. We see them in affliction—the common lot, the patrimony to which we are all born—and, while we participate their sorrows, learn to sustain and profit by our own.

In vain to the great purposes of spiritual improvement, do we read the lives of statesmen, heroes, princes, philosophers, poets, orators, and the mighty dead that emblazon the historic page. They excite our astonishment, and perhaps our pity, and some moral lessons may be gained from their reverses or the varieties of their characters; but the most useful history is the history of religion—religion in the village and in the family—religion as exhibited at Bethany, in the house of Martha and Mary.

It is a pleasing peculiarity of this household, that they were *all* the devoted disciples of Jesus Christ. Lazarus appears to have been a solid, established professor of re-

ligion, and of the two sisters it is recorded, they “sat at Jesus’s feet.” We do not hear of another disciple in the whole village, and all Judea could furnish but few, if any, similar instances of three in a single dwelling; three solitary lights amidst surrounding darkness; three flowers expanding to the newly risen Sun of Righteousness, and blooming in a desolate wilderness. The dispensations of providence and of grace are sometimes mysterious to the human eye, and we feel disposed to inquire into the reasons why so few were touched by divine influences, and bidden to follow Christ during his incarnation? Could not that same commanding authority which drew twelve apostles and seventy disciples into his train, and that same power which kindled the lamp of truth in one village or city, and left another in moral darkness, have filled Judea and the world with the glory of the Lord? Could not that energy which pervades the universe, and imparts such inconceivable fleetness to the morning beam when it irradiates the earth, have spread the knowledge of salvation with equal rapidity, and multiplied the disciples like the drops of dew?—Undoubtedly. No limits can be assigned to divine efficiency; but in the present state no explanations are afforded of the secret principles of his eternal government. Curiosity may often be disposed to inquire, with one of the hearers of Christ, “Lord, are there few that shall be saved?” but Scripture checks such investigations, and admonishes us rather to cherish an availing solicitude for our personal salvation: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.”\*

The state even of the civilized world at this day is truly deplorable. Although whole nations profess the Christian faith, yet every city, every village, and almost every hamlet, contains families in which there is not a single disciple of Jesus. The sun rises and sets upon a prayerless roof. No altar is erected to God—no love exists to the Saviour—nothing to attract his attachment or

\* Luke xiii. 23, 24.

to furnish a subject for angelic joy—no repentance—no faith—and none of “the peace of God which passeth all understanding.”\* Whatever may be the temporal circumstances of such families, Christian benevolence cannot avoid weeping over their spiritual condition. In many cases, the society admitted into their houses is of a most pernicious class. Uninfluenced by the sentiments of David, who said, “I am a companion of all them that fear thee,”† the friendships they form are but too plainly indicative of their own principles. You will not see them, like Martha and Mary, choosing the excellent of the earth, and welcoming Christ or his disciples to their tables, to share their comforts, to refine and improve their intercourse; but if they occupy a high station in life, the gay, the dissipated, or the thoughtless—if in an inferior situation, the vulgar, the sordid, the intemperate, and the profane, frequent their dwellings. Religion is in both cases too often treated with ridicule and contempt, vilified as mean-spirited in its principle, and enthusiastic in its pretensions; and the truth of the Gospel treated, as its Author was when upon earth, and would be were he still incarnate, with contemptuous rejection.

Some pleasing exceptions may be found to these observations. In many families exists at least *one* example of genuine piety—an Abijah in the impious family of a Jeroboam. There is reason to congratulate young persons especially who dare to be singular, to incur reproach, and to dismiss prejudices. The conquest in such instances is proportionably honourable as the propensity in human nature is powerful to follow a multitude to do evil. Such holy daring possesses great attractions, and the most beneficial consequences have been known to result. The child has become instrumental to the conversion of the parent, the parent to that of the child; the brother has proved a blessing to the sister, the wife to her husband: “for what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou

\* Phil. iv. 7

† Ps. cxix. 63.

shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?"\* In other instances the sword of division is sharpened, and the discordances already existing become more settled, more irreconcilable, and more violent. The natural mind betrays its malignant animosity against the spiritual principle, "and he that is born after the flesh persecutes him that is born after the Spirit."† But here the whole family was of "one heart and of one soul." Religion was the law of the family, and the bond of delightful union. They were possessed of one spirit; and, as Bishop Hall observes, "jointly agreed to entertain Christ."

Can it be doubted, that the favoured dwelling of Martha and Mary contained a very large portion of domestic felicity—a felicity founded on the noblest basis, cemented by the tenderest affection, and stamped with an immortal character? The religion of Jesus is indeed calculated to diffuse real happiness wherever it prevails; although, as we have intimated, it may become the *occasion* of discord, in consequence of the perverseness of human nature. Sin has disordered the mental and moral constitution of man, and thrown the world into a state of anarchy. The unbridled dominion of the passions disturbs the peace of the individual and the harmony of society. Sin makes a man at variance with himself, with his neighbours, with his nearest connexions, and with the whole constitution of the universe. He becomes restless as the ocean, impelled by every contrary wind, and tost about by every sportive billow. The desire of happiness exists, but he is ignorant how to obtain it, and pursues those means which only plunge him into greater misery. To this cause may be attributed all the mental distresses and all the bodily afflictions of individuals—the disturbances which too often prevent domestic enjoyment—the bickerings and jealousies of families with their various alliances—the animosities that annoy social life—

\* 1 Cor. vii. 16.

† Gal. iv. 29.

the intestine broils, ambitious emulations, and endless contentions, that distract a state, with every other form and mode of evil. Hence the importance of promoting that kingdom which is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;" the basis of which is the truth which Christ came into the world to propagate. It is this, and this only, which renders mankind happy in every connexion. It will harmonize and felicitate to whatever extent it is diffused. It will allay the discord of families, pacify the turbulence of nations, and silence the din of war. There will be "great joy" in the heart, in the family, in the city, and in the world. Under this influence "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fattling together, and a little child shall lead them. . . . They shall not hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain."\*

One, however, as Martha and Mary were in principle, they differed in character. When our Saviour first entered the house, it appears that they both welcomed him, and listened for a time to his instructions. He was in no haste for any refreshment, but eagerly improved every moment to benefit his beloved friends. It was his meat and drink to do the Father's will, and no kindness could afford him such satisfaction as a devout attention to his words. It was, in fact, less to receive than to communicate that he turned aside on his journey to visit these happy sisters. But if, at first, they both attended to the "gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth,"† Martha, anxious to furnish a suitable repast for their guest, withdrew to make what she deemed the necessary preparations. Mary continued riveted to the spot by a conversation which she could on no terms relinquish. She would not lose a word. Every faculty was absorbed in attention. Her elder sister busied herself for some time with her preparations, till at length becoming impa-

\* Is. xi. 6, 9.

† Luke iv. 22.

tient, she hastily demanded of Jesus to send Mary to her assistance. This intrusion incurred the memorable censure, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her."

The defective points of Martha's character seem to have been two. The first of these was domestic vanity and parade. Upon the arrival of her divine guest she is "cumbered about much serving," anxious not only to show a becoming hospitality, but to provide a great entertainment. In this she betrayed a false estimate of our Saviour's spirit. He who willingly submitted to every deprivation during his earthly career—who suffered hunger, and thirst, and peril, and wretchedness, in every form, although he could have commanded ten legions of angels to guard his life, or to supply his necessities, could not have felt a moment's anxiety respecting the abundance or the quality of the provision. This worthy woman not only knew that he could have turned every stone of the wilderness into bread, had he wished to pamper his appetite by luxurious living, but she had surely sufficient opportunities to perceive his disposition, and the perfect exemption of his mind from any kind of concern about his own accommodation. Her anxiety was therefore mistaken in its object, as well as excessive in its degree. And while remarking upon this subject, O that we could impress upon all the ministers of his word the necessity of imitating the conduct of their Master! It becomes them, as his avowed disciples, and as persons who are perpetually exhorting others to self-denial and courteousness, to manifest no care about their own convenience, to give as little trouble as possible to those who, for the sake of their office and their Master, treat them with kind hospitality, and to receive even a cup of cold water in a spirit corresponding to that in which humble piety bestows it.

While thus betraying a false estimate of Christ, Martha's principal fault becomes glaringly conspicuous. She

is full of bustle, full of eagerness. Her servants were, probably, despatched in every direction to prepare a sumptuous meal. Every thing must be in order; every dish in place. The food, the arrangement, the preparation of every description, she was probably solicitous should do her credit, as well as display the undoubted affection which she cherished for her Lord. Who can tell what she lost by her excessive care! He, "in whom dwelt all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,"\* was, during all this time, conversing with her sister; and would have freely communicated the same instructions to her, had not she precluded herself by needless anxieties.

But while we wonder at this voluntary sacrifice of spiritual advantages, advantages too, which, generally speaking, she did not undervalue, let us ask ourselves whether we have never merited a similar censure, whether we have not been seduced by our worldly cares into a similar and culpable remissness in religious duties? Happily, perhaps, like Martha, we love the Saviour, we avow our attachment, we welcome him in the persons of his representatives into our families; but, at the same time, forfeit our privileges, lose our opportunities, and suffer temporal concerns to supersede the habitual impression of spiritual realities. Let pious women, especially, take a lesson from this incident. Martha was by no means an unique. She represents a very numerous class of female professors. Here is a glass into which they may look and see a perfect reflection of themselves; and we trust they will not retire from the salutary exhibition of their own blemishes, *forgetting* what manner of persons they are. Domestic care, like every other, is liable to degenerate into excess. There are many ladies whose piety excites universal admiration, but who, from some constitutional proneness or some acquired habit, bestow a disproportionate, and therefore, on many accounts, highly pernicious concern upon their household arrangements.

\* Col. ii. 3.

We are not the apologists of uncleanness or disorder ; but it is possible to be over nice and over anxious : by the former, we may injure the comfort of others, as well as become burdensome even to ourselves ; by the latter, we may soon interfere with the superior claims of religion. The care of a family cannot extenuate the guilt of neglecting private devotion or public duties ; it cannot exculpate a neglect of the word or the ordinances of God ; and to be “ cumbered about much serving,” is not only waste of time, but unfits the mind for profitable intercourse, and is likely to produce an unhappy effect upon the disposition.

This leads us to notice the second great defect in Martha, which the present occasion tended to illustrate. This was fretfulness of temper. Her language indicates extreme irritation. “ Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her, therefore, that she help me.” It might be expected, that, overawed by the dignified and holy presence of the Son of God, this woman would have felt ashamed to show her impatience, and have been contented to remain silent. But nothing could restrain her. Something went wrong. There was some mistake, some confusion, or perhaps some dish out of order. She was bustling about to make preparations upon a scale which no necessity existed to justify, and she wanted the assistance of Mary. But Mary was better employed. She “ sat at Jesus’s feet, and heard his word.”

Let pious women beware of that anxiety which generates peevishness. It is a greater fault than any which servants can commit by mere negligence, to allow of those intemperate sallies against their misconduct, which, by degrading their mistresses in their eyes, diminish the good effect a genuine piety might otherwise produce. It is a weakness to be excessively rigid about trifles—to be always contending, morose, and dissatisfied. The particular sphere in which a woman is called to act, seems indeed beset with temptations to this evil : but this

consideration should serve to awaken care and circumspection. Religion ought to be exemplified in overcoming the difficulties of our situation, whatever they may be ; and the more numerous they are, the more honourable the resistance: Private life is a sphere of useful exertion. Though retired, it is important. If it be not a field of valour, it is one for patience. If women cannot obtain the laurels of heroism, they may win the better trophies of general esteem and domestic attachment.

The animadversions we have thought proper to make upon the faults of Martha, ought not however to obscure the view of her excellences. Jesus Christ did not censure her concern, but the excess of it. It was the unnecessary trouble she took, and as a consequence the extreme impatience of temper she manifested, that produced his solemn remonstrance, and led him to contrast her conduct with the silent piety of her sister. We must still admire her generous hospitality, and her warm affection for Christ, although her natural temperament and mistaken views betrayed her into an improper mode of expressing it. She presents a lively contrast to those who manifest no regard to religion or its ministers, and whose errors originate not in mistake, but in cherished hostility and inveterate prejudice. Her Master knew how to appreciate her character ; and if he censured her with a seriousness proportionable to her fault, the rebuke was attempered with a kindness expressive of his friendship. The historian distinctly records his personal affection for each member of this happy family. " Now, Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus."\* Let us remember, then, that the real followers of Christ have their defects, defects which perhaps appear the more conspicuous from their association with such opposite excellences : and let us learn, like our divine Master, to esteem even imperfect goodness, while we take every

\* John xi. 5

suitable opportunity of affectionately, yet faithfully, correcting its follies.

Reader! pause for a few moments, to reflect upon the important apophthegm pronounced by Christ upon this occasion, and the benediction upon Mary, with which it was accompanied: "One thing is needful!" This was virtually pronouncing religion, which involves a pre-eminent regard to the eternal interests of the soul, to be supremely important—a principle of holiness, a source of peace, and a pledge of immortal joy. It is, besides, of universal concern, and comprehends whatever is essential to the present and future felicity of a rational creature. "We should judge very ill of the nature of this care, if we imagined that it consisted merely in acts of devotion or religious contemplation; it comprehends all the lovely and harmonious band of social and humane virtues. It requires a care of society, a care of our bodies and of our temporal concerns; but then all is to be regulated, directed, and animated by proper regards to God, Christ, and immortality. Our food and our rest, our trades and our labours, are to be attended to; and all the offices of humanity performed in obedience to the will of God, for the glory of Christ, and in a view to the improving of the mind in a growing meetness for a state of complete perfection. Name any thing which has no reference at all to this, and you name a worthless trifle, however it may be gilded to allure the eye, however it may be sweetened to gratify the taste. Name a thing, which, instead of thus improving the soul, has a tendency to debase and pollute, to enslave and endanger it, and you name what is most unprofitable and mischievous, be the wages of iniquity ever so great; most foul and deformed, be it in the eyes of men ever so honourable, or in their customs ever so fashionable."\*

How important is it, that we should make a similar choice with that of Mary! This is obvious from the

\* DODDRIDGE on the Care of the Soul.

words of Christ, who represents it as "that good part which shall not be taken away from her." Genuine piety is calculated to prevent innumerable evils and sources of misery, by preventing those indulgences which pollute while they gratify, poisoning the constitution, impairing the reputation, and displeasing God; and by elevating the affections to the purity of heaven. It augments incalculably the pleasure which is derived from the possession of all other good of a subordinate nature. While it possesses the power of extracting the distasteful ingredients that imbitter the cup of adversity, it sweetens the sweetest portion of prosperous life; and such is its prevailing efficacy, that no changes can possibly deprive us of its consolations. It shall "not be taken away." How strange, then, is the infatuation of such as make a different choice, and how unfounded their reasons for such a guilty preference! However their conduct may be artfully varnished over with fair pretences, they betray consummate folly. The very foundation of all their hopes will fail, the specious appearances of the world will prove deceptive, like the rainbow that stretches its radiant curve over half the heavens, but vanishes as you approach it into mist and nothingness, and their condemnation will be no less remarkable than their ultimate disappointment. O that, with Mary, we may sit at the feet of Jesus, and by a prompt obedience to his commands "find rest to our souls!"\*

Scarcely have we read of the privileges of the two sisters at Bethany, when we are introduced to an account of their trials: so closely do pleasures and pains follow each other in the train of human events! The fairest fruit is often beset with thorns, the clearest day liable to be overcast with clouds; and should the morning of life rise in brightness, and the evening set in serenity, who can reasonably hope that no changes shall occur in its intermediate hours? Religion indeed promises consolation

amidst afflictions, but not exemption from them ; she is the guardian of our spiritual interests, but not the disposer of our terrestrial condition. How happily was the previous intercourse of Martha and Mary with Jesus calculated to prepare them for their more gloomy visiter, **DEATH !**

Lazarus, the brother of these excellent women, was taken ill, upon which they immediately sent to inform their divine Friend of the distressing circumstance. As soon as he heard it, he remarked to his disciples that this event would prove the occasion of enhancing his own and his Father's glory ; but notwithstanding the ardent friendship which he cherished for the family, and which the evangelist particularly notices,\* he did not hasten, as it seemed natural he should, to Bethany, but remained where he was two days longer. It was his intention, doubtless, to prove the faith of his disciples, to try the spirit of the two sisters, and to furnish an opportunity of working the miracle with which he afterward astonished the Jews. After this mysterious delay, he announced his purpose of proceeding into Judea : upon which his disciples remonstrated with him, representing the persecuting spirit of the people, which of late had been displayed in attempts upon his life. To this he answered, there were twelve hours in the day, and consequently it was requisite to use despatch in the performance of the labour assigned to him who would not stumble in the night, or leave his work unfinished ; and then intimating the departure of their friend Lazarus, he said, " I go that I may awake him out of sleep." Mistaking his meaning, and imagining that he had been speaking only of " taking rest" in natural sleep, the disciples replied, that if this were the case, it was probable he would soon recover, and therefore it was unnecessary to go to Bethany. Jesus then said plainly, " Lazarus is *dead*." Seeing the intrepidity of their Master, the disciples,

\* The whole narrative is contained in the eleventh chapter of John, and this reference in the fifth verse.

stimulated by Thomas, resolved to accompany him into Judea, and encounter every danger to which their attachment might expose them.

When Jesus had arrived in the vicinity of Bethany, he found that his beloved friend had been interred four days ; and as this village was not more than two miles from Jerusalem, many of the inhabitants who were acquainted with the family, were come to condole with them upon their loss. Martha hastened to meet Jesus, as soon as she heard of his approach ; but Mary, who perhaps was not yet informed of it, continued sitting upon the ground, in the usual posture of mourners.\*

Having expressed her surprise at his delay, Martha intimated to Jesus that she well knew that God would now grant every thing he might see fit to request, and if he had been present before, the death of her brother might have been prevented. Compassionating her distress, he replied, " Thy brother shall rise again ;" to which she answered, that she had the fullest conviction of this fact, as she believed the doctrine of the final resurrection. Her heart, however, was still overwhelmed with grief at her present calamitous bereavement ; and it was not without extreme reluctance, that she admitted the idea of never seeing him more till that distant period. Jesus then gave her the assurance of his being " the resurrection and the life," and of the mighty power which he as the agent in accomplishing this work, would display in elevating all his people to the felicities of another and a better existence ; in consequence of which death ought not to be regarded with terror, but merely as the season of repose previous to the morning of eternity, which would soon break with ineffable splendour upon the tomb. Martha declared her full persuasion of this sublime truth, founded upon her knowledge of him who addressed her as the true Messiah, the Son of God, to whom all power in heaven and earth was intrusted.

\* Comp. Job ii. 8. Ezck. viii. 14. Matt. xxvii. 67.

Upon this, she went by desire of Jesus to call her sister. As she had communicated the information to Mary in a whisper, her friends who were present supposed, when she rose up hastily, that she was going to visit the sepulchre of Lazarus, there to renew her griefs and bewail her bereavement. As soon as she found Jesus, she prostrated herself at his feet, and expressed herself in terms similar to those of Martha, indicative of a conviction that the death of her beloved relative might have been prevented, if he had but hastened to Bethany upon the news of his dangerous illness. This afflicting scene excited the deepest concern in him, who, though he had every passion under the most perfect control, now chose to indulge and to manifest his tenderness for Lazarus. He inquired where they had laid him, and, as they conducted him to the spot, he wept. Remembrance of the dead, sympathy for the living, and pity for the impenitent Jews, drew forth his tears, which, while they sanction the grief of his people at the loss of earthly connexions, do not justify its excess.

The spectators, in general, were affected with this testimony of friendship ; but some of them inquired among themselves, whether he who had opened the eyes of the blind, could not have prevented the calamity which he appeared so deeply to deplore. This was a very natural question ; and he was about to convince them that he *could*, by performing a miracle far more splendid and important than such an interposition. The sepulchre of Lazarus was a cave, with a large stone upon its mouth. Jesus commanded them to remove this stone, not choosing to do it miraculously, in order to avoid unnecessary parade. Martha, who seems to have been agitated by a great conflict of feelings, very improperly exclaimed against this proceeding ; and alleged, that as he had been interred four days, the corpse must have become offensive. Jesus, with his characteristic gentleness, reminded her that he knew well what he had ordered ; and that his

previous assurance, that if she would only believe she should see the glory of God, ought to have sealed her lips in silence.

The stone being removed according to the request of Jesus, he uttered a short but expressive prayer to Heaven ; and then, with a loud voice, cried out, " Lazarus, come forth." The realms of death heard his sovereign mandate, and their gloomy monarch yielded up his captive ; " and he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot, with grave clothes : and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go."\* The effect of this miracle was considerable ; for many of the Jews, who had come to sympathize with the bereaved sisters, believed in Christ though others instantly repaired to the Pharisees, to inflame their malignity by reciting what they had witnessed. With similar diversity of effect, is the Gospel now proclaimed to men ; its facts and evidences kindling the resentment of some, or hardening them into increased obduracy ; while they convince the minds of others, interesting their best affections, conquering their prejudices, and operating their salvation.

If there were any exception to that universal law which consigns man to the grave, it might be hoped that such as compose the church of God, being redeemed by the blood of his Son, called according to his purpose, and sealed by his Spirit to the day of redemption, would be freed from this calamity ; but death extends his dreadful dominion over the families of the righteous, as well as the impious. The people of God might, if he pleased, have been delivered from the present curse : his goodness might have indemnified them from the common evils which afflict human life, and appointed them some favoured region, the Goshen of the universe, where they should have passed their days in a state of rich pos-

\* John xi. 43, 44.

session and unmolested tranquillity ; but, if he have ordained otherwise, it is for wise reasons ; some of which, perhaps, we may succeed in explaining.

