



LECTURES ON THEOLOGY.



BY THE LATE

REV. JOHN [✓]DICK, D.D.,

MINISTER OF THE UNITED ASSOCIATE CONGREGATION, GREYFRIARS, GLASGOW; AND PROFESSOR OF
THEOLOGY TO THE UNITED SESSION CHURCH.

TWO VOLUMES IN ONE.

VOL. I.

NEW-YORK:
ROBERT CARTER AND BROTHERS,
No. 530 BROADWAY.

1874.

PREFACE

TO THE AMERICAN EDITION.

IN presenting this work to the American public, the publishers believe that they are rendering an important service to the religious community at large, and to theological students in particular. The first edition was published at Edinburgh in 1834, and has already obtained a very extensive circulation in Britain. An estimate may be formed of the value of these Lectures, from the fact of their having received the highest praise of some of the most distinguished theological scholars in Scotland and England; and though expressing in the most decided manner the views of the particular denomination with which their author was connected, (the Presbyterian,) the catholic spirit with which these opinions are maintained, the candour with which others are stated, and the ability with which the common Christianity is illustrated and defended, may be learned from the fact of their being warmly recommended by the leading periodicals of nearly all the Protestant denominations of Britain.

The Lectures of which this work is composed were read by their author to the students attending the Theological Seminary of the United Associate Church, in which he was Professor of Systematic Divinity. They were not prepared for the press; nor is it known that he ever entertained any design of publishing them. The following extract from one of the author's unpublished introductory addresses to his students will give a correct idea of his aim in drawing them up. "You come to this place to hear such an explanation of the doctrines of religion as will furnish you with materials of reflection, and assistance in your private inquiries. Of one thing it may be proper to admonish you; that you are not to expect to be entertained with things which may be properly called new. To some of you, indeed, many things may be new in this sense, that you have not heard them before; but in general, the subjects

to which your attention is directed, are truths as old as the Bible, which have been topics of discussion from chairs and pulpits from the first ages of our religion. It cannot be supposed that, in a field which has been so often and so carefully surveyed, there is any thing left to be gathered by the persons who shall walk over it again. Our purpose is gained if we are able to impart to the rising race the knowledge which was imparted to ourselves by our predecessors: and the utmost at which we could reasonably aim is to suggest some small matter which has been overlooked; to propose a new argument, or a better statement of an old argument; or, it may be, to throw some light upon a portion of the Scriptures not yet fully understood. In human sciences, discoveries may be made by superior penetration, and more patient inquiry; and their advanced state in the present age is a proof of the success of modern philosophers in the investigation of the secrets of nature. Discoveries might have been made in religion while revelation was in progress, and its light was increasing like that of the morning; but as seventeen centuries have elapsed since it was completed, and during this long interval it has engaged the attention of the wise, the learned, and the pious, there is every probability that we have been anticipated in all our views."

The Edinburgh edition was published under the superintendence of a son of the author, Andrew Coventry Dick, Esq. The present edition is an exact reprint of the former, and in the course of publication has been under the supervision of one who was formerly a pupil of Dr. Dick, and heard a considerable portion of them read.

The appendix, containing observations on the atonement of Christ, belongs properly to the fifty-eighth lecture; and it was the original design of the American editor to have inserted them in their proper place in the body of the work; but as he was at a loss, upon examination, to determine the precise place in which their author would have wished them to come, he has judged it best to allow them to be published in their present shape.

In the preparation of the memoir prefixed to the first volume, the editor has made much use of the Life of Dr. Dick by his son A. C. Dick, Esq., and of a short sketch of his life and writings of his son-in-law, Rev. W. Peddie, of Edinburgh.

J. F.

Philadelphia, 1835

CONTENTS.

OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

LECTURE	Page
I. On Theology,	11
II. The Sources of Theology: Reason,	15
III. ————— Revelation,	23
IV. Evidences of Christianity: Genuineness of the Scriptures,	33
V. ————— The same subject,	43
VI. ————— The same subject,	53
VII. ————— Authenticity of the Scriptures; Miracles,	64
VIII. ————— Prophecy,	75
IX. ————— Success of the Gospel; Internal Evidences,	87
X. ————— Objections considered,	98
XI. Inspiration of the Sacred writers,	110
XII. State of the Sacred Text,	122
XIII. The Study and Interpretation of the Scriptures,	128
XIV. The Dispensation of Religion: Under the Old Testament,	138
XV. ————— Under the New Testament,	147
XVI. On God: His Existence,	158
XVII. ————— The same subject; Eternity and Spirituality,	167
XVIII. ————— His Unity,	177
XIX. ————— His Immensity,	187
XX. ————— His Immutability,	197
XXI. ————— His Knowledge,	208
XXII. ————— His Wisdom,	219
XXIII. ————— His Power,	230
XXIV. ————— His Goodness,	240
XXV. ————— His Justice,	251
XXVI. ————— His Truth and Faithfulness,	264
XXVII. ————— His Holiness; and General Reflections,	273
XXVIII. The Trinity,	285
XXIX. The same subject,	295
XXX. The Divinity of Christ,	306
XXXI. The same subject,	317
XXXII. The same subject,	329
XXXIII. The Divinity of the Holy Spirit,	341

LECTURE	Page
XXXIV. The Decrees of God,	250
XXXV. ————— Predestination; Election,	359
XXXVI. ————— Reprobation,	367
XXXVII. Creation,	376
XXXVIII. Angels: The Holy Angels,	386
XXXIX. ————— The Fallen Angels,	396
XL. Man in his State of Innocence,	406
XLI. Providence,	416
XLII. The same subject,	426
XLIII. The same subject,	436
XLIV. The Fall of Man, and its Consequences,	446
XLV. The same subject	455
XLVI. The same subject,	465
XLVII. The same subject,	476
XLVIII. The Covenant of Grace,	488
XLIX. The same subject,	499
L. The same subject,	510
LI. The mediatorial Office of Christ,	520

M E M O I R
OF THE
REV. JOHN DICK, D.D.

THE subject of the following memoir was the son of the Rev. Alexander Dick, of Aberdeen, Scotland. His father was descended from a very respectable family in the county of Kinross, and connected with the church of Scotland. He pursued his literary course at the University of St. Andrew's, and prepared for the ministry at the Theological Seminary of the Secession Church at Glasgow, then under the care of the Rev. James Fisher. Shortly after his licensure he was installed pastor of a church in Aberdeen. At the time of his settlement in that city, the spiritual condition of the north of Scotland generally, and of this city in particular, was lamentable indeed. Beside himself, there was not known to be another minister who preached the gospel in its purity in that place or the immediate neighbourhood. Mr. Dick was not distinguished for his extraordinary talents nor his extensive literary attainments; but he was eminent for what is far better—holiness, and devotion to the cause of Christ, for primitive simplicity of character, and unwearied diligence in the duties of his office. "His life," according to the inscription on his monument, "was a perpetual commentary on the purity of his doctrine." After labouring in that city successfully for thirty-four years, he died in 1793, universally lamented. His memory, as the writer of this memoir can testify, is still precious in Aberdeen.

His eldest son, JOHN DICK, was born in Aberdeen, on the 10th of October, 1764. Mrs. Dick, who possessed a remarkably vigorous and well-cultivated mind, and who seems to have been fully aware of the extent of maternal influence and responsibility, watched with much anxiety the progress of his early education. And if the excellence of the scholar is any proof of the qualifications of the teacher, we may be certain that his education could not have been committed to better

hands. Dr. Dick always dwelt with peculiar delight on her memory, and never spoke of her but with enthusiasm. It is but proper to add, that she was permitted to reap the reward of her labours, as she lived to witness the distinction and the eminent usefulness of her son.

Dr. Dick received his early education in the grammar-school of Aberdeen; and there, at a very early age, gave proof of those abilities by which he afterwards rose to eminence. There is an incident connected with his entering the university of Aberdeen, and in proof of this, which is worthy of being related. At the commencement of the session he presented himself, without the knowledge of his father, as a candidate for a scholarship, which was to be determined by open competition. The exercise prescribed to the candidates was to translate two passages, the one from a Latin and the other from an English author, into the opposite languages respectively: and to preclude the possibility of unequal aid, each candidate was sent to a room by himself, without books or any other assistance; and though by much the junior competitor, he carried off the prize. He was then only in his twelfth year. While at the university, the late Rev. Robert Hall of Bristol, Sir James Macintosh, and the eminent Greek scholar, Dr. Charles Burney, were among his fellow students. With the former he at that time became but slightly acquainted; the two latter gentlemen were among his intimate associates and friends. It is rather an uncommon coincidence, that three such men as Robert Hall, Sir James Macintosh, and Dr. Dick should have been brought together to the same college at the same time; and still more, that they should have been all spared to a good old age, and cease from their labours within little more than a year of each other.

Dr. Dick was a particular favourite with all the professors whose classes he attended. Professor Ogilvy, under whom he studied Latin, entertained a very special attachment for him and was very desirous, knowing that his pupil was designed for the ministry, that he should enter the Established church. As he could not conscientiously unite with the Establishment, he resolved to connect himself with the Secession church, of which his father was a minister, although strongly urged also by family relatives belonging partly to the church of

Scotland and partly to the Episcopal church, to join one or the other of these denominations. To the professor's credit it deserves to be related, that the independence of his pupil was not allowed to terminate their friendship.

He completed his course at the University in 1780, when only sixteen years old, and immediately afterwards entered the Theological Seminary of the Secession Church, then under the care of the celebrated Rev. John Brown of Haddington.

In 1785, he was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Perth and Dunfermline. His talents, which had hitherto been known only among his particular friends, now began to attract very general attention. Soon after his licensure, he received invitations from a number of congregations to become their pastor. His first settlement was in Slateford, a village in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh. Here he was ordained, in 1786, to the high gratification of the people of his charge, and much to his own satisfaction, as the rural charms of the spot, one of the most beautiful in Scotland, delighted his imagination; and the retirement of the village afforded him the best opportunity for study. While at Slateford, though burdened with the cares, and subject to the many interruptions of the pastoral life, he formed a plan of study to which he ever afterward most scrupulously adhered, and by which he was doubtless enabled to gather those rich literary and theological stores, of which we have an example in these volumes. It will be interesting to all, and may be of service to some, to know what was the plan of study of such a man, who, while most diligent in the discharge of all his ministerial duties, was still enabled to make those attainments which gave him a place among the first theological scholars of Great Britain. "His plan," says his son, "was to rise in the morning before six o'clock, and immediately to begin the study which it may be said formed the business of the day. It was of course interrupted by his duties as a parent and head of a family; and in addition to such intervals, he regularly allowed himself two or three hours about midday, which he spent in visits of duty or friendship. His afternoon and evening studies were commonly suspended, or intermingled by conversation with his family or friends. At least one day of each week was devoted to the pastoral visitation of the families of

nis congregation. His morning studies were employed in the first place in making some progress in his preparations for the ensuing Sabbath. His discourses on that day were indeed begun on the Sabbath evening previous, sometimes even before it; and in general they were fully prepared by a day or two before the week ended. It may here be noticed that he seldom spoke in the pulpit or out of it, without having previously written what he meant to say: not that he wanted the ability to speak *extempore*, but because he disliked the inaccurate sentiments and unfinished phraseology incidental to that mode of speaking, and because he wished to offer in the sanctuary only the richest fruits. Of the quality of his expository lectures, which occupied the morning, and the sermons which occupied the afternoon of the Sabbath, a judgment may be formed from the printed specimens; there being between them and those of every Sabbath no perceptible difference. Whatever time allotted for study was not taken up in preparing for the pulpit, was devoted to various branches of learning, with the exception of part of the forenoon and the whole of the afternoon of Saturday, which he usually spent with his family. We conclude with stating what is necessary to complete the picture, that his studies were pursued apparently without toil, were resumed or laid aside with ease, and never seemed to be engrossing his mind while in the company of his family or friends; that, although a hard student, he did not leave undone any one of the more active duties of his profession; and that while his labours in the closet and out of doors, when put together, exceeded, perhaps, those of the most of men, he overtook them all without bustle and without hurry, and never performed them in a superficial manner, but left on every thing he touched the marks of careful finishing."

In 1788, Dr. Dick first appeared before the public as an author, in a sermon, entitled "The Conduct and Doom of false Teachers of Religion." This was occasioned by the appearance of a work, entitled, "A practical Essay on the Death of Christ," by Dr. M'Gill of Ayr, in which that author, though a Presbyterian minister, boldly advanced Socinian sentiments. This sermon, though not possessing the high polish nor the condensation of sentiment which characterize most of his subsequent productions, contains a large body of scriptural truth

and deep moral reflection, and everywhere breathes a truly apostolic spirit against those who would corrupt the fundamental doctrines of the gospel.

His next publication appeared in 1796, "On the Necessity of Confessions of Faith." A large number of the members of the Synod to which he belonged, and among them Dr. Dick himself, wished to have a change made in their ordination-service, in regard to a few points of a purely speculative kind. The proposal awakened considerable controversy, in the course of which, those who pleaded for the change were charged with acting inconsistently with their subscription to the standards of the church. The sermon is entitled, "*Confessions of Faith necessary, and the Duty of the Church in regard to them explained.*" In this sermon he of course defends the moderate use of confessions: the substance of his defence will be found in its proper place among his Lectures, and need not, therefore, be here repeated. It is proper, however, here to state, that he considered, and in this discourse endeavours to show, that one capital error on this subject has been committed by the great majority of Protestant churches, and one which has perhaps been a more prolific source of angry debate and schismatic division than almost any other: the error consists in their practically considering their various "Articles," "Confessions," and "Constitutions," as perfect and infallible. He does most pointedly and justly condemn that undue reverence for them which forms an almost impassable obstacle in the way of any subsequent revision when once they have been adopted, and which elevates them to a place in the estimation of a large portion of the religious public, to which, as the works of imperfect and fallible men, they can have no sort of claim—a place which belongs, in fact, only to the perfect word of God. He held, that they should be frequently revised, and that the contrary but most common practice is inconsistent with our profession as Protestants, and unworthy of those who are daily students of the Bible. As these views have not been very commonly expressed by the defenders of "Confessions," or, to say the least, have not been held up very prominently to view, and as the opposite and hitherto almost universal practice has given occasion to those who are hostile to "Creeds and Confessions" to "speak reproachfully" of them, we regret that this

sermon has not been more generally known in this country, particularly of late years.

His next work, "On Inspiration," which, prior to the publication of his "Lectures on Theology," formed the chief basis of his reputation as a theological writer, is said to have been occasioned by the same controversy that gave birth to the former. In the course of the discussion about the power of the civil magistrate in ecclesiastical matters, and on the binding obligation of those "covenants" entered into by the church and parliament of Scotland in the seventeenth century, which agitated a considerable portion of the Scottish church about forty years since, frequent reference was made to those events in the history of the Jews supposed by some of the disputants to be analogous to those events in Scottish history which were the matters of debate. They who denied these covenants to be any longer binding, it was affirmed, virtually questioned the inspiration of such portions of the Old Testament as had been referred to in the course of the controversy. The charge, being made in the heat of debate, was too contemptible to receive serious notice; it, however, induced Dr. Dick to direct his attention to the general subject of inspiration. He prepared and preached to his people a series of discourses on the subject. His mother, who heard them, and who was well qualified to judge of their merit, united with his people in asking their publication. With this request Dr. Dick did not then see fit to comply; but after a careful revision, he threw them into the form of an essay, and published it some years afterwards to aid in stemming the torrent of infidelity which was then setting in upon Great Britain with fearful power, owing to the popularity of French philosophy and politics. It is one of the best works upon the subject, and has already passed through a large number of editions in Great Britain, and through several in the United States. The substance of this work will also be found in its proper place among the Lectures on Theology.

These writings, and his occasional labours in various parts of the church, gained for him a very high reputation, and prepared the way for his being called to a more prominent position, and his entering on a more enlarged sphere of labour than he had previously occupied. He was twice called by the church

in Aberdeen, over which his father had presided, but did not see his way clear to accept their invitation. In 1801, he was called to be one of the ministers of Greyfriars church, Glasgow, one of the oldest in the Secession body, and by its extent, its wealth, and its situation in the midst of a populous and enterprising city, is one of its most prominent and important stations. Among this people he laboured faithfully and diligently, growing every year in their affection and veneration. A short time after his settlement in Glasgow he published his "Lectures on select Portions of the Acts of the Apostles," which have obtained a very extensive circulation, and which are declared by the best judges to be, "for soundness of view, richness of sentiment, lucid arrangement, and clear, forcible, and elegant diction, models for the exposition of the holy Scriptures."

In 1815, he received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from the college of Princeton, New Jersey.

The professorship of Systematic Divinity in the Seminary of the Secession Church having become vacant by the death of the venerable Dr. Lawson, in 1819, Dr. Dick was chosen to fill it. He at first would not consent to perform the duties of the professorship for a longer time than a single session; at the close of it, he yielded to the joint and urgent request of his pupils and his brethren in the ministry, to remain permanently in the office. Into this new office he entered, possessed of every qualification necessary to the discharge of its important duties, in a manner honourable to himself and useful to the church. He had a very humble opinion of his own attainments; and this, together with his extreme aversion to all parade, prevented strangers from becoming acquainted with their extent, except as it was discovered in the precision, soundness, and comprehensiveness of his general opinions and reflections. Of his acquaintance with theology, to teach which was the peculiar duty of his new office, this much can be said, that he had left no means untried to render his knowledge of it complete. To the study of that science he was devoted by love of its truths, by a sense of duty, and by an opinion which he carefully impressed on all around him, that it is peculiarly disgraceful in any man to be ignorant of his own profession. The holy Scriptures occupied every day a large share of his

attention; and to illuminate their pages he employed all the light he drew from other departments of knowledge.

The following character of him as a theologian is from the pen of one who knew him long and intimately well. "He was distinguished by the strictness with which he adhered to the great Protestant rule of making the Bible, in its plain meaning, the source of his religious creed, and the basis of his theological system. His distrust of reason, as a guide in religion, was deeply sincere, and never wavered; and so was his confidence in revelation; both were the result of inquiry: and the perfect reasonableness of his faith was in nothing more evident than in the limits which he set to it; for he had taken pains to ascertain the bounds of revelation, and within these he was as teachable as a child; to every thing beyond them, where we are left to our own resources, no one could apply the test of reason with more uncompromising boldness. When elected to the professorship, his powers of mind were in full vigour. Long and intense study, instead of impairing the strength of his intellect, or deranging its balance by an over-constant use of some one faculty to the neglect of the rest, had been a course of improving discipline to his whole mind. He retained the original force of his reasoning powers; even his imagination, which time might have been expected to cool or extinguish, seemed to be growing to the last in warmth, and acquiring new graces; and while he was in his closet, a singularly patient and laborious investigator, he elsewhere exhibited the playfulness, quickness, and occasional impetuosity in thinking and in speaking, which he had inherited from nature. The intellectual excellence for which he was chiefly remarkable was that of conceiving clearly; and when united, as in him, with acuteness and a sound judgment, must be peculiarly useful in theological investigation. Instinctively rejecting all obscure and dubious ideas, he either shunned entirely some departments of human research, in which the profoundest investigations can seldom reach clearness and certainty; or when he entered upon them, employed himself in ascertaining where inquiry ceased to satisfy, and in pointing out to others the limits of the human faculties. In this difficult task he was reckoned to have been eminently successful.

“Correspondent to the quality of his thoughts was the character of his language. By few words put together without effort, he could render thoughts luminous which many would have deemed worthy of pages of elaborate explanation: and perhaps his reputation was not so great with some, for reasons that ought to have increased it; for, as in the exposition of his ideas, he allowed to each its due space, and no more, those among them which were new or unusually valuable, having no undue prominences, did not catch the attention of some minds; and the transparency of his language made abstruse speculations so easily apprehensible, that frequently his hearers were not aware that he had brought them into the depths of divinity. To this we may add, that he had a peculiarly delicate perception of the want of clearness in the language of others; that though far from averse to the ornaments or the music of a fine style, he felt no pleasure in either if gained by the least sacrifice of that favourite quality; and that his taste in these matters having been early formed after the best models, continued steadfast through life to its first predilections, never for one moment permitting him to attempt in his own writings, or to admire in those of others, those novelties which gain from fashion a transient applause.”

Such is the portrait of Dr. Dick as a theologian, drawn by one who knew him well; and having enjoyed the privilege of his acquaintance, and having listened to his instructions as a theological professor, we can testify that it is entirely correct.

As the plan of theological instruction in Great Britain, and particularly in the seminaries of Scotland, is not very generally known in this country, we here insert an account of the mode pursued by Dr. Dick in conducting his class. The whole course of study directly preparatory to the ministry, extends through a period of five years: Dr. Dick's instructions were confined to the students of the last three years.

The class met twice every day, except on Saturday, when it met only in the morning; and on Wednesday, when the students met in the character of a theological society. The usual business of the morning meeting was the hearing and criticising of discourses. Two of these were delivered by different individuals, which were criticised by the professor, after the students generally had expressed their opinions. This

opportunity which was afforded the students to criticise, was, it is said, at one time very eagerly embraced by them; but for several years before the death of Dr. Dick, though regularly offered, was uniformly rejected, on the ground that they had other opportunities of exercising more unrestrainedly their powers of criticism, and also because the opinion of the professor was felt to be the only one which the person whose production was criticised was concerned to know, and by which the character of the discourse was finally determined.

Those only who enjoyed the privilege of Dr. Dick's instructions can form any idea of the deference with which his remarks on such occasions were received. This was owing not only to the high estimation in which he was held by his students as a person of great taste and judgment, but also to the sterling honesty that characterized all his criticisms. He seemed to feel that he had a most solemn duty to perform, on the faithful and important discharge of which might depend much of the future usefulness of his pupils.

The second hour of meeting was occupied with the delivery of his theological lectures. Regularly once a week, and sometimes oftener, the students were examined on these lectures, and on the general subject of which they treated. Of the character of these lectures it is unnecessary here to speak, as the public is in possession of them; yet this much we may say, that though there was nothing in the manner of the professor at all striking, his lectures were listened to with the most profound attention. We never can forget the feelings with which we ourselves listened to parts of the nineteenth and twenty fourth, and the impression produced upon the audience by their delivery.

On Wednesday, as has been already noticed, the students met without the presence of the professors, and engaged in the discussion of some topic connected with their studies, and in the criticism of essays that were then read. The evenings of Friday were spent in social religious exercises, especially designed to cherish a spirit of brotherly affection and devotion to the missionary cause.

Dr. Dick was not more venerated by his students as a teacher, than loved as a man. He was in the habit of inviting all of them to his house, in separate parties, twice during each

session, and by this means, though the number of students was very large, cultivated an intimate personal acquaintance with them all. On these occasions he entered familiarly into conversation, and proved himself to be a most edifying and entertaining companion. Though he could not but have his partialities, he was never chargeable with favouritism; on the contrary, he endeavoured to become more or less acquainted with the history of all of them; and continued, after their removal from his superintendence, to watch their movements and rejoice in their success.

It may be proper here to state, that since his death very material alterations have been made in the plan of the theological seminary with which he was connected; the term of study has been somewhat increased, and there are now four distinct professorships established, instead of two as formerly.

He was a man of peace, and loved to promote it, especially in the church of Christ, where it ought eminently to dwell; and he therefore delighted to advance any measure calculated to remove the divisions that exist among Christians, and permanently to unite them into one happy family. Those who are familiar with the ecclesiastical history of Scotland are aware that the Secession body was at an early period divided into two hostile branches, and continued in that unhappy state until 1820, when a proposal was made for their reunion, which was very happily carried into execution. This measure met with Dr. Dick's most cordial approbation, and he was appointed a member of the committee that framed the "Basis of Union." This event appears to have exerted a most happy influence on the Scottish churches; for it not only has made two bodies who once opposed each other with no little bitterness, one, but has evidently created a desire and prepared the way for a still more extensive union of Christians in that country. At the present time, while the tendency of things in some portions of the American church seems to be to still greater division than what even now exists; in Scotland the tendency is quite of an opposite character.

In the controversy which arose a few years since in Britain in consequence of the circulation of the Apocrypha by the British and Foreign Bible Society, Dr. Dick took a somewhat prominent part. With many more, he was startled by the first

disclosure of it, and joined in the remonstrance which effected its discontinuance; but his confidence in the honesty and the good intentions of the eminent Christians who were the leaders of the religious public in that great and noble institution, was never for a moment shaken. He was satisfied with the expedients which they adopted to correct the evil and prevent its recurrence; and he thenceforward adhered to them with a zeal which was not a little increased by the virulence of invective with which their opponents pursued them. After the resignation of the earl of Glasgow of the presidentship of the Glasgow auxiliary, in consequence of the dispute among the subscribers, Dr. Dick was chosen to fill the office, and continued in it until his death.

We come now to consider the closing scene in the life of this excellent man. On the 23d of January, 1833, a very large meeting was held in Glasgow for the purpose of petitioning the legislature to pass some enactments then proposed for the sanctification of the Sabbath. Having been intrusted with one of the resolutions, he spoke in support of it for some time, and with great animation. He had officiated as president at meeting of the Baptist Missionary Society, held a week or two before: a week or two later, it would have been his duty to preside at the anniversary of the Auxiliary in Glasgow to the British and Foreign Bible Society; and his friends were therefore congratulating him that in his old age he should be growing in public spirit. This, however, was his last public act, and was indeed a graceful and becoming close to his very useful career.

On the evening of the same day (Wednesday) on which he made the address to which we have referred, he met with the Session of Greyfriars to make arrangements for the communion which was to be observed on the ensuing Sabbath. On his return home, he complained of ear-ache; but as he was subject to this complaint, it now excited no alarm. He spent a restless night, and did not rise until the unusually late hour of ten o'clock on Thursday morning. On this day he had resolved to call on a poor member of his church with some money for her use, but finding this impossible, he sent it to her by one of his elders, and then devoted himself to committing to memory the discourse he had written for the next Sabbath.

The sermon has been published since his death; the text is John iii. 35. "The Father loveth the Son, and hath committed all things into his hands." It is an interesting proof that he was well prepared for the duties which he was not permitted to discharge; and the topics and the spirit of his latest meditations were happily in unison with the event which awaited him. While thus employed he was seized with a shivering, about noon, and found it necessary to retire to bed, although no danger was apprehended. Medical aid being immediately procured, he was twice bled, and from each operation experienced relief, conversing cheerfully with those around him; but about five o'clock in the afternoon he sunk unexpectedly into a stupor, out of which he never awoke. The cause was at that time unknown, but from the examination subsequently made, it appeared that his ear had suppurated internally, and that the matter flowing in upon his brain, produced inflammation and effusion, which caused the fatal issue. All hope of his recovery was now gone, and the rapid approach of death became every moment more evident to his surprised and sorrowing family. His death took place on the afternoon of Friday, 25th of January, 1833, and without much apparent suffering. There were present at the closing scene, besides those members of his own family who then were in Glasgow, only a few friends, who, learning accidentally of his illness, had come to inquire for him, and obeying the impulse of affection and sorrow, had entered his chamber. When he had ceased to breathe, an old friend and member of his church stepped beside his now lifeless remains, and exclaimed, weeping, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

From the circumstances attending his death, it was not possible that his friends should receive any of those testimonies to the reality and power of religion which so often illustrate, as with a supernatural radiance, the last moments of Christians. To his family and friends, who believed that he needed no warning, it is a consolation that death was not preceded by prolonged feebleness or sickness, and that he was spared the pain, which to him would have been inexpressibly severe, of being conscious of parting from those whom he loved, and that the closing struggle was quickly over.

To the deep sorrow of a very extensive circle, his death was

announced before even the fact of his illness had become generally known. In the public prints, and from the pulpits of ministers of all denominations, it was noticed as a loss to the community at large; and strong testimonies were borne to the worth and merits of the deceased.

His death took place in the sixty-ninth year of his age, the forty-seventh of his ministry, and the thirteenth of his professorship. The solemn event was improved to his congregation by his colleague in the seminary, the Rev. Dr. Mitchell, in the forenoon, and by his venerable friend, the Rev. Dr. Peddie, of Edinburgh, in the afternoon, and by a large number of the ministers of his own communion in different parts of Scotland and England.

We conclude this brief sketch of the life and labours of Dr. Dick with an extract from the sermon of his excellent friend and colleague, Rev. Dr. Mitchell, which presents us with what is believed to be a just description of his character.

“He seemed to possess in a high degree what may be called *harmony and strength of character*. The elements of which it was composed were of a high order, intellectual and moral, as well as of rare excellence. Its features were all in unison, and all admirable. A dignified plainness, simplicity—a noble simplicity—seemed to constitute the most prominent trait. Never spirit was more unsophisticated: he scorned to appear, or rather he could not appear that which he was not; what he seemed, that he was; what he spoke, that he thought and felt. Intimately connected with this was his inflexible integrity. This quality lies at the foundation of all excellence, of whatever is estimable in character, or noble in spirit, or confidential in friendship, or honourable in the intercourse of life; and this quality he possessed in an eminent degree. Being human, it would be too much to suppose that he never erred in judgment or in feeling; yet this we may say, that he might be mistaken, but he could not be dishonest; he might be misinformed, or act under a wrong impression, but he could not be disingenuous: and his integrity was not mere sincerity and honesty, such as an honourable man of the world may possess and exercise; no, his was associated inseparably with moral probity; it was the integrity of a hallowed mind, and of ‘truth in the inward parts;’ of high principle; of straight-forward

rectitude; of unbending resolution; of fearless faithfulness; and, when necessary, of noble daring. In some others, this principle is cold and repulsive in its spirit and workings; but in him it was firm and stern, united with affectionate feeling, with social sympathy, with the domestic virtues, with the Christian charities and graces.

“Of his abilities and attainments I need not speak particularly; the proofs are before the world, and the public have appreciated them: ‘his praise is in all the churches.’ These talents, we may be allowed to say, were of the first eminence. Seldom has such a combination of faculties, in respect of variety and energy, been conferred on one human being. He was highly gifted by the God of nature and of grace. Few have possessed such power, and penetration, and perspicacity of mind; such capaciousness, correctness, and retentiveness of memory. Few have made such proficiency in extensive, and accurate, and varied learning; and few have acquired such treasures of knowledge, sacred and literary. His taste was chaste; his imagination was well regulated; and he wrote the English language with a purity and an elegance which have, we apprehend, been seldom equalled. ‘Like a scribe who is instructed unto the kingdom of God, he brought forth out of his treasury things new and old.’ His delivery, partaking of his constitutional simplicity, was natural, correct, and dignified. The judicious hearer, though, it may be, not highly excited, was yet informed, interested, elevated: and the subjects on which he loved to dwell were solemn, interesting, and of the highest class. His was truly a gospel ministry; he delighted to ‘preach the unsearchable riches of Christ,’ and to unfold the plan of redemption in its sublime doctrines and practical bearings. Nor could any one be more faithful and diligent in discharging the private duties of the pastoral office; in visiting the sick, teaching from house to house, ‘caring for the poor,’ ruling well the spiritual affairs of the church, and, if need be, in ‘rebuking, exhorting, reproving, with all long suffering and doctrine.’ Much, truly, did he love ‘to spend and be spent’ for the Saviour and for souls; and sometimes, when infirmity would have afforded a satisfactory apology for the suspension of his labours. And with regard to his professional functions, those who were so happy as to be placed

under his care, will all, we are assured, with one accord bear witness to the punctuality and assiduity of his labours, the abilities and excellency of his instructions, the impartiality of his administrations, the judiciousness of his criticisms and counsels, and the condescending kindness of his attentions. Long will his 'work praise him in the gates,' and long will his pupils speak of him with affectionate veneration. His was sterling worth: no one ever owed less to assumption or ostentation. No one knew him fully who did not also know him intimately; and the excellency of his character rose in proportion as it was inspected and understood. He was, through the gifts and graces given to him of God, an ornament to our church; and I do not know the church to which he would not have been an honour. In short, we may say of him what was testified of an esteemed friend and brother concerning another venerable man of God who had been his colleague for a considerable period, that 'his was a character than which none could gain more or suffer less by a just delineation.' "

J. F.

LECTURES ON THEOLOGY.

LECTURE I.

ON THEOLOGY.

Introductory Observations—Theology defined: Its Object and Importance—Natural Theology—Supernatural Theology: Its Divisions into didactic, polemic, and practical—Qualifications of a Student of Theology: Piety, a competent Share of natural Talents and Learning, and a Love of Truth.

THEOLOGY embraces a great variety of topics, some of which are abstruse and difficult, and all have been perplexed by controversies, which commenced as soon as our religion was promulgated, and have been carried on from age to age, with all the arguments which ingenuity and learning could supply. It is like an immense field, thickly covered with briers and thorns, which impede our progress, and through which we must force our way with toil and pain, in the pursuit of truth. The private Christian, ignorant of the subtle disputes which have arisen concerning almost every article of faith, humbly takes up the Bible as the Word of God, and by a short and easy process, acquires that measure of knowledge which, through the teaching of the Divine Spirit, makes him wise unto salvation. But the minister of religion proceeds more slowly, encounters obstacles at every step, and often is compelled to assume the character of a polemic, because he must study theology as a science, and be able not only to instruct the simple and illiterate, but also to contend with the wise and learned, whether as infidels they oppose revelation in general, or as heretics they impugn any of its doctrines. To superintend and assist your studies in a subject so extensive, so complicated, and so embarrassed with difficulties, is a task which I should not have willingly undertaken; but as it has been imposed upon me for a time, I must attempt to perform it, although I know beforehand, that I shall neither do justice to you, nor give satisfaction to myself. I commit myself and you to the Father of lights, from whom comes down every good and perfect gift,—earnestly beseeching him to prevent me from handling his word deceitfully, or in any instance misleading your minds, and to bless such instructions as you may receive, for advancing your progress in divine knowledge and in personal religion.

There are various departments of human knowledge, to each of which a degree of value ought to be attached, according to its intrinsic worth, or its nearer or more remote connexion with our business and our interests. The objects of knowledge are, mind and matter; the sciences and the arts; man himself under his different aspects, as an animated being, as the subject of moral obligation, and as a member of civil society; the history of human opinions, inventions, and transactions; and many other particulars which it would be tedious to mention. To these, individuals are led to direct their attention, in some instances it would seem, by a natural predilection or an original disposition of mind, by accidental circumstances, by imitation, by a regard to interest, by the love of

glory, or by the principle of curiosity, which prompts us to inquire into what is unknown, and is gratified by the enlargement of our views. As man has been endowed by his Creator with intellectual powers, he acts conformably to his will when he exerts them in the acquisition of useful knowledge; and the knowledge which is thus acquired must be considered as a divine communication, not immediate, indeed, like the revelations which were made to the prophets, but proceeding as certainly from the Father of lights. Whatever blessing is obtained by the use of means with which Providence has furnished us, is as truly a gift of our Maker as was the manna which, being prepared by his own hand without, as far as we know, the intervention of any natural cause, fell every night around the camp of the Israelites. I do not therefore mean to undervalue those parts of knowledge to which I have referred, and which in their place are as necessary as revelation, when I add, that however worthy they are of attention, and however great are the advantages which they are calculated to impart, they yield in importance to the subject which alone will constitute the business of this course.

Theology literally signifies, a discourse concerning God. By the ancients, the term was used in a more restricted, and a more extended sense. In the writings of the Fathers, mention is made of the 'Theology of the Sacred Trinity, and of the 'Theology of the Son of God, or of the Divinity of our Saviour; while the word, at other times, denotes the general system of truth contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, or these Scriptures themselves. It may be defined to be the science which treats of God, his nature, his attributes, his counsels, his works, and his dispensations towards the human race. I call it a science, because it is equally worthy of that designation with any of those departments of knowledge to which it is applied by common consent; for, although its authentic records do not deliver theology in a scientific form, it is founded on first principles, from which its subordinate parts are deducible; and, throughout all its ramifications, there is a connexion, a mutual dependence, constituting a harmonious whole. Reflection upon the subject of theology will convince us that it claims the preference to all other studies. In God, we behold an assemblage of all conceivable excellencies, existing in the highest degree, and in the most perfect accordance; the union of grandeur and loveliness, of every thing fitted to awaken solemn and pleasing emotions, to impress us with veneration, to gain our confidence, to inspire us with hope. He is invisible to mortal eyes, but this is not a reason for suspending our inquiries, because we are furnished not only with external senses, by which we communicate with the material creation, but also with mental faculties, which qualify us for holding intercourse with the intellectual or spiritual world. The mystery which envelopes his nature might discourage us, if we entertained a presumptuous wish to comprehend his infinite essence; but it presents no obstacle to the attainment of that degree of knowledge which will serve as the foundation of religion, since he has been pleased to grant such manifestations of himself as are suitable to our limited capacity and our present state of existence. His remoteness from us, who are separated from him by an interval of infinite extent, has been urged by some men as an argument for dismissing him from our thoughts, and confining them to subjects more nearly allied to us; but it will have no weight in the estimation of those who consider, that independent and self-existent as he is, he stands in the closest relations to us, as our Maker, our Lawgiver, and our Judge. To know this mighty Being, as far as he may be known, is the noblest aim of the human understanding; to love him, the most worthy exercise of our affections; and to serve him the most honourable and delightful purpose to which we can devote our time and talents. To ascertain the character of God in its aspect towards us; to contemplate the display of his attributes in his works and dispensations; to discover his designs towards man in his original and his present state; to learn our duty to him, the means

of enjoying his favour, the hopes which we are authorized to entertain, and the wonderful expedient by which our fallen race is restored to purity and happiness; these are the objects of theology, and entitle it to be pronounced the first of all the sciences in dignity and importance. Ignorant of the other sciences, and of the arts which minister to the ornament and amusement of life, a man who can sustain himself by mechanical labour, may spend the short time of his earthly pilgrimage, not without comfort, nor without the honour which honesty and integrity may procure, especially if religion has shed some rays of its celestial light upon him; but he who has stored his mind with every kind of knowledge except the knowledge of God and divine things, lives like a fool, and shall die without hope.

Theology may be distinguished into natural and supernatural. By natural theology, is understood that knowledge of God which the light of nature teaches, or which is acquired by our unassisted powers, by the exercise of reason, and the suggestions of conscience. It is not meant, that there is in the human mind an innate idea of God, a supposition manifestly absurd, and contradicted by experience, for individuals have been found in a savage state, in whom there was no such idea; but that man, by contemplating the objects around him, is led to infer the existence of an invisible Being by whom they were created, possessed of certain perfections, the signatures of which are perceived upon his works; and from this first principle deduces other doctrines of religion, as that this God governs the world; that it is our duty to honour and please him, by the practice of piety, and justice, and benevolence; that the soul is immortal; and that there is a future state, in which the righteous will be rewarded, and the wicked will be punished. These are the great articles of natural theology; and much reason and eloquence have been employed in illustrating them, and demonstrating their truth in opposition to the objections of atheists. Upon this subject, however, there is a diversity of sentiment. It has been disputed, not only whether these are the only articles, but also whether there is such a thing as natural theology; or, in other words, whether the system, which bears that name, is discoverable by unassisted reason. There is no doubt that its truths, when proposed, are approved by reason, which supplies the most convincing arguments in support of them; but the question is, whether men, left to themselves, could arrive, by the observation of external things and the reflections of their own minds, at the conclusion that there is one living and eternal Being who created and governs the world, and would connect with it the other doctrines in a regular series. The discussion of this controversy does not belong to this introductory lecture.

Supernatural theology is the system of religion which is contained in the Holy Scriptures; and it is called supernatural, because the knowledge of it is not derived from reason, but from divine revelation. It incorporates the truths which have been enumerated as the articles of natural theology; but it comprehends many other truths, which it could not have entered into the mind of man to conceive, and which exhibit new manifestations of the divine character, suitable to the new situation into which we have been brought by the fall. It is the religion of sinners, and consequently the only religion with which we are concerned. What is called natural religion, is not adapted to our circumstances. It holds out no hope to the guilty; and, in the present enfeebled and corrupt state of our moral powers, its duties are absolutely impracticable. Christianity has been said to be a republication of the law of nature. The assertion is true, if it only mean that it teaches the doctrines which are supposed to be discoverable by reason, and teaches them more clearly, and fully, and authoritatively; but it is obviously false to affirm, that this is the whole design of Christianity, the distinguishing character of which arises from its superadding to those doctrines the discovery of the remedial or mediatorial dispensation.

Christian theology may be arranged under three divisions, distinguished by the titles of dogmatic or didactic, polemic, and practical.

It is the province of didactic theology to state and explain the several doctrines of religion, and to point out the proofs. In treating this part of the subject, the theologian proceeds in the same manner as a teacher of any other science, who lays before his pupils its constituent principles, and the conclusions which have been drawn from them, together with the train of reasoning upon which they are founded. Having examined the subject with attention and patience, and, as he trusts, with success, he imparts to others the result of his inquiries, to facilitate their progress, and to lead them to the same views which he has adopted from conviction. I will add, that it is his business, not only to bring forward the several doctrines of religion, and the proofs, but also to exhibit them in their order and connexion. It is granted, that the Scriptures do not deliver religion to us in that artificial form which we find in the writings of the schoolmen, and of those modern divines who have trodden in their steps, although there is certainly an approach to it in some parts of the Bible, particularly in the Epistle to the Romans ; but no man, I think, who (is in possession of his senses, and) understands what he is saying, will deny that religion is systematic. The word of God is not an assemblage of writings which have no other relation to each other but juxtaposition, or collocation in the same volume, but a continued revelation of his eternal counsels, “in which he has abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence.” There is arrangement here, as well as in his other works, although it may require time and patience to discover it. Religion, if I may speak so, has a beginning, a middle, and an end. It has first principles, and secondary truths derived from these principles, and precepts founded upon both. The study of the Scriptures is not recommended to us, that we may load our memories with a multitude of unconnected ideas, but that we may bring together and combine the truths which are scattered up and down in them, and thus “understand what the will of the Lord is.” In the mind of every intelligent reader of the Scriptures, a system is formed, the parts of which, by their union, reflect a new light upon one another ; and certainly, the utility of this system is not destroyed or diminished by its being committed to writing, or being communicated to others by oral instruction. I am at a loss to understand the declamations which are so common against systematic theology ; and am disposed to think, that they are often as little understood by their authors, unless it be their design, as, in some instances, we have reason to suspect, to expose to contempt a particular set of opinions, to cry down, for example, not the system of Socinus, or Arminius, but the system of Calvin. Were their objections pointed against a particular system, as improperly arranged, as too technical in its form, or as encumbered with a multiplicity of useless distinctions, we might concur with them, on finding the charge to be true. But to admit, as they must do, that religion is not a mass of incoherent opinions, but a series of truths harmonized by the wisdom of God, and, at the same time, to exclaim against its exhibition in a regular form, as an attempt to subject the oracles of Heaven to the rules of human wisdom, is conduct which ill befits men of judgment and learning, and is worthy of those, alone, who “know neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.”

In the department of polemic theology, the controversies are considered which have been agitated in the church, with respect to the doctrines, and precepts, and institutions of religion. The term is derived from a Greek word, which signifies *warlike*. A polemic divine is a warrior ; he goes forth into the field to encounter the adversaries of the truth. The word has an odious sound, and seems to accord ill with the character of a teacher of religion, who ought to be a minister of peace. On this ground, polemic theology is often held up as the object of scorn and detestation, and it is loudly demanded.

hat the voice of controversy should be heard no more within the walls of the church, that the disciples of Christ should bury all their disputes in oblivion, and, without minding differences of opinion, should dwell together as brethren in unity. There is much simplicity and want of discernment in this proposal, when sincerely made. It is the suggestion of inconsiderate zeal for one object, overlooking another of at least equal importance, accounting truth nothing and peace every thing, and imagining that there may be solid peace, although it does not rest upon the foundation of truth. Often, however, it is intended to conceal a sinister design, under the appearance of great liberality; a design to prevail upon one party to be quiet, while the other goes on to propagate its opinions without opposition. Every man who has observed from what quarter these cries for peace most frequently come, must have noticed that they are as insidious as the salutation of Joab to Amasa, whom he stabbed under the fifth rib when he took him by the beard, and said,—“Art thou in health, brother?”* Nothing is more obvious, than that when the truth is attacked it ought to be defended; and as it would be base pusillanimity to yield it without a struggle to its adversaries, so it would be disgraceful, as well as criminal, in one of its professed guardians, not to be qualified to sustain the dignity of his office, and to uphold the sacred interests of religion, by his arguments and his eloquence. He should be “able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort, and to convince the gainsayers.” If controversial theology be accounted an evil, it is a necessary one; and let the blame be imputed to the men who have laboured, and are still labouring, to pervert the oracles of God, not to those whom a sense of duty has compelled to come forward, and defend them against the rude assaults of presumption and impiety.

Practical theology states and explains the duties which are enforced upon us in divine revelation. The way is prepared for it by the two preceding departments of the science, under which the doctrines are illustrated and vindicated, upon which these duties are founded, and which supply the only motives that will lead to the proper and acceptable performance of them. Some consider this as the only part of theology which is worthy of attention, speaking slightly of faith, and pronouncing high panegyrics upon virtue as the one thing needful; and in doing so, they display much the same wisdom as a husbandman would show, who should think only of the produce of his fields, without concerning himself with the quality of the soil, and the means of calling forth its vegetative powers. By others, it is looked upon as of inferior importance; and they are apt to suspect those who are of a different opinion, of being perverted in their taste, and corrupted in their principles, and to accuse them of bestowing that admiration upon a cold and uninteresting morality, which should be reserved for the sublime mysteries of faith. Both are chargeable with mistaking a part for the whole, and disjoining what God has united; with forgetting that religion, in all its parts, is an emanation from the Fountain of wisdom and purity; and that it is alike necessary that its doctrines should be believed, and its duties should be practised. Religion is a barren speculation when it is treated merely as a theory. It should uniformly be represented as a practical system; the tendency of its doctrines to promote holiness of heart and life should be pointed out, and the nature of holiness explained, that men may know what are the good works which it is incumbent upon them, as the professed disciples of Christ, to maintain. “A scribe well instructed unto the kingdom of heaven,” a minister who would declare all the counsel of God to the people under his charge, must be an able expounder of the law, as well as a zealous preacher of the gospel.

Theology is not one of those recondite subjects, which it is left to the curious to investigate, and in the contemplation of which, speculative and

reflecting men may spend their hours of leisure and solitude. Its claim to universal attention is manifest from the succinct account which has now been given of its nature. Its instructions are addressed to persons of every description, to the learned, and to the unlearned, to the retired student, and him who is engaged in the bustling scenes of life. It is interesting to all, as furnishing the knowledge of God and his Son, which is the source of eternal life. But in your case, there is a particular reason, besides a regard to your personal welfare, why it should not only engage a share of your thoughts, but be made the principal object of your inquiries. Theology is your profession, as medicine is that of a physician, and law of a barrister. It should be your ambition to excel in it, not, however, from the same motives which stimulate the diligence of the men of other professions, the desire of fame, or the prospect of gain, but with a view to the faithful and honourable discharge of the duties of the office with which you expect one day to be intrusted. "These men are the servants of the most High God, who shew unto us the way of salvation."

In the sequel of this lecture, I shall briefly point out the qualifications which are indispensably necessary to a student of theology.

The first which I shall mention is piety. I have called theology a science, but I did not mean to insinuate, that like the other sciences, it should be regarded merely as a subject of cold speculation and philosophical inquiry. As the conscience should be deeply impressed with the authority of God in this revelation of his will, so the heart should be affected by the views which it gives of Him and ourselves, and all its movements should be in unison with the manifestations of his character and attributes. While the student of theology is assiduously labouring to store his mind with knowledge which is to be communicated to others, it should be his first care to convert it by faith and prayer to his own use, that he may be nourished with the heavenly food which he is preparing for the household of God. If we are destitute of piety, we cannot enjoy the divine blessing on our studies; and although, by the exercise of our natural faculties, and the common assistance of Providence, we may acquire the knowledge of the Scriptures as well as of any other book, what will it avail? It will minister no consolation to our minds, and will serve to aggravate our guilt and condemnation; for "the servant who knew his master's will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes." The knowledge which we do attain will be superficial and only literal, the unrenewed mind being incapable of discerning spiritual truths, and supernatural illumination being necessary to clear and impressive conceptions of doctrines, which reason is too dim-sighted to discover. We may think and speak of the wisdom and love of God in redemption, but we shall feel no holy admiration of the one, no animating and melting sense of the other. The want of piety may even prove an obstacle to the fairness and success of our speculative inquiries; for if our hearts remain under the influence of their innate enmity to God, we cannot cordially assent to those parts of the system which exalt him so highly, and degrade us so low; and we may be tempted, as others before us have been, to accommodate them to our prejudices, to mould them into a shape more pleasing to our taste, more accordant with our feelings. Those who indulge in perverse disputes, and resist the truth, are represented as "men of corrupt minds."* You ought therefore to begin, and to carry on your studies, with fervent prayer for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, who will lead you into all the truth, and fill you with joy and peace in believing. He who mingles humble and devout supplications with his studies, cannot fail to succeed.

But piety, although indispensably necessary, is not the only qualification

* 2 Sam. iii. 8.

The study of theology demands, if not the powers of genius, yet certainly a competent portion of intellectual ability, a mind capable of attention and patient investigation, of distinguishing and combining, and of communicating the result of its inquiries by accurate arrangement, and perspicuous exposition. It is a strange and unfounded notion, that theology is an inferior study, and that those may succeed in it who are disqualified for any other profession. Irreligious men may think that the lame and the blind are offerings good enough for the altar of God, but his service is worthy of the noblest talents; and although the ministrations of weak men have been frequently blessed, while those of some others far superior to them have not been attended with equal success, yet there is no doubt, that upon the whole it has been by the labours of persons properly furnished for the work by nature and education, that the edification of the church and the general interests of religion have been chiefly promoted. The mention of education leads me to remark, that as a competent portion of natural talents is requisite to success in the study of theology, it is farther requisite that these should be improved by previous discipline. You know what are the preparatory studies which our church prescribes to those who are looking forward to the office of the ministry. Whether their time is employed in acquiring the knowledge of languages, or in cultivating the sciences, the object is not only to enlarge their stock of ideas, or to open the sources from which ideas may be derived, but to exercise and invigorate their faculties, and to form their minds to habits of reflection and inquiry. Individuals may sometimes be found, who have not enjoyed the advantages of a regular education, but are so eminently gifted by nature as to be able to perform, in a creditable manner, the duties of public teachers of religion. But such instances are rare; and nothing is more absurd, than upon the authority of a few extraordinary cases to establish a general rule. In general, an unlearned ministry will be neither respectable nor useful. The experiment was made some years ago in this country, but its success was not such as to encourage its patrons to persist in it long. They soon discovered the incompetency of illiterate preachers, and found it expedient, for the credit of their party, to furnish them with a portion of human learning, which was once represented as useless and pernicious. It has been sagely asked, what need is there of Greek and Latin and philosophy, to qualify a man for proclaiming the good news of salvation? Why should he waste his time in schools and universities, where nothing is to be learned but the vain wisdom of the world? Let him take the Scriptures into his hand, and then declare to his fellow-sinners what he has read and believed. To these reasoners, or rather declaimers, for of the crime of reasoning they are on this occasion guiltless, I would reply in the words of the prophet, "What is the chaff to the wheat?" Bring forth your self-taught haranguers, and place, in opposition to them, an equal number of preachers of man's making, as you sometimes call them, that we may judge of the utility or worthlessness of human learning, by the self-sufficient dogmatism, the enthusiastic rhapsodies, and the perpetual recurrence of a few favourite topics, on the one hand; and by the good sense, the lucid arrangement, and the varied illustration of truth, on the other. Learning, then, is necessary to the study of theology; and without its aid, our knowledge must be very incomplete. Can he be called a divine, whose accomplishments are little superior, if they be superior, to those of many pious mechanics; or can he expound the Scriptures, who is unable to consult them in the original languages, and is unacquainted with the histories, and laws, and manners, and opinions, to which they so often refer? In this view, it may be justly said, *philosophia theologiæ ancillatur*,—philosophy is the handmaid, although not the mistress, of theology. I conclude this topic with a familiar scriptural allusion, for which we are probably indebted to Origen, the father of allegorical interpretation, who, recommending to his friend

Gregory of Nazianzum the study of the Grecian philosophy as a means of preparing him for the study of the Christian religion, adds, that as the Israelites employed the spoils of Egypt in the construction of the tabernacle and its furniture, so **we** should consecrate our learning to the service of God.

I shall take notice only of another qualification, the love of truth. which is to be found in every mind imbued with piety. Whatever is the **subject of** inquiry, men are always desirous to discover the truth, unless it happen that error will be more soothing, or more conducive to their immediate interests; but here, it should be sought with greater diligence and care than in any of the sciences, on account of its superior value. The constant aim of a student of theology, must be to ascertain the mind of God in the Scriptures, by reading and reflecting upon them. He should come to the study, not with a view to find out arguments in favour of the system which he may have been previously led to adopt, but to learn what is the system which has proceeded from the Father of lights by the ministry of his inspired messengers. I do not mean to concur with some (declaimers,) who would dissuade the student from having any recourse to human aid, and call upon him to make his own understanding his only resource, and to commence his inquiries as unprovided and as helpless as if not an individual had gone before him to point out the way. I do not so undervalue the labours of pious and learned men, who shine as lights in the firmament of the church; and I have little doubt, that nothing would be more mortifying to those declaimers, than our adopting their advice in its full extent, and treating their own writings with as little regard as they wish us to express for the writings of others. But I mean, that while we consult the opinions of others, we should remember that they are fallible, and in themselves of no authority; and that our ultimate appeal should be to the Scriptures, by which alone the question of truth and error can be decided in religion. Follow them whithersoever they shall lead you. Refuse not to follow them, although it should be necessary to part from those, whose dictates you have been hitherto accustomed to reverence as oracles. He who holds the office which I have undertaken must deliver a particular system, because it is the system of the church which has appointed him, and because he believes it to be true. He must say also, that if you will be ministers of that church, you must adopt her creed, because she allows no other to be taught to the people. But farther he has no right to proceed. He is not the lord of your faith. He does not claim to teach authoritatively, and, like Pythagoras, to substitute his own affirmations for wisdom. He calls upon you to inquire for yourselves, with earnest prayer for divine illumination, and to embrace the truth wherever you may find it. **“ Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”**

LECTURE II.

SOURCES OF THEOLOGY: REASON.

Sources of Theology, Reason and Revelation—Reason defined : Extent of its Discoveries respecting the Being and Attributes of God ; Man's Relation to God ; Creation ; Providence ; Morality ; and the Immortality of the Soul—Reason insufficient to establish the Doctrines of natural Religion : totally silent respecting those of supernatural Religion—The just Office of Reason in Theology.

IN the preceding lecture, I endeavoured to give you a general view of the nature of theology, and pointed out its superiority to every other subject of study. As it treats of God and divine things, of our duty and our hopes, it is equally interesting to the learned and the unlearned. I showed you that it is distinguished into natural, and supernatural or revealed theology ; and that of the latter there are three divisions,—didactic, polemic, and practical theology. Didactic theology explains the doctrines of religion, and states the proofs, or the arguments by which their truth is evinced. Polemic theology considers the controversies respecting those doctrines, and replies to the objections of adversaries. It is the business of practical theology to point out the improvement which should be made of the doctrines, by detailing the duties incumbent upon those who profess to receive them as true, and the motives which they supply to the faithful performance of these duties. I concluded by laying before you some of the qualifications for the study of theology ; and I mentioned piety, without which the study, if not unsuccessful, will certainly be unprofitable ; a competent share of human learning, which is indispensably necessary to eminence in your profession ; and the love of truth, or a sincere desire to know the will of God, leading to candour and diligence in your inquiries.

Let us now proceed to inquire what are the sources of theology ; or, in other words, what are the sources from which our knowledge of it is derived. These are reason and revelation. Here our attention is demanded to such questions as these—Whether reason and revelation are both necessary ? If only one, whether is it reason or revelation ? and, lastly, if reason alone is insufficient, how far its discoveries extend, and what are its defects, which are supplied by revelation ?

Reason signifies, in this place, the intellectual and moral faculties of man, exercised without any supernatural assistance in the investigation of religion. Whether under its guidance he can attain all the knowledge which is necessary to conduct him to virtue and happiness is the great subject of controversy between infidels and Christians. There is another dispute, among Christians themselves, with respect to the degree of its ability ; while some maintain that it can discover the doctrines of what is called natural religion, others affirm that these could not be known without the aid of revelation.

Nothing is more unphilosophical, and a more certain source of error, than to indulge in vague speculations and barren generalities upon any subject, when it is in our power to enter into a close investigation of it, and to bring it to the test of experience. It is easy to present to us a system of religion, containing a variety of articles supported by a train of arguments, which seem to amount to demonstration ; and to tell us, that reason, being the gift of God, must be perfectly sufficient to direct men in all the parts of their duty ; that religion being a general concern, they would not be responsible, unless they were all furnished with the means of acquiring the knowledge of it, that the supposition of supplementary means is a reflection upon the wisdom of God.

as if he had not originally adapted man to his situation, and was hence compelled to devise a new expedient for correcting the error. Without examining these assertions one by one, and showing, which we might do, that they are mere gratuitous assumptions, it may suffice to observe, that not a single fact in the history of mankind can be adduced in confirmation of them. They are an Utopian description of an imaginary state, not a sober relation of things which really exist. They are *a priori* arguments, or arguments deduced from our own previous conceptions, not arguments, *a posteriori*, or founded on observation and experience. The question is not, what should be, according to our ideas of justice and fitness, but what actually is; not what purposes reason, abstractly considered, may be presumed to accomplish, but what purposes reason, as existing in men, is found to have actually accomplished. It is preposterous, first to give an arbitrary definition of reason, and then to conclude that it is capable of exerting all the power which we have been pleased to ascribe to it; it is more consonant to sound philosophy, to judge of the power of reason by its effects. In a word, we must not waste our time, and impose upon ourselves, by endeavouring to show beforehand what reason can do; we ought to proceed according to a different and a safer plan, and inquire what it has actually done.

It may be proper to remark, that there are two senses in which reason may be understood, and consequently, that what is true of it in one sense, may not be true in another. First, reason may signify the high intellectual ability with which man was endowed at his creation; and which we may conceive to have been as sufficient to direct him in his original state, as instinct is to direct the lower animals, both being perfect in their kind. I would not affirm, however, that even then reason was his only guide, because it appears from the sacred history that he lived in familiar intercourse with his Maker, and was favoured with occasional communications of his will. Secondly, reason may signify the intellectual powers of man in his present state, when he feels the effects of the fall in all his faculties, and both his mind and conscience are defiled. It is with reason in this sense alone that we have at present to do. It is no more an impeachment of the wisdom and goodness of God to affirm the incompetence of corrupt reason in matters of religion, than it is to say, that an eye, which in consequence of disease does not see at all, or sees imperfectly, is unfit for the purpose which it was originally intended to serve.

From the preceding observations, we perceive that it is not from theory but from experiment, not from conjecture but from fact, that we can ascertain what assistance may be expected from reason in the study of theology. Let us, then, review some of the doctrines of what is called natural religion, and is supposed properly to lie within the province of reason, that we may see what has been the result of its researches.

The first principle of religion is the existence of God, who made us, and to whom we owe homage and obedience. No doubt seems to be entertained that this fundamental truth is demonstrable by reason; and, accordingly, there are many books in which it is evinced by arguments so strong and conclusive that it is not easy to conceive how any man who has attended to them can continue an atheist. The metaphysician, we should think, would be overpowered by the profound reasonings of Clarke; and the man of a plainer understanding, by the more obvious proofs collected in the writings of Ray, and Derham, and Paley. There is one thing which ought not to be overlooked, that this triumphant demonstration, as it may be justly called, is found only in the writings of Christians; for although a similar train was pursued by some of the heathen philosophers,—as Cicero in his work concerning the nature of the gods, and Socrates in the dialogues of Xenophon,—the illustration was not so ample as it is now made by the discoveries of modern philo-

sophy, nor was the conclusion to which it naturally led, drawn with equal clearness and confidence. The cause of this difference we are at no loss to divine. To the Gentiles, the existence of God was a point involved in doubt, an inference to be deduced from premises; and they who saw some steps of the process, were not always able to see with equal distinctness the result. When Christians sit down to discuss the subject, they are fully convinced of the fact; and how different it is to discover an unknown truth, by a slow induction of particulars, and to find out proofs of a truth already admitted; how much easier the one process is than the other, you will perceive upon the slightest reflection. The former is like the voyage of Columbus, who did not know whether there was such a country as America, and had nothing but probability to support him amidst the difficulties and perils of the enterprise; the latter is like the same voyage now, when the place being known, the sailor can shape his course to it by his chart and his compass.

Nature, it is acknowledged, cries aloud in all her works that there is a God; “but she spoke in vain,” as a late writer observes, “to the sages of antiquity, who either altogether failed to interpret her language, or suffered the still whisper of ‘divine philosophy’ to be lost amidst the various bustle of the world.”

“The ancients, imperfect as their sciences were, knew more than enough of the harmony and design of the universe, to draw out an unanswerable argument from final causes; and in point of fact, they did draw out both that and other arguments so far as to leave us indisputable proof, that the God of NATURAL THEOLOGY will never be any thing more than the dumb idol of philosophy; neglected by the philosopher himself, and unknown to the multitude, acknowledged in the closet, and forgotten in the world.”* This truth made no impression upon their minds, and it is not surprising that it did not, as their notions of it were exceedingly imperfect and erroneous. “The idea of what has been called the personality of the Deity, or his distinct subsistence, was in a great measure unknown to them. The Deity was considered not so much an intelligent being, as an animating power diffused throughout the world; and was introduced into their speculative system to account for the motion of that passive mass of matter, which was supposed coeval and co-existing with himself.” In practice, they adopted the polytheism of their country, and paid religious honours to the endless train of gods and goddesses, who were acknowledged by the vulgar. There was not a nation upon earth but the Jews, in which the living and true God was adored. Every object was mistaken for him; every part of the universe was deified, and fancy exerted its creative power in superadding a multitude of imaginary beings; insomuch, that the gods of Greece, that seat of refinement and philosophy, amounted to thirty thousand. In modern India, where science has been long cultivated, the number is still greater, and we are astonished at the information that its gods are estimated by millions.† Such are the achievements of reason with respect to the first principle of religion.

In the second place, it is the office of religion to inform us of our relation to God, because this is the foundation of our duty to him. Although we should conceive the existence of an all-perfect being, if there subsisted no connexion between him and us, how much soever his excellencies might excite our admiration, he would have no claim to our homage and obedience. By us, God is regarded in the characters of our Creator and Governor; and these ideas are so familiar to our minds, so interwoven with our sentiments and feelings from our infancy, that they appear to us almost self-evident, and we can scarcely think it possible that they should not occur to

* Sumner's Records of the Creation, preface.

† 330,000,000.

every person of reflection. We believe that all things were created by the almighty power of God ; and, although the production of the universe out of nothing is an event of which we can form no conception, because experience has not made us acquainted with any thing similar, yet we consider the cause as adequate, omnipotence being able to do every thing which does not imply a contradiction. But men, having the light of nature alone as their guide, entertained different sentiments. Unassisted reason never arrived at this conclusion, that the universe had a beginning ; nor when it was suggested, did it obtain its assent. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*, nothing is made out of nothing, was a maxim received without dispute by all the sages of antiquity. In the detail of their systems, they differed from each other ; but they all concurred in rejecting as absurd the idea of a proper creation. Some of them believed, that the universe was eternal both in matter and form ; that the sun, moon, and stars in the heavens ; plants, animals, and minerals on the earth, had always been ; and that the human race had no beginning, and would have no end. Others maintained, that the present order of things had a beginning ; but they attributed it to accident, to the fortuitous concourse of atoms, which, dancing up and down in infinite space, united themselves at last in the present regular system. Of those who acknowledged a deity, some, instead of considering him as the Creator, confounded him with his works ; and imagined him to be a soul or vital principle diffused throughout the universe, and giving life and motion to its various parts, as the soul of man animates his body ; while others, although they distinguished him from the universe, did not believe that he made it, but only that he reduced the wild chaotic mass into order. According to all of them, matter was co-eternal with the deity, and only thus far dependent upon him, that his power was exerted in moving and arranging it. Their notion, therefore, of the relation of man to God must have been very different from ours, who believe that he made us, and the earth on which we dwell, and the heavens which shed their influences upon us, and that “ in him we live, and move, and have our being.”