Is not such a dispensation, for instance, calculated to impress an awful sense of the malignity of sin ? So abominable is it, that the blessed God, who has made an ample provision for the future felicity of his saints, and who is daily imparting to them on earth the invaluable blessings of his grace, cannot, it seems, consistently with his perfections, exempt them from the stroke of death. It is requisite that his detestation of it should be evinced in a complete and undistinguishing overthrow of the race of mortals, amongst whom even those whose names are written in the book of life, on account of their nature being contaminated with depravity must suffer the punishment of temporal death, and show to admiring immortals, that God is “ of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and cannot look upon sin.”\*

Besides, this demolition of the corporeal frame is an essential means of its purification. The leprosy has infected every part of the building, the members of the body have become instrumental to the working of unrighteousness ; and, consequently, “ the earthly house of this tabernacle must be *dissolved*.”†

The infliction of this calamity upon believers in Christ as well as upon others, is calculated also to maintain their faith in vigorous and perpetual exercise. Were it permitted to them to pass into another world, as Enoch or Elijah did, by a sudden transportation beyond the regions of mortality to those of undecaying existence, without undergoing “ the pains, the groans, the dying strife,” or without experiencing the frightful alteration that occurs in other human beings, there would no longer exist the same opportunity as at present for the display of one of the noblest principles of a renewed mind. Who can contemplate the debased condition of the body,

\* Hab. i. 13.

† 1 Cor. v. i.

who can realize the amazing change which "flesh and blood is heir to"—the icy coldness, the stony insensibility, the universal inanimation that pervades the whole frame, the putrefaction to which it is subject, and the general loathsomeness of that which once appeared the fairest structure amongst the works of God, without an instinctive shuddering, and without perceiving that faith alone can give the victory over death? There is nothing surely in the state of the body *after* this event to indicate a future existence, but rather every thing to perplex such a sentiment, and to confound such an expectation. There is nothing in its aspect which seems to foretell life—nothing to predict resuscitation. In general, however desperate the case, hope is sustained by the most trifling circumstances, the feeblest glimmerings of the yet unextinguished lamp; if there be the gentlest breath, or the slightest motion, the solicitude of wakeful tenderness is still maintained, and the *possibility* at least of a return to health is admitted as a welcome and not irrational idea; but when the breath entirely fails, when motion is paralyzed, when the lamp is extinct, whence can any thought of a revival be obtained? What succeeds the fatal moment, but progressive decay? and who can discover the least trace of an indication that the departed friend will resume his life? Every hour seems to widen the breach, to increase the distance, that separates the dead from the living, and to complete the triumph of our mortal foe. All the powers of nature in combination would prove incompetent to produce life in the smallest particle—the most insignificant atom of dust; and hope naturally expires when animation ceases. When Christians, therefore, are required to part with their companions, or to die themselves, their only confidence must be in God; and whoever cannot receive *his* word, and rely upon the assurances which he has given with regard to the exercise of divine power in the recovery of man from the grave, has no adequate consolation amidst the desolations that await him.

Christians also must pass through the change of death, because the glory of Jesus Christ in the resurrection could not otherwise be so illustriously displayed. Never did the character of the Son of God appear with more commanding majesty than when he recalled the spirit of Lazarus from the invisible state, and at a word raised his body from the sepulchre. "Lazarus," said he, "come forth:" the summons entered the ear of death, and the "last enemy" felt himself "destroyed."\*

The scene is infinitely cheering. Though we "fade as a leaf,"† dropping one by one into the tomb like the foliage of autumn; the eternal spring advances, when "they that are in the grave shall hear his voice, and shall come forth."‡—renewed in vigour, purified in character, perfected in felicity—to return no more to this sublunary sphere, to descend no more to the dust, to struggle no more with sin and sorrow, to be assaulted no more with the "fiery darts of the devil."§

Death is so truly alarming to human nature and to shortsighted reason, so calculated by its external appearances to fill the mind with anxiety, that in order to suppress our fears and cherish our hopes, it seemed requisite to bring another existence into the nearest possible view, to render it in a sense visible, and to embody immortality. In the resurrection of Lazarus, as well as by other miraculous manifestations, this great purpose was effected. We perceive incontestably that death is not annihilation, and that the appearance which it assumes of an extinction of being is not a reality. *That* power which was exerted in one case, reason says *may*, and revelation declares *shall*, be exerted in another; and that, by the voice of Omnipotence, all the saints shall be raised at the last day from the abodes of darkness and silence. It is here Christianity takes her firmest stand—here she discloses her brightest scenes! Glorious ex-

\* 1 Cor. xv. 26.

† John v. 23.

‡ Is. lxiv. 6.

§ Eph. vi. 16.

pectation of rising to eternal life, and through Jesus, “the first begotten of the dead,”\* becoming superior to our most formidable enemy! What a train of happy beings will then be witnesses of his glory, trophies of his power, and inhabitants of his kingdom! This will be the jubilee of all ages, the anticipation of which is well calculated to suppress our anxieties, and quicken us to every duty.

What mutual congratulations must have circulated through the family of Lazarus, when he was restored to the affectionate embraces of his sisters! What a renewal of love would take place on that happy day! How was their sorrow turned into joy, and their lamentations into praises! What a triumph of mind did they feel over the grave, and what expressions of gratitude to their Deliverer burst from every heart! But who can imagine the transports of that moment, when the same power that raised Lazarus from the tomb, shall be exerted upon every believer in Jesus, who shall “meet the Lord in the air,” and be introduced to the eternal society of kindred minds; when the redeemed world shall assemble on the celestial shore, to recount their past labours and mercies, to renew their spiritual fellowship, to hail each other’s escape from the conflicts, the temptations, and the diversified evils of mortal life, to behold the glory of him who has washed them in his blood and saved them by his grace, to take possession of their destined thrones, and to mingle their strains of acknowledgment with the holy hymnings of the blest!

How *terrible* then is death, but how *delightful*! Death is the *end* of life; death is the *beginning* of existence! Death *closes* our prospects, and death *opens* them! Death *debases* our nature—death *purifies* and *exalts* it! “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!”†

Curiosity, ever disposed to pry into what the wisdom of God has not thought proper to reveal, has frequently

\* Rev. i. 5.

† Numb. xxiii. 10.

inquired into the history of Lazarus after his resurrection. It has been asked, what were his feelings, what the nature of his recollections, and what the topics of his conversation? Did he communicate to his sisters any important intelligence from the invisible state, or was he withheld by any divine interdiction from explaining the secrets of his prison-house? Was it not to be expected that some record of those transactions in which he afterward engaged, or of the manner in which he was at last removed from the world, should have been given in Scripture, or of the impressions of his mind respecting the amazing changes which he had experienced?

The probability is, that Lazarus had no remembrance of the state into which he had passed during the four days of his interment; and that, as it could answer no good purpose to himself or others to perpetuate in this world impressions suited only to the spirit in another condition of existence, the images of those realities were obliterated from his mind, like the visions of a dream that have for ever vanished away. It is sufficient for us, as it was enough for him, to know that the doctrine of the resurrection was exhibited to the Jews, with an evidence which, but for the violence of their prejudices, must have proved to all, as it did to many of them, irresistibly convincing.

Six days before the passover, Lazarus appears again upon the page of Scripture history, at supper with Jesus at Bethany; but our attention is less directed to him than to his sisters and their divine Guest. Martha, as usual, was busied with domestic preparations; and Mary, with her characteristic zeal and affection, "took a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment."\*

The disciples were displeased at what they deemed this *waste* of the rich balsam, and murmured against her. One of them especially, Judas Iscariot, exclaimed, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?"\* But this objection, so far from being dictated by any kindness for the needy, arose entirely from his eagerness to increase the store with which he was intrusted, and which he was intending to appropriate to himself. Aware of this design, and disapproving the uncharitable disposition manifested by his disciples, Jesus reprov'd them; and expressed his satisfaction with Mary's conduct as indicative of a regard for which she should hereafter be celebrated throughout the world. He intimated that he should soon leave them, and that this might be considered as an expression of fondness towards a friend who might be almost viewed as already dead, and to whom she would have few other opportunities of testifying her affection.

And shall not we be ready to consecrate our most valued possessions to the service of such a Master? Shall we hesitate to devote to him whatever he claims, or whatever we can bestow? Shall we feel a moment's reluctance to aid his cause by the application of some considerable part of our pecuniary resources to his church and people? He has bequeathed his poor to our care, and it is a solemn charge; neglecting which we shall miss the honour of his final benediction; but fulfilling it, we may indulge the delightful hope that he will recompense even the most trifling attention, and inscribe upon each future crown, in characters visible to the whole intelligent universe, *he* or "*she* HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD."

\* Three hundred Roman pence, or denarii, amount to about *nine pounds seven shillings and sixpence* sterling.

# THE POOR WIDOW.

## CHAPTER VIII.

Account of Christ's sitting over against the treasury—he particularly notices the conduct of an obscure individual—she casts in two mites—it is to be viewed as a religious offering—the ground on which it is eulogized by Christ—the example honourable to the female sex—people charitable from different motives—two reasons which might have been pleaded as an apology for withholding this donation, she was poor and a widow—her pious liberality notwithstanding—all have something to give—the most trifling sum of importance—the habit of bestowing in pious charity beneficial—motives to gratitude deduced from the wretchedness of others, the promises of God, and the cross of Jesus.

**U**NCHARITABLENESS does not seem to have been characteristic of the Jews at any period of their history, who erred rather on the side of ostentation than of parsimony. During the three great annual festivals, the offerings to the temple were very considerable, and of various kinds; although, in the time of Christ, the country was in a state of comparative depression, as tributary to the Roman empire. Many individuals, however, were no less distinguished for their liberality than their opulence. But it is common to be deceived by appearances; and an action which we may estimate as good, may be of little value in the sight of that Being who “searcheth the reins and hearts,” and who will “give to every one according to their works.”\*

In the history before us, our Saviour is represented as sitting “over against the treasury;” for though on every proper, and almost on every possible occasion, he addicted himself to solitude, both for the purpose of exemplifying the propriety of frequent retirement, and of obtaining spiritual refreshment; yet, at other times, he mixed with

\* Rev. ii. 23.

society to notice and to correct the follies of mankind. His observant eye could not overlook the minutest diversities of human character ; and he never permitted a favourable opportunity of deducing from these appearances salutary lessons for his disciples, to pass unimproved. Happy, thrice happy men, to have such an Instructor at hand—to live so near the “ Light of the world ”—to have constant and intimate access to him, “ in whom dwelt all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ! ” And happy, thrice happy we, notwithstanding our comparative disadvantages of time and circumstance, who possess the recorded instructions of “ the faithful and true Witness,” in the page of inspiration, while “ darkness covers ” so vast a proportion of “ the earth, and gross darkness the people ! ”

In the situation which Jesus had chosen, he distinctly saw the people casting money into the treasury, and particularly noticed the large sums which many rich persons contributed to this sacred fund. Little did they suspect what an eye was upon them, watching their movements, and estimating their motives ! It is probable that the majority of those who came to present their gifts on this occasion, had no personal knowledge of the Saviour, who assumed no extraordinary appearance, excepting that of extreme poverty of condition and deep humiliation of spirit ; and that of those who might recognize him, some had been so discomfited by his superior wisdom in the field of argument, as to feel no inclination either to dare another contest, or to submit to his decisions ; others were too indolent to make inquiries after heavenly truth, too ignorant to penetrate beyond his humble exterior, or too fearful to incur the censure of ecclesiastical authority, for seeming by a respectful approach to become his disciples ; while few, if any, who passed by, were aware that “ he knew what was in man.”

If there were many among the wealthy contributors to the treasury who gave from motives of vanity and osten-

tation, it is reasonable to believe that others were characterized by genuine benevolence, and as such approved by their unknown observer. They were not influenced either by a spirit of rivalry or pride, but devoutly wished to be serviceable to religion and acceptable to God. If some came in the temper of the boasting Pharisee, who is represented as professing to pray in these words, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican: I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess"—others, no doubt, as they cast in the liberal offering, felt if they did not exclaim with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner."\*

Although the Son of God has reassumed his glory, being exalted "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;"† he minutely investigates the characters and actions of men, and will hereafter "appear in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory,"‡ for the purpose of "rendering to every man according to his deeds."§ The proceedings of that day will be marked by the utmost impartiality and justice, founded upon a perpetual and complete inspection of all human actions, and a most perfect knowledge of their motives.||

"Can we think, O Saviour, that thy glory hath diminished aught of thy gracious respects to our beneficence? or that thine acceptance of our charity was confined to the earth? Even now that thou sittest at the right hand of thy Father's glory, thou seest every hand that is stretched out to the relief of thy poor saints here below. And if vanity have power to stir up our liberality, out of a conceit to be seen of men; how shall faith encourage our bounty in knowing that we are seen of thee and accepted by thee? Alas! what are we the better for the

\* Luke xviii. 11—13.

† Eph. i. 21.

‡ Matt. xxiv. 30.

§ Rom, ii. 6.

|| Comp. Matt. xxv. 31—46.

notice of those perishing and impotent eyes, which can only view the outside of our actions; or for that waste wind of applause, which vanisheth in the lips of the speaker? Thine eye, O Lord, is piercing and retributive. As to see thee is perfect happiness, so to be seen of thee is true contentment and glory.

“ And dost thou O God, see what we give thee, and not see what we take away from thee? Are our offerings more noted than our sacrileges? Surely, thy mercy is not more quicksighted than thy justice. In both kinds our actions are viewed, our account is kept; and we are as sure to receive rewards for what we have given, as vengeance for what we have defaulted. With thine eye of *knowledge*, thou seest all we *do*; but what we *do well*, thou seest with an eye of *approbation* !\* ”

After stating the general notice which Jesus Christ took of the variety of opulent contributors to the treasury, the sacred narrative informs us of his particularly remarking the offering of a certain individual, whom he exhibited to his disciples as a pattern of unrivalled generosity. The comparative value and magnitude of this gift are recorded; and though the name of this honourable character is concealed, the benevolent deed can never be forgotten.

We are not informed of the sums given respectively by wealthy persons upon this occasion, but only in general that they were very considerable: “ many that were rich cast in much.”

It is astonishing what large contributions have been sometimes advanced for charitable and other religious purposes; and from knowing that Jesus Christ selected for remark, and distinguished by an extraordinary eulogium, the offering of a certain woman to the treasury, we are eager to inquire who was the donor, and what the gift so celebrated.

But we must suspend our prejudices. Let us remember, that “ God seeth not as man seeth ”—that our

calculations of value and of magnitude are often false, because we do not use the balances of the sanctuary, but are governed by the erroneous opinions of mankind—and then we shall be prepared to learn, that on that memorable day, when Jesus sat over against the treasury beholding the numerous and splendid donations of the rich, a *female*, a *widow*, “cast in more than they all”—more than any one individually, and more than all collectively!

What then were her resources? Was she some Eastern potentate, who, like the queen of Sheba, “came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold and precious stones”—a queen who was able to present Solomon with “a hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones?”\* No, she was a *poor widow*: Our astonishment increases. But some poor persons have great future prospects, or great present connexions. Had she then sold an hereditary reversion, or borrowed extensively of some wealthy friends, and impelled by a zeal for God, given it to the treasury? No—she gave only out of her *poverty*—“she threw in *two mites*, which make a *FARTHING*,” or about *two-pence*, according to the proportionate value of English money.”† This was the donation that led Jesus to call his disciples, and address them thus, “Verily, I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.”‡

It is proper to remark, that this gift was rather religious than charitable, the offering of piety as distinguished

\* 1 Kings x. 2, 10.

† The farthing was a *quadrant*, or fourth part of a Roman *assis*, a coin of similar value with the *τετρατημοσιον* of the Greeks, or the fourth part of an *obolus* (the least Athenian coin,) that is, two brass pieces. These were the same with the *prutas* of the Jews, two of which make a *quadrant*.

‡ Mark xii. 43, 44.

from that of almsgiving. This will be obvious, upon considering that the contributions to the treasury were not for the support of the poor, but for the supply of sacrifices and other necessary services. Dr. Lightfoot states that there were thirteen treasure-chests, called *Shepheroth*, and collectively *Corban* or *Corbonah*, which were placed in that part of the temple denominated the Court of the Women. Two of these chests were for the half shekel, which every Israelite was to pay according to the law;\* and eleven others were appropriated to the uses specified in their respective inscriptions. 1. For the price of the two turtle-doves, or two young pigeons. 2. For the burnt-offering of birds. 3. For the money offered to buy wood for the altar. 4. For those who gave money to buy frankincense. 5. For those who offered gold for the mercy-seat. 6. For the residue of the money for the sin-offering. 7. For the residue of the money for a trespass-offering. 8. For the residue of an offering of birds. 9. For the surplus of a Nazarite's offering. 10. For the residue of a leper's trespass-offering. 11. For whosoever would offer an offering of the herds.

Our Saviour eulogized the gift of this good woman, less, probably, on account of its comparative superiority to the more splendid donations of opulent contributors to the treasury, whose circumstances were so widely different from hers, than because her motives were more pure and pious. The intention to purchase renown or self-approbation, diminishes the excellence of the most costly offering; while the simple desire to honour God and promote his cause, superadds substantial worth to the meanest donation. Jesus Christ perceived the workings of genuine faith and love in this woman's heart, and estimated them at a price above the choicest jewels or the purest gold. He saw and he approved the holy zeal of her mind, and well knew that the operations of her benevolence were restricted solely by the limitation of her

\* Exod. xxx. 12. 13.

means. These alone presented an impassable barrier to a liberality of spirit which impelled her far beyond the allowance of a timid policy, or a calculating prudence; and we may reasonably conclude, that she knew no regret at the scantiness of her pecuniary resources, and the inferiority of her condition, save what originated in perceiving her small capacity of usefulness. She who could cast into the treasury the only two mites that she possessed, would have adorned a higher station. Had Providence placed her amongst the princesses of the earth, while she retained such a disposition, what an extensive blessing to society would she have proved! Such, however, in too many instances, is the corrupting influence of large possessions, that it is always questionable, whether in the very great majority of cases an increase of riches would not deteriorate the principle of benevolence; and whether, if placed amidst the splendid scenes of elevated rank, our eyes would not be soon so dazzled, as to incapacitate us either for seeing the wants of the poor, or the necessities of the church of Christ.

How exquisite and how enviable must have been the feelings of this pious woman, when she cast her last two mites into the treasury! What a noble generosity! what disinterested zeal! She could not delay a moment to inquire respecting the means of her future subsistence, or the comfort of the present day; the impulse was too powerful to be resisted, and was amply recompensed by an instantaneous enhancement of her happiness.

This example is highly honourable to the female sex. It is not the language of flattery, but of truth, to say that they are distinguished by acute sensibility, quick sympathy, and persevering patience in doing good. They are naturally compassionate, and have the best opportunities of gratifying a charitable disposition. From constitution they are more susceptible, from habit more considerate, and from character more prompt than the other sex in promoting benevolent purposes. They generally require less urging to useful measures, and the flame of

charity often burns with more brightness and perpetuity in their bosoms.

In the church of Christ, women have ever been pre-eminent in numbers and in character; they have been the first to profess Christ, and the last to dishonour him; they have joined the train of his followers, borne the reproach of his accusers, sustained the cross of self-denial, and aspired to the crown of martyrdom; they are recorded with marked distinction by an apostolic pen, "Women received their dead raised to life again, and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection;"\*—in a word, whenever they have been required to suffer for Christ, they have willingly surrendered life with all its joys; and whenever called to maintain his cause by pecuniary supplies, they have been found ready, like the poor widow, to give even to their last *two mites*.

Some persons will not be liberal, unless they can be praised. They are anxious to see their names exciting public attention, and their benefactions proclaimed upon some public list. If you will allow them to be "seen of men," they will reconcile themselves to make some sacrifice for the good of others; and overcome their heartfelt reluctance to give, when they are assured of being repaid in a proportionate measure of fame. And thus, in fact, their charity is nothing but a sordid traffic; they barter for renown, and aim to ensure the recompense before they hazard the gift. But we may be assured, that this is of all speculations the meanest, the most detestable, and ultimately the most ruinous. The poor widow had no suspicion of the kind of observance to which she was exposed, and no wish to attract attention. She silently dropped her money into the chest, and departed. The whole world was, in her estimation, ignorant of the deed; and the whole world could not have bestowed upon her so rich a gratification.

\* Heb. xi. 35.

Persons of the class alluded to will sometimes admit of concealment. They adopt many measures to hide their virtue from the eyes of others ; they will by no means court public attention, or allow a formal publication of their deeds : but if perchance they are whispered abroad, if any indiscretion betrays them, if though not *written*, they are *stated* ; they are the last persons on earth to feel any offence, and congratulate themselves on having effectually secured the applauses of mankind.

“ Good actions,” as the admirable Archbishop Leighton remarks, “ cannot well be hid ; and it may sometimes be necessary for example and exciting others, that they know of it ; but take heed that vanity creep not in under this. And further than either unavoidable necessity, or some evident further good of thy neighbour carries it, desire to be unknown and unseen in this. When it must be public, let thy intention be secret ; take no delight in the eyes of men on thee ; yea, rather count it a pain ; and still eye God alone, for he eyes thee. And remember it even in public acts of charity, and other such like, *he sees in secret* ; though the action be no secret, the spring, the source of it, is ; and he sees by what weights the wheels go, and he still looks upon that, views thy heart, the hidden bent and intention of it, which man cannot see. So then, though in some cases thou must be seen to do, yet in no case do to be seen : that differs much ; and where that is, even the other will be as little as may be.”

There are other persons who, though they cannot in all cases be censured for penuriousness, have imbibed a very pernicious error. They plead that they have scarcely sufficient for themselves, that they cannot therefore afford to contribute even to a good cause ; and that if they were to do any thing, it must necessarily be so little as to be useless. What, say they, could our insignificant donations avail in aid of a fund which requires the most liberal and constant supplies ? Could our drop of charity materially increase the tide, or swell the ocean ? Would it become us to take from our few necessities, what could

not much augment the comfort or minister to the wants of others? Or does God require that his cause should be sustained by the poor, and the poorest of the poor, when he can command the purses of the opulent, or turn the stones of the desert into gold?

To this reasoning the instructive history we are considering is a direct reply. There were two circumstances in her lot, which not only merited compassion, but would have furnished as strong arguments against her contributing to the treasury as it is perhaps possible to adduce.

She was, in the first place, **POOR**—poor in the extreme; for when she cast in “two mites” it was “all her living.” Poverty is helpless. It does not possess the means of alleviating its own distresses, much less of assisting others to any considerable extent. “Wealth,” says Solomon, “maketh many friends, but the poor is separated from his neighbour”<sup>\*</sup>—separated by his neighbour’s *selfishness*, who is too much occupied with his own concerns to cast his eye beyond the narrow limits of personal interest—separated by his neighbour’s *insensibility*, whose heart is often cold and motionless to pity as the stone which paves his doorway—separated by his neighbour’s *avarice*, who idolizes gold, and grasps it with unyielding tenacity—separated by his neighbour’s *pride*, who looks with contempt upon his unoffending inferior—separated by his neighbour’s *servility*, who flatters greatness even by acquiescing in its unfounded dislike of the poor—ah! “the poor is separated from his neighbour!”

You plead poverty as an excuse for disregarding every claim upon you; but are you as destitute as this obscure yet excellent woman, who had but a farthing, and gave it even without solicitation? Be encouraged by recollecting who observes and who can repay you. Indeed, the poor of every class were the particular objects of the Saviour’s attention during his residence on earth; and he has rendered the tattered garment of poverty respectable by having worn it himself.

<sup>\*</sup> Prov. xix. 4.

There is one consideration, above all others, which seems to appeal most forcibly to the inferior classes of society in behalf especially of the cause of Christ, and to urge some, even the smallest donations, to the *treasury*, of the Christian temple, however incapacitated they may be for other benevolent exertions, namely, that *poverty appears to be the peculiar object of divine complacency and provision*. It is the common condition of the people of God, who “hath chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him.”\* The vale of poverty seems to be the favourite walk of celestial mercy. Here she distributes her charities—here she spreads her table—here she sends her ministers of grace. It was here the Saviour “went about doing good.” The discourses he delivered were adapted to the poor—he consulted their capacities, instructed their minds, felt for their circumstances, and relieved their necessities. Whom others despised he honoured—whom others forsook he sought—whom others suffered without a sigh to perish, he supplied, and comforted, and saved!

The Gospel itself was expressly addressed to the poor, and is peculiarly suited to their condition; and the messengers of heaven are directed to go out into the highways and hedges to compel men to come in.” The promises of Scripture are peculiarly appropriated to the necessities of the poor. They have no *money*; hence the blessings of the everlasting covenant are described as “wine and milk,” and are to be procured “without money and without price.” The poor are subject to *fatigue* through excess of labour; hence it is “the weary and heavy-laden,” whom Christ invites to “come to him,” promising them “rest.” The poor, being deprived of those means of mental cultivation which the rich enjoy, are usually *ignorant*; hence the source of the Redeemer’s grateful appeal to the Father, “Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them

\* James ii. 5.

unto babes." The poor are the *servants* of others ; hence we read of "the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free," and "if the Son make you free ye shall be free indeed." The felicities of the invisible state are represented in terms which form a complete contrast to the present condition of the poor. Are they now the tenants of the lowly cottage ? "In my Father's house are many mansions"—"we have a *building of God*, a house not made with hands, *eternal* in the heavens." Must they now look on all the fields around them, and sigh to think that they belong to another ? Through the grace of the Gospel they anticipate "an inheritance incorruptible, un-defiled, and that fadeth not away." Are they now clothed in wretched attire ?—they may expect to be adorned with "white robes" and "a crown of glory." Are they now in a state of obscurity—their names unknown—their condition mean and despised ?—hereafter they shall have a "name better than of sons and daughters ;" they shall "shine as the brightness of the firmament," and "as the stars, for ever and ever." Is their condition on earth eminently "the *house of mourning* ?" Do a scanty meal, a starving family, a pining partner, a wasting disease for which poverty forbids their procuring the most skilful means, frequently excite the bitter, the burning, the un-availing tear ? In heaven "the days of our mourning shall be ended," and "God himself shall wipe away all tears from our eyes."\*

Had this poor woman been disposed rather to have evaded the gift to the treasury than to have volunteered so large a donation as that of "all her living," the circumstance of her being a widow would seem to have been a sufficient apology. No condition of life can be conceived more wretched. A widow is deprived of the object of her tenderest regard, the soother of her cares, the defence of her weakness, and the staff of her life.

\* Luke xiv. 23. Is. lv. 1. Matt. xi. 28. Luke x. 21. Gal. v. 1. John iii. 36. xiv. 2. 2 Cor. v. 1. 1 Pet. i. 4. Rev. vii. 9. 1 Pet. v. 4. Is. li. 5. Dan. xii. 3. Eccles. vii. 2. Is. lx. 20. Rev. vii. 17.

She is left to bewail in solitude—to suffer alone ; or, if her children surround her, by tracing in their features the resemblance of her departed husband, she perpetually opens afresh the wound that time was kindly healing, and blends her fond caresses with tears of unavailing regret. She must now support herself—and perhaps struggle to supply them, whose childhood both disqualifies them from affording any assistance, and renders the incessant vigilance of maternal care essential to their very preservation. If, in addition to this, her poverty incapacitates her for resisting the arm of oppression, or vindicating herself against the unmerited reproaches of the censorious and the impious, her situation is inconceivably deplorable. Some part of this description certainly applies, and perhaps all, to the character under consideration. She was a poor widow ; and yet the miseries of her own state did not prevent her casting in a liberal supply, even “all her living,” into the treasury of God. She trusted for to-morrow to that Providence which had supplied her to-day ; a confidence which we cannot doubt experienced its appropriate reward.

In addition to these considerations, and as a reply to the sophisms already adverted to, by which so many in far superior circumstances to this good woman endeavour to fence themselves against the charge of illiberality, we remark—

1. It is by no means evident that you have absolutely *nothing* that can be applied to the purposes of a pious charity. In order to prove this, it would be requisite to show that all your labour is scarcely sufficient to procure your subsistence—a subsistence that does not require or admit the smallest redundancy or the least indulgence. You must prove that you never pamper one appetite or gratify one lust ; and that, in compliance with the exhortation of Christ, you “take no thought for the morrow.” This is a case of so extreme a nature that its occurrence seems a bare possibility, and will not, surely,

exonerate those who, if they are but scantily supplied in comparison with the ample abundance which enriches the condition of others, have nevertheless the means of a sufficient and perhaps a comfortable support. From those who possess much, much is required; and of those who have little *something*—to prove that the spirit of benevolence is not extinct, nor the claims of humanity and religion disregarded. You may be unable to pour in gold and silver, but surely you can contribute *two mites*! It is an excellent piece of advice, “If thou have but a little, be not afraid to give according to that little; for thou layest up a good treasure for thyself against the day of necessity.”\*

2. Whatever may be our estimate of the merit or utility of a small donation, the most trifling addition is of *some* importance. The seed which is sown in the field of benevolence will bear some fruit and help to swell the harvest. The immeasurable extent of sand upon the sea-shore is made up of grains, and the loftiest mountains are composed of diminutive particles of dust. If the millions who are able to contribute their mites could be induced to do so, the treasury would soon be full; but if they withhold them, the uncertain, capricious, and ostentatious, though large contributions of the opulent, may fail to replenish it.

3. The *habit* of giving, however small the sum, is inconceivably beneficial to the contributor himself. It is an important means of cherishing in the breast that divine principle, which without exercise and use would be likely to languish: for whatever sentiments we feel, whatever theories we adopt, and in whatever eloquence of language and warmth of spirit we expatiate upon the excellencies of liberality, unless we *give* to the necessitous ourselves, the heart will become hardened and cold; and a *theoretical religion* can never preserve us from a *real impiety*.

\* Tobit iv. 8, 9

“ The peculiar nature of our religion,” observes Dr. Barrow,\* “ specially requires it, and the honour thereof exacts it from us ; nothing better suits Christianity, nothing more graces it, than liberality ; nothing is more inconsistent therewith, or more disparageth it, than being miserable and sordid. A Christian niggard is the veriest nonsense that can be ; for what is a Christian ? What but a man who adores God alone, who loves God above all things, who reposes all his trust and confidence in God ? What is he, but one who undertaketh to imitate the most good and bountiful God ; to follow, as the best pattern of his practice, the most benign and charitable Jesus, the Son of God ; to obey the laws of God and his Christ, the sum and substance of which is charity ; half whose religion doth consist in loving his neighbour as himself ! What is he further, but one who hath renounced this world, with all the vain pomps and pleasures of it ; who professes himself in disposition and affection of mind to forsake all things for Christ’s sake ; who pretends little to value, affect, or care for any thing under heaven, having all his main concernments and treasures—his heart, his hopes, and his happiness, in another world ? Such is a Christian : and what is a niggard ? All things quite contrary. One whose practice manifestly shows him another thing besides and before God ; to love mammon above God, and more to confide in it than in him ; one who bears small goodwill, kindness, or pity towards his brother ; who is little affected or concerned with things future or celestial ; whose mind and heart are rivetted to this world ; whose hopes and happinesses are settled here below ; whose soul is deeply immersed and buried in earth ; one who, according to constant habit, notoriously breaketh the two great heads of Christian duty, *loving God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself*. It is, therefore, by comparing those things very plain, that we pretend to

\* BARROW’S Works, vol. i. p. 457, fol.

reconcile gross contradictions and inconsistencies, if we profess ourselves to be Christians and are illiberal. It is indeed the special grace and glory of our religion, that it consisteth not in barren speculations, or empty formalities, or forward professions ; not in fancying curiously, or speaking zealously, or looking demurely ; but in really producing sensible fruits of goodness, in doing (as St. Paul signifies) *things good and profitable unto men.*"

The story of the poor widow is eminently calculated to inspire gratitude in the hearts of those who are mercifully exempted from the wretchedness of such extreme poverty, which exposes to the temptation of repining at the dispensations of Heaven, and of pursuing improper measures for obtaining relief. Nor is its least evil that of cherishing an envious spirit towards those who are in superior circumstances. From the abodes of penury and want it is indeed a pleasing fact that Divine Grace has chosen its objects, and from lowly vales and humble cottages elevated them to thrones of immortality. We hear apostles saying, "Silver and gold have we none ;" and Bartimeus, brought into the train of disciples from "the highway-side," where he was "blind" and "begging." And though it is a delightful consideration, that religion can alleviate the rigours of want, and infuse sweetness into the bitterest waters of sorrow ; yet poverty, with its concomitant evils, is an affliction from which, in its extreme form, we may pray to be relieved. Though in the strictest sense, the Christian, like the apostle, while "having nothing" may yet be said to "possess all things ;" yet that degree of necessity which arises from extreme poverty is far from being desirable either for the body or the soul.

In the most destitute circumstances, however, the promises of our Father in heaven, and the examples which we find upon sacred record, are encouraging. "I have never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread"—"He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man : that he may

bring forth food out of the earth ; and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart."\* Of Zion it is asserted, " I will abundantly bless her provision : I will satisfy her poor with bread : "† and " He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly ; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribery, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil ; he shall dwell on high : his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks : bread shall be given him ; his waters shall be sure."‡

Remember the interpositions of God to supply the necessities of the destitute. Go to *Egypt* and *Canaan*, and trace the wonderful appointments of that Providence which supplied the famished household of Jacob ! Go into the wilderness of *Sin*, and behold an extraordinary kind of dew covering the camp of Israel and sparkling in the morning sun, in fulfilment of the prediction, " I will rain bread from heaven for you ! "§ Observe the famished prophet at " the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan," and see the ravens of heaven descending with bread and flesh to supply Elijah ! Follow Jesus into a desert place, where five thousand weary, wayworn strangers, besides women and children, are fed by his liberal hand and his miraculous power ! " Behold the fowls of the air ; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they ? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature ? and why take ye thought for raiment ? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow ; they toil not, neither do they spin : and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is

\* Ps. civ. 14, 15.

† Ps. cxxxii. 15.

‡ Is. xxxiii. 15, 16.

§ Exod. xvi. 4.

cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or Where-withal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek :) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.\*

O, how sweetly does that spirit rest which reclines upon the lap of Providence, and feeds contentedly on "daily bread!" The storms may rise and the winds may blow—the clamours of human competition may fill the air; but nothing can disturb his repose. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."† When Solomon was about to ascend his throne, how earnestly did he implore superior wisdom, and how readily leave the disposal of earthly good to his God and Father! And what was the consequence? "God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days."‡

Finally, let us deduce motives for consolation under the pressure of sorrow, and for the limitation of our wishes to the necessary subsistence of life, from "a greater than Solomon." Who was it that stooped to a manger and a cross? Who fasted forty days and forty nights in the desert, refusing to employ his power in furnishing a miraculous table? Who had not "where to lay his head?" Who lived on the scanty fare of a small purse in common with the family of his disciples? Who withdrew from the en-

\* Matt. vi. 26—32

† Is. xxvi. 3.

‡ 1 Kings iii. 11—13.

tertainments of Jerusalem to the humble cottage of Mary and Martha, cheerfully subsisting on the most homely and casual provision?—He, who has taught us to limit our desires of temporal good within the narrow circle of *one short request*—*GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD.*”

# S A P P H I R A .

## CHAPTER IX.

Mixed constitution of the church of Christ—benevolent spirit of the primitive believers at Jerusalem—anxiety of Ananias and Sapphira to appear as zealous and liberal as others—Ananias repairs to the apostles to deposit the price of his possessions—is detected in deception and dies—similar deceit and death of Sapphira—nature and progress of apostacy—peculiar guilt of Sapphira—agency of Satan distinctly marked—diabolical influence ascertained—consolatory sentiments suggested to Christians.

**T**HE kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this . . . The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil.\*

This parable, so descriptive of the mixed constitution of the church of Christ, from the primitive times down to the present age, is strikingly exemplified in the history of Ananias and Sapphira. These were some of the first tares that appeared in the apostolic field of labour; and we should feel grateful that their names and characters are transmitted to us upon whom the ends of the world are come, for the purpose of salutary warning. Their singular atrocity was but a more full developement of the very same evil principles that exist in embryo in the

\* Mat. xiii. 24—28, 38, 39.

hearts of mankind in general ; and their signal and immediate punishment, which was some deviation from the more ordinary methods of Providence, which permits the tares and the wheat to grow together till the harvest or “ end of the world,” was under all the circumstances a necessary expression of divine displeasure.

During the first age of Christianity, when it was propagated by apostles and their holy coadjutors, and when Jesus Christ, having so recently departed from the world, had left an unusual glow of ardour and affection in their minds, it seems natural to anticipate not only extensive success in the establishment of Christian churches, but a peculiar purity in the sentiments and conduct of their members. And where shall we find such union, such fervour, such simplicity, such energy, as prevailed in that golden age ? Persecution separated them indeed, but could not dissolve their attachment either to the cause or to each other ; it could not extinguish their ever-burning zeal. But in vain should we hope for perfection even in the purest societies on earth. If a Judas insinuated himself amongst the apostles during the personal residence of Christ on earth, and under his immediate eye, it is not surprising that an Ananias and a Sapphira intruded into the earliest and best of his churches ; nor should it prove unduly discouraging to his ministers or people at any period, when they witness similar instances of deceit and impiety. The more valuable the coin, the greater is the reason to apprehend its being counterfeited ; and the more excellent religion appears, and the more highly it is esteemed, the greater will be the probable number of hypocritical professors.

The history of these two offenders is intimately blended. Their sin and punishment were similar ; but there were some circumstances connected with the transaction which exhibit the guilt of Sapphira in characters of more conspicuous enormity. While reviewing the inspired narrative, let us not cherish the feeling of Hazael, who indignantly demanded of the prophet, “ Is thy servant

a dog, that he should do this ;”\* but, deeply aware of our inward propensities and our moral dangers, let us unite fervent prayer with sleepless circumspection, “lest we enter into temptation.”†

The church at Jerusalem possessed one peculiarity, resulting from the remarkable exercise of a pure, exalted, disinterested benevolence. Rising superior to every selfish interest, and, in the spirit of unbounded love and liberality, concurring in every measure that was devised to promote the general good ; “as many as were possessors of lands or houses, sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet ; and distribution was made to every man according as he had need.”‡ The great proportion of converts were probably indigent, for in no age have “the mighty and the noble” been attracted by the unostentatious simplicity of the religion of Jesus ; but some were persons of property. They had lands and houses, with which, however, they willingly parted to supply the necessities of their poorer fellow-Christians. This was a generosity which could not fail of exciting the admiration of the whole society, and of acquiring for them considerable influence. While the apostles approved their disinterestedness, the widows, the orphans, and the indigent of every class, would pour their best benedictions upon their heads, and look up to them as the ministering angels of Providence. Too often, indeed, the supplies of benevolence are received with a coldness which is truly repulsive, and which bespeaks a secret conviction in the minds of the wretched, that they have a right to expect, and that the opulent are bound to bestow them ; but these were *Christian poor*, and were influenced, we should hope, by a gratitude which such benefactions were calculated to inspire. At the same time, even the unthankfulness of the recipient ought not to shut up our “bowels of compassion.”

\* 2 Kings viii. 13.  
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† Mark xiv. 38.  
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‡ Acts iv. 34.

Ananias and Sapphira were anxious, amidst such fine specimens of disinterested goodness, not to appear backward. They might be conscious that the respectability of their situation, and the zeal of their profession, excited expectations amongst the other disciples; and though they were certainly under no obligation to practise this profuse charity, they seemed unwilling to lose the opportunity of enhancing their fame. We may justly suspect, that a long straggle was maintained between the love of money and the love of applause. They consulted together: they were anxious to devise an expedient by which they might gratify their vanity, and yet retain at least the principal part of their property. Ambition and avarice were to be alike gratified, but they were to contrive the concealment of their hypocrisy. With this view, they agreed upon a course of meanness and dissimulation, which involved the most tragical consequences. Ananias seems to have proposed, and Sapphira to have abetted, the transaction. With her consent, which he chose to obtain, and which might have been legally necessary, their estate was sold; and *part* only of the purchase-money was laid at the apostles' feet, as if it were the whole, and as if Christian charity had dictated this liberal distribution of it.

Hypocrites, we perceive, are frequently very much influenced by example and popular applause. How many ostentatious charities may be traced to this polluted source! It is not to do good, to assist the needy, to promote the cause of Jesus Christ; but to escape censure, or to purchase renown, that men often unite in pious contributions. They will not be outshone by others, or submit to the dishonour of being reputed niggardly and ungenerous. But however such persons abound in *visible* acts of benevolence, their charity does not resemble the subterraneous rivulet, that revives the drooping flower, and refreshes the languishing herb, wherever it directs its *secret and silent* course.

What a fine opportunity was afforded on this occasion to Sapphira, for fulfilling the high but difficult duties of her situation! How would she have immortalized her name, had she suggested proper advice to her husband, and acted with an upright firmness herself! If, instead of coinciding with his impious plan, she had objected to the proposal, and warned him of the probable consequences of his dissimulation, a strong remonstrance from so dear a relative might have produced the happiest effect upon his mind; and had he still persisted, would at least have vindicated her refusal. Wives are indeed required to "submit to their husbands,"\* but there are cases in which resistance is a virtue of the noblest class. If, transgressing the proper bounds of civil dominion, he attempts to lord it over her conscience, and urges, however authoritatively, her concurrence in iniquity, she must steadfastly oppose temptation. However painful the contest, it is honourable. It will be owned in heaven as a war of duty and necessity.

In some cases, the woman proves the first instigator to evil, or the prime coadjutor in mischief; but, in others, her sentiments may be sought with advantage. A wise man will seldom engage in an affair of considerable importance without soliciting advice, for, "in the multitude of counsellors there is safety;" but who so naturally expects, or who so much deserves to be consulted, as the wife of the bosom? Her opinion is likely to be the most disinterested and the most affectionate of any that can be obtained; and if we could obtain a faithful history of domestic life, it would appear that a consultation so natural and proper, has often proved the means of guiding in perplexity and rescuing from error.

In the full confidence that their scheme had been concerted with the utmost privacy, Ananias, after the sale of his possessions, hastened to deposit a part of the price in the hands of the apostles. He, no doubt, expected to be

\* Col. iii. 18.

welcomed in the warmest terms of commendation. With what astonishment and horror, therefore, must he have heard the terrible appeal of Peter, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God!" Instantaneous as the lightning of heaven, Almighty vengeance descended upon the unhappy criminal, and withered him in a moment. "Ananias hearing these words, fell down and gave up the ghost; and great fear came on all them that heard these things." He was immediately buried, and about three hours afterward, his wife, totally unacquainted with the melancholy fate of her infatuated husband, and glowing with expectation of sharing the praises which the assembled disciples, as she supposed, were bestowing upon their generosity, presented herself to the apostles. Peter immediately demanded an explicit answer to the question, whether the sum which Ananias had subscribed were the real purchase-money of their estate? To this she deliberately replied in the affirmative. "How is it," said Peter, excited to holy indignation, "how is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out." Immediately, to the universal astonishment and terror of all the spectators, "she fell down at his feet and yielded up the ghost; and and the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her forth, buried her by her husband."

The apostle, by representing the atrocious sin of these offenders as "lying unto God," and "tempting the Spirit of the Lord," intended to intimate, that as the ambassadors of Heaven, and endowed with miraculous powers and discernment, they who attempted to deceive them, virtually offered an insult to that Holy Spirit that resided in them. They were his representatives and agents,

acting by his authority and under his influence. God was present with the apostles in a manner totally different from the mode of his manifestation to any other persons ; and in attempting to deceive them, they virtually denied the agency of the Omniscient Spirit, in communicating to them a capacity to discern the inmost motives of the mind.