We could not expect those who were so much mistaken, or so imperfectly informed with respect to the character of God as the Creator of the world, to entertain just ideas of his government of it. It was natural for such philosophers as attributed the present system to chance, to deny a providence ; and accordingly, the followers of Epicurus represented the gods as indolently reposing in their own region of undisturbed felicity, and beholding with indifference the concerns of mortals. The sentiments of some other philosophers were different ; and we are delighted to hear them expressing themselves in a manner approaching, in accuracy and sublimity, to the discourses of those who have derived their knowledge from the high source of revelation. “ Of religion towards the gods,” says Epictetus, “ this is the principal thing, to form right conceptions of them as existing, and administering all things well and justly ; to obey them, and acquiesce in all things that happen, and to follow willingly as being under the conduct of the most excellent mind.” But the elevated language of the Stoics loses much of its value, when we reflect upon their doctrine of fate, which meant some inexplicable necessity by which all things were controlled, and to which gods as well as men were compelled to yield. The world, then, was not properly governed by the gods ; but they, as well as their nominal subjects, were governed by fate, and bound by the eternal and inviolable chain of causes and effects. The opinion of the vulgar was more simple. The dominion of the gods was acknowledged by their prayers and thanksgivings, and other religious services ; but even in their creed, the power of the gods was circumscribed by stern irresistible necessity, or was exercised with all the wantonness of caprice, and, as they did not hesitate to say, in some instances with injustice. The idea of a Providence

floated in the minds of the heathens, but they were not able to give it a distinct and consistent shape. All that reason could do, was to point out the general truth ; it failed in its attempts to illustrate it, and to erect upon this foundation the superstructure of rational piety.

Let us, in the next place, inquire what have been the discoveries of reason in morality. Here it must be acknowledged that its success has been greater. There are admirable treatises upon morality, which were composed by heathen philosophers, and may be perused with pleasure and advantage ; but he is very ignorant indeed, who imagines that he shall find in them a perfect system of duty. Lactantius, indeed, has somewhere affirmed, that every thing delivered in the Scriptures on this subject, is contained in the writings of one or other of the philosophers ; but Lactantius, although a fine reasoner, and an elegant writer, is not entitled to much deference in questions of theology, of which he has shown himself to be an incompetent judge. What he has affirmed is not true ; for in the moral systems of the philosophers, some duties of great importance are omitted, and some things which they call virtues, when brought to the Christian standard, turn out to be vices. According to Cicero, " virtue proposes glory as its end, and looks for no other reward." Zeno maintained, " that all crimes are equal, and that a person who has offended or injured us should never be forgiven." It was his opinion, as well as that of other philosophers, " that the crime against nature is a matter of indifference." The Cynics held, " that there was nothing shameful in committing acts of lewdness in public." Aristippus affirmed, " that as pleasure was the *summum bonum*, a man might practise theft, sacrilege, or adultery, as he had opportunity." Humility, which is the first of Christian virtues, was despised as an indication of a mean, dastardly spirit ; and the tendency of their moral lessons was to inspire a notion of personal dignity, a feeling of self-approbation, a consciousness of worth, which of all tempers the Scriptures pronounce to be the most offensive to our Maker. Besides the morality of the heathens, imperfect as it was, wanted authority. Being rather a deduction of reason, than a law emanating from the Author of our being, of the communications of whose will they were ignorant, it had little or no power over conscience ; and the motives with which it was enforced, were not of sufficient efficacy to counteract the innate propensity to evil, and to overcome the strong temptations to which men are daily exposed. Hence a general depravity of manners prevailed among the ancient Gentiles, and still prevails among modern heathens to a degree, of which, corrupt as Christian countries are, we can hardly form a conception : a depravity which extended not only to the lower and uneducated classes, but to the higher and better informed, and even to the very men who professed to be teachers of wisdom. We are apt to impose upon ourselves, or to be imposed upon by others, when we are thinking of the heathen philosophers. We look upon them as a set of sages, who spent their days in the study and practice of virtue. But the particulars of their history which have come down to us, and the testimony of some of their own order, will correct this mistake, and show us that they were unprincipled declaimers, whose infamous conduct daily gave the lie to their eloquent harangues. Suspicion rests upon the most celebrated names ; and with respect even to Socrates, the visit which he paid to an Athenian courtesan to see her beauty, and to teach her more perfectly the arts of seduction, and the profane oaths with which his conversation was interlarded, with some other particulars in his history, place him at an immense distance from the lowest member of a Christian church. Were this wisest of men according to the oracle, this pattern of every excellence according to the nonsensical panegyrics of pedants and fools, now to appear among us, no man with correct ideas of piety and morality would choose to be seen in his company.

Lastly, what was the result of the inquiries of reason with respect to the immortality of the soul? a doctrine of primary importance in religion. The common people generally believed, that the soul survived the death of the body, and that there was a future state of rewards and punishments; but they could assign no reason for the belief, but the authority of their ancestors and popular writers, especially the poets, the theologians of the vulgar. The doctrine had not been adopted by their ancestors in consequence of a process of reasoning from which it was the legitimate inference, but they also had received it without examination, upon the testimony of others. When thus traced back from age to age, it appears that it was a tradition, or a fragment of revelation, preserved amidst the general wreck; and consequently, that it is unfair to produce this article as a proof of the sagacity of reason in the investigation of truth. The philosophers, not content with implicit faith, endeavoured to prove the immortality of the soul by argument; but although they enjoyed this advantage, that the fact was known, and it was left to them only to bring evidence in support of it, they had no great cause to congratulate themselves on their success. Some of their arguments may be admitted to be good; but this praise is not due to them all. In the *Phædo* of Plato, the reasoning is often exceedingly obscure, and arguments are employed so fanciful, and so manifestly false, that while we cannot avoid pitying those who groped their way by the dubious twilight of nature, we are not surprised that they should have produced no permanent conviction in the mind. "I know not how it happens," says Cicero, "that, when I read, I assent, but when I have laid down the book, all that assent vanishes." After all the arguments which the philosophers could muster up, suspicion haunted their minds, that there was some step in the process which weakened the force of the conclusion. Socrates himself died in doubt, as we learn from the close of his *Apology*, as given by Plato. "It is time," he says to his judges, "for us to depart, that I may die, and you may live: to which of us shall it be better, is unknown to all but God." This uncertainty, this hesitation, we should take into the account, when we light upon some passage, in which the confidence of hope is expressed, and death seems to be longed for as a dismissal "*ad illud divinum animorum concilium cætumque, ex hac turba et colluvione*,"* from this vile and worthless crowd into the divine council and assembly of souls. Their thoughts were as changeable as some of our days, which are alternately darkened by clouds and rain, and cheered by gleams of sunshine.

This induction of particulars will serve to prove the insufficiency of reason to acquire the knowledge of the principles of natural theology. Let no man presume to tell us that it is sufficient, till he can point out an instance, in which, without any assistance, it has discovered and established, by satisfactory arguments, the great truths of religion. And here I may observe, that little as reason has done, we have no evidence that it could have done so much, if all aid had been withheld, and it had been left to work out its discoveries alone. But its solitary strength has not been fairly tried; for man has never been without revelation, and, although it was in a great measure lost among the nations of the world, yet some fragments of it remained, with which they contrived to make up their various systems of religion. From this source, they derived the general idea of the existence of a God, and their notions of providence, of morality, and of a future state, and still more plainly, their oracles and prophets, their sacrifices, and the opinion of the placability of the divine nature upon which they were founded. Tradition was supplementary to reason. Its light, indeed, was faint; but still it served to show dimly some objects, which the eye of reason could not have discovered amidst

* Cic. de Senectute, xxiii.

the surrounding darkness. "Though the ancients," says Shuckford, referring to their theories concerning the origin of things, but his observations are applicable to other parts of theology, "have hinted many of the positions laid down by Moses, yet we do not find that they ever made use of any true and solid reasoning, or were masters of any clear and well-grounded learning, which might lead them to the knowledge of these truths. All the knowledge which the ancients had on these points lay at first in a narrow compass; they were in possession of a few truths which they had received from their forefathers; they transmitted these to their children, only telling them that such and such things were so, but not giving them reasons-for, or demonstrations of the truth of them. Philosophy was not disputative until it came into Greece; the ancient professors had no controversies about it; they received what was handed down to them, and out of the treasure of their traditions imparted to others; and the principles they went upon to teach or to learn by, were not to search into the nature of things, or to consider what they could find by philosophical examinations, but, *ask and it shall be told you; search the records of antiquity, and you shall find what you inquire after*; these were the maxims and directions of their studies."*

We have now seen how defective reason is in what may be considered to be its proper province, natural theology. If we proceed to supernatural theology, we shall find, that here it is altogether useless. It cannot make a single discovery. It is like the eye, which is capable of perceiving objects upon earth that are not placed at too great a distance from it, but cannot discern those parts of creation which lie in the profound abysses of space, unless it be assisted by art. The line which separates natural and supernatural theology is impassable. On the one side of it, there are some gleams of light; on the other, there is impenetrable darkness. Supernatural theology is founded on that mysterious distinction in the Divine essence, which we call the Trinity: a distinction not altogether unknown to the heathen philosophers, as is evident from the writings of Plato and his followers, but which every person acknowledges they had learned from tradition. Although reason could demonstrate the existence of God, and his unity, it possesses no premises from which it could infer a plurality in his nature. It is a secret which he alone could disclose. Supernatural theology is also founded on the divine counsels respecting our fallen race, of which no trace can be looked for in creation, as they relate to a state of things posterior to it, and different from the state in which mankind was originally placed. We may investigate the design of our Maker in the formation of the universe, by observing the apparent tendency of his works, and say, that in subordination to the display of his perfections, it is the diffusion of happiness: but how shall we ascertain, except by information from himself, what is his design with respect to his revolted subjects, if he has any other design than to punish them? Some Christians have asserted, that in the works of God, there is an obscure revelation of grace; and the celebrated infidel writer, Lord Herbert, has laid it down as one of his five articles of natural religion, that if men repent of their sins, they will be forgiven; and this, I apprehend, is the meaning of the former, when they speak of a revelation of grace. But nature teaches no such thing; for, first, there is nothing in creation, or even in the dispensations of Providence, which, when fairly interpreted, indicates an intention on the part of God to pardon his disobedient creatures; and, secondly, the principle assumed as the dictate of nature, is false, it being the express doctrine of Scripture, that God does not pardon sinners upon repentance, without an atonement, of which nature knows nothing. But it is unnecessary to waste time upon a point so

plain, as that the scheme of redemption, being founded in the sovereign will of God, and the purpose which he formed before the foundation of the world, could be known only by divine communication, and by its actual execution. Whether Job speaks of it or not, the following words will admit of an easy application to it. "Where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. The depth saith, it is not in me; and the sea saith, it is not with me." "Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? seeing it is hidden from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof, with our ears. God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder; then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out. And unto men he said, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." *

It is not my intention, in these observations upon the insufficiency of reason, to insinuate that it ought to be entirely discarded from religion. You will ask then, what purpose does it serve? and to this question I shall endeavour to return an answer in the remaining part of this lecture.

Its first office is to judge of the evidence of religion; and while thus employed, it not only collects proofs from observation and experience in favour of the doctrines of natural theology, but examines the grounds upon which any new doctrine is said to be a divine communication. As various systems of religion have claimed to proceed from this high source, it brings them to the test. There are two ways in which this inquiry may be conducted. We may compare the system which demands our assent with our prior conceptions of the divine character and will, in order to ascertain whether it harmonizes with them, because it is certain that sound reason and a genuine revelation cannot contradict each other: Or, we may consider certain circumstances, extrinsic to the revelation itself, by which its pretensions to a supernatural origin may be determined. As I have not yet spoken directly of revelation, I am rather anticipating what would have been introduced more properly afterwards; but its connexion with the preceding part of the lecture is my apology for bringing it forward at present. The external circumstances to which I allude, are the character of the publishers of the system, the nature of their testimony, and the works to which they appeal in attestation of their mission; of all which, reason is competent to judge. The doctrines of the system may be so far beyond its range, that it shall be altogether incapable of deciding upon their truth or falsehood by an abstract contemplation of them; while the marks of truth with which they are accompanied may be of easy apprehension, and carry conviction to any ordinary understanding. He who is not able, by his own researches, to discover a truth, may find no difficulty in estimating the force of the proofs by which it is supported. We do not, then, retract what has been formerly said concerning the weakness of reason in matters of religion, when we constitute it judge of its evidence, in which there is nothing mysterious, nothing which is not as plain to a common understanding, as the subjects which the mind is called upon to consider in the common course of affairs.

The second office of reason is to examine the contents of revelation, to ascertain the sense of the words and phrases in which it is expressed, to bring to the illustration of it our previous knowledge of subjects connected with it, to trace the relation of its parts, and to draw out in regular order the system of doctrines and duties which it teaches. Our intellectual powers

* Job xxviii. 12. et seq.

must be exercised with a view to obtain a distinct idea of the import of any communication which our Creator has condescended to make of his will. If we had no more understanding than the irrational animals, we should be equally incapable as they of religion; and if we did not employ our understanding in the study of it, it would be addressed to us in vain. God, having given us rational powers, requires us to exert them in the search of truth; and they are never so worthily employed as in endeavouring to acquire just notions of his character, and our relation to him; of the duty which he has enjoined upon us, and the hopes which his goodness authorizes us to entertain.

You will perceive, that the province which we have assigned to reason does not constitute it a judge of religion. It is not the doctrines of religion which we submit to its test, but the evidence. Let it canvass the evidence, and proceed to settle by the laws of criticism and common sense the genuine import of revelation; but here it should stop. "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther." The wisdom of God must not be tried by the foolishness of men. In the former case, reason acts as a servant: in the latter, it assumes the authority of a master. Man exchanges the character of a scholar for that of a teacher, and presumes to dictate to his Maker. I will not receive such doctrines, because I cannot conceive how they can be true; the ideas which they associate, appear to me to be contradictory. "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" Presumptuous mortal! the range of thy thoughts extends only to a small portion of the universe; and of the objects which lie within this limited space, there is not one of which thou hast a perfect comprehension. And yet thou speakest as if thy mind grasped all possibilities. How canst thou tell what may, or what may not be, in the infinite essence of the Creator, or what counsels are worthy of that understanding which comprehends time and eternity by one act of intuition? "Who can, by searching, find out God? who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?"* He dwells in thick darkness; and the proper posture for thee is to fall down with humility and reverence before Him, whose judgments are unsearchable, and whose ways are past finding out.

LECTURE III.

SOURCES OF THEOLOGY : REVELATION.

Revelation, the second Source of Theology—A Revelation is possible; Objections stated and refuted: That it is desirable, asserted and proved from the natural Ignorance and Guilt of Mankind—Probable Character of a Divine Revelation: it should be fitted to dispel moral Ignorance; it should be authoritative; but not free from Mysteries and Difficulties.

In the preceding lecture, I stated that there are two sources from which we may derive our knowledge of theology, reason and revelation. Reason signifies the intellectual powers of man, exercised without supernatural assistance in the investigation of religious truth. I have endeavoured to ascertain what is the amount of its discoveries; and it has appeared, that the streams which flow from this source are neither clear nor copious. I shall not now recapitulate what was said, as there will be an opportunity to revert to it in a subsequent part of the lecture.

Let us proceed to speak of the other source of theology namely, divine

* Job xi. 7.

revelation. I begin with a definition of the term :—revelation signifies information supernaturally communicated ; and according to this general definition, it comprehends not only the discovery of truths which lay beyond the range of reason, but the publication, with new evidence and lustre, of such truths as are within its reach, but of which, in its present corrupt state, it had not been able to form distinct conceptions.

The first remark which I make is, that a revelation is possible. There is no reason to doubt, that he who had imparted to man a certain degree of light, by endowing him with intellectual powers, might impart to him a higher degree by some other means. In doing so, he would only act the same part with a person of superior talents and acquirements, who should make known to his pupils, by oral instruction, certain recondite truths which their utmost efforts could not have discovered. The subject may be illustrated by another comparison. Revelation is to the mind what a glass is to the eye, whether it be intended to correct some accidental defect in its structure, or to extend its power of vision beyond its natural limits. God, when he gave understanding to man, did not exert himself to the utmost of his power ; nor did he come under an obligation never to enlarge this faculty, or to furnish it with extraordinary assistance. If man should sustain any injury in the intellectual part of his nature, there was nothing to hinder his benevolent Creator from repairing it ; nor, if he should be brought into such circumstances that new knowledge was needed, was there any physical or moral cause which could prevent him from affording it. Revelation does not imply a reflection upon the original work of God, as if he had made man an intelligent creature, but afterwards found that the degree of intelligence was not adequate to the purposes of his being. The most zealous advocates for revelation maintain that reason, in its pure state, was perfectly sufficient for all the ends which it was intended to accomplish, and that the necessity of revelation arises from a new state of things, superinduced by man himself. He now needs more light, and it is the business of revelation to impart that light. All reasoning, the object of which is to establish the prior impossibility of a revelation, is manifestly absurd.

But attempts have been made to prove this point by arguments of a different kind. Doubts have been raised, whether a revelation could be made, because it does not appear how a person could be certain that it was a genuine revelation, and not a dream or an illusion of fancy. “Enthusiasts,” it has been said, “who are prompted only by a wild imagination, and persons in a phrensy, or the raving fit of a fever, are as fully satisfied of the reality of the things represented to them, and convinced of the truth and soundness of their own notions, as those are whose senses are clear and perfect, and whose reason is in its full vigour.” On this ground, it has been represented as not easy to conceive how the prophets and apostles, as we call them, could have been so confident as they were that God had in reality made any revelation to them. But this argument is so foolish, that it may seem equally foolish to give a serious answer to it. What is the amount of it ? It is this,—that there is much imposture in the world, and therefore there is no truth ; that many persons are deceived, and therefore no man can know that he is in the right. To what purpose tell us of the dreams of enthusiasts, or of men labouring under fever or lunacy ? We are speaking of persons in the full possession of their senses ; for those to whom divine communications were made, although powerfully impressed, and strongly excited to act under their impulse, were not agitated like the priests of Baal, or the Pythoness of Delphi, but retained the calm exercise of their faculties, and were able to distinguish among their thoughts those which could be traced to a natural cause, and those which proceeded from a higher source. Besides the objection is

founded on a supposition, than which one more absurd cannot be conceived, that although God might make a communication to the mind of an individual, he could not convince that individual that it was a communication from himself. He could infuse ideas into his mind, but he could not enable him to discern whether they were true or false, whether there was any thing real in them, or they were the shadowy creations of fancy. A man can assure his correspondent, that the message which he receives, comes from him, and not from another ; but God, it seems, possesses no means of authenticating his declarations. It must for ever remain uncertain, whether they are the dictates of infinite wisdom, or the offspring of a disordered brain. The man who should think that there is any force or even any degree of plausibility in this argument against the possibility of a revelation, may be justly considered as destitute of common sense. I can hardly believe that any infidel was ever so stupid as to lay any stress upon it ; and am disposed to suspect that it may be referred rather to the malice, than to the cool judgment of those by whom it has been retailed. We, indeed, cannot tell how inspired men distinguished divine communications from the suggestions of their own minds, for this obvious reason, that they have not informed us, and we have not experienced such communications. But our ignorance ought not to be opposed to their knowledge, and to the unquestionable fact, that God could stamp upon his communications infallible signatures of truth.

But although a person, to whom a divine communication was made, might be fully assured of the source from which it came, it has been objected, that the assurance must remain with himself, as there are no means by which he can produce a similar conviction in others. To this argument it has been replied, that God might enable him to give such signs as should satisfy others that he is his messenger. But this answer, which seems to be perfectly rational, infidels are not disposed to admit, and they endeavour to evade it by various pretexts. Some of them argue as if miracles were impossible. If they mean, that there is no power by which a miracle could be performed, we may close this controversy with them, because it is manifest, that they are atheists in their hearts, whatever hypocritical professions they may make of their belief of a Deity ; if they mean, that God, having established the laws of nature, will never alter them, they assume a principle which they cannot support by a shadow of proof, and which we are at perfect liberty to deny. Is he bound by fate, like the gods of heathenism ? or has he bound himself by an immutable decree ? What should hinder him from occasionally changing his ordinary mode of operation, when some great purpose of his moral government will be accomplished by the change ? Whether would wisdom be more displayed by pursuing a uniform course, without any regard to new combinations of circumstances, or by deviating from it, to meet the emergencies which might arise in the progress of events ? It is not worth while to spend time in refuting a gratuitous assumption. If it can be shown, that a single alteration or suspension of the laws of nature ever took place, these profound speculations vanish into smoke.

But some, who admit that miracles are possible, maintain that they are not sufficient to prove a revelation, upon this ground, that there is no necessary connexion between truth and power. We acknowledge that the power of man may be, and often has been, exerted in favour of falsehood ; but what has this to do with the dispensations of an all-perfect Being, in whose eyes truth is sacred, and of whom it would be blasphemous to suppose that he would interpose to lead his creatures into error ? But the infidel will perhaps tell us, that this is not what he means. He suspects no intention in the Deity to deceive ; but he cannot place confidence in the fidelity of his messengers ; or, at least, he has no assurance that they would honestly deliver their message

and religiously abstain from adding to it, or taking from it. They may alter it to serve a particular purpose, and may employ the miraculous power with which they are invested, to give authority and currency to imposture. But, surely, as God is thoroughly acquainted with the characters of men, and foresees their future actions, we might assume it as certain, that he would not commit a trust so important, so intimately connected with his own glory, and the happiness of his creatures, to any person by whom he foresaw that it would be abused. The supposition of its abuse is a direct impeachment of the knowledge or the wisdom of God in the arrangement of his plan. Besides, no man who believes that God has power over his creatures, over their minds as well as their bodies, can doubt that he is able to exert, and would exert, a controlling influence upon his servants, which would prevent them from corrupting, and suppress all desire to corrupt, the revelation which they were appointed to deliver to the world. They would be thus far passive in his hands, that they could not frustrate his design in selecting them. It is vain to tell us that men are voluntary agents; for while we admit this truth, we know that their freedom does not render them independent of their Maker; that by some mysterious link, it is connected with the immutability of his counsel; and that their liberty is unimpaired at the moment when they are fulfilling what he had determined before to be done. But there is another consideration, which will still more clearly demonstrate the absurdity of the supposition, that men may apply to a different purpose the miraculous powers with which they are endowed in order to attest revelation. Infidels seem to suppose, that a man may possess the power of working miracles, in the same manner as he possesses the power of moving his arm; that, by the gift of God, it becomes inherent in him, and is as much subject to his will as any of his natural powers. But their ideas are totally erroneous. Even among Christians, there is perhaps an indistinctness of conception upon the subject; and they speak of the power of working miracles as if it were some divine virtue, residing in the person by whom it is exercised. But in this sense, the power of working miracles was never vested in any mere man. In every case, God was the worker of the miracles; and all that belong to the prophet or apostle was to give the sign, or to pronounce the words, which the miracle immediately followed. No person ever dreamed, that, when Moses stretched out his rod over the Red Sea, he exerted a power by which its waters were divided; the account given by himself accords with the suggestions of reason on the subject: "And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided."* The same remark may be made upon all other miracles, which were equally beyond the sphere of human ability. If this statement be correct, it follows that the case supposed is altogether imaginary. No man could abuse the power of working miracles, because, to speak strictly, no man ever possessed it. The power was in God, and not in his servant; and could the servant wield the omnipotence of his Lord at his pleasure? No; he might give the usual sign, or pronounce the usual words but, if it was his intention to deceive, no effect would have followed. This argument, therefore, against the possibility of a revelation, is as destitute of force as the others. It is founded in a confusion of ideas, in a gross misapprehension of the subject, and will cause no difficulty to those who consider that men were merely the instruments of the miracles which God was pleased to work by his immediate power.

Having shown that a revelation is possible, and pointed out the futility of the pretexts, by which a proposition so simple and obvious has been perplexed

* Exod. xiv. 21.

I remark, in the next place, that it is desirable. In this sentiment, all will concur but those who account religious truth a matter of absolute indifference, or who believe that reason is sufficient for all the discoveries which are necessary to guide men to virtue and happiness. Infidels adopt the latter principle, but at the same time give abundant evidence that they are influenced by the former. In no part of their conduct is there any indication of reverence for religious truth, and of a sincere desire to discover it; but they continually betray symptoms of levity and impiety, a contempt for seriousness, a disposition to cavil rather than to inquire, to muster up objections, to perplex evidence, to involve every thing in doubt, and to turn the most solemn of all subjects into ridicule; so that, it should seem, that there is nothing which they are less eager to discover than truth, and that nothing would be so unwelcome as a clear and convincing manifestation of it. But, whatever are the thoughts of men devoted to pleasure, and living without God in the world, every person, who feels that he is an accountable being, must be desirous to know by what means he may fulfil the design of his existence, and obtain the happiness of which his nature is capable.

That a revelation is desirable is evident from what you heard in the preceding lecture. I there considered reason as a source of theology, and proved its insufficiency to give us satisfactory information respecting the doctrines of natural religion. It is proper, in this place, to take a short review of the observations which were made upon this subject. It appeared, that the existence of one God, which is the fundamental principle of religion, is not discoverable by reason, or, at least, cannot be discovered by it with such clearness as to produce a firm, permanent, and practical conviction of it in the mind. Hence we find, that not only did the people in all heathen nations fall into polytheism and the grossest superstition, but the philosophers patronised, by their example, the errors of the vulgar; and if they sometimes spoke of one God in their writings, there was nothing like certainty and consistency in their opinions. Amidst their speculations, the idea occurred to them, but obscurity hung upon it, and to the wisest of them he remained an unknown God. It appeared also, that their notions of his relation to man were exceedingly imperfect. None of them believed a proper creation, all holding the eternity of matter; and their views of providence, even when they approached nearest to the truth, were very different from those which we have learned from revelation, as they maintained the doctrine of fate, to whose irresistible decrees the gods, as well as men, were compelled to bow. It appeared further, that, although they had made greater progress in the science of morality, the general precepts of which are suggested by conscience, by the relations subsisting among men, and by means of private and public utility, they were not able to deliver a perfect code of duty. In their best systems, there were great defects; virtue was mistaken for vice, and vice for virtue; there were omissions which ought to have been supplied, and redundancies which ought to have been retrenched. Besides, their moral precepts wanted authority; in proportion as the sanctions of religion were imperfectly understood, their power over the heart was feeble; they were rather themes of declamation than rules of practice, and proved utterly insufficient to render the teachers themselves virtuous, and, as might be naturally expected, to restrain the torrent of licentiousness among the people. Lastly, it appeared, that with respect to the immortality of the soul, the wisest men lived and died in doubt. In the popular creed, future rewards and punishments had a place; but they were treated with derision by those who boasted of superior wisdom, partly on account of the ridiculous manner in which they were described by the poets and partly because they rested upon no solid ground. They were reputed

tales of the nursery, or the fictions of poets. The light of nature was too feeble to dispel the darkness which enveloped the world beyond the grave.

A revelation was desirable, although had it gone no further than to solve those doubts, and to shed light upon the doctrines of natural religion. These were interesting to all, and engaged the particular attention of men of reflection; but the success of their inquiries by no means corresponded with the earnestness of their wishes. In these circumstances, would not revelation be acceptable, as is the rising of the sun to the bewildered traveller, who is anxiously seeking the road to the place of his destination, but cannot find it amidst the darkness of the night? There are several passages in the writings of the heathens which show, that while they were sensible of their ignorance, they were persuaded that there was no remedy for it but in a divine interposition. "The truth is," says Plato, speaking of future rewards and punishments, "to determine or establish any thing certain about these matters, in the midst of so many doubts and disputations, is the work of God only." Again, one of the speakers, in his *Phædo*, says to Socrates concerning the immortality of the soul, "I am of the same opinion with you, that, in this life, it is either absolutely impossible, or extremely difficult, to arrive at a clear knowledge in this matter." In his apology for Socrates, he puts these words into his mouth, on the subject of the reformation of manners: "You may pass the remainder of your days in sleep, or despair of finding out a sufficient expedient for this purpose, if God, in his providence, do not send you some other instruction." But the most remarkable passage is in the dialogue between Socrates and Alcibiades, on the duties of religious worship. The design of the dialogue is to convince Alcibiades that men labour under so much ignorance, that they should be exceedingly cautious in their addresses to the gods, and should content themselves with very general prayers, or what is better, not pray at all. "To me," he says, "it seems best to be quiet; it is necessary to wait till you learn how you ought to behave towards the gods, and towards men." "When," exclaims Alcibiades, "when, O Socrates! shall that time be, and who will instruct me, for most willingly would I see this man who he is?" "He is one," replies Socrates, "who cares for you; but, as Homer represents Minerva as taking away darkness from the eyes of Diomedes, that he might distinguish a god from a man, so it is necessary that he should first take away the darkness from your mind, and then bring near those things by which you shall know good and evil." "Let him take away," rejoins Alcibiades, "if he will, the darkness or any other thing, for I am prepared to decline none of those things which are commanded by him, whoever this man is, if I shall be made better."* The passage is truly curious, and deserves particular attention from us at this time, as a proof of the longings of nature for such a revelation as has been since given to the world. The wisest philosopher of antiquity acknowledged it to be necessary, and ventures to anticipate it, without, however, knowing what he said. His disciple was transported at the thought, and professed his readiness to submit to the lessons of his teacher. It is only among the present race of unbelievers, the Socrateses and Platos of modern times, as they would have us to account them, that the idea of a revelation is held up to ridicule, and the self-sufficiency of reason is maintained.

What were the ideas of the heathens in general with respect to a revelation, we may infer from some parts of their religion. Their prayers were applications to the gods for direction and assistance in the conduct of affairs; their priests and priestesses, whom they believed to be inspired, their omens and auguries, and their oracles which they consulted in cases of difficulty, were so many testimonies to the general conviction, that the ignorance and infirmity

* *Platonis Alcibiad. ii.*

of man rendered intercourse with beings of superior wisdom and power necessary to his welfare. It was thus that the defects of reason would be supplied. What man knew not, the gods could teach him; and it was chiefly to the temple of Apollo, the god of wisdom, that the Greeks, and persons from other nations, repaired, to obtain the responses of the oracle in matters of public and private interest.

Revelation would be desirable, even although reason were capable of discovering all the truths of natural religion. It would not follow, upon that supposition, that they were so obvious as to be discovered without any labour. The exercise of our mental powers would be necessary to collect the proofs of the existence and government of God, and to trace our duty in its manifold ramifications. There are no innate ideas in the human mind, no ideas with which we are born, and which we perceive intuitively as soon as reason begins to dawn; all our knowledge is derived from observation and experience. Hence it is evident, that a revelation would facilitate the acquisition of knowledge to all, and particularly to those whose intellectual faculties were originally not strong, and had not been improved by education, and whose daily occupations afforded them little leisure for inquiry and reflection. It cannot be denied, that a great part of mankind labour under disadvantages for the discovery of truth; that they are apt to be misled by false opinions, and distracted by worldly cares, and to neglect those objects which require abstraction of mind and patient investigation. The infidel himself is compelled, by indisputable facts, to acknowledge, that, whatever power he ascribes to reason, it has generally failed to lead men to a rational system of religion; nay, that such a system was never established by its aid, in any nation, or even in any school of philosophy. It is manifest, therefore, that if a revelation had been granted to point out at once the conclusions at which reason could have arrived only by a tedious process, it would have been an invaluable gift to the world. Upon this subject, we can entertain no doubt. A revelation has been granted, and what is the consequence? The doctrines of natural religion are better understood than they were at any former period; they are known not only to men of studious and contemplative minds, but to the illiterate; we become acquainted with them at the outset of life; and there are thousands of young persons in a Christian country, whose knowledge far exceeds that of the most distinguished heathen philosopher. They have learned by a few lessons more than he could acquire by the painful researches of a long life.

We have proved, however, that reason is not sufficient to discover the truths of natural religion; and, consequently, that revelation was not only desirable, but necessary, to deliver men from a state of ignorance at once shameful and perilous. And this necessity will be more apparent, if we consider that they were not only ignorant but guilty, fallen from innocence and happiness, condemned by the law of nature, a clearer discovery of which would have served only to impress more strongly on their minds a conviction of demerit, and to heighten the dread of their offended Creator. The republication of the law of nature would have done nothing to quiet their apprehensions and revive their hopes; on the contrary, it would have had the same effect as would take place in the case of a criminal, who, suspecting that he was doomed to punishment, should have the sentence of death put into his hands, distinctly written, and authenticated by the signature of the judge. Still he knows that his prince can reprieve him; but whether he will extend mercy to him, he cannot learn from the law which has condemned him, but by a new communication, transmitted in a different channel. The situation of men, in consequence of sin, is like that of the criminal. The law under which they were made has pronounced sentence upon them; the lawgiver, according to the best conceptions which they can form of his character, is just, and able

to maintain the authority of his law. There is, indeed, a display of goodness and patience in his administration, but it is so intermixed with tokens of his wrath, that the hope to which it may give rise is faint and fluctuating; and unbiassed reason must come to this conclusion, that the guilty have every thing to fear. If the lawgiver has any merciful design towards his rebellious subjects, it is a secret in his own breast, and all our speculations on the subject are conjectural and presumptuous. In the commencement of our course, while we have not yet proved that a revelation has been given, I cannot quote any parts of it as possessing more authority than belongs to the sayings of an ordinary man, which are agreeable to the dictates of reason and common sense. The following words of the apostle of the Gentiles are brought forward merely as a just representation of the state of the case:—"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so, the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God."* As the thoughts of a man are known to none but himself; as he alone is conscious of them, and they remain concealed from others, unless he disclose them by external signs; so the counsels of God with respect to his fallen creatures are a mystery, hidden from every eye but his own, a secret which no sagacity could explore. And those counsels are so much above our conceptions, so different from any thing which appears in creation and providence, that no idea of them would have ever occurred to the human mind in its loftiest excursions. It is evident, therefore, that a revelation is necessary for the information of man, in the new circumstances in which he was placed. He wanted to know whether the Deity was placable; whether he was disposed to exercise clemency to offenders; upon what terms he would receive them into favour, and by what expedient he would adjust the claims of mercy and justice. Who does not see, that in reference to points so interesting, but so obscure, none could give him satisfaction but God himself? If a revelation had not been granted, there would not have been any religion in the world. What natural religion actually is, you will learn, not from the factitious systems of Christian writers, but from its state among heathen nations; and although it is hardly worthy to be accounted religion, yet if you are disposed to give it this name, remember that any portion of truth which it contains is not derived from unassisted reason, but from tradition, and that it is probably owing to this cause that it has not become utterly extinct. Revelation is indisputably the sole origin of the religion which we profess. Without it, we should have been profoundly ignorant of the Saviour in whom we believe, and of the promises which are the ground of our hope.

I have endeavoured to show that a revelation is possible and desirable, and proceeding a step farther, have affirmed that it is necessary. This necessity arises from the ignorance of mankind respecting points of the greatest importance, which could be remedied by no other means. It was necessary that light should be thrown upon those primary truths, in which we conceive man to have been at first instructed by his Maker, but which his dim-sighted reason could no longer discern in their original purity and beauty; and that new discoveries should be made to him, adapted to the exigencies of the new situation in which he had been placed by his apostacy from God. This general view of the design of revelation leads me to inquire what, upon a calm and unbiassed view of the subject, we might previously expect to be its nature and character.

* 1 Cor. ii. 9—11.

First,—we might expect it to contain all the information which man wants, as a moral and accountable being. We cannot conceive any design with which it should be given, but to communicate to us the knowledge of God, and of our duty to him, and to point out the means of regaining his favour, and rising to perfection and felicity. Proceeding as it does, according to the hypothesis, from the Fountain of wisdom and goodness, it must be perfect, like his other works; that is, it must be fitted to answer its end. Neither defect nor redundancy would be consistent with the character of its author. But remember that its end is religion; and that if it accomplish this end, it is worthy of God, although there should be many other ends, and these, too, of importance to mankind, to which it is not adapted. There is much knowledge which is useful and necessary to us in the present life, but which it would be unreasonable to expect that a divine revelation should teach us. There is the knowledge of the arts, by which human life is sustained, and cheered, and adorned, and the knowledge of the sciences, which not only gratify curiosity, but lend their aid to improve the arts, and promote in various ways our temporal interests. But revelation says nothing about them, because they are not connected with its main design, and here reason is perfectly sufficient. There are also many questions, relative to the nature of God and our own, the constitution of the universe, the phenomena of the moral world, and a future state of existence, of which it would gratify us much to obtain a satisfactory solution; and to some idle speculatists, information concerning them would be more acceptable than communications of unspeakably greater importance. But these questions have nothing to do with our duty, and although they were all answered to our complete satisfaction, they would make us neither wiser nor better; they would not relieve a guilty conscience, or console an afflicted heart. It is for purposes of greater moment that the God of heaven will deviate from his usual course; it is to send down some rays of celestial light to our benighted world, to show us the path to glory and immortality.

Secondly,—we might expect a revelation to deliver its instructions rather in an authoritative than in an argumentative manner. The argumentative manner is proper, when we are addressed by men who have no title to be heard, unless they give reasons for what they say, or content themselves with the idle labour of repeating self-evident propositions. The authoritative manner has been sometimes adopted by certain professed teachers of wisdom, but they had to deal with a very credulous audience, or they had contrived previously to establish a belief of their superior attainments. Pythagoras enjoined silence upon his disciples for a certain number of years, during which they were to give an implicit assent; and *αυτος εφη, he said it*, passed current among them as sufficient authority. But, whatever blind submission there may be among mankind to the dictates of others, it is generally reprobated as unworthy of our rational nature. It is demanded of him who pretends to teach others, that he should prove what he affirms, because it is evidence only which can produce rational conviction, and no man has a right to call upon others to follow him, unless he can show them that the way is safe. But a different procedure is suitable to a divine revelation. It comes from the Source of wisdom, who is not liable to err, and can have no intention to deceive us; from the Author of our being, who has a right to require that we should serve him with the submission of our understandings, as well as with the love of our hearts. Revelation is not a counsel, but a law. It is not proposed as a subject of deliberation, which may be accepted or rejected according to the result; but it is a declaration of the will of the supreme Lord, which all, to whom it is published, are bound to obey. Nothing would be more unjust than to object against a revelation, because it was propounded in a tone of authority. The

objection, however, was made when the Christian revelation was promulgated; and we find Celsus, who expressed the sentiments of other philosophers, exclaiming against our religion and its ministers, because, instead of reasoning with men, they required them to believe. The objection would have been well founded, if, without producing any proof of the divine origin of the gospel, they had insisted that men should believe it; but after the evidence had been exhibited they acted in character when, speaking in the name of God, they commanded their hearers to acquiesce in the dictates of his wisdom, without murmuring and disputing. If in this stage of the business I may be allowed to appeal to the revelation which has been given to the world, it will be found that although reasoning is employed on particular occasions, upon the whole it is delivered in an authoritative form. There is a striking example at the beginning of it, for the account of the creation is not supported by a single argument, but is delivered in a simple narrative, to be received upon the authority of the writer or rather of God, by whom he was inspired.

Lastly,—we might expect that there would be some difficulties in a divine revelation. At first it might seem that difficulties would be inconsistent with its design, which is, as the word imports, to discover what is unknown, and to illuminate what is obscure. But a little reflection would convince us that even here perfect light is not to be looked for. Such a degree might be reasonably expected, as should fully assure us of the great doctrines and duties of religion, but not so much as to give us complete satisfaction respecting all the points of which we might wish to be informed. Revelation speaks of the things of God; and how could they be made plain to our understandings? Language, being the vehicle of human thought, could not convey a distinct account of subjects which the human faculties are unable to comprehend. There are facts relative to the essence and the dispensations of the Almighty which it may be necessary that we should know, because our duty may be intimately connected with them, but which it may be impossible to explain to us. Revelation demands faith; and pure faith is an act of the mind, by which it assents to certain facts, or propositions upon the authority of testimony, without having any other evidence of their truth. Faith is therefore more perfect, in proportion as the thing to be believed possesses less credibility in itself, and rests solely upon the veracity of the testifier. Hence we may conceive a great moral purpose to be served by the difficulties which are found in revelation. Whether in some cases they might not have been avoided, is a question which we are not competent to discuss; but they are so far from counteracting, that they promote the design of revelation, which is to make us not only wise, but good, to exercise our moral as well as our intellectual powers. Difficulties are a trial of man's dispositions, like our Lord himself in the state of humiliation and suffering, who to some was precious, but to others a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. They call for docility and humble submission to divine authority; and wherever these tempers are, revelation will be cordially received. But the men who are elated by the pride of science will not stoop to authority, and refuse to believe what they cannot comprehend. They must do as they have a mind. If, notwithstanding the luminous evidence with which revelation is attended, they will reject it because every part is not adjusted by the square and compass of reason, they only betray their own folly and presumption, and they must abide the consequences.

LECTURE IV.

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

HAS a Revelation been given?—Inquiry confined to Christianity—On the genuineness of the Christian Scriptures: Account of the Books of the Old Testament; The Pentateuch; Historical and circumstantial Evidence of its Genuineness stated: General Observations respecting the other Books—Apocryphal Books.

IN the preceding lecture, I showed that a revelation is possible; that it is desirable; and that it is necessary. I concluded by stating the general expectations which might be previously entertained respecting its contents.

Let us now proceed to inquire whether a revelation has been actually given; whether there is ground to believe that what reason could not teach us, has been made known to us by supernatural means. Pretensions to revelation have been common, of which we have examples in the Sybilline Oracles of the Romans, and the sacred books of the Persians and Hindoos; but it is not necessary to examine their claims, since, with one consent, they are acknowledged to be impostures. Nor shall we spend our time in considering the pretended revelation of Mahomet, which has been received by a large portion of the human race in Asia, Africa, and Europe. Its author was able to produce no evidence of its divine origin, but his own affirmation that it was communicated to him by the angel Gabriel. If he talked of miracles, they were such as had been witnessed by himself alone, and consequently were no ground of belief to others. He appealed, indeed, to the intrinsic excellence of the Koran, as an evidence that it had emanated from a higher source than human ingenuity, and has thus subjected it to the test of criticism. The beauty of the style has been extolled by competent judges, but this amounts only to a proof of the taste of the composer, and, at the most, entitles it to be ranked with the elegant productions of other ages and countries. But it is the language only which has a claim to admiration; an acquaintance with the matter is sufficient to convince us that it is the work of a man, and of a man by no means pre-eminent in intellectual attainments. It is a farrago of incoherent rhapsodies; it abounds in silly and puerile remarks; and, had it appeared among a people whose taste and judgment were disciplined by literature and science, it would have excited universal disgust and contempt. A few passages have been often quoted as specimens of the true sublime, but they have obtained praise much beyond their merit, in consequence of the wretched stuff amidst which they appear, as a green spot planted with trees and abounding in springs, seems a paradise to the traveller who has been journeying for many days in the parched and sandy desert. After all, the passages which have been so much extolled are not original, but have evidently been borrowed from our Scriptures, and have suffered injury in passing through the clumsy hands of the impostor. Posterior to the Jewish and Christian revelations, the Koran is indebted to them for any portion of truth, for any noble sentiments which it contains; and these are neutralized by its falsehoods and immoralities. It does not exhibit a single character of divinity; it is fraught with ridiculous stories and superstitious precepts; while, without any reason, it inculcates total abstinence from wine, it grants almost unbounded license to the sexual appetite; the punishments which it denounces in the future state, although terrible to our animal nature, have been conceived by a low and childish imagination; and the paradise which it promises to his followers is a brothel. We presume

that if a revelation come from God, it will be distinguished by the signatures of his moral perfections, as a work of man discovers the powers and dispositions of the mind which contrived it. The Koran is stamped with the express image and superscription of the profligate in whose brain it was concocted; and in the absence of all internal and external evidence of its truth, it was first propagated and is still supported by the sword. Its success proves only that Mahomet was a conqueror, and that his followers, stimulated to frenzy by enthusiasm, were too strong for the nations whose dominions they invaded under the standard of the crescent. There is not an instance of a nation which embraced the religion of Mahomet from a calm, unbiassed investigation of its claims.

No alleged revelation has any semblance of truth but that which is contained in our Scriptures, as infidels themselves will acknowledge. They reject, indeed, every revelation; but they cannot deny that there are arguments in its favour, to meet which, they have been compelled to call forth all the resources of their ingenuity. Mahomet was evidently a favourite with Gibbon, and he has employed all the force of his eloquence to depict the heroism of his followers, and the success of his arms; but he did not for a moment suppose him to be a prophet, or attribute his procedure to any higher cause than enthusiasm or imposture. Other infidels content themselves with laughing at his religion; but besides ridicule, they find it necessary to bring the most powerful arguments which their cause can furnish, to bear against Christianity. It is on this account, and because it is the religion which we have adopted, that our attention shall be exclusively directed to it; and, if we succeed in establishing its divine origin, we virtually disprove all other revelations, because it is obvious, that contradictory systems cannot all proceed from a Being of whom truth is an essential attribute.

Before we can establish the truth of revelation, we must ascertain what it is, and where it is to be found. There are certain books in which it is said to be contained, commonly called the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament; and that these are faithful records can be known only by ascertaining that they are genuine, that they are the writings of the persons whose names they bear, or to whom they are ascribed. This is the first step, and it leads to a proof of their authenticity. Let me request your attention to the difference between these two words, which are sometimes confounded. When we call a writing *genuine*, we mean that it is really the composition of the person whom it claims as its author; when we call it *authentic*, we mean that its contents are true, that it possesses authority to command belief. These qualities are by no means inseparable. A book may be genuine which is not authentic, because it is a mere assemblage of fictions and falsehoods. On the other hand, a book may be authentic, that is, may contain information on which dependence should be placed, although it was written by a different person from its reputed author. But genuineness and authenticity are inseparably connected in the case of the sacred writings; for if we can show that they were written by the persons whose names they bear, it follows that they are worthy of credit; because, had their contents not been true, they would not have been received, as in fact they were, by those to whom they were addressed.

The necessity of ascertaining the genuineness of the Scriptures will be manifest upon reflection. They relate miracles; but how do we know that the miracles were actually performed? This is one argument in favour of them, that the books were published at the time of the miracles, and were then received; for it is evident, that, if the miracles had not been really wrought, the narrative would have been rejected as fabulous. It is only on the supposition of their genuineness, that we can believe their report of supernatural facts to be true. They contain prophecies; but, whether these are to be

considered as true predictions, can be determined only by the fact, that the books were written prior to the events which they profess to foretell. You see, then, the reason why, in endeavouring to demonstrate the truth of our religion, we begin with an examination of its records. I shall consider them in the order of publication.

I begin with those of the Old Testament. That they existed in the state in which we now find them, in the days of our Saviour and his immediate followers, is evident from his references to them under the titles of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms; and from the numerous quotations from them by the evangelists and apostles. Among the Jews, the Law signified the five books of Moses; and the Prophets and Holy Writings, or, as they were sometimes called, the Psalms, because this was the first or principal book in this division, comprehended all the rest. We have also the testimony of Josephus,* who wrote in the first century, and informs us, that the Jews had twenty-two sacred books; five of Moses, thirteen of the Prophets, and four containing hymns and moral precepts. You might think, in counting the books, that Josephus has omitted some of them, because you find that there are actually thirty-nine: it is therefore proper to inform you, that the Jews made an arrangement corresponding to their alphabet, which contained only twenty-two letters, and reduced the Sacred Writings to the same number, by making a single book of the twelve minor Prophets, a single book of the Prophecies and Lamentations of Jeremiah; and by joining in one the two books of Samuel, the two books of Kings, the two books of Chronicles, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the books of Judges and Ruth. By a small change in the classification, the modern Jews have made the number twenty-four.

Having found the Jewish Scriptures in the days of our Saviour, we can trace them two or three hundred years back to the time when they were translated into Greek. The version is known by the name of the Septuagint, because it has been supposed to be the work of seventy or seventy-two interpreters, who came for this purpose from Judea to Egypt at the request of Ptolemy Philadelphus. Many strange stories have been circulated about it; and in particular, Justin Martyr relates that they were shut up in separate cells, where each made a translation; that when the translations were compared, they were found to agree to a tittle, and that Ptolemy being convinced, as well he might, that they were supernaturally assisted, held them in high honour, and having bountifully rewarded them, sent them back to their own country. The story is now exploded as fabulous; and it is wonderful that it was ever believed. No man who has read the translation can suppose that the authors were inspired. It is full of mistakes and errors, deviates widely from the original in many instances, and sometimes presents passages which it would require an oracle to explain. Its true history is obscure. It is not certain that even the Pentateuch was translated by the order of Ptolemy. It is probable that it was undertaken by the Jews in Egypt, who, not understanding Hebrew, were anxious to have the Scriptures in the vernacular tongue; and that the five books of Moses having been turned into Greek, to be used in the synagogues, where the law was read once a year, the other books were added at different times. The purpose for which I have referred to this translation is, to show that at the time when it was made, the Jews possessed the same books which they still acknowledge as divine.

I am not aware that any information respecting them can be derived from any foreign source, at a period more remote. I presume, however, that it will not be denied that they existed in the days of Ezra, about whose time the canon was completed by the writings of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

* Joseph. cont. Apion. lib. i.

If we will not believe the Jews, when they tell us that the books are inspired, we surely may believe them when they affirm, on the faith of uninterrupted tradition, that they were in being at the termination of the Babylonian captivity. As we are certain that their religion was then observed with all its forms and institutions, we cannot doubt that they possessed the law upon which the whole ritual is founded. We may rest in this conclusion with the more confidence, as no person has ventured to suggest that the books were forged after that period.

I have said that they then possessed the Law; and in what follows, I shall direct your attention to the books of Moses. If we may give credit to the historical books of the Old Testament, merely as a narrative of facts, as containing the annals of the nation,—and there is no more reason for calling in question their credibility than those of other national records,—we shall be able to trace back the law of Moses within a few years after his death. In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, there are numerous references to it, and it was publicly read in their days in an assembly of the people. During the time of the captivity, express mention is made of it by Daniel in his solemn prayer and confession, recorded in the ninth chapter of his prophecies;* and such mention, as being incidental, carries irresistible evidence of its existence. During the reign of Josiah, not long before the captivity, a copy was found in the temple;† and from the attention which it excited, and the impression made by its contents, it is probable that it was the autograph of Moses, the identical copy written with his own hands, which was deposited in the tabernacle. We can trace it in the reign of Hezekiah, when all things were done “according to the law of Moses the man of God:”‡ in the reign of Jehosaphat, who sent judges through the land, who had “the book of the law of the Lord with them,” and “taught the people:”|| in the reigns of David and Solomon, for we find the former before his death charging the latter “to keep the statutes and commandments, the judgments and testimonies of the Lord, as it is written in the law of Moses.”§ During the succession of judges, this law was the rule according to which they governed the people; and this was the charge of Joshua to the Israelites, “Be ye very courageous to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left.”¶ Unless the whole history of the Israelites be rejected as a forgery,—and on better ground we might reject the history of the Greeks and Romans,—the repeated references which are made to the law of Moses, plainly with no design but to appeal to it as the law of the land, furnish sufficient evidence that it existed, not as a tradition, but in writing, from his own time down to the close of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Let not the evidence be deemed defective because we cannot produce testimonies that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch from contemporary writers. If there were any at that remote period, their works and their memory have perished. “The Jews, as a nation,” says Sumner, in his *Treatise on the Records of the Creation*, “were always in obscurity, the certain consequence, not only of their situation, but of the peculiar constitution and jealous nature of their government. Can it then reasonably be expected that we should obtain positive testimony concerning this small and insulated nation from foreign historians, when the most ancient of these, whose works remain, lived more than a thousand years posterior to Moses? Can we look for it from the Greeks, when Thucydides has declared that even respecting his own countrymen he could procure no authentic record prior to the Trojan war? or from the Romans, who had scarcely begun to be a people when the

* Verses 11 and 13.
‖ 2 Chron. xvii. 9.

† 2 Kings xxii. 8.
‡ 1 Kings ii. 3.

‡ 2 Chron. xxx. 16.
¶ Joshua xxiii. 6

empire of Jerusalem was destroyed and the whole nation reduced to captivity ?”^{*} Such profane testimony as he can produced serves only to show what was the prevailing opinion among heathens ; and when we find them not only recording many of the facts in the narrative of Moses, but speaking of him by name, and referring to his law, we conclude that no doubt was entertained that he was the lawgiver of the Jews, or that his writings were genuine. Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, Tacitus, Juvenal, and Longinus make mention of him and his writings, in the same manner as we appeal to Cicero and his works.

It is the interest of infidels to bring into doubt the genuineness of the Pentateuch : but, having no solid argument to advance, they endeavour to gain their end by assertions, conjectures, and cavils. We can easily see the design with which such men as Hobbes and Spinoza have maintained that the books commonly ascribed to Moses are called his, not because they were written by him, but because they treat of him and his actions. But this opinion has been adopted by some professed Christians, and particularly by two persons well known to theological scholars, the celebrated critic Father Simon, and the not less celebrated Le Clerc. But while they agree in denying that the Pentateuch is the genuine work of Moses, they differ in the grounds of their opinion, and Le Clerc labours to prove that the arguments of Simon are false. His own views of the subject were truly singular. He supposed that the Pentateuch was drawn up by the priest who was sent from Babylon to instruct, in the manner of the god of the land, the new inhabitants whom the king of Assyria had planted in the room of the Israelites ; and that with a view to reclaim these from idolatry, he undertook to give them a history of the creation and of the Jews to the giving of the law ; from which it would appear that there was only one God, and that it was he whom the Israelites worshipped. The priests in Jerusalem, he adds, would approve of the work, finding nothing in it but what was pious and true ; and the Samaritans would receive it, because it came from a person whom they did not suspect. This hypothesis has the character of boldness, but I do not see that there is any other quality to recommend it. It is conjectural, improbable, and contrary, not only to the uniform belief of the whole Jewish nation, but also to the testimony of inspiration. He endeavours to support it by an induction of particulars collected from the books which he pretends to be of such a nature that they could not have been written by Moses himself, and therefore prove that the books are falsely ascribed to him. To this objection a satisfactory answer has been returned by different authors, and particularly by Witsius, in the fourteenth chapter of the first book of his *Dissertation de Prophetis et Prophetia*. It is easy to show that some of the particulars might have been written by Moses, and that others which betray a later hand might have been added for illustration when places had changed their names, and certain facts had ceased to be known. “A small addition to a book,” it has been observed, “does not destroy either the genuineness or the authenticity of the whole book.”[†] It is probable that Clericus hastily adopted this opinion ; it is certain that on mature reflection, he renounced it,[‡] and acquiesced in the common belief of Jews and Christians, which is confirmed by the testimony of our Lord and his apostles, that the first five books of the Bible were written by Moses.

In corroboration of the historical evidence, we may establish the point by reasoning founded on the circumstances of the case. When we affirm that the writings of Moses are genuine, he who denies the assertion is bound to assign his reasons for dissenting from the common opinion. If, however, he shall devolve on us the burden of proof, we would ask him, Since you allege

^{*} Vol. i. p. 32.

[†] Bishop Watson's *Apol. for the Bible*, Letter iii.

[‡] Cleric. *Prolegom. in Pentateuch. Dissert. iii. de Scriptore Pentateuchi*.

that they were of a more recent date, at what time were they composed and published? Did they appear immediately after the death of Moses? Their contents were true or false. Suppose that they were true,—by which supposition only can we account for their having been received by men who were contemporaries of Moses and witnesses of many of the facts which are related,—in this case, the argument in favour of the Jewish religion is precisely the same as if they had been written by Moses himself. But let us suppose them to be false,—and it is solely with a design to create a suspicion of this kind, that any infidel is anxious to prove them not to be genuine,—it was impossible, if they were false, that they could have obtained any credit; because, in this case, every person was a competent judge whether the things related to have taken place within his own memory had really happened. The Israelites would not have believed that the Red Sea was divided to afford them a passage; that they had journeyed for forty years in the wilderness; that during all that time a miraculous cloud had covered them by day, and a fire had illuminated their dwellings by night; that they had been supplied with food which daily fell around their camp; that God had published his law with an audible voice, and punished the violation of it with terrible plagues;—they would not have believed these things if the whole narrative had been a fiction. It would have excited their ridicule as a clumsy and monstrous romance; or their indignation, as an audacious attempt to wreath a yoke about their necks which they were not able to bear. It is morally impossible that the books of Moses could have been received in the age immediately after his death, if their contents had been false; and highly improbable, that although true, they would have been considered as his writings if they had been set forth by some other person in his name, and had not appeared till he was lying in his grave. In either case, but particularly in the first, they would have been rejected by universal consent, and would have long since disappeared; and it is probable that at this distance of time it would not have been known that such an imposition had ever been attempted.

But the objector may pretend that the Pentateuch was published as the genuine work of Moses at a later period, when there were none to contradict its statements from personal experience. Let us assume this hypothesis. It is acknowledged that forged writings have been repeatedly palmed upon the world, and in some cases with temporary success. It is obviously impossible to say positively that in no case the design has completely succeeded; but there have been so many instances of detection as to render it probable that no imposition of this kind has ultimately eluded discovery. Forged writings have usually been of such a nature as not materially to affect the interests of mankind at large; literary productions, for example, under the venerable name of some ancient author. We have no example of a forged code of laws brought to light after a long interval, and passed upon a nation as the work of their ancient legislators, which they were bound to adopt as the rule of their civil and political institutions. It is certain that any attempt of the kind would fail. The man would be laughed at who should come forward and say, “These are the laws of this country, enacted many ages ago, which have hitherto lain in obscurity. I call upon you to abolish your present institutions, and henceforth to regulate your affairs by this new system.” The well-known saying of the English barons, *Nolumus leges Angliæ mutari*, is expressive of the common feeling of men, who are attached to the existing laws by habit as well as by the experience of the benefit resulting from them: and are averse to hazard a change, when property, liberty, and personal safety are concerned. The Israelites would have received with astonishment the proposal to submit to a new code of laws stamped with the venerated name of Moses, their ancient deliverer. If they had listened to it with patience, they would have

demand proof that the laws had emanated from him, or from God by his ministry; we cannot conceive that they would have implicitly acquiesced, unless we should suppose them to have been first deprived of reason and common sense. "How does it appear," they would have said, "that these are the genuine laws of the man with whose name they are anctioned? If they are really his laws, how came it to pass that our fathers did not observe them, and knew nothing about them? In what archives were they deposited? In what secret place have they so long lain concealed? How came you to discover them? And what evidence do you produce to convince us that they were not fabricated by yourself?" To these questions the impostor could have returned no answer,—none, at least, which would have persuaded the people that they were bound to comply with his request. There is a manifest impossibility that the writings of Moses could have been imposed on the Israelites as his genuine productions in any posterior age. Men were not simpletons then, any more than they are at present. They had their senses as well as we; they were as much alive to their interests; they were as much the creatures of habit, as tenacious of their rights, as unwilling to be deceived. The argument becomes stronger when we attend to the nature of the laws, which, according to the hypothesis, were imposed upon the Israelites. They enjoined a cumbersome and expensive ritual; they prescribed usages which separated them from all other nations and exposed them to reproach; they required them not to till their ground once in seven years, and every fiftieth year to give liberty to their slaves and restore mortgaged lands to the original proprietors; they commanded all the males thrice a year to repair to the place of solemn worship, and thus leave the country open to the invasion of their enemies. These laws, so contrary to human policy, so fraught with danger upon the principles of common prudence, no nation would have received on the ground of a mere pretence that they were delivered by a legislator who had, many years before, been laid in the grave. Upon the whole, it is evident, to the satisfaction of every candid mind, that the laws of Moses, and the books in which they are contained, could never have obtained credit among his countrymen if they had not been published in his own lifetime, and supported by those proofs of his divine mission which this is not the proper time to consider.

I have dwelt so long upon the books of Moses, because it is of the greatest importance to ascertain their genuineness. In them the foundation was laid of the ancient dispensation, as they contain the laws and ordinances which, we believe, were significant of a better economy, and by the observance of which the Jews were distinguished as the peculiar people of God. They are introductory to the other books of the Old Testament; and if the former are admitted, there will be little difficulty in acknowledging the latter.

The book of Joshua is understood to have been written by himself, with the exception of a few verses in the end, giving an account of his death, and it is afterwards quoted under his name. It gives an account of the invasion of Canaan, the conquest of its inhabitants, and the division of the land. The book of Judges is attributed to Samuel, who most probably wrote also the book of Ruth, which may be considered as a supplement to it, although others have ascribed it, on what grounds I know not, to Hezekiah or to Ezra. Samuel is also supposed to have written the first twenty-four chapters of the book which bears his name, and by us is divided into two; the rest being added by the prophets Gad and Nathan. This opinion is founded upon the following words in the first book of Chronicles:—"Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of

Gad the seer.”* With regard to the two books of Kings, they are supposed to have been made up from annals or histories composed by different persons, of which mention is made in the Chronicles; as the acts of Solomon by Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo; the acts of Rehoboam by Iddo and Shemaiah; the acts of Jehoshaphat by Jehu; and the acts of Hezekiah by Isaiah. Perhaps the compilation was the work of Ezra; by whom, too, it is probable that the materials of the two books of Chronicles were collected and arranged. There is little doubt that the two books which follow in order were written by the persons after whom they are called; the one by Ezra, and the other by Nehemiah. The book of Esther is so designated, not because she was the author of it, but because it relates the history of that singular woman, and the deliverance which, through her means, the Jews obtained from the power of their enemies. It has been ascribed to Ezra, to Mordecai, or to the distinguished persons who lived at that time, and are known by the title of the Great Synagogue. The truth of the facts which it relates is established by the feast of Purim, which was instituted in commemoration of them, and has been ever since celebrated by the Jews.

Some consider the book of Job as a fiction of the parabolical kind, as a dramatic work founded on tradition, as an allegory, representing the sufferings and deliverance of the Jews; and assign to it a comparatively recent date. It is manifestly a true history; but by whom it was drawn up, is not certainly known. There are endless disputes upon this subject; and while some attribute it to one author and some to another, the most common opinion is, that it was the work of Job himself, or of Moses.

The book of Psalms bears the name of David, solely, however, because a considerable part of it was composed by him. It contains the poetical compositions of different persons, some of which were written before and others after his time. We do not know by whom they were collected; but the probability is in favour of Ezra, who, according to the tradition of the Jews, revised and corrected the text of the Sacred Writings.

The books attributed to Solomon are three, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs; and they are generally admitted to be genuine. Grotius, indeed, is of opinion, that Ecclesiastes is a pious and moral composition of more recent times, published in the name of Solomon, and on the subject of his repentance:† but his skepticism is of no value in opposition to uninterrupted tradition. Gibbon has adopted his opinion, and affirmed that “Ecclesiastes and the Proverbs display a larger compass of thought and experience than seem to belong either to a Jew or a king.”‡ But this is an assumption without proof. Gibbon has assigned no reason why a Jew, without supposing him to be inspired, might not have known as much of human nature as a man of any other nation; nor shown how it was impossible that a king endowed with talents of the first order, and devoted to study, should have acquired an intimate and extensive acquaintance with life and manners. The criticism is unworthy of attention. It is an arbitrary decision founded upon an arbitrary standard.

Next in order are the prophetic books, about the writers of which there is no uncertainty, as their names are prefixed to their respective works. Their genuineness, like that of any other books, is ascertained by competent testimony, namely, the testimony of those among whom they appeared, and who were particularly interested in them. They have always been assigned to the persons whose names they bear. It has been represented or affirmed that they were written after the events which they pretend to foretell. This

* 1 Chron. xxix. 29.

† Annot. ad Vet. Test.

‡ Gibbon's Hist. ch. xli note 33

charge was brought by Porphyry, the noted adversary of Christianity in the third century, against the prophecies of Daniel, which relate so particularly the transactions of the successors of Alexander the Great in Syria and Egypt, that the whole seems to be rather a narrative than a prediction. But, besides that the date is ascertained by unquestionable testimony, the charge is repelled by the fact that the books contain prophecies which, without all doubt, were not fulfilled till after the time when they are known to have existed. There are predictions in the book of Daniel respecting the Roman empire which have been accomplished since the days of Porphyry.

You must have remarked, that nothing certain is known concerning the writers of some parts of the Old Testament: but our ignorance in this point does not impair their credit, because they have been received by the Jews as authentic records of the transactions related in them; and their testimony will appear to be of great weight, if we attend to the circumstances in which it was delivered. Whether the books of Moses were human or divine compositions, we know that they believed them to be inspired; and, under this impression they would be very careful what other books they admitted to complete the standard of their faith and practice. Every composition would not obtain this honour; not even every composition which could claim as its author a person of distinguished wisdom and piety. It is altogether incredible that, while they looked upon the first books as a revelation of the will of God, and were warned in them against hastily recognising new claims to a divine mission, they would make up their canon in a careless manner, and give a place in it to writings of a doubtful origin, or coming from persons without authority. Although some of the writers are unknown to us, they were known to them. A few of the books are anonymous, but not supposititious. Their contemporaries were acquainted with the authors, and fully assured that the works ascribed to them were genuine. They would not have ranked them with the books of Moses and the prophets, or those whom they considered as prophets, unless they had been satisfied that the authors had a similar commission and similar qualifications. We have all the evidence which the case admits, that the Scriptures of the Old Testament are genuine.