It is not with a view to extenuate the guilt of Ananias or Sapphira, but merely to detect character and illustrate the progress of sin, that we suggest the probability that when they first determined upon the sale of their estate, it might be under the impulse of a momentary benevolence, and that the device of retaining a part of the price was a subsequent consideration. Hypocrites are not profoundly acquainted with their own hearts, or with all the secret operations of a spirit of self-delusion. A sinner does not always, nor perhaps often, imagine the extreme lengths of impiety to which one erroneous step may ultimately conduct him. If he could be brought to see at the period of first indulgence the odious outline, not to say the finished picture, of his *future self*, he would start with instinctive horror, and blush with unutterable confusion. Secret wickedness is frequently long concealed from all but the eyes of God, by a religious deportment. It remains buried deep in the recesses of the soul till occasion exhibits it, as the needle continues at rest till the magnetic influence approaches. Hence the church of Christ is sometimes astonished and alarmed by the misconduct of a character in whom, perhaps, it had reposed the utmost confidence, or placed the warmest affection ; and which, though immediately produced by some sudden temptation, was really the result—the natural, easy, and almost necessary result of a previous course of secret iniquity. The train had been long preparing, but it required some kindling touch to produce the explosion.

The progress to apostacy is, indeed, usually gradual, though rapid, resembling the irresistible haste of persons travelling down a precipitous path, or the descent of a

heavy body towards the earth, whose velocity is accelerated in proportion as it approaches its destination. The first compliance with temptation is accompanied with misgivings—trembling—restlessness—the very thought of sin is admitted with difficulty, and the determination to practise it is formed amidst a thousand relents and prickings of conscience. Still the mind lingers with the object—still the fancy plays about the forbidden fruit, till the hand is stretched forth to gather it—an increased appetite is superinduced, accompanied with a diminished resolution. How many youthful persons, deterred for a time by a religious education and sedate habits, have paused—and paused—and paused on the brink of danger ; like Cæsar ere he crossed the Rubicon ; their passions and their conscience have held a warm debate—till induced in some fatal hour of illusion to comply, they have progressively advanced to a state of confirmation in guilt, and have made a covenant with hell !

The character of Sapphira seems marked with even a deeper stain of guilt than that of her husband. She had more time for reflection, and received a salutary premonition by the question of Peter. Not to advert to the period in which she might probably be left alone during the various transactions of the sale of the estate, three hours elapsed between the infliction of judgment upon Ananias, and her coming to the apostolic assembly. If her concurrence in this base action had resulted in any degree from mistake, from momentary illusion, or from mere persuasion, she had time to correct her error by immediate repentance : or if she had hitherto sinned with deliberation, it was a time in which conscience might have been heard, and the wretched backslider have yet been reclaimed. This was the golden moment, the period of long-suffering and mercy, the “ accepted time !” Repentance was not yet too late—return to reason and duty was not even now impossible—she might still have retraced her steps, though her worthless husband had suffered for his iniquity, and had passed the boundaries

of time, the sacred enclosure, the hallowed ground where celestial mercy dispenses her pardons. Every thing was favourable to penitence. She was alone, and solitude has sometimes shaken the purpose of the sinner, and opened his eyes to an awful perception of the atrociousness of guilt. But Sapphira was “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”\* Long since she had dismissed every compunctious feeling, and was hurried on to perdition by the fiends of avarice and vanity, to whom she had resigned the dominion of her soul.

The inquiry of Peter, pointed and abrupt—“Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?” would have startled an ordinary transgressor, and produced those sensations of shame and confusion which a consciousness of detection is calculated to excite. O, if she had even then trembled, confessed her iniquity, and sought forgiveness through the blood which cleanseth from all sin, who will affirm that she could not have obtained mercy, and perhaps escaped both temporal and eternal punishment! But she was obdurate. The falsehood which Ananias had *acted* she deliberately *affirmed*, and justice instantly dismissed her to the society of her kindred transgressor in a state of condemnation. Here, then, we read in characters too legible to be mistaken, that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”†

If we pursue this subject, it will conduct us far beyond the sight of mere temporal punishment. Sin not only incurs present misery, but has opened the gates of despair, and kindled inextinguishable flames. That wrath which must have inevitably consumed the whole of Adam’s posterity, but for the Redeemer’s interposition, will rage for ever against the impenitent and the apostate. “Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies; thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee. Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger; the Lord shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall de-

\* Heb. iii. 13.

† Heb. x. 31.

your them.”\* “ Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest ; this shall be the portion of their cup.”†

It is surely wonderful to holy angels, that by persevering acts of impiety and rebellion, men should voluntarily reduce themselves to a state in which it “ had been good for them if they had never been born.”‡ Can there be a more important gift than life, or a more valuable quality attached to it than immortality ? Yet apostates, by their degeneracy, convert this greatest of blessings into a curse—this noblest good into an infinite evil. “ As righteousness tendeth to life, so he that pursueth evil, pursueth it to his own death.”§

Who can paint the horror of that moment, when the final, the irrevocable sentence will be passed upon a guilty race—when INFINITE LOVE will denounce INFINITE WO—when every word proceeding from the mouth of eternal justice will prove a poisoned arrow, struck into the destiny of transgressors—when that face which has always illuminated the regions of glory with smiles of ineffable grace, will gather blackness and look despair ! O what a crush !—what a ruin !—what a wreck !—How many human temples, defiled by intolerable abominations, will in a moment fall into the gulf of perdition to supply its everlasting fires !—What lightnings will accompany the “ thunder of his power !”—What fervid heat will melt these elements—what terror shake the lowest abyss of hell ! O, could we descend to the regions of despair, whence “ the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever ;” or, transported on a seraph’s wing, rise to listen only for a single moment, to those rapturous sounds which warble from immortal harps, and bespeak infinite felicity—with what feelings should we return to this probationary state ! How should we be alarmed and allured—terrified and enraptured—deterred by “ sights of wo,” excited by scenes of glory !—but, “ if we hear

\* Ps. xxi. 8, 9.

† Ps. xi. 6.

‡ Matt. xxvi. 24.

§ Prov. xi. 19.

not Moses and the prophets," Christ and the apostles : if " God who at sundry times, and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son," to no purpose ; " neither should we be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

This dreadful history ought not to excite despondency in trembling saints. Ministerial anxieties are principally excited by a presumptuous state of mind. It is not the timid, the diffident, the cautious, that awaken apprehensions, but the forward, the fearless, the bold. That solicitude which agitates the pious mind, is an effectual antidote against the evil it dreads, while that confidence which possesses the hypocrite, prevents the good it anticipates. The one obtains through fear, the other loses through presumption. The one is victorious, by maintaining a constant petty warfare with all his corruptions ; the other is overthrown through rushing fearlessly forward, and falling into the ambuscade which Satan has prepared for him. Hypocrisy is contriving, full of artifice, and arrogant—sincerity is quite the reverse, aiming to be right—fearing mistake—avoiding even trifling deviations and slight compliances—" sitting at the feet of Jesus"—clothed with humility,"—and in a " right mind !"

Let us adore the grace which has hitherto prevented our falling, and humbly depend upon it for future preservation. Conscious of our infantine weakness, let us lean upon the arm of Omnipotence. Under the conduct of him who directed the march of ancient Israel by the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night, we may hope to be upheld, protected, and guided in our journey to Canaan. Hail, happy hour, which shall put us in possession of our rest ! Hail, celestial morning, whose bright beams shall disperse the shadows of death, and diffuse the splendours of immortal day upon our inheritance !

In the account of the crime by which Ananias and Sapphira have acquired such an awful celebrity, the

agency of SATAN is distinctly marked—"Why," said Peter, hath Satan filled thine heart?—This is a subject so seldom treated, and yet of such great importance, that it seems proper to avail ourselves of this statement, in order to examine it with some attention, and to suggest some consolatory reflections to the timid Christian.

The earliest mention we have of Satanic influence, is at the fall. Assuming the body of a serpent, this evil spirit attacked the first woman and seduced her into a transgression which "brought death into the world, and all our wo." If Satan were permitted to practise his detestable machinations in the earthly paradise, who will presume to say that it is improbable he may yet be able to tempt man in the wilderness? He knew the position of human affairs, he manifested extraordinary skill in the adaptation of the means which he employed to promote his purposes, and in the incidental conversation, which he contrived with our first parent; and although Christians have run into great extremes in their estimate of his powers, he unquestionably possesses superior knowledge and capacity. His talents, like those of other wicked beings, are probably not impaired by his fall, but even sharpened and invigorated by malignant practice. In the aspect of this creation, and in the character of a degenerate world, we may perceive the infernal fiend. We may see his dark hand in the strifes of society, supplying the burning fuel to intemperate passions and discordant societies. We may mark his detestable footsteps in the field of death, staining provinces with blood, where human brothers are polluted with the guilty spirit of assassination, and sacrifice to the glory of war, the hopes of nations, the comforts of life, and the earthly existence of infuriated millions, unprepared to enter an eternal state. In these mighty tempests and desolating whirlwinds, we may hear the hissing breath of his malice, and the yell of his infernal joy. If he seduced our parent in innocency, is

it incredible he should seduce her race in their apostasy? if he were the chief agent in the *first* of sins, is it improbable that he should instigate other crimes peculiarly connected with human misery and degradation?

Scripture, which we take as the "lamp to our feet, and light to our path," represents *delusion* as the appropriate work of the arch-fiend. It is not for us to inquire by what means he operates upon the mind, because we know so little of the economy of the spiritual world, of the manner in which spirit can operate on spirit, and consequently of the nature of that influence which superior beings are capable of exercising upon others in this world, that we could at best only make a vague conjecture. It is sufficient for all moral purposes to ascertain the fact, that such an influence is possible to evil spirits, and permitted by Providence, that it forms a part of the trial of good men in this state of existence, and often tends to accelerate the too rapid progress of human impiety.

Satan then is possessed of great subtlety, and addicted to *wiles, snares, and devices*, for the purpose of deluding mankind. He is thus described by Christ: "He was murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the *truth*, because there is no *truth* in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a *liar*, and the father of it."\* Peter, in addressing Ananias, said, "Why hath *Satan* filled thine heart to *lie* to the Holy host?" "We are not ignorant," says the same apostle, "of *Satan's devices*." "If our Gospel be hid, it is hid from them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath *blinded the minds* of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."† "I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent *beguiled* Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."‡ In speaking of the de-

\* John viii. 44. † 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4. ‡ 2 Cor. xi. 3.

deceptive practices of false apostles, he thus alludes to infernal power—"No marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light."\* And in writing to the Ephesians, Paul exhorts—"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."† A ntichrist is described by a similar allusion. "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and *lying wonders*, and with all *deceivableness* of unrighteousness."‡ "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit, and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should *deceive* the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season."§

Satan doubtless attacks mankind by diversified modes of operation, and deceives them on various occasions and by different means. In the parabolical representations of our Lord, he is described as *sowing tares* in the field," and as "coming immediately" where the *word* is *sown*, "to take away the word that was sown in their hearts."|| This is indeed a *figurative* statement, but nevertheless descriptive of a fact. The essence of the representation is *real*, though decked out in the attractive garb of imagery, to win attention and to excite inquiry. To suppose otherwise in this or in other cases would be to reduce Scripture to the standard of Tales for Children or Arabian Nights' Entertainments. What then, is the truth intended to be conveyed here? It is that Satan possesses some mode of access to the human mind, that he is peculiarly attentive to the impression which the ministry of the word is producing, and that he

\* 2 Cor. xi. 14.      † Eph. vi. 11.      ‡ 2 Thess. ii. 9, 10.

§ Rev. xv. 1—3.      || Mat. xiii. 19

uses his utmost skill to neutralize its effect: probably, by tempting the hearer to doubt its truth, to dispute its importance, or to defer immediate regard to its holy requisitions. And in the human heart there is such an ample supply of materials upon which to work—such a tendency to evil—such depravity of spirit—such corruption of nature—such love of the world—such enmity against God, that he soon succeeds in erecting an edifice of delusory hope, in which the deluded soul takes shelter from the sharp-pointed arrows of ministerial fidelity and Scriptural appeal.

“Your adversary the devil” is represented as walking “about, seeking whom he may devour :”\* which intimates *the settled enmity* of this spirit. He is your *adversary*—at once the most malignant, most subtle, most invisible, and often least suspected of all others. This passage describes his *powerful superiority*—he is a *roaring lion*—remarkable for fury, strength, and zeal. It represents his *incessant activity, secrecy, and watchfulness*; “he *walketh about.*” It proclaims his *destructive purpose*—“to devour.” He is not, it seems, confined to place, but fixed in torment, and destined in all ages to suffer a perpetual aggravation of his misery, in consequence of the increase of his guilt, and the frequent discomfiture of his devices.

The severest contests of the Christian are with this adversary, who, being possessed of insinuating subtlety, powerful resources, constant vigilance, distinguished sagacity, and invisible means of operation, combined with infernal malignity, must be acknowledged to be a most formidable foe. It is both needless and unscriptural to assign ubiquity to Satan, but by himself and his emissaries he undoubtedly possesses a very extensive range in this lower world, and his favourite employment is to cherish the rebellious principle, to perpetuate the backsliding character, and thus to form the finish-

\*1 Pet. v. 8.

ed apostate. He observes with a vigilant inspection every tree planted in the garden of the Lord, and provided there be no real fruits of righteousness, he is not displeased at the leaves of profession. He knows this will never prevent the decree, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?"\*

Pregnant with horrors as this subject appears to be, the Scriptures supply two most desirable sources of consolation, with the resolution of which I shall hasten to conclude it.

1. While considering the terrific facts of the existence and works of the devil, recollect the *limitation of his agency*. If no kind of restraint were imposed upon his efforts, if his untractable malice were allowed to act with all its diabolical force, and were absolutely under no restrictions, the idea of his being and of his malignity would be unutterably appalling: but the giant foe is held in the mighty grasp of Omnipotence. His power is only permitted to operate to a certain extent, and under the regulations of certain laws ordained by the eternal mind. He who says to the raging ocean "Here shall thy proud waves be stayed," assigns the sphere of infernal influence, and places impassable barriers of a moral nature to his further encroachment. Evil of every description, and evil beings of every order, are under divine superintendence and control. The lion is chained—the dragon cannot add a cubit to his stature—a point to his tongue—or a drop to his venom. The serpent may hiss, but he cannot devour.

The influence of Satan resembles every other test that Divine Wisdom sees fit to apply to human character. It is probationary. The people of God are put to the proof, and their principles subjected to fiery trials. But gold will endure the furnace, and real piety will "resist the devil, and he will flee." He could tempt the Son of God, and he can torment his followers; but he possesses

\* Luke xiii. 7

no compulsory power. His attacks can never be successful, unless we give them efficacy by our criminal negligence and compliance.

Nor is it just to suppose, as many good people do to their inexpressible but useless alarm, that every individual is under his constant power, or every moment exposed to his incessant attacks. This would be to assign him a degree of omnipresence wholly incompatible with his nature and the economy of providence. Like other evil beings, he *walketh about*. His movements may be more rapid as a spirit, and his capacities more extended, and certainly his malignity more violent, than those of other wicked beings;—still he is but a creature—he has his appointed sphere of exertion—his capacities are finite—and he is observed by the unsleeping eye of God. He may prowl around the sheepfold of Christ, but the guard is too strong for him; and if he seize, or attempt the feeblest of the flock, Omnipotence will ultimately rescue the prey from the hand of the terrible.

2. Let us realize with holy satisfaction the *destruction of Satanic power*. “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” The apostle John, in his Revelation, describes “the devil” as “cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”\*

In conceiving of the destruction of this hateful dominion, we may realize it as *certain*. Although the issue of the war between good and evil, Christ and Belial, heaven and hell, be deferred to a distant age, it is not doubtful or precarious. It is ever present in the eye of God, and forms a part of that irresistible destiny which infernal power cannot avert. There is no escape from the chains of darkness which Omnipotence will finally rivet on; and this irreversible doom of fallen spirits is essen-

\* Rev. xx. 10.

tial to the final arrangements of that wonderful period which will develop "the consummation of all things."

It is the glory of the religion of Christ, that none of its promises or plans are precarious. The hopes of Christians cannot be lost in the crush of nature or the wreck of the world; and the condemnation of impenitent sinners and of Satan, cannot be averted by any mistake of evidence, by any confusion of multitude, or by any unevenness of balance in the scales of justice in the day of judgment.

The destruction of Satan and his power may be considered as *gradual* in the mode of its accomplishment. The whole system of revealed truth, from the period of the first prediction, points to this predestined end; and the whole scheme of Providence, including the rise and fall of empires, the work of Christ, and all the events of time through successive generations, respects this mighty and this marvellous result—a result connected so essentially with the glory of God, the honour of Christ, and the felicity of a redeemed universe.

"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." But it was not deemed fit to do it at once and at a single blow; if it had, he who commanded the boisterous winds and the raging seas, and they were still—he who expelled demons at a word, and cured diseases by a touch—he whose creative energy restored lost limbs to the victims of misery—who reanimated the dead and the putrifying, and remanded their spirits from an invisible state—could have withered at a touch the power of hell, crushed in a moment the throne of diabolical authority, and bound the dragon himself in his eternal chain. But the wisdom of God, which at first permitted evil to stain his moral creation, designs to admit the reign or influence of Satan for an appointed period, and to overturn his dominion by a gradual establishment of truth and righteousness in the earth. The great adversary was smitten by his hand

when the first promise of salvation was given to our race ; the stroke was repeated, in successive predictions to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ; and the death-blow inflicted when the expiring Redeemer exclaimed on the cross, “ *It is finished!*” Still, like a dying monster, who raves amidst his agonies, and terrifies spectators by his terrific aspect and more terrific efforts, and destroys or mangles all who venture within the reach of his arm, Satan still rages and raves—sometimes languishing into comparative inaction, at other times breathing out threatening and slaughter against the church of God—still conscious that his power is declining, and that the whole system of providence is preparing for his final overthrow.

This overthrow will be *complete*. He will never more ascend from his confinement, to fill the earth with plagues or the church of Christ with terror. The “new heaven and earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness,” will never be exposed to his awful revisitings—the contest will have for ever ended—the struggle eternally ceased ; and the harps of angels, with the holy hymnings of ten thousand times ten thousand before the throne—

“Blest voices, uttering praise!—”

will proclaim the full, the final, the everlasting victory. And, in the heavenly city “there shall be no more curse : but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it ; and his servants shall serve him : and they shall see his face ; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there ; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun ; for the Lord God giveth them light : and they shall reign for ever and ever.”\* (See APPENDIX.)

\* Rev. xxii. 3—5.

## **DORCAS.**

### **CHAPTER X.**

**Joppa illustrious on many accounts, particularly as the residence of Dorcas—she was a disciple of Christ—faith described as the principle of discipleship—the inspired testimony to the character of Dorcas—she was probably a widow or an aged maiden—remarks on the reproaches commonly cast upon the latter class of women—Dorcas exhibited as a pattern of liberality, being prompt in the relief she afforded—her charities abundant—and personally bestowed—observations on the propriety of visiting the poor—the charities of Dorcas often free and unsolicited—wise and conducted upon a plan—the pretences of the uncharitable stated and confuted—riches only valuable as they are used in bountiful distribution.**

**SEVEN** of the most celebrated cities of antiquity (Smyrna, Rhodes, Colophon, Salamis, Chios, Argos, and Athens) are said to have disputed the glory of having given birth to Homer; and it must be admitted that places and families acquire an importance from their connexion with names which appear conspicuous on the page of history, and have been praised by the united voices of successive generations. We cannot hear, without an instinctive glow, of the cities of Rome, Athens, Sparta, Syracuse, and others which respectively produced a Cæsar, a Demosthenes, a Lycurgus, and an Archimedes; of the islands of Samos and Ægina, whence emanated the resplendent genius of a Pythagoras and a Plato; of the villages of Alopece and Andes, immortalized as having produced a Socrates and a Virgil.

But let not the enchanting annals of Roman literature or Grecian wisdom detach our minds from the nobler records of inspiration, or diminish the conviction which religion must ever inspire, that the birthplace of benevolence and piety is more illustrious than the birthplace of genius and philosophy. On this principle we look

with admiration upon the town of Joppa, which, if it cannot boast a prodigy of valour, talent, or learning, is nevertheless conspicuous as the residence of one “of whom the world was not worthy.” She was not, indeed, rich in wealth, but in good works. She was not a conqueror of nations or a distributor of crowns, but a giver of alms. She had no name on earth beyond the limits of a small Christian church, but her record was on high, and her memorial is not perished with her.

Joppa was the nearest seaport to Jerusalem on the Mediterranean. It was situated in the tribe of Dan, in a fine plain, and has acquired the modern name of Jaffa. This place is frequently mentioned in Scripture. The materials for the construction of Solomon’s temple were sent thither in floats, by Hiram the king of Tyre,\* whence they were easily conveyed by land to Jerusalem. Jonah, in his flight from the presence of the Lord, embarked at this port,† and gave occasion to the mythological fable of Andromeda. Here the apostle Peter enjoyed that remarkable vision in which he saw heaven opened, and a great sheet descending to the earth, which seemed to contain every variety of beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air ; intimating to him the abolition of the Mosaic law, and the removal of those distinctions which had so long separated the Jews and the Gentiles.‡ It is probable Philip preached the Gospel here in his progress through various cities to Cesarea ;§ but the history of Dorcas, or, as she was originally called in the Syriac dialect, Tabitha, has given it peculiar prominence in the sacred page.

The memorial of this excellent woman is short, but replete with instruction. Her character is sketched at a stroke, and by the introduction of an incident as full of significance and interest as can well be imagined. Dropping those minute details and accidental circumstances

\* 2 Chron. ii. 11.

‡ Acts x. 10, &c.

† Jon. i. 3.

§ Acts viii. 40.

which are not necessary to character, and which the New Testament so seldom mentions, the most instructive part of her story is preserved and set in the most brilliant point of light.