This reasoning is corroborated by the fact that the Jews did not admit books into their canon indiscriminately, but received some and rejected others; thus showing that there were certain principles upon which they proceeded in judging of their claims. We have a proof, that in order to the reception of a book, it was deemed necessary that its genuineness should be ascertained. At a later period of their history, books appeared which were dignified with the names of some of the most celebrated persons of their country, as Solomon, Daniel, Ezra, and Baruch. But they were not imposed upon by the titles. It was understood that these were not the real authors; and hence, although they might be read, they never obtained any authority among the Jews.

I shall conclude with a few remarks upon the Apocryphal books, which are the following:—two books of Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Esther, the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, the Song of the Three Children, the History of Susannah, Bel and the Dragon, the Prayer of Manasses, and four books of the Maccabees.—Of these the church of Rome acknowledges as canonical only Tobit, Judith, the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, the first and second book of the Maccabees, Baruch, with the additions to Esther and Daniel. It is certain, as I have already stated, that they were not acknowledged by the Jews, so as to be classed with the books which they held sacred. For this we have the express testimony of Josephus, who, having enumerated the canonical Scriptures, informs us that there were other books containing an account of the transactions of the nation, which were not reputed of equal

authority, because they were written after the succession of prophets had ceased; and that it was a proof of the reverence of the Jews for the canonical books, that, during the long interval which had elapsed since their publication, no person had dared to add to them, or to take from them, or to make any alteration in them.* In this stage of the inquiry, we are not at liberty to quote the New Testament as any thing higher than human authority; but as it was written by Jews, it may be fairly considered as expressive of the sentiments of the nation respecting the records of their religion. Now it is remarkable, that the Apocryphal books are never cited by Christ or his apostles. We cannot, indeed, produce quotations from all the acknowledged books of the Old Testament: but while there are references to the greater part of them, they are all recognised under the general division into the law, the prophets, and the holy writings. It is impossible to account for the total silence respecting the Apocryphal books, but upon the principle that the writers of the gospels and epistles did not regard them as possessed of sufficient authority to be appealed to in matters of religion. Some of them were originally written in Greek, and consequently not in Judea, where a different language was spoken after as well as before the captivity; and others are said to have been written in Chaldaic, but about this point learned men are not agreed. We need not be surprised that they were rejected by the Jews, when we consider their contents. They contain fabulous accounts, and are chargeable with contradictions, which render them unworthy of a place among the records of their faith. It is unnecessary to say any thing farther about them. Their exclusion from the canon by the Jews places them on a level with other human compositions. I have only to add, that it is a proof of the stupidity as well as the impiety of the church of Rome, that she has presumed to elevate them to equal honour with the writings of Moses and the prophets, in defiance of the judgment of the Jewish, and I may add, of the ancient Christian church. They were not admitted into the catalogues drawn up by individuals, or by councils, for several centuries; and were regarded as inferior to the writings which are accounted inspired till the meeting of the council of Trent, which established error, idolatry, and superstition, by law. In what esteem they were held in the days of Jerome, we learn when he says, "As the church reads Judith, Tobit, and the books of the Maccabees, but does not receive them among the canonical Scriptures, so let us read Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon. for the edification of the people, but not for the confirmation of doctrines."†

* Joseph. cont. Apion. Lib. i.

† Præf. in Lib. Salom.

LECTURE V.

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

Genuineness of Books of the New Testament: Account of the Gospels; The Epistles of Paul; The Epistle to the Hebrews; The Catholic Epistles; The Revelation of John—Apocryphal Writings—Lost Writings—Importance of the Inquiry into the Genuineness of the Holy Scriptures—Ground on which we believe them to be genuine.

I PROCEED to inquire into the genuineness of the books of the New Testament. I have already pointed out, in general, the importance of this inquiry in reference to the sacred writings. There are many books of which it does not concern us at all to know the authors, and every purpose of information and amusement may be gained, although we should remain in ignorance of their origin. When we read a romance, or fictitious story, we are pleased with the scenes and characters which it describes, and feel a wish to know by whom it was composed, only that our curiosity may be gratified, or that we may fix our admiration and gratitude upon the person to whom they are due. A treatise upon science which is distinguished by the accuracy of its observations, the exactness of its arrangements, and the clearness of its demonstrations, stands in need of no name to recommend it, but rests upon its own intrinsic merits. Even an anonymous narrative of facts may be authentic, because it is understood from collateral evidence to be a faithful record of transactions, and has always been received as such by competent judges. But in the case of laws which are obligatory only because they emanated from a particular source, and of facts which could not be ascertained but by contemporary testimony, and with which our highest interests are inseparably connected, the question of genuineness is of primary importance, and can alone decide whether we shall give credit to the facts, and submit to the laws.

The truth of this observation will be more evident, if the facts are of a supernatural order; for, being out of the usual course of nature, they require more particular proof, and refusing to listen to vague reports, we call for the testimony of eyewitnesses. An account drawn up in a subsequent age is liable to the suspicion of imposture. I shall give you, as an example, the story of the miracles of Apollonius of Tyana, a famous magician, who flourished towards the end of the first century, and was pronounced to be not so properly a philosopher, as an intermediate being between the gods and men. The design of the heathens was to confront his miracles with those of our Saviour, and to prove that Apollonius was equal or superior to him. He was represented as understanding all languages, although he had not learned them; as knowing the language of beasts, and the speech of the gods. Wonderful works were ascribed to him, which appear to us perfectly ridiculous; as that he discovered at Ephesus the pestilence in the form of an old and tattered beggar, and commanded the people to stone him; and, being present at a marriage, detected the bride to be one of those malevolent spirits who were called *Lamiæ*, *Larvæ*, or *Lemures*: but they were considered by his admirers as undoubted proofs of divine power. It is true that such a man existed, and imposed upon the credulity of the vulgar by juggling tricks; but the credit of his miracles is destroyed by the fact, that the record was not drawn up by any person who witnessed them, or lived at the time when the account might have been subjected to a strict examination, but by Philostratus and Hierocles, of

whom the one flourished in the third, and the other in the fourth century. The first account did not appear till near two hundred years after his death, when the author was at liberty to say what he pleased. Hence you perceive, that the question respecting the genuineness of the writings of the New Testament is connected with their authenticity. The subject of inquiry is, whether they were written in the age when Jesus Christ is said to have appeared, and to have performed the miracles which are ascribed to him, or were composed and published at a subsequent period. I shall proceed to give you an account of the books.

I begin with the gospel of Matthew. That he was the writer of this book, and that it was the first which appeared, are facts supported by the uniform testimony of antiquity. With respect to the time of its publication, there has been a considerable diversity of opinion. It has been assigned by some to the year 61, 62, 63, or 64; by others, to the year 41, 43, or 48; and by others, to the year 37, or 38. As there is nothing in the book itself, or in the writings of the early Christians, by which the date can be settled, we must content ourselves with probability; and there appears to be considerable force in the reasoning of Bishop Tomline, who prefers the year 38. "It appears very improbable that the Christians should be left any considerable number of years without a written history of our Saviour's ministry. It is certain that the apostles, immediately after the descent of the Holy Ghost, which took place only ten days after the ascension of our Saviour into heaven, preached the Gospel to the Jews with great success; and surely it is reasonable to suppose that an authentic account of our Saviour's doctrines and miracles would very soon be committed to writing for the confirmation of those who believed in his divine mission, and for the conversion of others." "We may conceive that the apostles would be desirous of losing no time in writing an account of the miracles which Jesus performed, and of the discourses which he delivered, because the sooner such an account was published, the easier it would be to inquire into its truth and accuracy; and, consequently, when these points were satisfactorily ascertained, the greater would be its weight and authority."* There has been much controversy, in modern times, concerning the language in which this gospel was written. By the ancients, Papias, Irenæus, and Origen, and by others who followed them, it was said to have been written in Hebrew; but many learned men contend that the original was Greek. Much credit is not due to the testimony of Papias, who was a weak and credulous man. The works of Irenæus have been understood to import, that besides the Greek, Matthew published also a Hebrew gospel. Origen, in some passages, seems to proceed upon the supposition, that if Matthew wrote in Hebrew, he wrote also in Greek. To reconcile the opposite opinions, we may say, that Matthew published his gospel both in Hebrew, or the mixed dialect which then bore that name, and in Greek: in Hebrew, for the use of the Jews living in Judea, to whom that language was vernacular; and in Greek, for the use of Jews and Gentiles in other countries. Or we may reconcile them by supposing that his gospel was translated into Hebrew, and, as it was generally believed to have been designed for the inhabitants of Judea, in process of time the translation was mistaken for the original. It is altogether improbable that this single book should have been written in Hebrew, or in Hebrew alone, while all the rest are in Greek; and if it be inspired, as Christians believe, that there should exist only a version by an unknown hand, of whose competence and fidelity we have no assurance. If it were a mere translation, I do not see that any dependence could be placed upon it, except so far as it agrees with the other accounts.

* *Introduct. to the Study of the Bible*, part ii. chap. ii.

The next gospel was written by Mark, who is commonly supposed to be the sister's son of Barnabas, and was called first John, and afterwards Mark : but some have entertained doubts whether this was the person. He was not an apostle, but is said to have been the constant attendant of Peter, and to have composed his narrative with his approbation. The following account is given by Eusebius. He tells us, that Peter having preached at Rome, the people were so pleased with his instructions, that they anxiously desired to have them in writing ; that by their earnest entreaties they prevailed upon Mark to draw up a memoir of them ; and that Peter approved of what was done, and authorized the writing to be introduced into the churches.* It was even sometimes called the gospel of Peter, because it was believed that he had revised it and given it his sanction. These traditions are not absolutely certain ; but there is universal consent respecting the publication of the book at an early period, and the name of the author. According to Eusebius and others, it appeared at Rome ; but others assign to it a different place, Alexandria in Egypt. It is not so certain as is commonly supposed, that the apostle Peter was ever in Rome ; but if we admit, upon the authority of antiquity, that he did preach in that city, and that the occasion of writing this gospel was such as has been related, it is probable that the date should be fixed somewhere about the year 60. It is the voice of antiquity that it was written in Greek ; but some authors in the Romish church have maintained that the original was Latin ; and give this reason for their opinion, that, as it was drawn up for the use of the Romans, it must have been presented to them in their own language. But the argument proves too much, and therefore proves nothing ; for it is acknowledged by all, that the epistle sent by Paul to the Romans was not written in Latin, but in Greek. It was long asserted that the original in Latin was preserved in Venice ; but it has been discovered that it is the fragment of a manuscript, which has no pretension to be the autograph of the evangelist. It has been affirmed that the gospel of Mark is a mere abridgment of the gospel of Matthew, and consequently is not an independent testimony to the facts of the evangelical history. But although this notion has obtained currency, it has been proved by different persons, and particularly by Mr. Jones in his work on the canon, to be without foundation. There is a resemblance between the two gospels, but at the same time, there is such a difference as shows that they are both original compositions. "For the most part the accounts by Mark are much more large and full, and related with many more particular circumstances than the same accounts are by Matthew." "The disagreement which seems to be between the two evangelists in relating several circumstances of their history, is a clear and demonstrative evidence that the one did not abridge or copy the other." "Lastly, Mark's gospel is not an epitome of Matthew's, because he has related several very considerable histories of which there is not the least mention made by Matthew."†

The writer of the third gospel was Luke, who is supposed to have been a native of Antioch, descended from Jewish parents, and by profession a physician. What is most certain is, that he was the companion of Paul in his travels, and a witness of many of the things which he relates concerning that apostle in the Acts. The time when he published his gospel is not ascertained, some referring it to the year 53, and others to the year 63, or 64 ; and so also is the place, there being no evidence to determine whether it was written in Achaia, or Syria, or Palestine. All antiquity agrees in ascribing it to Luke. The superiority of the style, which approaches nearer to the classical standard, has given rise to the idea that he had been better educated than the other evangelists. The occasion of writing his gospel is thus stated by himself. "For-

* Euseb. Hist. lib. ii. c. 14, 15.

† Jones on the Canon, vol. iii. pp. 56. 70. 76.

asmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed.”* These words might almost lead us to think that the gospel of Luke was the first, were it not for the unanimous testimony of antiquity to the contrary. It was natural that the Christians should be desirous to have an accredited account of the actions and sayings of our Lord: and this would be an inducement to different individuals to come forward with their narratives. It is true that the gospels of Matthew and Mark were already in circulation; but some of the accounts might have appeared before them; and even after those gospels were published, the curiosity or the wishes of the public would not be immediately satisfied, as copies could not be so rapidly multiplied as they now are by the press, and there was still room for the labours of others. But, as it happens in cases of this kind, their narratives would be imperfect, and, it may be, inaccurate. Luke, indeed, does not directly charge them with unfaithfulness or mistake, but speaks of them merely as “declarations of the things which were believed among Christians,” founded on the report of eyewitnesses. It is evident, however, that he considered his new narrative as called for; and he seems to intimate, when he says that he “had a perfect understanding,” or had accurately traced “all things from the first,” that his information was more extensive and correct.

The last gospel, it is acknowledged by all the ancients, was written by John. He was one of the sons of Zebedee, is frequently mentioned in the evangelical history, and is distinguished from the other apostles as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” We may conceive him, therefore, while employed in compiling this book, not only to have obeyed the impulse of inspiration, but to have experienced the melting tenderness of heart with which a person records the actions and sayings of a friend. While his thoughts were elevated to Jesus Christ reigning on the throne of heaven, he could not but remember that this was he with whom he had lived on familiar terms, and on whose bosom he was once permitted to lean. It is peculiar to this gospel that it gives us the name of the writer, or what is equivalent, refers to the well-known affection which subsisted between him and our Saviour; while the names of the other evangelists are known only by tradition. “This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things.”† The date of it is as uncertain as that of the other gospels. Some have assigned the year 68, 69, or 70; and as a proof that it was prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, these words have been appealed to: “Now there is at Jerusalem, by the sheep-market, a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue, Bethesda, having five porches.”‡ He does not say there *was*, but there *is* such a pool. There are some authorities in favour of *est* instead of *est*; but not to lay any stress upon these, we may remark that, although the walls and houses of Jerusalem were demolished, the pool might remain, and the porches might have been left standing to afford accommodation to the Roman garrison, and to others who occasionally visited the ruins; so that the mention of it, as in existence, determines nothing respecting the date of the gospel. Notwithstanding this passage, it is by many considered as posterior to the fall of the holy city, and supposed to have been written about the year 97, after John had returned from Patmos, to which he was banished by the emperor Domitian.

If this be the true date, the apostle must have been very old. It is probable

* Luke i. 1—4.

† John xxi. 24.

‡ John v. 2

that he was about the same age with our Lord; and since his ascension, between sixty and seventy years had elapsed. In other words, the year 97 marks both his age and the date of his book. I add, that if we adopt this date, the gospel is the last book of the New Testament, and not the Revelation, as is commonly thought. John is reported to have spent much of his time during the latter part of his life in Asia Minor, and it is the general opinion that his gospel was published there. The narrative is in a great measure new: he omits most of the facts which are mentioned by the other evangelists, and relates particulars which they have left out; and hence it would seem that his narrative appeared after theirs, and was intended to be supplementary to them. We are informed, too, by Irenæus, Jerome, and others, that one important design which he had in view, was to confute the erroneous dogmas of various heretics, the Ebionites, the Cerinthians, and the Nicolaitans, concerning the person of Christ. Accordingly, while Matthew, Mark, and Luke begin with an account of his human birth, the gospel of John opens with a solemn testimony to his pre-existence and divinity. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* The subject is repeatedly brought forward more fully and explicitly than by the other evangelists. Eusebius quotes the words of Clement of Alexandria to the following effect, "that John, the last of the evangelists, observing that corporeal things had been explained in the other gospels, and being impelled by his acquaintances, and moved by the Spirit, composed a spiritual gospel."† With respect to the composition in general, Dr. Campbell says, that it bears marks more signal than any of the gospels, that it is the work of an illiterate Jew;‡ and other critics have remarked upon the homeliness and inaccuracy of the style. On the other hand, Michaelis has pronounced the style to be better than that of the other gospels, and ascribes this superiority to the skill in the Greek language, which the apostle had acquired by a long residence in Ephesus."§ In such uncertainty are we left, when we depend upon the opinions of others. It is somewhat strange that so distinguished a scholar should prefer the style of John to that of Luke.

Irenæus, in his work *Adversus Hæreses*, has assigned reasons why there are four gospels, and there could not be more. You will readily anticipate that they are fanciful, and will be convinced that they deserve this character when you hear that these are two of them;—there are four regions of the world in which the gospel was to be preached, and the cherubims between whom Jesus Christ sits had each four faces. We cannot tell why four were published, and not three only; but we may safely suppose the reason for more than one to have been, that at the mouth of two or three witnesses, the history of our Lord might be established.

If the gospel of Luke is acknowledged to be genuine, it follows that he was the writer of the Acts of the Apostles. This appears from the introduction to the latter book. "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up."¶ As the two treatises were composed by the same author, and addressed to the same person, it has been supposed that they were drawn up and published at the same time. At any rate, if the date which we have assigned to his gospel be correct, the interval between its appearance and the publication of the Acts could not be long. The history in the Acts comes down to the end of the two years of Paul's imprisonment at Rome; soon after which, he was set at liberty in the year 63. It is probable, that about this time, this second

* John i. 1.

† Campbell on the Gospels, Preface to John.

‡ Marshe's Michaelis, vol. iii. p. 16.

† Hist. lib. vi. c. xiv.

¶ Acts i. 1.

treatise was sent to Theophilus. You will observe that Luke gives no account of the martyrdom of Paul; undoubtedly because he composed this narrative before it; and it is understood, that after having enjoyed his liberty for a short period, the apostle was again brought before the tribunal of Nero, and condemned. The design of Luke was not to give a complete account of the propagation of the gospel, but to show that in obedience to the command of our Saviour, it was published first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. Accordingly, having recorded the events of the day of Pentecost, and some subsequent proceedings of the apostles in Jerusalem and Samaria, he enters upon the history of Paul, and sets before us a summary of the labours of that zealous and indefatigable servant of Christ among the Gentiles. With the exception of Peter and John, we hear little or nothing of the other apostles, although there can be no doubt that they were equally faithful and diligent in publishing the religion of their divine Master.

I proceed to speak of the epistles which have been divided into two classes, the epistles of Paul, and the Catholic epistles. Those of Paul are fourteen in number, but are not placed in our Bibles in the order in which they were written. The epistle to the Romans stands first, because it was addressed to the inhabitants of the capital; and then follow two epistles to the Christians of Corinth, a large and flourishing city of Greece. If they had been arranged according to their respective dates, the two epistles to the Thessalonians would have stood first, because they preceded all the rest. The epistles of James and Jude, the two epistles of Peter, and the three of John, were called Catholic, because they are not addressed to particular churches and individuals, but to Christians in every part of the world. But there is an obvious error in this statement; the second and third epistles of John ought to have been excluded from the number, since the former is addressed to a person whom he calls the elect Lady, or, as some think, the Lady Eclecta, and the latter to Gaius. Even then, the classification would have been inaccurate. The first epistle of Peter is addressed to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia; not to the whole society of Christians in the world, but to that part of them which resided in those countries; and the epistle of James was sent to the twelve tribes scattered abroad, and consequently, is not more catholic than the epistle to the Hebrews. Thus you see, that this ancient division of the epistles is destitute of any foundation.

There is no difficulty in ascertaining the writer of the epistles which are ascribed to Paul, because he gives his name in the superscription, and sometimes introduces it towards the end. Thus, he says, in the second epistle to the Thessalonians, "The salutation of Paul, with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write."* It appears, that for some cause not mentioned, perhaps because his handwriting was not good, he commonly employed an amanuensis; not always, however, for he says to the Galatians, "Ye see how large a letter I have written to you with mine own hand."† But when he did use the pen of another, he wrote the salutation himself to authenticate the epistle, or that those to whom it was sent might be satisfied that it was genuine.

It is not my business at present to give a summary of the contents of the epistles; and I shall satisfy myself with a brief notice of the time when each is supposed to have been written. The most probable date of the Epistle to the Romans is the year 57 or 58. The first Epistle to the Corinthians was written in the year 56 or 57, and the second in the following year. It has been made a question, whether Paul wrote any other epistle to the Corinthians, and it is founded upon these words in his first epistle, "I wrote to you in an

* 2 Thess. iii. 17.

† Gal. vi. 11.

epistle, not to keep company with fornicators.”* Learned men are divided in opinion, some contending that there was an epistle which has not been preserved, and others that he refers to the epistle which he was at that moment writing. There is no doubt that the apostles wrote many letters which are not in existence, and might not be intended for the general use of the church; but tradition makes mention of only two epistles to the Corinthians, although the words naturally suggest that there was another which has not come down to us. The date of the Epistle to the Galatians is very uncertain, and it has been assigned almost to every year between 48 and 52. The Epistle to the Ephesians was written during his imprisonment in Rome, probably in the year 61. Some learned men have contended that this epistle was sent, not to the Ephesians, but to the Laodiceans. The reasons which they give are so insufficient, that we cannot conceive how any person of discernment should have been satisfied with them. Paul says to the Colossians, “When this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.”† But how this passage proves the point, it is not very easy to see. It is not a clear inference, that an epistle *from* Laodicea is an epistle which Paul had sent *to* Laodicea. We do not know what it was; it may have been a letter from the Laodiceans to Paul, about matters in which the Colossians were concerned, and of which, therefore, he transmitted a copy to them. There is certainly not the slightest evidence that it was the epistle to the Ephesians. It is not so called in a single manuscript, and Ephesus is named as the place to which it was sent, in all manuscripts now extant, except one in which it is omitted. The Epistle to the Philippians was written while Paul was a prisoner in the year 62 or 63; and the same date may be assigned to the Epistle to the Colossians. The two epistles to the Thessalonians were earlier, and were written about the year 52. There is much dispute about the date of the first Epistle to Timothy, which has been fixed to the years 57 and 64. The second was written while Paul was in bonds, but whether during his first or second imprisonment, is doubtful. It has been referred to the year 65. It is not known when, or where, the Epistle to Titus was composed; and several years have been mentioned from 52 to 65. Paul was in Rome when he sent his letter to Philemon, and probably wrote it in the year 62.

Of the epistles of Paul, there remains only to be considered that which is addressed to the Hebrews. But, although its antiquity is acknowledged, its genuineness has been disputed, on account, not only of the omission of the name, but of the difference of the style. Jerome says, in his catalogue of ecclesiastical writers, that it was believed not to be Paul’s, because the style was different; and that it was attributed to Barnabas, to Luke, or to Clement, bishop of Rome, who arranged and expressed, in his own words, the sentiments of Paul. Some thought that Paul wrote in Hebrew, and that another person translated it into Greek. Origen affirms, that the epistle does not exhibit the simple and humble form of speech which is usual to Paul, but is composed in purer Greek; that the sentiments, however, are admirable, and not inferior to those of his acknowledged epistles. “I would say,” he adds, “that the sentiments are Paul’s; but that the language is that of another person, who committed them to writing; but who wrote the epistle, God only knows.”‡ At the same time, he admits that it may be received as an epistle of Paul. It is attributed to him, at an earlier period, by Clemens Alexandrinus, and finally was acknowledged as his production by the Catholic church. Some learned men have denied that there is such a difference of

* 1 Cor. v. 9.

† Col. iv. 16.

‡ Quoted by Euseb. Eccl. Hist. lib. vi. c. 25.

style as warrants the supposition of a different author. There are also internal proofs that it was written by him, consisting in its similarity to his other epistles, in expressions, allusions, and modes of interpreting and applying passages of the Old Testament. It was sent from Italy; and, as he proposed soon to visit the Hebrews, in company with Timothy, then restored to liberty. it must have been written after his own release from prison, in the year 62 or 63.

There remain to be considered the Catholic epistles. The genuineness of them all, with the exception of the first epistle of Peter, and the first of John, was, for a time, called in question by some; but, upon accurate examination, they were finally received as the productions of those to whom they were ascribed. The first, according to the order in our Bibles, is the Epistle of James, who has prefixed his name to it, and addressed it to the twelve tribes scattered abroad. There was another person of this name, who was the brother of John, and was put to death by Herod; but this James was the son of Alphaeus, or Cleophas, and is called the brother of our Lord, because he was nearly related to him. He is sometimes called James the Just; this honourable title having been given to him, for the distinguished holiness of his life. He is said to have resided much in Jerusalem; where he wrote this epistle, it is supposed, in the year 61, and suffered martyrdom in the year 62. The first epistle of Peter was sent from *Babylon*; but learned men are not agreed what city is meant; some of the ancients supposed, and several of the moderns concur with them in thinking, that it is the mystical Babylon, or the city of Rome. Their reasons I consider as by no means satisfactory. Rome is, indeed, called Babylon in the Revelation of John, but we have no evidence that it had received that name in Peter's time, and still less that it was so common as, without any danger of mistake, to suggest the proper sense to the Christian reader. It is impossible to conceive any reason why, in a plain epistle and a common salutation, Rome should be called Babylon. In whatever place it was written, the epistle is assigned to the year 64. The second epistle seems to have been written not long after, for the apostle signifies that his death was near, which is said to have taken place in the year 65. Although no name is prefixed to the first epistle of John, it was received by the ancient church as genuine, and contains internal evidence that it was written by him, in its striking similarity to his gospel, both in sentiment and in language. Various dates have been assigned to it, from the year 68 to 92. From the expression, "It is the last time,"* it has been inferred, that it was written when the Jewish state was drawing to an end, or shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem; but the expression has been understood of the close of the apostolic age. The second and third epistles have been referred to the year 69. It was some time before they were acknowledged as genuine; and as they were addressed to individuals, it is probable that some time elapsed before they were generally known. Jude, who is also called Lebbæus and Thaddeus, was a son of Alphaeus, and like James the Less, the brother or near relative of our Lord. His short epistle, which was addressed to the saints in general, has been assigned to the year 70. The quotation of a prophecy of Enoch, which is not found in the Scriptures, is no argument against the genuineness or the authenticity of the epistle, because it was a true prophecy, in whatever way he came to the knowledge of it. We have no reason to believe that the Apocryphal book, called the prophecy of Enoch, from which some have supposed it to be taken, was then in existence; and we may presume that the forgery was suggested by the passage in Jude.

The last book of the New Testament is the Revelation of John.

* 1 John ii. 18.

genuineness was called in question by some in the third and the fourth centuries, but it was received at an early period as the work of the apostle. Polycarp, who was his disciple, has cited it once. Justin Martyr, in A. D. 140, acknowledges it as his; and Irenæus, who was the disciple of Polycarp, repeatedly quotes it as the production of John the disciple of the Lord. To these may be added, in the second century, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Apollonius, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian, who defends the book against Marcion and his followers. Several objections against the genuineness of the Revelation were advanced by Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, about the middle of the third century, who ascribed it to another John, an elder of the church of Ephesus; but most of them are trifling, and none of them is sufficient to invalidate the testimony in its favour. The suspicions of some were founded on a fancied resemblance between the prediction of the reign of Christ with his saints for a thousand years, and the doctrine of Cerinthus, that our Saviour would establish a kingdom upon earth, in which his subjects would be admitted to the unrestrained enjoyment of carnal delights. We can only wonder at the stupidity of those who confounded things totally different. The Revelation was omitted in several of the catalogues of the canonical books; but the reason seems to have been, that on account of its obscurity, it was not deemed proper to be publicly read. The prophetic visions recorded in it, were seen in Patmos, to which John had been banished by Domitian, and from which he was permitted to return after the death of that emperor. This happened in the year 96, and about that time the book may be dated.

There were many books in former times which pretended to be the productions of the persons to whom the acknowledged books are ascribed. They are so numerous, that it would be a waste of time to go over them all. A few of them remain, but the greater part have perished. I may mention the Gospel according to the Hebrews, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel according to the Egyptians, the Gospel of Thomas, the Revelation of Paul, the Revelation of Peter, and some books under the name of Christ. Of all these, nothing is left but the names and a few fragments. But we have still the Gospel of Mary, the Protevangelium of James, the Gospel of our Saviour's infancy, the Gospel of Nicodemus or the Acts of Pilate, the Acts of Paul and Thecla, a Letter of our Lord to Abgarus, king of Edessa, and letters of Paul to Seneca. All these books have been rejected as spurious, because they contain histories and doctrines contrary to those which were known to be true; because the matter is silly, and evidently fabulous; because things are related in them which were posterior to the times in which those lived under whose names they were published; because the style is different from that of the authors to whom they are ascribed; and because they breathe a different spirit from that of the persons by whom they claim to have been written. No mention is made of them by the Christian authors of the first century, Barnabas, Hermas, and Clemens; or by Ignatius and Polycarp, of the second; succeeding writers rarely refer to them, and then speak of them in terms expressive of disrespect; they were forbidden to be read in the churches, and were not appealed to as authorities in matters of doctrine and controversy. They were treated as human compositions, and as forgeries; and those which have survived the wreck, are such wretched compositions, that only the most stupid of mankind could deem them worthy of a place among the books of the New Testament.

The question, Whether any books have been lost? will admit of different answers, according as the question is stated. We have no reason to think that any book which the evangelists or apostles wrote for the permanent use of the church, has disappeared, because no hint of this kind is given by those

who, living near their time, had the best opportunities of knowing. Much that was spoken by inspiration was never recorded, for the apostles, we believe, were assisted by the Spirit in preaching as well as in writing; and it is not to be doubted, that they sent letters to individuals and to societies, which did not long survive the occasions which they were intended to serve. There were many prophets under the Jewish dispensation, of whom we have no memorial but their names, although it may be presumed that their predictions were sometimes committed to writing. It is said of Jeroboam, son of Joash, king of Israel, “he that restored the coast of Israel, from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amitai the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher.”* Now, here is a prediction which was preserved, but of which there is not a vestige in the Old Testament, till it is incidentally mentioned at the time of its fulfilment. There may have been, and there must have been, many other prophecies written down and fulfilled, of which no trace remains. The gospels contain only a small specimen of the miracles and discourses of our Saviour; the greater part is irrecoverably gone—“The world itself could not contain the books which might have been written.”† What we contend for is, not that all the writings of the apostles have been transmitted to us, but that those have been preserved which were designed to convey the religion of Christ to succeeding generations. And hence it follows, that although the inference were true, which some have drawn from a passage in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, formerly quoted, that there was another epistle addressed by Paul to that church, which has perished, there would be nothing in the idea to startle us and to disturb our faith, because we have no reason to suppose that all that inspired men wrote was to be preserved, any more than all that they spoke. It is enough that we possess all the books which were considered by the Christians in the early ages, as constituting the perpetual rule of faith and manners to the church.

This historical account of the books of the New Testament is intended to assist us in the inquiry whether they are genuine; an inquiry which may appear to some, but I trust to none of you, to be superfluous, or perhaps impious, because it may be understood to imply a state of mind approaching to infidelity. ‘What!’ it may be said, ‘shall we dare to doubt that the New Testament is the work of the evangelists and apostles?’ To this question we would answer, that the inquiry does not proceed from any suspicion, but is instituted for the purpose of satisfying ourselves, or, if we are already satisfied, of convincing others, who are not so well informed, that the books really possess the authority which is commonly ascribed to them. We are bound to give a reason of our faith; and it is particularly incumbent upon those to be able to do so, who are the appointed guardians of religion, and are officially called to defend it against the attacks of its adversaries. The subject, however, does not meet with all the attention which it deserves. There may be ministers of the gospel who are very slightly acquainted with it; and among the private members of the church, it is rare to find any who have thought of it at all. It was long ago observed by Mr. Baxter, that “few Christians among us have any better than the popish implicit faith on this point, nor any better arguments than the papists have, to prove the Scriptures the word of God. They have received it by tradition; godly ministers and Christians tell them so; it is impious to doubt of it; therefore they believe it. Though we could persuade people never so confidently, that Scripture is the very word of God, and yet teach them no more reason why they should believe this than any

* 2 Kings xiv. 25.

† John xxi. 25.

other book to be that word; as it will prove in them no right way of believing, so it is in us no right way of teaching." "Many ministers never give their people better ground than their own authority, or that of the church, but tell them that it is damnable to deny it, but help them not to the necessary antecedents of faith."*

It has been said, that "we receive the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the only sacred and canonical books, not because the church receives them as such, but because the Holy Ghost witnesses to our consciences that they proceed from God, and themselves testify their authority." Similar assertions have been made by other learned and pious individuals, but they require to be explained. We do not deny that a man may be convinced of the truth of the gospel by internal evidence. He may have the witness in himself, because it has come to him with such power and demonstration, that he could no more doubt that it was the word of God, than if it had been proclaimed by a voice from heaven. Many have firmly believed the truth, and led a holy life, and submitted to death for Christ, who had no other evidence. But observe, that this evidence could go no farther than to satisfy them that those doctrines and promises were from God, by which they were enlightened, sanctified, comforted, and inspired with more than human courage, and with the triumphant hope of immortality. How could it convince them that all the books of the Bible are divine? How could it enable them to distinguish, as the French church pretends, between the canonical and the apocryphal books? There is more reason and truth in the words of Baxter:—"For my part, I confess, I could never boast of any such testimony or light of the Spirit, which, without human testimony, would have made me believe that the book of Canticles is canonical, and written by Solomon, and the book of Wisdom apocryphal, and written by Philo. Nor could I have known all or any historical books, such as Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, to be written by divine inspiration, but by tradition."

LECTURE VI.

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

General Evidence of the Genuineness of the New Testament—Testimony of early Writers Of early Heretics, and Infidels: The Syriac Version—Force of these Testimonies—Internal Marks of Genuineness; The Style; The Nature of the Composition, and Narrative Discrepancies and Coincidences—Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*.

HAVING given an account of the books of the New Testament, I proceed to lay before you the evidence by which it is proved that they were written by the persons whose names they bear. This work has been already performed with great diligence and learning by different authors, among whom I refer you, in particular, to Jones, in his new and full method of settling the canonical authority of the New Testament; and to Lardner, in the second part of his *Credibility of the Gospel History*. The subject may be said to have been exhausted by them; and nothing is left to others, but to verify their references by consulting the original authors, or now and then, perhaps to add a passage which had escaped their observation.

* Baxter's *Saints' Rest*, part ii. chap. ii. § 1.

The persons, in the early ages, to whom we are chiefly indebted for information, are Eusebius, Jerome, and Origen, of whom the two former flourished in the fourth century, and the latter in the third. They were all men of great learning, and had devoted their time and talents to the study of the Scriptures. Eusebius has divided the writings, which claimed to be received as a rule of faith and practice to Christians, into three classes.* Those of the first class are the *γραφαι ἐμιλοζουμεναι*, which are the four gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the epistles of Paul, the first epistle of John, and the first epistle of Peter; and to these, he says, may be added, if it should seem proper, the Revelation of John. Those of the second class, are the *γραφαι αντιλογουμεναι*, writings, the genuineness of which was doubted by some. These are the epistle of James, the epistle of Jude, the second epistle of Peter, and the second and third of John, because it was uncertain whether they were written by him, or by another person of the same name. It appears, however, that these books were acknowledged by the majority of Christians. Those of the third class are the *γραφαι νοθαί*, spurious writings, as the acts of Paul, Andrew, John, and other apostles, and gospels under the names of Peter, Thomas, and Mathias, the epistle of Barnabas, and the Shepherd of Hermas.

Eusebius distinguishes the spurious from the canonical books by two internal marks. The first arises from the style, which is quite different from that of the apostles—*ὁ τῆς φράσεως παρὰ τὸ ἦθος τοῦ ἀποστολικῶν ἐναλλαττεῖ χαρακτήρ*. The second is furnished by the sentiments and design, which are at variance with orthodoxy, and show them to be the compositions of heretical men—*ἢ τε γνώμῃ καὶ ἢ τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς φερόμενων πρᾶξεων πλείστον ὅσον τῆς ἀληθοῦς ἐκδοξίας ἀπαρῶσα*.†

Eusebius uses another argument against the spurious books, and it is this; that no ecclesiastical writer, in the succession from the apostles, had deemed them worthy to be mentioned. They are not appealed to as books of authority; they are not quoted as the productions of inspired and apostolical men. Now, by considering this omission as a proof that they are forgeries, Eusebius suggests to us the plan which we should adopt, with a view to ascertain the genuineness of the Scriptures; and it is the plan which was pursued by himself. We must have recourse to those who were contemporaries of the apostles and evangelists, or flourished soon after them, and see whether they knew any thing about the books which are commonly ascribed to them.

The only Christian writers of the first century of whom there are any remains, are Clement, Barnabas, and Hermas. Clement is mentioned in the epistle to the Philippians as a fellow-labourer of Paul, and as one whose name was in the book of life; and he is said, by the ancients, to have been bishop of Rome. There are two epistles under his name, addressed to the church of Corinth, the first of which is generally admitted to be genuine, but suspicions are entertained of the second. Barnabas was the companion of Paul. I should think, that any person who peruses the epistle ascribed to him would be convinced that he was not the author of it, and that it is the composition of another person of the same name, or who assumed his name. It is believed, however, to be a work of the first century; and the same date is assigned to the Pastor or Shepherd of Hermas, who is supposed, although not with good reason, to be the Hermas mentioned in the epistle to the Romans. In the epistle of Clement, there are at least eight quotations from, or allusions to the gospel of Matthew; six to the gospel of Luke; one to the gospel of John; two to the Acts of the Apostles. In the epistle of Barnabas, there are seven to the gospel of Matthew, and one at least to the gospel of John. In the Shepherd of Hermas, there are nine to the gospel of Matthew. I have not

* Euseb. Hist. lib. iii. cap. 25.

† Ibid.

mentioned any quotations from Mark, or references to it: and the reason is, that in consequence of the similarity of his gospel to that of Matthew, it is not easy to determine whether some of the passages were cited from the one or from the other.

With these may be joined Ignatius, who was their contemporary, but survived them, and finished his course in the early part of the second century. From an expression in one of his epistles, it has been concluded that he saw Christ in the flesh. He is said to have been appointed bishop of Antioch about thirty-seven years after the ascension; and having continued in office forty years, he suffered martyrdom at Rome. The testimony of such a man is of inestimable value, both because he had the best opportunities of ascertaining what books had come from the original teachers of religion, with several of whom he may be presumed to have been personally acquainted, and because, being a Christian and a bishop, he would be careful not to admit, but upon sufficient grounds, any writing as the rule of his faith. Now, in his epistles we find eight quotations from the gospel of Matthew, one from Luke, and two or three from John.

The next in order is Polycarp, who lived in the first century, and conversed with the apostle John. He was made bishop of Smyrna about the year 94 or 95, and suffered martyrdom in the year 167, having attained a very great age, and served Christ, as he told the judge who condemned him, eighty years. There is extant only one epistle sent by him to the Philippians, in which we cannot expect many quotations. There are, however, six from the gospel of Matthew, and in some fragments two more, and one quotation from the Acts.

Justin, who is commonly called Martyr, because he suffered death for Christ in the year 140, is a more voluminous author, and consequently furnishes many more references to the gospels. There have been collected out of his works, from thirty to forty passages from the gospel of Matthew, nine from the gospel of Luke, five from the gospel of John, and one from the Acts. They are often cited in a book which goes under his name, but it is not believed to be his, and is entitled Questions and Answers to the Orthodox.

In the writings of Irenæus, bishop of Lyons, who flourished from A. D. 179 to A. D. 202, the quotations are numerous. He has taken at least two hundred and fifty passages from Matthew, and several times cites his gospel by name; seven passages from Mark, and names him twice; above one hundred from the gospel of Luke; above one hundred and twenty from the gospel of John; and he very often refers to the Acts. In the book *adversus Hæreses*, he adopts the fanciful idea, that there could only be four gospels, and assigns fanciful reasons for it; but he mentions them all by name, and gives a summary of their contents.

Quotations are also found in the writings of Athenagoras and Theophilus of Antioch. In the works of Clemens Alexandrinus and Tertullian, they are so frequent, that we do not attempt to specify the number. It has been observed that "there are more and larger quotations of the small volume of the New Testament in the writings of one Christian author, Tertullian, than there are of all the works of Cicero in writers of all characters for several ages."*

Hitherto, I have produced testimonies in favour only of the historical books, the gospels and the Acts. If these are admitted to be genuine, there will not be much dispute about the epistles, which are so closely connected with the scheme unfolded in the writings of the evangelists, being an illustration and continuation of it. Clemens Alexandrinus not only gives an account of the

* Lardner's Credibility, part ii. chap. 27.

order in which the gospels were written, and cites Luke as the author of the Acts, but quotes almost every book of the New Testament by name. Irenæus, whose means of ascertaining the truth were the best, as he was the disciple of Polycarp, who was the disciple of John, has not only ascribed the four gospels and the Acts to their respective authors, but has acknowledged as canonical and *genuine* the epistle to the Romans, the epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, the first and second epistles to the Thessalonians, the two epistles to Timothy, the epistle to Titus, the two epistles of Peter, and the first and second epistles of John. He has alluded to the epistle to the Hebrews, has quoted the epistle of James, and borne express testimony to the book of Revelation. Justin Martyr not only makes mention of the memoirs of the apostles, and the memoirs of Christ, evidently meaning the gospels, but refers to the Acts, the epistle to the Romans, the first epistle to the Corinthians, the epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, the second epistle to the Thessalonians, the first epistle of Peter, and the book of Revelation. Polycarp alludes to several other books of the New Testament besides the gospels, the epistle to the Romans, the first and second epistles to the Corinthians, the epistle to the Ephesians, the first epistle to Timothy, the first epistle of Peter, and the first epistle of John. In the seven epistles of Ignatius which are supposed to be genuine, there are quotations from, or manifest allusions to the epistle to the Romans, the first and second epistles to the Corinthians, the epistle to the Galatians, the epistle to the Ephesians, the epistle to the Philippians, the epistle to the Colossians, the second epistle to the Thessalonians, the two epistles to Timothy, the epistle to Titus, the epistle to the Hebrews, the epistle of James, and the first epistle of Peter. In the epistle of Clemens Romanus, the following books are cited; the epistle to the Romans, the two epistles to the Corinthians, the epistle to the Philippians, the first epistle to the Thessalonians, the first epistle to Timothy, the epistle to the Hebrews, the epistle of James, the first and second of Peter, and the Revelation. The works of Barnabas and Hermas also contain allusions to several books, but they are less frequent and explicit, because the subject of the epistle of Barnabas led him to refer rather to the Old Testament, and the Shepherd of Hermas is composed in the form of a vision.

It is observable, that the quotations and allusions are sometimes accompanied with the names of the apostles and evangelists, but frequently they are omitted. "This proves," says Paley, speaking of the gospels, "that these books were perfectly notorious, and that there were no other accounts of Christ then extant, or at least, no other so received and credited, as to make it necessary to distinguish these from the rest."* The observation may be applied to the other parts of the New Testament. References to them without any specification of their titles or authors show, that they were well known, that they were considered as standard books, that their sayings were received as authoritative, and consequently, that they were understood to be genuine. And, that they were viewed with respect as writings of a higher order than human compositions, is evident from the terms in which they are spoken of, as Holy Scriptures, Divine Scriptures, Fountains of Truth and Salvation; and also from the fact that they were read in the religious assemblies.

It is unnecessary to pursue this inquiry farther. It is well known that in the third and following centuries, they were regarded as the writings of those under whose names they were current in the world. It is proper, however, to inform you, that catalogues of the books of the New Testament were drawn up by different persons, from which it appears, that the same books were then received which are at present acknowledged.

* Paley's Evidences, part i. chap. ix. § 1.

The first is the catalogue of Origen in the year 210, who omits the epistle of James and Jude, but acknowledges both in other parts of his writings. The second is the catalogue of Eusebius in the year 315, which is the same with ours. He says, however, as you heard before, that a few of the books were disputed by some. The third is the catalogue of Athanasius of the same date, which exactly accords with the modern one. So does the catalogue of Cyril of Jerusalem in A. D. 340,—with an exception as to the Revelation. The catalogue of the Council of Laodicea, A. D. 364, omits the Revelation, but has all the other books. The catalogue of Epiphanius, A. D. 370, agrees with ours; but the Revelation is omitted in that of Gregory Nazianzen, A. D. 375. Philostrius, bishop of Brexia, A. D. 380, leaves out the Revelation, and mentions only thirteen epistles of Paul, excepting, most probably, the epistle to the Hebrews, of which some doubted, but he has all the other books. Jerome, A. D. 382, receives all the books, for, although he speaks doubtfully of the epistle to the Hebrews, he acknowledges it as canonical in other parts of his writings. The catalogues of Ruffinus, A. D. 390, of Augustine, A. D. 394, and of the Council of Carthage in which Augustine was present, are in all respects the same with ours.

Nothing farther is necessary to satisfy us that the books were written at the time assigned for their publication, and by the persons to whom they are ascribed. There seems not, indeed, to have been any doubt relative to this matter in the early ages. It was generally understood from whom the books came, and they were received with as little hesitation as we feel with respect to a book published among us, to which the author has prefixed his name. We have seen that the genuineness of a few of them was called in question, only however by some; but this circumstance supplies new evidence, by showing that proof was required before any of the books was acknowledged. When we find that men are far from being credulous, and that while they give an assent in some instances, they withhold it in others, we rest with the greater confidence in their conclusions. If it should be said that the primitive Christians, from indifference or simplicity, permitted forged writings to be palmed upon them as the productions of evangelists and apostles, we have it in our power boldly to contradict the assertion. They did not give credit to every pretence, but exercised a spirit of discrimination, in consequence of which, they not only rejected a variety of books circulated under the most venerable names, but regarded at first with some degree of suspicion certain others, which they afterwards admitted into the canon, when their title was more fully established. If their testimony should be pronounced insufficient in these circumstances, there is an end to all confidence in human veracity; and it will be impossible to prove the genuineness of any book in the world. The truth is, that none has come down to us from ancient times so fully attested as the Christian Scriptures.

Additional evidence is furnished by the heretics who arose in the early ages. Cerinthus lived at the same time with the apostle John; he taught that circumcision and the observance of the law of Moses were necessary to salvation; and rejected the inspiration and authority of Paul, because he had delivered a contrary doctrine. Hence it is plain that the epistles of Paul were then in existence, and are the same with those which we at present possess. The Cerinthians bore testimony to the existence of the gospel of Matthew, for they received it, because they did not consider it as at variance with their tenets. The Ebionites, who were contemporary with them, also prove the existence of Matthew's gospel, and of the epistles of Paul, by their having received the former in a corrupted form, and rejected the latter. Marcion, in the beginning of the second century, received the gospel of Luke, but altered it so as to make it a gospel of his own. He affirmed that the gospel of Matthew, the epistle

to the Hebrews, and the epistles of Peter and James, were not fit for the use of Christians, but of Jews; but he received ten of the epistles of Paul. All these books, therefore, existed and were known in his time. Basilides, in the early part of the second century, acknowledged the gospel of Matthew, and there is no evidence that he rejected the other three. The Valentinians, about the same date, drew arguments in favour of their opinions, as Irenæus informs us, from the evangelical and apostolical writings, and it is probable, that they received all the books, as various other sects and leaders of heresy did, whom it is not necessary to particularize. “Noetus,” says Dr. Lardner, “Paul of Samosata, Sabellius, Marcellus, Photinus, the Novatians, Donatists, Manichees, Priscillianists, beside Artemon, the Audians, the Arians, and divers others, all received most or all the same books of the New Testament which the Catholics received; and agreed in a like respect for them as written by apostles, or their disciples and companions.”*

There is still another source from which we are furnished with evidence in favour of the antiquity of the books, and of the fact that no doubt was entertained of their genuineness. I refer to Celsus, ever a virulent enemy of Christianity, in the latter part of the second century. His writings have perished, but a great part of his work is transcribed in Origen’s elaborate answer, from which it appears, that he knew the names and contents of the books of the New Testament, and expressed no suspicion that they were forgeries. Porphyry, in the third century, was accounted one of the ablest and most learned opponents of our religion. His writings also are lost, but it appears that he allowed our Scriptures to be genuine, and did not even call in question the miraculous facts related in them. That, if he had found any pretext, he would have willingly convicted them of forgery, is evident from the attempt which he made to prove that the prophecies of Daniel were written after the events. Julian, in the fourth century, who is called the apostate, because, having been once a Christian, he embraced heathenism, and employed all his influence and authority to re-establish it, also bears testimony to the Scriptures of the New Testament, and particularly to the historical books. He speaks of Matthew, Luke, John, and the Acts of the Apostles; and instead of disputing the genuineness of the writings, admits many of the facts recorded in them, and even the miracles of Christ—an admission which nothing would have induced him to make, but the utter impossibility of invalidating the narrative of the evangelists. The last argument which I shall produce, is founded on the Syriac Version. Some learned men believe, and have endeavoured to prove, by a variety of arguments, that it was made in the first century; and as four Catholic epistles, the second of Peter, the second and third of John, and the epistle of Jude, are wanting, and also the Revelation, they suppose that, at the time, these books had not appeared. If this early date be assigned to it, it proves not only that the other books were then in existence, but that they were considered as the productions of the evangelists and apostles; for it could only be on this supposition, that they were translated for the use of the Syrian churches.

We have proved the genuineness of the books of the New Testament, by the evidence which is resorted to in all cases of this nature,—the testimony of those who had the best opportunities of ascertaining whether they were written by the persons whose names they bear, because they lived in the age when they were published, or soon after, and were led by their circumstances to make an accurate inquiry. This is a point which demands particular attention. When a book is in circulation in which we take no interest, we perhaps do not give ourselves the trouble to ask who is the author; or if a

* Lardner, part ii. General Review.

momentary curiosity prompts us to put the question, we are satisfied with the first name which is mentioned, because in a matter so trifling we care not whether we are right or wrong. The truth would be of no advantage to us, and a mistake would do us no harm. But the books of which we are speaking, claimed to be received as authoritative, professed to prescribe the terms of salvation, and called upon men to make a total change in their religious sentiments and practice; a change which was opposed not only by the power of prejudice and habit, but by a regard to personal safety; for it was quite evident that it would both subject them to the charge of singularity, and draw upon them the hatred and the violence of those who, retaining their old opinions, would look upon them as guilty of impiety and apostacy. We cannot suppose that men in their senses could have run this hazard upon slight grounds, upon vague reports. "It was a matter of importance only to a few, or rather of no real moment to any body, whether Thucydides wrote the history, and Plato the dialogues, which pass under their names; but the present peace and the eternal salvation of thousands and millions, the decision of innumerable controversies, and the regulation of the faith and practice of the church in all ages and nations, depended upon the certain knowledge that the writers of the New Testament were the immediate followers and ambassadors of Christ." If the books were received by persons thus circumstanced, we may believe that they knew them to be genuine productions.

This reasoning is confirmed by certain proofs of genuineness which are furnished by the books themselves. They contain internal marks, from which it appears that they were written in the age to which they referred, and by the persons to whom they are ascribed.

The first is the style.—The books profess to have been written by Jews, who lived in Judea, a short time before the destruction of Jerusalem. Luke indeed is supposed to have been a native of Antioch, but he is understood to have descended from Jewish parents; and Paul was a native of Tarsus in Cilicia, but he was "a Hebrew of the Hebrews," and received his education under Gamaliel, a doctor of the Jews. The books are all written in Greek, for it is not worth while to except the gospel of Matthew, since so many learned men have called in question the opinion of the ancients that it was originally published in Hebrew. Greek was the fittest language for a revelation intended for mankind at large, because it was generally understood; but the native tongue of the writers was Hebrew, as it is called in the New Testament, although it was a mixed dialect, and has been more correctly denominated Syro-Chaldaic. Now, this language had not only its peculiar words, but also its peculiar idioms, which a person who had been accustomed to them from his infancy would retain, after he had laid aside the use of the words; for we find, in modern times, that when a man attempts to compose in a foreign language, although he may use none but words of that language, he often employs combinations of terms, and modes of expression, which are contrary to its laws, and are borrowed from his own. When Englishmen write French, or Frenchmen write English, they frequently fall into this error. It may be avoided, by accurate study and long practice; but they are very few who are able to express themselves in an acquired language with perfect purity; and this excellence was not to be expected in the apostles and evangelists, who were men without education. Luke and Paul, indeed, may be excepted; but their education, being Jewish, was not calculated to remedy this fault. Knowing, then, to what nation the writers belonged, what might we have presumed *a priori* would be the nature of their style? We might have presumed, that the words would be Greek, but that the idiom would be Hebrew; or that the composition would be that of persons who thought in one language and wrote another: and this is exactly the character of the gospels and epistles. On

this subject, indeed, learned men have differed in opinion. Blackwall, in his *Sacred Classics*, has undertaken to vindicate the New Testament from the charge of solecism and barbarism; and in executing this task, has displayed great learning and ingenuity. It must be acknowledged, that in not a few instances, he has succeeded in showing that certain modes of expression and construction, which had been objected to, are not inconsistent with purity, by producing similar examples from the most approved authors; but after all his labour, 't is admitted by every scholar, that the Greek of the New Testament bears the marks of a Jewish origin. It is such Greek as would have been written by the persons to whom the books are ascribed; that is, by Jews, who had not enjoyed the advantage of attending the schools of grammarians and rhetoricians.

This, then, is an internal proof of the genuineness of the books. Their composition accords with the character and circumstances of the reputed authors. Had the language been classical, there would have been some ground of suspicion; and the style would have been produced as a proof that they were not the works of the apostles and evangelists. To this objection, if Christians had replied, that the superiority of the style might be accounted for by the inspiration of the writers, infidels would have told them, that this argument was of no weight, because it rested upon an assumption of which there was no proof. It was therefore wisely ordered, that the writers, although, as we believe, under divine superintendence, were permitted to set down their thoughts in a style which was natural to them, and thus to furnish internal evidence that the works which bear their names are really their own. It has been observed, that the books could not have been written as they are written, later than the first century, and no person assigns to them an earlier date. There were no Christians in Judea, in the second century but the Ebionites and Nazarenes, who will not be suspected of having forged Greek gospels, because it is known that they used only one, which was in Hebrew. The composition of Christians in other countries would have approached nearer to the classical purity. The New Testament would have been free, at least, from Jewish idioms.

The second internal evidence of the genuineness of the books, is simplicity, by which I mean, the absence of all appearance of art. It must strike every reader of the gospels, I should think, that there is in them nothing like contrivance, nothing like the exercise of policy or ingenuity to accomplish a particular end. The manifest purpose of the gospels, is to give a narrative of the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, of the works which he performed, and the doctrines which he taught. Now there is evidence on the face of them that they were drawn up as the events took place, or as they occurred to the recollection of the writers, without any studied design to combine them into a well-digested history, or to produce a particular effect. It was their obvious intention to exalt the character of their Master, but they do not resort to the usual method of panegyric and elaborate description. They content themselves with a naked relation of facts; and although many of them are of an extraordinary nature, they give no comment upon them, affix no note of admiration, employ no method to arrest the attention of their readers, and to excite corresponding emotions. In all this a candid mind will perceive the signature of truth, and recognise a manner totally different from that of an artful man, whose aim it was to palm a forgery upon the world. The evangelists are evidently men, who, believing what they relate to be true, leave the facts to speak for themselves, being convinced that they did not stand in need of any assistance from them to make a proper impression. The calmness of their manner seems to indicate, that they were familiarized to such events as they record; for how could they have spoken of stupendous

miracles in dispassionate terms, if they had not frequently witnessed them? These observations go to establish not only the genuineness but the truth of the narratives: but the latter is not at present the subject of inquiry; and I intend merely to show, that they are such as we might have expected from the persons to whom they are ascribed. Their story is the story of eye and ear-witnesses. It bears no resemblance to a fabricated tale to which the contriver was anxious to gain credit. In the epistles, there is the same simplicity or artlessness. It is impossible not to consider them as letters which were actually sent to the persons addressed. There are so many allusions to facts, so many incidental notices, so many references to existing circumstances, as to leave no suspicion of forgery. They are such letters as we should conceive the apostles to have sent to different Christian societies soon after their formation, while the Jews still subsisted in a national capacity, and the controversy was carrying on between the law of Moses and the religion of Christ. That controversy lost much of its interest after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple: and had the epistles been composed in the second century, they would have rarely, if ever, referred to it.

The third internal evidence of the genuineness of the books, is their particularity. You will perceive that I chiefly refer to the historical books; but in the epistles also, there is such a specification of names, places, and facts, as affords sufficient ground for concluding that they were written by the apostles. When a man sits down to compose a fictitious narrative, with an intention to pass it upon the world as a true one, he finds it necessary to confine himself to general statements. It would be dangerous to descend to particulars, because the more he abounded in them, it would be the more impossible to avoid detection. The circumstantiality of the gospels, the specification of times and places, of the persons concerned in events, and of the persons who witnessed them, furnishes an argument in favour of their truth, if they were published at the period to which they are assigned: but my sole purpose is to use it as a proof of their genuineness. When a person composes a fictitious narrative of transactions, and lays the scene in an age and country different from his own, it would require greater skill and circumspection than fall perhaps to the lot of any individual, effectually to conceal his design. He would be apt to err in his descriptions of the country, in his representations of manners and customs, in his statements of civil institutions, and of religious opinions and practices. He would be apt to fall into anachronisms, by introducing modes of thinking and acting which belonged to a different period. Blunders of this kind have often furnished the means of discovering forgeries. The Sibylline oracles, which were so much circulated in the early ages, and professed to have been uttered by certain prophetesses of the heathen world, who lived before the coming of Christ, are so clumsily fabricated that we cannot but feel surprise, that any person should have supposed them to be genuine. The predictions are clearer than those of the Old Testament; and they could have been written only by a person who lived after the events. In the same way other forgeries have been detected, although by no means so gross. Minute circumstances are apt to escape an impostor, which unveil his design to a scrutinizing eye. It is extremely difficult to give falsehood the exact resemblance of truth, when it extends to a system having many ramifications. "The accuracy of the writers of the New Testament," it has been remarked by Dr. Cook in his *Inquiry into the books of the New Testament*, "has been proved by the strictest examination and comparison of their works with those of the best historians nearest to their own times, who mention any of the same facts, and by the admirable consistency which the narratives and allusions to fact made by the writers of the New Testament have with one another. It is an accuracy which embraces the topography, the vegetable

productions, the agriculture, the climate of Palestine ; the habitations, dress manners, character of its inhabitants, the civil and religious institutions customs, opinions, philosophical sects, and political parties, whether of the Jews or Romans, and the various distinguished individuals, and offices, and actions occasionally introduced into the narrative. It is accuracy pervading not only what Lardner has called the principal facts of the New Testament, relating directly to the life, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ, but the occasional facts connected with all those various collateral, and some of them transient subjects just enumerated. It is accuracy equally conspicuous in the more formal direct narratives of events, and in the incidental allusions to them ; so that there is no clashing of the one with the other, no false movement indicating the manufacture of fraud. Now, this harmony and consistency, it is well known, from the extreme difficulty of giving even to a short narrative connected with known events, the semblance when it has not the foundation of truth, cannot be accomplished where that foundation is wanting ; and where they exist, decidedly proclaim the most intimate acquaintance with the facts thus faithfully described.”* Hence we infer, that the books of the New Testament were written by persons who were present at the scenes and witnessed the events which they describe ; and minute circumstances have been pointed out in the course of the narratives which an impostor would not have noticed, and which would have occurred to no person who was not upon the spot.

The fourth internal evidence is furnished by the discrepancies between the gospels. If they were not written by the apostles and immediate followers of Christ, they were fabricated at a later period by some persons who acted in concert, with a view to impose the account contained in them upon the world, as true. Now, let us think for a moment in what manner persons having this design would proceed. If they agreed, in order to give their respective accounts a greater appearance of truth, not always to relate the same events, and to use the same words, they would agree to avoid any thing like contradiction, because, being conscious of their own design to deceive, they would be in continual apprehension lest others should suspect it, and would guard against any circumstance calculated to excite or to strengthen this suspicion. Whatever other mistakes in their narratives might have betrayed them, we should have expected, that, in relating the same facts, they would have studied to render their statements perfectly harmonious. This is the plan which false witnesses always adopt. We find, however, if we judge by this rule, that the writers of the New Testament did not act in concert, and that they came forward in the character of independent witnesses to the facts which they relate. There are differences in their accounts, which have been considered by some as amounting to express contradictions. How these may be reconciled, is not our present business to inquire. The fact is certain ; and it serves to prove the genuineness of their writings, because it shows, that each of them set down events as they appeared to him at the time, or afterwards occurred to his recollection, without having consulted with any others regarding the best form of the narrative. We discover nothing which has the character of forgery. If they agree or disagree, it is without design ; there is an artlessness, and to speak of them merely as human authors, an unguardedness, which is the most distant imaginable from a fraudulent contrivance.

The last proof which I shall produce, is founded on the undesigned coincidence or correspondence between certain parts of the New Testament. The argument from this source has been applied to the Acts, and the epistles of Paul, with great industry and ability by Dr. Paley, in his work entitled *Horæ*

Paulinæ. He observes, that "agreement or conformity between letters, bearing the name of an ancient author, and a received history of that author's life, does not necessarily establish the credit of either." "The history may 'have been wholly, or in part, compiled from the letters; in which case, it is manifest that the history adds nothing to the evidence already afforded by the letters.'" "The letters may have been fabricated out of the history; a species of imposture which is certainly practicable: and which, without any accession of proof or authority, would necessarily produce the appearance of consistency and agreement." Once more, "the history and letters may have been founded upon some authority common to both; as upon reports and traditions which prevailed in the age in which they were composed, or upon some ancient record now lost, which both writers consulted; in which case also, the letters, without being genuine, may exhibit marks of conformity with the history; and the history, without being true, may agree with the letters." He goes on to state, that in "examining the agreement between ancient writings, the character of truth and originality is undesignedness," by which we understand, that the allusions in one writing to another must appear to have been made without any intention to corroborate or verify what the other had said, and to have been suggested solely by the author's familiar acquaintance with the facts. They occurred to him without an effort, as things which he witnessed or experienced. "With respect to those writings of the New Testament, which are to be the subject of our present consideration," Dr. Paley adds, "I think, that, as to the authenticity of the epistles, this argument, where it is sufficiently sustained by instances, is nearly conclusive; for, I cannot assign a supposition of forgery, in which coincidences of the kind we inquire after are likely to appear. As to the history, it extends to these points; it proves the general reality of the circumstances; it proves the historian's knowledge of these circumstances. In the present instance, it confirms his pretensions of having been a contemporary; and in the latter part of his history, a companion of St. Paul." "In a great plurality of examples, I trust the reader will be perfectly convinced, that no design or contrivance whatever, has been exercised; and if some of the coincidences alleged appear to be minute, circuitous or oblique, let him reflect, that this very indirectness and subtilty is that which gives force and propriety to the example." He mentions some references in which the argument will not hold, because it might be said that they were intended for the purpose of giving the appearance of agreement between the epistles and the history; but he produces the following as a case in point: "When I read in the Acts of the Apostles, that, 'when Paul came to Derbe and Lystra, behold a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, *which was a Jewess*;' and when, in an epistle addressed to Timothy, I find him reminded of 'his having known the Holy Scriptures from a child,' which implies, that he must, on one side or both, have been brought up by Jewish parents, I conceive, that I remark a coincidence which shows, by its very obliquity, that scheme was not employed in its formation."* I have stated this argument almost entirely in his own words; but it is impossible to do justice to it within such narrow limits, and I therefore refer you to the work itself.

* Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*, chap. i.

LECTURE VII.

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

Authenticity of the Scriptures inferred from Genuineness—Their Reception as genuine is Evidence of the Miracles therein recorded—Argument from Miracles—Definition of a Miracle—Miracles are possible; The Work of God alone; Capable of being proved—Examination of Hume's Argument—Miracles are natural and necessary Accompaniments of a new Revelation—Heathen and popish Miracles—Criterion of Miracles.

WE have produced, in the preceding lecture, a variety of external and internal proofs of the genuineness of the Christian Scriptures. If any man should still deny that they were written by the persons to whom they are ascribed, we have a right to ask, By whom then were they composed? We do not, however, expect an answer to the question; for, as they were never attributed to any other authors by those who had the best opportunities of knowing their history, it would be ridiculous, at this late period, to attempt to trace them to a different origin. It is certain that the books were known and read, and received as genuine, in the second century; it is certain that they were known and read, and received as genuine, in the first. It remains, therefore, to ascertain what credit is due to them, and to the books of the Old Testament, the genuineness of which has been also established.

I formerly stated the difference between the genuineness and the authenticity of a writing. It is genuine, if it be the work of the person under whose name it was published; it is authentic, if its contents are true. These properties are by no means inseparable. A book may be genuine, but unworthy of credit, because it is full of fables and fictions; and it may be true, although bearing a false name. In the present case, however, they are inseparable; that is, the genuineness of the sacred writings infers their authenticity; and that this is a legitimate conclusion, will appear from the following observations.