She is simply announced, in the first place, as “ a certain disciple,” or one that embraced the faith of Christ, and professed it by baptism and a public union with his church. Whatever might be her situation in other respects was of little consequence ; this was her best, her most substantial distinction. It invested her with a real glory, which however overlooked by those who are chiefly attracted by exterior splendour, surpassed every vain and glittering honour of the world. It raised her to the dignity of a name in the volume of inspiration, and the unfading distinction of a place in the annals of eternity.

How poor and how perishable is human fame ; and yet with what eagerness is it universally sought ! What is it but like a bubble, excited by some accidental cause, to sparkle for a moment on the stream of passing ages, and then to disappear for ever ! And yet the love of fame has been called, and perhaps with propriety, the ruling passion ; for so much does it blend itself with human motives, that there are comparatively few of our actions, at least such as are visible to the public eye, which may not be traced to this feeling, or which do not receive a tone from its influence.

But how shall we describe that faith which is often mentioned in the New Testament, which so marked the character of Dorcas, and which, perhaps, may not be inaptly called the *principle* of discipleship ?

This term is of various import, and of very extensive application in Scripture. It signifies belief, and refers to testimony either human or divine ; but is restricted in its evangelical use to the latter. Revelation in general is the object of faith ; and those invisible realities which it discloses to the mental eye are seen with equal distinctness, and believed with equal conviction, as if they were capable, from possessing some material

quality, of impressing the corporeal senses. Faith glorifies its great Object and Author by paying an implicit deference to his authority. It asks no other bond than his promise, no other evidence or attestation than his veracity. It not only ranges through worlds which mortal eye could never explore, but which human reason could never discover; and as by transgression man has fallen under the dominion of his senses, it delivers its happy possessor from this state of degradation and wretchedness.

But though this be a general signification of the word, its more precise and appropriate use in the Gospel is expressed by the phrase, “believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.”\* Here the general and the particular use are necessarily blended. Faith is belief—but belief in “the truth as it is in Jesus.”† To believe, in the ordinary sense, is to admit a fact, to assent to the statement of an accredited or respectable witness; to believe in Jesus as the Son of God, is to acknowledge his real character, to perceive his true dignity, to view and to love him, not only as distinguished by perfect excellence, but as specifically the Saviour of lost sinners: for “whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God.”‡ Faith comprehends what he is, contemplates him in all his glorious offices, and from the manger of meanness traces him to the throne of power, relying upon what he has suffered and said as the infallible pledge of what he will accomplish. It is not only well informed, but humble. It resided in his heart who exclaimed, “Lord, save me!”§ It dictated his language who cried out, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”|| It gave efficacy to the prayer of that humble petitioner who said, “Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.”\*\* It is pleasing to God, essential to salvation, and his own gift: for “Enoch had this testimony, that he pleased God”—

\* John ii. 27.

† Eph. iv. 21.

‡ 1 John. v. 1.

§ Matt. xiv. 30.

|| Luke xxiii. 42.

\*\* Matt. viii. 8

“ a man is justified by faith”—and “ by grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.”\*

Faith is not dormant, but active and operative. It resembles good seed sown in the cultivated soil, which expands, and grows, and produces fruit. This holy vegetation exists in very different degrees of vigour, according to the diversities of Christian character, but it is apparent in all—the mark of true religion, the pleasing verdant hue that covers the whole surface of the spiritual creation. We cannot point to every pious person as a Dorcas, who presents a singular fertility of some of the noblest graces ; but of all it may be said, “ the root of the matter is found in them,” and “ their root shall not be rottenness, nor their blossom go up as dust.”†

It is the nature of genuine faith to stimulate to the most laborious duties, to sustain amidst the most poignant sufferings, to produce the greatest purity of character, to communicate the noblest kind of happiness of which a creature in the present state can be susceptible, to nerve the feeblest arm with strength, to give the dullest eye perception, above all, to “ work by love.” For these reasons, and because of its transforming influence, we denominated it the principle of discipleship. It operates by love to its object and to all its subjects, as well as to the divine commandments in general ; and influences its possessor to practise universal philanthropy. To the latter our particular attention is now directed by the example of Dorcas ; but it must not be forgotten, that though the particular specimen of her excellence be taken from the common offices of kindness and the act of almsgiving, the existence and proportionate vigour of the great principle from which her minor charities resulted must be presupposed, as by observing the fertility of a branch or the verdure of a twig, or even the greenness of a leaf, we infer the growth of the tree, its root, its stem, and all its

\* Heb. xi. 5, 6. Rom. iii. 28. Eph. ii. 8. † Job xix. 28. Is. v. 24.

various ramifications. While we contemplate this flourishing plant of grace, we know that it was deeply "rooted and grounded"\* in faith.

The inspired testimony is as follows: "This woman was full of good works and alms-deeds, which she did." Amongst other acts of beneficence, she was accustomed to make "coats and garments" for "the widows." Her own circumstances are not specified. If she were *poor*, as the mass of Christian converts in the apostolic times appears to have been, her readiness in furnishing these supplies was admirable indeed. As Paul testified of the Macedonian believers, she contributed to the utmost, yea, and beyond her power: † nor are these solitary instances of persons willingly impoverishing themselves in obedience to the fine impulse of a pious sympathy. While others have calculated, they have acted, incapable of a cold arithmetic and a measured benevolence. If Dorcas were *rich*, she is perhaps entitled to a still higher commendation. So many are the obstructions which "great possessions" cast in the way of charity, so many temptations to a lavish expenditure, beset the opulent, and to support this, on the other hand, to a parsimonious, *saving* habit; so easy is it to frame excuses, and by trifling precautions to escape importunity, or at once to silence it; that it may well excite both wonder and delight to find charity associated with splendour. It is surprising, however, and no less deplorable than surprising, that persons of this class will not consider for a moment, how easily, with how few sacrifices even of time or money, they might be extensively useful. A single drop of supply from their replenished cup of worldly prosperity, would often make "the widow's heart sing for joy," and prove a healing cordial to the sufferings of perishing humanity. A slight taxation upon even acknowledged superfluity, would, in some cases, produce an ample revenue for many indigent families, although religion claims

\* Eph. iii. 17.

† 2 Cor. viii. 3.

on their behalf more than a scanty and unwilling pittance ; for “ he which soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly ; and he which soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give ; not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver. ” \*

From the sacred narrative, we are led to infer that Dorcas was either a widow herself, possessed perhaps of a moderate competence, a state which seems of all others the most favourable to a benevolent disposition ; or one of the class of females, sometimes designated by the reproachful epithet of *old maids*. And having introduced the term, it may not be improper to make a short digression upon this subject.

It cannot be doubted that a life of celibacy is unnatural, and contrary to the general appointment of Infinite Wisdom ; consequently, a voluntary seclusion of this kind from the duties of our proper sphere as social beings, unless the case be very remarkable, and the counteracting obligation singularly clear, must deserve censure. By this conduct, whatever important results are connected with the marriage union by the law of Providence, are deliberately opposed, and the principle is no less sinful than it is pernicious. But the case of determined celibacy is far less common among females than with the other sex, and where it does exist, is usually attended with less evil effects upon the good of society.

In respect to the two most frequent occasions of continuing single, among women of piety, the one demands admiration, the other pity ; but neither can, without a total dereliction of all reason and propriety, excite ridicule. The first which has been made, is that of a voluntary resignation of the pleasures and solitudes of matrimony, for the sake of more extensive usefulness, and at the call of duty. Such is the case of women, who deem themselves required, or are considered by others

\* 2 Cor. ix. 6, 7.

as remarkably qualified for foreign and missionary service in the cause of God, or who, from the high tone of their irreligious feeling, have ascended to an unusual degree of spiritual elevation of character, and whether called to labour abroad or at home, are desirous of an entire and incessant self-devotement to Jesus Christ. These instances are indeed rare, and can scarcely be estimated by ordinary rules, but they were not unprecedented in the primitive age of Christianity. Dorcas might possibly be a woman of this extraordinary character. Her works were at least worthy of one who was thus bearing the cross, for "the kingdom of heaven's sake."

The second class of aged single females presents a subject for compassionate sympathy. They are not solitaries by choice, but necessity; and whoever sports with their destiny, betrays a cruel, if not a wicked mind. They have already been the prey of disappointments the most agonizing to the mind; let them not be the objects of unmeaning contempt or impious sarcasm. There was a time when the morning of life rose upon them in all its enchantment and beauty. Every thing around them smiled, and their yet unwithered hopes were alive to every delightful impression. Who knows but the object of their tenderest earthly affection was severed from them by death, whose murderous instrument inflicted an incurable wound? Who can say, but that the very sex which dares to load them with contumely for their solitary condition, was, by its base flatteries and delusive promises, the very occasion of their unhappiness? Who can deny, but that religion itself might have been honoured by their noble heroism, in refusing the solicitations of some, who, although distinguished for many accomplishments, possessions, and connexions, were either enemies to the Gospel or indifferent about it? They trembled, perhaps, to please their taste, and "lose their own souls."

Nameless and numberless may be the occasions of an involuntary, and therefore justifiable celibacy. Besides,

how has this condition been improved! How have some of these venerable women gone about doing good! What a wise and holy improvement have they made of the dispensations of Providence! Their very disappointments have become the means of increased zeal in the best of causes, and given an impulse to their activity. They have arisen from the golden dreams of pleasure and promotion, to the dignity of the saint indeed. Their temporal sorrows have awakened their spiritual energies. They have lost the blessings of a family, but have from that moment adopted, under that sacred name, the whole community of mankind. Let ridicule be abashed before the majesty of such characters!

The excellent woman in question seems to have partaken much of the spirit which pervaded the church at Jerusalem in these times of primitive simplicity and zeal, when all temporal considerations appear to have been overwhelmed by the hope of eternal blessedness. "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul; neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common . . . . Neither was there any among them that lacked; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses, sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made unto every man, according as he had need."\*

Although this community of goods is not to be regarded as an absolute precedent for our imitation, considering that it is impracticable in all cases, was chiefly restricted to one Christian society in a very peculiar situation, and is never enjoined upon others; yet, no duty is more expressly commanded, or more solemnly inculcated in Scripture; than that of liberality to the poor. In the enactments of Moses it is vigorously enforced, it is urged

\* Acts iv. 32, 34, 35.

by the prophets and apostles; and represented by Christ himself as an evidence of the highest perfection of character: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor."\* In those passages where a summary of religion is presented by an enumeration of its most important points, this virtue is distinctly mentioned. It is stated as an invariable characteristic of the most eminent saints, as Abraham, Job, and others; it is often called *righteousness*, is represented as a fulfilment of the divine law, or the best expression of our love to God; and while tremendous judgments are threatened to those who disregard this sacred duty, the most ample rewards are promised to the pious benefactors of mankind. "Blessed," said Christ, "are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." "To do good and communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." Such persons are described as "making themselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not"—as "making themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when they fail, they may be received into everlasting habitations"—and as "laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."† The equitable decisions of the last day are to be founded upon a reference to these principles, as the basis of that sentence which will irreversibly fix our destinies. "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and 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. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was

\* Matt. xix. 21.

† Matt. v. 7. Heb. xiii. 16. Luke xii. 33. xvi. 9. 1 Tim. vi. 19.

thirsty, and ye gave me drink : I was a stranger, and ye took me in : naked, and ye clothed me : I was sick, and ye visited me : I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee ? or thirsty, and gave thee drink ? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in ? or naked, and clothed thee ? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee ? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels : For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink : I was a stranger, and ye took me not in : naked, and ye clothed me not : sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee ? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment : but the righteous into life eternal.”\*

The history of Dorcas is very instructive as to the genuine character of charity, and the best mode of distribution. It teaches us not only to cultivate this heavenly temper, but in what manner it may become most useful. We have here, indeed, a fine and finished picture ; and we cannot do better than study it closely, and copy it with all possible accuracy.

This venerable woman was *prompt* and *undelaying* in the relief she afforded to the necessitous. She was not all promise and all tardiness, quick to feel but slow to succour. It is not uncommon for the most parsimonious persons to be liberal in good words, and to superadd the

pang of disappointment to the already almost insupportable sufferings of the destitute. What is the language of commiseration unaccompanied with substantial assistance, but a drop of burning caustic poured into the wounded heart, instead of a healing cordial? To listen to the tale of wo, and to solicit by apparent kindness its minute and tragical details, only to mock expectation by professed incapacity, is the very perfection of cruelty, the forfeiture of a solemn pledge which is given in the very assumption of a listening attitude, and highly dishonourable; for we have no right to know the history of distress, if we feel indisposed to relieve it. “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled, notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?”\*

There is a posthumous charity which often purchases to the dispenser considerable reputation when he little deserves it, and which is utterly vain to him who is inevitably beyond the reach of human applause or censure. If the charity of Dorcas had been of this questionable nature, we should not have read of the widows that stood weeping by her death-bed, and exhibiting the various articles of clothing she made “*while she was with them.*” Assured that life was the proper time of action, and that opportunities of usefulness could never be recalled, she “did with her might whatever her hands found to do.”† It is deplorable to see the numbers who, while possessing ample means and rich opportunities of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick, consume their lives in forming their plans, or proclaiming their intentions. They are indeed great benefactors in their wills, and with unsparing liberality distribute their wealth, when they can no longer keep it. They were bountiful, only because they were mortal; and notwithstanding the misplaced commendations of their survivors, bestow re-

\* James ii. 15, 16. † Eccles ix. 10

luctantly what death extorts. Dorcas was “full of good works and alms-deeds which she did.” A person, with whom the writer is acquainted, had specified a large sum in his will to be appropriated to the purpose of erecting convenient alms-houses for the poor; but bethinking himself of the possibility that his life might be extended to a distant period, and that in the meantime the poor would continue to suffer, and many of them perish without the projected aid, he became the instant executor of his own will, and lived for years to be a gratified witness of that comfort which must otherwise have been so long delayed. It is descriptive of the “good man,” that “he HATH dispersed, he HATH given to the poor.”\*

Another feature in the beautiful portrait of female excellence before us, is the *abundance and variety of her charities*. Dorcas is represented as “full of good works and alms-deeds;” and though the coats and garments which she gave to the widows are only mentioned, they are to be considered as one specimen only of a very extended system of benevolence. She was neither capricious, nor merely occasional in her bounty; but “glorified the Father, by bearing *much fruit*.”†

Some persons are the mere creatures of impulse. When affected by any violently exciting cause, they start into momentary vigour, and by a kind of convulsive effort resist the inwrought habit of their minds, but instantly relapse into greater insensibility. If a necessitous case be presented to their attention under deeply afflicting circumstances, with powerful recommendations, especially from those whom they are solicitous of pleasing, or with whom they expect to be enrolled in the popular and widely circulated list of donations, they may at times be found “willing to communicate,” but even then never attain the noble pre-eminence of “a cheerful giver.” It would have pleased them, however, to have remained unasked; and if by any petty artifice they could have

\* Ps. cxii. 9.

† John xv. 8.

evaded the application, they would most readily have adopted it, provided they could have saved their reputation as well as their pence.

You may sometimes meet with persons who are indeed charitable, but their charity is sectarian. They do good within certain limits, but never take a wider range ; and if they do not " forbid " others, who " follow not with them," they afford no encouragement to their exertions. They have chosen a particular spot to cultivate, and beyond the encircling fence which bigotry has marked out, they cannot be persuaded to impart even a drop of refreshing supply. What they do seems, in some measure, an apology for what they omit ; but what they omit detracts from the value of what they do. They are not " FULL of good works."

Others have certain stated charities ; and though they have passed the narrow boundary of party prejudice, have made no provision in their plans for cases of singular and sudden calamity. Their charity walks in particular districts, and cannot go a step out of the beaten track. They have allotted a certain portion of their income to the regular calls of necessity, which cannot be exceeded, and have a specified circle of objects which cannot be changed ; and, if one may judge by their comparative callousness to all other claims, it would be natural to infer that they had taken a certain *quantum sufficit* from their stock of sensibility, which bore an invariable proportion to their calculations. In vain you plead for the most urgent distress, in vain you solicit the smallest contribution ; they have no sympathies left ; and, beyond a certain sphere, they are relentless, impenetrable, and cruel.

In proportion as charity is methodical, it is apt to become cold ; and though we cannot plead for that diffusiveness which is bounded by no prescribed limits, regulated by no order, or influenced by no preferences, yet care should be taken lest it suffer by restriction. If this

holy fire be too much confined, it will be in danger of extinction.

Another and a pleasing peculiarity in the benevolence of Dorcas is, that, so far as appears from her brief history, her benefactions were *personally bestowed*. She is represented as *making* the garments given to the poor widows herself; and doubtless to ascertain what they wanted, and the proportion of their respective necessities, she was in the habit of visiting their habitations, for the purposes of inquiry and inspection. These visits, besides, would afford favourable opportunities for pious conversation. How often she wept over their sorrows—what words of peace and consolation she uttered—what salutary instructions she communicated—what fervent petitions she uttered, cannot indeed now be ascertained; but there is a book which has recorded them in imperishable characters, and a day approaching when they shall be disclosed and rewarded. “For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”\*

It would be easy to specify many reasons why the charitable should *visit* the poor. Independently of the inferiority of the impression which is produced on the mind by the mere recital of the sufferings of others, it is scarcely possible to obtain correct information respecting their actual and diversified necessities, without repairing to their cottages. The most faithful narrator will not deem it necessary or proper to enter into certain particulars, which the vigilant eye of sympathizing benevolence would at once discover, and the heart of pity must deeply feel. Owing to the different effects which the same distress produces on persons whose natural constitutions are dissimilar, it may often happen that the most

\* 2 Cor. v. 10.

afflicting part of their condition is overlooked ; and the prompt assistance which would otherwise be afforded, is lost through some omission or unintentional misstatement. "To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction," is no less represented by an apostle as constituting the best exemplification of "pure religion," than "to keep himself unspotted from the world ;"\* and in the transactions of the final judgment, the supreme Arbiter is described as noticing with peculiar approbation, as even making the very determining point of his people's character and destiny, their *visiting* the sick and those in a state of imprisonment, in order to supply them with the necessaries or comforts of existence.

Ladies are respectfully urged to these labours of love, from the consideration that they possess the most leisure and the best opportunities of doing them. It would prove a wise and pleasurable mode of employing some of the intervals of domestic engagement, and furnish both useful and interesting subjects of reflection to fill up the vacancies of thought. But if the multiplicity of their concerns furnish some plausible excuse for, at least, a less constant and busy attention to the wants of poverty ; single ladies, on whom the cares of a family have not yet devolved, should feel it their duty, and will ever find it their privilege, to be thus devoted to the cause of suffering humanity. Their time is their own, their property at their command. They are responsible alone to God and their own consciences ; and by these services to the community are every day and hour giving a practical and unanswerable reply to the scoffings of an illiberal world. How much better are these visits of mercy than visits of ceremony, in which useless hours are squandered away amidst the butterflies of fashion, insufferable fatigue is sustained, scandal circulated, and religion outraged ! Sweet and refreshing is the sleep of active benevolence : it knows no tossings, is visited by no bitter

\* James i. 27.

compunctions or terrific visions ; it is cradled in innocence, lulled to rest by the music of gratitude, and guarded by the sleepless eye of Providence.

The habit of visiting the abodes of misery is an important means of improving our sympathies. They will become less sickly and less capricious. Those who have only wept over fictitious sorrow, will learn to shed tears of real feeling at the sight of real grief ; and will gradually associate the idea of doing good with the strong emotions of a genuine liberality. It is of importance for our own sakes, as well as for the welfare of others, that sentiments of this kind should fill the mind, and that the fine edge of sensibility should never be blunted. Some, it is true, are very little solicitous for the improvement of any of their faculties ; but let them remember that the faculty which is not improved, usually and almost necessarily suffers deterioration ; and that he who does not warm and expand into benevolence, is likely to contract into contemptible selfishness.

Mere pecuniary aid, or indeed any other form of donation, is after all a cheap description of charity. The most avaricious persons may sometimes resort to annual or other stated contributions, as expedients to save trouble and to pacify conscience ; and while we duly appreciate this periodical goodness, it is insufficient as the basis of a claim to philanthropy of spirit. How many in the carpeted walks of wealth will readily purchase, by this means, an exemption from the inconvenience of soiling their shoes, or hurting their delicacy, by going to witness scenes of real distress !

Ladies of opulence or of leisure should reflect further, that in paying an occasional visit to the dwellings of poverty and suffering, they are not only likely to discover many cases of silent, unobtrusive wretchedness, which but for their personal inquiries and researches might sink into the grave without the smallest relief, while clamorous wo sometimes gains the ear of the most thoughtless passenger, but they become the means of

imparting a twofold blessing. In addition to what they give, the sense of their sympathy enhances the favour, and it is received with double pleasure. Man is possessed of a social principle, which operates with peculiar energy in cases of affliction. As a consciousness of neglect excites disgust and resentment, so a conviction of being the object of solicitude and sympathy produces the most grateful emotions. It may, therefore, be safely asserted, that a donation to the poor, when *personally* bestowed by the donor, is, in consequence of the effect produced on the *mind* of the sufferer, of incalculably greater importance and use than the same or even a superior sum contributed by the cold agency of some unfeeling distributor. Besides, a charitable soul has a perpetual feast. Who can remain an unaffected spectator of the tearful eye—the speaking look—the thankful smile? The very silence which an overwhelming sense of kindness imposes, is more delightful to a benevolent spirit than dainties to the taste or music to the ear.

In dispensing charity, many valuable acquisitions may be gained. It is, in fact, a profitable service; and he makes an excellent exchange indeed, who, while bestowing money or goods to assist the poor, obtains substantial instruction. Here then, in the meanest hovel, in the most shattered and weather-beaten shed, amidst cries of distress and sights of sorrow, the wisest may gain knowledge. What a lesson of gratitude is taught in every scene and circumstance! Who maketh thee to differ from another in point of temporal possession, mental superiority, or religious distinction? What hast thou, that thou hast not *received*? That humble cottager is human, like thyself: That nest of callousness and weakness contains the same species with thyself, on whom Providence has bestowed wings to soar to heights of prosperity and enjoyment. Thou art descended from the same common Father, and art heir of the same common dust! Thy life is no less precarious, if it be less wretched, than that which animates a meaner clay, and breathes in a less

decorated exterior: If the one be porcelain, and the other earthenware, both are brittle. "God hath made of one blood all nations of men."\* Sometimes a cottage furnishes an impressive lesson respecting the *independence of happiness upon external circumstances*. It teaches the salutary truth, that it is in the power of religion to impart substantial felicity in every condition, to communicate exalted enjoyment, to form an ennobled character in the meanest habitation, and to inspire the sublime sentiment of the poet:

"Give what thou wilt, *without* thee I am poor,  
And *with* thee rich, take what thou wilt away."

COWPER.

Poverty has been the lot of the most distinguished of the human species; and if ever the vanity of riches, and the incurable emptiness of temporal splendour are felt, surely it must be when visiting the dwellings of the *pious poor*. No riches can inspire their songs of praise, or purchase a title to their immortal inheritance. No rank or dignity can attract the eyes of those holy spirits that hover round the spot to which affliction has confined an outcast Lazarus, or kindle such rapturous sensations and holy congratulations, as they manifest at the repentance of a sinner. Piety hallows the dwelling which it inhabits, and felicitates as well as sanctifies the heart, the family, and the city which it pervades. In the primitive ages of Christianity, the disciples of our Lord could see the rapacious oppressor seize the last portion of their worldly goods, and "take it joyfully;"† they could "most gladly glory in their infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon them;"‡ they could hail the martyr's stake, while they anticipated the martyr's crown; and, in the days of Paul and Silas, if there were a spot on earth where celestial joy took up her residence, it was, at least for one happy night, in the very dungeon of persecution.§

\* Acts xvii. 26.    † Heb. x. 34.    ‡ 2 Cor. xii. 9.    § Acts xvi. 25.

To return to Dorcas. Her character is so described, as to imply that hers were *free*, and often *unsolicited charities*. She did not indolently wait for applications, or contrive a thousand delays, while misery was pining into the grave; but, like her divine Master, “*went about doing good.*”<sup>\*</sup> She penetrated the obscurest retreats, not waiting to be pressed and urged to afford a trifling relief; but her benevolence resembled the course of the sun, which pours its beneficent radiance upon the earth with undistinguishing liberality.

It ought not to be forgotten, that sometimes minds of the most delicate constitution are involved in all the miseries of poverty, and placed in a situation of all others the most painful, that of persons reduced from former competency and comfort. The privations of life are far more sensibly felt by those who have once known plenteousness. To them the wind of adversity blows with tenfold keenness, and the crust of want seems peculiarly unpalatable. They are reluctant, not to say “*ashamed, to beg.*” The blushes of an instinctive sensibility suffuse their countenances, and petitions for assistance falter on their tongues. They have to contend not only with the afflictions of poverty, but with all the timidity which a consciousness of degradation superinduces. In many cases of this description, persons of eminent worth have been found, who could not overcome their scruples, till absolute want forced them abroad to suffer the rebuffs of an unfeeling world, or to gain the scanty pittance which mere importunity extorted from reluctant opulence. Dorcas is celebrated for having particularly selected such a class of sufferers. She had sought out the *widows*, who had lost their dearest relatives, by whose daily and cheerful labours they were perhaps enabled to live in decent sufficiency, or by whose sympathizing tenderness they were at least consoled amidst inevitable sorrows. The weakness of their sex, or the infirmities of their advan-

\* Acts x. 38.

ced age. prevented their contending with the storms of life ; and, no doubt, many of them, surrounded by a numerous family, at the decease of the beloved of their hearts, were left to struggle with accumulated difficulties.

Women on whom Providence has bestowed a sufficiency, might here find ample means of usefulness among persons of their own sex. A helping hand might rescue many a widow from the deep waters of overwhelming grief: a trifling sum would in many cases prove an inestimable boon ; and a very small expense of time and trouble might produce the most valuable results. A well-constructed system of benevolence resembles a fine adjustment of mechanism : by a gentle force or a moderate supply, judiciously applied, the whole machinery is kept in motion, and the greatest burdens are removed.

This leads us to remark another characteristic feature in the charity of Dorcas. It was *wise* and *prudential*. She had a *plan* which was not only unexceptionable, but singularly excellent and worthy of imitation. This consisted in furnishing the poor with substantial assistance, and providing for the proper application of her aid to their real and most pressing necessities. She made "coats and garments" for widows.

It is to be feared, that the good intentions of persons charitably disposed are often frustrated by the improper manner in which they render assistance to the poor. They fulfil the impulse of a benevolent spirit by sending or giving their money, leaving the mode of its expenditure to their own judgment. But it is notorious, that such as are in reduced circumstances, and who feel the particular pressure of the moment which they are most anxious to relieve, have very little sense of the real value of money and of the propriety of providing against the difficulties of futurity. They take the cordial to-day, draining out every drop, forgetting that the phial will be empty to-morrow. In consequence of this extreme improvidence and inconsideration, the pecuniary help they receive fre-

quently does little good, and fails of all the purposes which a pious charity intended.

The depravity of mankind, which must be expected to operate in the poor as well as in the rich, is another occasion of the misuse of benevolent aid. The friendly supply is consumed upon their lusts. Abandoned in character and selfish in principle, many heads of poor families addict themselves to bad company, despoiling their families of their earnings and of charitable supplies, and stupifying their consciences in the cup of intoxication. The discovery of such a misapplication ought not to extinguish the feeling of sympathy, but rather excite it afresh; both because the individuals themselves are to be doubly pitied for their destitution of moral feeling and want of religion, as well as of necessary subsistence, and because their outraged families demand renewed attention. It ought also to render liberal persons particularly watchful of the use which is made of their benefactions. It should not shut the heart, but regulate the course of feeling. The sin of others does not exempt us from the duty of contributing to the alleviation of their miseries, though it ought to induce us to study the best expedients for counteracting it. It is, in fact, quite as requisite that we should see to the application of what is given as to give, in all cases where this is possible or convenient. Dorcas appears to have adopted the useful plan of expending the money which she appropriated to the poor widows, *for them*; partly because she was probably better able to judge of the most useful mode of assisting them, and partly because the very same sum would prove doubly efficient in consequence of the savings which would accrue from working with her own hands.

The pretences by which men excuse themselves from giving to the poor are stated, and satisfactorily answered, by Dr. Paley,\* in the following words:

“ i. ‘ That they have nothing to spare,’ *i. e.* nothing for which they have not provided some other use; no-

\* PALEY'S Moral Philosophy, vol. i. p. 254—257.

thing which their plan or expense, together with the savings they have resolved to lay by, will not exhaust : never reflecting whether it be in their *power*, or that it is their *duty*, to retrench their expenses, and contract their plan, ‘ that they may give to them that need :’ or rather that this ought to have been part of their plan originally.

“ 5. ‘ That they have families of their own, and that charity begins at home.’ The extent of this plea will be considered when we come to explain the duty of parents.”

*N. B.* The explanation is, that the duties of parents comprehend “ maintenance, education, and a reasonable provision for the child’s happiness in respect of outward condition. . . . A father of a family is bound to adjust his economy with a view to these demands upon his fortune ; and until a sufficiency for these ends is acquired, or in due time *probably* will be acquired (for in human affairs *probability* ought to content us,) frugality and exertions of industry are duties. He is also justified in ~~the~~ declining expensive liberality : for, to take from those who want, to give to those who want, adds nothing to the stock of public happiness. Thus far, therefore, and no farther, the plea of ‘ children,’ of ‘ large families,’ ‘ charity begins at home,’ &c. is an excuse for parsimony, and an answer to those who solicit our bounty. Beyond this point, as the use of riches becomes less, the desire of *laying up* should abate proportionably.

“ 3. ‘ That charity does not consist in giving money, but in benevolence, philanthropy, love to all mankind, goodness of heart,’ &c. Hear St. James : ‘ If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace ; be ye warmed and filled ; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body ; what doth it profit ? (James ii. 15. 16.)

“ 4. ‘ That giving to the poor is not mentioned in St. Paul’s description of charity in the thirteenth chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians.’ This is not a description of charity, but of good nature ; and it is not necessary that every duty be mentioned in every place.

“ 5. ‘ That they pay the poor-rates.’ They might as well allege that they pay their debts : for the poor have the same right to that portion of a man’s property which the laws assign to them, that the man himself has to the remainder.

“ 6, ‘ That they employ many poor persons :’—for their own sake, not the poor’s ;—otherwise it is a good plea.

“ 7. ‘ That the poor do not suffer so much as we imagine ; that education and habit have reconciled them to the evils of their condition, and make them easy under it.’ Habit can never reconcile human nature to the extremities of cold, hunger, and thirst, any more than it can reconcile the hand to the touch of a red-hot iron : besides, the question is not, how unhappy any one is, but how much more happy we can make him.

“ 8. ‘ That these people, give them what you will, will never thank you, or think of you for it.’ In the first place, this is not true : in the second place, it was not for the sake of their thanks that you relieved them.

“ 9. ‘ That we are liable to be imposed upon.’ If a due inquiry be made, our merit is the same : besides that the distress is generally real, although the cause be untruly stated.

“ 10. ‘ That they should apply to their parishes.’ This is not always practicable : to which we may add, that there are many requisites to a comfortable subsistence which parish relief does not supply ; and that there are some, who would suffer almost as much from receiving parish relief as by the want of it ; and lastly, that there are many modes of charity to which this answer does not relate at all.

“ 11. ‘ That giving money encourages idleness and vagrancy.’ This is true only of injudicious and indiscriminate generosity.

“ 12. ‘ That we have too many objects of charity at home, to bestow any thing upon strangers ; or that there are other charities, which are more useful, or stand in greater need.’ The value of this excuse depends entirely upon the *fact*, whether we actually relieve those neighbouring objects, and contribute to those other charities.

“ Besides all these excuses, pride, or prudery, or delicacy, or love of ease, keep one-half of the world out of the way of observing what the other half suffer.”

The sentiments expressed by the profound Dr. Barrow\* will form an appropriate conclusion to the present chapter.

“ If we contemplate our wealth itself, we may therein descry great motives to bounty. Thus to employ our riches, is really the best use they are capable of ; not only the most innocent, most worthy, most plausible ; but the most safe, most pleasant, most advantageous, and consequently in all respects most prudent way of disposing of them. To keep them close, without using or enjoying them at all, is a most sottish extravagance or a strange kind of madness ; a man thence affecting to be rich, quite impoverisheth himself, dispossesseth himself of all, and alienateth from himself his estate : his gold is no more his than when it was in the *Indies*, or lay hid in the mines ; his corn is no more his than if it stood growing in *Arabia* or *China* ; he is no more owner of his lands than he is master of *Jerusalem* or *Grand Cairo* : for what difference is there, whether distance of place or baseness of mind sever things from him ? whether his own heart or another man’s hand detain them from his use ? whether he hath them not at all, or hath them to no purpose ? whether one is a beggar out of necessity

\* Sermon on the Duty and Reward of Bounty to the Poor.

or choice? is pressed to want or a volunteer thereto? Such an one may fancy himself rich, and others, as wise as himself, may repute him so; but so distracted persons, to themselves and to one another do seem great princes, and style themselves such; with as much reason almost he might pretend to be wise or to be good. Riches are *χρηματα*, things whose nature consists in usefulness; abstract that, they become nothing, things of no consideration or value; he that hath them is no more concerned in them than he that hath them not. It is the heart, and skill to use affluence of things wisely and nobly, which makes it wealth, and constitutes him rich that hath it; otherwise the chests may be crammed, and the barns stuffed full, while the man is miserably poor and beggarly; 'tis in this sense true which the wise man says, *'There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing.'*

# LYDIA.

## CHAPTER XI.

Account of Paul and his companions meeting with Lydia by the river-side at Philipp<sup>i</sup>—the impression produced upon her heart by the preaching of Paul—remarks on conversion as exemplified in the case of this disciple—its seat the heart—its accomplishment the result of divine agency—the manner of it noticed—the effects of a divine influence upon the human mind, namely, attention to the word of God and the ordinances of the Gospel, and affectionate regard to the servants of Christ—remarks on the paucity of real Christians—the multiplying power of Christianity—its present state in Britain—efforts of the Bible Society.

**T**HE historical part of the New Testament called the ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, contains a faithful record of the early propagation of the Gospel and the incessant exertions of the first labourers in the vineyard. They were not men who “wasted their strength in strenuous idleness,” or dissipated the time of action in “laboriously doing nothing;” but were endowed with extraordinary qualifications and an inextinguishable zeal for their novel and interesting employment. They reflected the light of the Sun of Righteousness upon a dark age, and glowed with the very spirit of their ascended Lord. Remarkable effects were produced upon the moral world, notwithstanding the counteracting influence of human prejudice and opposition; and as they quitted the world, amidst the whirlwinds of persecution and in the flames of martyrdom, they dropped from their ascending chariots the mantle upon their successors in office, who “entered into their labours,”\* and continued “with great power” to give “witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all.”†

So wonderful are the appointments of Providence, that we find a youth who took an active part in the murder of

\* John iv. 38.

† Acts iv. 33.

the first martyr to the Christian cause, and afterward breathed forth an unrelenting hostility against all its adherents, selected as the chief instrument of its extension in various countries. That mighty energy which "commanded the light to shine out of darkness," as he was on a persecuting expedition to Damascus, "shined into his heart," and by a miraculous interposition not only checked him in his career, but communicated to him "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus, and turned all the energies of his character into a new and most important course of exertion. He became a Christian, a preacher, an apostle, and a missionary to the Gentile world: and while by his indefatigable labours he benefited so large a proportion of his contemporaries, by his inspired epistles, he has instructed the church of God in every succeeding age of the world.

Paul appears to have travelled over a considerable portion of Asia and part of Europe. Barnabas, and afterward Silas and Timotheus, accompanied him. In many places he suffered great personal injury, and his valuable life was repeatedly endangered. Having passed through Phrygia and the proconsular province of Asia, of which Ephesus was the capital, Paul and Silas came at length to Troas, where the former had a vision, in which he saw an inhabitant of Macedonia standing before him, and uttering this request, "Come over and help us." This impressed his mind with a conviction that he was called in Providence to preach the Gospel in that part of Greece; and he immediately sailed down the Ægean Sea by the island of Samothracia and the port of Neapolis, and from thence to Philippi, which was a Roman colony.\*

\* Acts xvi. "Philippi was a city of Macedonia near the confines of Thrace. It lies near the sea, as it were at the head of the Archipelago. It was so named from Philip king of Macedon, who repaired and enlarged it; but its more ancient name was Dathos. It was also called Crenides from its numerous springs, whence flowed the river mentioned Acts xvi.

In this city, whither it seems probable from the history, that Luke had accompanied them, they remained some days ; and here we are introduced to the brief but instructive account of the excellent woman whose name is prefixed to this chapter.

Paul, and the companions of his missionary tour, first met with LYDIA at one of the Jewish places of prayer by the river-side, which ran near the city.\* The Temple at Jerusalem, and previously the Tabernacle, were the appointed places for the public worship of God, in the open court of which before the altar the people assembled. But such as lived at a distance, or from local inconveniences could not constantly repair to the place of general association, were allowed to build *Proseuchæ*, or *Oratories*, in one of which our Saviour continued all night in prayer.† They had no covering like synagogues, but were surrounded by porticoes to afford shelter from the inclemency of the weather, and were erected in the suburbs of a city by the sea-side or near rivers, on account of the purifications so frequent with the Jews, and usually on very elevated spots of ground. The *proseucha* signalized by the devotions of Christ was on a mountain. Some have supposed that Isaac went out to meditate in the evening in a place of this description.‡ These were probably the *high places* of ancient times, in or near which groves were planted, and which are only condemned in Scripture when appropriated to idolatrous purposes. “ I am like a green olive-tree,” says the Psalmist, in the house of God.§

13 ; *κρηνη*, *krenee*, in Greek meaning a spring. Julius Cæsar is said to have planted there a Roman colony ; and the neighbourhood of Philippi was the scene of conflict between him and Pompey, and afterwards between his assassins, Brutus and Cassius, and his partisans, Antony and Octavius. It is said still to retain some monuments of its former splendour, although it is much depopulated and sunk to decay.” BRYAN'S *Life of the Apostle Paul*, p. 367.

\* Acts xiv. 12—15.

† Luke vi. 12. *Gr.*

‡ Gen. xxiv. 63.

§ Ps. lii. 8.

Availing themselves of the opportunity afforded by the resort of devout persons to these religious retirements, these zealous ministers of the Gospel conversed and preached to the people, who on this occasion were chiefly women. But though many were addressed, it does not appear that more than one was substantially benefited. Her attention was excited, her heart opened, and her profession of the name of Jesus immediate and public. The several points of her character deserve particular and distinct illustration.

Lydia is said to have been of the city of Thyatira ; but whether she had removed to Philippi, or was only come for the purpose of trade, is not certain. She was one who " worshipped God," that is, one who, in distinction from the heathen around her, had learned the character of Jehovah, and was probably a Jewish proselyte.\* Instructed in the ancient records of that extraordinary nation, which had been so many past ages the only depository of divine truth, she was expecting the predicted Messiah ; and while, from the natural aversion of mankind to the humiliating doctrine of salvation through a crucified person, the greater proportion of Jews rejected him, she experienced a true conversion, not only from the principles of heathenism, but from those of Judaism, to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A few instances of this description occur in the evangelical record to show the sovereignty and diversified operations of the grace of God.

That moral change, that spiritual renovation, which has been called CONVERSION, is, we are aware, and ever will be, the subject of profane ridicule amongst unbelievers. It does not indeed produce any astonishment, although it awakens extreme regret, that one of the most obvious effects resulting from the publication of the

\* For information on the subject of proselytes, consult DR. GILL'S " Dissertation concerning the Baptism of Jewish Proselytes," chap. i. in vol. iii. of his " Body of Divinity."

Gospel of Christ should be so unblushingly denied by this class of mankind. "The natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God, because they are spiritually discerned."\* The Scriptures themselves predict this incapacity, even in some of the most refined and intellectual of our species, to form a conception of this marvellous change; and experience evinces the truth of what they affirm, and which originates in the very nature of things. It is characteristic of human perversity to disbelieve what is imperceptible to reason or invisible to sense, and to vaunt itself upon that very infidelity as a distinctive mark of pre-eminence, which is, in fact, a proof of debasement and guilt. If a system of religion were to be so constructed as to be exempt from the ridicule of the profane, it must be itself ridiculous; because their distorted minds cannot discern the beauties of truth, and their depraved feelings will not admit her claims. To secure their approbation religion must change her character, alter her doctrines, new cast her precepts, and new modify her principles.

Lydia presents an interesting specimen not only of the reality but of the nature of the great work of conversion; and, however contemptible the subject may appear in the eye of a dissipated world or to the mind of a prejudiced reader, we hesitate not to state the sentiments which necessarily arise out of the present example respecting the seat and source of this change, the agent by whom it is accomplished, and the corresponding effects produced.

1. Our attention is, in the first place, to be directed to *the seat of this spiritual renovation*. It is said of Lydia that her HEART was opened. This change, therefore is of a moral nature, not merely circumstantial but radical. It does not consist in assuming a new name, professing new opinions, using a new language, performing a few rites and ceremonies, or reforming a few exterior

\* 1 Cor ii 14.

rices. These are only branches—the tree itself must be made good—the crab stock of nature must be grafted with spiritual principles, and by being planted in the garden of the Lord be brought under a heavenly culture. It is then only “the fruits of righteousness” may be anticipated, “which are to the glory and praise of God.”\*

The disordered state of the passions is a striking evidence of human degeneracy. In consequence of this a thousand mistakes are committed and a thousand follies practised. Each passion is fixed on a wrong object, pursues an unworthy end, and is susceptible of false impressions. Indeed, the will is totally perverted, and chooses, with obstinate resolution, whatever is erroneous and criminal: on which account men are represented in the metaphorical language of Scripture, as “loving darkness rather than light.”† So astonishing is the degree of this perversion, that the Supreme *Good* is dreaded and avoided as if he were the only *evil* in the universe; and, however vain the attempt, guilt is continually seeking concealment in some secret covert, some supposed security from his omniscient inspection. Captivated by deceitful appearances, human confidence is perpetually misplaced, and therefore perpetually betrayed; the siren song of pleasure soothes the unhappy captives of her bewitching charms into the bosom of destruction—the splendour of earthly distinctions dims the eye of sense, and prevents its perception of the bright realities of heaven. In fact, such has been the melancholy effect of sin upon the perceptions of the human soul, that every thing is seen through the medium of sensual passions in an inverted position—good seems evil, and evil good—and till this disorder become rectified by a divine touch, the heart will remain at enmity against God, the refuge and resort of the worst dispositions, and the great central pandemonium of every diabolical affection. Such is the statement of Jesus Christ himself, “From within, out of the

\* Philip. i. 11.

† John iii. 19

heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; all these things come from within, and defile the man."\*

As the intellectual and moral state of man are, in a religious view, closely connected, the renovation of the heart is essentially connected with an important change in the understanding. The latter may, indeed, be considerably improved and informed when no spiritual effect is produced upon the former, but the former cannot be renewed without corresponding and coincident effects on the latter; and the illumination of the understanding is so universal, that believers are said to be "light in the Lord."† Their perceptions of truth are not mere gleamings and streaks of divine radiance thrown across the obscurity of the mind, but all is light. Nor is it merely new light diffused over objects familiar to the thoughts, but a discovery of new scenes. The soul, in a sense, changes its hemisphere, emerges from darkness, ascends to the summits of Pisgah, and contemplates the ineffable glories of a new creation. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new."‡ How touching and how worthy of adoption the poet's language:

— "Celestial light  
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers  
Irradiate; there plant eyes, all mist from thence  
Purge and disperse!"