Let it be remembered, that the books were narratives of events, which are said to have taken place in the age and before the eyes of the persons who were called to receive them as authentic. There was no opportunity to take advantage of the credulity with which men are often and justly chargeable, and to support a plausible account by feigned authorities which would overawe their judgments. But every person was competent to decide at once, without a tedious process of reasoning, whether what was related was true or false. Let it be observed, too, that the events were not of a common kind, and of an uninteresting nature, the accuracy of which it was the concern of no individual to settle, so that the account, although blended with fiction, might be permitted to pass without contradiction. Many of them were miraculous and were designed to attest a religion on which the future hopes of mankind should be founded, and by which their present conduct should be regulated. They were connected with what is usually considered as the most important subject which can engage our attention. It is contrary to all the principles of reason to suppose, that in such a case, men would yield a listless assent; and still more, that they would be satisfied with evidence which they knew to be false.

The religion which Moses called the Israelites to embrace was not absolutely new, because their fathers had worshipped the same Being who was now announced as the God of the nation. But there is reason to believe that they had in a great measure forgotten him during their residence in Egypt, and

were tainted with the idolatry of the people among whom they had lived for more than two hundred years. Many of them, therefore, can be considered as no better than heathens,—probably the majority, if we may judge of their former state by their subsequent conduct; and, consequently, the change which they were required to make, was almost as great as if Moses had undertaken the conversion of the Egyptians themselves. The greatness of the change is manifest from a review of the religion. They were commanded to renounce the gods of Egypt, and of all other nations, to whose service they appear from their history to have been strongly addicted, and to worship Jehovah alone. Upon this fundamental tenet was founded a system of observances, which, instead of being modelled after the idolatrous forms to which they had been accustomed, as some have supposed without the slightest evidence, was contrived in express opposition to the usages of Egypt and other countries, for the purpose of effecting a complete separation. The rites enjoined were multiplied to a great number, were to be practised not only in the sanctuary, but in the whole detail of life, required constant attention and circumpsection, and must have been felt to be extremely inconvenient. Besides, they subjected the Israelites to no inconsiderable expense, by the frequent sacrifices which they found it necessary to offer, and by the tithes which they were commanded to pay to the priests. There were also certain injunctions to which there is nothing similar in the laws of other nations, and which are of so peculiar a character, that it is altogether unaccountable, upon the principles of political wisdom, that any legislator should have proposed them, or any people should have submitted to them. I refer to the law of the Sabbatical year, when the ground was not to be tilled and sown; to the law ordaining that thrice a year all the males should repair to the place where the sanctuary stood; to the law forbidding the multiplication of horses; and to the law of the jubilee, which required mortgaged possessions to return to the original proprietors, and slaves to be restored to liberty. It is evident that these laws interfered with public and private interest. They exposed the country to the danger of famine, invasion, and conquest, and demanded from individuals a sacrifice of property which might have given rise to open resistance.

It is altogether incredible that any legislator of a sound mind would have made such enactments by his own authority, or that any nation would have acquiesced in them, merely because he chose to impose them. Such, indeed, is the texture of the whole law, that we cannot conceive Moses to have contrived it, or the Israelites, if left at liberty to choose, to have received it. It may be said, that he persuaded them that Jehovah was its author. But how did he persuade them? How did he accomplish his purpose? Was it by boldly affirming that his law was a revelation from heaven? The Israelites must have been simple indeed if they believed him,—simple to a degree of which there is no other example. Did they quietly submit to have the yoke of ceremonies wreathed about their necks? to live in a state of separation from the world? to be the objects of the ridicule and hatred of mankind, merely because Moses told them that such was the will of God? Truly, he who can believe this is as simple as they are supposed to have been. But their history forbids the supposition, and shows that they were an obstinate refractory race,—very unfit materials to be moulded into any form at the pleasure of an impostor. Besides, we know that it was not by simple affirmation that Moses gained his end, but that he appealed to evidence, and the evidence was miraculous. While he asserted that the law was from God, he told them that they had themselves heard a part of it published with his own voice, and that the other parts had been delivered by him as his accredited messenger,—accredited by signs and wonders which they had seen with their own eyes. Would this new pretence, if it was a pretence, have added any weight to the first? No;

it would have had the contrary effect; it would have furnished the means of disproving it, and have put it in the power of every Israelite to say, "It is perfectly plain to me that your claim to be the minister of Jehovah is false, for I never heard his voice, nor saw one of those supernatural works by which you say he attested your commission." The reception of the law is therefore a proof that the people were satisfied of the authority of Moses to impose it, or rather, that they were satisfied that the law emanated from the God of their fathers; and, consequently, is a proof that they had witnessed the miracles in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness.

Thus, the genuineness proves the authenticity of the books, or the truth of the religion contained in them. They were published at the time to which they are assigned, and consequently would not have been received if the events recorded in them had not actually happened.

The same reasoning may be employed to prove the authenticity of the books of the New Testament, and particularly the historical books. The religion which they announced was not new, but was the development and completion of the revelation made by the ministry of Moses and the prophets; but it differed from that revelation in some important respects, and still more from the views of it which were generally entertained; for, although the Jews professed the religion of their fathers, they had greatly corrupted it. The Messiah whom the books introduce to our notice, is not the person who was expected in that character. He was a man of obscure birth, and in a humble rank of life; his doctrine was spiritual; his actions were of a peaceful nature; he avoided worldly honours; instead of encouraging his countrymen to rebel against the Romans, and assert their national independence, he taught them to submit to the established government; and after a short course of contradiction and suffering, he died upon a cross. There was not one trait in his character which corresponded with the prevailing hope of a mighty conqueror, and a splendid temporal monarch. But this is not all. They were required to adopt not only new opinions, but new practices; to renounce the religious institutions which had been established in the nation for fifteen hundred years, and to which they were strongly attached, not only as sacred, but as the means of recommending them to the favour of God. They were to forsake the temple and the altar, with their pompous services, and be content with a simple ritual, which prescribed nothing to please the senses. At the same time, they were to forego the flattering distinction which they had long enjoyed of being the peculiar people, to see the Gentiles invested with the same privileges, and to regard them as in every respect their equals, as subjects of the Messiah, and members of his church. We cannot suppose that they would have admitted upon slight grounds a religion which demanded such important changes and such costly sacrifices.

To the Gentiles, the religion of the gospel was new, in every sense of the word. It was a new God whom it announced; for although he had been worshipped for ages by the Jews, he was unknown, except by vague report, to the nations of the world. Yet he claimed the exclusive possession of Divinity, and required to be worshipped without a rival. Of the person by whom this religion was founded, they had never heard before; and the character in which he was exhibited was strange, and in the first instance unintelligible; for, ignorant as they were of the Divine law, and of the degree and extent of human guilt and depravity, they had no expectation and felt no need of a spiritual Saviour. The doctrines connected with his person and work, and the general scheme of Christianity, would appear to them to be extravagant, unphilosophical, and false. Not less objectionable in their eyes, would be the system of duties which it enjoined. Of some of them they had no idea and of others they entertained a contemptuous opinion; while the opposi-

views were so common, that all sense of their moral turpitude was lost, and their wisest men had recommended them both by precept and by example. There is a consideration which is equally applicable to Gentiles and to Jews--that the new religion being so adverse to those already established, the persons who first embraced it would not only be reproached for their singularity, fickleness, and credulity, but would incur the hatred of zealots and bigots, awaken the suspicion and jealousy of the higher powers, and subject themselves to such restraint and punishment as might be deemed necessary to check this dangerous innovation.

In this state of things, the religion of Christ was presented to mankind in the discourses of the apostles, and in the written records which have been transmitted to us. By what means did it obtain credit? This was not a case in which bold affirmation and eloquent appeals would succeed. There was no predisposition in favour of the religion, there was a strong prejudice against it. What was wanted was evidence, clear, convincing, and overwhelming. Now the books tell us, that such evidence was furnished, both by the author and by the preachers of the religion, in the miracles which they performed in Judea, and in other countries. We have here a satisfactory solution of the problem, how the books, and the religion taught in them, came to be received; but it is impossible to explain the fact, upon any other hypothesis. If those who lived in that age saw miracles, they could not doubt the truth of the system, in support of which they were wrought; but if they did not see them how were they persuaded? The effect is certain, and we can discover no other adequate cause. It would be the greatest miracle of all, says Chrysostom, if the world believed without miracles. When all the circumstances of the case are taken into consideration, it would be a fact in the history of mankind without a parallel, and absolutely inexplicable. Admit the miracles, and all is intelligible; deny the miracles, and all is mystery. Deny the miracles, and you must say, that there were two epochs, namely, the age of Moses and the age of Christ, when the human mind underwent a sudden revolution, and acted in opposition to the laws by which, at all other times, it is governed. Men believed without evidence; without evidence, they adopted opinions contrary to their deep-rooted prejudices; engaged in practices repugnant to their strongest inclinations; sacrificed the good opinion of those whose favour they once highly prized; and exposed property, liberty, and life to hazard, for a dream. But as human nature is the same in all ages, those who lived at the periods referred to must have had good reason for their conduct. Now the only reason which could justify their conduct, was such evidence as left no room for doubt: and in this case, the evidence must have been miraculous, for in no other way could a revelation from heaven be proved.

The argument founded on the testimony of the primitive times is weakened in the minds of some, by a misapprehension respecting the persons by whom it is borne. They were Christians who received the books of the New Testament, and have attested the facts upon which our religion is founded. They are, therefore, looked upon with a degree of suspicion, as if they were interested persons. It seems to be supposed, and infidels take it for granted, that there was a set of men who, having become Christians no man knows why, laid their heads together to practise an imposition upon the world. This puts one in mind of the Indian hypothesis that the earth rests upon an elephant, and the elephant stands upon a tortoise; but upon what the tortoise is supported, we are left to conjecture. The witnesses, it is said, are Christians, and therefore are not to be depended upon. But what made them Christians? This question is overlooked by the objectors; but a right answer to it would show that their testimony is worthy of credit. I cannot do better than to transcribe the words of Mr. Addison, in his short treatise on the evidence of

the Christian religion:—"Let us now suppose, that a learned heathen writer who lived within sixty years of our Saviour's crucifixion, after having shown that false miracles were generally wrought in obscurity, and before few or no witnesses, speaking of those which were wrought by our Saviour, has the following passage:—"But his works were always seen, because they were true; they were seen by those who were healed, and by those who were raised from the dead. Nay, these persons, who were thus healed and raised, were seen not only at the time of their being healed and raised, but long after. Nay, they were seen not only all the while our Saviour was upon earth, but survived after his departure out of this world; nay, some of them were living in our days.' I dare say you would look upon this as a glorious attestation for the cause of Christianity, had it come from the hand of a famous Athenian philosopher. These forementioned words, however, are actually the words of one who lived about sixty years after our Saviour's crucifixion, and was a famous philosopher in Athens; but it will be said, he was a convert to Christianity. Now, consider this matter impartially, and see if his testimony is not much more valid for that reason: Had he continued a Pagan philosopher, would not the world have said that he was not sincere in what he writ, or did not believe it; for if so, would they not have told us, he would have embraced Christianity? This was indeed the case of this excellent man: he had so thoroughly examined the truth of our Saviour's history, and the excellency of that religion which he taught, and was so entirely convinced of both, that he became a proselyte, and died a martyr." "I do allow that, generally speaking, a man is not so acceptable and unquestioned an evidence, on facts which make for the advancement of his own party. But we must consider that, in the case before us, the persons to whom we appeal were of an opposite party till they were persuaded of the truth of those very facts which they report. They bear evidence to a history in defence of Christianity, the truth of which history was their motive to embrace Christianity. They attest facts which they had heard while they were yet heathens, and had they not found reason to believe them, they would still have continued heathens, and have made no mention of them in their writings."*

It appears, that from the genuineness of the books, we may infer their authenticity. They would not have been received, if they had not been true; or what amounts to the same thing, the religion which is taught in them would not have been embraced, if the men of that age had not witnessed, or were otherwise assured of the facts upon which it was founded. The truth of the facts is the only conceivable motive by which they would be induced to become converts to it. It is affirmed in the New Testament, that miracles were wrought, not only by Jesus Christ, but by his apostles. This affirmation is not only made in general terms, but is confirmed by particular instances; and the time when, the place where, and the persons upon whom the miracles were wrought, are frequently specified. What is more, the very persons to whom some of the books are addressed, are appealed to as witnesses of the miracles. In the second epistle to the Corinthians, Paul says to them: "Truly, the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds;"† and in the epistle to the Hebrews, he mentions it as an unquestionable fact, that when the gospel was preached to them, God bore the preachers witness, "both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will."‡ The argument, then, is reduced to a narrow compass. These assertions were either true or false. If they were false, how could the apostle venture to make

* The Evidences of the Christian Religion, sect. iii.

† 2 Cor. xii. 12.

‡ Heb. ii. 4.

them? Had he lost his senses? was he a raving visionary, who mistook the illusions of fancy for realities? or was he in jest, and did he wish his letters to be laughed at? These suppositions are out of the question. He was in a sound mind, and expected what he wrote to be received with respect. And how were his epistles received? were they treated with the scorn, or the indignation which is due to the man who presumes to tell lies to our face? We know that they were regarded then, as they have ever since been, as the compositions of an apostle, who was authorized and qualified to instruct the church in the important truths and duties of religion. But they could not have been so regarded, if the Corinthians and the Hebrews had not seen miracles performed by Paul and by others, in confirmation of their doctrine. The claim to supernatural powers would have destroyed all their credit, if it had not been substantiated. "In matters of opinion, it is possible to impose upon others by bold asseverations, and subtle reasonings; but he who promises to cure the blind, and raise the dead, leaves himself no subterfuge, and must either perform his promise, or submit to be considered as a fool or a madman." There is another view which may be taken of the argument. While the apostles affirm that they had wrought miracles in the presence of those to whom they wrote, they farther affirm that some of those persons had received miraculous gifts. There are intimations of this kind in several of the epistles; but the subject is discussed at length in the first epistle to the Corinthians. This is the last thing which an impostor would do, or rather it is a thing which he would not do. He might appeal to the reason of others, because he had contrived previously to pervert it by sophistry; he might appeal to their senses, because he could deceive them by the arts of legerdemain; but he would not dare to appeal to their consciousness. Paul would have been laughed at, if supernatural gifts had been unknown in the primitive church. But he was still regarded as an apostle of Christ; and the continued respect which was shown to him, is a proof that such gifts did exist in the church. By the communication of them, the revelation contained in the books of the New Testament was authenticated.

A miracle is a supernatural work. It is an effect which could not be produced according to the laws of nature, and, therefore, implies a suspension of these laws, or a deviation from them. Some have called it a transgression or violation of them: but I do not think that these terms are well chosen, because in their usual application, they suggest the idea of disobedience to authority, and an encroachment upon right; and consequently, are improper in speaking of any act done by the Creator himself, or by others according to his will. Let it be observed, that we do not give the name of miracle to every prodigy or strange event, because it is not necessary in such cases to suppose that the laws of nature are counteracted or surpassed. They may be accounted for, and many of them have been explained by an accidental concurrence of causes which rarely meet, and their number is diminished in proportion as the boundaries of science are enlarged; that is, the more thoroughly nature is understood, the more easily can such things be shown to be in harmony with its laws. Not a few of the miracles related by ancient historians are now known not to be such, but merely uncommon events. We do not call a monstrous birth, or a fall of stones from the clouds, miraculous; but we would so designate the cure of blindness by a touch, and the raising of the dead by a word.

The possibility of miracles will be called in question only by atheists. He who believes that the universe exists by eternal necessity, may consistently deny that any change can take place in its established order; but no such idea can be entertained by a person who admits that it is the work of an intelligent and an omnipotent Being. To an enlightened theist, its laws must appear

to be nothing else but the uniform exertion of his power; and surely he can alter the mode of operation when there is some end worthy of his wisdom to be accomplished. Vegetation implies a particular process, in which a seed, the earth, moisture, air, light, and heat, perform their respective parts, and a certain time is required to its completion; but there is no doubt that he, who gives efficacy to this process, could produce a perfect plant in a moment, as it must be allowed that he did at the beginning. Now, if a tree should instantly spring up before us, in full size, covered with foliage and laden with fruit, we should not hesitate to acknowledge a miracle. It is not necessary to dwell upon this point, because it will not be disputed that miracles are possible, whatever doubts may be entertained with respect to their necessity and expedience.

I proceed to observe that none but God can perform miracles. The truth of this observation, I should think, would be conceded, if the true idea of a miracle were kept steadily in view; for, if it be understood to be an effect which cannot be produced by the laws of nature, we are compelled to have recourse to the immediate power of God for the cause. It is acknowledged that there are some passages of Scripture, from which it has been inferred that miracles may be performed by evil spirits and their agents. After some of the miracles which Moses wrought, it is said that "the magicians of Egypt did in like manner with their enchantments."* But many learned men contend, and have endeavoured to prove, that nothing more is meant than that they imitated what Moses had done, by sleight of hand, and the assistance of those who were in concert with them. They think that this is evident from the nature of the miracles in which they pretended to rival the power of Moses, and which afforded them an opportunity to practise their dexterity; but when he proceeded to work other miracles, their skill was baffled, and they confessed that this was the finger of God. The story has much the appearance of art carried to a certain length, and then failing, because its resources were exhausted. Our Lord foretold that there should arise false Christs and false prophets, who would show great signs and wonders; but we know that these were not real miracles, from the accounts which have come down to us of the wonders which they did exhibit, and which are exactly of the same kind with the tricks employed by jugglers to excite the admiration of the multitude. It is admitted that evil spirits might do some things which would appear miraculous to us. They might, for example, raise a man from the ground, and convey him through the air to a distant place, as Satan did to our Saviour. But whatever astonishment such an event might excite, it would not, when understood, be regarded as a miracle. If we saw the spirit in a visible form lifting up the man, and carrying him in his hand, we should be surprised indeed, but still we should know that what was done was as agreeable to the laws of nature as if he had been elevated in a balloon. It would be a real miracle, if he was raised without the agency of any natural power, because the event would be referrible, in this case, to God himself, suspending or counteracting the law of gravitation. But, in speaking of miracles, we presuppose the existence and moral government of the Deity. On this ground, we believe that the different species of creatures will be restrained by his providence from going beyond their proper sphere; that wicked spirits will not be permitted to act such a part, as would lay mankind under an absolute impossibility of distinguishing between truth and falsehood, and subject them to unavoidable delusion. This would be the effect if they were permitted to work real miracles, or to do such things as could not be distinguished from real miracles; for then they could practise any imposition

* Exod. vii. 11.

upon mankind, and there would be no means of discriminating a true from a pretended revelation. But they cannot act independently of Him, in whom all creatures live, and move, and have their being : and surely, he would not give them liberty to do any thing which would defeat the purpose of those communications to mankind, which it might seem fit to his wisdom to make. It is true, that men have been employed in working miracles, but they were merely instruments in the hands of God ; and the only person who ever wrought them by his own power was Jesus Christ, who, as the Lord of nature, controlled its laws at his pleasure. We are apt to fall into a mistake, when we speak of miraculous powers having been communicated to certain individuals. We are mistaken if we suppose that such powers were inherent in them, were properly their own, and were exerted by them as they exerted their natural faculties. I believe that the apostle Paul could no more work miracles than I can, and the only difference between us is, that in consequence of a commission which he had received, and I have not, divine power accompanied the signs which he gave, or the words which he pronounced, when any thing was to be done out of the ordinary course. It was not Paul who performed the miracle, but God, or Jesus Christ, who secretly directed him to rebuke diseases, for example, when it was his design to remove them. "Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The name of Jesus, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know."* We say, then, that God alone can work miracles.

Miracles may be proved ; that is, there is no reason why we should conclude against them *a priori*, if they are not contrary to the perfections of God, or to any previous declaration of his will. In either of these cases we might at once pronounce them to be impossible, because we should be certain that he who only could, would not perform them. I acknowledge that the expectation that the course of nature will continue has been considered by philosophers to rest on an instinctive principle of belief ; and that, upon this principle, it has been said, all the operations which have a respect to futurity are conducted. No man would build a house, if he did not expect that it would stand by the law of gravitation ; or sow his field, if he did not calculate upon the regular order of the seasons. But observe how far this principle goes. It assumes the constancy of the laws of nature, (the knowledge of which, however, is derived from experience,) and from their past, deduces their future continuance. But what demonstrates the connexion between the premises and the conclusion ? It is not *intuitively* evident, that because an event has regularly taken place for a long period, it will take place for a period equally long. If the course of nature is the order in which divine power is exerted to uphold the system of creation, we can have no certainty that it will be always exerted in the same order, without an express declaration from the Creator himself. By those who believe revelation, the conclusion that it will be perpetual must be pronounced to be false, and a time will come, when the expectation, founded on this instinctive principle of belief, will fail, because it foretells a mighty revolution, which will be followed by a new order of things. It is certain, that God has not obliged himself by any thing which he has said or done, by any thing which we can collect from reason or experience, to a uniformity in the exercise of his power, without a single deviation. To suppose that he has would be a mere assumption ; and if any person should on this ground affirm that miracles are improbable, he would not deserve a serious answer. If the universe is governed by Omnipotence, for aught that we could tell, its movements might stop to-morrow, or some

* Acts iii. 12. 16.

alteration might be made which would give it a new constitution; and the utmost which we are warranted to presume, is, that if it is the will of the Most High that the present race should still people the earth, the present order, which is so admirably adapted to their nature and necessities, will be upheld. It should be observed, at the same time, that miracles no more disturb that order than the sudden movement of the index the fiftieth part of an inch backward or forward would disturb the order of a watch. The effect upon the system is, if possible, still less; for a miracle is a suspension or counteraction of the laws of nature only in one point of infinite space. The cure of a disease, or the resurrection of a dead body, does not affect the general laws of the universe.

These remarks have prepared our way for estimating the force of the celebrated argument against miracles which Hume has founded on experience.* He maintains that the proof against them is complete, being established upon the constant experience of the immutability of the order of nature. After the view which we have taken of the subject, this will appear to be no proof at all. Assuming that for four thousand years the course of nature had not been disturbed, we have yet no certain data upon which we could conclude that it would never be disturbed. If it is subject to the control of an intelligent Being of infinite power, it is presumptuous in any man to say that no case could arise which would render it proper for him to interpose in a sensible manner. The argument from the stability of nature is a mere sophism, an inference which is not contained in the premises. But we must say something more of it. The premises are neither self-evident nor demonstrable, but assumed. The advocates of miracles affirm that the course of nature has not been immutable; and this philosopher deems it sufficient to say that it has. How did he know what has been the course of nature in past ages? He did not exist from the beginning of time; he was but of yesterday, and was indebted for his knowledge of what had happened before him, to testimony. Now this testimony told him, as it tells us, that the course of nature had not been uniform, but had been subjected to repeated interruptions; and how could he say with candour and truth that it had never been altered? It was the business of a philosopher, not to take the uniformity of nature for granted in opposition to the only evidence which he could have on the subject, but to prove, if he was able in some, other way, that its course had never undergone the interruptions which history alleged. Had this plan been adopted, we should have never heard of his boasted argument, "which, with the wise and learned, would be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and consequently, would be useful as long as the world endures,"† namely, that as our experience of the uniformity of nature is firm and unalterable, but our experience of the truth of human testimony is variable, the evidence against miracles from the former, overwhelms and annihilates any evidence in their favour which is supposed to be afforded by the latter. He first falsifies testimony by representing it as establishing the immutability of the laws of nature, which it does not, and then opposes testimony, under the name of experience, to testimony affirming the change of those laws. We know that variable as is our experience of testimony, that is, although we find it sometimes to be true, and at other times to be false, the declaration of a single witness will often induce us to believe an event totally different from any which had fallen under our own observation. Credit is given every day to a traveller of acknowledged capacity and integrity, when he relates strange phenomena, and equally strange occurrences in the countries which he has visited. Were he indeed to affirm that he had seen a miracle, we should not be so ready to believe him: but if his report were cor-

* Hume's Essays, vol. ii. Of Miracles.

† Vol. ii. p. 124

robored by other witnesses alike possessed of mental and moral qualifications; if they agreed, not only when brought together, but when separately examined; if they had no interest to serve by their statement, but the maintaining of it would tend to their prejudice; if they should persist in averring its truth in the midst of sufferings and in the article of death; if they would not retract, although, upon condition of doing so, they were promised their lives; there is not a man in the world who would not admit that the evidence was irresistible. This is undoubtedly a case in which, to use the language of Hume, the falsehood of their testimony would be more miraculous than the event which they relate; and then, as he admits, they might pretend to command our belief or opinion. But these are the circumstances in which the testimony to the miracles of Christianity was delivered; and consequently, we must set aside, as irrelevant, all reasoning from the uniformity of the course of nature.

My next observation is, that a case may be conceived in which there would be a reason for the working of miracles, and it is the case in which they are alleged to have been actually wrought. If God should be pleased to make any communication to mankind for their benefit, and his own glory, there would be a necessity that he should interpose in a sensible manner. I do not say that we could have expected miracles beforehand, because we could not have known beforehand that he would make any communication of his will. But we see that amidst many things in the course of events which must be viewed as indications of severity, there are also tokens of his goodness. Notwithstanding the criminal conduct of his creatures, he makes the sun shine, and the rain fall upon them, gives them food and raiment, and innumerable blessings, and exercises mercy in relieving them from the evils which fall to their lot, and in providing the means, by the use of which their sufferings are alleviated. We could not, from these things, infer that he would proceed farther in our behalf; but if he should extend his care to our souls as well as to our bodies, it would be an extension of the benevolence already displayed in his works. It would be in conformity to the plan which he has hitherto pursued, and a farther development of it, if he should interpose to rescue fallen men from ignorance, guilt, and perdition. It would not be unworthy of him, or rather it would reflect great glory upon his character, if he should impart to them more correct views of his nature and attributes, deliver to them a plain rule of duty, point out the means of regaining his favour, and make such discoveries of the future state as would animate their obedience, console them in affliction, and raise them above the fear of death. It is certain that they have no claim to such a revelation; but the granting of it would be in accordance with the kind and compassionate nature of the providential dispensation under which they are placed. It does not follow that a revelation was strictly probable; but the reasoning shows that it was not improbable; that there was no presumption against it; nay, that there was some presumption in its favour; that is, that although nothing exactly similar had taken place, there was something so like it as to render it by no means incredible. Now, if God should be pleased to make a revelation for the instruction and happiness of his creatures, miracles were evidently necessary, because it was only by them that it could be attested. It was not to be a revelation to every individual, conveyed into his own mind with such marks of its origin as should take away all doubt; but a revelation communicated to a few, to be by them published to the world. Here, then, is a case in which miracles were called for to confirm the testimony of the ministers of heaven, to convince others that they spoke by higher authority than their own, and, consequently, the probability of miracles is in proportion to the probability that a revelation would be made. They are inseparably connected; the one could not be without the other.

We have already seen that if miracles had not been wrought, our sacred books could not have been received as authentic, and that the religion taught in them could not have made its way in the world. No hypothesis but that of miracles will account for its success. It has been alleged, with a view to throw suspicion upon the scriptural narrations, that stories of miracles have been circulated and believed in all ages; and that, as credulity and the love of the marvellous are so prevalent among mankind, these principles will account for the belief of the Christian miracles. Our antagonists refer us to heathen and popish writings, in which are many similar relations equally entitled, as they insinuate, to attention.

It is true that ancient historians abound in wonderful facts; but there is no evidence that Livy, for example, gave credit to those which he records, and certainly he has stated no grounds on which we should believe them. He does not pretend to have seen any of them himself; they happened long before his time, and they were obviously vague rumours, the consequences of which affected no individual. Some of the miracles were natural events, as the fall of lightning upon a house or a tree, and the descent of stones, or as they are called in modern science *aërolites*, from the clouds; others were monstrous productions which now and then appear; and others were of the same ridiculous nature with the marvellous stories which are still current among the vulgar. The best authenticated heathen miracles are those which Vespasian performed in Alexandria upon a blind and a lame man.* It is questionable whether Tacitus, who relates them with a grave face, himself believed them. At first, Vespasian laughed at the proposal to attempt the feat, and did not proceed till he was excited by his friends, and assured by physicians that the lameness and blindness were curable by proper applications; that is to say, the whole business was a farce; but being acted by a mighty emperor, surrounded by his courtiers and soldiers, and tending to the honour of the tutelar god of the city, it passed without examination. How different were the Christian miracles, performed by a few obscure individuals, in the midst of enemies, and opposed by all the powers of the state!

Popish miracles are without number. Some of them carry their own confutation in their face, being so absurd and ridiculous that even a child would laugh at them. Some, again, are profane and impious in a shocking degree. Not a few of them have been clearly proved to be impostures by the confession of the persons employed in them, and by the discovery of the means by which they were effected; and these destroy the credit of the rest, upon this principle, that if you have once proved a man to be repeatedly guilty of falsehood, you are not bound ever to believe him.

Dr. Douglas, in his *Criterion of Miracles*, and Dr. Paley after him, have laid down various rules for distinguishing false accounts of miracles from true. No credit is due to relations long posterior to the time; to accounts of miracles which are said to have been performed in a far distant scene; or to transient rumours of wonderful events which soon cease to be mentioned. The miracles of Christianity were wrought on the spot where, and in the age when, the narrative was published: they have ever since been believed and appealed to as proofs of our religion. No credit is due to reports of miracles in which, to use the words of Paley, "no interest is involved, nothing is to be done or changed in consequence of believing them. Such stories are credited, if the careless assent that is given to them deserve that name, more by the indolence of the hearer, than by his judgment; or, though not much credited, are passed from one to another without inquiry or resistance."† But the miracles of Christianity must have awakened all the attention of mankind, because they

* Tacit. Hist. lib. iv.

† Paley's Evidences, part i. prop. ii. chap. 1.

decided, “if true, the most important question upon which the human mind can fix its anxiety.” Once more, miracles may be suspected when they are reported to be wrought in confirmation of a religion supported by the state, and embraced by the people. All the heathen and popish miracles fall under suspicion on this ground. The miracles of Christianity were wrought against the established religions. The design of them was not to give credit to a sect already existing, but to found one upon the ruins of all other sects. There was no prejudice in their favour; the prejudices of mankind were all hostile to them. It was only by being true that they could accomplish their end; and since they did succeed, we may implicitly confide in the record of them which has been transmitted to us.

LECTURE VIII.

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

What Miracles prove—Are they alone sufficient to prove a Revelation?—Argument from Prophecy—Definition of a Prophecy: Implies Divine Foresight—Characteristics of real Prophecies—Their Force as an Evidence of Revelation—Notice of some particular Prophecies—Argument from the Success of Christianity: Statement and Force of this Argument.

WE have shown that miracles are possible, that there is no improbability against them, and that cases may be conceived in which they would be manifestly proper and necessary. It has appeared that God only can work miracles, and that the men who have been employed in them ought to be viewed in no other light than as the instruments by whom his power was exerted. The conclusion from these premises is, that the religion in favour of which miracles have been wrought, is true. We have proved the certainty of the miracles alleged in support of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, and hence we are warranted to account them a Divine revelation.

I do not see that this inference can be rationally disputed. I should presume that if a person were once convinced that the miracles related in the Scriptures were really performed, he would not hesitate to give an assent to the doctrines taught in them. Miracles were signs of the presence of God with those who exhibited these seals, as they have been called, by which their commission to communicate his will was attested. Infidels have asked, What connexion is there between truth and power? meaning that there is no connexion, or that the truth of a doctrine cannot be proved by a miracle. They might have asked with equal wisdom, What connexion is there between a man's signature and the validity of the bill or bond which he has subscribed? What connexion is there between the credentials of an ambassador and his right to transact the business of his sovereign? If they could perceive the connexion in these cases, they could see it in the other, unless they were wilfully blind. Were it in the power of men to work miracles, we could draw no inference from them respecting the truth of their tenets, because they might be influenced by corrupt motives, and have a design to deceive. But, believing that God is a holy Being, who will not and cannot deceive, because falsehood is contrary to his nature, we hold that the exertion of his power in favour of any religious system, is the highest evidence of its truth. To suppose the contrary is impiety and blasphemy. Those who witnessed the supernatural works by which

the law of Moses and the gospel of Christ were confirmed, were furnished with the means of being as fully assured that the revelations proceeded from God, as if they had heard him pronounce them with an audible voice ; and we to whom their testimony to the works has been faithfully transmitted, may have equal confidence in the divinity of these revelations.

It has been asserted by some Christian writers, that miracles alone are not sufficient to prove the truth of a doctrine, and that we must take into the account the nature of the doctrine, as well as the miracles. This has always appeared to me to be reasoning in a circle, as Papists do, when they prove the authority of the Scriptures from the church, and the authority of the church from the Scriptures. It completely changes the design of miracles, which are no longer decisive proofs but merely testimonials, which when a man can produce, "if he teaches nothing absurd, much more if his doctrines and precepts appear to be good and beneficial, he ought to be obeyed." So says Dr. Jortin,* and so say others, but with very little wisdom. Who is to determine what is absurd and what is not? May not doctrines which are true seem absurd to the ignorant and prejudiced? Were not the peculiar doctrines of Christianity viewed in this light by both Jews and Gentiles? Who is to judge what is good and beneficial? Are there not exercises and duties of our religion, the goodness of which is known only by the declarations and promises of God, and could not have been ascertained by reasoning *a priori*? The ground on which this opinion rests, is the difficulty of distinguishing true miracles from false. If, by the latter, are meant such signs and wonders as it was intimated by our Lord that false Christs and false prophets would perform, we have already seen that they were merely feats of dexterity. There is reason to believe that the acts of the Egyptian magicians were not exceptions. Let those who talk of miracles as wrought by evil spirits give us a well-attested instance of one. Moses, indeed, has said, "If there arise among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams."† You will, however, observe, that this is only a hypothetical case, and seems to have been intended as a general admonition to beware of those who might entice them to idolatry; but we do not find that the case supposed was ever realized, for we read nowhere of false prophets among the Jews who wrought miracles, unless you give this name to the wizards, necromancers, and dealers with familiar spirits, whom all allow to have been of the same class with our own jugglers and fortune-tellers. It ought to be farther observed, that the case supposed is that of a sign given to draw men away from a religion already established by miracles. As God cannot contradict himself, we are sure, without any farther inquiry, that those are false miracles which are designed to seduce us to adopt any opinion or practice which he has forbidden. In such a case, too, the one set of miracles will be contradicted by the other; those which are wrought in attestation of truth, bearing such clear marks of omnipotence as to demonstrate that those by which error is supported have emanated from an inferior power. Thus, although the miracles of the Egyptian magicians had been real, yet their evidence was destroyed by the miracles of Moses, which they were not able to imitate. Was it ever heard that a teacher of error divided the sea before his followers; brought down manna from heaven; stilled a tempest in a moment; fed a multitude with a few loaves; cured all kinds of disease by a word or a touch, and called the dead from the grave? Till some person be produced who supported a system of his own invention by such mighty deeds

* Remarks on Ecclesiastical History, book ii.

† Deut. xiii. 1—3.

we may allow that miracles are sufficient to prove the truth of a revelation, independently of any consideration of its contents. The opposite opinion supposes a capacity in men to decide concerning what is true, and fit, and expedient in religion, which they do not possess. It constitutes reason, in part at least, the judge of revelation; whereas a revelation, being an authoritative declaration of the will of God, demands to be received upon the simple exhibition of its evidence. We are not to inquire whether it is worthy of God, but to believe that it is so, simply because it has manifestly proceeded from him. In a word, this opinion is at variance with the Scriptures, which so often appeal to miracles as a proof of doctrines; and it represents our Lord as having reasoned inconclusively when he said, "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake."* "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me."† Can any thing be plainer? He rests his claim to be believed solely upon his miracles. Will any person still affirm that miracles are not in themselves sufficient to establish the truth of a doctrine? He must also affirm that our Lord, in the passages quoted, made an unreasonable demand upon his hearers, and that their not believing in him on the ground of his miracles alone, would not have been so criminal as we have been led to suppose.

Our first argument for the truth of revealed religion is founded on the miracles which were wrought to attest it. The next is derived from prophecy; but before we enter upon the illustration of it, we may remark its connexion with the proof of the genuineness of the sacred writings. We can know that certain parts of them are prophetic, only by having previously ascertained that they were composed before the events which they profess to foretell. Any doubt upon this subject would destroy the argument; and were there reason to believe that they were posterior to the events, we should be under the necessity of pronouncing them to be forgeries. Hence you perceive, that in this discussion, it was an indispensable preliminary to show that the Scriptures were the productions of the persons to whom they are ascribed.

A prophecy is the annunciation of a future event which could not have been foreknown by natural means. Human knowledge is almost entirely confined to things past and present; with a few exceptions, those which are future are the objects only of conjecture. There are, indeed, certain events which we confidently expect. We believe, without any mixture of doubt, that in all ages to come, while the world endures, the sun will rise and set, the ocean will ebb and flow, the wind will blow from different points of the compass, and the seasons will change. It requires no prophetic spirit to foretell these events, because they will arise from the constitution and course of nature, or from causes which already exist and are known. It would be a real prophecy if any person could at this moment inform us at what precise period this regular succession will cease; a prophecy, however, which would have no practical effect, because its truth would not be established till the present system had come to a close, when prophecy and miracles will no longer be wanted. We can also, from what we know of certain individuals, draw probable conclusions respecting their actions in given circumstances; but we proceed upon the general principles of human nature, which are as permanent as the laws of matter, and upon our previous acquaintance with the characters, dispositions, and conduct of the persons in question. Superior sagacity consists in quickly and accurately combining the elements of calculations, and anticipating the result. Yet it is almost needless to say, that the best-founded expectations are often disappointed.

* John xiv. 11

† John v. 36.

Every coincidence between an event and something which has been said before, is not to be accounted a prophecy. You may find in an ancient author passages surprisingly applicable to occurrences which were long posterior; but the agreement is manifestly accidental. There is no evidence that the author had any knowledge of the occurrence; nor were the passages ever supposed to have an original reference to it. It may happen, too, that of a variety of conjectures, some shall be realized; but no person of a sound mind would, for this reason, look upon them as more than conjectures. He would say that the accordance was owing to chance, and was not more wonderful than it is to find, among a multitude of portraits, one which bears a resemblance to an acquaintance without being intended for him. Design enters into the idea of prophecy; that is, the words in which it is expressed were spoken for the avowed purpose of giving notice beforehand of an event, hidden at the time from every mortal eye amidst the darkness of futurity.

But, although human foresight could not be the foundation of prophecy, it may be supposed that the knowledge necessary to it might be furnished, not by God, but by superior beings. If there are evil spirits who interfere in the affairs of mankind, and take pleasure in deceiving them, it will not be doubted that they far excel us in intellectual endowments, and may possess the means of extending their discoveries beyond our limited range. "It is easy to conceive Satan," as I have elsewhere observed, "if his preternatural agency upon the mind be admitted to have enabled the subjects of his inspiration to reveal secrets, because deeds committed in darkness and in the closest retirement are open to the inspection of a spirit. He could farther have made them acquainted with distant transactions, the immediate knowledge of which it was impossible to obtain by natural means. He might have given them some notices of futurity by informing them of such things as he intended to do, or as were already in a train to be accomplished. He undoubtedly can conjecture with much greater sagacity than we, what will be the result in a variety of cases from the superior powers of his mind, his longer and more extensive experience, and his more perfect acquaintance with human nature in general, and the dispositions and circumstances of individuals."* Thus far his knowledge may go; but it is obviously inadequate to such predictions as are found in the records of revelation. It catches a glimpse of the outskirts of futurity, but cannot penetrate into its dark and distant recesses. "A real prophecy, or the prediction of an event which shall be effected by causes not yet in existence, or which depends upon the free agency of men who shall live a hundred or a thousand years hence, we may safely pronounce him to be as incapable of delivering as the most short-sighted of mortals."†

It is probable, that if men had formed a previous idea of prophecy, they would have supposed that it would be distinct and particular, giving a clear description of events, and thus guarding against all misapplication, and against all danger of overlooking the fulfilment. This is the character of predictions written after the event, as we see in the pretended Sybilline Oracles, which are often as plain as historical narrative. But there is an obscurity in the prophecies of Scripture, referrible, however, to a different cause from the studied ambiguity to which the obscurity of the heathen oracles was owing, for they were so framed as to admit an application to the event, whatever it might be. Such was the answer to Pyrrhus, when he was going to make war with the Romans:

*Aio te Æacida Romanos vincere posse;
Ibis redibis nunquam in bello peribis.*

* Lectures on the Acts, second edition, p. 317.

† Ibid.

“I say, that thou, O son of Æacus, art able to conquer the Romans: thou shalt go, thou shalt return, thou shalt never perish in war.” Or, “I say, that the Romans are able to conquer thee, O son of Æacus: thou shalt go, thou shalt never return, thou shalt perish in war.” Of the same kind was the answer of the oracle to Cræsus, when he was going to make war with the Persians; *Κρείσσει Ἄλυν διαβας μεγάλην ἀρχὴν διαλύσει.* “Cræsus, having passed the river Halys, shall overturn a great empire.” This was a safe prediction, because it would prove true whether his own kingdom or that of the Persians was subverted. The obscurity which attends the prophecies of Scripture has proceeded from the wisdom of God, who designed to give such notice of future events as should excite a general expectation of them, but not to make the information so perspicuous and minute as to induce men to attempt either to hasten or to impede their fulfilment. They are a part of his moral administration, and were adjusted, like all the other parts of it, to the moral nature of the persons who were to be the instruments of accomplishing his purposes. “As the completion of the prophecy is left for the most part,” says Bishop Hurd, “to the instrumentality of free agents, if the circumstances of the event were predicted with the utmost precision, either human liberty must be restrained, or human obstinacy might be tempted to form the absurd indeed, but criminal purpose of counteracting the prediction. On the contrary, by throwing some parts of the predicted event into shade, the moral faculties of the agent have their proper play, and the guilt of an intended opposition to the will of Heaven is avoided.”* But the obscurity is not so great as to render it uncertain whether they are prophecies or happy conjectures. It is dispelled by the event; and when the prediction is turned into history, we perceive the exact correspondence. It may be observed, that the degree of obscurity is not equal in all predictions; and that some of them are more minute and explicit than others, insomuch, that on account of their particularity, it has been affirmed, that they must have been written after the events. This was the charge of Porphyry against the prophecies of Daniel.

The argument from prophecy, for the truth of revealed religion, may be thus stated. As it is the prerogative of God alone to declare the end from the beginning, he who predicted future events must have derived his knowledge from inspiration. A prophecy, therefore, like a miracle, attests the commission of the person by whom it was delivered, proves him to be a messenger from God, and stamps the character of truth upon the instructions which he delivered in his name. A prophecy vouches not only for itself, but for all the communications which are connected with it. By bestowing this gift upon an individual, God pointed him out as one whom he had authorized and qualified to declare his will to us; and we ought implicitly to believe the religion which has been published by a succession of prophets, because we are sure, that he who has an absolute control over the minds and hearts of men, would not permit them to mix their own sentiments with the revelation which they were empowered to make, and to impose them upon the world, as of equal authority with the dictates of his wisdom.

Miracles were proofs of religion to those before whom they were wrought: and being fully attested, they are proofs to succeeding generations. Prophecies were not proofs to those who heard them delivered, but serve this purpose to those who see them fulfilled. If it be asked, Why are not miracles continued? we may answer, that they are not necessary, for various reasons; and particularly, because there is a standing evidence of the truth of religion in the prophecies which have been fulfilled, and are fulfilling before our eyes. And, to adopt the words of Bishop Newton, “this is one great excellency of

* Hurd's Works, vol. v. p. 46.

the evidence drawn from prophecy for the truth of religion, that it is a growing evidence, and the more prophecies are fulfilled, the more testimonies there are, and confirmations of the truth and certainty of divine revelation. And, in this respect, we have eminently the advantage over those who lived even in the days of Moses and the prophets, of Christ and his apostles. They were happy, indeed, in hearing their discourses, and seeing their miracles; and doubtless, many righteous men have desired to see those things which they saw, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which they heard, and have not heard them; but yet, I say, we have this advantage over them, that several things, which were then only foretold, are now fulfilled; and what were to them only matters of faith, are become matters of fact and certainty to us, upon whom the latter ages of the world are come.” “Miracles may be said to have been the great proofs of revelation to the first ages, who saw them performed; prophecies may be said to be the great proofs of revelation to the last ages, who see them fulfilled.”*

After these general observations, I proceed to lay before you some of the prophecies which are found in the Sacred Books.

First, let us consider the prophecies respecting the Jews; and I select those which are contained in the writings of Moses, relating to the future calamities of the nation; and which, at whatever period the Pentateuch may be supposed to have been published, were undoubtedly written long before the event. To go over them minutely would lead us into too long a detail; I shall therefore take notice of only a few particulars. First, He clearly foretells the invasion and conquest of their country. “The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance.” “He shall eat the fruit of thy cattle and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed.”† In these words it is impossible not to see a description of the Romans; who were not neighbours to the Jews, as the Philistines, the Syrians, and the Egyptians were, but had established the seat of their government at a great distance in Italy; who were distinguished by the extent and rapidity of their conquests; spoke a language totally different from that of Judea; first reduced the country into the form of a province, and afterwards laid it waste in the reign of the Emperor Vespasian. In the second place, Moses foretells the dreadful sufferings of the Jews at the time of the conquest. “He shall not regard the persons of the old nor show favour to the young.” “He shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down; and thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee.”‡ Let Josephus, an eyewitness, prove how awfully this prediction was verified in the indiscriminate slaughter of men, women, and children, by their un pitying foes, and in the dreadful famine which the wretched inhabitants suffered during the siege of Jerusalem. He relates one instance, and there might be many, of a woman who ate the flesh of her own child; and he says, “that no other city ever suffered such things, as no generation from the beginning of the world so much abounded in wickedness.” In the third place, Moses foretells the dispersion of the nation: “And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people from the one end of the earth even unto the other.”§ We all know that the prediction has been fulfilled, and that the present state of the Jews exactly corresponds with it. They have no country, no province, no city which they can call their own, but for more than seventeen centuries have

* Dissertation on the Prophecies. Introd.

† Deut. xxviii. 50. 52.

‡ Deut. xxviii. 49—51.

§ Ibid. 64.

been strangers and wanderers, yet remain distinct. The last circumstance to which I shall direct your attention, is signified in the following words: "And there shalt thou serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, wood and stone."* This prediction was long since fulfilled in the fate of the ten tribes, who, wherever they reside, have adopted the false religion of the heathen among whom they sojourn; and has been fulfilled in that of the Jews, who were more lately dispersed by the Romans; for it is well known that in popish countries, particularly in Spain and Portugal, many of them, to avoid persecution, have conformed to the established religion, and become worshippers of images. The whole prophecy is truly wonderful, and affords a striking proof of the divine prescience, when we reflect that it was delivered fifteen hundred years before the events, and foretold the rejection of the Jews, at the very same time when God was taking them to be his peculiar people.

There is a prior prophecy concerning Ishmael, which is worthy of our notice. "He will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren."† It was also foretold that he should become a great nation; but the description, which seems at the first view to relate to himself alone, and was to a certain extent applicable to him, is understood to refer ultimately to his descendants. These are the Arabians, whose character and history exactly correspond with it. The greater part of them have been from time immemorial, and still are, wild men, ranging the deserts, and living upon the spoils which they gather from solitary travellers, from caravans, and from the adjacent countries into which they make frequent incursions. Their hand is against every man, and every man's hand has been against them. They have provoked the hostility of different nations; of Sesostris, the famous king of Egypt; of Cyrus, the conqueror of Babylon; of Alexander the Great; and of the Romans; but their attempts to subdue them were baffled. Throughout all past ages they have maintained independence, and dwelt "in the presence of their brethren."

I pass over the prophecy concerning Egypt, "the basest of kingdoms," which has been fulfilled in its constant subjection to foreign domination, and in the poverty and wretchedness of its inhabitants amidst the stupendous monuments of its ancient greatness; and the prophecy concerning Tyre, "the mart of nations." "When you come to it," says Maundrell, "you find no similitude of that glory for which it was so renowned in ancient times, but a mere Babel of broken walls, pillars, and vaults, there being not so much as one entire house left. Its present inhabitants subsist chiefly upon fishing, and seem to be preserved by Divine Providence, as a visible argument how God has fulfilled his word concerning Tyre,‡ that it should be like 'the top of a rock, a place for fishers to dry their nets on.'"

The fate of Babylon was foretold in the following words. "And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation; neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces; and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged."§ The destruction of a city so extensive, containing magnificent buildings, and surrounded by lofty walls, could have been effected suddenly only by an earthquake. It was the work of time; but every particu-

* Deut. xxviii. 64.

† Gen. xvi. 12.

‡ Ezek. xxvi. 14.

§ Isa. xiii. 19—22.

lar has been fulfilled. For centuries, the very place where it once stood, the wonder of the world, was unknown. If modern travellers, who think that they have discovered it, are right, it is an awful monument of the truth and power of God. It is a mass of ruins, and nothing but ruins, covering the face of the country for miles; and amidst these they have heard the cry of wild beasts, and seen them roaming in their solitary domain. Other particulars connected with its doom are specified; that it should be besieged by the Medes and Persians;* that the Euphrates, which flowed through the midst of it, should be dried up;† that its gates should be open to Cyrus, its conqueror;‡ that it should be taken during the dissipation and security of a feast;§ and that the country around it should be turned into a marsh.|| How exactly these things were accomplished, we learn from the writings of Xenophon and Herodotus.

The prophecies concerning the Messiah comprehend a considerable portion of the Old Testament, and branch out into a great variety of particulars. The prophets foretell the family from which he should spring; the place of his birth; the time of his appearance; his supernatural endowments; the manner of his life; the nature of his doctrine; his miracles; his rejection by his countrymen; his sufferings; his death; his resurrection; his ascension; the establishment of his religion; and its progress in the world. They enter into so minute a detail as to give notice of the mode of his death; of the character of the persons in whose company he should die; of the accidental circumstances of presenting vinegar to him on the cross, and casting lots for his garments, and of the piercing of his side with a spear. One prophet writes almost as if he had been a spectator of the sorrowful scene;¶ and among all the efforts of Grotius to wrest the Scriptures, there is none more wretched and detestable than his abortive attempt to apply that chapter to another person. The unassisted human mind could not have conceived such a character, and such a train of events, as prophecy has described. Nothing similar ever occurred before, or will occur again, while the world endures. When we attentively consider the predictions relative to our Saviour, they divide themselves into two classes, of which the one describes his humiliation, and the other his glory. They predicate of the same subject, things apparently the most inconsistent, which could not have been contrived by any imagination. So impossible has it appeared to the Jews to unite them in one person, that they have dreamed of two Messiahs, to whom they have respectively allotted them. The one is the descendant of Ephraim, who, aided by some of the tribes, shall attempt to deliver the Jews from the power of their enemies, but shall fall in the enterprise. The other is a descendant of David, who will restore the first Messiah to life, raise the departed Jews from the grave, rebuild their temple, and subdue all the nations of the earth. They have fallen into this error by totally misapprehending the character of the Messiah, and the design of his mission. He is represented as a worm and no man, but as a prince higher than the kings of the earth; as a man of sorrows, but anointed with the oil of joy above his fellows; as dying, and yet abolishing death; as despised and rejected of men, and as called the Blessed by the grateful tribes of mankind. Every reader of the New Testament perceives that these discordant attributes meet and harmonize in Jesus of Nazareth, who is both God and man, and who, having abased himself, and submitted to the death of the cross, is exalted at the right hand of the Father, and has received dominion and a kingdom, that all nations and languages should serve him. To him bore all the prophets witness; and as most of their predictions have been punctually fulfilled, we believe that those which remain will also be accomplished in their season.

* Isa. xxi. 2 Jer. li. 11.

‡ Isa. xlv. 1.

§ Jer. li. 39. 57.

† Isa. xlv. 27. Jer. l. 38. and li. 36.

|| Isa. xiv. 22, 23.

¶ Isa. liii.

There are also many prophecies in the New Testament, among which we might notice that which relates to the fall of Jerusalem; but it is in substance the same with the prophecy of Moses, which has been considered. It is, however, more particular, and besides mentioning by name the city which was to be the scene of desolation, it points out, not obscurely, the armies by which it would be destroyed, marks the time of the event, and enumerates the signs which would announce its approach. Three of the gospels, it is universally acknowledged, were published before the catastrophe; but the fourth did not appear for a considerable number of years after it. It is worthy of attention, that it is omitted in the fourth, but is inserted in the other three.*

In the writings of Paul, and in the Revelation of John, there are clear intimations of the rise of a power hostile to the religion and the church of Christ, while professedly it would be connected with both. "Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."† The scene of his impious deeds is the temple of God, not that in Jerusalem, which was laid in ruins a short time after these words were written, but the church, which is called the house of the living God. There, he would usurp the attributes and prerogatives of Deity, and claim authority to supersede the ordinances of heaven, and to establish his own laws in their room. We learn from other passages, that this power would erect his throne in the city of Rome; that it would succeed in extending its dominion over nations, and peoples, and tongues; that it would persecute with unrelenting fury those who should refuse to submit to it, and would profusely shed the blood of the saints. It was quite improbable at the time that such a power should ever arise among Christians, few in number, as they comparatively were, and professing a humble and holy religion. It was improbable, that, if it should make its appearance, it should meet with encouragement, as its claims could not succeed, unless men would consent to surrender their spiritual liberty, and yield up their judgments and consciences to the dictates of a self-constituted tyrant. It was improbable that imperial Rome, which, at that moment, reigned over the kings of the earth, and where idolatry displayed its splendour and its triumphs; that Rome, where Christianity had made little progress, and was regarded as a detestable superstition, should, at some future period, crouch at the feet of a Christian priest. I need not tell you how exactly these things have been fulfilled in that corrupt, idolatrous, and persecuting church, which derives its name from the seat of the Cæsars; and in its proud, presumptuous head, who calls himself the vicar of Christ, claims infallibility, and requires from his subjects obedience to his unholy decrees on pain of eternal damnation.

Many of the predictions in the book of Revelation relate to the antichristian power; but it embraces other subjects, and contains a history of the world, as connected with the true church, from the days of John to the second coming of Christ. A considerable part is yet to be fulfilled, and the interpretations which have been given are conjectural. But a considerable part has been fulfilled, as different writers have satisfactorily shown; and hence we confidently expect that every particular will be accomplished in its order and season.

This is the second argument for the truth of our religion. The fulfilment of prophecy attests the commission of the prophet, and lays us under an obligation to receive whatever he delivers to us in the name of God.

The third argument for the truth of our religion is founded on its success. acknowledge that mere success is not a decisive proof of the truth of a reli-

* Matt. xxiv. 15. &c. Mark xiii. 14, and Luke xxi. 20.

† 2 Thess. ii. 3, 4.

gion, because it may be owing to other causes than the justice of its claims. A religion may spread, not indeed rapidly, as the Christian did, but gradually, through its adaptation to the opinions, prejudices, inclinations, and worldly interests of men; great effects may be produced in the course of time by the united influence of artifice and authority, when there is a predisposition to yield to them. We can account in this manner for the progress of idolatry in the heathen world, and for its progress in the Christian church during ages of ignorance. A religion may be rapidly and extensively propagated by force. We have an example in that of Mahomet, which diffused itself in a short time over several countries in the East. The case is very different when a religion succeeds without any external advantages; when it succeeds in the face of strong and continued opposition; when it succeeds although it be contrary to the opinions, prejudices, inclinations, and worldly interests of those who are prevailed upon to embrace it; and we can account for the fact only upon the hypothesis that it was accompanied with overwhelming evidence, and patronized by the Governor of the world.

I had occasion in another lecture to point out the repugnance of the Christian religion to all the principles by which men are determined in their choice, and I need not go over the same ground again. It was a stumbling-block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks. Each of these classes found something in it which was irreconcilable to their preconceived opinions. It was a stumbling-block to the Jews, because it proclaimed a suffering Messiah, a spiritual kingdom, and the admission of the Gentiles to the same privileges with the peculiar people. It was foolishness to the Greeks, because, setting aside their learned speculations and their splendid superstitions, it called upon them to acknowledge a God unknown to their ancestors, and a Mediator of whom they had never heard before, and to yield an unhesitating assent to doctrines new, strange, and inexplicable by the principles of philosophy. It is evident that when Jesus Christ published this religion to his contemporaries, he intended it to be the religion of mankind. He intended that it should supersede all other religions, and be the rule of faith and practice in every country and in every age of the world. By what means was this design to be accomplished? We know of one religion which was propagated by the sword; but unlike Mahomet, in this as in every other part of his character, our Lord made no use of carnal weapons to disseminate his religion, and positively disclaimed them: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence."* He would have none to become his disciples but from conviction and choice. But where should he find persons properly qualified to publish and recommend his religion? What influence did he possess over the wise, the learned, and the eloquent, to prevail upon them to devote their time and talents to the service of his gospel? With such persons he had no connexion. They stood aloof from him during his short ministry in Judea; and although by any other man they would have been deemed the fittest instruments, and he would have been anxious to engage them in his cause, Jesus used no means to secure their assistance, and does not appear to have wished for it. From motives which are inexplicable upon the principles of human policy, he took such associates, I might say, as first presented themselves; or rather, he studiously selected those whom every other person would have rejected as being destitute of the necessary qualifications, fishermen and tax-gatherers, without learning, without reputation, without friends, men whose appearance was ungainly, whose manners were unpolished, and who, instead of drawing attention to their doctrine by the arts of oratory,

* John xviii. 36

would render it still more revolting by the rudeness of their speech. Yet these were chosen to announce a religion sublime in its doctrines, but opposed to the prejudices of all classes ; pure in its precepts, but for that reason unacceptable to a licentious age ; a religion which aimed at universal dominion, and required the priest, the philosopher, and the statesman to bow to its authority ; and become its lowly disciples. In this procedure there is something extraordinary. That Jesus Christ was a wise man, his religion shows ; but in this instance, according to the maxims of worldly prudence, he seemed not to display his usual wisdom. There is only one way of accounting for his conduct, and that is, by supposing the truth of his claim to be the messenger of the living God. This being admitted, we must believe that he was certain of success ; that he calculated upon it, not from the fitness of the instruments, but from the supernatural power which would be exerted ; and that he chose persons so incompetent in themselves for the express purpose of making that power manifest, and furnishing a decisive evidence that his religion was divine. His conduct was the reverse of that of an impostor. He knew that he had truth upon his side, and was sure that it would prevail.

This expectation was realized. The religion preached by publicans and fishermen attracted attention, and was embraced by many of all ranks in Judea, and in other countries. We have the testimony of Tacitus to its extensive propagation even in the days of the apostles, about thirty years after the crucifixion ; for he informs us that in the reign of Nero there was *ingens multitudo*, a great multitude of Christians in Rome, many of whom were cruelly put to death by that merciless tyrant.* This testimony is valuable, because it shows in how short a space Christianity had passed from the distant province of Judea to Rome, and with what success it was attended in the capital of the world. We learn from the younger Pliny, who presided over the province of Bithynia in the beginning of the second century, that in that country the gospel could boast of numerous disciples. The superstition, as he calls it, had seized not only cities, but smaller towns and villages ; and till he began to use severities against the Christians, the heathen temples were almost deserted, and those who sold victims for sacrifice could hardly find purchasers.† These are testimonies of heathens who could have no interest in magnifying the number of the Christians. We may add to them the testimony of Justin Martyr, about thirty years after Pliny, which, although it should be admitted to be somewhat hyperbolic, asserts the substantial fact, that the new religion was widely diffused : “ There is not a nation, either of Greeks or barbarians, or of any other name, in which prayer and thanksgiving are not offered up to the Father and Maker of all things, in the name of the crucified Jesus.”‡ I subjoin the words of Tertullian, in his *Liber Apologeticus*, who flourished in the latter part of the same century. Addressing the Roman magistrates, he says, “ We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place ; your cities, garrisons, and free towns ; your camp, senate, and forum ; we have left nothing empty but your temples.” It is unnecessary to produce passages from other writers to the same effect. It is an historical fact, that Christianity, without any external aid, did make its way in the face of obloquy and persecution, of all the opposition which it encountered from the reasonings of philosophers, and from the edicts and the penalties of civil governments. It was like a ship propelled in its course by an invisible power, although wind and current are against it. The more it was oppressed, the more it grew. Blood was shed, but it proved a seed from which there sprung up a new race of martyrs and confessors. The struggle was prolonged nearly three hundred years, but truth prevailed,

* Annal. lib. xv. cap. 44. † Plin. Ep. x. 97, 98. ‡ Just. Mar. Dial. cum Tryphon. p. 341.

and the religion of the man whom his countrymen rejected, was established in all the provinces of the Roman empire.

As the fact cannot be explained upon the principles of reason and experience; as it is a fact which has no parallel in the moral history of mankind, we are led to inquire into it, and to discover, if we can, an adequate cause. Since it cannot be doubted that men in former times had the same understanding and the same feelings which they have now, it would be absurd to imagine that they would submit to the new religion, with all the foreseen consequences of embracing it, unless such evidence had been presented as fully satisfied them that its claim to a divine origin was well founded. Of this evidence the resurrection of its author was an essential part, because he had himself foretold it; and as it was necessary for the vindication of his character from the aspersions thrown upon it, if he had not risen from the grave, not a single person would have admitted his pretensions. His immediate followers would have known that he was an impostor, and would not have exposed themselves to sufferings and death, in order to immortalize a man who had so grossly deceived them. No motive can be conceived which would have induced them to engage in the office of propagating his religion. They must have seen at once, from its nature, that as it was false its success was impossible; and, consequently, they could have no hope of gaining fame, or wealth, or power, by the attempt. The cause was desperate, as their leader had perished, and his promises of supernatural assistance had utterly failed. The apostles, too, when they entered upon their labours, were convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead; but it was necessary that they should convince others of the fact, and if they had not been able to establish it by satisfactory evidence, they would have addressed Jews and Gentiles in vain. The circumstances in which their testimony was delivered, the manifest absence of any sinister motive to which it might be imputed, their confidence, and the consistency which they maintained in the severest trials, might have rendered it worthy of credit in the opinion of some persons of reflection; but to mankind in general, more unquestionable evidence would be necessary; because there was not merely a simple fact to be proved, but a fact involving the most serious consequences, as all who admitted its truth were bound to embrace and maintain the new religion, through good report and bad report, in life and in death. In such a case I do not see that less would have sufficed than miraculous evidence, than the exhibition of such signs, the performance of such works, as demonstrated that the persons who proclaimed the truth of Christianity and the resurrection of its founder, were the ministers and messengers of God. Miracles are the operation of Omnipotence; and if miracles were wrought in favour of revelation, the question is decided. The success of the gospel, notwithstanding the opposition which it had to encounter, is a proof that it was accompanied with supernatural evidence by which incredulity was subdued. To a reflecting mind, this short statement by one of the evangelists will appear to be true, because it is the only statement which accounts for the success of the apostles: "And they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following."*

* Mark xvi. 20.

LECTURE IX.

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

Argument from Success of the Gospel, continued—Examination of Gibbon's five secondary Causes—Internal Evidences of Revelation: Its Doctrines concerning God, the Origin of Evil, the Atonement, the Immortality of Man, and future Retribution; The Purity and Universality of its moral Code; The Character of Christ; and the Harmony of its Parts—The Effects of Christianity.

WE have seen that the success of Christianity in the first ages presupposes miracles, which alone could satisfy of its truth those to whom it was published. God could have rendered unbelief impossible by an immediate revelation to each individual, which would have produced the same conviction that was felt by the prophets and apostles; but he would deal with men as rational beings, by presenting such evidence as was sufficient to all who should candidly attend to it, and would leave them without excuse if they rejected his word. We find, however, that in vain were miracles wrought before the eyes of many in that age. The Jews, who had seen the wonderful works of our Saviour, crucified him, and evaded the evidence which they afforded of his divine mission, by ascribing them to demoniacal assistance. The Gentiles resisted the argument on the similar pretext of magic. It follows that those who were convinced must have got over this and other prejudices equally strong, and seen something in the miracles themselves and in the religion which they were designed to attest, which satisfied them that the whole dispensation was from God. This effect is not to be attributed to their superior discernment; for the greater part of the converts were not distinguished for mental capacity, but were such persons as are still found among the lower classes of society, persons poor and uneducated; yet this was not the character of them all, for the gospel numbered among its friends not a few individuals of learning and elevated station. But the more we think of them and of the other class, the more we shall be convinced that divine influence upon their minds and hearts was necessary to overcome the obstacles to a cordial reception of the truth, and to make them obedient to the faith. This is the account which the first preachers of Christianity give of their success, when they tell us that the spiritual weapons which they used were "mighty through God," to bring the thoughts of men into captivity to Christ.* The influence to which I refer could not be proved, like miracles, by ocular demonstration; but every man who fully and seriously examines the matter will be sensible that it must have been exerted; and if it be admitted that the invisible but efficacious power of God accompanied the publication of the gospel, it is no longer a question whether it was an invention of men or a revelation from heaven.