MILTON.

The total renovation of the heart is evinced by susceptibility of conscience. This moral faculty, in an unregenerate state, is either perverted or hardened. In the former case, our obligations are not clearly discerned, or are easily dispensed with; in the latter, the most

\* Mark vii. 21–23.

† Eph. v. 8.

‡ 2 Cor v. 17.

powerful appeals to love or fear are resisted. In the progress of sin to its most awful consummation, those gentle whispers which were at first noticed, and made the transgressor tremble till he sometimes let fall the forbidden fruit, are at length unheard. Every intimation is silenced by guilty merriment, which perhaps was at first forced, but soon becomes habitual. Where conscience is not lulled into total inaction, it is, in this state of character, violated with little remorse. The mind loses sight of the glory of God, its best regulating principle; it is alive to personal interests only, and discards every thing of a nobler nature. But, in the sincere and humble Christian, conscience is tender, easily offended with evil, and gradually approximating that state of susceptibility in respect to sin, in which it resembles a well-polished mirror, that shows the slightest particle of dust or damp upon its surface. Such a conscience is no less *rigorous* than it is tender, and repels temptation with persevering energy. It will hold no debate with the tempter; and so far from seeking to ascertain how far it may advance towards sinful compliances without contracting actual guilt, it will “abstain from all *appearance* of evil.”\*

In stating that the heart is the seat of those principles and the source of that transformation of character which is comprehended in the term *conversion*, it is intended to express the *permanent* nature of the change. It is not an opinion or an emotion resembling the morning cloud and early dew that pass away, but an abiding and deep-wrought alteration. “He which hath begun a good work in you, will carry it on until the day of Christ Jesus;”† in consequence of which, “the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”‡

“That such improvements of character often *have* occurred, and are often taking place now, cannot be denied

\* 1 Thess. v. 22.

† Phil. i. 6.

‡ Prov. iv. 18.

by any philosophic observer of human nature: to disregard them, or to neglect an investigation of their use, is to neglect one of the most interesting classes of facts observable amongst mankind. Who has not either heard of or witnessed the most extraordinary changes of conduct, produced through the *apparent* influence (to say the least) of religious motives? I say nothing here of the *three thousand* converted in one day at the feast of Pentecost—of the conversion of St. Paul and others mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles—because those are usually ascribed to the miraculous and *extraordinary* influences of the Holy Spirit in the apostolic times. But I may call your attention to matters of more recent occurrence. You have witnessed instances of men running eagerly the career of folly and dissipation, who have been suddenly arrested, and changed from ‘lovers of pleasure’ to ‘lovers of God.’\* You have known others who have devoted themselves early to the military profession, who literally knew *no* fear, who have spent their lives in the pursuit of glory, who have approached the verge of life full of scars and full of honours, still panting after ‘glory, honour, immortality,’ but thinking nothing of ‘eternal life;’ till, touched by an irresistible hand, they have been transformed from good soldiers to ‘good soldiers of Jesus Christ,’ have buckled on ‘the armour of God,’ ‘fought the good fight of faith,’ and, following ‘the Captain of their salvation,’ have obtained ‘the victory’ and been rewarded with *unfading* laurels. Others again, you have known, who have been strong and *high-minded*, professing never to be subdued but by the force of argument, and dexterously evading an argument when it *was* forcible, if it were calculated to expose the sophistry of ‘free-thinking,’ (as it is called,) or to exhibit the reasonableness and advantages of being pious; you have seen them increase in the dexterity of unbelief, and in callousness to *moral* impression, year after year,

\* 2 Tim. iii. 4.

Cleaning the blunted shafts that have recoiled,  
Aiming them at the shield of truth again ;

and when a band of them has gone to church for the purpose of quizzing, or of staring out of countenance, some preacher of rather more than usual energy and zeal, have known one of this band pierced by ' a dart from the archer,' convinced that religion is ' the one thing needful,' and though he came ' to scoff, remaining to pray.' \*\*

II. The second observable circumstance in the inspired account of Lydia's conversion is, *its accomplishment by divine agency*. It is stated that the LORD opened her heart. The effect is not ascribed to the apostle Paul, or his illustrious coadjutors in the Christian ministry. They might speak with the tongue of angels, and burn with the zeal of seraphs ; to them might be given in trust " the everlasting Gospel," which, like the apocalyptic angel, they were carrying through " the midst of heaven" to the inhabitants of the earth, " to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people ;"† they might indeed possess the power not only of placing facts in the clearest light, or urging arguments in the most forcible manner, but even of working miracles ; still they could not " open the heart." Indefatigable as they were in their labours, they could not command success. At this precise point human instrumentality ceases, and divine agency commences.

It is by no means an unfrequent effect of ministerial fidelity, to confirm the native aversion of the impenitent to the doctrines of Christ. Pride resists conviction, and fosters prejudice ; and however unanswerable the statements, or fervent the appeals which may be addressed to them, the mind still remains unsubdued, the heart is still

\* GREGORY'S Evidences, Doctrines, and Duties of the Christian Religion, vol. ii. p. 127, 128.

† Rev. xiv. 6.

unopened. It requires the interposal of a mightier power than either reason, remonstrance, or miracle, to accomplish this wonderful transformation of character. Hosts of apostles and legions of angels, would be incompetent by their own unaided exertions, to do “any thing as of themselves ;”\* to give light to *one* blind eye, or to rectify *one* prejudiced heart.

Human agency, then, cannot be of itself effectual. It is the *Lord* who opens the ear, the eye, the conscience, the understanding, and the *heart*. The weapons of this spiritual warfare, in which Christian ministers are engaged, can alone “pull down strong holds, cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God,” and “bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ,” being “mighty *through God*.”† What would the weapon accomplish, if the hand of Almighty power were not to grasp and wield it? The experience of modern preachers, no doubt, resembles that of their apostolic predecessors in the same field of holy labour. When stout-hearted sinners have been attacked by all the force of argument, all the power of eloquence, all the fire of zeal, all the holy violence of appeal, all the tenderness of tears, and all the terrors of denunciation—and when it might have been expected that a heart of marble thus smitten must yield and break, and yet no emotion, at least no repentance, no relinquishment of sin, and no obedience to Christ has resulted—how often have they retired exclaiming, “*O the impotence of human instrumentality!*” But when returning to their work, desponding or deeply apprehensive, “going forth weeping, bearing precious seed,”‡ they have at length seen the rebel struck, and in a moment abashed, humbled, penitent—melted at a word—his prejudices dashed to the ground, like Lucifer from heaven—his heart opened, like that of Lydia, and the bitter stream of his enmity turned into the sweetness of Christian love—they have paused—

\* 2 Cor. iii. 5

† 2 Cor. x. 4, 5

‡ Ps. cxxvi. 6

inquired—wondered—beheld the *excellency* of the power,” which was “not of man, but of God;”\* and have retired exclaiming, “*O the omnipotence of divine grace!*”

It is an extraordinary circumstance, that the agency of God, in the production of the natural world, should be universally admitted, because no other adequate cause can be assigned; and yet that it should, with so little hesitation, be denied in the moral world. Why is God to be excluded from this superior creation, but because men “do not like to retain him in their knowledge,”† and because corrupted reason would deify itself and dethrone the Almighty?—And here we have the characteristic distinction between religion and irreligion. The former assigns God as the cause and agent in every thing, both interior and exterior to us. It places him upon the throne, subordinates every thing to his will, attributes every thing to his influence. It contemplates his dominion as infinite, and his will as the law of nature and of nations. It fully believes, that naturally and spiritually “in him we live, and move, and have our being.”‡ Irreligion—and we may comprehend in the term, not only extravagant immorality or gross impiety, but a system which is found to exist under the cloak of religion, and the pretence of doing God service—irreligion of every class and in every form, is perpetually limiting the empire of the Deity, prescribing bounds to his influence, criticising and defining his prerogatives, and refusing him the “right to rein over us.”

The Scriptures uniformly ascribe the first principle, all the successive actions, and the final consummation of religion in the heart, to the Spirit of God. It is the subject of express promise; “And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.”—“This shall be the

\* 2 Cor. iv. 7.

† Rom. i. 28.

‡ Acts xvii. 28

covenant that I will make with the house of Israel ; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people.”—“ A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you ; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh ; and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.”\* The nature of this moral transformation is distinctly stated in such passages as the following—“ *Born*, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” —“ Ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be the Spirit of God dwell in you. But if any man have not the Spirit of God, he is none of his”—“ As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God”—“ We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath ordained, that we should walk in them.”† In the same manner the increase of religion is ascribed to the Spirit. “ He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ”—“ Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.”‡

Let us then, as Moses expresses it respecting the bush which he saw at the back of Horeb, burning but still unconsumed, “ turn aside and see this great sight.”§—“ God is every where by his *power*. He rolls the orbs of heaven with his hand, he fixes the earth in its place with his foot, he guides all the creatures with his eye, and refreshes them with his influence ; he makes the powers of hell to shake with his terrors, and binds the devils

\* Deut. xxx. 6. Jerem. xxxi. 33. Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

† John i. 13. Rom. viii. 9, 14. Eph. ii. 10.

‡ Philip. i. 6. Heb. xiii. 20, 21. § Exod. iii. 3

with his word, and throws them out with his command, and sends the angels on embassies with his decrees . . . God is especially present in the hearts of his people, by his Holy Spirit ; and indeed the hearts of holy men are temples in the truth of things, and in type and shadow they are heaven itself. For God reigns in the hearts of his servants : there is his kingdom. The energy of grace hath subdued all his enemies ; this is his power. They serve him night and day, and give him thanks and praise ; that is his glory. The temple itself is the heart of man ; Christ is the high priest, who from thence sends up the incense of prayers, and joins them to his own intercession, and presents all together to his Father ; and the Holy Ghost, by his dwelling there, hath also consecrated it into a temple ; and God dwells in our hearts by faith, and Christ by his Spirit, and the Spirit by his purities : so that we are also cabinets of the mysterious Trinity ; and what is short of heaven itself, but as infancy is short of manhood, and letters of words ?”\*

How inconceivably glorious is “ the beauty of holiness in the renovated soul ! That “ God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness,” should “ shine into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus”†—that the vileness of our nature should be superseded by the purity of grace—that sinners should be pardoned and sin subdued—that the good seed should vegetate in such a barren and overgrown wilderness of desolation—that we who were “ sometime darkness” should become “ light in the Lord,” is truly marvellous. This establishment of “ the kingdom of God *within* us,”‡ excites the gratitude of saints, the wonder of angels, and the loud anthems of triumph that vibrate from the harps of heaven. When God made a fair world from a formless mass of matter, “ the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy ;”§ but when he devised the plan to make a

\* Bp. TAYLOR'S Holy Living, Chap. i. sect. 3.

† 2 Cor. iv. 6.

‡ Luke xvii. 21.

§ Job xxxiv. ii. 7.

holy human being from a base and fallen rebel, they sung  
 “Glory to God in the HIGHEST.”

How animating the consideration, that the hope of salvation inspired in the soul by the Spirit of God, can never be extinguished! The grace that powerfully impels him to take the first step in the Christian life, as forcibly urges him forward to the end of his course. The light which is kindled in his bosom will burn and brighten, and consummate his immortal bliss. It is itself the pledge of this increase and perfection. The felicity of the Christian here is similar in its essence to his glory hereafter, as the first ray of morning is the same in nature with the noontide brightness. It may struggle through obscurities, but will rise to perfect day. Death indeed is rapidly approaching: but as the solar orb plunges for a short season into darkness, to reappear with new splendour; so will the righteous eventually ascend above the tomb and the worm, to “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”\*

The manner of Lydia’s conversion ought not to be overlooked. Her heart was *opened*. There is something gentle, as well as effectual, in the representation. The Spirit of God not only operates by a variety of instruments, but by a considerable diversity of modes. He descends on Sinai in tempests, and on Calvary in smiles. Sometimes his manifestations are terrible, and sometimes soothing; sometimes he breaks, and sometimes opens the heart. In Scripture we are furnished with illustrations of this diversified operation. Manasseh, who “made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen,” and who “would not hearken” to divine monitions, was taken by the Assyrians “among the thorns, and bound with fetters, and carried to Babylon.” He who was unaffected, either by mercies or menaces, in his prosperity, “when he was in affliction, besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him; and

\* Matt. xiii. 43.

he was entreated of him and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then, Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.\* Paul, who breathed out threatening and slaughter against the Christian church, was suddenly struck to the earth by a miraculous light from heaven, and from a persecutor transformed into an apostle.† The Philippian jailer exclaimed amidst his terrors, “What must I do to be saved?” and was not only prevented from committing suicide, but directed to heaven by the doctrine of his apostolic prisoner, which through grace he cordially received: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thine house.”‡ On the other hand, Samuel, Timothy, and Lydia, were “drawn with bands of love.”§ They heard the whispers of mercy, and felt the attractions of grace. Each of their hearts, like that of Lydia, was *opened*. Passion subsided, prejudice withdrew, ignorance melted away. They were not taken by storm, but “made *willing* in the day of his *power*.”||

The importance of this change is intimated in the remarkable declaration of Jesus Christ to Nicodemus, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven.”\*\* It is essential to the possession of paradise; it constitutes the very basis of the Christian character; and to be indifferent to it is a mark of condemnation. Its present influence, and its future consequences, are so wonderful, that it becomes us to cherish an immediate and incessant solicitude upon the subject. Look upward—Almighty love “waits to be gracious”—Is it not recorded, and can it ever be forgotten, that “every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened? If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a

\* 2 Chron. xxxiii. 9—13. † Acts xxii. ‡ Acts xvi. 30, 31.

§ Hos. xi. 4. || Ps. cx. 2. \*\* John iii. 3.

scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"\*

III. The account of Lydia is further illustrative of the *effects resulting from a divine influence upon the human heart.*

The first of these effects is intimated by the statement, that "she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul." Her spirit was exceedingly different from that of the hearers of Ezekiel: "Thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do them not."† Lydia, on the contrary, heard to profit. She listened, reflected, and "inwardly digested," the truths of the Gospel. She heard with seriousness and with self-application. The doctrine was to her novel and interesting. The Gospel came to her, "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance;" for she "received the word of God which she heard, not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God," which "effectually worketh" in believers.‡

And is this descriptive of *our* views and feelings? Do we *pay attention* to divine instructions, and "hear so that our souls may live?" Is the word of God to us like descending manna from the skies, which we go forth with

\* Luke xi. 10—13.

† Ezek. xxxiii. 30—32.

‡ 1 Thess. i. 5. & ii. 13.

eager haste to gather for our spiritual subsistence? Whenever we repair to “the house of God,” are we “more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools?” Do we dwell upon the lips of the preacher? Do we aim to remember, seek to understand, and humbly resolve to practise what is taught? Or, do we go to public worship with reluctant and hesitating steps, compelled alone by the force of habit, education, example, or terror? When *arrived*, do we enter with irreverence, assume a careless and familiar attitude, give the rein to our wandering thoughts, resign our bodies or our consciences to unhallowed slumber, or watch with frequent glances the slowly revolving hour that will free us from an irksome service? When *retired* from public engagements, do we forget God our Maker, dissipate consecrated hours, and at length lose every salutary impression amidst the cares of life, and the subordinate concerns of a moment?

It is possible you may even plead temporal anxieties and business, as an extenuation of the guilt of religious negligences, or as a sufficient ground of exemption from the claims of piety. You are forsooth too busy, too needy, too perplexed in establishing connexions or conducting commercial transactions, to pay an immediate regard to the interests of the soul and eternity; and although you at present defer such considerations, you apologize for your folly by saying, it does not arise from aversion, but inconvenience. You do not deny, you only procrastinate. But who has ensured your life? Who has perused for you the page of destiny, which numbers the years of your mortal existence? Who has given you any evidence, that the distant day of intentional repentance shall be a day of health, seriousness, and leisure? Who can tell that the sun, which illumines the path of your prosperity at this period of irresolution, will not, upon the arrival of the predicted hour of penitence, shine only upon your grave? Who has given you authority to invert the order which Christ has established in the ad-

monition, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness?"\*

But we have a valuable example to cite. Go to Philippi. Learn of a woman, whose name cannot perish, though generations pass away, and the stars become extinct. *Lydia* was not a person of leisure; she was a "seller of purple," or cloths, which were died of a purple colour, or purple silks.† She had surely sufficient occupation, and yet she has no apologies at hand. She was not too much engaged to be concerned about her eternal salvation; but when the apostle of the Gen-

\* Matt. vi. 33.

† "The purple die is called in 1 Maccab. iv. 23. *purple of the sea*, or *sea purple*; it being the blood or juice of a turbinated shell-fish, which the Jews call חלזון *Chalson*; this they speak of as a shell-fish. Hence those words, 'Go and learn of the *Chalson*, for all the while it grows, its shell grows with it:' and that purple was died with the blood of it, appears from the following instances: *The best fruits in the land*, Gen. xliii. 11. are interpreted, the things that are the most famous in the world, as the *Chalson*, &c. with whose blood, as the gloss on the passage says, they die purple: and the purple died with this was very valuable, and fetched a good price. The tribe of *Zebulon* is represented as complaining to God, that he had given to their brethren fields and vineyards, to them mountains and hills; to their brethren lands, to them seas and rivers: to which it is replied, All will stand in need of thee because of *Chalson*; as it is said, Deut. xxxiii. 19. *They shall suck of the abundance of the seas*; the gloss upon it, interpreting the word *Chalson* is, it comes out of the sea to the mountains, and with its blood they die purple, which is sold at a very dear price. . . . It may be further observed, that the fringes which the Jews wore upon their garments, had on them a riband of blue or purple, Numb. xv. 38. for the word there used is by the Septuagint rendered *purple*, in Numb. iv. 7. and sometimes *hyacinth*; and the whole fringe was by the Jews called תכלת, *purple*. Hence it is said, 'Does not every one that puts on the purple (i. e. the fringes on his garments) in Jerusalem make men to wonder?' and a little after, the former saints or religious men, when they had wove in it (the garment) three parts, they put on it תכלת, *the purple*. And there were persons who traded in these things, and were called מוכרי תכלת, *sellers of purple*, as here; that is, for the *tzitzith*, or fringes for the borders of the garments, on which the riband of blue or purple was put, as the gloss explains it. The Jews were very curious about the colour and the dying of it, that it should be a colour that would hold and not change, and that the riband be died on purpose for that use. Maimonides

tiles preaches she *must* go, she *must* hear, she *must* attend. She was “diligent in business,” but this did not preclude her being “fervent in spirit.” As a seller of purple she could only have become *rich*—the acmè, indeed, and summit of human wishes, but a miserable barter for real and everlasting happiness; as a hearer of Paul, she might and did become “*wise to salvation.*”

Every thing is beautiful in its season. We must not wander from our proper business under pretence of religion, nor must we neglect religion upon a plea of business. Religion does not require a relinquishment of our calling and station in society, but no civil engagements can justify a disregard of religion. We may sell our purple—but we must also attend to the instructions of the ministry and the word of God. If we imitate Lydia in diligence, let us not forget to imitate her in piety. It is vain and wicked to aver, that the concerns of this world and those of another interfere; because an ardent religion is not only compatible with worldly occupations, but promotes both their purity and integrity, if it do not secure their success.

Another effect of divine influence upon the heart of Lydia, and essentially connected with her reception of the great principles of Christianity, was an immediate attention to the ordinance of baptism. “She was baptized and her household.” In the true spirit of that apostle from whose lips she received the truth of heaven, and by whom she was directed to “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world,” “she conferred not with flesh and blood.” With a promptitude which was at once expressive of the sincerity of her faith and

gives rules for the dying of it, and they were no less careful of whom they bought it; for they say that *the purple* was not to be bought, but of an approved person, or one that was authorized for that purpose; and a scruple is raised by one, whether he had done right or no in buying it of the family of a doctor deceased. Now, since Lydia might be a Jewess, or, at least, as appears by what follows, was a proselytess of the Jewish religion, this might be her business, to sell the purple for their fringes, and, it may be, the fringes themselves.” GILL in loc.

the zeal of her mind, she did not hesitate to observe the baptismal institution of her Lord and Saviour. What were to her the wonder of ignorant spectators—the ridicule of her fellow-traders—the reflections of her heathen neighbours—when balanced against the approbation of God and her own conscience? She had “bought the truth,” and would not sell it—she had found “the pearl of great price,” and went and sacrificed every temporal consideration for it—she had “found the Messiah,” and was resolved to follow his footsteps whithersoever they conducted her. She did not dispute or hesitate, but she obeyed. May the bright example of Lydia stimulate us to a similar conduct!

In the primitive times it is obvious that whoever received the Gospel was baptized in the name of Christ, and to express a resolution to adhere to him. And this obedience is a part of that decision of character which should distinguish the genuine disciple of Christ. He demands it as a proof of love, and by virtue of his supreme authority in the church. The command to be baptized is, in the New Testament, usually connected with the exhortation to repent, because this is the order of things which the Son of God has established, and the most convincing evidence that we have voluntarily devoted ourselves to his service. Baptism was significant of a burial and resurrection with Christ, of being regenerated by his Spirit, renewed by his influence, and separated from all the unholy principles of a depraved nature, and from the sinful practices of a corrupt world. The abundant use of water in this institution was considered as illustrative of the purifying influence of the Holy Spirit, of his miraculous descent on the day of Pentecost, and of the overwhelming sufferings of the crucifixion. The precursor of our Lord predicted Christ as coming to “baptize them with the Holy Ghost and with fire.” John immersed our Saviour himself in the river Jordan; when, as he “went up straightway out of the water,” he beheld the “heavens opened unto him,”

saw the descending Spirit of God like a dove, "lighting upon him," and heard a voice saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Viewing in awful perspective the tragical scenes of his life, which were to terminate in the more tragical sufferings of his last hour, he exclaimed, "I have a *baptism* to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!"\*

Happily, Lydia was not alone in her public profession of religion. She had the satisfaction of seeing her household introduced by baptism into the church of Christ. We are not informed either of their number, sex, or age. The circumstances of the case seem most naturally to point out her servants or adult children, to whom, as in the instance of the jailer, the word of the Lord might be addressed.† She no doubt felt extreme solicitude for their spiritual interests, and from the moment of her own conversion would give them every opportunity of attending the apostolic instructions. To have witnessed in them the kindlings of divine love, the workings of genuine penitence, the dawnings of true religion, must have afforded her the richest pleasure, in comparison with which all the accumulations of trade and commerce dwindled into perfect insignificance.