"Our curiosity," says Gibbon, "is naturally prompted to inquire by what means the Christian faith obtained so remarkable a victory over the established religions of the earth. To this inquiry an obvious but satisfactory answer may be returned; that it was owing to the convincing evidence of the doctrine itself, and to the ruling providence of its great Author."† These are complimentary and insidious words; for he proceeds to point out, what he calls the secondary causes of the rapid growth of the Christian church; and they are

* 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

† Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, chap. 15.

such as, if true, would divest our argument of its force, and leave nothing to be contemplated which might not be found in the success of any other religion.

The first cause which he assigns is "the inflexible and intolerant zeal of the Christians." Without stopping to animadvert upon the opprobrious epithets by which their zeal is characterized, we may ask every rational man whether this can be considered as an adequate cause. The zeal of a party may excite public attention, and gain some proselytes; but the more vehement it is, it is the more likely to defeat its end, by stirring up a zeal of equal vehemence in its antagonists. This zeal could, at first, be displayed only by a few, who would have been overwhelmed by the multitude of their opponents; for, if Gibbon refers to the zeal of the Christians when they had become numerous, and it was then only that it could have made an impression upon mankind, he puts the cause after the effect, and it remains to account for their previous increase. How did they grow up to such a number, that their united activity was capable of contending effectually with the formidable army of Jews and Gentiles? Besides, it is altogether inconceivable that mere zeal would have gained men over to a religion so contrary to all their prejudices, and habits, and interests.

The second cause is, "the doctrine of immortality;" but to the Jews this was no novelty, and the Gentiles cared little about it, although their philosophers made it a subject of speculation. Men gave themselves no more concern about the future state than they do at present, when, with the exception of a few, they studiously keep it as much as possible out of view. It is contrary to experience to suppose, that the doctrine of immortality had such powerful attractions as to recommend to mankind at large the religion by which it was taught. To the ambitious, the covetous, the sensual, the vicious of every description, the Christian doctrine is revolting, because the happiness which it promises is reserved for the pure alone, and to others it announces an eternity of suffering. A heaven without a hell would have been more pleasing to the age when the gospel appeared, especially if that heaven had resembled a Mahometan paradise.

He assigns, as a third cause, "the miraculous powers which were ascribed to the primitive church," but, at the same time, labours to prove that no such powers were possessed, and that the claim to them was founded on imposture, and supported by credulity. That, however, miracles were performed in attestation of the gospel, we have already shown; and as the fact was admitted by the most virulent enemies of the faith, Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian, it was too late for an infidel in the eighteenth century to deny it. Pretended miracles were common in the first ages, and had lost their credit; so that if those to which the Christians appealed had been of the same character, they would have injured instead of assisting their cause. If their miracles did draw attention, and produce conviction, it could only be because they were clearly distinguished from the counterfeits, and bore unequivocal marks of a supernatural origin.

The "pure and austere morals" of the Christians are mentioned as the fourth cause; but their virtues, as he represents them, were calculated to excite contempt and opposition; for they consisted in a mean-spirited repentance, a monkish abstinence from innocent pleasures, and aversion to the active duties of public life. If they were in reality distinguished by genuine virtues, whence did they originate? in what soil were they produced? They cannot be traced to the spirit of Judaism, which was superstitious and intolerant; nor to heathenism, that overflowing source of corruption of manners. Their virtues were inspired by their religion, and may well be believed to have often made an impression in its favour. The testimony of Pliny to the purity of their manners is well known. Tertullian informs us that it was common to say

such a person is a good man, but he is a Christian. The only defect in his character was his religion

The last secondary cause is the "union and discipline of the Christian republic." But a union which should have the effect of changing the established order of things, presupposes numbers; for the combined efforts of a few would be as inefficient as the human breath is to ruffle the surface of a lake. Before, then, the union of the Christians could be conceived to advance their cause, a society must have been formed of considerable extent; and how is its existence to be accounted for? How came it to exist and to make progress prior to the time when its union was brought into operation? Here again we have the effect put before the cause; the success of a religion attributed to the union of its friends, while every person sees that it must have gained friends before they could unite. But this union, to which such mighty effects are ascribed, is merely assumed by the historian for the present purpose. No man has described, in more glowing colours the disputes and divisions of the followers of Christ. Differences of opinion began at an early period, even in the days of the apostles; they increased as time advanced; and, while Christianity was in a state of persecution, its professed advocates exhibited the unedifying spectacle of doctrine against doctrine, sect against sect, and anathemas hurled against each other by those who called themselves the disciples of the same Master.

I do not think that these secondary causes, which, however, Gibbon meant to be understood as the only ones, would give any satisfaction to a candid inquirer. It would still remain to be explained by what means a few Jews, who were the first followers of Jesus of Nazareth, without all human qualifications for the enterprise, succeeded in propagating a new and strange system, opposed to all the prejudices and worldly interests of mankind; by what means they gained numerous converts in the various provinces and cities of the Roman empire, and those converts, pursuing the same course, advanced in the face of persecution till their cause triumphed, and Christianity became the religion of the state. This is no ordinary phenomenon; there is nothing similar to it in the history of human affairs. I do not believe that Gibbon was satisfied with his own account. But the infidel must say something against Christianity; and if it raise a laugh, or impress the giddy and inconsiderate, he has gained his end.

I have considered the external evidences of revealed religion, miracles, and prophecy, and to these have added the argument derived from the success of the gospel. I proceed to give a short view of the internal evidences which arise from a survey of its contents. Is there any thing in the nature of our religion which would lead us to ascribe it to a supernatural origin? Are its articles such that we could not conceive them to have been invented by the publishers? Are its doctrines and precepts, as far as reason can judge, agreeable to its best and clearest dictates? Does the whole system appear to be worthy of God, and suitable to the condition of man? Does it give us information upon subjects of manifest importance, and throw light upon topics into which men had anxiously inquired, but without success?

Let us attend, in the first place, to its doctrine concerning the existence and unity of God. This doctrine is so clearly taught in the New Testament, that it is unnecessary to refer to particular passages. I shall only observe, that there are three descriptions of the Supreme Being, which, in a few simple words, convey more just and elevated ideas of him than the most elaborate and splendid compositions of human genius and eloquence. "God is a spirit."* — "God is light."† — "God is love."‡ The sublimity of the conception and the comprehensiveness of the expression are unrivalled; and, coming from

* John iv. 24.

† 1 John i. 5.

‡ 1 John iv. 8

persons confessedly unlearned, may well excite our astonishment, and make us ask, whence had they this wisdom? wisdom in the presence of which philosophy is abashed. Did Socrates or Plato, or any other celebrated man, ever thus announce the spirituality, the purity, and the benevolence of the first Cause? But our Saviour and his apostles lived in an age of learning and science, and may have been indebted to others for these discoveries. I am not aware that any person has been so foolhardy as to say so; but if he had, we could have confounded him at once, by calling upon him to point out the source from which they were borrowed. But let us go back to an earlier period. Let us look into the Old Testament, and we shall find the same doctrine from the beginning to the end of it. We shall find, that while polytheism prevailed in every region of the earth, and the wise men of the heathen world were "feeling after God, if haply they might find him," he was known to a nation which infidels call barbarous, and known at the commencement of their history, while they were surrounded by the grossest idolaters. Let us transfer ourselves in idea to the age when Moses lived; let us reflect that, in that age, reason had not been cultivated as it now is, nor had science lent its aid to confirm its conclusions concerning the Author of the universe; that the nation to which he belonged was a race of peasants and mechanics, who had been long in a state of oppression; and the question naturally occurs, how came Moses to possess such noble conceptions of the Deity? Among the teachers of theology in the ancient world, he stands on a proud eminence. In the most polished nations we find them inquiring, doubting, occasionally stumbling upon the truth as by accident, and then starting away from it, bewildered in a maze of mystery, involving themselves and their disciples in midnight darkness, and terminating their laborious researches by acquiescing in the errors and superstitions of the vulgar. We are told indeed, that Moses was instructed in all the learning of Egypt; and, as the inhabitants of that country were celebrated for their wisdom, it may be supposed that he derived purer ideas of theology from them. We do not exactly know what was the theological system of the Egyptians in his days; but it appears from his writings, that the true God was unknown to them, for their haughty monarch exclaimed, "Who is Jehovah, that I should obey him? I know not Jehovah, neither will I let Israel go."* It would be strange to imagine that Moses was indebted for his sublime doctrine to a people, distinguished from all heathen nations by the number and the baseness of their gods, and whose priests, the depositories of all learning, which they carefully concealed as a thing too sacred to be exposed to the eyes of the public, seem, from some notices of their tenets which have come down to us, to have been not a whit wiser than the philosophers of other countries. When we see Moses excelling all his contemporaries, and all who succeeded him for many centuries; when we observe that, at an early period of the world, he possessed, without human instruction, a degree of knowledge which has never been surpassed, and the accuracy of which subsequent discoveries have confirmed, what can we conclude but that he was instructed by the God whose existence he proclaimed? Who else could have told him that there was only one God, eternal, independent, and almighty, the Creator and Governor of the universe? It is impossible to account in any other way for the discovery which he made, and all others missed, and for the unhesitating manner in which he announced it, while the sages of antiquity groped and disputed in the dark. If it should be said that this knowledge was transmitted to him from his ancestors, our reasoning is not affected, but carried back to a period still more remote; and we again ask, how came they to be acquainted with a doctrine of which others were ignorant? How were they reclaimed from idolatry

* Exod. v. 2.

which, according to the narrative, was practised before the call of Abraham, by himself and his progenitors?

Let us observe, in the second place, the account which revelation gives of the relation in which this great Being stands to men. It represents him as the Creator of our race, and likewise of the earth which we inhabit, and the heavens which shed their light and influences upon us. There is a sublimity in the idea of creation, or the production of all things out of nothing; and it is an idea peculiar to revelation: so far was it from occurring to speculative men, that not one of them ever dreamed of it, and it was pronounced by them all to be absurd and impossible. According to them, the universe had always existed as we now see it; or it was reduced to its present form by divine power, out of pre-existing materials. It is an idea consonant to the purest dictates of reason; for, the more we reflect, the more shall we be convinced that inert unconscious matter could not be self-existent, and that every being, the duration of which is measured by time, must have had a beginning. Yet we owe this idea, so grand, so worthy of the Deity, not to any of the mighty geniuses whose memory is venerated by an admiring world, but to the leader, as infidels call him, of a barbarous people. This idea pervades the volume of inspiration. Associated with it, is the view which the Scriptures give of the government of the world. It is known that some speculatists among the heathen excluded God from all concern in human affairs; and that, although others admitted a providence, and said many specious things upon the subject, they confounded it with fate or inexplicable necessity, a chain of causes and effects, by which men and gods were bound. Nature did every thing; and the series of events was the order of nature; but the rational deduction from the creation of the universe, is its constant subjection to the will and power of its Author. The machine having been constructed and put in motion, is preserved from waste and disorder by its Maker. The mind is relieved and satisfied by this idea. There is a confidence in what are called the laws of nature, when we view them as enacted and executed by the Deity himself; there is additional sublimity and beauty in its scenes, when we consider him as present, and revealing himself to us by his works. There is a fitness in events which reconciles us to them, when they are regarded as his appointments. A providence ever vigilant and active, which extends to small as well as to great events, cares for individuals, and directs all the incidents in their lot, administers many moral lessons to us, calls forth the best emotions of the heart, corrects, consoles, and animates us, elevates our thoughts on all occasions to God, and exhibits him as the object of our reverence and our gratitude. It is a doctrine at once philosophical and pious; and it is so worthy of Him who is the Parent of the human race, that it recommends itself to our approbation, and attests the truth of the only religion by which it is fully and clearly taught.

In the third place, revealed religion gives the only satisfactory account of the present state of things. In the surrounding world and the circumstances of men, we see numerous proofs of intelligence and goodness; but we cannot say of the whole system, that it displays perfect order, and unmixed benevolence. There are many instances of apparent discrepance, and real severity. This globe has evidently suffered a dreadful convulsion, by which its external structure has been deranged, and has once been covered with water, which must have destroyed the whole or the greater part of its inhabitants. On its surface, while there are plains and mountains clothed with herbs and trees, there are immense tracts which yield nothing for the support of animal life, and are doomed to perpetual sterility. We find also, that in many places there are volcanoes, or burning mountains, which discharge stones, ashes, lava, and boiling water, by which the labours of men are laid desolate, and great havoc is made of human life; and that by earthquakes,

whole cities are overthrown, and the unsuspecting inhabitants are buried in the ruins. These are occasional evils; but there are inconveniences of a more permanent nature, which indicate, that he who governs the world did not intend that it should be a place of rest and pure enjoyment to man. In one region, he is scorched by the heat of the vertical sun; and in another, he shivers amidst frost and snow; and although it has been remarked, that, unlike other animals, he can accommodate himself to every climate, yet, wherever there is excess in the temperature, he suffers in a greater or a less degree. He is at all times compelled to labour, that he may earn a subsistence; at all times, liable to have his hopes disappointed, particularly by the inclemency of the seasons; at all times, subject to infirmities of body and mind, to diseases of various kinds, and to death. From these things it appears, that although man and the system with which he is connected, were evidently intended for each other, there is not a complete adaptation. And why is it not perfect? Has this proceeded from a want of wisdom or a want of goodness? Reason will not permit us to impute either to the Deity; and we must therefore suppose, that some cause has arisen, which has deranged his original plan, and, to a certain extent, interrupted his benevolence. The ancients said, that nature acts like a stepmother, meaning, that it does not treat us with all the kindness and tenderness of a parent. Nature is a word without meaning; and in a rational system of theology, can signify only the Author of nature. This then is the question. Why does he treat us with severity? And unenlightened reason cannot return a firm and satisfactory answer to it. The existence of moral evil was acknowledged in every age; it was too palpable to be overlooked; but whence it came, or how it originated, was a problem, which men, without revelation, were incompetent to solve. To suppose them to have been created with a propensity to evil, was to impeach the purity and the benevolence of the Creator. To ascribe it to the malignity of matter, was to talk nonsense; for matter has no moral qualities, and could not corrupt the mind, although placed in the closest connexion with it. The Scripture history throws light upon the mysterious subject. I do not say that it removes every difficulty, and furnishes an answer to every objection; but it states a fact which helps us to explain present appearances. It informs us, that in the primeval state of man, none of those physical evils which he now suffers, existed; that while he was innocent, all nature smiled upon him and ministered to him: that he lost his innocence by his own fault, and not by an act of his Maker, and being himself corrupted, has communicated the taint to his posterity; that a change immediately took place in the surrounding scene, which did not efface all vestiges of the divine goodness, but adapted it to the circumstances of a guilty race; and that barrenness, toil, inclement seasons, and, in a word, all natural evils, were the appointed penalties of transgression. It recommends this narrative, that it accounts for moral and physical evil, without impeaching the wisdom, and goodness, and holiness of the Creator. It shows that the exercise of another principle was called for, namely, justice, which suits its acts to the merit or demerit of its subjects, leaves to the innocent the enjoyment of their privileges, but allots to the guilty, stripes, and chains, and death. Thus we understand why man, the offspring of God, is treated as an alien; why the place of his habitation is so incommodious; why his days are few and full of trouble, and his last abode is in the dust. Unassisted reason is astonished at these things, and has been tempted to deny a providence, and even the existence of an intelligent Governor of the universe. Revelation furnishes a solution of the difficulties; it explains the phenomena; and its discoveries, so seasonable and satisfactory, afford a presumption at least of its truth.

In the next place, it being admitted that men are sinners, and there being in their circumstances evident tokens of the displeasure of their Maker, let

us observe what revelation teaches concerning the means of regaining his favour, and consider whether it does on this account recommend itself to our approbation. Amidst the depravity of human nature, conscience remains, and performs its office so far as to convince men that they are guilty, and occasionally to excite uneasy apprehensions and forebodings. The following words occur in the Scriptures, but as they were spoken by a person who did not belong to the Jewish nation, they may be quoted as expressive of the natural sentiments and feelings of the human mind: "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"* We see the strong workings of fear, an anxiety to appease the Deity, and a willingness to make the most costly sacrifices. Into the origin of sacrifices we need not at present inquire. If they were devised by men themselves, as some have supposed, contrary to all probability, it will follow, that reason itself dictates that an atonement is necessary, and that it can be made only by the substitution of a victim in the room of the offender. If they were divinely appointed, as there is every ground to believe, the continuance of the practice among nations who had lost the memory of the original institution, is a proof that reason approved of it as a fit expedient for averting the anger of the Deity. But although the idea of propitiation was familiar to Jews and Gentiles, such a sacrifice as the Christian religion exhibits was altogether new. Men had already resorted to human sacrifices, as more valuable and efficacious than those of brute animals; but it had never occurred to any of them that the sufferer must be more than man. It had never occurred to them that a divine person must by incarnation become the victim; that the blood of a divine person, united to man, must flow for the expiation of sin. There is something in this idea so foreign to all our modes of thinking, so utterly improbable, so apparently impossible, that we cannot conceive it to have spontaneously arisen in the mind of any man, however wild is the imagination, and however extravagant are its combinations. A God becoming a man; a God dying on a cross for his creatures! who could ever have entertained such a thought? It seems to bear upon it the signature of a supernatural origin; it seems that nothing could have suggested it but revelation. From its singularity, its insulated nature, its total want of connexion with all other ideas, it seems to possess the character of truth. If it should be said, that its strangeness cannot be justly accounted a proof of its conformity to truth, and that we might for the same reason give reality to the most monstrous figments, let it be observed, that this idea is recommended by its manifest fitness to serve the purpose for which it is introduced. By such a sacrifice as is supposed, the end of sacrifices is accomplished, and the mind has sure ground to rest upon in its expectation of forgiveness. It required little wisdom to perceive that animal sacrifices could not be an adequate atonement; and this was the reason that, in despair, human sacrifices were resorted to. Yet even after these, the guilty could not avoid doubts and suspicions, which led them on new occasions to repeat the bloody rite. But if the sacrifice of Christ be admitted, there can be no doubt that its intrinsic value has fully satisfied the demands of justice, that this one offering was sufficient. We cannot but see its consonance to our best conceptions of the character of God. There are two perfections which enlightened reason will ascribe to him, goodness and justice; and of both there are clear indications in the proceedings of Providence. This sacrifice affords scope for the exercise of both. It allows

* Micah vi. 6, 7.

goodness to effect its purpose, and secures its rights to justice. There may still be difficulties in the case which we cannot fully explain; but upon the whole, this interposition in behalf of our fallen race appears worthy of our merciful and righteous Governor; and it has been found to be the only expedient which can give relief to the conscious sinner, condemned by himself and trembling in the presence of his Judge.

Again, revealed religion gives the only distinct and satisfactory account of the future destiny of man. It has been the general expectation that he will survive the stroke of death. Men have believed that there was a principle in them distinct from the body, called the soul, the mind, or the spirit, which will exist in another state. Yet this belief, as we have seen, was disturbed by doubt, and the most profound speculations could never give rise to certainty. Philosophers affirmed and denied, and declared with their last breath, that they did not know whether they were to sink into an eternal sleep or to retain conscious existence. The first thing which must strike an attentive reader of the sacred volume, is the confidence of the writers in speaking of this subject. There is no hesitation, no comparison of probabilities, no argumentation, but strong, positive assertion. The immortality of the soul is assumed as an unquestionable fact, is authoritatively announced. How do we account for this difference? Were the writers persons of greater sagacity than other inquirers? Or did they, considered as men, enjoy any peculiar advantages for the discovery of truth? Infidels will not admit their superiority in these respects; nor can we contend for it, who know that, with a few exceptions, they were illiterate men, and belonged to a nation by no means distinguished for intellectual accomplishments. How then did they come to speak, in the most decisive tone, about a point which had perplexed the mightiest geniuses of the heathen world? If any other reason can be assigned but their inspiration, let it be produced, and we will attend to it; but till then we must be permitted to say, that their wisdom descended from the Father of lights. Observe, too, how different are their representations of the future state from those of heathen authors. The latter divided it into two regions, the one of happiness and the other of misery; but in assigning their respective inhabitants, it is not to be supposed, that with their imperfect ideas of morality they would make a proper allotment. The place of punishment was peopled by persons guilty of such crimes as are universally condemned; but who were admitted into Elysium? It seems to have been reserved chiefly for heroes, poets, philosophers, and statesmen; as if courage, genius, and political wisdom were above all things pleasing to the gods. We know, however, that these have no necessary connexion with virtue, and are often disjoined from it; and no man who is but slightly imbued with the doctrines of revelation would admit the thought, that such qualifications entitle their possessors to future felicity, or in any degree prepare them for it. It proves the superiority of the Christian scheme, that while it holds out the hope of happiness to the mean as well as to the illustrious, to the illiterate as well as to the learned, it promises it only to the morally good, without any respect to intellectual accomplishment. The future state of the Scriptures is manifestly calculated to serve the only purpose for which it ought to have a place in a religious system,—to advance the interests of virtue, to promote the perfection of human nature, to excite men to the duties of piety, charity, and justice, and not to tempt them to the pursuits of ambition and vain-glory. And its tendency to these effects recommends it as a doctrine of truth, as a communication from the Governor of the universe, of whose administration we must conceive it to be the ultimate end, to establish the authority of his moral laws over mankind. In short, as the hell of revelation is appointed for the guilty and impenitent, its heaven is the abode of those alone who have mortified their passions, and obeyed the voice of their Maker

or, to use its own language, have lived “soberly, and righteously, and godly.” It is beyond the limits of probability, that the sacred writers should of their own accord have thought of such a heaven; that, having naturally the same views and feelings with other men, who are so much influenced by their senses, and devoted to the pleasures of the world, they should have conceived the happiness of the future state to consist solely in spiritual enjoyments. The Elysium of the ancients bore no resemblance to it, and nothing is more different from it than the paradise of Mahomet. It is not therefore a conjecture, or a creation of fancy, but a reality, the knowledge of which they derived from a supernatural source. There is another peculiarity in the Christian doctrine of immortality, namely, that it relates to the body as well as to the soul. This part of man was left out of the theories of the heathens. It was disposed of after death according to the funeral rites of each nation, and then forgotten. This was a capital defect in their system. The body being an essential part of human nature, it may reasonably be expected to share the fate of the individual to whom it belonged, and whose instrument it was in his virtuous or vicious deeds. It is incredible that it should have been created for a temporary purpose; it would seem, *a priori*, that it would be preserved as long as the soul. Experience, indeed, shows us that it dies, and to all appearance is lost; but to him who reflected upon its intimate connexion with the soul, and their harmonious co-operation for a long series of years, the natural desire of all men to continue the union, and the violence with which it is dissolved, its resurrection would not be so improbable as it was pronounced to be by the Gentiles, who were prejudiced by absurd notions of the malignity of matter. The Christian doctrine of immortality is complete. It provides for the future existence of man; and while it is more consonant to reason than the partial system of heathenism, it excites attention by its novelty, and may be justly regarded as an intimation from Him who does nothing in vain, and having created man will preserve him for ever as a monument of his goodness or his justice.

Once more, we may found an argument for the truth of revealed religion upon its precepts, the general excellence of which even some infidels have been compelled to admit. Had not our religion been, to a certain extent, a moral system,—had it not enjoined the great duties which we owe to God and to man,—we could not have acknowledged it as a divine revelation. The dictates of reason and conscience in favour of piety, justice, and fidelity, prove that these are agreeable to the will of God; and, consequently, we are justified in rejecting any system in which they are discarded or not inculcated, as bearing upon its face the character of imposture. But it is not because our religion teaches morality that we receive it as a revelation, but because it teaches such morality as is found in it. The Christian law is perfect; it embraces all the duties of man, and lays the foundation of the highest attainments in virtue; and were it universally obeyed, the innocence of the golden age would be revived, and the earth would be an unvaried scene of peace and good will. Now, let it be observed by whom this law was given to the world. It was never alleged that they were distinguished by eminence in intellectual vigour, by literary accomplishments, by metaphysical acumen, or by large experience of human life. The greater part of them, confessedly, could lay no claim to these qualifications. Yet they have delivered a code which far surpasses the most celebrated laws and precepts of the legislators and wise men of the heathen world. To what cause can we ascribe their superiority? If their wisdom was more than human, it must have been derived from a superhuman source. Since infidels will not admit this inference, let them substitute a better one. It is certain that the moral law of the Scriptures excels every other law in its injunctions and prohibitions, and in its motives. It inculcates duties which were omitted

in other systems, and condemns practices which they tolerated and approved. Among duties, it prescribes humility, meekness, the forgiveness of injuries, and the love of our enemies, which had been considered as indications of a mean and dastardly spirit; and it restrains the sensual appetites, to which the best of the philosophers gave ample encouragement, both by their precept and by their example. It requires us to renounce the world as a source of happiness; not like the Stoics, in a fit of pride and self-sufficiency, but from a deliberate conviction of its vanity, and a decided preference of heavenly things. So great is the contrast, that the virtuous man of the heathen world, as described by themselves, would now be regarded as a monster, and those who think otherwise, either know nothing of the matter, or voluntarily shut their eyes; whereas the virtuous man of revelation, when compared with him, is a being of a superior order, pure, benevolent, and devout, happy in himself, and a blessing to others. Such, at least, is the pattern which every Christian is called to imitate, and all the doctrines and promises of religion tend to promote his conformity to it. Human laws are concerned only with our actions, but the law of the Scriptures extends its authority to the heart, and regulates its movements. The sinful act is not condemned with greater severity than the principle from which it proceeded. The law of man says only, "Thou shalt not steal;" but the law of Scripture goes farther, and says, "Thou shalt not covet." The law of man forbids adultery; but this law forbids the first emotion of criminal desire: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."* There is one remark still to be made, that the sacred writers placed duty upon its proper basis, the principle of piety, unlike other moralists, who found it upon the deductions of reason, the fitness of things, and views of private and public good. Thus they sanctify our duty, by rendering it obedience to the Author of our being, and take the most effectual measure to enforce the performance of it by interposing his paramount authority. It is the will of God which they call us to obey; it is the hope of his approbation which they propose as the animating motive, and his glory as the end. Separated from piety, morality is merely a matter of decorum or of interest; in connexion with it, it is the homage of creatures to their Creator.

Suppose it to have been possible for the sacred writers to have invented this code of morality, would they have done so? Would impostors have laboured to subject the world to a law so holy; a law which, in the first place, condemned themselves for presuming to use the name of God with a design to deceive their fellow-men? Would they who set out with a gross violation of truth and of charity, have been anxious to guard others against evil thoughts and contrivances? Would men, who retained no reverence for the Supreme Being, have placed him at the head of the system, and discovered a jealous care of his honour, a desire to make him the object of universal respect and love? The precepts of our religion are an irresistible proof that it did not emanate from bad men; and good men would not have passed it on the world as divine, if it had originated from themselves. They might have presented it to the public as their view of a subject, about which so many have delivered their sentiments; but they would have given it in such a form, and accompanied it with such declarations, as would have satisfied all that it was a work of their own.

There are some other internal evidences which I shall briefly mention, as our limits will not permit me to enlarge upon them.

The character of the Founder of our religion is not a human invention. It

must have been drawn from actual observation. It exhibits the union of properties and qualities which were never associated before; qualities so unlike, that it was apparently impossible that they should meet in the same individual, the attributes of Godhead, and the infirmities of humanity. Had an attempt been made to delineate such a character from fancy, it would have failed; the one class of properties would have been obscured or destroyed by the other. But in the New Testament this singular character is supported throughout, in a great diversity of scenes, and on the most trying occasions; in so much that, in whatever point of view we contemplate it, we perceive a perfect accordance of all its parts. The sacred writers had seen it; and if the Son of God appeared in our nature, the religion of the Scriptures is true.

The manner in which the books are composed furnishes another argument. I have already remarked upon their artlessness, as a strong presumption of their truth, and upon the simplicity with which they relate the most wonderful facts, which can be accounted for only by the supposition that they had no design to deceive, and that, being convinced themselves, they deem nothing more necessary than to act the part of faithful historians. In many parts of Scripture we meet with instances of sublimity which throw all examples of it in profane authors into the shade. The taste and judgment of that man who should think of placing them upon a level, would not be envied. They are found in both the Old and the New Testament, and the most sublime book in the world is the Revelation of John. The true account of this superiority is, that the prophets and apostles did not speak of themselves.

I call your attention, in the next place, to the harmony of all the parts of revelation. I do not here consider the objection founded on the discrepancies which have been pointed out, particularly in the historical books, because these do not affect the present argument, which relates to the system unfolded in the Scriptures. From the age of Moses to the days of our Saviour, there was an interval of fifteen hundred years; and how much the manners and religion of other nations have changed in a shorter space, every person knows. The Jews had passed through all the vicissitudes of liberty and servitude, of peace and war. They must have made progress in knowledge and arts, and were, in many respects, a different people, at the close of that long period, from their fathers immediately after their deliverance from Egypt: yet we find the same scheme pursued throughout their successive generations, and the followers of Christ appealing to the testimony of Moses in favour of their doctrine. The Christ of the New Testament is, in all points, the Messiah of the Old; the character of God is the same; and so also are the moral laws, the doctrines and the promises, with no other difference but the greater clearness and fullness of the last revelation. There is, indeed, a great dissimilarity between the two dispensations, but they are not opposed to each other; the former prefigured what was accomplished in the latter; they are parts of one whole; different modes employed by the wisdom of God for revealing his will, and communicating his blessings to mankind. Here, then, is a surprising phenomenon; an unanimity where there was no concert, kept up for fifteen centuries amidst many revolutions in external affairs, and in customs and opinions. During the interval, new religions had arisen, and old ones had disappeared; systems of philosophy had flourished and decayed; but the public creed of one people had undergone no alteration. What can we say, but that error is evanescent, while truth is eternal? Do we not perceive a proof of divine interference in overruling the minds of so many individuals, and making them think the same thoughts and speak the same words?

Lastly, we may deduce an argument for our religion from its effects. It has changed the state of those nations which have embraced it, and introduced a degree of knowledge, of morality, of civilization, and of domestic happiness

of which there was no experience before its appearance. It has humanized the general manners, and produced many individual examples of virtue, to which no other religion can present a parallel. Is that an imposture which has reclaimed the nations from idolatry, and raised peasants to a rank in the moral scale far above Socrates or Antoninus? Put the question to unprejudiced reason, and she will answer in the negative.

These are some of the internal evidences of the truth of our religion; evidences which would present themselves to a competent inquirer on examining the religion viewed by itself, independently of the external proof arising from miracles and prophecy. Put the volume in which it is contained, into the hands of a person previously acquainted with the scanty and dubious discoveries of unassisted reason, and having no object in view but to discover the truth, and although I do not say that he would be immediately convinced of the justness of its claim to a supernatural origin, yet I have no doubt that he would deem the subject worthy of farther inquiry, would admit that the claim possessed a considerable degree of probability, and would yield to it, in its full extent, as soon as any part of the external evidence was laid before him.

LECTURE X.

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

Objections considered: That the Light of Nature is sufficient: That the diffusion of Christianity is partial: That Revelation contains Mysteries and Doctrines contrary to Reason: That the Scriptures relate trivial and absurd Facts—Give false Ideas of God—And abound with Contradictions.

THE evidence with which revelation is accompanied, is sufficient to satisfy a candid mind. It is not indeed irresistible, that is, so overpowering that every person to whom it is presented is necessarily convinced; but it affords a rational ground of belief. We do not ask, and it is impossible to obtain the highest evidence in the conduct of our worldly affairs; we are obliged to act upon probabilities, and often upon a mere presumption, and yet we do not consider this as a reason why we should fold our arms, and passively wait for events. I do not mean that the evidence in favour of revelation is of this low kind. It is far superior to the evidence which we have for the success of any of our worldly enterprises; if carefully examined and impartially weighed, it will be found to leave no room for reasonable doubt; and accordingly, it has produced a firm persuasion in the minds of thousands, among whom were not a few of the most distinguished talents. Still, however, it is moral evidence, which requires to be canvassed with a mind freed from prejudice, and prepared to admit the conclusion to which the premises shall lead. It is evidence which may not be perceived, if only a superficial glance is taken of it; and which may appear defective, if viewed through the medium of misrepresentation, or under the influence of a state of mind unfavourable to the discovery of religious truth. If these things be taken into the account, it will not be surprising that Christianity, although bearing the clear marks of a heavenly origin, has not met with universal reception. Even miracles failed, in some instances, to convince those before whose eyes they were wrought; not because the miracles were suspected to be false, but because the persons, being unwilling to embrace the religion which they attested, contrived to evade the evidence by theories

which accounted for them without a divine interposition. The Gentiles attributed them to magic, and the Jews to demoniacal influence. The true reason of resorting to these subterfuges, was the repugnance of the system to their preconceived opinions, and their secular interests. Christ crucified was a stumbling-block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks.

We need not wonder that, in modern times, there should be disputers by whom the evidence of Christianity is impugned, and its claims are rejected. The corrupt passions of mankind account for their opposition. 'Men hate the light, because their deeds are evil; and will not come to it, lest they should be reproved.' Licentiousness wishes to be free from restraint; and pride of understanding will not acknowledge the deficiency of its own resources, and submit to the dictates of superior wisdom. Was it ever found that a truly virtuous and humble man was an infidel? Does infidelity abound among persons of this character, the devout, the pure, the modest, and dispassionate inquirers after truth? Or are its advocates the profane and the dissipated, smatterers in knowledge, false pretenders to philosophy, and self-conceited speculatists, who, from the lofty eminence of genius and science on which they suppose themselves to be placed, look down with contempt upon the opinions and pursuits of the multitude?

I shall conclude this series of lectures upon revelation and its records, by briefly considering some of the objections which have been advanced against them.

The first objection is against any revelation at all; and proceeds upon the ground, that it is unnecessary, because reason is a sufficient guide in religion. A revelation reflects upon the wisdom of the Creator of man, as if he had not at first duly fitted him for the end of his being, and therefore found it expedient afterwards to supply the defect. We answered this objection by anticipation, when we showed, in a former lecture, the inadequacy of reason in matters of religion. It appeared, that unassisted reason has never attained to the knowledge of the true God, been able to construct a perfect rule of duty, and establish beyond doubt the doctrine of a future state. In whatever manner it is accounted for, the fact is undeniable. Nothing is more absurd than to wrangle about the sufficiency of reason, although it has proved insufficient in every trial; and to engage in a formal refutation of the claim, would be as great a waste of time, as to prove by arguments that the sun does not shine at midnight, were it not expedient to guard those who are ignorant of the history of mankind against being imposed upon by bold, but false affirmations. Show us, I will not say a nation, but an individual, who, unaided in his researches, discovered the truth in the particulars mentioned, and we will acknowledge, at least, that reason was sufficient to him. If it shall be asked, How can this be, since reason is the gift of God? I am not obliged to answer that question; it is enough that I prove that it is not sufficient. If the infidel shall choose to lay the blame upon his Maker, of having bestowed an imperfect gift upon man, let him do so, and abide the consequence of his blasphemy. The fact is a stubborn one, and no speculation can set it aside. To us, there is no difficulty in accounting for it. We believe, that reason, when first conferred, was fully adequate to all the purposes which it was intended to serve; but that it has since been impaired and perverted by sin, which has both darkened the understanding and corrupted the heart; so that it is now led astray by the imagination and the passions, adopts false principles, and draws erroneous conclusions. Let it not be said that the depravity of reason is only a doctrine of revelation, which it has assumed to justify its own pretensions. The history of mankind vouches for its truth; for, what is it, but a history of the grossest absurdities, so far as religion is concerned? To say, then, that a revelation was unnecessary, because men possessed, from nature, the means of

making all useful discoveries, is to contradict the most ample evidence furnished by the prevalence of idolatry, superstition, and immorality in all ages and nations. Either, then, truth on these points was not an object of importance, or a revelation was desirable, and there was no improbability against it. The strength of the argument is increased, when we consider that if human nature is depraved, as the errors of reason abundantly show, even although it had succeeded in discovering all the articles of natural religion, it would not have been a competent guide, because the new circumstances of man required the knowledge of new truths, which lay beyond the range of its inquiries. Reason could give us no information respecting the means of recovering our innocence, and regaining the favour of our Maker, any more than the knowledge of all that is necessary to us in health, would direct us to the remedies which are wanted in disease and sickness. This was an occasion which called for the interference of superior wisdom, or for the interference of the Creator, who alone could tell by what expedient we might be restored to our original state. Unless, then, it be denied that man is a sinner—and with those who controvert so plain a fact it is in vain to reason—and unless it be denied that more knowledge was necessary to us when fallen, than sufficed us when innocent, it must be admitted, that a revelation was necessary to revive our hopes, and to direct us into the way which leads to peace and felicity. If men were ignorant and exposed to perdition, it surely was not unworthy of God to supply the instruction which would extricate them from that deplorable condition.

The second objection is directed against the revelation in the Scriptures, and is founded on its partial diffusion. If it was necessary, why has it not been granted to all? Can we believe that to be a gift of the universal Parent, which only a few of his children are permitted to enjoy? shall we ascribe favouritism to a Being of infinite benevolence? The objection applies to the Christian, but with greater force to the Jewish revelation. Here is a nation inferior in many respects to other nations, which is said to have been selected by God to be his peculiar people, and on which he conferred peculiar privileges; while the rest of the human race were left to wander in the mazes of ignorance and sin. Let us state a similar case. Here is a nation without any peculiar merit, which enjoys all the advantages of a fine climate, and a fertile soil, and all the blessings of civilization; while there are many others in a half barbarous state, inhabiting barren regions, and struggling with inclement seasons. Again, here are a few individuals adorned with genius and taste, so as to seem to be beings of a superior order, when compared with multitudes who rank low in the scale of intellect, and are as children in comparison of them. Unless, on the ground of these differences, you are prepared to deny a Providence which rules over all, I do not see that you can deny a revelation because it was once confined to a single people, and is still known only to a portion of mankind. To reason from the goodness of God, that it will be dispensed in equal shares to all men, is found to be false in experience, and must be false also in theory: that is, to infer *a priori*, that if a revelation were made, it would be communicated to all nations, is contrary to the analogy of providence, which gives to one, and withholds from another. Men forget themselves, when they seriously bring forward the present objection. Does it belong to them to prescribe to the Almighty the mode of his providence? or have they a right to demand that a free gift shall be alike imparted to all? We could not have claimed a revelation as our due, unless God had at first made man without the knowledge necessary for the fulfilment of the end of his being. But the revelation of the Scriptures supposes every individual to be guilty, and consequently to have forfeited any title to the favour of his Maker. Upon what ground, then, shall he complain, that a particular blessing has been withheld from him? or, upon

what ground shall he say, It is impossible that God has bestowed a gift upon another, because he has not bestowed it upon me? This question is met by another, May not God do what he pleases with his own? You see, then, that there is no reason for rejecting the Jewish revelation, because it was confined to Judea; or the Christian, because it is not universal. If the nations of the world had forsaken the true God, were worshippers of idols, and practised innumerable abominations, he was not bound in justice to reclaim them. He did more than he was under any obligation to do, when he gave his statutes and judgments to one of them. The proofs of his mercy towards that nation, cannot be annihilated by the withholding of it from others. It never entered into the mind of any Israelite to deny that there was light in Goshen, because there was darkness over all the land of Egypt. What is the fact at present? Here is a religion said to have come from God, which is known to several nations. Is there any evidence of its divine origin? It is to this that we must look, and not to the accidental circumstance of its partial or universal propagation. This is not the test by which its claims should be tried. We must appeal to the evidence in its favour, if we would fairly decide the question; and finding it sufficient, we are bound to embrace the religion, whether its benefits have been extended to few or to many. Let a man acknowledge the virtue of the medicine which has cured him, although there should be thousands labouring under the same disease, to whom it has not been administered.

In the third place, it is objected against revelation, that it contains mysteries and doctrines contrary to reason. What do you object to mysteries? Is it that they surpass our comprehension? Well, but you are not required to understand them. Have you any thing farther to say? Yes; it is absurd to suppose that a divine revelation would propose, as objects of belief, articles of which we cannot form an adequate conception. They must be useless, as they are unintelligible. No; I answer, it by no means follows, that a fact is useless, because I cannot explain it. There are many facts of this description upon which the business and the happiness of human life intimately depend. We know that a wound inflicted on the body causes pain, but we do not know now it affects the mind; and yet the simple fact excites us to use the precautions which are necessary to the preservation of life. In like manner, the mysteries of religion may have, and are proved to have, a powerful influence upon the devotion, the consolation, and the obedience of those who believe them. Nothing can be more unreasonable, than to object to mysteries in revelation, while they abound as much in natural religion; and it is so far from being true that religion ends where mystery begins, that all religion begins with mystery, and is accompanied by it throughout its whole progress. What is a more mysterious subject than God, a being without beginning, infinite but not extended, comprehending all things at a glance, upholding all things without perplexity, and infallibly accomplishing his purposes, yet leaving his creatures in possession of liberty? Is there, in fact, any thing which man thoroughly knows? A grain of sand or drop of water puzzles him. Why then does he expect that religion shall be free from mysteries? Is this a department in which all things must be plain? Why should every nook and crevice be illuminated here, while in every other province light is mingled with darkness? Is not the God of revelation the God of nature? and does it follow, that because he has been pleased to speak to us, all the secrets of his Essence shall be disclosed, and his transcendent Majesty shall be brought down to the level of our capacity? Might it not have been anticipated that as he was now to appear in a new character, and to carry on a new system of operations, new wonders would meet our eyes? The objection against revelation on account of its mysteries, is utterly contemptible; unless it could be shown that the doctrines referred to under this name, are contrary to reason. But it

is one thing to assert, and another thing to prove. If a man should tell us, as Hume has done in his speculations on Cause and Effect, that for aught which we know, a feather might have created the universe; or should affirm with atheists, that the human race had no beginning, although each individual had a beginning; or should maintain that, although there are marks of design in the system of created things, it had not an intelligent author; we might justly pronounce his doctrines to be contrary to reason. But are there any doctrines in revelation which resemble these? We are often reminded of the Trinity, and clamorously told, that it is impossible to conceive a proposition more repugnant to our clearest ideas, than that the same Being should be one and three. This would unquestionably be true, if it were affirmed that he is one and three in the same sense; but let our adversaries demonstrate the impossibility of his being one in one sense, and three in another; one in essence, and three in personal distinctions. It is not so in men, they exclaim. We grant it; but does it follow that it is not so in God? Is nothing possible in an infinite, unless it exist in a finite essence? This is the logic of these mighty men of reason; but they should be sent to school again that they may learn not to draw conclusions which are not contained in the premises. The presumption would be ridiculous, were not a more serious emotion excited by the impiety of puny mortals who know not how a hair of the head grows, and yet take upon them to pronounce what can and cannot be, in that Nature which fills heaven and earth.

In the fourth place, objections are advanced against the scheme of redemption revealed in the Scriptures, as implying what is incredible and impossible. Infidels exclaim against the incarnation of our Saviour as absurd and impious; and say, Who can believe that man was God, and God man, that God was born, suffered, and died on a cross? Let us first state the doctrine accurately. We maintain that God became man by uniting himself with human nature in a mysterious manner; but we deny any confusion or mixture of the natures, which remained perfectly distinct; so that when we speak of the Son of God as having been born, and as having suffered and died, we refer exclusively to the assumed nature, of which alone such things are predicable, although we ascribe them to the person to whom that nature belongs. Now, to the doctrine thus cleared from misrepresentation, what objection can be made? Although such a union would have been previously improbable—and it is acknowledged that nothing could have been more remote from the ordinary train of human thought—this neither proves that it was impossible, nor can it invalidate the evidence that it has actually taken place. In any other case, a man would be laughed at who should obstinately withhold his assent to what was told him, on the ground that it was improbable, although it had been established by satisfactory evidence. The only ground which could justify him in disregarding evidence, would be the impossibility of the thing. But who will presume to say that this union of the divine and human nature was impossible? or rather, who will demonstrate that it was impossible? for we will not be content with assertion, but demand proof. Who can tell us what God can and cannot do? Who has explored all the resources of Omnipotence? God has conjoined in the composition of man two substances which have no common properties, and yet, as experience teaches us, operate together and upon each other. God exerts his power immediately upon his creatures, to uphold, assist, and excite them to act; for it is a dictate of reason as well as of revelation, that “in him we live, and move, and have our being.” How is it proved that he must stop here? that he cannot form a more intimate alliance with his creatures? that it would be unworthy of him and contrary to the nature of things, to select a human being as the instrument of his agency for some great purpose, and with this view, to connect that being with himself by

a peculiar and mysterious relation ! This is the doctrine of the incarnation and till we hear something more than clamours against it, we shall continue to believe it upon the general evidence that the Scriptures are true.

Again, infidels object against the method by which the incarnate Redeemer is said to have effected our salvation, namely, by his substitution. What is more inconsistent with justice, than that one person should suffer for another,—the innocent should bear the punishment of the guilty? Whatever force there may seem, at first sight, to be in this objection, it has been rejected by universal consent; for the idea of vicarious sufferings has prevailed in all ages and nations. Jews and Gentiles have believed that the Deity might be appeased, not only by the sufferings of the guilty themselves, but by the death of animals offered in their room; and hence sacrifices were an essential part of their religion. To whatever original source the idea may be traced, its universal diffusion is a proof that men did not consider it as incompatible with justice, that the penalty to which one individual was subject, should be inflicted on another. The idea is admitted still in all cases of suretiship, when one person is called to make good the engagements which another has failed to fulfil. It may be said that in such cases there cannot be injustice, because the surety, when he became responsible for another, was aware of the consequences, and according to the common saying, *volenti nulla fit injuria*. It is precisely on this ground that we vindicate the Scripture doctrine of the atonement of Christ. His sufferings were voluntary, in the most perfect sense, the result of generous love to man, and of ardent zeal for the glory of his Father. It would be contrary to justice that the innocent should suffer for the guilty, if the sufferer was compelled to be the victim; if he were not master of his own life, and, however willing, had not a right to dispose of it; or if society would be injured by his death, and if the punishment would be complete and final loss to himself. But none of these things is applicable to the present case. First, Jesus Christ was a willing victim; and when the time of his sufferings was near, he “steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.”* Secondly, he was Lord of his own life; he had power to lay it down, and had power to take it again.† Thirdly, so far was his death from being injurious to society, that the greatest benefit has resulted to mankind from it, as the price of their eternal redemption. Lastly, his sufferings have terminated in unspeakable advantage to himself; for while he has accomplished the benevolent design on which he was so fully bent, he has obtained the highest felicity and glory, and reigns at the right hand of his Father, over heaven and earth. When we consider the ultimate end of his sufferings, the manifestation of the holiness of God, the maintenance of his authority, the restoration of his law, the advancement of the cause of righteousness, and the expulsion of sin and misery from his kingdom; the substitution appears to be an act worthy of the Supreme Governor of the universe, and in itself and its consequences, the most glorious part of his moral administration.

Once more, it is objected that if the Son of God assumed human nature, and died for the salvation of men, the end was disproportionate to the means. The dispensation would be unworthy of the wisdom of God; for it is incredible that such grand preparations should have been made for the sake of a race of beings so insignificant, that the destruction of them, and the earth which they inhabit, would not have caused a perceptible blank in the wide regions of creation. But such reasoning is fallacious. The universe itself is as nothing, yea, less than nothing, in the eyes of its Maker. Might we not then say, why does he take any concern in it? Why does he bestow attention on particular parts of it—for example, upon men—as we learn from expe-

* Luke ix. 51.

† John x. 18.

rience that he does, in the dispensations of his providence? Why does he care for still more contemptible creatures, insects and animalcules, whom he brings into existence by his power, and sustains by his bounty? To reason from the greatness of God and the littleness of man, would lead to conclusions which we know to be false. The proper question, therefore, in the present case is, not what in our apprehension did it become God to do, but what has he actually done? But we may give the argument a different shape. You say that man was not worthy of all this care, which is implied in redemption. But consider distinctly what was its object. It was to deliver millions of human beings from perdition, and to raise them to a state of consummate and interminable bliss. Was this an insignificant object? Can any person estimate the value of one soul, when viewed in connexion with eternity? And what is the value of myriads of souls? Although the salvation of men had been the sole object of redemption, we must have pronounced it to be worthy of the benevolence of the Deity, and to be a noble display of wisdom and goodness. But are we sure that this was the only design? Is there no reason to think that it is a part of a great moral scheme, and that its effects extend to the whole intelligent creation? Was it not intended to be a manifestation of the character and perfections of the Deity, by which he would be exalted in the eyes of all orders of rational beings, the authority of his law would be more solemnly established, the obedient would be confirmed in their allegiance, and their felicity would be augmented. Taken in this connexion, our little world, and insignificant race, acquire an importance which, viewed in themselves, they did not possess. Man has been made the object of this wonderful dispensation, not for his own sake only, but for the good of the whole family dispersed among the countless worlds which roll in the immensity of space; and the earth is the chosen theatre for the display of the glories of the Godhead. The spot is nothing, the display is everything; but surely a more proper scene could not have been devised, than the habitation of beings as mean as they were vile; in whose salvation there would be an impressive manifestation of the unsearchable riches of the love and grace of the Most High. This is the centre from which rays diverge in every direction throughout the universe, to illuminate and gladden the myriads who people its numerous provinces. The hour of our redemption is the most memorable era in its history, the commencement of a new order of things which will last for ever.

In the fifth place, infidels object to many of the facts related in the Scriptures, as absurd and impossible. The story of the temptation of our first parents, has afforded an abundant subject of ridicule, because the agent was a serpent, and the sin consisted in eating an apple. With regard to the sin, in a moral estimate, the matter of it is of little account; it is the disposition which is to be considered. The action may be trifling in itself; but it assumes another character when it proceeds from resistance to lawful authority. Those who cannot make this distinction, are unfit to be reasoned with. The agent was a serpent, but not the dumb irrational reptile alone; for we learn from other places, that it was merely the instrument of a malignant being, who was permitted to utter articulate sounds through its mouth, for the trial of the primitive pair. It would require more knowledge of the invisible world than infidels possess, in order to prove that this was impossible. The story of Balaam's ass has been also held up to ridicule; but most unjustly. We do not suppose that the animal had the power of speech, and understood the sounds which it uttered, but merely that it was enabled to express a few words for a particular purpose; and all objections should be silenced by the statement, that "the Lord opened its mouth,"* for none but an atheist will deny

* Num. xxii. 28.

that this could be done by omnipotence. He who made man's mouth could make other creatures to speak like men; and we know that some irrational creatures are taught by human art to pronounce words, without understanding them. The history of the deluge has been assailed by many objections, although our earth exhibits every where proofs that it has suffered a dreadful convulsion, in which water was the agent. If it be asked, where water could be found in such quantity as to cover the whole surface of the globe? I cannot tell; but does it follow, that he who made the sea and the dry land could not provide it? If it be asked, how the various kinds of animals could be brought together from their distant abodes into one place? I can see no difficulty in believing the fact, since they are always under the control and direction of the Author of their instincts. If it be asked, how they could all be contained in the ark? I answer, that it has been proved, by accurate calculation, to have afforded ample space for them, and for food to sustain them during the time of the confinement. If it be asked, how such an unwieldy body could be prevented from oversetting in the waters, and being overwhelmed by the fury of waves and currents? It is enough to know, that it was under the protection of Providence. The miracle recorded in Joshua, where the sun and moon are said to have stood still, has been pronounced to be impossible according to the constitution of nature. It is pitiful to say that the sun could not stand still because it does not move; for the history speaks according to the ideas of the age, and was intended to record simply the appearance to the eye, to which the language of men, whether philosophers or peasants, is still conformed in common conversation. Whether the effect was produced by a supernatural refraction, or whether the motion of the earth around its axis was suspended, we do not possess the means of determining. In either case there was a miracle; and both were alike easy to Omnipotence. He who gave law to nature could stop its course without the slightest injury to the system. I shall take notice, in the last place, of the fate of Jonah, who was three days in the belly or stomach of a whale, or rather a great fish, for the word is general, and does not inform us of the species. To account for the fact upon natural principles, it has been stated, that a living substance is not acted upon by the juices of the stomach, and that persons in whom the *foramen ovale* remains open can live without breathing for a considerable time. But although these things were true, for what purpose are they resorted to? Is it to prove that what has been accounted a miracle was an event, uncommon indeed, but not supernatural? There is no occasion to summon God's own laws to his assistance; for no person, who believes that he is omnipotent, can doubt that he could have preserved Jonah in his perilous situation. Nothing is more absurd than to object to a miracle on account of its difficulty; for in doing so, we set limits to the power of God, and assimilate it to the power of man, which succeeds in some cases and fails in others. God could as easily make us live in water or in fire, as in air, because, being the sole Author of life, he could support it without means, or in opposition to the natural causes of its destruction. If an alleged miracle is not physically impossible, its greatness does not in any degree diminish its credibility; and all that concerns us is to ascertain that it is fully attested.

In the sixth place, infidels object, that some things in the Scriptures are unworthy of God, and reflect upon the excellence of his nature, the purity of his character, and the wisdom of his procedure. The Scriptures, it is said, give us false ideas of God, while they represent him as a corporeal being, who has eyes, ears, hands and feet, and attribute to him human infirmities and passions, as hope, fear, grief, repentance, &c. But the man who seriously advances this objection must be strangely deficient in candour, if his reading has not been confined to the few passages with which he is dissatisfied. There

is no book which is so careful to admonish us against supposing that God bears any resemblance to his creatures, and gives such sublime descriptions of him as infinite, independent, immutable, and possessed of every possible perfection. “To whom will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.”* Such passages are an effectual antidote to those in which he is spoken of after the manner of men, to assist our feeble conceptions, and to impress abstract truths more strongly upon our minds, through the medium of the imagination and the senses. If he has an arm, it is an arm which sustains all nature; if he has eyes, they are eyes which survey the universe at a glance, and see in the dark; if he has ears, they hear the thoughts and desires of the heart. With respect to his hope and fear, his sorrow and repentance, the abuse of these attributions is guarded against by the explicit declaration, that “all his works are known to him from the beginning of the world,” and that he “works all things according to the counsel of his will,” or that he foresees every thing, and every thing is in unison with his eternal decrees. It is objected again, that the Scriptures make God the author of sin, by representing him as tempting men, hardening their hearts, and putting it into their minds to do evil. But justice requires, that, if possible, we should explain a book consistently with itself; and when we find the Scriptures affirming that God is a being of unspotted purity, that he holds sin in abhorrence, and the great end of the dispensations of providence and grace is to reclaim men from it, are we not bound to put a favourable construction upon expressions which seem to be of a contrary import? Viewed in their connexion, they can only mean that God did not interpose to change the dispositions of the persons referred to; that he left them to themselves; and that the circumstances in which they were placed had a tendency to elicit their depravity, and to confirm their criminal purposes. Farther, the morality of some commands which issued from God has been impeached; and they have been accused of sanctioning cruelty, injustice, and fraud. Among the number is the command to Abraham to offer up Isaac. Can it be believed that the Deity would require a human sacrifice? We may say, that God had no design to accept such a sacrifice, and that nothing more was intended than to make trial of the faith of the patriarch, and furnish a noble example of obedience to succeeding generations. But if Isaac had been slain, would any injustice have been done? Not surely to Isaac, whose life was forfeited by sin, like that of all other men, and might be taken from him in this way, as well as by disease. It would have been painful to his father to be the agent; but the right of the supreme Governor to prescribe any service to his subjects is indisputable; and in obeying him they can do no wrong. What shall be said of the command to exterminate the nations of Canaan, which seems rather to have proceeded from the demon of destruction, than from the merciful Governor of mankind? Let the case be stated as it was. These nations were impious and profligate in a more than ordinary degree; and will it be doubted, that if the divine government is moral, they deserved to be punished? Had God employed an earthquake to bury them under the ruins of their dwellings, would any man have thought that he had dealt unjustly with them? There seems no more injustice in rooting them out by the sword of the Israelites; and there was a fitness in making them the instruments, because, having witnessed the sufferings of the Canaanites, and knowing the cause of them, they would be more effectually restrained from imitating their abominable practices. The command to the Israelites to spoil the Egyptians is justified on these grounds; that the Sovereign Proprietor has a right to transfer the property of one person to another, and that the present was an instance of just retribution, because the Israelites

* Isa. xl. 25.

had long laboured for the good of the Egyptians, but had been cruelly oppressed, and defrauded of their due. The means are objected to, because, to borrow implies a promise to restore, while it is certain that the Israelites had no such intention. But this difficulty exists only in our translation; for the original says, that they were commanded to *ask* jewels of gold and silver, and raiment from their neighbours; and to account for the success of a simple request, it is stated, that “the Lord gave the people favour in the eyes of the Egyptians.”*

Our limits permit me to take notice only of a few objections of this kind as a specimen. Passing, therefore, many which have been advanced, I shall mention only other two, which are founded on the history of the Israelites. The idea that they were a peculiar people is rejected as implying partiality in the Deity, and establishing a system of favouritism on the ruins of universal benevolence. This objection will deserve an answer when it is proved that creatures have a claim upon their Creator, and that he is bound to treat them all upon equal terms. But we shall look for such proof in vain, and the whole history of providence is opposed to it; for, as individuals enjoy different degrees of understanding, health, and riches, so nations are at present, and have always been, differently situated in respect of soil, climate, civilization, and, in short, in respect of both physical and moral advantages. The peculiar privileges enjoyed by the Israelites include something of greater importance, namely, the exclusive possession of divine revelation; but if God did not owe a revelation to mankind, there was no injustice in giving it to one people, and withholding it from others. The law which was enjoined upon this select people has been boldly condemned as unworthy of the wisdom and goodness of God. Its precepts have been called trifling, unmeaning, vexatious; calculated only to foster superstition, and to substitute external observances for purity of heart. A vindication of the ceremonial law, against which these charges are chiefly directed, would lead to a lengthened discussion. We should always remember, that it was not the only law delivered to the Israelites, but was accompanied with the moral law, which was summed up in the two precepts of love to God, and love to our neighbour, and reminded them that piety and holiness constituted the essence of religion. This being the case, whatever might be the effect upon individuals of the constitution under which they were placed, its native tendency was, not to cherish superstition, but to inspire noble sentiments and holy dispositions. It is impossible for us, who live at such a distance of time, and are imperfectly acquainted with the state of things in that age, to account for every precept; but, from some particulars which have come to our knowledge, we may conclude, that all the precepts were wise and necessary, as preservatives from the customs of the idolatrous nations with which the Israelites were surrounded. In judging of a law, fairness requires that we should consider its design. Now, we know that the ceremonial law was not intended merely to regulate the conduct of the Israelites in matters of religion, but had a reference to another dispensation, the great events of which it prefigured. In this connexion it should be viewed, and then many of its institutions, of which a satisfactory account could not be otherwise given, will appear to have been framed with consummate wisdom, in order to direct their thoughts to the events of futurity, and likewise to furnish, in the exact fulfilment of its types, a new proof of its own divinity, as well as an evidence of the truth of Christianity, in which it received its accomplishment. The wisdom of God is illustrated by the harmony of the law and the gospel.

In the last place, the supposed contradictions in the Scriptures furnish a ground of objection: for it is said, How can a book be true which asserts one

thing in one place, and a different thing in another? And above all, how can it have proceeded from Him who is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever?" It is not enough to answer, that these discrepancies do not affect the general truth of our religion, because a testimony may be substantially true although the witnesses do not agree in some subordinate points. Contradiction in minute matters is inconsistent with the idea of inspiration; and, instead of evading the objection, we must endeavour to meet it, if we would maintain the divine authority of the record.

In some cases, the contradiction is only apparent, and is removed by an explanation of the passages. When Solomon says, "answer not a fool according to his folly;" and again, "answer a fool according to his folly;"* the reasons subjoined to these injunctions show us that he viewed the case in different lights, and intimate that what would be proper at one time, would be improper at another. If "the strength of Israel will not lie, nor repent," and it is affirmed that he repented having set Saul king over Israel,† there is no real opposition in these two statements. God does not repent in the sense of changing his counsels, but he repents in the sense of changing his dispensations; for, like a man who has altered his design, he reversed what he had formerly done. The apostle James seems to be at variance with Moses, because the one says, "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God," and the other tells us that the Lord "did tempt Abraham;"‡ but the difficulty is removed by the simple observation, that James means by tempting, soliciting to sin, while Moses means, making trial of faith and obedience.

It is acknowledged that there are some contradictions which it is impossible to reconcile; but as they may be accounted for by a false reading, candour requires that we should admit this solution; and, in some cases, it is absolutely necessary that we should, because the error is such, that it could not be committed by the original writer. For example, we read that Ahaziah was forty and two years old when he began to reign, although, in the preceding chapter, we are told that his father died at the age of forty, and besides, he was his youngest son. No man in his senses would thus contradict himself, and assert an absolute impossibility; and we therefore believe that the proper reading is twenty-two, as we find it in another book.§ In the same way we explain the different accounts of the age of Jehoiachin at the commencement of his reign, who is said, in Kings, to have been eighteen, and in Chronicles, to have been eight.|| From the same cause, too, Solomon is represented, in one place, as having forty thousand stalls for horses, and in another place, as having only four thousand.¶ In a book so ancient as the Old Testament, and which has been so often transcribed, it is not surprising that some mistakes should have been committed; and without a miracle, they could not have been prevented. This is not a mere supposition, but a fact clearly established, by the collections which learned men have made of various readings; and there is no case, in which a transcriber was more liable to err than in numbers, especially if they were expressed not by words, but by letters or arbitrary marks.

The following general remarks are applicable to historical and chronological difficulties, and may be successfully employed in many cases to remove them; "that in the Scriptures, as well as in other histories, the order of time is not always strictly observed; that the same persons and places have sometimes different names; and in the case of years and numbers of any kind,

* Prov. xxvi. 4, 5.

† James i. 13. Gen. xxii. 1.

‡ 2 Kings xxiv. 8. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 9.

§ 1 Sam. xv. 11. 29.

¶ 2 Chron. xxii. 2. 2 Kings viii. 26.

|| 1 Kings iv. 26. 2 Chron. ix. 25.

round numbers are used, or an even number is put for another, which was in a small degree deficient or redundant; that periods of time, as for example, the reigns of kings, have different dates, a king being reckoned to have commenced his reign, either at the death of his predecessor, or when he was associated with him in the government; that an event, which, from its similarity to another, is supposed to be the same, may be different, and is therefore related with some difference of circumstances; and that there may be an apparent discrepance in the relation of the same transaction by two or more writers, because one omits some particulars which have been mentioned by another, or adds particulars of which another has taken no notice.”*

By referring to different dates, we account for the difference in the number of years. When it is said, in one place, that Abraham’s seed should be, for four hundred years, strangers in a land which was not theirs, and in another, that they were delivered from Egypt at the expiration of four hundred and thirty years;† the date, in the first, is from the birth of Isaac; and in the second, from the call of the patriarch. I shall produce one instance of seeming contradiction, arising from a disregard of the order of time. According to John, Christ was anointed at Bethany six days before the passover, but Matthew does not speak of it till within two days of the feast.‡ It was then that Judas offered to betray his Master; and in relating his treachery, Matthew recollected the event which compelled him to consummate his design, the rebuke which he received from Christ some days before, when he complained of the waste of the ointment.

It is impossible to do more than to give you a specimen of the modes of reconciling different passages. The subject is extensive, and you must be referred to the authors who have treated it at length. The two genealogies of Christ are so widely different, that there is no way of accounting for them, but by the supposition, that Matthew gives his descent from David, in the line of Joseph, his reputed father; and Luke, his descent in the line of Mary his mother.§ Jesus, says Luke, was about thirty years of age, being *ὡς ἐννέα μίσητος*, not really, but *as was supposed*, the son of Joseph, whose true father was Jacob, but he is here called the son of Heli, because he was his son-in-law, being married to Mary his daughter. The different accounts of the superscription on the cross may be reconciled by the circumstance, that it was written in different languages; whence one of the evangelists has given it from the Hebrew, another from the Greek, and another from the Latin. “This is Jesus, the king of the Jews;” “Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews;” “This is the king of the Jews.”|| In like manner, with regard to the exclamation of the centurion, who said, according to Matthew, “Truly this was the Son of God;” but, according to Luke, “Certainly this was a righteous man:”¶ both accounts may be true, for he may have uttered both sentences, although each of these evangelists has chosen to give only one of them.

No wise man will be surprised that we meet with difficulties in revelation; nor will they have any undue effect upon an honest mind. They certainly call for investigation, but no greater importance should be attached to them than they really possess. We should pronounce that man to be a fool, who, having complete evidence of a fact presented to him, should continue to entertain doubts of it, because there were some things connected with it which he was unable to explain. In cases of this kind, our judgment should be deter-

* Essay on Inspiration, p 297.

† John xii. 1. 3. Matt. xxvi. 2. 7

‡ Matt. xxvii. 37. John xix. 19. Luke xxiii. 38.

¶ Matt. xxvii. 54. Luke xxiii. 47.

† Gen. xv. 13. Exod. xii. 40.

§ Matt. i. Luke iii. 23, et seq.

mined by the preponderance of the evidence. If the arguments for the conclusion are superior to the arguments against it, we do not act rationally, but absurdly, when we withhold our assent. It must be a weak or a prejudiced mind which is influenced by some objections to reject Christianity, notwithstanding the abundant evidence by which its claims are established ; and we have reason to suspect, that the heart is in fault still more than the head, and that in this case, men hate the light because their deeds are evil.

LECTURE XI.

INSPIRATION OF THE SACRED WRITERS.

Inspiration claimed by the Writers of Scripture—Different Opinions respecting it—Plenary Inspiration—Degrees of Inspiration according to the Jews ; According to Christian Divines : Superintendence, Elevation, Suggestion—Account of the different Degrees of Inspiration—In what Sense the Scriptures are the Word of God—Did Inspiration extend to the Language ?—Character of Persons inspired ; Modes of Inspiration—Privilege of Moses.

I HAVE endeavoured, in the preceding lectures, to prove the genuineness and authenticity of the Scriptures ; that they were written by the persons to whom they are ascribed, and that their contents are worthy of credit. These two points are sufficient to establish the truth of our religion. It is not absolutely necessary to inquire, whether the sacred writers were supernaturally qualified for composing the records of revelation ; because if their veracity and competence are ascertained, the facts which they attest furnish satisfactory evidence of the divine origin of Christianity. But however fully we might be convinced of the general truth of our religion, when we proceed to examine its nature, to investigate its doctrines, precepts, institutions, and promises, we could not have perfect confidence in the detailed account, although we should entertain no suspicion of the honesty of the writers, unless we had reason to believe that they were assisted in drawing it up, so as to commit no mistakes either in narrating or in reasoning, and to leave out nothing which was essential to the system. Our confidence would be the less, when, not to mention the difficulty, or rather the impossibility, which persons of the greatest talents must have felt, to avoid all error in an account so complicated, and embracing so great a variety of matter, we reflect that the sacred writers were men without education, unskilled in composition, and consequently inadequate to the task. It might have almost been assumed, *a priori*, that if God was pleased to give a revelation to the world, he would not expose it to the hazard of being misrepresented, corrupted, and mutilated, through the infirmity of those who should undertake to transmit it to succeeding generations ; and that, by a continuation of the miraculous agency which a revelation implies, he would so influence their minds, that those who lived at a distance in respect of time and place, should have the same advantages for exactly knowing its contents, as they had to whom it was primarily delivered. And surely, to those who admit that miracles are wrought to attest revelation, it will not seem incredible that there should have been one miracle more, so obviously necessary, as the inspiration of the persons by whom it was committed to writing. The possibility of inspiration none but an atheist will deny ; and it would be strange indeed if its probability should be called in question by any who bear the Christian name, while they are compelled to admit the fact in the case of the prophets.

It is not, however, by reasoning, the solidity of which might be disputed, that we prove the inspiration of the Scriptures. We appeal to their own testimony, and might produce many passages in which it is explicitly asserted, or plainly implied. I shall quote the words of Paul, in the second Epistle to Timothy, because whatever attempt some critics have made to evade their force, they convey distinct information to those who are candidly disposed to receive it: "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."* I acknowledge that the apostle must be understood to speak only of the Jewish Scriptures, which Timothy had known from his childhood, for when he was a child no part of the Christian Scriptures had been published; but if the inspiration of the former is established, that of the latter will be readily conceded. It has been affirmed that the verse should be rendered thus—"Every writing divinely inspired is profitable;" and it is thus converted into a general proposition, which does not vouch for the inspiration of any particular book, and leaves the question undecided, what books are inspired. This makes it a proposition which communicates no specific information, and is as superfluous as it would be to tell us that the sun gives light. It would have never entered into the mind of any man to suppose that a book really inspired was of no use. But although we should admit the translation, it goes farther than its authors intended; for while it was their design to destroy the evidence arising from the words, in behalf of the inspiration of the Jewish Scriptures, they still bear explicit testimony to it. The apostle had mentioned them in the preceding verse, and he now adds, "every inspired writing is profitable," evidently assigning the reason why these Scriptures were able to make Timothy wise unto salvation. It was their inspiration which made them profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. We can conceive no reason for the mention of inspired writings in this connexion, but to attest the inspiration of the books of the Old Testament. Thus the translation turns out an abortive attempt to weaken or overthrow the authority of the Jewish canon. That it is a mistranslation, every person will see on consulting the original, *πασα γραφη θεπνευστος και ωφελιμος*. The conjunction *και*, which connects *θεπνευστος* and *ωφελιμος*, clearly shows that both adjectives belong to the predicate of the proposition, and that *πασα γραφη* alone is the subject. No example can be produced where two adjectives are thus joined, of which the one belongs to the subject, and the other to the predicate. Had Paul meant to express the idea which these critics attach to his words, he would have left out the conjunction, or perhaps have substituted the verb of existence, *εστι*, as a copulative. *Πασα γραφη θεπνευστος ωφελιμος*, or, *πασα γραφη θεπνευστος εστιν ωφελιμος*. This, then, is the proper translation, *every writing is divinely inspired, and is profitable*; that is, every one of the writings referred to in the preceding verse, under the designation of the Holy Scriptures; and thus he asserts the inspiration of all the books contained in the sacred volume of the Jews.

There are many other passages in which the inspiration of the Old Testament is asserted or implied. The books are called the "oracles of God,"† by which designation they are plainly referred to a divine origin, and distinguished from human compositions. They are frequently quoted under the name of Scripture, *the writing* by way of eminence; that is, the inspired writing, according to the words of Paul, which have been considered. Our Saviour appealed to them as containing the words of eternal life, and bearing testimony to him;‡ and gave his sanction to them all, as arranged by the Jews in the three divisions of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms.§ When

* 2 Tim. iii. 16.

† John v. 39.

‡ Acts vii. 38. Rom. iii. 2. Heb. v. 12. 1 Pet. iv. 11

§ Luke xxiv. 44.

we look into the Old Testament itself, we find the claim of inspiration repeatedly and explicitly advanced. Moses affirms that he wrote part, at least, of the Pentateuch by the command of God;* David tells us, that “the Spirit of the Lord spake by him, and his word was in his tongue,”† and all the prophets delivered their messages in the name of Jehovah.

There are many particulars from which the same conclusion may be drawn, with respect to the books of the New Testament. It is evident that the writers were not left to their own unassisted faculties, from the promise of our Saviour, that the Father would send the Spirit in his name, “who should teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever he had said unto them.”‡ “Howbeit,” he adds, “when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come.”§ He likewise admonished them, when they were brought before magistrates and councils for his sake, to “take no thought what they should say, because it would be given them in that hour what they should speak;”|| that is, proper sentiments and words would be suggested to them. We do not surely overstrain these promises, when we infer from them that they enjoyed the same supernatural assistance in composing their narrations and epistles; in which it was at least equally necessary, as these were to be the rule of faith and practice to the church in all ages. Accordingly, they did claim inspiration, not only by placing their own writings on a level with those of the prophets, but by many express declarations. Thus Paul tells us, in the name of his brethren, that they have received the Spirit of God, that they might know the things which were freely given them of God; “which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.”¶ With respect to himself, he affirms that he had “the mind of Christ:”** that the things which he wrote were “the commandments of the Lord;”†† that the gospel which he preached, he had received “by the revelation of Jesus Christ;”‡‡ and that whosoever despised the things which he and his brethren taught, despised not man but God, who had given to them the Holy Ghost.§§ John speaks thus of all the apostles: “We are of God, he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.”|||| You observe that some of the passages now quoted refer directly to their writings, and that in them all it is assumed, that the apostles were supernaturally assisted in communicating the gospel to mankind, and consequently in committing it to writing as well as in preaching it.

On the ground of these declarations, it has been generally admitted, that there is a specific difference between the sacred books and human compositions. Their inspiration has been generally acknowledged; but the question, how far it extends, has given rise to a diversity of opinions. Some have had the boldness to deny it altogether; and some have circumscribed it within very narrow limits. “I think,” says Dr. Priestley, “that the Scriptures were written without any particular inspiration, by men who wrote according to the best of their knowledge, and who, from their circumstances, could not be mistaken with respect to the greater facts, of which they were proper witnesses, but like other men subject to prejudice, might be liable to adopt a hasty and ill-grounded opinion, concerning things which did not fall within the compass of their own knowledge, and which had no connexion with any thing that was so.” It must strike you at once, that this is a direct contradiction of

* Deut. xxxi. 19, 22.

|| Matt. x. 19.

‡‡ Gal. i. 12.

† 2 Sam. xxiii. 2.

¶ 1 Cor. ii. 13.

§§ 1 Thess. iv. 8.

‡ John xiv. 26.

** Ibid. 16.

||| 1 John iv. 6.

§ John xvi. 13.

†† 1 Cor. xiv. 37.

the sacred writers, and an impeachment of their veracity ; and if they have told us a falsehood, when they asserted their inspiration, how can we give credit to them in any other thing ? If they were all deceived on this point by imagination, they were incompetent witnesses ; and if they were not deceived, they have forfeited all title to our confidence. Dr. Priestley found it necessary to destroy the authority of the record, that he might pave the way for establishing his own system, from which all the peculiar doctrines of Christianity are excluded, and might be at liberty to believe as much or as little as he pleased. It is strange to suppose a revelation to have been given so full of misstatements, and false reasonings, that in order to discover what is true and what is false we must end where we began, by making reason the supreme judge in religion. Others have maintained, that the inspiration of the apostles was only occasional ; that they were not always assisted and guided by the Holy Spirit ; and that consequently, being sometimes left to themselves, they thought and reasoned like ordinary men. As this is a mere hypothesis, unsupported by proof, it is entitled to very little attention. If admitted, it would involve us in the greatest perplexity, because, not knowing when they did, and when they did not, enjoy the presence of the Spirit, we should be utterly at a loss to determine what parts of their writings we ought to believe. There would be truth, and there might be error in them ; but how to distinguish and separate them, would puzzle the wisest head. And it comes to the same thing at last, whether you say, that they were not inspired at all, or that they were inspired on certain occasions, while you do not furnish us with the means of ascertaining those occasions. Once more, it has been affirmed, “ that the whole scheme of the gospel was supernaturally revealed to the apostles, was faithfully retained in their memories, and is expounded in their writings by the use of their natural faculties.” I do not thoroughly understand this theory, because it does not distinctly explain how much is assigned to inspiration, and how much to the persons inspired ; but, if it is meant, that after the revelation was made to them, they had the same power over it as a man has over his own thoughts, and were at the same liberty with respect to the mode of communicating it as we are with respect to the suggestions of our own minds, I consider it as inconsistent with the scriptural idea of inspiration, and with the statement, that “ the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”*

Many learned men have held the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, which imports, that every part of them is inspired. The doctrine has met with violent opposition, and has been treated with ridicule ; but the objections against it have arisen, in some cases at least, I apprehend, from misconception. It has been supposed to imply, that every part of the sacred books was immediately communicated to the minds of the writers : and as some parts of them relate to common things, to things which might have been known from other sources, it seemed absurd to introduce a revelation, where the bodily senses and natural reason were fully adequate to the purpose. But this is not the true idea of plenary inspiration. It extends, indeed, to the whole Scriptures ; but it admits of degrees suited to the nature of the subject which the writers were employed to record, and did not supersede the use of their natural faculties, so far as these could contribute to the general design. The whole was not a revelation in the strict acceptance of the term, but the whole was committed to writing by the direction and with the assistance of the Spirit.

Inspiration may be defined to be, “ an influence of the Holy Spirit upon the understandings, imaginations, memories, and other mental powers of the sacred

* 2 Pet. i. 21.

writers, by which they were qualified to communicate to the world the knowledge of the will of God.”* The definition is designedly made general, that it may comprehend the different degrees of inspiration, which will be afterwards mentioned; and it is so expressed as to suit the highest and the lowest. The possibility of such an influence will be admitted by every person who believes that God is the former of our souls, and the master of our faculties; and the necessity of it is evident, if human agents were to be employed in giving instruction to their brethren on the high and important subject of religion.

The Jews make mention of three degrees of inspiration, to which they refer the several books of the Old Testament according to their fancy. The first and highest they attribute to Moses, with whom “God spake mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark similitudes.” The second, they call the gift of prophecy, of which they imagine various subordinate degrees, corresponding to the different methods in which God revealed himself to the prophets. The last and lowest is the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, from which proceeded those books that are called the holy writings. Were it worth while to examine this division, and the classification of the books founded upon it, it would be easy to show that it is altogether arbitrary, and discovers the folly and stupidity of its authors. Of books which bear precisely the same character, some are ascribed to the gift of prophecy, and others, without reason, to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. “It would be idle,” says Dr. Grey,† “to trouble the reader with the discussion of these rabbinical conceits; and it may be sufficient here to remark upon this subject, that though the Scripture mentions different modes by which God communicated his instructions to the prophets, and particularly attributes a superior degree of eminence to Moses, yet that these differences, and this distinction, however they may affect the dignity of the minister employed, cannot be supposed to increase or to lessen the certainty of the things imparted. Whatever God condescended to communicate to mankind by his servants must be equally infallible and true, whether derived from immediate converse with him, from an external voice, or from dreams or visions, or lastly, from the internal and enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit. The mode of communication, where the agency of Providence is established, can in no respect exalt or depreciate the intrinsic character of the thing revealed.”

These observations are applicable to the different degrees of inspiration, which have been stated by Christian authors; for all agree that it was not enjoyed in the same degree by all the sacred writers. The three degrees of inspiration which are usually mentioned, are superintendence, elevation, and suggestion. Superintendence signifies the care exercised over those who related things which they knew by ordinary means, and by which they were preserved from the possibility of error. Elevation prevailed, says Dr. Doddridge,‡ “when the faculties, though they acted in a regular and common manner, were elevated or raised to some extraordinary degree, so that the composition was more truly sublime, noble, and pathetic, than what would have been produced merely by the force of a man’s natural genius.” Suggestion is “the highest kind of inspiration, and took place, when the use of the faculties was superseded, and God as it were spoke directly to the mind; making such discoveries to it as it could not otherwise have obtained, and dictating the very words in which these discoveries were to be communicated

* Dick’s Essay on Insp. chap. i. p. 21.

† Key to the Old Testament and Apocrypha, Introduction, p. 10.

‡ Doddridge’s Diss. on the Inspiration of the New Testament.

to others. But although this distinction is very generally adopted, I think it liable to material objections, which will be stated in the sequel.

As I have nothing to say on the kinds or degrees of inspiration different from what I long since gave to the public,* I shall content myself with repeating my former observations on the subject.

First, there are many things in the Scriptures which the writers might have known, and probably did know, by ordinary means. As persons possessed of memory, judgment, and the other intellectual faculties which are common to men, they were able to relate events in which they had been concerned, and to make such occasional reflections as were suggested by particular subjects and occurrences. In these cases, no supernatural influence was necessary to enlighten and invigorate their minds: it was only necessary that they should be infallibly preserved from error. They did not need a revelation to inform them of what had passed before their eyes, nor to point out those inferences and moral maxims which were obvious to every attentive and considerate observer. Moses could tell, without a divine afflatus, that, on such a night, the Israelites marched out of Egypt, and at such a place they murmured against God; and Solomon could remark, that “a soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger;” or, that “better is a dinner of herbs, where love is, than a stalled ox, and hatred therewith.”† It is with respect to such passages of Scripture only, as it did not exceed the natural ability of the writer to compose, that I would admit the motion of *superintendence*, if it should be admitted at all. But, perhaps, this word, though of established use, and almost undisputed authority, should be entirely laid aside, as insufficient to express even the lowest degree of inspiration. In the passages of Scripture which we are now considering, I conceive the writers to have been not merely superintended, that they might commit no error, but likewise to have been moved or excited by the Holy Ghost to record particular events, and set down particular observations. They were not like other historians, who introduce facts and reflections into the narratives which they compose, in the exercise of their own judgment, and according to their own ideas of propriety; but they rather resembled amanuenses, who commit to writing such things only as have been selected by their employer. Passages written by the direction, and under the care of the Divine Spirit, may be said, in an inferior sense, to be inspired; whereas, had the men written them at the suggestion of their own spirit, they would have been mere human compositions; and though free from error, would have been exactly on a level with those parts of profane writings which are agreeable to truth. Superintendence, indeed, is no peculiar kind of inspiration, but is the care exercised by Providence over all the sacred writers, in whatever degree or manner inspired, to secure a faithful relation of the histories, doctrines, prophecies, and precepts, which they were employed to communicate to mankind.

Secondly, there are other passages of Scripture, in composing which, the minds of the writers must have been supernaturally endowed with more than ordinary vigour. It is impossible for us, and perhaps it was not possible for the inspired writer himself, to determine where nature ended and inspiration began. He could not have marked, in all cases, with precision, the limits which separated the natural operation of his faculties, and the agency of the Spirit of God. It is enough to know, in general, that there are many parts of Scripture, in which, though the unassisted mind might have proceeded some steps, a divine impulse was necessary to enable it to advance. I think,

* Essay on Insp. chap. i. The nine following paragraphs are taken from the same chapter

† Prov. xv. 1. 17.

For example, that the evangelists could not have written the history of Christ if they had not enjoyed miraculous assistance. Two of them, Matthew and John, accompanied our Saviour during the whole, or the greater part of his personal ministry. At the close of that period, or rather a considerable number of years after it, the gospel of Matthew having been published, as is generally agreed, at least eight years, and that of John between sixty and seventy, posterior to the ascension, there can be no doubt that they had forgotten some of his discourses and miracles; that they recollected others in distinctly; and that, if left to themselves, they would have been in danger of producing an unfair and inaccurate account, by omissions and additions, or by confounding one thing with another. Simple and illiterate men, who had never been accustomed to exercise their intellectual faculties, could not, it is probable, have retailed his shorter discourses immediately after they were delivered, and much less those of greater length, as his sermon on the Mount, and his last instructions to his disciples. Besides, from so large a mass of materials, writers of uncultivated minds, such as Jewish fishermen and publicans may be conceived to have been, who were not in the habit of distinguishing and classifying, could not have made a judicious selection: nor would persons, unskilled in the art of composition, have been able to express themselves in such terms as should ensure a faithful representation of doctrines and facts, and with such dignity as the nature of the subject required. A divine influence, therefore, must have been exerted, by which their memories and judgments were invigorated, and they were enabled to relate the discourses and miracles of their Master with fidelity, and in a manner the best fitted to impress the readers of their histories. The promise of the Holy Ghost to bring to their remembrance all things whatsoever Christ had said to them,* proves, that in writing the gospels, their mental powers received from his agency new degrees of strength and capacity.

Farther, there are several passages of Scripture in which there is such elevation of thought and style, as clearly shows the faculties of the writers to have been raised above their ordinary state. There is a grandeur, a sublimity of ideas and expressions, of which their acknowledged powers were obviously incapable, and which must, therefore, have been the result of superior influence. Should a person of moderate talents give as elevated a description of the majesty and attributes of God, or reason as profoundly on the mysterious doctrines of religion, as a man of the most exalted genius and extensive learning, we could not fail to be convinced that he was supernaturally assisted; and the conviction would be still stronger, if his composition should transcend the highest efforts of the human mind. In either of these cases, it would be impossible to account for the effect by the operation of any ordinary cause. Some of the sacred writers were taken from the lowest ranks of life; and yet sentiments so dignified, and representations of divine things so grand and majestic, occur in their writings, that the noblest flights of human genius, when compared with them, appear cold and insipid. This remark on the matter and language of Scripture admits of an obvious application to the prophetic and devotional books of the Old Testament, and may be extended to many other passages, in which the purest and most sublime lessons are delivered on the subject of God and religion, by the natives of a country unacquainted with the philosophy, the literature, and the arts of the more polished nations of antiquity.

Thirdly, it is manifest, with respect to many passages of Scripture, that the subjects of which they treat must have been directly revealed to the writers. They could not have been known by natural means; nor was the knowledge

* John xiv. 26.

of them attainable by a simple elevation of the faculties, because they were not deductions from the principles of reason, or from truths already discovered, but were founded on the free determination of the will of God, and his pre-science of human affairs. With the abilities of an angel, we could not explore the thoughts and purposes of the divine mind. This degree of inspiration we ascribe to those who were empowered to reveal heavenly mysteries, "which eye had not seen, and ear had not heard;" to those who were sent with particular messages from God to his people; and to those who were employed to predict future events. The plan of redemption being an effect of the sovereign counsels of heaven, it could not have been known but by a communication from the Father of lights.

This kind of inspiration has been called the inspiration of *suggestion*. It may be deemed of little importance to dispute about a word; but *suggestion* seeming to express an immediate operation on the mind, by which ideas are excited in it, is of too limited signification to denote the various modes in which the prophets and apostles were made acquainted with supernatural truths. God revealed himself to them, not only by suggestion, but by dreams, visions, voices, and the ministry of angels. This degree of inspiration, in strict propriety of speech, should be called *revelation*; a word preferable to suggestion, because it is expressive of all the ways in which God communicated new ideas to the minds of his servants. It is a word, too, chosen by the Holy Ghost himself, to signify the discovery of truth formerly unknown to the apostles. The last book of the New Testament, which is a collection of prophecies, is called the *revelation* of Jesus Christ. Paul says that he received his Gospel by *revelation*; that "by *revelation* the mystery was made known to him, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it was then *revealed* unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;" and in another place, having remarked that "eye had not seen, nor ear heard, neither had entered into the heart of man, the things which God had prepared for them that love him," he adds, "but God hath *revealed* them unto us by his Spirit."*

I have not names to distinguish the two other kinds of inspiration. The names used by Dr. Doddridge and others, superintendence, elevation, and suggestion, do not convey the ideas stated in the preceding particulars, and are liable to material objections, as we have already shown with respect to the first and the last of them. Superintendence does not include the notion of a moving or exciting influence on the minds of the sacred writers, and consequently cannot denote any kind of inspiration: and suggestion being a word of too limited a meaning to express all that is intended, ought to give place to one more appropriate, which is furnished by the Holy Spirit himself. By those who use the term elevation, to signify a particular kind of inspiration, it is confined to such parts of Scripture as are lofty and sublime; whereas it is easy to perceive, that there must have been, in some cases, an elevation of the faculties, or a raising of them above their ordinary state, even when the province of the writer was simple narrative. This has been proved by a particular reference to the evangelists. The account now given of the inspiration of the Scriptures has, I think, these two recommendations, that there is no part of them which does not fall under one or other of the three foregoing heads; and that it carefully discriminates the different kinds or degrees of the agency of the Holy Spirit on the minds of the different writers.

From the preceding statement it appears, that we do not apply the term, inspiration, in the same sense to the whole of the Scripture, because the same degree of divine assistance was not necessary in the composition of every part

* Rev. i. 1. Gal. i. 12. Eph. iii. 3, 5. 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.

of it. In some parts, if I may speak so, there is more of God than in others. When a prophet predicts the events of futurity, or an apostle makes known the mysteries of redemption, it is God alone who speaks; and the voice or the pen of a man is merely the instrument employed for the communication of his will. When Moses relates the miracles of Egypt, and the journeys of the Israelites in the wilderness, or the evangelists relate the history of Christ, they tell nothing but what they formerly knew; but without the assistance of the Spirit, they could not have told it so well. "In some cases," it has been properly remarked, "inspiration only produced correctness and accuracy in relating past occurrences, or in reciting the words of others; in other cases it communicated ideas not only new and unknown before, but infinitely beyond the reach of unassisted human intellect; and sometimes inspired prophets delivered predictions for the use of future ages, which they did not themselves comprehend, and which cannot be fully understood till they are accomplished."*

From the preceding account of inspiration, it is easy to perceive in what sense the Scriptures, taken as a whole, may be pronounced to be the Word of God. We give them this denomination, because all the parts of which they consist have been written by persons moved, directed, and assisted by his Holy Spirit; but we do not mean, that all the sentiments contained in them are just, and all the examples are worthy of imitation. In the sacred writings, we meet with sayings and actions, which are neither wiser nor better for being found in them than if they had occurred in any ordinary history. I apprehend, that some persons, from want of reflection, fall into a mistake in this matter. They quote a sentiment as authoritative because they read it in the Scriptures, without waiting to consider by whom it was uttered; and draw arguments for the regulation of their own conduct and that of others from an action, without previously examining whether it received the divine approbation or not. Yet it is certain, not only that wicked men and wicked spirits are often introduced as speaking and acting, but that, as the saints of whom mention is made were not perfect and infallible, any more than the saints who are now alive, their opinions and conduct must not instantly be presumed to be right, unless it appear that they were under the influence of the Spirit of God, or their example be expressly or implicitly commended. From the mere admission of any fact into the inspired history, no other conclusion can be warrantably drawn, than that it actually took place, and it was the will of God that we should be acquainted with it: its moral nature, its conformity or disconformity to the standard of truth and rectitude, must be ascertained by some other test than its simple insertion in the Bible. Were clear ideas formed on this subject, some misapplications of passages would be prevented, and some objections which are brought against the inspiration of the sacred books, would either be not advanced at all, or would be immediately perceived to be inconclusive or unjust.

For the more complete elucidation of this point, let it be considered, that there are two different senses in which a book may be denominated the Word of God. In the first place, the meaning may be, that all the contents of the book were spoken or revealed by God himself; or that they proceeded directly from the eternal source of wisdom and purity, and consequently are all true and holy. It is evident, that, according to this sense of the Word of God, the name can be given only to a part of the Scriptures, because they contain, besides a revelation of the divine counsels, an account of human opinions, manners, customs, superstitions, and crimes. Sometimes it is God who speaks, and at other times it is man. Now, we are presented with a view of his wise

* Bishop of Lincoln's Introduction to the Study of the Bible, chap. i. p. 16.

and holy dispensations ; then, there is a delineation of the policy, the ambition the folly of his creatures. In the second place, a book may be styled the Word of God, to signify, that it was composed by his direction and assistance, and that every thing contained in it was inserted by his special appointment. It is plain, that, consistently with this definition, there may be things in the book which were neither spoken nor approved by God, though for wise purposes he has assigned them a place in it. In this sense the title, the Word of God, is applicable to the Scriptures at large, the whole having been written by men whom he inspired, and who, being guided and controlled by his Spirit, could neither fall into error, nor be guilty of mutilating and corrupting them by omissions and interpolations. Hence we are authorized, not only to consider all the doctrines, all the precepts, all the promises, and all the threatenings, delivered by God himself, or by others in his name, as true, righteous, and faithful ; but farther to believe, that the events which are said to have happened, and the words and actions which are represented to have been spoken and done, did so happen, and were so spoken and done. But whether the conduct related be wise or foolish, moral or immoral, we must determine by the judgment pronounced in the Scriptures themselves on particular cases, or by applying those principles and general rules, which are laid down in them to regulate our decisions.

There remains a question which has engaged a considerable share of attention, Whether inspiration is to be understood as extending to the language as well as to the sentiments ? In answering this question, it is necessary to distinguish one part of Scripture from another. In those parts which are delivered in the name of God, which are commands, messages, and communications from him, we cannot suppose that the writers were left to choose their own words, but are necessarily led to conceive them to have adhered with equal strictness to the words as to the thoughts. This must have been the case when they announced heavenly mysteries and new doctrines, of which they could have had no conception, unless the words had been suggested to them ; and when they delivered predictions which they did not understand ; for it is plain that here the inspiration consisted solely in presenting the words to their minds. They were much in the same situation with a person who sets down a passage in an unknown tongue, at the dictation of another. And that they did not always understand their own prophecies, is obvious from the words of Peter, who represents them as studying them, and trying to discover their meaning,—“ searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”* Thus far, I do not see upon what ground it can be denied that inspiration extended to the words.

With regard to other parts of Scripture, consisting of histories, moral reflections, and devotional pieces, I would not contend for the inspiration of the language in the same sense. It is reasonable to believe that the writers were permitted to exercise their own faculties to a certain extent, and to express themselves in their natural manner. At the same time, when we consider the promise of Christ to his disciples, that when they were brought before kings and governors for his sake, it should be given them in that hour what they should speak,† and recollect the affirmation of Paul that he and the other apostles used not the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost taught,‡ we cannot suppose that, when they were most at liberty, they were in no degree directed by a secret influence in the selection of words and phrases. It was of the utmost importance, that the facts and observations which God intended for the instruction of mankind in all ages, should be properly expressed ; and there was a danger that errors would be committed by

* 1 Pet. i. 11.

† Matt. x. 19.

‡ 1 Cor. ii. 13.

such persons as the penmen of the Scriptures, the greater part of whom were illiterate, and ignorant of the art of composition. If we had nothing to depend upon but their own skill and attention, we could have no certainty that the statements are always accurate, and our piety would be frequently disturbed by the suspicion, that what is only a difficulty might be a mistake. It must be granted, that even in relating what they knew, what they had seen, what they had learned from the testimony of others, the sacred writers were assisted, although we should concede only, that occasionally a more proper word or expression was suggested to them than would have occurred to themselves; and consequently, the style was not strictly their own, but was a style corrected and improved, and different from what they would have spontaneously used.

The objection against the inspiration of the language, founded on the diversity of style observable in the sacred writers, falls to the ground, if upon the whole they were permitted to express themselves in their natural way. If a diversity be remarked even in prophecy and revelation, properly so called, it may be accounted for by the hypothesis, which is in the highest degree probable, that God accommodated himself in his communications to the character and genius of the persons employed; and surely no man in his senses will affirm that there was only one style in which he could communicate his will. There is no force in the argument, that if the words were inspired, translations would be unlawful. There is no sacredness in the terms of a particular language, although they may be applied to a sacred purpose; they are still arbitrary signs, for which equivalent signs may be substituted. Those who use this argument, do not scruple to translate into English or Latin the ten precepts of the moral law, which were undoubtedly published by God himself *verbatim* in Hebrew. The only proper inference from the inspiration of the words is, that we should be exceedingly careful when we translate the Scriptures, to make word answer word, and phrase correspond to phrase, so far as the idiom of the two languages will permit.

The persons employed in declaring the will of God to the world, and committing it to writing, were not different from other men, in respect of their natural talents and dispositions. There was no peculiar aptitude in them for the work; for no original conformation of mind, no course of education or habit of life, can be considered as predisposing individuals for the reception of supernatural gifts, which were distributed in the exercise of Divine sovereignty. Those who were inspired are called prophets and apostles; the former signifying the messengers of God under the old dispensation, and the latter his messengers under the new. But the difference of the name implies no difference in the influence exerted upon their minds; no difference in the kind of influence, although there was a difference in degree, the apostles being favoured with a clearer illumination than the prophets. On some occasions, God declared his will immediately; as when he proclaimed the threatening and the promise in the ears of our first parents, and subsequently made revelations to the patriarchs: and particularly when his awful voice, issuing from the midst of darkness and tempest, published the decalogue to the trembling millions assembled at the base of the mountain on which he appeared. But, in general, he made use of the ministry of men. With regard to character, they were saints; for "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." There were; however, a few exceptions, among which Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, holds a conspicuous place; but the inspiration of such persons was transient, and granted for a temporary purpose. Those who were permanently employed in communicating the will of God by word or by writing, were men of another spirit; and it does not seem to us that it would have been suitable to the holiness of God, to have selected for so sacred a work, persons whose minds were alienated from the truth, and under the habitual

influence of sin. As some of them were intended only to promote the interests of religion in their own age, they have left no records behind them, and their instructions are lost, or only a few fragments of them have been preserved. But others were directed by the Spirit to commit their revelations to writing, for the benefit of succeeding ages; and the books collected into one volume, and called by way of eminence the Bible, constitute the perpetual rule of faith and practice.

To these persons God made known his will in various ways, as Paul expresses it, *πολυτροπως*,* in divers manners. Why he did not adhere to one mode, but changed it to different persons, and to the same person at different times, it is not for us to inquire. Sometimes he revealed himself by secret suggestion, or by infusing knowledge into the mind without the intervention of means. He who created the spirit of man has direct access to it, and stands in no need of words or external signs as the vehicle of communication. During profound silence, and complete abstraction from sensible things, the souls of his servants were irradiated by the pure rays of celestial light. To this mode of communication David refers, when he says, “the Spirit of the Lord spake by me,” or “in me,”† and Peter, when he tells us that “the Spirit of Christ, who was in the prophets, testified beforehand his sufferings, and the glory that should follow.”‡ In this manner were the apostles endowed with the knowledge of the mysteries of the gospel; and Paul in particular, “received not the doctrine which he preached of men, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.”§ Sometimes the will of God was communicated by audible sounds, or by a voice which is called the voice of God, because the sounds were formed by his immediate agency. This voice spake to our first parents, to Abraham, to Samuel, and on many occasions to Moses; for this is the account which he gives: “And when Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with Him, then he heard the voice of one speaking unto him from off the mercy-seat that was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubims.”|| Again, a third mode of revelation was by visions, or representations made to the senses or to the imagination. We have examples in Isaiah, who saw Jehovah attended by the seraphim in the temple;¶ in Ezekiel, by the river Chebar;** and in Daniel, to whom the mighty revelations on the state of the world were exhibited in symbolical figures. Another mode of revelation was by dreams, than which nothing is usually more vain, nor is there greater folly than to consider them as portending future events; but a different estimate must be formed of supernatural dreams, which have been regarded in all ages as means of communication with superior beings. *ὄντιο εκ Διως εστι*, was a saying of the ancients; and dreams are related by them, which, whether true or false, were supposed to be of a higher character than the arbitrary creations of fancy. We have instances in Jacob’s dream at Bethel, and in that of Paul, to whom there appeared a man of Macedonia, saying, “Come over, and help us.”†† In some cases, the design of the dreams was obvious; but in others, explanation was necessary. On a few occasions, the dream was sent to one person, and another was employed to interpret it. You will remember the history of Pharaoh and Joseph, and of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel. Lastly, revelations were made by the ministry of angels, as by Gabriel to Daniel, and by the same messenger to the blessed virgin.

I shall take notice, in a few words, of the peculiar privilege of Moses. “If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all my house. With him will I speak mouth to

* Heb. i. 1.

† 2 Sam. xxiii. 2

‡ 1 Pet. i. 11.

§ Gal. i. 12.

|| Num. vii. 89.

¶ Isa. vi.

** Ezek. i. 1.

†† Acts xvi. 9.

mouth, even apparently and not in dark speeches, and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold.”* It is said in the account of his death, “There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.”† Moses was the only person who could have explained these words, but as he has left no commentary upon them, we are ignorant of their meaning. This, however, they obviously import, that he enjoyed a familiar intercourse with God, to which other inspired men were not admitted; and that the revelations made to him surpassed those with which they were favoured in clearness, and resembled the communications which one friend makes to another, when they meet and converse together.

LECTURE XII.

STATE OF THE SACRED TEXT.

Existing MSS. of the Scriptures—Various Readings—Causes assigned for them—Sources whence they are collected; From different MSS., the Writings of the Fathers, ancient Versions and conjectural Criticism—Account of the principal Editions of the New Testament—Utility of this Inquiry.

IN some preceding lectures, we have considered the evidences of our religion, and the authority of the records in which it is contained. There is a question intimately connected with it, to which I mean to direct your attention in this lecture. It relates to the state in which these records have come down to us, and is confessedly of great importance, as every person must wish to be satisfied, whether they are a faithful representation of the original documents, or have been altered and corrupted through carelessness or design.

We do not possess the original copies of the sacred writings. The autographs of the apostles and prophets have long since disappeared. The copy of the law, which was written by the hand of Moses himself, seems to have been preserved for many ages, and it was probably that copy which was found by Hilkiah the high-priest, and read in the ears of Josiah;‡ but it perished, we may presume, in the destruction of the temple. We have no information respecting the original copies of any other parts of the Jewish Scriptures. From a passage in Tertullian, who flourished towards the close of the second century, it has been inferred, that the autographs of the apostles were then in existence, but no mention is made of them by any later author, and they have been lost with all the other writings of that age. Modern times can boast only of transcripts, removed from the originals by more or fewer steps, according to the age in which they were written. The most ancient manuscripts of the New Testament, are the Codex Alexandrinus, so called because it was brought from Alexandria in Egypt; the Codex Vaticanus, in the Vatican library at Rome; the Codex Bezae, or Codex Cantabrigiensis, which was presented by Beza to the University of Cambridge; the Codex Cottonianus, in the Cottonian library, containing, however, only fragments of the four Gospels; the Codex Ephraemi; and the Codex Claromontanus of the epistles of Paul. The dates of these manuscripts cannot be certainly fixed; but the oldest of them cannot be referred farther back than the fifth, or perhaps the fourth century, and is posterior to the last book of the New Testament by at least three hundred years. There are no manuscripts of the Old Testament of equal antiquity.

It may be presumed, that the persons employed in transcribing the sacred writings would be at great pains to make the copies accurate, both from reverence for books which they believed to be inspired and from a regard to their own interest, as errors, when discovered, would have prevented the sale of the copies, or have greatly lowered the price. Yet, without a miracle, every transcript could not have been a faultless representation of the original; and that no supernatural influence was exerted upon their minds, may be very confidently inferred from the different readings which appear upon a collation of manuscripts. It is certain that they cannot all be right, and it is probable that not one of them is perfectly correct.

The existence of various readings in the Old Testament was remarked, if not, as some suppose, in the days of Ezra, yet as far back as the fifth century, when the Jewish work called the Masora was composed, or at least was begun by the Jewish critics, who are known by the name of Masorites. The design of it was to ascertain the true reading, and much scrupulous care has been employed in numbering the verses, the words, the letters, the vowel points, and the accents. As they did not venture to alter the text, for which they entertained a superstitious reverence, but contented themselves with recording what they judged to be the true reading, we have a specimen of their criticisms on the margins of some of our printed Bibles, and are referred to them by a small circle over the word, for which that on the margin is to be substituted. Hence the origin of the words Keri and Chetib, which frequently occur. The Chetib denotes what is written, and the Keri what ought to be read; that is, you are not to read the text as it stands, but to correct it by the note. I shall give only one instance, in which there can be no doubt that the Masorites have done right in correcting the text, because they have the sanction of apostolical authority. In the tenth verse of the sixteenth Psalm, we read in Hebrew, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer חַסִּידֶיךָ *chasidicha*, thy holy ones, to see corruption.” But on the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted it thus, and applied it to Christ, “Neither wilt thou suffer חַסִּידְךָ *chasidcha*, thy holy One, to see corruption;” and it is in this way that the Masoretic note requires us to read it, by marking the *jod*, the sign of the plural, as redundant. Had they wished to favour their own cause against Christians, they would have left the reading in the text unnoticed, and might have done so without incurring the charge of corrupting it, since it seems to have been vitiated before their time. But they acted with perfect fairness, and restored the word which, we are sure, was used by the Psalmist. In modern times, the industry of learned men has greatly augmented the number of various readings. More than six hundred manuscripts were more or less fully consulted for Dr. Kennicott's edition of the Hebrew Bible; and four hundred and seventy-nine manuscripts, besides two hundred and eighty-eight printed editions, for De Rossi's *Variae Lectiones Veteris Testamenti*.

As I shall have occasion afterwards to speak more particularly of the various editions of the New Testament, I only observe at present, that to obtain an accurate text has been deemed an object of great importance almost since the revival of learning; and that, in this work, many have laboured with great diligence and ability, among whom Mill, Wetstein, and Griesbach, are eminently entitled to notice.

The following causes of various readings have been assigned. First, when a copy was written from the dictation of another, he who dictated might read or pronounce wrong, or the transcriber might hear wrong, and in either case a mistake would be produced. Secondly, as some Hebrew and Greek letters are similar, and according to the modes of writing in former times, had a greater resemblance to each other than at present, negligent copyists might substitute one letter or word for another. Thirdly, a transcriber having read a

whole clause at once, and retaining the sense, but forgetting some of the precise words, substituted a synonymous word, and thus altered the text. Fourthly, a transcriber, casting his eye on a preceding line or word, would write over again what he had written already, and thus make an addition to the text. Fifthly, a transcriber, directing his eye to a word or line following the place which he was transcribing, might write from the subsequent place, and omit all that intervened. Sixthly, a person, having written one or more words from a wrong place, and not observing his mistake, or not choosing to correct it, lest he should spoil the appearance of the manuscript, might return to the proper place, and thus insert something into the text which did not belong to it. Lastly, when a transcriber had made an omission, and afterwards observed it, he then subjoined what he had omitted, and thus produced a transposition.

These are all instances of mistake. But some various readings may be traced to design. Critical transcribers sometimes transferred what they deemed a clearer or fuller expression, or added a circumstance to the narrative before them, from a parallel passage: and this liberty has been frequently taken in the gospels. They sometimes corrected the New Testament from the Greek version of the Old, with a view to make the quotations in the former agree with the passages in the latter. They are charged, also, with having sometimes altered it in conformity to the Vulgate. They made alterations in their copies, in order to correct some word which appeared to them faulty, or which they did not understand; they omitted words which they reckoned superfluous, or added words to illustrate what they judged defective or improper. Various readings have also been produced, by transferring to the text glosses or notes which had been written on the margin. Some have been attributed to wilful corruption, with a view to serve the purposes of a party. This crime has been charged upon the Jews, upon heretics, and even upon those who were called orthodox. The accusation may be true in some instances; but it has been justly remarked, that "mistaken zeal is forward to impute false readings to design in those whom it opposes; but we ought not to ascribe them to this principle rashly, when they might have naturally arisen from chance, or where there is no positive presumption or evidence of design."

No single manuscript can be supposed to exhibit the original text, without the slightest variation; it is to be presumed, that in all manuscripts, errors more or fewer in number are to be found. It is therefore by a collation of manuscripts, that we may hope to obtain a faithful representation of the sacred books, as they were delivered to the church by the inspired writers. In estimating the value of manuscripts, the preference is given to the most ancient, because they approach nearest to the time of the sacred writers, and in proportion to the less frequency of transcription, there is the less danger of error. The antiquity of a manuscript is ascertained by testimony, or by internal marks, and particularly by the form of the letters. Those which are written in *uncial* letters, as they are called, or capital letters, are supposed to be the oldest. Some, however, have considered this proof as not quite satisfactory, because copyists might, from choice or design, imitate more ancient writing, or give a *fac simile* of the manuscript before them, to display their dexterity, or to enhance the worth of their copy. Again, those manuscripts are most esteemed which appear to have been written with great care, not only because we may conclude that they are faithful copies of the older manuscripts, from which they are transcribed, but because, when a various reading occurs, we have reason to believe, that it was not introduced by the copyists, but was found in the manuscript before them.

Critics have divided the manuscripts of the New Testament, of which above five hundred have been consulted, into classes, assigning to each different

degrees of authority. Griesbach has established three classes, the Alexandrine, the Occidental or Western, and the Oriental or Byzantine, and has given the highest rank to the first. He has distinguished them by the name of *recensions*, which signifies the same thing with a word more common and generally intelligible, editions. Scholz has found out five recensions, the Alexandrine, the Occidental, the Asiatic, the Byzantine, and the Cyprian. Matthæi has rejected all these divisions, and maintained that there is only one class of manuscripts containing, what others have called, the Byzantine text. The classification of Griesbach has been disputed by two learned men in this country, who have endeavoured to show that it is destitute of any solid foundation, and that some important alterations which he has made in the received text upon its authority, ought not to be admitted. I refer to Dr. Laurence, who has published remarks on the classification of manuscripts adopted by Griesbach in his edition of the New Testament; and to Mr. Nolan, the author of a work entitled, an Inquiry into the Integrity of the Greek Vulgate, or received text of the New Testament, in which he introduces a new classification, into the Egyptian, the Palestine, and the Byzantine, and gives the preference to the latter, on which the *textus receptus* is founded. From this short review of the different opinions entertained by learned men, it appears that some degree of uncertainty still rests upon the subject, and that after all that has been done, the field is still open to new inquirers.

There are other sources of various readings besides manuscripts. Some are collected from the writings of the Fathers, in the faith that they have accurately quoted from their copies. Here critics have shown how sensible they are of the necessity of caution, by laying down a variety of rules for judging in what cases the quotations may be considered as faithful. But after all, we tread upon slippery ground. We know how careless moderns often are in citing passages; that they trust to their memories to save themselves the trouble of looking at the text, and that sometimes they are not solicitous to be exact, but intend only to give the sense, and throw in occasionally a word for the purpose of illustration. We have no reason to believe that the Fathers were at greater pains; and I should think it probable that they referred less frequently to the text than we do, from the form of their manuscripts, which required to be unrolled, and from the difficulty of finding a particular sentence, as they wanted those minute marks of reference which we possess in the division of the Scriptures into chapters and verses. I do not deny all authority to their quotations, but I should not be disposed to lay much stress upon them, except when they are brought forward on some occasion where accuracy was indispensable, or occur in commentaries which were professedly written to explain them.

Ancient versions of the Scriptures are also another source of various readings. But here, I think, greater caution, if possible, is necessary. For in the first place, we are not certain that those versions have come down to us in an uncorrupted state, or rather we are certain that they have suffered as much as the manuscripts of the Scriptures by transcription, so that we cannot be sure, in many cases, that where they differ now from the originals, they differed at first. In the second place, we never can know, that where they differ from the received text, there was a different reading in their copies, because it is possible that they misapprehended the sense. They may have mistranslated; they may have substituted a term or phrase for another, supposing it to be equivalent, while it was not; they may have changed the meaning, in adapting to it the idiom of their own language; they may have been guilty of oversight, just as modern translators are. If a person were to read a variety of modern translations, and not to know that they were all made from the same text, I have no doubt that he would in some cases conclude

that they had been formed upon different texts. It is, therefore, with extreme hesitation that ancient versions should be admitted as authorities for various readings. There is one case where their testimony may be received, namely, "when the original is absurd, or yields no sense, a single version may give probability to another reading, especially when from it the present reading might have naturally arisen."

Conjectural criticism, which has supplied some readings, is a dangerous expedient, which should never be resorted to, except when emendation is manifestly required, and no assistance can be derived from any other quarter; and even then the proposed correction can rise no higher than probability. It is astonishing that some men have not been deterred by reverence for the word of God, from making too liberal a use of it.

Rules have been proposed for judging concerning various readings. The greater part of them are of no value, and possess no authority which entitles them to attention; but others are so evidently right, that they ought to be received into the text, although they should be found in no printed edition. The limits of this lecture will not permit me, as I intended, to give an account of the principles laid down by writers on sacred criticism, for estimating the value of readings with a view to the emendation of the received text; and I shall therefore content myself with referring you to some of the books in which they will be found; Horne's Introduction, Gerard's Institutes of Biblical Criticism, *Institutio Interpretis Novi Testamenti* by Ernesti, the Prolegomena of Mill, Wetstein, and Griesbach, the preface to the work of Bengelius entitled *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, &c.

It remains to give a short account of the principal editions of the New Testament.

The first is the Complutensian, which was printed at Complutum or Alcalá, in Spain, in A. D. 1514, but was not published till some years after, so that the edition of Erasmus, which was in fact posterior, appeared before it. It was prepared and published under the patronage of Cardinal Ximenes. The manuscripts used by the editors are lost, but although they are said to have been ancient, it is now generally understood that they were of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, and consequently possessed little intrinsic value. They have also been charged with introducing some changes in conformity to the Vulgate.

The first edition of the New Testament by Erasmus, appeared in A. D. 1516, and was followed by several other editions. The first was drawn up in great haste, in the short space of five months, and on this account could not be of much value as a critical work. The manuscripts which he consulted were not many, nor of great antiquity. The editions which appeared after the publication of the Complutensian were corrected by it.

The next edition which demands attention is that of Robert Stephens, in A. D. 1546. He adhered closely to the Complutensian and Erasmian editions, but not servilely, for he has adopted various readings on the authority of manuscripts, which were consulted to the number of fifteen. But some of those manuscripts contained only a part of the New Testament; they were examined, not by Robert himself, but by his son Henry, who, although he proved one of the most learned men of his age, was then a youth of eighteen; and it is affirmed that not much critical skill was exercised in the formation of the text.

Beza gave his first edition to the world in A. D. 1565. But although he had access to a collection of various readings by Stephens, possessed an ancient manuscript of the Gospels and Acts, and another of the Epistles of Paul, and besides had an opportunity to consult the Syriac version, which had been recently published, he is said not to have made a full use of these advantages.

He has corrected the edition of Stephens only in fifty places, and the alterations do not always rest upon sufficient authority.

In the year 1624, an edition was printed at the press of Elzevir without a name, and to this day it is not known by whose labour it was prepared. Whoever he was, he has formed the text upon the edition of Stephens and Beza, although in a few instances he has departed from both. This is called the *textus receptus*, because since that time it has been admitted into all common editions. How this edition acquired such authority as to settle the text, it is not easy to say. Griesbach ascribes it to the opinion, that the Elzevir editions were as distinguished by accuracy as they were by the beauty of the type. He justly observes, that a corrupt text might be printed without a single typographical error, but would not for this reason become genuine.

It is evidently ignorance and prejudice which would lead any person to consider the received text as so sacred that no alteration ought to be made in it. Its history shows that its claim is disputable, and that it may be superseded by a text more carefully compiled. Too little had yet been done to render the labours of subsequent critics unnecessary. The learned world, or such of them at least as viewed the subject in a calm and impartial light, were prepared to receive the editions of Mill, Wetstein, and Griesbach, which appeared in the course of the last century, not to mention the editions of other distinguished men, who have contributed their part to exhibit the genuine text of the New Testament. No capable judge could object to the design, whatever faults he might find with the execution of it. As new manuscripts were discovered, it was fair to listen to their testimony, since those which were consulted by the earlier editors had no title alone to be heard; and it is not a little surprising, that some celebrated men, as Dr. Owen in the seventeenth century, and Dr. Whitby in the beginning of the eighteenth, should have exclaimed against any attempt to new-model the text as presumptuous and dangerous. The report of thirty thousand various readings collected by Mill was no doubt alarming; and the numbers since collected by Wetstein and Griesbach is much more formidable; but the fears felt for the sacred writings have proved to be imaginary. Of the various readings many have no authority, being found only in one manuscript or two; others have only some degree of probability; and those which appear to be well supported very often consists in the omission or insertion of the article, or some little word which does not affect the sense, in the order of words and phrases, in the spelling of proper names, and other matters equally insignificant. Important alterations have indeed been made, particularly in passages which relate to the divinity of Christ; but besides that their propriety is disputed, and strong reasons have been advanced for the common reading, the doctrine is so clearly taught in other passages, that the admission of them makes no change in our faith. The truth is, that by a hundred and fifty thousand various readings, no doctrine or duty of our holy religion is affected; and the labour of biblical critics have terminated in establishing, instead of weakening, the authority of the text. We are now fully satisfied, that we possess substantially the same text which was exhibited in the autographs of the evangelists and apostles; and this is also the result of the critical labours which have been bestowed upon the Old Testament.

It is not expected that every minister of religion shall be a profound biblical critic. The talents which are necessary to success in this study do not fall to the lot of all, and comparatively few enjoy the aids and opportunities, without which talents will be of little avail. Books must not only be read, but possessed, for the purpose of frequent consultation, from which most are precluded by their situation and their limited means; and a proficiency in

scholarship is indispensable, which can be attained only by deep and persevering study. We shall more easily find fifty good theologians, than one accomplished biblical critic. A man who is himself distinguished in this department, and is one of the most learned bishops of the church of England has said, that to clergymen in general, criticism is rather a luxury than a necessary; and no person who understands the subject will dispute the assertion. But it would be well if every minister would endeavour to acquire some general knowledge of it, that he may be able to tell on what grounds he believes, not only that the Scriptures were divinely inspired, but that the books called Sacred, contain the genuine writings of the men who were moved by the Holy Ghost. The rapid sketch which has been now given is intended to excite you to inquire for yourselves.

LECTURE XIII.

THE STUDY AND INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES.

An Acquaintance with the Original Languages a Prerequisite to the Study of the Scriptures—Rules of interpreting Scripture stated—External Aids to Interpretation—Scripture the Standard of Faith—Lawfulness of Inferences from Scripture—Conduct of the Church of Rome.

IN the preceding lecture, I directed your attention to that part of sacred criticism which is employed in ascertaining the genuine text of Scripture. As long as the autographs of the prophets and apostles were preserved, there was an easy method of settling it; and by an appeal to them, any errors which might have been admitted into particular manuscripts could be corrected. Their history is obscure. There is some reason to think that the original copy of the law of Moses existed in the days of Josiah, and that towards the close of the second century, the books of the New Testament still remained in the handwriting of the authors; but what became of them afterwards, no man can tell. It is probable that the copy of the law perished in the destruction of the first temple; and that the manuscripts of the New Testament were lost amidst the troubles to which the church was exposed during the first three centuries. You see, then, that we possess only transcripts of the records of revelation, in general, no doubt, executed with great care, by persons who were influenced either by a principle of religious reverence, or by a regard to their own interest, being aware that their copies could not have been disposed of if they had been inaccurate, or would have been sold at an inferior price. But it should be considered, that the transcribers were men who might err through inadvertence or incompetence, and that as we have no security for the honesty of them all, some of them might be guilty of wilful corruptions, to serve the purposes of a party. It is not, therefore, upon the faith of a single manuscript that we should settle the text, but by the collation of many manuscripts, and by the assistance derived from other sources, which were mentioned in the preceding lecture.

To ascertain the genuine text is, however, only a preliminary step; the next office of criticism is to discover its meaning, since the Scriptures were given, not to be gazed at with distant reverence, or preserved as a literary curiosity, but to be perused, and understood, and believed. The languages in which they are found were vernacular to those into whose hands they were primarily delivered, but they have long since ceased to be spoken. It is sup

posed that the Hebrew language was lost during the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, or that, after their return, it gave way by degrees to the mixed dialect which was spoken in Judea in the days of our Saviour; and we know that the Greek language, which had been partly corrupted before the fall of Constantinople in the fifteenth century, by the introduction of foreign words and idioms, has since degenerated into the Romaic, which differs from it almost as much as Italian does from Latin. The first prerequisite, then, to the study of the Scriptures, is an acquaintance with the languages in which they were composed.

The Old Testament has come down to us in two languages, a part of Ezra, a verse in Jeremiah, and a part of Daniel being written in Chaldee, and all the rest in Hebrew. The interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures is the more difficult, because they are the only books which now exist in that language. The Jewish Targums, or paraphrases, are in Chaldee; and Rabbinical Hebrew is a corrupt mixture of different languages, from which little assistance can be derived for understanding the original tongue. Hence an acquaintance with the kindred languages has been considered as of great use, the Chaldaic, the Syriac, and the Arabic. It has been remarked by critics, that “they discover roots, or primitives, which are not found in the Bible, though their derivatives occur there, and by doing so, point out the signification of these derivatives; that they ascertain the precise signification of roots, and consequently of their derivatives, the signification of which had been fixed only by conjecture; that they afford the best, and where the ancient versions vary in translating them, the only means of determining with certainty the signification of such words as occur but once, or very seldom, in the Bible; that they enable us to discover all the senses of words, some of which only had been collected from the Bible, though others would have better suited particular passages; in particular, that they discover the primary signification of many roots, even such as are most commonly used, the secondary senses of which have alone been attended to, though the primary sense would throw light on some texts; and that they assist us to understand the meaning of phrases, or idiomatical combinations of words which are found in the Bible, but the exact import of which could not be determined by it.” If there were many books in the Hebrew language, we might explain, by their assistance, every word and phrase which occurs in the Old Testament; but as this is not the case, our next resource is to consult those languages which have been derived from it, or are, together with it, branches from the same primitive stock. If there were only one book in Latin, as it could not be supposed to contain the whole language, we should be at a loss to understand some words and phrases in it; but I have no doubt that the Italian, Spanish, and French languages, which are more or less intimately allied to it, would help us in some of our difficulties.

The Greek of the New Testament is more easily understood, because there are many books composed in that language. Yet an acquaintance with classical Greek alone will not fully qualify us to interpret the gospels and epistles, not only because Syriac and Latin words occur in them, but because they abound in foreign idioms, and use words in peculiar senses, which were unknown to the natives of Greece. There has, indeed, been a difference of opinion among learned men upon this subject. While some admit what has been now stated, others contend that the Greek of the New Testament is pure, among whom Blackwall, the author of the book entitled *Sacred Classics*, holds a distinguished place. It must be acknowledged that he has displayed great research and ingenuity in vindicating the inspired writers from the charge of solecism and barbarism, and that in many instances he has produced, from the most approved authors, the same combinations of terms, and the same irregularity of construction; but, after all, it must be allowed, that the

language of the New Testament is different from that of the ancient historians and philosophers. It has been called the Greek of the Synagogue, or Hellenistic Greek, from the name of Hellenists given to Jews living in foreign countries, who used the Greek language, but introduced into it modes of expression borrowed from their native tongue, and employed some of its words in a sense founded on the usage of Judea. This kind of Greek is found in the translation of the Seventy, the study of which is therefore of great importance, to assist us in understanding the language of the New Testament, which was drawn up by persons who, like those translators, wrote in Greek but thought in Hebrew. Let me add, that for the same purpose an acquaintance with the Old Testament in the original is of great advantage, and will enable us to account for forms of construction, the use of prepositions, peculiar phrases, and the application of terms, which would otherwise seem strange, and perhaps would not be intelligible. The phrase, *οὐκ ἐν σαρκὶ πᾶσα σὰρξ*, which we translate, "no flesh should be saved," but which, literally rendered, is, "all flesh would not be saved," must have sounded uncouthly in the ears of a Greek, and the meaning would not have been obvious to him, although the words were familiar, because the whole expression was different from the idiom of his native tongue, and the word *σὰρξ* was used in a sense to which his countrymen did not apply it. In pure Greek, it signifies the *muscular substance which surrounds the bones of animals*; but here it means *men*, and in other places, the *corruption of nature, infirmity, external privileges, &c.* The sense would present itself at first sight to a Jew.

By a critical knowledge of the original languages of the Scriptures, we ascertain the grammatical sense, and may be able to translate them into our own language, so as to express the meaning with perfect fidelity. This will not be the effect of a version servilely literal, which will sometimes give no meaning at all, but of a version which attends not only to the words, but to the genius of the two languages, and substitutes for the peculiarities of the one the corresponding idioms of the other. There is an error into which some have been betrayed, by paying too much deference to etymology, and to the idiomatical character of a language, which has led them to suppose words and expressions to be very emphatical, which to persons familiar with the language had no more force than the corresponding terms and phrases in our own. You will find wonderful discoveries of this kind in the writings of minute critics, but in general they have no better foundation than ignorance and fancy.

Your time will not permit me to speak of the benefit which may arise from translations, ancient and modern: and I proceed to observe, that, to ascertain the grammatical sense of the Scriptures, is only a preliminary step. Our next business is to discover the true meaning of them, or to find out the sentiments which the sacred writers intended to convey. Besides the simple perusal of the Scriptures, there are various methods to be used for the elucidation of the text.

In the first place, one method which should be employed, with a view to ascertain the sense of Scripture, is it to compare it with itself. It consists of several books which appeared in different ages; but, as the whole was written under the direction and inspiration of the Holy Ghost, we are sure that there is no real contradiction in it, and that there is a harmony among its parts, which conspire to one end, our instruction in the system of religion. It will, therefore, tend to throw light upon one part, to bring into view other parts which are allied to it. Now this alliance is more or less close. Sometimes different passages of Scripture agree, not only in treating the same subject, but in expressing it in the same terms. A comparison of these will show the harmony of the sacred writers, but will not contribute to elucidate their meaning. Others discuss the same subject in language somewhat different, enlarging

upon certain points, and introducing new circumstances. It is evident that these are of great use, by giving a more complete view of the subject, and serving as a commentary upon the passages which are more concisely expressed. Lastly, there are passages which may be called parallel, not in respect of the language, but of the matter. The same doctrine, or the same duty, is discussed in a variety of words and phrases: and hence, when the different passages are placed together, and attentively considered in their bearings upon the common topic, new light is reflected upon it. What is obscure in one place is explained by what is perspicuous in another, and what is defective is supplied. You perceive now for what reason it has been said that the Bible is its own interpreter; and that it may perform this office in relation to itself, is the design with which some Bibles have been published, with an ample collection of marginal references. But the saying must be understood with certain limitations, for some parts of it are unintelligible without foreign assistance, and in particular, prophecy can be explained only by the event.

In the second place, in studying the Scriptures, it is necessary to attend to their scope or design. By this, I mean the purpose which the sacred writers had in view in the books which they composed, or in particular passages, and it will be best discovered by an attentive and repeated perusal of them. The knowledge of the design of a book will enable us to account for its general structure, and the disposition of the parts, and will serve as a key to the exact meaning of words, the import of phrases, and the connexion of particular passages. The design of the gospels was not to give a complete history of our Saviour, but such a specimen of it as would prove that he is the Son of God, and the Messiah; and this is the reason that they do not all relate the same facts, but one records certain particulars which are omitted in another. The design of the Acts was not to give a full account of the propagation of Christianity, but to show that it was preached first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles; and hence, it says little of any of the apostles but Peter and Paul, of whom the one was the minister of the circumcision, and the other of the uncircumcision. It seems to have been the design of the epistle to the Romans, to give a succinct account of the general system of Christianity, and in particular, to instruct them in the important doctrine of justification by faith, without the works of the law. The design of the epistle of James is different; and unless the difference be attended to, we shall be led into the error of those who have supposed that the two apostles contradict each other, and have either rejected one of the epistles as uncanonical, or in attempting to reconcile them, have corrupted both. Luther called the epistle of James *straminea epistola*, an epistle of straw, because it appeared to him to be opposed to the doctrine of Paul; and others, assuming that James teaches justification before God by works, have vexed and tortured the words of Paul to make him speak in the same strain. The design of James was to refute the error of those who, perverting the doctrine of Paul, rested too much upon faith, and imagined that a man would be justified by it, although he continued to live in his sins. As soon as this difference of design is understood, the two apostles are found to harmonize. As the one speaks of justification before God, and the other of justification before men, there is no discrepance of sentiment, in ascribing the former to faith, and the latter to works.

In the third place, it is necessary to attend carefully to the nature of the composition in different passages of Scripture which is literal or figurative. When the composition is literal, and words are used in their common and familiar sense, nothing is necessary but a thorough acquaintance with the grammar, the vocabulary, and the idioms of the original tongues. But words are frequently employed in a figurative sense, partly from necessity, and

partly from choice ; and hence, besides a general knowledge of the figures of speech, it is requisite to observe when they do occur, that we may neither call that which is figurative, literal, nor that which is literal, figurative. The Scriptures themselves furnish us with several instances of mistake. When our Lord said to the Jews, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," they imagined that he referred to the second temple constructed of stone and timber, whereas he spoke of the temple of his body. At the institution of the sacred supper, we called the bread his body, by a common trope giving the name of the thing signified to the sign, as is evident from the nature of the case, as well as from the use of the same trope in other passages ; but papists have founded on his words the monstrous doctrine of transubstantiation, in defiance of the testimony of our senses, and the plainest dictates of reason. The style of prophecy is highly figurative. We have not only examples of personification, apostrophe, and hyperbole, but metaphor of the boldest kind, representing political revolutions as earthquakes and storms ; the fall of monarchs as an eclipse of the celestial luminaries ; and the spiritual change in the state of human affairs, which was to be effected by the gospel, as the creation of new heavens and a new earth. Without attention to the meaning of the symbols, prophecy will not be understood ; the fulfilment of past predictions cannot be perceived, and those which are yet to be accomplished will excite extravagant expectations, which will not be realized. The language of the parables, which occur both in the Old and in the New Testament, is also figurative, because the terms are intended to convey a sense which they do not bear in their literal import. Considered as a simple narrative of facts, the parable of the Sower might be true in the common acceptation of the terms ; but if it were so understood, its design would be lost. The Sower is not a husbandman, but Jesus Christ ; the seed is not wheat or barley, but the word of God ; and the different kinds of ground are not varieties of soil, but the hearts of different individuals. A parable being a short story in which spiritual things are exhibited under sensible images, it is necessary, in order to the right interpretation of it, that we should keep in view the main design. There is a general truth or moral to be drawn from it ; but in doing so, we must beware of minutely explaining every particular, because some particulars are evidently introduced merely to complete the narrative, or to adorn it. It is ridiculous, in the parable of the prodigal, to pretend to tell us what is meant by the fatted calf, and what by the ring which was put on his finger, and the shoes which were put upon his feet ; as nothing was intended, but to teach us that the return of a sinner is acceptable to God, and that he is invested with the honours and privileges of a son. It is quite contemptible, in explaining the parable of the good Samaritan, first, to commit the egregious blunder of supposing him to be Christ, and then to explain the two denarii which he gave to the innkeeper, of the active and passive obedience of our Saviour. Nothing can be more wretched than such expositions of Scripture. They may make idiots admire, but they excite the laughter or the disgust of the wise.