But let us inquire whether we resemble Lydia. Do we monopolize the hopes of salvation and the cup of spiritual blessing? or are we active distributors of the heavenly bounty? What do we *feel* for our families, our children, our domestics, our dependents, our friends, and connexions? What have we *done* for them? They need instruction—they possess souls to be saved, or lost—they are responsible creatures—they are given us in charge by Providence, and will finally meet us at the tribunal of God. Should it not awaken alarm to be accessory in any degree to their destruction by negligence, if not by compulsion or by bad example? Is it not worthy

\* Mat. iii. 11, 13—17. Luke xii. 50.

† Acts xvi. 32.

of a holy ambition to become instrumental to their eternal welfare ? Do you lead them to the domestic altar ? Do you watch over their conduct with a vigilant and paternal eye ? Do you guide them to the house of God ?—To show them the path to heaven—to be instrumental in lodging *one* important sentiment in their minds—to sow, if but a single grain, that may vegetate and rise into a tree of holiness, is incalculably more satisfactory and more honourable than to obtain the victories of an Alexander, or the riches of a Cræsus. O, let us never remain content with a solitary religion ; but aim, like Lydia, to multiply our satisfactions, and, in the spirit of an exalted charity, to distribute happiness in the earth ! “ None of us liveth to himself, and no man (as a Christian,) dieth to himself.”\*

A third and most visible effect of Lydia’s conversion, was an affectionate regard to the servants of Christ. With the zeal of a new convert and the generosity of a genuine Christian, she invited Paul and the companions of his labours to “ come into her house and abide there.” She thus proved herself “ a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men ;”† which although it be one of the appropriate characteristics of “ a bishop,” or spiritual overseer and pastor, enters into the very elements of a religious character in every station. We are exhorted “ to do good to all men, especially to them that are of the household of faith ;”‡ and Jesus Christ has represented love to the brethren as an indication of discipleship.§

The invitation of Lydia was not cold and formal. She did not merely pass the compliment of asking these holy guests to her board, but solicited it as a favour, and with an unusual degree of importunity. She entreated—she “ constrained” them. Her plea was modest, but so expressed as to be irresistible. They could not deny her request when put upon this basis : “ If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house.”

\* Rom. xiv. 7.

† Titus i. 8.

‡ Gal. vi. 10.

§ John xiii. 35.

Gratitude was undoubtedly a principal occasion of this urgency. She had received through their instrumentality the best gift of Heaven. The eyes of her understanding had been enlightened—the affections of her heart had been excited and sanctified to a noble purpose. They had proclaimed to her with surprising effect, “Jesus and the resurrection;” and, although she had been a devout proselyte of the Jewish religion, she would not, humanly speaking, but for them, have become acquainted with the Christian, of which the former was only a prefigurative shadow. They had unlocked the door of wisdom, and put her in possession of the ample treasures of truth; they had taught her the evil of sin, and shown her “the Lord our righteousness;” they had dispersed her doubts, dispelled her fears, removed her darkness, satisfied her inquiries, and conducted her to “the light of the world,” new risen upon benighted nations, and whose blessed radiance was already diffused in every direction. Lydia was anxious to repay these benefits, or rather to testify her overwhelming sense of their immensity. What could she do but invite them home? They were “strangers,” amongst senseless idolaters and persecuting foes, and she “took them in,” conscious of having incurred an obligation which she could but imperfectly discharge. And have we cherished similar sentiments? Have we revered and ministered to the servants of our Lord? Have we supplied their necessities—cherished their persons—guarded their reputation? Have we thus “rendered honour to whom honour is due”—esteeming them very highly in love for their work’s sake”—and having been made “partakers of their spiritual things,” considered it our “duty to minister unto them in carnal things?”\* Respect for the truth itself ought to generate a suitable predilection for such as faithfully dispense it. We should value the “earthen vessels” for the sake of “the heavenly treasure” they contain. If in

\* Rom. xiii. 7. 1 Thess. v. 13. Rom. xv. 27.

any instances the professed ministers of the Gospel act **inconsistently** with their character, a mind like that of Lydia, would not become dissatisfied with the truth itself, nor hastily utter extravagant censure. We have known persons take an apparent pleasure in detailing the faults of persons eminent either for character, or for official situation. They have betrayed, by their triumphant air, significant inuendoes, or needless circumstantiality, a secret and criminal gratification, whilst loudly protesting their sorrow. But a sincere piety, which sympathizes with all the adversities and prosperities of the Christian cause, and knows the general and especially the personal consequences of such deplorable inconsistencies, will commiserate, and weep, and pray.

The importunity of Lydia was no less honourable to Paul and his coadjutors than to herself. It proves their delicacy and consideration. They felt unwilling to accept her hospitality, lest it should prove burdensome or troublesome. These were not men to take advantage of the impressions they produced, and to gain a subsistence by art and fraudulence. They knew how to use prosperity, and how to sustain adversity, how to “abound and to suffer want.” They were not ashamed of poverty nor afraid of labour. Hardship, imprisonments, scourgings, and even death, had lost their terrors; and on every occasion they were solicitous of evincing a disinterestedness of spirit that might compel their bitterest enemies to attest the purity of their motives. Hence Paul could appeal to the elders of the Ephesian church, “I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, you yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me;” and to the Corinthian believers, “what is my reward then? Verily, that when I preach the Gospel, I may make the Gospel of Christ without charge; that I abuse not my power in the Gospel.” His language to the

Thessalonians is still more remarkable : “ We did not eat any man’s bread for nought ; but wrought with labour and travel night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you.”\*

Lydia might probably be influenced in making this request by another consideration. She expected great advantage from more familiar intercourse with her guests. In the social hour—at the friendly table—in the retirement of home—she could propose inquiries, which such a man as Paul would be happy to hear and ready to answer. He who could thus address the saints at Rome—“ I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established ; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me ;”† must have proved an interesting companion to so pious and inquisitive a woman. She would receive him as a father and honour him as an apostle. Happy, thrice happy for us when we make a proper selection of our bosom friends, and improve the hours of social intercourse to the purposes of spiritual improvement ! Nothing is more advantageous than reciprocal communication ; it elicits truth, corrects mistake, improves character, conduces to happiness, animates to diligence, and gives a new impulse to our moral energies. “ Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it ; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels ; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked ; between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.”‡

In reviewing this history, we cannot help regretting

\* Acts xx. 34.      1 Cor. ix. 18.      2 Thess. iii. 8.

† Rom. i. 11, 12.

‡ Mal. iii. 16—18.

the specimen it affords of the paucity of real Christians. The whole city of Philippi furnished only Lydia, the jailer, and a few others, who attended to the preaching of Paul. Immersed in business, devoted to superstition, or depraved by sensuality, the glad tidings of salvation were despised or disregarded. They had neither eyes to see, ears to hear, nor hearts to feel. The god of this world blinded them, that they did not believe. There was not even a Jewish synagogue in Philippi—not one altar erected to the true God—and only a small retreat by the riverside, to which a few female inquirers resorted unnoticed or abhorred. Such is the world in miniature! In reviewing the long track of ages, we can observe but here and there a traveller along the road to Zion. The “narrow way” appears an unfrequented path, while thousands and myriads crowd the “broad road that leadeth to destruction.”\* The page of history is not adorned with the names of saints, but, blessed be God, they are recorded in Scripture, and will shine for ever in the annals of eternity.

The subject, however, presents another aspect. Lydia was the first convert to the Christian faith in EUROPE! In her heart was deposited the first seed that was sown in this new field of labour: in which so rich and extensive a harvest has since sprung up. It was then, indeed, according to the parabolical representations of Christ, but as “a grain of mustard seed,” which is “the least of all seeds;” but what a plant has it since become, striking deep its roots, and waving wide its branches, so that the nations recline beneath its refreshing shade, and feel the healing virtue of its sacred leaves! At that distant period, while Asia was under spiritual culture, Europe presented nothing to the eye but an outstretched wilderness of desolation—ignorance spread over her fairest regions “gross darkness,” and the very “shadow of death”—and Superstition reigned upon his gloomy throne with triumphant

\* Matt. vii. 13, 14.

and universal dominion. The particular state of Britain may be inferred from the general condition of the world ; but if any difference existed, there is reason to suppose, from its peculiar disadvantages and insular situation, that a blacker midnight enveloped this region, than spread over the more civilized provinces of the Roman empire. There was, indeed, no nation in which the grossest practices of idolatry did not prevail, and where human nature did not appear in a state of awful degeneracy. Their very reason was folly ; their very religion impiety. Let us, then, be unceasingly grateful to that Providence, which has not only sent the Gospel to Europe, but has caused the light to shine with peculiar glory in this favoured land, which, at its first promulgation, was in a state of singular depravity ; fixed, so to speak, in the very meridian of the benighted hemisphere.

Britain has now emerged into day ; and has not only caught the rising beam of mercy, but is becoming the very centre of illumination to every kindred and people of the globe. The different orders of Christians engaged in missionary undertakings—*Moravian, Baptist, Independent, and Church Societies*, ought to be mentioned with distinguished approbation, and hailed as FELLOW-LABOURERS in the vineyard. May they ever co-operate, and not control each other ! May they be one in spirit, though diverse in operation ! May they unite their respective energies in one common cause, while bigotry retires abashed from the glory of such a scene !

Above all, “ the United Kingdoms may fairly claim, what has been freely and cheerfully accorded by foreign nations, the honour of giving birth to an institution, (the British and Foreign Bible Society,) the most efficacious ever devised, for diffusing that knowledge which was given to make men wise unto salvation.

“ But although the approbation so generally bestowed on the British and Foreign Bible Society, may be received as a gratifying homage to the simplicity, pu-

riety, benevolence, and importance of its design, it is not to the praise of men, but to the improvement of their moral and religious state, that the Society aspires. Acting under the influence of an ardent desire to promote the glory of God, and adopting the spirit of the apostolic injunction ‘As we have opportunity let us do good unto all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith ;’ its object is to administer comfort to the afflicted, and rest to the weary and heavy-laden ; to dispense the bread and water of life to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness ; to feed the flock of Christ at home and abroad ; and to impart to those who sit in darkness the cheering rays of the Sun of Righteousness.

“ The theatre on which the Society displays its operations, is that of the whole world. Considering all the races of men, as children of one common Father, who ‘maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust ;’ and who wills ‘that all men should come to the knowledge of the truth ;’ the British and Foreign Bible Society offers the records of eternal life to the bond and the free, to Heathens and Christians,—in the earnest hope that they may become a lamp unto the feet, and a light unto the paths, of those who now receive them, and of generations yet unborn.

“ To support the character which the British and Foreign Bible Society has assumed, to realize the hopes which it has excited, to foster and enlarge the zeal which it has inspired, are obligations of no common magnitude, and which cannot be discharged without correspondent exertions. ‘As a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid,’ the eyes of nations look up to it with expectation. Immense portions of the globe, now the domains of idolatry and superstition ; regions where the light of Christianity once shone, but is now dim or extinguished ; and countries where the heavenly manna is so scarce, that thousands live and die without the means of tasting it,—point out the existing claims on the benevolence of the Society.

“ To supply these wants, fill up these voids, and display the light of revelation amidst the realms of darkness, will long require a continuance of that support which the British and Foreign Bible Society has derived from the public piety and liberality, and perhaps the persevering efforts of succeeding generations. Let us not, however, be weary in well doing ; ‘ for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.’

“ Whatever may be the extent of the existing or increasing claims on the British and Foreign Bible Society, it has ample encouragement to proceed in its sacred duty of disseminating the Word of Life.

“ ‘ I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not ; I will lead them in paths that they have not known ; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight.’\* ”

“ These are the words of the Almighty himself. Let the British and Foreign Bible Society, uniting its prayers with those that are daily offered up at home and abroad for the blessing of God on its proceedings, humbly hope that it may become the instrument of his providence, for accomplishing his gracious promises ; and that, by means of the Scriptures distributed through its exertions, or by its influence and encouragement, nations now ignorant of the true God, may learn ‘ to draw water from the wells of salvation.’ The prospect is animating, the object holy, its accomplishment glorious ; for the prospective efforts of the society are directed to a consummation, (whether attainable by them or not, is only known to Him who knoweth all things,) when all the ends of the earth, adopting the language of inspiration, shall unite their voices in the sublime strains of heavenly adoration : ‘ Blessing and honour, and glory and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever : Hallelujah ! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth !’ ” †

\* Isa. xiii. 16.

† Eighth Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

# APPENDIX.

(See p. 231.)



**T**HE concurrent evidence of a variety of passages of Scripture respecting the existence of Satan, and his interference in human concerns, have been rejected with singular and pertinacious audacity, solely upon the ground that the whole of these representations must be figurative, because they are not consonant to HUMAN REASON—which seems to be a very dignified sort of personage, assuming to herself the right of calling revelation to her bar, and disposing at pleasure of the doctrines of Heaven. As, however, truth will always bear investigation, it may not be improper to devote a few additional pages to this subject, with the view of satisfying the humble inquirer, that sound sense and divine testimony are really and entirely coincident.

Whatever is revealed it becomes us to believe, and simply on this account, that it is *revealed*: if the subject of the revelation be mysterious or incomprehensible, this does not annul our obligation implicitly to believe it, because sufficient reasons may exist in the Eternal Mind for the concealment of its nature, or it may surpass the comprehension of our limited capacities; but if it be naturally capable of investigation—if it be not only a fact, but a fact in proof of which evidences may be adduced, and explanations furnished, our minds cannot be better employed, than in thus superinducing substantial evidence or vivid probability upon the testimony of divine inspiration.

I. It is highly reasonable to suppose, that there are beings of a distinct and superior order to ourselves in the universe. Nothing can be more improbable than to imagine that this earth is the only inhabited region of universal empire, the only peopled province in the creation of God; especially when we observe that it forms but one, and that a small globe of matter belonging to a system in which others, and some very superior bodies, are found moving round the same centre, and regulated by similar laws; and that this whole sys-

tem itself is but one out of ten thousand others that constitute the heavenly constellations, and “*pave the shining way to the divine abode.*”

The productions of Infinite Wisdom are wonderfully diversified. In the present world we have an opportunity of observing them only in the descending scale, from man, the summit of creation, down through all the gradations of animal existence, to the scarcely discernible insects that flit in the summer-beams, and to the minuter world of microscopic discovery. But analogy would lead us to infer, that there may be beings in the vast dominion of universal space as much superior to man as man himself is superior to insects or animalculæ. It is not probable that creative power should cease to operate precisely at the point where human existence commences; and especially as *mind* admits of incalculable diversity in the extent of its energies and capacities, and as it is found in all cases to possess a power of improvement and expansion, it is likely, under other circumstances and in other worlds, it may be inconceivably superior to the highest elevation it has ever attained in this lower region. Hence we infer the great probability of angelic existence.

II. It is reasonable to suppose, that superior intelligences were constituted free agents, and capable therefore of retaining or forfeiting their *primæval* character and happiness; for this is the evident law of the rational creation, so far as it comes within the limits of our observation. If this be the case, some of these beings may probably have misused their liberty, and become depraved and corrupt. It is essential to the notion of free agency, to suppose this possible; and though from the infinite benignity of the Divine Being, we should infer that he would *create* them holy and happy, we cannot conclude they must *necessarily* be *preserved* in such a state. There is nothing in the nature of the blessed God, as a just and holy Being, to require this; no obligation to do so resulting from the mere circumstance of their being thus created; and nothing, in a perfect system of holy government, to demand it. Indeed, quite the reverse, because it is natural to infer, that the subjects of divine government, however elevated in character and condition, should be responsible to their Ruler; and liberty of thought and action, the power of choice, and refusal of obedience and disobedience, is essential to responsibility. There may, therefore, probably exist unholy or evil spirits; such as have not kept their first estate, and consequently amenable to righteous laws, and proper objects of punishment.

III. As it is reasonable to suppose that the government of God may admit of the existence of fallen and evil spirits, as well as those of a more honourable class, it is equally so to conclude, that a similar or analogous variety of talent, capacity, and guilt may obtain, to that which we observe in the constitution of other intelligent

atures, both good and evil, in this world. Wicked men are not satisfied to be solitary criminals; they have no wish to be alone in sin, but are uniformly anxious to seduce others into the perpetration of those iniquities which they themselves have dared to commit. The first action of Eve, after her transgression, was to hand the forbidden fruit to her husband, and persuade him to eat; and it is the earliest wish of a rebellious heart to involve others in the guilt and misery of their own deeds, partly for the sake of concealing their enormity, by diverting the eye from observing the awful proportions of their individual offences, and partly to acquire encouragement and support in the commission of yet unpractised crimes. Hence, "one sinner destroyeth much good." According to his capacity or opportunity, he becomes the centre of a large circle of impious association; he sways inferior minds, and forms them into so many satellites round his person, who individually acquire a lustre from his pre-eminence, and feel the attraction of his base superiority. Hence the world of wickedness is ruled by an incalculable number of petty princes, who each assume independent empire; but all combine to carry on eternal war against the order of providence, the good of society, and the glory of God.

It is not absurd, then, to conclude, that a similar diversity prevails amongst evil beings of a superior class, that some may be far more atrocious in their characters than others, and more capacitated to do extensive mischief. It is equally likely, that their influence over other evil spirits may be proportioned to these circumstances, and that their example or advice may excite to deeds of infernal daring. These considerations would eventually conduct us to the probability of the existence of one, pre-eminent above the rest in crime and in capacity, who may influence the several chiefs of the infernal empire, as they exercise a power over inferior demons; or that Satan, or the devil, is "the prince of the power of the air."

IV. The *invisible* nature of diabolical agency can be no sufficient objection to its existence. Admitting that there are other proofs, this circumstance could not diminish their force, much less destroy their evidence. It must be granted, that without other proofs it would be a radical objection, because in such a case the whole statement would be gratuitous and conjectural. If it were allowable to suppose such an agency, it might be equally so to refuse admitting it; every one may be amused or not with a pure fiction, an imaginary creation. But do not plead, that the invisibility of diabolical agency is any proof or any presumption of its reality; but simply that it is no objection, that it has no power to neutralize the evidence produced, and that unbelievers have no authority, on this account, to treat the subject with that profane and impertinent ri-

dicule, which is a mere commonplace artifice to evade unwelcome convictions.

God is invisible—but is this any argument against his being? the human soul is invisible—is this a proof that it does not exist? The magnetic influence cannot be seen—is this a reason that it does not operate? Are the opinions of philosophers deduced from the analogies of nature, that suns and stars and systems occupy the distant regions of space, which have never yet been penetrated by the best constructed telescopes, rendered improbable by the allegation, that no eye and no instrument can discern them?—The existence and operations of the devil are admitted to be invisible to sense, and in many cases, perhaps, difficult of investigation by reason—what then? Nothing

V. The supposition that the operation of invisible spirits is secret and imperceptible to ourselves, cannot be adduced as demonstrative against its reality. What is more difficult to ascertain than the operation of our own minds, and the motives by which we are impelled? Nor is it difficult only to trace the process of reasoning that has led us to any particular conclusion, and to recall the fleeting thoughts which have passed through the mind in rapid succession, so as to tell how we came to be influenced to a certain conclusion; but we often cannot discover what external objects, or what incidental circumstances, first directed us into the inquiry, or led to the result.

Still more inconceivable is the manner in which spirit operates upon spirit, where there is no external agency; and it is inconceivable, because of our little experience on the subject, and because the usual modes of impression are through the medium of sense. The ear, the eye, the touch, convey impressions to the spirit; but when neither are sensibly affected, we cannot trace the influence exercised upon us, although it is highly irrational to deny its possibility. Besides, we know that “God, who is a Spirit,” operates upon our souls at times and under circumstances, when we are unconscious of this influence; and, if we had no evidence from Scripture, reason must admit that such an operation is not improbable.

The only objection which can arise here, is that of supposing the evil spirit in any respects independent of God; a supposition, however, which is not to be charged upon the advocates of diabolical agency. “It is evident,” says Dr. Leland, “to the common sense of mankind, that there is a vast difference between the supposition of an almighty and independent evil being, a supposition full of absurdity and horror; and that of an inferior dependent being, who was made originally pure and upright, but fell by his own

voluntary defection into vice and wickedness; and who, though permitted in many instances to do mischief, and to act according to his evil inclinations, as wicked men are often permitted to do in this present state, yet are still under the sovereign control of the most holy, wise, and powerful Governor of the world. For, in this case, we may be sure, from the divine wisdom, justice, and goodness, that God will, in the fittest season, inflict a punishment upon that evil being and his associates, proportionable to their crimes; and that in the mean time, he setteth bounds to their malice and rage, and provideth sufficient assistance for those whom they endeavour to seduce to evil, whereby they may be enabled to repel their temptations, if it be not their own faults; and that he will in his superior wisdom bring good out of their evil, and overrule even their malice and wickedness, for promoting the great ends of his government. This is the representation made to us of this matter in the holy Scripture, nor is there any thing in this that can be proved to be contrary to sound reason. And we may justly conclude, that in the final issue of things, the wisdom as well as righteousness of this part of the divine administration, will most illustriously appear."

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