In the fourth place, another assistance in understanding the Scriptures, is the analogy of faith, which signifies, that we should explain passages that are obscure or doubtful, by the general sense of Scripture previously ascertained. When it is thus defined, there appears to be no just objection against this rule of interpretation, and no cause for the ridicule with which it has been treated, and the contempt with which it has been set aside by some authors, and particularly by Dr. Campbell in his Dissertations, who, in more instances than one, has allowed his wit and satire to run faster than his judgment. If it were meant that we should first form a system in our own mind, and then proceed to explain the Scriptures by it, our conduct would be preposterous, and, as he

says, we should begin with giving judgment and afterwards examine the proof, employing at the same time all our skill to rest the evidence in favour of our judgment. But we make no such absurd proposal. We believe, in opposition to all skeptics, whether philosophers or divines, that the sense of Scripture may be certainly known; and having ascertained the general doctrines which are taught in it, we contend that we are authorized to apply them to the elucidation of obscurities, and to interpret in conformity to their such passages as, taken by themselves, do not convey a definite sense. This rule must be admitted with respect to any human composition, the author of which was a man of sound mind and upright intentions. We apply it to the Scriptures, on the principle that the Holy Ghost does not contradict himself, and that there is undoubtedly a perfect harmony among all his declarations. This, then, is the analogy of faith for which we plead. With any other idea of it we have nothing to do; and if some men choose to attack it in a different form, we leave them to amuse themselves with first setting up a man of straw, and then beating him down.

As it is possible in this lecture to give only a superficial sketch, I add, in the last place, that in interpreting the Scriptures, there are external sources from which assistance is to be derived. Chronology and geography have been called the two eyes of history, and must be of great use for understanding the Scriptures, a considerable portion of which consists of historical narrative, and accounts of different countries. They enable us to trace the series, the causes, the connexions, and the consequences of events; they furnish the thread by which we find our way through the mazes of the labyrinth; they reduce to order what would otherwise appear to be a confused mass of particulars. Without the knowledge of profane history, many parts of the Bible would be unintelligible, or would make only an indistinct impression on the mind. In particular, all the prophetic parts would be words without meaning. We could not know whether they were prophetic or not; and for aught that we could tell, they might be the wild ravings of fancy, or descriptions written after the event in the oracular form, for the amusement of the authors, or with a view to make sport of the credulity of others. The evidence arising from prophecy in favour of the inspiration of the Scriptures, would be lost as there would be no proof that it had been fulfilled. An acquaintance also with natural history, and with the arts of life, is highly useful, as there is mention made of plants and animals, several of which are unknown to us, but are described by philosophers and travellers; and there are frequent allusions to husbandry, gardening, commerce, and the pastoral life. And this leads me to remark, that no man can understand many passages of Scripture, and explain them satisfactorily to others, without some knowledge of ancient customs and manners. I shall take notice of two or three familiar examples. When Moses says that the Israelites should sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians, and run the risk of being stoned, a common reader must be utterly at a loss to apprehend what he means, till he is informed that heifers, rams, and goats were held sacred by the Egyptians, and that to offer them in sacrifice was accounted a daring act of impiety. Mention is frequently made of going up to the house-top, walking, praying, and conversing upon it. All this must seem strange to a native of this country, who has seen houses only with sloping roofs; but his surprise will cease as soon as he learns, that in Judea the roofs of the houses were flat, and were accessible by steps erected for the purpose. Again, we might wonder that our Lord speaks of putting new wine into new bottles for safety, and not into old ones, which might burst, because from the nature of the bottles which we use, greater danger is to be apprehended from the new, which have not been tried, than from the old, which have stood the test. But we perceive the reason why he prefers the former to the latter.

when we are told, that bottles being then made of skins, as they still are in the eastern countries, those which had been often moistened and dried, and exposed to the heat of the sun, were much more apt to give way than such as had been recently made. But I must bring this subject to a conclusion. I intended only to give you a few hints respecting the means to be employed in the study of the Scriptures. There is, however, one thing of which I would remind you, that the literal ought always to be considered as the true and only sense of Scripture, except in those cases in which it is evident that something more is intended. In parables and allegories, we ought not to rest in the letter, but should search out the hidden meaning. In passages, too, which relate to typical persons and events, a double sense must be admitted; and in general, when figurative language is used, we must attend, not to the literal signification of words, but to the ideas which, by a trope, they are used to represent. But in historical narration, in the enunciation of doctrines, and in moral precepts, the grammatical sense alone is to be considered. The practice of spiritualizing the Scriptures, of finding mysteries in the plainest things, which has long prevailed in the church, is a sad proof of the want of judgment and taste. It should never be indulged, although it may excite the admiration of the ignorant; for with whatever appearance of piety it may be clothed, it is a perversion of the word of God, is calculated to expose it to the ridicule of the profane, and instead of edifying, inflates the minds of men with reveries and dreams.

In studying the Scriptures, we should bear in mind, that they are the only standard of religion. As this idea will inspire us with reverence for their authority, so it will excite us to inquire into their meaning with the utmost care. The church of Rome makes tradition the standard of religion as well as the Scriptures, and explains the latter by the former; thus distracting the attention between the word of God and the word of men, and, in fact, giving greater authority to tradition than to the Scriptures. It is, therefore, of as much importance, at least in that church, to know what the fathers have said, as what the prophets and apostles have taught; and accordingly, their writings are much studied by popish divines, and their sentiments are quoted as decisive in matters of faith and practice. Protestants acknowledge the Scriptures alone as the standard of truth. They have drawn up articles or confessions of faith, to which the title of Standards is given; but they are called subordinate standards, and it is always in this light that they should be regarded. The great Protestant principle, that all appeals should be ultimately made to the Bible, is not always, I am afraid, practically maintained. There is apt to grow up in the mind an undue reverence for the standards of a church, which, by being never subjected to revision, seem to be considered as absolutely perfect, and as enacted for all time to come, and in this country have acquired an air of inviolable sanctity by certain transactions of our fathers, which seemed to ratify them, as the law of Moses was ratified by the solemn covenant between God and the Israelites. Hence there are some persons who think, that they have answered your objections and refuted your opinions, by quoting a passage from the Confession of Faith, and charge you with the most criminal presumption for daring to suggest a doubt of the truth of any part of it. In the same spirit, the papist refers you to the decrees of councils, and the dogmas of the fathers. When the question is, whether a particular opinion is agreeable to the doctrine of the church, the proper appeal is to the standards of the church; but when the question is, whether a particular opinion is true, the appeal ought to be to the Scriptures. I care not, nor should any man care, what the church of England, or the church of Scotland, has determined. My business is with the word of God

which alone is infallible. The supreme judge of all controversies is the Scriptures, or rather the Holy Ghost, speaking in the Scriptures.

It has been a subject of controversy, whether it is lawful to draw inferences from Scripture, and what authority should be assigned to them. It is not easy at first sight to conceive, why there should have been a diversity of sentiment upon a point which seems to admit of no dispute; for nothing is more plain than that, when a proposition is laid down from which certain inferences naturally arise, it is the office of the understanding to draw the conclusions, and to rest in them with equal confidence as in the premises from which they are deduced. This is the mode of procedure of all intelligent creatures, in the matters to which they turn their attention. Human knowledge would be exceedingly circumscribed and imperfect, if our views were strictly confined to facts; and these would be of little use, if we were not permitted to educe from them, observations and maxims for the regulation of our conduct. Had every thing, which it is necessary for us to know, been delivered in express terms in the Scriptures, the Bible would have been too voluminous for general use; and besides, such minuteness was not necessary. God does not speak in it to children, but to men, who are capable of reasoning on the common affairs of life, and can use this power in matters of religion. It is remarked by Theodoret concerning some persons in his time, who affirmed that we should receive the simple words of Scripture without endeavouring to ascertain their import, that they overturned all human things, divested men of reason, and converted them into brutes. The objection against deducing consequences from Scripture is made with a design to serve a particular purpose; to protect certain opinions, which are contrary to Scripture, by the plea that the opposite opinions are nowhere affirmed *totidem verbis*. It is a miserable shift, as there is no fundamental error which may not be refuted by the very words of inspiration, without any commentary upon them; but it so far answers their intention, that it leaves them the advantage of concealing their real sentiments, and assuming the appearance of orthodoxy, while they express themselves in the language of Scripture, but secretly affix a meaning to it which is subversive of its obvious import. If you say, that Christ is the Son of God, they will assent; but if you proceed to say, that the only-begotten Son of God, his proper Son, must be a partaker of his essence and perfections, they exclaim that they find no proposition so expressed in the Bible. The true reason why some cry out so loudly against confessions of faith, is, that although they have learned to use the words of Scripture in any sense which best suits them, they find in confessions the doctrines which they controvert, expressed in terms which can by no artifice be twisted to their purpose, and the collected sense of different passages imbodyed in articles, by which their systems of error are confronted and demolished. The denial of the lawfulness of drawing consequences from Scripture goes much farther than its opponents are aware, and would place them and us in the most awkward and ridiculous situation; for it would follow, that we must never write or speak about religion but in the words of inspiration, and that all theological books and all sermons should be discarded; for of what do they consist but of inferences from Scripture, when they do not merely retail its words, but attempt to explain their meaning?

Before concluding, I would call your attention to the conduct of the church of Rome, in reference to the Scriptures. She has interposed her authority to hinder the study of them, in direct opposition to the express command of our Saviour.* While the council of Trent declared the Vulgate, that is, the Latin translation which had been used from the days of Jerome, to be authentic in all public readings, disputations, preachings, and expositions, it did not

* John v. 39.

absolutely discourage versions into the vernacular tongues, but prescribed such regulations as were calculated to limit the use of them. The following is the sum of the fourth of the Rules concerning Prohibited Books, which were drawn up by certain Fathers appointed by the council for this purpose, and were sanctioned by Pope Pius the Fourth:—"That since it is manifest from experience, that if the Bible be indiscriminately permitted in the vulgar tongue, more injury than benefit will result through the rashness of men, the use of Catholic versions shall be granted, by the advice of the priest or confessor, to those alone who it is understood will not be hurt by the reading of them; but will be advanced in faith and piety." Conformable to this virtual proscription of the sacred writings, are the representations which are given of them by Popish divines, with a view to deter men from any attempt to become better acquainted with them. The Bible has been pronounced to be very obscure, and indeed unintelligible; to have no authority in itself, and were it not for the authority of the church, to be not more credible than Æsop's fables; to be incapable of making men wise unto salvation, and to be calculated rather to lead them astray; to be the cause, or at least the occasion, of all errors and heresies. If this be the true character of the Scriptures, we cannot wonder that the church of Rome, in her great solicitude for the spiritual and eternal welfare of men, should exert all her power to keep them out of their hands, as we would keep edge tools out of the hands of children. After all, the Bible, according to her, is an imperfect book, containing only a part of revelation, the remainder being laid up in the traditions of the church, without which the Bible cannot be understood, and which we are therefore commanded by the Council of Trent to receive, *pari pietatis effectu ac reverentia*, with equal reverence and affection as the writings of the prophets and apostles.

I need not spend time in showing how contrary to the obvious design of revelation, as well as to its express principles, are all endeavours, whether by authority or by argument, to prevent it from becoming the subject of general study. The thing, indeed, is so absurd, that it would never have been proposed or thought of, if there had not been some sinister purpose to accomplish. No man is displeased that others should enjoy the light of the sun, unless he be engaged in some design which it is his interest that they should not see; and in this case, he would wish the gloom of midnight to sit down upon the earth, that he might practise his nefarious deeds with impunity. It is an interest contrary to the Scriptures which has impelled the church of Rome to exert her power to hinder the circulation of them, and to open her mouth in blasphemy against the God of heaven, as if he had delivered to the world, as a rule of faith, a book so obscure that it cannot be understood, and so dangerous that, if the common people meddle with it, it will be at their peril. If that church were convinced that her constitution, and doctrines, and religious rites were conformable to the word of God, we cannot doubt, after what we know of her eager desire to establish a universal dominion, that she would not fail to display every where evidence so overpowering. No man will withhold, especially when his claims are controverted, the proofs by which they are substantiated. When the apostate church declaims upon the obscurity of the Scriptures, and the dangerous consequences of putting them into the hands of the people, we seem to hear Milton's Satan telling the sun how much he hates its beams, because they remind him of the splendour from which he has fallen. This is the secret of her opposition to the Scriptures; and although Papists would willingly conceal it from us, they have not been ashamed to speak of it among themselves: "Among all the counsels which we can give at this time," said the bishops met at Bononia, to consult for restoring the dignity of the Roman See to Pope Julius the Third, "we have reserved

the most weighty to the last. You must strive with all your might, that as little of the Gospel as possible, especially in the vulgar tongue, may be read in the cities under your jurisdiction; the little which is in the Mass ought to be sufficient, neither should it be permitted to any mortal to read more; for as long as men were contented with that little, all things went well with them, but quite otherwise since more was commonly read. 'This book, above all others,' they add, 'has raised the storms and tempests with which we are carried away. And truly, if any man diligently examine it, and then consider the things which are practised in our churches, he will see that they differ very much from one another, and that our doctrine is altogether different from it, and often contrary. These sheets are therefore to be concealed with great caution and diligence, lest we should be involved in greater troubles and tumults.'*

The knowledge of the original languages, and of the rules of interpretation, are necessary to enable us to ascertain the meaning of the Scriptures. They are of essential importance to all who are already employed, or hope to be employed, as teachers of the Christian people. A man is despised who engages in a profession for which he is not prepared; but an unqualified minister of religion is not only contemptible but criminal, because he has intruded himself into an office to which he was certainly not called; and through his ignorance and incapacity, incalculable injury may be done to those who are unhappily placed under his care. 'The priest's lips should keep knowledge, because the people seek the law at his mouth.' It would be well for the church, if all ministers and students were endeavouring, by diligence, and humble dependence upon the Divine blessing, to answer the description which Solomon has given of himself: 'Moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words; and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.'†

But let every one of you consider, that he has a personal interest in the Scriptures, and should study them for his own benefit. He should labour not only to understand their meaning, but to feel their power. They are able to make you wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ; but what will it avail you, if they are not thus received? By the diligent use of your natural talents, you may preach to the advantage of your hearers, but you will be like a lamp which wastes away as it gives light to others, and then expires. Beware of forgetting your own interests, while you are attending to those of your fellow men. The Bible addresses itself to you in every page; and it is your duty to listen, with serious attention, to its important and varied lessons. A minister of religion ought not to be like an actor, who recites to others tales which do not affect himself, and seeks the applause of his audience by assuming the appearance of passion which he does not feel. That he may possess genuine animation, and that the warmth of his heart may correspond with the fervour of his language, let him be deeply impressed with the alarming and consoling truths which so often come under review. Let him remember that he cannot, without being self-condemned, call upon his hearers to believe, while he contents himself with a cold assent; and that in this state of mind, his exhortations must freeze upon his lips, or if they are pronounced with earnestness, it is the earnestness of hypocrisy, for which, if any portion of moral sensibility remains, he must in the hour of reflection despise himself. Happy is he who has the Bible in his head and in his heart! The knowledge of its truths will make him wise, and its inspiring influence will render him eloquent. His discourses will be virtually a detail of his own experience; he will be able to say, 'I speak that which I know, and testify that which I believe.'

* Consil. de Stabilienda Rom. sede, p. 6.

† Ecclesiastes xii. 9, 10

LECTURE XIV.

THE DISPENSATION OF RELIGION.

Orig'n of our Religion—First Promise of a Saviour—Institution of Sacrifices—State of Religion in Patriarchal Times—Institution of the Jewish State—Its Codes—Design of the Ceremonial Law—Character of the Mosaic Dispensation.

ABOUT a hundred years ago, a book was published in England, by the celebrated infidel, Dr. Tindal, bearing this title, "Christianity as Old as the Creation;" the object of which was to show that the Gospel is a republication of the law of nature, and that there neither is, nor can be, any revelation distinct from what he calls the internal revelation of that law in the hearts of all mankind. In opposition to this bold and impious assertion, we maintain, with President Forbes in his *Thoughts concerning Religion, Natural and Revealed*, that Christianity is very near as old as the creation. We deny that it was the primitive religion of mankind; but we are ready to prove, that only a very short time elapsed before it became their religion; or in other words, that substantially the same system of religion which we at present profess, was made known to our first parents, and has been received and acted upon by the people of God in every subsequent age.

As, in consequence of the permanent relations in which man stands to God and his fellow-creatures, the moral law is immutable, and requires the same duties in every new period, and from every successive generation, so to man considered as in a state of guilt and pollution, there could at no time be any essential difference in the mode of intercourse with his Maker, and the only conceivable variety would be in the form. The same views of the divine character were necessary to relieve him from the disquietudes of conscience, and the same promises to encourage his confidence and hope. We are accustomed to give the designation of Christianity to the religion which was published to the world about eighteen hundred years ago, by our blessed Saviour and his apostles, and thus to distinguish it from the preceding revelations; but our design is not to signify that it was a new religion. The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, holds the truths taught by both, and acknowledges as her Head the same divine Redeemer who is the subject of their united testimony.

Although God at first created the world in a state of perfection, he has since carried on its affairs by second causes, which produce their effect by a regular but gradual process. The full evolution of the human body, from the seminal principle in the womb of the parent, is the work of years, and so is the growth of plants and trees. Light increases slowly, from the faint dawn in the east, to the full splendour of noonday; and human reason, rising up amidst the instincts of childhood, develops itself by successive steps, till after a long course of experience and discipline, it attains maturity. Religion has advanced to its present state by a similar progress. At first it was like the seed which the husbandman throws into the soil, which, although containing the germ of the future plant, gave no promise to the eye of what it would become; but under the care, and by the renewed influences of Heaven, it has waxed greater and greater, and now it is presented to us in all its luxuriance and beauty.

In this lecture, I shall direct your attention to the dispensation of religion prior to the coming of Christ.

Immediately after the fall, God made known his gracious design to our first parents indirectly, and in figurative language, while he was pronouncing sentence upon the malignant being who had deceived them. "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."* To suppose nothing more to be intended by these words, than that there should be henceforth war between the tribe of serpents and the human race, that serpents should sometimes bite men, and men should sometimes destroy serpents, is to interpret Scripture with as little regard to common sense as to piety, and seems designed to turn it into ridicule. There is no doubt that, although the serpent is mentioned, it was not against it that the curse was directed, but against the invisible agent, who used it as his instrument in the seduction of Eve, and appears to have been the prince of the apostate angels, who, in reference to this transaction, is said to have been a liar and murderer from the beginning; and in allusion to the character which he assumed, is called the old serpent.† The antagonist would be a descendant of the woman, and the nature and effects of the conflict are described in terms accommodated to the circumstances of both. The man would be wounded in the heel; the serpent would be bruised on the head. The heel is most exposed to the bite of a serpent, which creeps upon the ground, particularly when a person is attempting to crush it with his foot; and if the head of a serpent be trodden upon, it will inevitably die. The heel is the human nature of our Saviour, which alone could be injured by Satan, and which he contrived, by means of his agents upon earth, to nail to the cross; the head is the power of Satan over mankind, which our Lord abolished by his death. The event enables us to understand this prediction, and it seems clear in the light of its fulfilment; but how far its meaning was apprehended by our first parents, it is impossible to ascertain. It was unquestionably intelligible in some degree to Satan, as it was evidently intended that he should immediately know how miserably his scheme would terminate for himself; and it may be presumed that it was also, in some degree, intelligible to Adam and his wife. Being pronounced in their hearing, it was designed for their use, to relieve them from their fears, to awaken their hopes, to encourage them to return to their Maker, to lay the foundation of a new and friendly intercourse with him. They learned from it, that notwithstanding their great offence, God would be merciful to them, and would not doom them with their adversary to irremediable destruction. They learned that he would receive them again into favour, as is manifest from the declaration concerning the woman, from which, undoubtedly, the man was not excluded, that he would put enmity between her and the serpent, changing her heart by his grace, and uniting her in friendship with himself. They learned that their deliverance would be effected by one of their own offspring, the Seed of the woman in a peculiar sense, who, although a sufferer in the warfare with their enemy, should obtain the victory, and destroy the empire which he had established over them. From all this it follows, that the gospel was first preached to our progenitors in paradise; and the words which we have considered were the dawn of the dispensation of grace, the first rays of the Sun of righteousness which began to dispel the moral darkness that had overspread the earth.

That the revelation of a Saviour was accompanied with the institution of religious rites, and particularly of sacrifices, may be inferred from the use of them in the service of God. As he afterwards prohibited, in the most express terms, every species of will-worship, and regulated with the greatest minuteness all the forms of religion, it is incredible that our first parents were left to devise a ritual of their own; and particularly, that so important a rite as the offering of sacrifices, which were of indispensable obligation, and served the

* Gen. iii. 15.

† John viii. 44. Rev. xii. 9

high purpose of typifying the great redemption, was the fruit of human invention. It is indeed inconceivable, that the mind of man should of itself have contrived sacrifices as the means of propitiating the Deity, because reason can perceive no connexion between the slaying of an animal and the averting of his wrath; and it might rather seem to be a new offence to put an innocent creature to death, because we were doomed to die, and were desirous to make our escape. There is no doubt that our first parents were supernaturally guided to this mode of at once acknowledging their guilt and imploring the mercy of their Maker, with a reference to the future substitution and atonement of the seed of the women. Some have supposed that the coats of skin, with which God is said to have clothed Adam and Eve, because, by his direction, they used them as garments, were the skins of animals which had been offered on the altar. Be this as it may, we find their two sons, Abel and Cain, presenting their offerings, the one the firstlings of the flock, and the other the fruits of the ground. A remarkable difference in the reception of their oblations is pointed out by the sacred historian, when he says, "the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering; but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect;"* and it is thus explained in the epistle to the Hebrews: "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice, *καλὴν καὶ βελτίω*, than Cain."† Much criticism has been employed about these words; but whether we translate them, *more sacrifice*, *a greater sacrifice*, or *a fuller sacrifice*, the result is the same, that the sacrifice of Abel, being of a propitiatory kind, and presented in the faith of God's mercy through the promised Redeemer, was accepted; while Cain, neglecting to bring such an oblation, and contenting himself with a sacrifice of thanksgiving, met with the doom which every sinner may expect who presumes to draw near to God without an atonement. The faith for which Abel is celebrated, implies that his sacrifice was founded on a divine institution accompanied with a promise of acceptance, and that it bore a typical relation to the great Redeemer, who, by dying, was to restore life and happiness to our guilty race.

The next fact in the history of the primeval religion occurs in the following words. "And to Seth also, there was born a son, and he called his name Enos; then began men to call upon the name of the Lord."‡ There has been considerable discussion respecting the meaning of these words, and they have been explained in different, and even opposite senses. It has been supposed by some, that the proper translation is, "Then began men to profane in calling upon the name of the Lord," from which they have inferred, that at this time the practice of idolatry commenced. But although sin was in the world almost from the beginning, and the conduct of Cain is a proof that atrocious deeds were early committed, it is altogether improbable, that while the memory of the creation was fresh, and our first parents were living among their descendants, any of them should have erred so much against the clearest dictates of reason and religion, as to exalt any imaginary being to the throne of their Maker, or to assign to the works of his hands equal honour with himself. It is a confirmation of this reasoning, that although mention is made of the great wickedness of mankind, and of the violence with which the earth was filled, there is not a single hint in the Scriptures which would lead us to think that idolatry was one of the sins of the antediluvian generations. There are two ways in which the words have been understood in reference to the true worshippers of God. "Then began men to be called," or "to call themselves, by the name of the Lord;" that is, in the days of Enos, an open separation took place between the pious and the profane; the former making a public profession of religion in opposition to the latter, who lived without God

* Gen. iv. 4.

† Heb. xi. 4.

‡ Gen. iv. 26.

in the world. They seceded from the ungodly multitude, and formed themselves into societies dedicated to the worship and service of Jehovah. These separatists are the sons of God mentioned in the sacred history, who, in process of time, relaxed their strictness, and lost their purity, by taking for wives the daughters of men, or by intermarriages with the corrupt race amidst which they lived. The other way in which the passage may be read, is adopted by our translators. "Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord," but the precise sense which should be affixed to these words is doubtful. To suppose them to mean, that at this time men began to hold public assemblies for the worship of God, is liable to this objection, that it is altogether improbable that, for a period of between two or three centuries, God had been worshipped only by individuals, or by families. Perhaps the words refer to some revival of religion; to some new and more vigorous efforts made by good men for the honour of God, and the more general observance of his institutions. At any rate, it is certain that a new epoch is marked in the history of religion.

The only thing which remains to be noticed prior to the flood, is what is related of Enoch, who was distinguished by his faith and piety, and was honoured with a miraculous testimony of the divine approbation. "And Enoch walked with God, and he was not: for God took him."* Paul explains these words, by informing us, that he was translated to heaven.† This was a personal favour to Enoch, who was exempted from the operation of the general law of mortality; but we have reason to think, that something farther was intended, and that the ultimate design was to give a public testimony to the truth of religion, before a sinful and incredulous race. In the antediluvian world, great corruption of manners prevailed; and as this state of things is the consequence of a disbelief of the doctrines of religion, we may conclude, that the principles of impiety were generally entertained. God and eternal things were disregarded; and with the exception of a few whom divine grace preserved pure and faithful, the rest were intent solely upon their gains and their pleasures. At this crisis, God was pleased to translate a good man to heaven, no doubt before competent witnesses, to remind those who were left behind that there is an invisible world, in which the righteous shall be rewarded, and consequently that there is a God who judges in the earth. As this extraordinary termination of his earthly course eminently contributed to uphold the authority and interests of religion, so the time which he spent among men was devoted to the same important purpose. He was a prophet and a preacher of righteousness, who instructed, and comforted, and established the people of God who were his contemporaries, testified against the conduct of the wicked, and forewarned them of the day of vengeance and recompense. "And Enoch also," says Jude, "the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."‡ This is a plain prediction of the second coming of Christ and its circumstances; and it is worthy of attention, that that event was known and announced in this early age of the world. It is not Moses, but Jude, who informs us that it was delivered by Enoch; and had not the apostle been directed to record this prophecy, we might have doubted whether men were then apprized of the general judgment. One inference may be deduced from it, namely, that we are imperfectly acquainted with the degree of religious knowledge which the antediluvians possessed; and that it was greater than we should have supposed, from the few

* Gen. v. 24.

† Heb. xi. 5.

‡ Jude 14, 15.

particulars respecting them which Moses has transmitted to us. It is manifest that more was told to them than was contained in the first promise, or that other revelations were occasionally made to them, of which there is not a trace in the history, and by which their views were directed to the promised Redeemer and the life to come ; so that believers among them rose superior to the world by the hope of immortality, and lived as strangers and pilgrims upon earth ; and hence we see how rashly some have concluded, that the Jews were ignorant of a future life, because there is no express mention of it in their law.

After the flood, the dispensation of religion was carried on for a considerable time in the same manner as before it. There was no written record of the Divine will ; but the faith of the people of God was sustained, and their practice was directed, by such occasional communications as infinite wisdom deemed it proper to make. The person by whom these were enjoyed in the greatest abundance, was Abraham, whom God had called from his native country to sojourn as a stranger in the land which was afterwards to be possessed by his posterity. While the hope was given him of a numerous offspring, and of their future settlement in Canaan, the promise of the Redeemer was repeatedly renewed to him, and he was informed that he should spring from his loins. "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." It would be a perversion of this promise to suppose it simply to mean, that the world should be indebted to his posterity for the knowledge of the true God, which having been preserved among them when it was lost among other nations, should afterwards be communicated to the Gentiles. It relates to an individual who would be the Saviour of the human race, and we are assured by an apostle that the seed is Christ. It may be presumed, that Abraham had a much more distinct and extensive knowledge of his illustrious descendant than these few words would lead us to suppose. Unless explanations had accompanied this and the first promise, both he and our first parents could have formed only a confused and general idea of some great thing to be done for our guilty race, which would have given but little satisfaction to their minds. There is no doubt, that the revelation was more ample than it is here expressed ; so as to impart, not indeed the same views of the Messiah which we have attained by the Gospel, but such apprehensions of his character and work as laid the foundation of peace of conscience, and joy in God, and the exhilarating hope of eternal life. That this is not a mere conjecture, may be inferred from these words of our Lord to the Jews : "Your father Abraham rejoiced," or desired, "to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad ;"* words which obviously import, that he was favoured with a discovery of the future redemption, which satisfied his earnest wish, and filled him with ineffable delight.

There is nothing farther to be noticed in the period between the deluge and the exodus, but the repetition of the promise of the Messiah to Isaac and Jacob ; by the latter of whom, when in his last years he was blessing his sons, the advent of that illustrious person was foretold in the following terms : "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come ; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."† As the time drew nearer, the information became more particular. The Redeemer had at first been announced as a man, and afterwards as a descendant of Abraham ; but now the tribe, from which he should arise, is pointed out, and the era of his appearance is fixed, namely, while the civil polity of Judah should subsist, and the consequence is represented to be the gathering of the people to him, or the adoption of his religion by the nations of the world.

The time at last arrived when God was to make a change in the dispensa-

* John viii. 56.

† Gen. xlix. 10.

tion of religion, by establishing it in a single nation and in a particular country, by giving to his people a written rule to guide their faith and practice, and by enacting a variety of laws for the purpose of exercising their obedience, directing their views to the Redeemer and his atonement, and preserving them in a state of separation from the rest of mankind. With this design, when the appointed day was come, four hundred and thirty years after the covenant with Abraham, he delivered his seed, who had increased to a great multitude in Egypt, from the yoke of their oppressors, led them through the Red Sea into the wilderness, where they were detained for forty years, and finally put them in possession of the land which he had promised to their fathers. During the successive steps of this process, a series of miracles was exhibited, of which it was the object to convince the Egyptians, the Canaanites, and the neighbouring nations, of his superiority to the gods whom they worshipped, deeply to impress upon the minds of the Israelites the fundamental truth, that he was Jehovah, the Creator and Governor of the world, and the author of those laws which were delivered to them by Moses his servant, and to assure them that in yielding the obedience which he required, they should be safe and prosperous under his protection.

The religion of the Israelites was virtually the same with the patriarchal religion, in respect not only of the truths to be believed, but also of some of the rites to be performed; but as they were imbodyed into a nation, and brought into a more perfect state, there was given to them a code of laws, adapted to the circumstances in which they were placed. It was promulgated on Sinai, partly by God himself with an audible voice, and partly by a private communication to Moses, who conveyed to the people his messages and commands. The laws may be divided into three classes, the judicial, the moral, and the ceremonial.

With regard to the first, we may pass them with a brief notice, because they did not properly constitute a part of the religion of the Jews, except so far as they were to be obeyed from respect to the Divine authority, but were merely national laws, enacted like those of any other country by the supreme power for the internal government of the people, regulating marriages, contracts, purchases, and such other matters, as are elsewhere the subjects of human legislation. They respected the Israelites merely as a civil community. They were temporary institutions, that is, being intended for this nation alone, they were to last no longer than it continued as a political body. They are binding upon no other people, except so far as they are founded on the principles of immutable justice; and in such cases the obligation arises not from their having been delivered to the Jews, but from their essential rectitude, their conformity to the nature and relations of things. That part of the code, therefore, which regarded the Jews as a civil society, may be considered as abolished.

The moral law is contained in the ten commandments engraved upon two tables of stone, and was the only part of their religion which was promulgated by God himself with an audible voice. It is the same law which was written upon the heart of man at his creation, and is the rule of righteousness under all dispensations. Its solemn republication at this time was necessary, because the Israelites may be conceived to have lost just notions of morality, during their residence in Egypt, where they did not enjoy the benefit of regular instruction, and were exposed to be corrupted by the maxims and example of an idolatrous people; and at the same time it was the design of God, by whose finger it was recorded, and by whose command it was transcribed into the writings of Moses, to establish a perpetual standard of duty from which there should be no appeal.

But the law, which the design of this Lecture requires us particularly to

consider, is the ceremonial, the object of which was twofold, to separate the Israelites from all other nations, and to direct their attention to the great redemption, and the means of its accomplishment.

It was the will of God to make a particular people the depositaries of the true religion, and for a time to leave the rest of mankind without any other means of instruction than their own reason, and some traditionary notices. The rejection of the Gentiles is to be dated from the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, or from their settlement in Canaan. Prior to this period there had been in every nation, good men who feared God and wrought righteousness; and who, guided by the light of revelation, which was universal in the family of Noah, and favoured with the influences of grace, were acceptable to him. But henceforth, "darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people." No interposition on the part of Heaven was made in their behalf; no prophet was sent to reclaim them from idolatry to the knowledge and worship of the true God; no miracles were wrought to display his power, and confirm the truth of his oracles. It was partly with an intention to maintain this separation that the ceremonial law was given to the Israelites; and that it was well fitted to accomplish this design, is evident from the religious rites which it prescribed, and which were contrary to those of other nations, and from the rules which it laid down with respect to some of the common usages of life. Tacitus has justly described the character and spirit of the Mosaic institutions, when he says, "*Moses, quo sibi in posterum gentem firmaret, novos ritus contrariosque ceteris mortalibus indidit. Profana illic omnia, quæ apud nos sacræ, rursum concessa apud illos, quæ nobis incesta.*"* He perceived the studied opposition of the Jewish rites to those of other nations, and regarded it as an expedient for preserving that people distinct and separate. This was, in a particular manner, the design of those laws which related to meats, and pronounced some to be clean, and others to be unclean: "I am the Lord your God, which have separated you from other people. Ye shall therefore put difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean; and ye shall not make your souls abominable by beast, or by fowl, or by any manner of living thing that creepeth on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. And ye shall be holy unto me; for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine."† The Israelites could not associate with their neighbours on familiar terms, and sit down at table with them, because there was danger of contracting pollution by eating their food. The ultimate intention was to prevent free intercourse with the heathen, by which the Israelites might have been led to join in their idolatrous worship. It was the will of God, that the people should dwell alone, and should not be reckoned among the nations, and that all temptation should be taken away to corrupt the religion which had been committed to their trust.

The other design of the ceremonial law, was to prefigure Christ, and redemption through his blood. Its institutions were typical. A type is a person or thing by which another person or thing is adumbrated. That which corresponds to it, is called the antitype. The latter is considered as future; and in this view, the type partakes of the nature of a prediction. To serve its purpose, it must be instituted by God, who alone can establish the relation; and it is by no means sufficient, that between two distinct persons or events there should be an accidental resemblance. The essence of a type consists, not in its similarity to another object, but in its being divinely appointed to be a representation of it.

That the Mosaic institutions were typical, is a point about which there has been little difference of opinion. Some, indeed, have denied it, and laboured

* Hist. lib. v. 4.

† Lev. xv. 24—26.

to show that in the New Testament there are only allusions to them, as if the writers had merely taken advantage of a resemblance between the two dispensations, to illustrate the one by the other. The ground of this opinion is not any solid, or even any plausible reason, but a wish to evade the evidence in favour of the atonement of Christ, arising from the vicarious and propitiatory nature of the sacrifices of the law. We detest the disingenuity which resorts to the most unfair means to establish a favourite point, and the impiety which impeaches the veracity and judgment of an apostle. Nothing can be more explicit than the affirmation of Paul, that the ceremonial ordinances were shadows of good things to come; and the professed design of his Epistle to the Hebrews is to illustrate this position by a variety of particulars. The high-priest represented Jesus Christ; the sin-offerings were symbolical of his expiatory oblation on the cross; the aspersions of blood were significant of the application of the virtue of his atonement to the conscience; and the annual entrance into the holy of holies was a figure of his entrance into heaven, in the name of his people, to plead the merit of his death in their behalf, and to procure the enjoyment of spiritual blessings.

A type, I have said, bears a resemblance to the antitype. But however exact the likeness might be, it could not of itself have led the mind to the antitype, which was distant and future, and either altogether unknown or imperfectly understood. Notwithstanding, therefore, the perfection of the Levitical law as an adumbration of good things to come, it would not have served its great purpose, by directing the views of the Israelites to the Messiah, if it had been given alone. It contained the substance of the Gospel; but it was the Gospel in a mystery, the sense of which no human sagacity could have discovered without assistance. Had no light been thrown on its design, it would have appeared a series of unmeaning observances; or it would have suggested false ideas to the Israelites, as if its animal sacrifices were sufficient to atone for their guilt and reconcile them to God, and its external ablutions could purify them from the defilement of sin. But prior to the establishment of this law, the people of God were in possession of information concerning the redemption which was to be effected by the promised Redeemer; and when sacrifices were first appointed, we may presume that men received some general instruction respecting their ulterior design. Whether Moses explained his institutions to the Israelites, we cannot tell, as the history is silent on this subject; but it is certain, that under the legal economy many intimations are given of the future Saviour, and of the new dispensation which it was the purpose of God to introduce. Prophets arose in succession, who admonished the people not to rest in the sacrifices which were required by the law, but to look to him who would put away our sins by the oblation of himself. If he was sometimes described as a mighty conqueror, and his kingdom was portrayed in all the pomp and magnificence of a worldly monarchy, the triumph of his religion being exhibited under these figures; at other times he was held out to view as an humble, lowly person, a sufferer, wounded, bruised, and put to death; a peculiar victim, through whom peace with God would be established, and whose blessings would be all of a spiritual nature.

In this manner the Jewish church was instructed, and under this form of administration religion subsisted from the days of Moses to the coming of Christ, a period of fifteen hundred years. To some, the ceremonial system of worship may seem too carnal to have been given by a spiritual Being, and the apparent childishness of its rites may be deemed unworthy of the majesty of God. Viewing it, indeed, in itself, we perceive nothing which might lead us to refer it to a divine origin, and with Tacitus, we might attribute it to the political contrivance of Moses. But when considered in its relation to the

future economy which it prefigured, it assumes a new aspect, and affords a striking display of the wisdom of its author. As there were reasons why the Redeemer should not be manifested till the fulness of the time was come, and it was necessary that sinful men should possess some knowledge of him, to encourage them to worship God and hope in his mercy, it was evidently proper that they should be instructed not only by prophecies, the meaning of which could not be distinctly understood prior to their fulfilment, but also by symbols and symbolical actions, which would throw light upon the prophecies, by giving as it were a body and form to the event which they announced. No idea could have been affixed to the declaration that the Messiah would die for the sins of men, if they had not been accustomed to see sacrifices substituted in their room, and slain to avert the anger of God from the offerers. As images and pictures have been called the books of the unlearned, so types were instituted to enable those who could not read, or could not understand, to form some conception of the fundamental truth upon which the religion of sinners depends, the suretiship and propitiatory sufferings of the Seed of the woman.

But all the information which could be derived from typical institutions and unfulfilled prophecies, was limited and indistinct. A general expectation was excited of a Redeemer, who would restore our forfeited happiness, and a vague idea was perhaps entertained of the means by which his benevolent design would be accomplished, but the particulars were unknown till time developed them. Many prophets and righteous men desired to see and hear those things which the disciples witnessed, believing that more glorious discoveries were reserved for their successors. So great, indeed, is the difference between the degree of knowledge under the past and the present dispensation, that the former is represented as the night and the latter as the day: "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth."* Let it be observed, however, that this is figurative language, and ought not to be too rigidly explained. It is not true that under the legal economy there was absolute darkness; but, so much clearer are the manifestations of divine things which are now made, that the prior revelation seems to be wrapt up in obscurity. The Sun of righteousness has now ascended above the horizon, and diffused his bright and salutary beams.

We may remark also concerning the former dispensation, that it was very burdensome in consequence of the nature and the multiplicity of its injunctions,—a yoke, as Peter says, which the Jews were not able to bear.† The observance of many holidays was enjoined, which caused frequent interruptions of their necessary labours. The laws respecting meats must have required much caution and care in the preparation of their food, and would subject them on many occasions to great inconvenience. They might be polluted, not only by what they ate, but by what they touched, and by other causes over which they had no control; and in such cases, it was necessary to wash their bodies and their garments, and to remain unclean until the evening. When they had committed any sin, it could not be expiated without a sacrifice, and Jerusalem was the only place in which it was lawful to offer it. To Jerusalem, all the males were commanded to repair three times in a year; and as it was situated at a great distance from some parts of the country, many of them must have performed long and fatiguing journeys. The offerings demanded from them were costly, a lamb, a ram, a bullock, or a he-goat; and a single sacrifice would have cost an Israelite more than most Christians are called to give in a year for the support of the simple institutions of the Gospel.

Notwithstanding these disadvantages, the Israelites enjoyed the true religion, and the law was a schoolmaster to lead them to Christ. It is a great error, in

* 1 John ii. 8.

† Acts xv. 10.

comparing the two dispensations, to exalt the one, as some do, at the expense of the other, by representing the Christian as spiritual, and the Jewish as altogether carnal. Let it not be imagined, that when an Israelite had gone through the forms of his religion; when he had offered sacrifices, and performed ablutions, and observed holidays, he had fulfilled all its demands. He who is a Spirit must require the same worship in every age of the world. It was the service of the heart which alone was acceptable to him then, as it is now; the ordinances were carnal, but the intention of them was spiritual; and between the two dispensations this is the difference, that the spirituality of the worship is now more evidently signified, because the multitude of ceremonies is abolished, and only a few simple forms are left to express the devotion of the soul. In the Old Testament, the most exact conformity to the Mosaic ritual is treated as a thing of no value, and indignantly rejected, when not accompanied with pious sentiments, and the practice of holiness.

There is another mistake, against which it is necessary to be on our guard, and the more so, because it may seem, on a superficial view, to be countenanced by Scripture itself, when it describes the times of the Gospel as the dispensation of the Spirit, and may be understood to confine it to that period. The Gospel, indeed, is called "the ministration of the Spirit,"* and a copious effusion of his influences is mentioned by the prophets as the privilege and glory of the new economy. But we are not to conclude that he was not given before the coming of Christ. Without him, religion would have been a cold and lifeless form; there would have been no faith, no repentance, no love, no holiness, for these, we know, are the fruits of the Spirit. Besides the express testimonies in the Jewish Scriptures to his presence with the people of God under the law, the existence of genuine piety in the hearts of many individuals is a proof that they were the subjects of his gracious operation. The high attainments of some of the ancient saints, the faith of Abraham, which is a pattern to all succeeding generations, the sublime devotion of David, and the patience of Job, demonstrate that they enjoyed no ordinary share of his influences.

After all, the church was in a state of infancy. The dispensation was too imperfect to be final; it was accommodated to the times which then were, and it did not realize all that the people of God were taught to expect. God had provided some better things for us, which we enjoy through the ministry of his Son, by whom he has spoken to us in the last days. Of the Christian dispensation, I shall speak in the next Lecture.

LECTURE XV.

THE DISPENSATION OF RELIGION.

Ministry of John the Baptist—Appearance of Christ—Abrogation of the old Dispensation—Characteristics of the Christian Dispensation: its Author; its Revelations; its Ministers, System of Worship; Advantages and Attainments of its Subjects; its Catholicity.

THE Old Testament closes with the following prediction and command: "Unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings. Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and

* 2 Cor. iii. 8.

dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”* The system of laws and ordinances which God had delivered to his chosen people by the ministry of Moses, was to be carefully observed in all their generations. No change was to be made in it for a long succession of years; and religion was to consist in a close and devout adherence to its institutions. But an event was announced, which would be introductory to a great revolution, the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, the appearance of the Messiah, who would come, not to give the sanction of his authority to the law of Moses, but to establish a new law of superior excellence, and perpetual duration. A messenger would precede him to proclaim his advent, by whose ministry the expectations of men would be excited, and they would be prepared to receive the Redeemer himself.

That messenger was John, the son of Zacharias and Elizabeth, who, endowed with the spirit and power of Elijah, appeared on the banks of Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance, and telling the people that there was one coming after him, “the latchet of whose shoes he was not worthy to unloose, who would baptize them with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.”† As when great monarchs were to undertake a journey to any part of their dominions, pioneers were sent before them to put the highways in a complete state of repair, that there might be no obstacle to their progress, to level mountains, and to fill up valleys, so the object of the mission of the Baptist was to awaken the Jews to a sense of their sins, to overthrow the vain confidence which they placed in their descent from Abraham, and their external privileges, that, feeling their need of a spiritual Saviour, they might give him a cordial reception “Behold, I send my messenger before thy face; he shall prepare the way before thee.” Upon the greater part of his hearers, the doctrine of the Baptist made no impression; but the attention of many was directed to the Messiah, and in consequence of the instructions and exhortations of his forerunner, they resorted to him, and became his disciples.

The Baptist held an intermediate place between the Old and the New Dispensation, between the Prophets and the Apostles. He was superior to the Prophets, and inferior to the Apostles. His superiority to the Prophets arose from the near relation in which he stood to our Saviour, whose approach he proclaimed, and from his seeing him and conversing with him; in consequence of which, his views were clearer and more extensive than those of the most distinguished persons who lived at such a distance from the event. But the Apostles enjoyed greater advantages, because they were the familiar associates of the Messiah, hearers of his doctrine, and witnesses of his miracles, and death, and resurrection; and because they received more ample measure of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, by whom they were fully instructed in the scheme of redemption. Indeed, so much light is thrown upon the prophecies by their fulfilment, so much more distinctly are the character and work of the Messiah now understood, that the knowledge even of an uninspired Christian exceeds that of the Baptist. “Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”‡

When John had executed his office for some months, our Lord himself came forth to public view; and having received baptism from the hand of his forerunner, began to preach in Galilee and Judea. With respect to the period of his manifestation we may remark, that it is called το πληρωμα του χρόνου, “the fulness of the time;”§ an expression which imports, that it was the exact time pointed out by prophecy, and that it was chosen by divine wisdom as the fittest. If it should be asked, why there was so long an interval between the fall and the mission of our Saviour as four thousand years; why he was not sent sooner

* Mal. iv. 2, 4—6.

† Luke iii. 16.

‡ Matth. xi. 11.

§ Gal. iv. 4.

and the cumbersome apparatus of the ceremonial institutions superseded? different answers might be returned; and the preference of the actual period might be justified on various grounds: but after the general consideration, that it was so determined by him who sees all things in their connections and consequences, and has reserved the times and the seasons in his own power, it is the most satisfactory answer, that, by this delay, an opportunity was given fully to demonstrate the necessity of his interposition. Had he appeared immediately after the fall, it might have been said, that the case did not require such extraordinary means, that the evil might have been remedied by a less costly expedient, that no time had been given to try what man could do to extricate himself from sin and its effects. But when ages after ages had rolled on, and no relief was found; when the human race, instead of growing wiser, sunk deeper and deeper in ignorance, and crimes multiplied as the world advanced; when philosophy had discovered nothing of any value, and religion had provided no atonement; when even the sacrifices of divine institution had failed to take away the conscience of sin, and the ceremonial law was proved to be only a shadow; a conviction was produced on every reflecting mind, that some more effectual method was necessary to restore sinners to the favour of God; and the mission of Christ was seen to be at once a display of his love, and a demonstration of his wisdom.

There have been different opinions respecting the time which our Lord spent in his public ministry, some reducing it to a year, and others extending it to three years and a half. The first is too short, and cannot be reconciled to the evangelical history. Whatever was its duration, he employed it in preaching the gospel of the kingdom, or the good news of the reign of grace, in performing miracles to attest his mission, and in making preparation for his death, in which its design would be fulfilled. In one view, the old dispensation may be considered as having terminated when his ministry commenced, or rather at the commencement of the ministry of his forerunner: and this seems to be the meaning of the following words: "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of heaven is preached, and every man presseth into it."* The law, indeed, had not yet lost its authority, nor were the prophecies fully accomplished; but a new state of things then began, which would issue in the establishment of a new mode of administering religion. In another view, the beginning of the new dispensation may be dated from the death and resurrection of Christ, when the sacrifice and oblation legally ceased, although for reasons which will be afterwards mentioned, they were permitted to continue for a time, and when the Apostles were sent forth to erect a church distinct from that of the Jews, observing new ordinances, and governed by new laws. This change was announced by the prophets, sometimes in highly figurative language, and at other times in plainer terms. It was foretold as the abolition of the old covenant which God had made with the Israelites, and as the making of a new one. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt: but this shall be the 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. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord. for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more."† It was predicted as a state of things, under which the Gentiles should be associated in the church with the Jews, should partake of the same spiritual privileges, and should be admitted to the holy offices which had exclusively belonged to

* Luke xvi. 16.

† Jer. xxxi. 31—34.

the priests and the Levites. "And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to 'Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow ; to 'Tubal and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory ; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles. And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord, out of all nations, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the Lord, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord. And I will also take of them for priests, and for Levites, saith the Lord."* Once more it is represented under an image which is not uncommon in the prophetical writings, namely, that of a new creation, which implies an exertion of almighty power similar to that by which the universe was produced. "Behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth : and the former shall not be remembered, nor come unto mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create ; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy."†

In the Christian dispensation, there are four particulars by which it is characterized ; a greater degree of light ; a new system of worship ; a more abundant effusion of the Spirit ; and its universality.

First, under the Christian dispensation, the light is greater, because the Sun of righteousness has arisen upon us, with healing in his wings. One important part of the office of the Messiah, was to make known the will and counsels of God ; and how he was qualified for this duty, we learn from these words of Isaiah, which are applied to him in the New Testament. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek."‡ If it should be asked, what qualification he could need, who being the Son of God, was possessed of every possible perfection ? I answer, that, in the passage quoted, he is spoken of as incarnate, and as receiving in our nature which he had assumed, a more ample measure of gifts and graces than was ever conferred upon the most eminent prophet or apostle. A child may know, although some men seem to have considered, that what is said concerning his anction and the communication of the Spirit, refers to his human nature alone, because it was equally impossible that his Divine nature should receive, as that it should lose any perfection. It was the Messiah who was anointed, but he was anointed in his human nature ; as the Messiah died, but suffered death only as a man. God had promised to raise up to his people a prophet from among their brethren, or a prophet who should be one of themselves ; and every created nature, angelical or human, whether it subsists by itself, or is mysteriously related to the Deity, derives all from the Creator. Its existence and its endowments emanate from the Source of life and intelligence ; its talents and virtues are inspired by that omnipresent and beneficent Being who pervades, and sustains, and animates the natural, and moral, and spiritual world. It was thus, according to the Baptist, that our Saviour was furnished with all necessary knowledge, and fitted to reveal the counsels of his Father to mankind. "He whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God ; for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."§

Our Lord grew in wisdom as well as in stature ; but when he entered upon his public ministry, he was fully prepared for all the duties of his office. He understood, in its whole extent, the scheme of redemption, which is the subject of inquiry and profound meditation to angels and men. How pure was the light which irradiated his mind ! It not only excluded the slightest error, but gave a full manifestation of truth in its most sublime mysteries and most minute details ; so that the gospel preached by himself and by the Apostles with his assistance, is a system in which nothing is wanting to perfect the knowledge, and support the faith, and promote the consolation of the church in its militant state, and

* Is. lxvi. 19-21. † Is. lxv. 17, 18. ‡ Is. lxi. 1. Luke i. 18. § John iii. 34.

discoveries are made which intelligences of the highest order admire, and those who are savingly enlightened prize above all the wisdom of the world. To him the most obscure subjects were clear, the most profound were of easy apprehension, the most magnificent and awful were familiar, so that he spoke of them with all the calmness which we feel in talking of common objects, and the daily occurrences of life. That his mind was richly furnished, we learn from many circumstances in his history. When a question was proposed, he was always ready to return an appropriate answer; when an objection was started, it was repelled by a few words in reply; when information was humbly asked, it was immediately given. Ideas and words were at command; he could discourse upon any subject without premeditation; and from his lips there flowed, without an effort, a stream of heavenly eloquence, which delighted his friends and confounded his enemies. "Never man spake like this man."* This is the Wisdom of God; this is the Teacher in comparison of whom philosophers are fools, and the ancient prophets were children. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."†

In the preceding lecture, something was said concerning the obscurity of the former dispensation. To the increasing clearness of revelation, we may apply the words of Isaiah: "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days."‡ The discoveries of divine things were gradual and progressive. We must suppose revelation in every age to have been sufficient to guide men into the way of salvation, or it would have been given in vain. Under the Mosaic economy, it was clearer than under the patriarchal; but the law and the writings of the prophets must yield in perspicuity and fulness to the gospel of Christ. Typical institutions, as we have seen, were delineations, more or less distinct, of future transactions and events; but it requires little reflection to perceive, that in themselves they could convey no information, and that their significance depended solely upon the explanation which accompanied them. This was, in part at least, given by prophecy; but however plain particular predictions may now appear to us, they did not afford an equal degree of light in ancient times; and those who then lived must have felt the same difficulty in discovering their meaning, which we experience in the interpretation of prophecies which are not yet fulfilled. How little we know of them, it is unnecessary to say. But now the means of instruction are different; the events prefigured by the institutions of the law have been accomplished; prophecy has been turned into history; the Messiah is not exhibited under the vague notion of a mighty deliverer, but as the incarnate Son of God, who was born in Bethlehem, and died on Calvary; and the spiritual nature of his salvation is distinctly understood. The views of the untutored Christian, who reads his Bible with humble prayer for divine teaching, are much more enlarged than those of the most eminent Jewish sages. In consequence of the greater clearness and fulness of the revelation, the abundance of the means of instruction, the facility of access to them, and the mission of the Spirit, of which we shall afterwards speak, the prediction is now fulfilled, "they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they all shall know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them."§

When we speak of the perfection of the Christian revelation, we must be understood to refer to it, as completed by the ministry of the apostles. The whole is the revelation of Christ, because it was delivered either by himself in person, or by others whom he had commissioned and inspired. It is the word "which began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him."|| During his lifetime upon earth, he announced himself as the Messiah, and preached the gospel in Judea and Galilee; but even to

* John vii. 46.

† John i. 18.

‡ Is. xxx. 26.

§ Jer. xxxi. 34.

|| Heb. ii. 3.

his own disciples, to whom it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom, he did not make a full disclosure of the counsels of his Father. He adapted his instruction to the time and to their capacity, and reserved much to be communicated by the Holy Ghost, whom he would send after he had ascended to heaven. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."* He is commonly supposed to refer to the change which he intended to make in the constitution of the church, for which they were not prepared while their Jewish prejudices continued; but I apprehend that he meant also the nature of his salvation, of which they entertained erroneous notions, which nothing would correct but his death and resurrection, and the coming of the Spirit to enable them to understand the true meaning of the prophecies. The revelation which God has given to the church as the rule of faith and obedience, is contained in the gospels and the epistles. It is a most unfounded distinction which some make between these writings, when they ascribe greater authority and importance to the former, as if our ideas of christianity were to be derived exclusively from them; and there is not the slightest pretext for it, unless it could be proved that the gospels were inspired, but the epistles are only human compositions. The truth is, that those who insist upon this distinction, call in question the inspiration of both Apostles and Evangelists; and, assuming a right to themselves to determine the comparative merits of the different portions of the New Testament, they wish to lower the authority of the epistles, because they teach so clearly the doctrines which they are unwilling to admit, among which the vicarious death and propitiatory sacrifice of Christ hold a prominent place. Paul is particularly obnoxious to them; and in a bold tone of impiety, he has been charged with mysticism, false reasoning, and inextricable confusion. The New Testament is a whole: and while the gospels relate the history, and discourses, and miracles of our Saviour, the epistles unfold, under the guidance of the Spirit, the nature of the religion which he died to establish.

The revelation of Jesus Christ being perfect, is consequently final; nothing will be added to it, for nothing is wanting to its integrity. It is the only plan according to which God will ever deal with the human race. Moses foretold a prophet who should arise after him, and commanded the people to hear him; but Christ gave no intimation of any successor. The Spirit would come, but he would come in his name, to take of his things, and show them to his followers.

The second particular, which characterizes the new dispensation, is the introduction of a new system of worship. "The priesthood being changed," as Paul observes, "there is made of necessity a change also of the law."† The ceremonial law was connected with the ministry of Aaron and his sons, and prescribed the mode in which they were to conduct the service of the sanctuary; but as soon as they were superseded by a new priest, it became obsolete, and circumstances demanded a different ritual. The very design of the ceremonial law is a proof, that although it was sometimes spoken of as a statute for ever, nothing more could be intended than that it was to last till the advent of the Messiah; and that then, like every other thing which has fulfilled its purpose, it would be abolished. As a shadow it was of no value to those who possessed the substance; as a notification of good things to come, had it been retained in the worship of God, it would have proclaimed a falsehood, signifying that the events predicted were still to be expected, although they had been fully accomplished. As soon as our Saviour died upon the cross, the sacrifice and oblation legally ceased; the temple of Jerusalem was no longer the habitation of God; the priests had no right to minister in it; the covenant of peculiarity was disannulled, and the privileges of the people of God were extended to men of every nation under heaven. The temple, indeed, stood almost for forty years, and the priests performed the service after the usual manner; but the

* John xvi. 12.

† Heb. vii. 12

sanctity of the place, and of the ministrations, had passed away. God did not any more require the fat of rams and sacrifices of fed beasts; a sacrifice of a different kind had been offered without the gates of the city, in which he had smelled a sweet savour of rest. He therefore rejected the splendid apparatus by which it had been prefigured, and the hopes of men had been directed to it. But he delayed for some time the visible abrogation of the ceremonial law, which could not be effected but by the dissolution of the Jewish state, in order that an offer of salvation might first be made to the Jews in their national capacity, and that, before their dispersion, such of the elect as were among them might be gathered into the Christian church.

Under the new dispensation, the mode of service is entirely changed. There is now no magnificent temple appointed to be the seat of worship, to which men are required to repair at stated seasons from their distant dwellings; but in every place they are commanded to worship the Father. There is now no particular family who alone are authorized to minister in the sanctuary, and by whom the oblations of the people must be presented, that they may be acceptable. God chooses his servants from every class of society, and gives a commission to those, whom he has called by his providence and grace, whatever may be their parentage and connections, to dispense the ordinances of religion. There are now no sacrifices of the flock and the herd, nor the smoke of incense ascending from the censers of the priests; the only oblations are those of prayer and praise, and of a devout and holy heart. The new ritual is distinguished by its simplicity, and contains little that is addressed to the senses; there is no sensible representation of things to come, and we have only in the sacred Supper, a memorial of the past, intended to recall and to impress upon the mind, the great facts and truths of Christianity. It is therefore spiritual worship that is enjoined under the gospel; not, as I remarked in the last lecture, that under the Jewish economy, carnal worship only was required, but that the spirituality is now more manifest, as the multitude of ceremonies is abolished, and divine things are brought, if I may speak so, into closer contact with the mind. Except in the sacraments, which are symbolical institutions, without any gorgeous display, however, any imposing ceremonies to rivet the attention upon the external rite, there is nothing to attract the eye; the ear only is addressed in the words of truth and soberness, and men are called upon to present to God the homage of humble faith and fervent love.

You will perceive that I refer to the system of worship which is found in the New Testament, and was practised in the apostolic age. It soon, however, underwent a change, and by one addition after another, became as pompous as the Jewish, and acquired a near resemblance to the ritual of Paganism. From an ill-judged intention to recommend Christianity to the heathens, the ceremonies to which they were accustomed were adopted, till the simplicity of the primitive times was lost amidst a mass of superstition, and idolatry profaned the temple of God. In this corrupt and spurious form, religion is still exhibited in the church of Rome. Although the Reformation restored the purity of doctrine, circumstances prevented in some places a return to the original order and discipline of the church; and besides the form of their government, which appears to us to be unscriptural, we find in certain Protestant societies rites of which there is no vestige in the New Testament; as kneeling at the sacrament, the sign of the cross in baptism, bowing at the name of Jesus, and the observance of holidays. The simplicity of our worship is a subject of censure and ridicule to them as well as to the followers of antichrist, and both reproach us with having made religion too naked and too spiritual for human nature, which requires to be excited through the medium of the senses. But in accusing us, they accuse the Author of our religion, to whose word we appeal, and from reverence for whom we reject these superstitious addi-

tions. Superstitious we justly call them, because this epithet is properly applied to the inventions of men in the service of God; and we reject them, because we know that he guards his own institutions with jealous care, and is offended at the presumption which deteriorates, under the pretext of improving them.

A third particular which distinguishes the Christian dispensation, is a more abundant communication of heavenly influences. I observed in the last lecture, that it would be a very great error to suppose that the Spirit was not given prior to the coming of Christ, because there could in this case have been no genuine religion, no acceptable worship,—faith, and repentance, and holiness, which are essential to it, being the effects of his operations on the soul; and the Jews might as safely have wanted an external revelation, as have been denied the supernatural grace by which only they could be enabled to understand and believe it. We hear Wisdom saying, in the days of Solomon, and to sinners of that age, “Behold, I pour out my Spirit upon you.” But there were promises of another and a more copious effusion at a future period, or in the last days, which means the times of the gospel. It may be supposed, indeed, that these promises refer to miraculous gifts, which were liberally communicated in the apostolic age; and that some of them may be so explained, is evident from the application of the following prophecy of Joel, to the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, when the apostles began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance: “It shall come to pass in the last days, (saith God,) I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants, and on my hand-maidens, I will pour out in those days of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.”* But it is impossible to understand, in this limited sense, all those passages of Scripture which speak of heavenly influences falling in the days of the Messiah as rain and dew on the grass, breaking forth as streams and rivers in the wilderness, and flowing through barren land to convert it into a fruitful field. They are rightly interpreted of those ordinary operations of grace, by which men are endowed with holy dispositions, and rendered active in the service of God. That they foretell the enjoyment of a more ample measure of grace, is evident not only from the terms in which they are expressed, but from many specific declarations in the Christian Scriptures, in which we are informed that the Holy Ghost was not given while Jesus was not glorified; that the great promise which he made to his disciples to comfort them in the view of his departure, was the mission of the Spirit; that on his ascension he received him from his Father, and then poured him out on his disciples; and that the gospel is more glorious than the law, because it is the ministration of the Spirit. “If the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance, which glory was to be done away; how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious?”† It is imported in this description of the new economy, that the Spirit is given in greater abundance than under any former dispensation.

If we take into the account the superior clearness of the Christian revelation, and the more liberal communication of heavenly influences, is it not a natural inference, that as the privileges and advantages of the people of God are now greater, their attainments also are higher? Considered in a collective capacity, the Jews will not bear a comparison with Christians; the Scripture speaks of the former as children, and of the latter as men. From the difference of their circumstances, there must be a degree of knowledge, and consequently of faith and holiness, among Christians, which could not be expected among the Jews. It may be objected, that of the ancient saints some rose to great

* Joel ii. 28. Acts ii. 17, 18.

† 2 Cor. iii. 7, 8.

eminence in piety, and are proposed to us as examples, and that they are models which we may faintly imitate, but cannot hope to equal. We acknowledge their excellence, we admire their virtues, but we deny that it is impossible to rise to their level, and know of no ground on which such an idea should be entertained. It is a mere prejudice, which will not bear to be canvassed. I have no doubt that they have been often equalled, and I will venture to add, have perhaps been excelled by not a few in the Christian church. Why should it seem incredible that the holiness of many a believer, who had a nobler example before his eyes than that of Abraham, or Job, or David, the perfect example of our Lord Jesus Christ; who enjoyed clearer discoveries of life and immortality, and was animated by the spirit of liberty and love; why should it seem incredible that the holiness of many a believer, thus advantageously situated, has even surpassed the holiness of patriarchs and prophets, been less mingled with the infirmities of the flesh, and less sullied with stains and blemishes? Have the superior privileges of the present dispensation been bestowed in vain? If Christians beheld the glory of the Lord with uncovered face, do they attain no higher degree of conformity to his image than those by whom it was dimly seen through a veil? While they have gained so much in knowledge, have they gained nothing in purity, which is the end of knowledge? Whatever opinion may be formed with respect to individuals of former times, it is unquestionable that Christians in general claim the pre-eminence above those who preceded them. The spirit of the law was a spirit of bondage; but the Spirit of the Gospel is a spirit of liberty, elevating the faith of the people of God, inflaming their love, brightening their hopes, and powerfully but delightfully impelling them forward to perfection. The days of the Messiah are come, in which it was foretold that the righteous should flourish, and abundance of peace should be enjoyed.

The last particular which characterizes the new dispensation, is its universality, of which frequent notices were given in ancient prophecy; as when it was foretold, that "from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, the name of God should be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense should be offered, and a pure offering;" that "his dominion should be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth;" that "all kings should fall down before him, and all nations should serve him;" and that "men should be blessed in him, and all nations should call him blessed."* In the fifty-sixth chapter of Isaiah, the comprehension in the dispensation of grace, of those who had hitherto been excluded from it, is described in language suited to that age, and by images which were then familiar. To the "sons of the stranger," or to the Gentiles, who are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, it is announced, that "God would bring them to his holy mountain, and make them joyful in his house of prayer." There is an evident allusion to the mountain or elevated ground on which the temple was erected, and to the temple itself, in which the solemn services of the ancient worship were performed, and which, as we learn from the words of Solomon at its dedication, was in particular intended to be a place in which supplications should be presented to God. It is implied in the promise "to bring the sons of the stranger to his holy mountain, and make them joyful in his house of prayer," that he would call them to the knowledge of salvation by the gospel, and confer upon them all the privileges of the new dispensation: "Then their burnt-offerings and sacrifices would be accepted on his altar." Such sacrifices as were enjoined by the law of Moses, would no longer be offered; but by this figure, which it was so natural to a Jew to employ, the worship of the Christian church is described. The time would then be, when "neither in Jerusalem nor in Mount Gerizzim men should worship the Father, but the true worshippers should worship him in spirit and in truth."†

* Mal. i. 11. Zech. ix. 10. Ps. lxxii. 11, 17.

† John iv. 21, 23.

It was the design of God, who had long distinguished the seed of the patriarchs as his peculiar people, to extend his favour to other nations. It is in reference to the universality of the new dispensation, that he is said to have loved the world, and John calls Christ “the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world;”^{*} meaning, not every individual from the beginning to the end of time, but the human race in general, as distinguished from the Jews, to whom divine mercy had been hitherto confined, and for whom exclusively the ancient sacrifices were offered. The commission given to the apostles was unlimited, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;”[†] and the apostles acted upon it, to the great displeasure of many of their countrymen, who, not entering into the benevolent views of prophecy, wished to continue the monopoly of the gifts of heaven which they had enjoyed for ages.

It is evident, from the nature of the former dispensation, that it was intended solely for a particular people. As the obvious design of some of its institutions was to prevent them from associating with other nations, so its system of worship was not practicable but in a country of limited extent. There was only one altar on which sacrifices could be offered; and there were three annual festivals at which all the males were commanded to appear in the capital, and were therefore supposed to be living within a reasonable distance. These things are changed under the Christian economy. There are now no sacred places to which it is necessary to repair, because in them alone God is to be found; but his people may assemble any where to serve him, and their prayers and praises are equally acceptable to him in the open air as in a magnificent building.

Thus the church is opened to all the families of the human race. The distinction of circumcised and uncircumcised is abolished. They are no more twain, but “one new man in Christ, who has broken down the middle wall of partition, and made peace by the blood of his cross.” It is the glory of Christianity, that it has united those who were long and, in appearance, for ever separated, and that, by its influence, many nations have been turned from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven. The establishment of the religion of the Messiah in a single nation would not have been an adequate reward of his humiliation and sufferings, something greater was promised to him, and something greater has in part been accomplished. “It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.”[‡]

As the new dispensation is universal in intention, no part of the human race being excepted in the apostolic commission, so we believe that it will be universal in fact. However improbable it may seem that the whole world should be christianized, we know that God is able to perform what he has promised. The great revolution commenced immediately after our Saviour’s ascension; and although for ages it was stationary, or rather retrograde, it has been advancing since the era of the Reformation, and is going on in our days with renovated vigour. A future generation will witness the rapidity of its progress; and long before the end of time, “the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.” Christianity will gain a complete triumph over all false religions; and the visible kingdom of Satan will be destroyed, or reduced within narrow limits, during the happy period when, in the figurative language of the Apocalypse, “he shall be bound.”

Here we close our survey of the dispensation of religion. It will be commensurate with time, and “then cometh the end, when Christ shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, and God shall be all in all.”[§]

* 1 John ii. 2.

† Mark xvi. 15.

‡ Is. xlix. 6.

§ 1 Cor. xv. 24, 28.

INTRODUCTION

TO THE

DOCTRINES OF THEOLOGY.

I now proceed to enquire into the contents of the Sacred Records, or to give in detail a summary account of the religion taught in the Old and New Testament. Of its doctrines, some are discoverable, or at least demonstrable by reason, and others are matters of pure revelation, truths which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived. To the former class belong what are called the doctrines of Natural Religion; the existence and perfections of God, providence, the rules of duty, and a future state of rewards and punishments. Without inquiring what knowledge of these articles may be acquired by the unassisted efforts of the human mind, with the Scriptures in our hands, it is our wisdom to consider them as they are there exhibited with far superior evidence and authority. The doctrines of pure revelation are those which relate to the scheme of redemption, which, being founded on a free act of the Divine will, and on a new state of things superinduced upon the primitive arrangement, is necessarily placed beyond the sphere of human speculation.

The natural order requires that we should begin with God, his attributes, the distinctions in his essence, with his immanent acts, or the purposes which he formed in himself while he existed alone. From these, we proceed to his transitive acts, or his external operations; and here a wide field opens to our view. We see the universe rising out of nothing at his command, and arranged in admirable order by his wisdom; and we see man occupying the chief place in this world, adorned with the image of his Maker, and happy in the enjoyment of his favour. But the scene is suddenly changed, and man, fallen from his high estate, appears degraded, miserable, and pursued by the vengeance of his Creator. From this melancholy spectacle, our attention is summoned to the contemplation of that wonderful expedient by which he is recovered from guilt, and reinstated in happiness; and here it is necessary to consider the original plan, the person appointed to execute it, the means by which he has effected his design, and the benefits resulting from it, which embrace a history of the proceedings of Divine grace, from its first exercise to the sinner to the completion of its work in the perfection of the heavenly state. This is only a general sketch, and does not comprehend a great variety of particulars which are connected with the main subject, and hold an important place in the system. Let us humbly pray that the Divine Spirit may lead us into all the truth; and that while our understandings are enlightened, our hearts may feel the holy emotions which the diversified views of the Divine character and conduct are calculated to excite. And let us not forget that it is life eternal, spiritually to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

LECTURE XVI.

ON GOD.

His Existence—Belief of it universal—Dr. Clarke's argument *a priori*: its fallacy—Idea of God—Argument for his Being founded on the idea of Him; estimate of its force—Argument from the existence of a material Universe—Argument from the marks of Design in the Universe.

THE primary article of Natural and Revealed Religion is the existence of God. If there is such a being, he is the proper object of the reverence, adoration, thanksgiving, and confidence of his intelligent creatures, and of all the other exercises and duties which are implied in the notion of religion. If there is no such Being, men have nothing to hope or to fear beyond the passing events of time, are subject to no law but that of blind and stern necessity, and can rationally propose no higher end, during their fugitive existence, than to take care of themselves, and secure their happiness by every expedient in their power. Virtue and vice are words without meaning, and the only foundation of a distinction of actions is prudence, or a selfish regard to their present interests, which are paramount to beings who know that they shall soon cease to think and feel.

The belief of the existence of God may be said to be natural to man. Were the reason of a human being matured, it may be presumed, that on contemplating the objects around him, he would be led to the conclusion that there is an intelligent Power which created the universe, or at least sustains and governs it; and this idea seems to be favoured by the words of an inspired writer, that "the invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made."* But as this point has been disputed, we may affirm, that the notion of a First Cause, the Author of life, and motion, and order, is so agreeable to the dictates of reason, and so exactly accords with the appearances of nature, that as soon as it is proposed, it will meet with the cordial assent of every person who is not prejudiced. Hence it may be deemed unnecessary to enter upon a proof of the existence of God; and to some it may appear to be presumptuous and irreverent, because it seems, in the first instance, to call in question a truth of which it is impiety to doubt. But there are two considerations which justify our procedure.

Let it be remarked, that although men, with a very few exceptions, have in all ages admitted the existence of God, yet many have paid little attention to the subject, and having received it upon authority, without exercising their own thoughts, would be much perplexed if they were called to give a reason of their faith. They may be regarded as children in religion, who require to be taught to read the characters of their Maker's glory, which are stamped upon his works; and those upon whom the office of teaching them devolves, should be previously furnished with the requisite knowledge. Besides, a review of the argument may be eminently useful to such as are already convinced. It is impossible that a truth so important and sublime, on which the hopes and fears, the duty and the happiness of mankind are suspended, can occupy their attention too much, or be too deeply impressed upon their minds. We have all to lament that the impression is so faint, and the obvious remedy for this evil, is frequent and attentive meditation on the signatures of the power and majesty of the Divine Being with which we are surrounded. I may add, that however firm our belief may at present be, we cannot tell to what trials it may be exposed, and with what objections it may be assailed. Some of the most devout

* Rom. i. 20.

men whom the world ever saw, have complained that there were moments when they were disturbed with doubts respecting not only the dispensation of providence, but the perfections and the existence of God.

In ancient times, certain Pagans were stigmatised as atheists ; justly in some cases, but in others it may be questioned whether the charge was not founded on their disbelief of the popular systems of religion. Lord Bacon expresses himself as if he doubted whether any man could be really an atheist. “ The Scripture saith, ‘ the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.’ It is not said, the fool hath thought in his heart, so as he rather saith it by rote to himself, as that he would have, than that he can thoroughly believe it, or be persuaded of it. For none deny there is a God, but those for whom it maketh there were no God. It appeareth in nothing more, that atheism is rather in the lip than in the heart of men, than by this ; that atheists will ever be talking of that their opinion as if they fainted in it within themselves, and would be glad to be strengthened by the consent of others.”* It is certain, however, that atheism has been avowed, and in no period more openly than in the present age, when the spirit of impiety has gone forth, and is labouring by the arts of sophistry, to persuade men to throw away their Bibles and their reason, and with the discipline, to renounce the hopes, of religion. Modern philosophy pretends to demonstrate, that there is no intelligent Being who presides over nature, no Lawgiver whom we are bound to obey, no Judge who will call us to an account ; in short, that the idea of a God, wise, righteous, and holy, is a tale of the nursery, a dream of superstition. Whatever misgivings of mind professed atheists may experience, whatever suspicions of their own reasonings may at times check their confidence, their public dissent from the general opinion on this momentous subject, calls upon us to be prepared to encounter their arguments, and to secure the foundation of our faith.

The existence of God has been proved by metaphysical arguments, which it requires acuteness of intellect and close attention to understand, and which are therefore useless to the greater part of men ; and by arguments of a simpler kind, adapted to common capacities, and founded upon the things which are obvious to our senses. When the celebrated Mr. Whiston was conversing with Dr. Clarke about his Discourse concerning the being and attributes of God, pointing to a nettle, he told him that that weed furnished more satisfactory evidence than all his abstruse reasoning ; to which the Doctor answered, that it was true, but that since the adversaries of religion employed metaphysics against it, it was necessary to repel them with their own weapons.

In demonstrating this fundamental truth, recourse may be had to the argument *a priori*, or to the argument *a posteriori*. The argument *a posteriori* infers the cause from the effect, and proves the existence of a Creator from the works of creation. It is an ascending process, by which we rise from what is seen to what is unseen, from things to their first principle. The argument *a priori* infers the effect from the cause, and consequently supposes something to exist before that, the existence of which is deduced from it. Hence it should seem that this argument can have no place in a demonstration of the existence of God, who preceded all other beings, and is the cause of every thing which exists. To this objection it has been replied, “ that though no thing nor being can be prior to that Being, which is the First Cause and Original of all things ; yet there must be in nature a ground or reason, a permanent ground or reason, of the existence of the First Cause ; otherwise its existence would be owing to, or depend upon, mere chance.” “ The existence, therefore, of the First Cause is necessary ; necessary absolutely and in itself. And therefore, that necessity is *a priori*, and in the order of nature, the ground or reason of its existence.”† But

* Bacon’s Essays. Of Atheism.

† Clarke’s Discourse concerning the being and attributes of God, Edit. 10th, p. 498. Answer to Seventh Letter.

although it is Dr. Clarke who reasons in this manner, I suspect that we cannot form any distinct conception of his meaning. Necessity is an abstract idea, and when applied to the present subject, can only signify, that there *must* be a First Cause. But how do we come by this notion? It is by profound meditation upon the nature of necessity, and does it hence appear, as an unavoidable inference, that a First Cause must exist? This indeed would be the argument *a priori*; but it is not in this way that we arrive at the conclusion. Our belief of a First Cause is founded on the fact that other beings exist, who could not have made themselves, nor have existed in an eternal succession, as we shall afterwards see, and must, therefore, have been created by a Being who existed without a cause. But this is the argument *a posteriori*. It is by this argument that we rise to the knowledge of the uncaused existence of the Author of the universe, and not by abstract speculations on necessity. We should have never known that he exists, but from our own existence and that of other beings around us; and as in this way we ascertain that he does and must exist, it seems absurd to talk of proving his existence *a priori*. Whatever use may be made of this argument to prove his perfections, it cannot be employed in proof of his being. Dr. Clarke himself acknowledges, that “the argument *a posteriori* is by far the most generally useful argument, most easy to be understood, and in some degree suited to all capacities; and, therefore, it ought always to be distinctly insisted on.”*

When we profess to demonstrate the existence of God, we speak of a Being, underived, independent, immutable, and possessed of every possible perfection. It is evident that in the idea of God every perfection is included, because if one or more were wanting, we could conceive another Being who possessed them all, and that other would be God. We therefore ascribe to him every excellence, intellectual and moral, not only power but wisdom, not only goodness but purity. These perfections subsist in the highest possible degree. If they were subject to any limitation, there might be a Being who possessed them without limitation; and to him, as soon as he was known, it would be our duty to transfer the homage which we had hitherto paid to another, whom we now found to be inferior to him. In short, God is a Being to whom the designation of Optimus Maximus, with which the heathens dignified him under the name of Jupiter, justly belongs. He is the Greatest and the Best, incomprehensible to finite minds, of whom we cannot form an idea but by uniting every conceivable excellence in one assemblage, and supposing them to extend beyond the highest attainments of the most exalted creatures, and the utmost reach of the most enlarged understanding.

I now proceed to lay before you the arguments by which the existence of God is evinced.

I. An argument which has been frequently advanced by metaphysical writers, is founded on the idea of God. As it is very abstruse, and I am not sure that I distinctly apprehend it, I shall give you a statement of it, nearly in the words of Bishop Stillingfleet, in whose *Origines Sacræ*,† it is fully detailed. He begins with observing, that such things are contained in the idea of God, as necessarily imply his existence. The force of the argument lies in this, that what we clearly and distinctly perceive to belong to the nature and essence of a thing, may be with truth affirmed of the thing itself; as, if I clearly perceive that to be an animal doth belong to the nature of man, I may with truth affirm that man is a living creature; if I find it demonstrably true, that a triangle has three angles equal to two right ones, I may truly affirm it of any triangle. But now we assume, that upon the most exact search and inquiry, I clearly perceive that necessary existence doth immutably belong to the nature

* Ibid. p. 499.

† Book iii. Ch. i. § 14.

of God, therefore I may with as much truth affirm, that God exists, as that man is a living creature, or a triangle hath three angles equal to two right ones.

In order to manifest more clearly the force of this argument, in which some kind of sophism may be suspected, he proceeds to observe, in the first place, that the greatest evidence we can have of the truth of a thing, is a clear and distinct perception of it in our minds. When we speak of clear and distinct perceptions, we suppose the mind to proceed upon evident principles of reason, or to have such notions of things, which, as far as we can perceive by the light of reason, do agree with the natures of the things which we apprehend; if in such things then there be no ground of certainty, it is as much as to say that our faculties are to no purpose, which highly reflects either upon God or nature. In the second place, we have clear and distinct perception that necessity of existence doth belong to the nature of God. We are to consider the vast difference which there is in our notion of the nature of God, and of the nature of any other being. In all other beings, I grant we may abstract essence and existence from each other; now, if I can make it appear that there is evident reason, *ex parte rei*, why I cannot do it in the notion of God, then it will be more plain that necessity of existence doth immutably belong to his nature. It is manifest to our reason, that in all other beings of which we apprehend the natures, nothing else can be implied in the natures of them beyond the bare possibility of existence, no, although the things which we do apprehend do really exist, because, in forming an idea of a thing, we abstract from it every thing which is not implied in the very nature of the thing; now existence being only contingent and possible as to any other being, it cannot be any ingredient of its idea, because it doth not belong to its essence; for we may fully apprehend the nature of the thing without attributing existence to it. But now, in our conception of a Being absolutely perfect, bare possibility or contingency of existence speaks a direct repugnancy to the idea of him; for how can we conceive that Being absolutely perfect, which may want that which gives life to all other perfections, namely, existence? The only scruple in this case is, whether this necessary existence doth really belong to that Being whose idea it is, or is only a mode of our conception in apprehending God. Here we have no rule so certain and evident as this, that in those things which are merely joined together by the act of the mind, the understanding can abstract them, and divide them in its conceptions from each other; but in such things as cannot be divided without altering the essence of the subject to which they are ascribed, it is a certain evidence that they were not conjoined by the mere act of the mind, but do immutably belong to the natures of the things themselves. The reasons which make us attribute bare possibility of existence to any being, are taken away when we conceive a Being absolutely perfect, for then existence is implied among the number of perfections, and this Being is independent upon all others, and infinitely powerful, so that nothing can hinder its existence, and therefore we must conclude that necessity of existence doth belong to the nature and notion of God, and is not any mode only of our conception, because, if we take away necessity of existence from God, we lose the notion of a Being absolutely perfect. It not only follows as a necessary conclusion from these preliminaries, but is in itself evident to the reason of any person, that if necessary existence belongs to the nature of God, he exists; for it implies no less than a contradiction, for a being to exist necessarily, and yet that it should be questionable whether he doth exist or not.

Such is the celebrated argument for the existence of God, which was brought forward by Des Cartes, and had been hinted at by some of the Schoolmen. I know not whether you have been able to follow the reasoning, and what impression it has made upon your minds. By some it has been considered as a complete demonstration, which supersedes all other arguments; but others

have viewed it in a different light. It is one objection to it, that it is not easily apprehended, and almost eludes the grasp of the understanding: and it is of too shadowy a nature to produce a strong and vivid effect. By many distinguished metaphysicians and divines, it has been pronounced to be a sophism. It is acknowledged that whatever properties are included in the clear idea or notion of a subject, do certainly belong to it; and indeed, it is a self-evident and tautological proposition, that all things comprehended in any conception of the mind, may be predicated of it. But here the reasoning fails, in that it infers the actual existence of an object *in rerum natura*, from the existence of the idea of it in the mind. "It seems to extend only," as Dr Clarke observes, "to the nominal idea or mere definition of a self-existent Being, and does not, with a sufficiently evident connection, refer and apply that general nominal idea, definition, or notion, which we frame in our own mind, to any real particular being actually existing without us."* All that can be legitimately inferred is this, that if there exists any Being, in the clear idea of whom necessary existence is involved, that Being exists by a necessity of nature. If you say, but necessary existence is involved in the idea of God, it is manifest that the only just inference is, if God exists, necessary existence ought to be affirmed of him. You do not demonstratively prove that God exists in opposition to the atheist; you merely conclude hypothetically, that if there is a God, his existence is necessary. This the atheist will readily grant, and at the same time retain his opinion; because all that you have done is to settle the true idea of a God, while it still remains a subject of dispute, whether such a Being exists. I conclude with the words of Mr. Locke, who, declining to enter upon this argument, contents himself with the following general remark, "that it is an ill way of establishing the existence of God, to lay the whole stress of so important a point upon that sole foundation, and take some men's having that idea of God in their minds, (for it is evident some men have none, and some worse than none, and the most very different,) for the only proof of a Deity, and out of an over-fondness of that darling invention, cashier, or at least endeavour to invalidate, all other arguments, and forbid us to hearken to those proofs as being weak or fallacious, which our own existence, and the sensible parts of the universe, offer so clearly and cogently to our thoughts, that I deem it impossible for a considering man to withstand them."†

II. Our second argument is, that since something exists now, something must have existed from eternity. The foundation of this argument is, the present existence of ourselves, and of the other parts of the universe. We are assured of our own existence by consciousness, and of the existence of other beings by the evidence of our senses, to which we give implicit credit by the law of our nature, without paying the least regard to the attempts of sceptical philosophers to invalidate their testimony. Hence we infer that something has existed from eternity, for nothing is more evident than that if there ever had been a time when no being existed, it was impossible that any being should have ever come into existence. Every being has a reason or ground of its existence, either in itself, and then it is self-existent, or in the will and power of some other being. But according to the supposition, no being necessarily exists, for there was a time when no being was; and consequently there was no reason or cause why any being should ever exist. There was a time when there was nothing, and how could something have been produced? Beings could not make themselves: for this would suppose them to have existed before they existed; and they could not have sprung up by chance, for chance signifies no cause of any kind, and is merely a word expressing our ignorance of the cause.

It is then certain, that since something now exists, something must have existed from eternity. About the truth of this proposition, there is in fact no

* Clarke's Discourse, p. 20.

† Essay on the Human Understanding, B. iv. c. 10.

dispute. It is admitted by atheists themselves; and, accordingly, the most celebrated of them in ancient times, Epicurus and his followers, while they maintained that the world, or the present system of the universe, was formed by a fortuitous concourse of atoms, felt the necessity of acknowledging that atoms had moved in infinite space from eternity.

The atheist, being compelled to concede that something has existed from eternity, will tell us that it is the universe itself. Nature is underived and self-existent; we can trace no vestige of a beginning, and we see no prospect of an end. He has no objection to the idea of an eternal Being, if that Being is not understood to be endowed with intelligence and power, and above all, to be possessed of such moral perfections as justice and purity, the thought of which would lay a restraint upon his conduct, and create the disquieting apprehension of a future reckoning.

Let us examine his position, and see whether it is consonant to reason. The human race is an important part of the universe, which, according to this hypothesis, has always existed by an eternal succession. Of the individuals who compose this succession, not one is self-existent, but each is derived from his immediate predecessors. The present generation has sprung from that which preceded it, and that generation from another, and so on as far as the series can be traced. Here then is a succession, every part of which had a beginning. To tell us that it is eternal, is to substitute a mere assertion for proof, and to hurry us on to the conclusion, without giving us time to inquire whether it is possible that such a succession could be eternal. We ask, how could a succession be eternal, although all its parts had a beginning? How could all the parts have a beginning, and yet the whole be without beginning? How could the individuals be dependent in respect of their being, having each derived it from his parents, and yet the race be self-existent? I am unable to conceive a more express contradiction, than to assert that all the parts had a beginning, but that the whole had no beginning; that the parts are finite, but that the whole is infinite. When we see a chain extended, we perceive the limits of each link, and conclude that, if we had time and opportunity, we could trace it to the first link. It would never enter into our minds that the chain was stretched out *in infinitum*. The human race is a chain; individual men are the links; and we conclude as naturally and rationally in this as in the former case, that there is a first link on which the rest are dependent. No, says the atheist, the chain has no beginning; there never was a first man, the human race is eternal. In other words, he tells us that there is a chain which has only one end. Were any person to say so of a real chain, he would be supposed to have lost his senses; but when some men affirm that the human race had no beginning, they would have us believe that they are wiser than all the world besides, and assume the name of philosophers. Common sense revolts at this assertion, and every good man will rejoice to find that impiety is compelled to take refuge in palpable absurdity. We may apply this reasoning to the other parts of the universe. The various races of animals and vegetables; the diurnal motion of the earth; the revolutions of the heavenly bodies; and in a word all things, the duration of which is measured by hours, and days, and years, must have had a beginning.

Some disprove the eternity of the universe in the following manner:—If it has subsisted from eternity, it must have subsisted as it is; there being, on the hypothesis of atheists, no cause to produce a change, and a change being inconsistent with the idea of necessary existence. Hence we see, by the way, that matter cannot be that being which has existed from eternity. If it existed from eternity, it exists by necessity of nature. But it is an express contradiction to suppose that which exists necessarily, not to exist; and yet we are all sensible that there is no contradiction in supposing the non-existence

of matter, for we can all conceive it to be annihilated. It is a contradiction to suppose that which exists necessarily, to exist in any other state or form. But we can conceive matter to be in motion or at rest; and finding some parts of it in the one state, and some in the other, we conclude that its existence is not necessary, but contingent. We can conceive it to be differently modified; that it might have wanted some of its properties, and possessed others which do not belong to it; that the frame of the universe might have been different; and that in our system there might have been more or fewer planets, and these might have been attended with more or fewer satellites. But if the universe is self-existent, it must have always been as it now is. The sun must have always been the centre of this system, and the planets must have always described their orbits around him. There must have been eternal revolutions of Saturn and the Georgium Sidus, and eternal revolutions of the Earth and Mercury. Now, as these revolutions are performed in different times, and, on the supposition of their eternity, are all infinite in number, it follows that we have infinities which as infinities must be equal, but being made up of revolutions performed in unequal times, are unequal. But this is impossible, and the hypothesis from which it is deduced is absurd. It has been objected, that according to the doctrine of the infinite divisibility of matter, there may be one infinite greater than another, as the parts of matter differ in size. But the infinite divisibility of matter is a mere figment of the imagination; and, besides, only implies that our minds can affix no limit to the division, while here the division is actually made; revolutions have been described in periods longer and shorter, and yet they are equal in number, for they are all infinite.

From the whole of the preceding reasoning, we are authorized to draw these conclusions; that something has existed from eternity; that that eternal Being is not matter or the universe; and, therefore, that there is a God, undervived and independent, the Author of every thing which exists.

III. The next argument is founded on the proofs of design in the universe, according to the obvious dictate of reason, that where design appears, there must be a designer. An argument is frequently drawn from the creation of the universe; and certainly if it can be shewn that the heavens and the earth had a beginning, it follows that there is a Being of almighty power who called them out of nothing, because it is manifest that they could not give existence to themselves. Some remarks have been already made, in order to shew that matter could not be eternal; and we have thus anticipated a part of what might be said upon this head. Few, or perhaps none, of the heathen philosophers believed the creation of matter; but, in general, they admitted that it was arranged by divine agency, and consequently, that the present system had a beginning. A traditionary account of its origin seems to have prevailed among all nations; and the antiquity of the account is manifest from the writings of Moses, which, without assuming their inspiration, ought to be considered as a record of the opinion entertained upon this subject in his age, which preceded that of authentic profane history by a thousand years. The recent introduction of arts, which in many instances can be traced to their inventors; the late origin of nations; the total want of any credible accounts reaching farther back than about six thousand years; the imperfect occupation of the earth, which must long since have been fully peopled if it had existed from eternity; all these undeniable facts concur to prove, that it is not long since our globe and its inhabitants were brought into being, and consequently, that there is a great First Cause, by whose will and power they were produced.

Not to dwell upon this argument, I would call your attention to the evidences of intelligence in the works of nature, from which we are authorized to infer the existence of an intelligent cause. If any man should deny that there are marks of design, I could not answer him better than in the words of Ci-

cero: "If those things which are formed by nature are better than those which are executed by art, and art effects nothing without reason, certainly nature is not to be accounted destitute of reason. How is it consistent, when you have looked at a statue or a painting, to acknowledge that art has been employed; when you have seen the course of a ship, not to doubt that it is guided by reason; when you contemplate a sun-dial, to be convinced that the hours are pointed out, not by chance, but by skill; and at the same time to be of opinion that the world, which comprehends those arts, and the artists, and all things, is without reason and counsel? If any person should carry into Scythia or Britain the sphere lately constructed by our friend Posidonius, the movements of which produce the same changes with respect to the sun, and the moon, and the five planets, which take place every day and night in the heavens, who in these barbarous countries could doubt that that sphere was constructed by reason? But these," namely, certain philosophers to whom he refers, "doubt concerning the world, whether it was made by chance, or by necessity, or by the divine reason and mind; and think that Archimedes had more concern in imitating the motions of the sphere than nature in effecting them."* Such are the reflections of that eloquent orator, and they command the approbation of every reflecting mind. If we lighted upon a book containing a well-digested narrative of facts, or a train of accurate reasoning, we should never think of calling it a work of chance, but would immediately pronounce it to be the production of a cultivated mind. If we saw in a wilderness a building well proportioned, commodiously arranged, and furnished with taste, we should conclude without hesitation, and without the slightest suspicion of mistake, that human intellect and human labour had been employed in planning and erecting it. In cases of this kind, an atheist would reason precisely as other men do. Why then does he not draw the same inference from the proofs of design which are discovered in the works of creation? While the premises are the same, why is the conclusion different? Upon what pretext of reason does he deny that a work, in all the parts of which wisdom appears, is the production of an intelligent author? and attribute the universe to chance, to nature, to necessity, to any thing, although it should be a word without meaning, rather than to God?

It is impossible to survey the objects around us with any degree of attention, and not perceive marks of design, ends aimed at, and means employed to accomplish those ends. We need to go no farther in quest of evidence than our own frame, which appears the more admirable the more carefully it is examined, and the more intimately it is known. No person who considers the use of the eye, and is acquainted with its internal structure, so skilfully adapted to the transmission and refraction of the rays of light, can any more doubt that it was intended for the purpose of vision, than he can doubt, when he understands the construction of a telescope, that it is intended to enable us to see objects at a distance. No man can doubt, when he examines the external form and internal configuration of the ear, that it is an instrument expressly provided for the conveyance of sound; or that the lungs were made for respiration; the stomach for the reception and concoction of our food; and the wonderful system of vessels known by the names of arteries and veins, for carrying the blood from the heart to every part of the body, and then returning it to its source; in one respect resembling the pipes by which water in the fountain or reservoir, is distributed through all the streets and lanes of a city. No man can doubt that the design of glands is to secrete; of nerves, to propagate feeling and motion; of the teeth, so differently formed, to cut and masticate; of legs, to support the body, and move it from place to place; of arms and hands divided into fingers, to perform the various operations which are ne-

* De Nat. Deor. lib. ii. § 34.

cessary to our subsistence and comfort. These instances are quite sufficient to satisfy any reasonable inquirer.

Marks of design are equally apparent in the bodies of the inferior animals, which in their general structure bear a striking analogy to our own. When a difference is found, the proofs of wisdom multiply upon us, for it manifestly proceeds from an intention to accommodate the animal, or to adapt it to its peculiar circumstances. It is comprehensive wisdom; wisdom which can command not only one system of means, but a variety of expedients, to meet the diversity of cases which were necessary to the replenishing of the different parts of nature with inhabitants. For example, if one animal lives upon herbs, another upon seeds, and a third upon the flesh of other animals, we find that while they are in common furnished with a stomach, this member is differently constructed in each, so as to receive and digest its peculiar food. We observe again, that whether animals move upon the surface of the earth, or fly in the air, or swim in the waters, their external form and internal organization are admirably accommodated to their mode of life, and to the place of their habitation. This variety amidst uniformity is an evidence upon which we may confidently depend, that what appears to be design is not the effect of chance, or of a blind necessity which would always produce the same results, but of an intelligent mind, wonderful in counsel and excellent in working; of a Being fertile in contrivances, and in every instance choosing the best.

The doctrine of final causes cannot be admitted, without at the same time acknowledging a First Cause, possessed of knowledge and wisdom. Atheists have therefore exerted themselves to obscure its evidence, and to bring it into disrepute; but their attempts in this way have reflected no honour upon their understandings and their hearts. "Our bodily organs," says Lucretius, "were not formed that we might use them, but their prior formation suggested the use. Sight was not before the eyes were made, nor hearing before the ears; but the ears existed long before any sound was heard, and all our members before their office was discovered."* In short, according to this philosopher, for such he is called, eyes were not intended to see, nor tongues to speak, nor legs to move; but somehow they belonged to the body, and men ingeniously contrived to turn them to good account. There was no prospective contrivance in any of our organs and members; they were formed by chance; but luckily, it happened that they might be made to serve the various purposes of our being, and as luckily, men made the discovery, and wisely resolved to take the advantage of them. How long it was before this discovery was made, and if some time elapsed, how men contrived in the meantime to live without speech, and hearing, and sight, and motion, this hierophant of atheism has not condescended to inform us. It would be a waste of time to refute downright nonsense. You would laugh at a man who should tell you, that a telescope was not constructed with a design to view distant objects, but that after it was made, it was discovered that it would serve this purpose, and was therefore applied to it; and you may laugh at Lucretius, or any other fool, who affirms that sight is not the original design, but an accidental use of the eye.

The theories of modern atheists are not more wise, or more worthy of attention. Thus, some account for the production of living creatures, by what they call the principle of generation, that is, by a word; others, by the supposition, which you will observe is only a supposition, that nature is full of living particles, which have a tendency to arrange themselves in organized forms: and others, by what they call appetencies, "or propensities in parts of matter to particular actions, which by continual endeavours, carried on through a long series of generations, work themselves gradually into suitable

* Lucret. de *Rer. Natura*, lib. iv. 832.

forms, and at length acquire an organization fitted to the action which their respective propensities led them to exert."

"We know a cause," says Dr. Paley, "adequate to the appearances which we wish to account for; we have this cause continually producing similar appearances; yet, rejecting this cause, the sufficiency of which we know, and the action of which is constantly before our eyes, we are invited to resort to suppositions, destitute of a single fact for their support, and confirmed by no analogy with which we are acquainted. The 'suppositions' here alluded to, all agree in one character. They all endeavour to dispense with the necessity in nature, of a particular, personal intelligence; that is to say, with the exertion of an intending, contriving mind, in the structure and formation of the organized constitutions which the world contains. They would resolve all productions into *unconscious* energies, of a like kind, in that respect, with attraction, magnetism, electricity, &c. without any thing farther."*

I shall resume this argument in the next lecture.

LECTURE XVII.

ON GOD.

Argument for his Being from the marks of Design in the Universe, continued—Argument from general consent; its just force—Argument from Historical Evidences of a Superintending Providence—Reflections drawn from the Existence of God—Eternity of God: proof of it—Different from the perpetual duration of creatures—Speculations respecting his Eternal Existence—Spirituality of God—Doctrine of Materiality; contrary to Scripture and Reason.

IN the last lecture, I entered upon the argument for the existence of God, from the proofs of design which are discovered in the works of nature, and illustrated it at considerable length. I directed your attention to the evidence presented by our own bodily constitution, and by the organization of other animated beings.

Proofs multiply upon us when we extend our observation to the various parts of the universe, and are not less striking and convincing in inanimate objects. To begin with those which, although organized, cannot be considered as endowed with consciousness and a principle of activity, there is not a tree, or a plant, or an herb, however insignificant it may seem, in which the signatures of divine wisdom may not be perceived. In the structure of vegetables, there is an arrangement, different indeed from what is observable in animals, but affording proofs not less satisfactory, of wise intention directed to the same general end, the subsistence, health and growth of the individual, and the continuation of the species. There are vessels for drawing nourishment from the soil to which they are attached; vessels for conveying the juices to every part; vessels for admitting and expiring the air; vessels for the production of flowers and fruits. Between a vegetable and a stone or a clod, the difference is great, and can be accounted for only by the agency of an intelligent Being. In the latter we see simple existence; but in the former we perceive design.

When we survey the surface of the earth, and observe the disposition of its parts, it is impossible for any person in his senses to suppose that they were huddled together by chance. There are clear indications of a wise and benevolent plan. We see the earth in one place, stretching out into plains, and in another

* Paley's Theology, chap. 23.

er, rising into hills and mountains ; and the reason of this diversity is apparent. The plains would be arid wastes, furnishing no sustenance for man and beast, without the higher parts, which attract the clouds, and imbibing their watery treasures, distribute them to the lower regions in springs and streams which fructify the vallies, and give drink to their inhabitants. The surface of the globe is divided into the sea and the dry land. The dry land affords firm footing to man, and all terrestrial animals, as well as produces the vegetable substances which serve them for food. The sea is an inexhaustible source of vapours which rising in the atmosphere, are there condensed, and descend in mists and rains ; and at the same time, it facilitates the intercourse of nations, and the transportation of the productions of one region to another. Had there been no sea, the earth would have been a desert, the silent abode of desolation and death.

Once more, proofs of design present themselves to us when we look beyond this earth, and contemplate the system to which it belongs. In the centre is placed the sun, and around him the planets, retained in their orbits by an invisible power, perform their unceasing revolutions, while light and heat flow from this inexhaustible fountain to cheer their inhabitants. In particular, with respect to our earth, no rational man can doubt that its double motion is the effect of design, who considers that, by turning round its own axis once in twenty-four hours, the succession of day and night is produced ; and that its annual motion round the sun gives rise to the changes of the seasons.

But of examples of contrivance there is no end. A few are sufficient to satisfy a candid inquirer ; but in proportion as they are multiplied the argument becomes stronger ; because, while it is possible that chance might produce the appearance of design in a solitary instance, although it has never yet formed a watch, a house, or the simplest instrument of labour, it is contrary to the idea of chance, that such appearances should be uniform or frequent. Our argument then is, that where there is design, there must be a designer ; where there is a plan there must be a mind in which it was conceived. The adaptation of means to an end presupposes a being who had the end in view, and perceived the fitness of the means. The universe is full of designs. They are visible in its general frame, and in its particular parts. The refuge of the atheist is to say, that the wisdom is in nature ; but he speaks unintelligibly, and we are sure does not understand himself. Wisdom is an attribute of mind, and must reside in a being distinct from the universe, as the maker of a machine is distinct from the machine itself. That Being is God, "wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working."

IV. An argument for the existence of God is founded on the general consent of mankind. It has been believed in all ages and nations, and is therefore consonant to the natural unbiassed dictates of the mind.

The fact of a general consent is, in the first place, to be proved ; and for this purpose, we appeal to the history of the human race, of which religion makes a prominent part. It is objected, that some nations have been found without religion, or any idea of a God ; but we have two answers to return. In the first place, the allegation has been made upon insufficient grounds in some cases at least, upon a superficial acquaintance with certain tribes, by persons ignorant of their language, and who had no proper opportunity to investigate their customs and opinions ; and a more intimate knowledge of them has demonstrated that the account was a hasty and unjust assumption. But suppose that there were some tribes who had no notion of religion, the strength of the argument would be little impaired ; because we do not affirm that men have an innate idea of God, but that the idea presents itself, with the evidence of truth, to those who are capable of thinking as rational beings ; and if in the persons supposed, reason has not been exercised, if it is almost in a dormant state, and they in fact differ little from brutes, it is no more wonderful that they have not discovered this truth, than it is that a blind man does not see. But it

may be said, that the existence of God has been denied by men, who had cultivated reason, and were dignified with the name of philosophers. It is not certain, however, that they really disbelieved it, although the love of singularity might lead them to say so; but if they really did disbelieve, we know that prejudice and sophistry sometimes pervert minds, which deem themselves completely free from their influence, and that there is no truth, not even the evidence of the senses, which some person or other, calling himself a philosopher, has not controverted. At any rate, they are but a few against many, a minority not to be considered, when opposed to the innumerable millions who have maintained the contrary doctrine. "Let it be supposed," says Bishop Wilkins, "that some men have declared a disbelief of the divine nature in general; yet as there have always been some monsters among men, in respect of their bodies, so may there be likewise in respect of their minds; and this is no prejudice to the standing laws of nature."*

It may be objected farther, that mankind have not agreed in the belief of one God, but of a multiplicity of Gods, and that, with the exception of the Jews, polytheism was the system of all nations in ancient times, as it still is, where neither Christianity nor Mahometanism has been introduced. But even among such nations, the general principle was admitted, that there is a nature superior to man, by which the universe was arranged in its present form, and its affairs are still administered: besides, it should be remarked, that although the doctrine of the unity was much obscured, yet it was not altogether obliterated; for even the grossest idolaters retained the notion of a supreme deity, called *Zeus* and Jupiter, by the Greeks and Romans, and described by the latter, as *hominum Sator atque Deorum*. Some of their philosophers approached still nearer to the truth, and conceived him to be exalted far above the gods of vulgar adoration, and as requiring to be worshipped, not by images and sacrifices, but by devout meditation and virtuous conduct.

The atheists of the school of Epicurus, accounted for this general belief by the principle of fear. *Primus in orbe deos fecit timor*. But this seems to be reasoning quite worthy of the system which it is brought to support. It puts the effect before the cause. Other men would have supposed that fear proceeded from the previous belief of a power or powers superior to mortals, which were able to injure them. Every other affection is excited by a suitable object; but in the present case, men by some inexplicable impression began to be afraid of something, they knew not what; and thinking this very unreasonable, as it undoubtedly was, set about finding out an adequate cause of their fear, and luckily lighted upon the idea of Gods, terrible beings whom it was hazardous to offend. We need say nothing more about this theory, however ingenious it might appear to its inventors.

Another attempt was made to account for this general belief, by ascribing it to the artifice of statesmen, who contrived in this manner to give greater authority to their laws, and to retain men in subjection by the sanctions of religion. But an assertion without proof, we are at liberty to deny. By what historical facts is it supported? Who was the first legislator, who propagated the story of the existence of the Gods? And how did he succeed in persuading a whole people to give credit to a dogma, of which they had no evidence but his affirmation, and had never heard a whisper before? If one legislator was the inventor of it, how did it come to spread rapidly over the whole earth? Or did all the princes and statesmen of the world assemble in congress, and having agreed upon this expedient for maintaining their authority, return to their respective countries to put it in practice? Was there in ancient times a holy alliance? And how did it happen that they became the dupes of their own stratagem, and believed in the Gods as firmly as their subjects?

* Principles and Duties of Natural Religion, Book i. chap. 4.

With a few exceptions, the belief of a superior Being, obscured indeed by polytheistic notions, has prevailed among mankind. We do not appeal to this fact, as if the existence of God were to be decided by the number of suffrages, or rested upon the feeble basis of opinion. We would not represent it as conclusive in itself, independently of other proofs; nor is it the strongest argument in favour of the doctrine, but can be viewed only in the light of a subsidiary one. The amount of it is this, that there is something in the constitution of the human mind, which leads to this belief; or that it is the result of the due exercise of the rational powers, with which man is endowed. When we find men in distant countries, who had no intercourse with one another, born in distant ages, and differing widely in language, and manners, and modes of thinking, united in believing that there exists a great Being, who is the Maker or the Ruler of the world, what can we infer, but that the proofs of his existence are exhibited throughout all nature, and are so conspicuous as to be seen by every eye? The consent of nations corroborates the argument, which we have drawn from the marks of design in the works of creation; as it shews that the inference deduced from them is not a local prejudice, but a legitimate conclusion from the premises. "What nation is there," says Cicero, "or race of men, which does not entertain some notion of the Gods prior to instruction?—When, therefore, this opinion is not established by instruction, or custom, or law, and all without exception firmly assent to it; it is necessary to understand that there are Gods, since we have implanted or rather innate knowledge of them. It is necessary that that, in which all naturally agree, should be true."*

V. The existence of God may be inferred from a variety of facts in the history of human affairs. Every argument which proves a superintending Providence, proves that there is an intelligent and active Being by whom the universe is governed. When we appeal to the order and regularity which prevail, and to the beneficial results of the operations which are incessantly going on around us, the atheist tells us that these are the laws of nature. But what is nature? is it something, or nothing; a being distinct from the universe, or the universe itself? If nature means the universe, he has given us no information. We inquired how there is such order in the universe, and how such beneficial effects are produced; and he deems it sufficient to say, that such is the constitution of things. Such an answer we might receive from an ignorant man, whom we had interrogated respecting something which he did not understand. He would say, I do not know, but so it is. But surely we should never think of calling this man a philosopher. With the exception of professed atheists, all men have acknowledged a Providence; and events occur of such a character, as to lead the mind away from the mere succession of natural causes and effects, to the interposition of an almighty and intelligent Agent. When we see an undoubted instance of retributive justice—and such instances are not rare even under this mixed dispensation—we unavoidably think of an invisible Judge; and when we observe tokens of wisdom more than human, directing and controlling, and over-ruling events to its own ends, we have recourse to Him who works all things according to the counsel of his will. The atheist may talk of such events in the jargon of his system, but he cannot fully satisfy his own mind, and still less the minds of others. Hence it sometimes happens that, bold when there is no danger, but a coward when calamity and death seem to be near, he is dismayed at the tokens of a present Deity, and with a voice of terror, implores the mercy of the Being whom he lately scorned as a phantom.

Under this argument supernatural facts have been adduced as proofs of the existence of God. By these, we mean facts which cannot be accounted for

* Cic. de Nat. Deorum, Lib. i. § 17.

by the known laws of nature. There may be facts of an extraordinary kind which cannot be called miraculous, because, although they show a deviation from the ordinary course, they do not imply a suspension of the laws, or the interposition of a power superior to them. They are the result of natural causes unusually combined; and in this way, we explain the production of monsters, and strange phenomena, which excite wonder. But if it can be proved, that on any occasion, a law of nature has been suspended or reversed, it is a legitimate inference that there exists somewhere a power by which nature is controlled. I allude to two kinds of facts as indicating the agency of a Being greater than nature and its laws, namely, miracles and prophecy; and in appealing to these, I tread in the steps of the most illustrious philosophers of antiquity, who considered omens, prodigies, and oracles, as proofs of the existence and providence of the gods. It would be preposterous at present to quote Scripture as authoritative, because we must first be assured that there is a God, before we can know that any book contains a revelation of his will. I refer to the sacred writings only as records, the genuineness of which has been fully established, and from which we learn that works, which may be strictly called miraculous, have been performed; and that predictions were delivered many ages ago, which have been subsequently fulfilled with the utmost exactness. If a miracle is an event which could not be brought to pass by any law of nature, it cannot be denied, that to give sight to a man born blind, to restore an arm or a leg which was wanting, and to still a storm by a simple command, were miracles: and what conclusion could those who witnessed them draw, or what conclusion can be drawn by those who are assured of them by competent testimony, but that there is a Being who sways the sceptre over the universe, and is possessed of power sufficient to the production of any effect? The same conclusion follows from prophecy, which, supposing knowledge in the prophet that does not belong to man, must have proceeded from an intelligent Being, to whom the future is as manifest as the present, and who possesses such dominion over physical and moral causes, over the material system, and the thoughts and volitions of men, as to accomplish with unerring certainty whatever he had foretold. That Being is God.

Such are the arguments by which we demonstrate this fundamental doctrine of religion. Some of them are conclusive by themselves; and when taken together, they compose a mass of evidence which must give complete satisfaction to every person who fairly considers them, and which nothing can resist but prejudice and obstinate incredulity.

Before I proceed further, I shall lay before you two or three reflections upon the truth which we have established.

First, the doctrine of the existence of God diffuses light and order over the whole system of creation. The atheist can account for nothing; his creed is embarrassed with inextricable difficulties. He ascribes eternity to beings who must have had a beginning; he speaks of contrivances which had no contriver; he sees many bodies in motion which observe a constant and regular course, but denies that there is a first mover. To him the universe is a riddle, and a mystery. A Deity explains the phenomena of nature. As soon as he is recognized, we have power which could call the things which are out of nothing; wisdom capable of arranging and governing them; and goodness, the source of the beauty which charms our eyes, and of the happiness which is felt through all the ranks of animated beings. I cannot conceive an atheist to experience any pleasure from the contemplation of objects in which he perceives no marks of intelligence and benevolence, nothing on which an enlightened and feeling mind would delight to dwell. But, to the religious man, nature is a mirror which reflects the glory of its Maker. It is animated by his presence; it brightens under his smile, it speaks of him to all nations, and proclaims him to be wise and good.

Secondly, the doctrine which we have established by so many arguments shews us at the head of nature, a Being, the contemplation of whom is calculated to rouse the noblest energies of our souls, the best affections of the heart. The atheist sees no being in the universe better than himself, and hence selfishness becomes the distinguishing feature in his character. He lives to himself, and regards his own interests as of paramount importance; and nothing but the dread of reaction and retribution, restrains him from making inroads upon the happiness of others. To the moral discipline of the mind; to acts of self-denial and disinterested beneficence; to the abhorrence of crime for its own sake; to the maintenance of purity and innocence, even when there is no danger of detection, and no fear of any painful result; there is no motive in the system of the atheist. But the idea of a God holds out to view an assemblage of perfections which command our reverence and our love, and create the desire of approximating, in some faint degree, to the standard of excellence. From this idea flow all the sentiments and emotions of piety, and the various exercises of virtue, in the mortification of unhallowed appetite, the patient endurance of evil, and the practice of justice and charity. Religion is the parent of every good quality in man; the glory of his nature consists in the impress which it bears of the image of his Maker.

Lastly, this doctrine is replete with consolation amidst the vicissitudes and troubles of life. In the hour of extremity, the atheist has no resource but reluctant and sullen submission to necessity. He has nothing to reconcile him to the evils of life, which come, he knows not how, and rob him of a portion of his happiness without any compensation. His ultimate prospect is annihilation or unconsciousness, when the bubble of existence shall burst, and mingle with the elements. He lives like a beast, and like a beast he shall die. Amidst the distresses of the present scene, religion points to God, the Father of our spirits, the friend and guardian of the righteous, from whose omnipotent love there is every thing to hope. It teaches us to resign ourselves to his merciful disposal; to be thankful even for afflictions, because they are instruments of good; and to trust, in the most forlorn circumstances, amidst the decays and failure of our bodily constitution, that he will bestow upon us, in another state of being, the happiness which it has seemed meet to his wisdom to deny us in this world.

This great and glorious Being, whose existence we have proved by a variety of arguments, is ETERNAL. According to our conceptions, eternity is distinguished into anterior and posterior; or, in the language of the schools, into eternity *a parte ante*, and eternity *a parte post*; that is, we conceive of it as a duration preceding the present moment, which had no beginning, and a duration following, which will have no end. We have already seen, that since something exists now, something has existed from eternity; that that something is not matter, or the universe, but a living, intelligent Being, a designing Cause, the Author of the manifold contrivances which we observe in the creation. There was a time when he existed alone, and there never was a time when he did not exist. This existence is not contingent, but necessary. He exists in and of himself; and to suppose any anterior reason of his existence, would be to strip him at once of eternity and independence; and would prove that we had erred in conceiving him to be God, and that the name ought to be transferred to the prior cause. It is evident, that what exists by necessity of nature, must have always existed. The idea of the Epicureans, that the Gods were formed by the same chance, to which they attributed the formation of all other things, was absurd; and their sole design in allowing their existence, was to avoid the charge of atheism, by a seeming acknowledgment of the popular system. The ancients justly remarked, that they granted it in name, but denied it in fact.

As God has existed from eternity, so he will exist to eternity; to use the language of inspiration, "his years shall not fail." No conceivable reason can be assigned, why he should cease to be. There is no superior Being upon whom he is dependent for existence, and who might revoke his gift; and in his nature there is no principle of decay. From the one or the other of these causes, every other being might be annihilated or reduced to a state of unconsciousness; but the Creator is manifestly not exposed to their influence. "A principle," says Plato, "has no origin, for all things arose from a principle, but the first principle arises from nothing, neither were it a first principle, if it were originated by some other. And if it has no beginning, it can have no end." The eternity of God has been proved from his immensity in the following manner. "The mode of existence," says Gale, "always follows the mode of essence, because existence, according to the confession of the schools, adds nothing to essence but actuality; neither is it indeed really distinct from essence. Now duration is nothing else but continued existence; whence it necessarily follows, that if God's essence be infinite, his existence and duration must be also infinite."* But as we have not yet demonstrated the infinitude of the Divine Essence, we shall not deduce an argument from it in proof of its eternity. We think, that its eternity is manifest from its necessary existence; for hence, it is equally evident that it shall never cease to be, as it is that it never began to be. Necessity operates alike at all times. It is a permanent reason; it is the same now as it formerly was; and it will be the same hereafter as it is now. Contingent beings exist at one time, and may not exist at another, because there is nothing in their own nature which secures their continuance; but a necessary Being is immutable in duration. What he at present is, he always will be.

From what has been said, we perceive an important difference between the eternity of God and that which may be predicated of some of his creatures as angels and human spirits. Both are destined to exist for ever, but they are not necessarily immortal, and there is no contradiction in supposing them to be annihilated; nor is their existence without beginning, as it will be without end. There was a time when they were not; and all that can be said of them is, that having begun, they shall never cease, to exist. Their life is an interminable series; it will flow on without intermission, and never approach nearer to a close. It is an infinite duration, not absolutely, but as it is incommensurate, admits of no limits, and will be perpetually progressive. The eternity of God comprehends the past as well as the future, and is thus expressed by an inspired writer: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God."† And hence we may see why, although angels and the souls of men shall subsist for ever, it is said of God, that "he only hath immortality."‡ To him exclusively belongs the attribute of absolute, underived, independent, and necessary eternity. The creatures to whom we have referred, shall never die, but their continuance in life is the result of the will of their Creator; and besides, to speak in our imperfect manner of so mysterious a subject, it is only half an eternity which is allotted to them as their portion, the half which is to come, while eternal ages had revolved before they were called out of nothing. But there is still a more important difference between the eternity of God, and that of creatures. Theirs is not wholly possessed at once; it is enjoyed in detail, and consists in a perpetual succession of moments. It unites stability and change; stability, as their existence is infallibly secured, and change, as it is a constant transition from one part of duration to another. But the eternity of God has been defined to be the interminable possession of life, complete, perfect, and at once. *Æternitas est interminabilis vitæ tota simul et perfecta*

* Court of the Gentiles, part iv. B. ii. c. 1. § 3.

† Ps. xc. 2.

‡ 1 Tim. vi. 16.

possessio. The import of this definition is, that the divine existence is not like that of creatures, successive; but comprehends what we call the past, the present and the future. These are divisions of time; but the first and the last have no place in the duration of the Supreme Being, to whom nothing is past, and nothing is future. The Schoolmen call it *punctum stans*, or *nunc semper stans*, and a celebrated poet has thus expressed it:

Nothing there is to come, and nothing past,
But an eternal now does always last.*

These have been pronounced to be words which have no meaning; but with the same critic we must acknowledge, "that as some being must necessarily have existed from eternity, so this being does exist after an incomprehensible manner, since it is impossible for a being to have existed from eternity after our manner or notions of existence. Revelation confirms these natural dictates of reason in the accounts which it gives us of the divine existence, where it tells us, that he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; that he is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending; that a thousand years are with him as one day, and one day as a thousand years: by which and the like expressions, we are taught, that his existence with relation to time or duration, is infinitely different from the existence of any of his creatures, and consequently that it is impossible for us to frame any adequate conceptions of it."†

Whatever objections may be made to an eternal now, and a *punctum stans*, as abortive attempts to express the mode of the divine existence, the truth which they are intended to signify, however confounding to our apprehensions, namely, an eternal existence without succession, may be established by this argument; that a past infinite succession is impossible, as we showed in the preceding lecture, when proving that creatures could not have existed from eternity. We can conceive a future infinite succession, or a line continually extending; but we cannot conceive a past infinite succession, or a line which had not a beginning. Hence, whatever difficulty we may experience in annexing an idea to our words, we must pronounce the eternity of God to be stationary, and not like ours, in motion. It may be objected, that in Scripture, his eternity is described by differences of time, and in particular that he is represented as one, "who was, and is, and is to come."‡ But it may be answered, that these are only adaptations of the subject to our modes of thinking, of which we have other examples in the attribution of corporeal members and human affections to the Deity. We have no word which properly expresses the stable nature of his eternity, and are under the necessity of applying to it words in common use, founded on the divisions of time. "In eternity," it has been said, "there is no divisibility, no majority or minority, no priority or posteriority, no accession, recession, or succession; no difference of time, but one indivisible, simple, and permanent instant." Passages have been quoted from Heathen Philosophers, which prove that this idea did not originate among Theologians, but was entertained long before the Christian era. I shall mention only the saying of Plato, "that the parts of time, *it was*, and *it is*, agree not to eternity, because these imply motion and succession; but eternity is always immutably the same."

A subject so far above our comprehension may be easily perplexed by objections. It has been said, that if there is no succession in the eternity of God, all succession among creatures is impossible; what is past must be present, as well as what is to come. It has been replied, "that in the co-existence of God with creatures, there is priority and posteriority, not in God, but in temporary beings. The co-existence of things with God is successive, according to the necessity of the things, and so the co-existence of God with the

* Cowley.

† Spectator, No. 590.

‡ Rev. iv. 8.

creatures admits of some kind of succession as to external denomination; not as if there were any new existence of God with the creatures, but only by reason of the new existence of the creatures with God." I know not whether this answer is satisfactory; but we may be equally puzzled with respect to the immensity of God, and it may be asked, how can he be present in different places without being extended? as well as, how can he co-exist with creatures, without a successive duration? It is no reason for rejecting a doctrine established upon solid grounds, that there are objections to it, which we cannot answer. It is acknowledged on all hands, that the divine existence is mysterious; and I think, it has been proved from the nature of time, that this cannot be the measure of it. In a Being who had no beginning, succession is impossible.

Having found that there is a Being self-existent and eternal, we are naturally desirous to obtain some more intimate knowledge of him, and in the first place, to ascertain what is his nature. Of the essences of all beings, we are profoundly ignorant: we are acquainted only with their properties; but these we arrange in different classes, and call that to which the one class belongs, matter, and that to which the other belongs, spirit. Both *substrata*, or subjects, are equally concealed from us by an impenetrable veil. The objection against the existence of spirit, that we can form no conception of it, holds in full force against the existence of matter, for we have no idea of it distinct from its qualities.

As it has already appeared, that matter is not eternal and self-existent, it has been virtually proved, that God is not a material being. If he were material, he could not be immense, for it is not more absurd to speak of an infinite duration which is past, than of an infinite extension, that is, of an infinite whole made up of finite parts. It is certain that matter must have limits, however difficult it may be to imagination to fix them. Besides, according to the acknowledged doctrine of the impenetrability of matter, or that two bodies cannot occupy the same portion of space, were the Deity material, he would be necessarily excluded from every place which is filled up by the visible creation. Were God material, he would be divisible; for divisibility is an essential property of matter. His substance might be separated, and would be actually separated by other corporeal beings; who, occupying certain portions of space would not only exclude him from them, but would interpose between one part of his essence and another, as the continuity of a stream is destroyed by the rocks which rise above its surface. He would also be subject to change from every interposition of this kind; would now be expelled from one place, and then fill up another, as different bodies advanced or retired; in short, as mutability is essential to matter, although there were no cause of mutation in himself, he would be continually exposed to impressions from external objects. I will not add, however, that if he were a material being, he would be visible; because this is not a necessary consequence; there being much matter which is not perceived by the eye, as the atmospheric gases, the magnetic fluid, and electric matter not in a state of ignition.

It will not be deemed superfluous to prove, that God is not a material being, if you reflect, that erroneous ideas upon this subject have been entertained, not only by heathens, but by professed Christians. Some of the Fathers appear to have thought, that God had a bodily shape. The same was the opinion of the Anthropomorphites, who believed, as their name imports, that when man is said to have been created in the image of God, there is a reference to his body as well as his soul. Among the older Socinians also, the same gross apprehension prevailed; and some of them maintained, that God was confined to heaven, and might be seen there with our bodily eyes.

The passages of Scripture, which are supposed to favour this impious

opinion, have been misunderstood. The image of God in which man was created, is expressive of a moral resemblance to his Maker, and is elsewhere said to consist in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Appearances of the Deity, in ancient times, were intended solely to affect the mind through the medium of the senses, and not at all to suggest the idea, that he was in himself such a being as was perceived by the eye. We have no reason to suppose, that any of the persons who were favoured with such appearances, fell into this mistake. The ascription of bodily members to the Most High, can be easily accounted for. It is simply an accommodation to our modes of thinking, and is designed to teach us, that there exist in the divine nature, qualities corresponding to those in men, which are exerted by means of corporeal organs. Eyes and ears are expressive of his knowledge, and hands of the power by which he performs his mighty works. We may add to these considerations, that in other places of scripture, such descriptions are given of the transcendent greatness of Jehovah, as are utterly irreconcilable with the notion of corporeal and limited existence. He who measures the waters in the hollow of his hand, and metes out the heavens with a span, and comprehends the dust of the earth in a measure, may justly ask, "To whom will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?"

The conclusion to which we are led by the preceding reasoning, is, that God is a Spirit. We cannot tell what a spirit is, but we know, that it is not compounded, that it is not divisible, that it is not the object of sight or of touch. There are other properties of spirit, which strengthen our argument, because we have undoubted evidence, that they belong to the divine essence, but cannot be predicated of matter.

First, he is a living being, as we infer from the fact, that there is life in the universe, which is replenished with various orders of animated creatures; and it is a dictate of reason, that there cannot be more in the effect, than there is in the cause. Now, life is the peculiar attribute of spirit. Matter is dead. If our bodies are said to be alive, it is solely because they are connected with another substance by which they are actuated; and hence, as soon as the union is dissolved, they are reduced to the same state of insensibility with the earth in which they are deposited. God is called in Scripture "the living God," and "Jehovah," which is his incommunicable name, and imports that he possesses all life in himself, underived, independent, and immutable. He is the fountain of life; and all that feel and think, all that exert the various energies of body and mind, live, and move, and have their being in him.

Secondly, he is an intelligent being, as we collect from the appearances of design in his works. But knowledge is an attribute of spirit or mind. There is nothing in the properties of matter which is allied to thought and feeling. Divide or combine it as you will; take it in its state of greatest refinement, pure as a ray of light, and subtle as an impalpable and invisible gas; it makes no nearer approximation to thought than in its rudest and most unshapely form. Even when organized, it is still unconscious; and merely serves as the instrument of sensation to the principle with which it is united. It is not the eye which sees, or the ear which hears, but the soul. Matter being incapable of intelligence, all the proofs of wisdom in the universe, are at the same time proofs, that the divine essence is spiritual. God is a being possessed of understanding. He certainly knows every thing in the system which he made and governs; and we may presume, also knows every thing possible, every thing which his power could effect.

Thirdly, he is an active being. He is the first cause of all things which exist, the prime mover of this great machine. We are conscious of the activity of our own spirits, which are employed without interval when we are awake, and are often equally busy in sleep. Matter is essentially inactive. It moves

only by impulse: and as it cannot begin, so it is incapable of stopping or altering its motion. Power belongs to God, as we know from its effects; and it belongs to him, because he is a Spirit. As he is possessed of intelligence, so he is possessed of will; and its acts are omnipotent. He speaks, and it is done; that is, the effect follows the volition, without delay and without difficulty. His work is perfected in a moment, as it was in the beginning, when he said, "Let there be light, and there was light."

It follows from the spirituality of his essence, that he is the object of mental contemplation. We neither see his shape, nor hear his voice. Wrapt up in the mystery of his nature, he is concealed from the eyes of mortals. He addresses our senses in his works and his word; but in this case, the senses serve only to convey to the mind materials of reflection, from which we rise by a gradual ascent to a conception, imperfect indeed, but not altogether unworthy of the Being of beings; with whom none in heaven or earth can be compared, and whose glory the highest created understanding cannot fully comprehend. He is "the King eternal, immortal, and invisible, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see."

LECTURE XVIII.

ON GOD.

The Unity of God: inferred from the harmony of the Universe; just force of this Argument. Unity inferred from various other Properties in the Divine Nature—Unity opposed to Polytheism and Dualism—Account of Dualism—Unity consistent with a Trinity in the Godhead.

WE have proved that there is a Being distinct from the universe, who has existed from eternity by necessity of nature, and upon whom all other beings depend. We have neither seen his shape, nor heard his voice; he is concealed from all our senses; and it is solely by the deductions of reason from the objects around us, that we arrive at the knowledge of him. The arguments in support of this fundamental truth are conclusive, and produce, in every unprejudiced mind, a conviction not inferior in strength to that which we entertain of our own existence. But our inquiries will not stop here. We must feel a desire to be more fully acquainted with this mysterious Being; to make some partial discovery of his character; to ascertain what he is in himself, and in his relation to us; what are the distinguishing properties of his nature; what homage we owe to him, and what expectations we are authorized to entertain.

In our reasoning in proof of the existence of God, we have proceeded on the assumption that there is only one eternal and self-existent Being; nothing occurred in our progress which could lead us to suspect that there is a plurality. Those who argue from the idea of God, include in it every possible perfection, and consequently unity; for certainly a Being existing alone, without any equal, is more perfect and glorious than he would be if there were other beings independent and possessed of the same excellencies. The argument, that since something now exists something must have always existed, does not require that there should be more than one; for this is its amount, that since the universe could not have started into being by chance, nor have subsisted from eternity, because an infinite past succession is impossible, there must have been a self-existent First Cause, and more than one do not appear to be necessary. In like manner, when we reason from the proofs of design, that

there is a designing Cause, we meet with nothing which suggests the idea of combined operation ; but as we shall presently see, the uniformity which prevails, indicates a single agent throughout the whole system, as far as we are able to trace it. The consent of nations seems at first not to be favourable to the point which we purpose to establish, because polytheistic notions were generally adopted ; but it will appear, that amidst the strange aberrations of the human mind, the idea of unity was more or less explicitly retained. Lastly, the extraordinary events which imply the existence of a Cause different from nature, and superior to it, may be accounted for without referring them to more than one Agent ; or rather, as all such are properly connected with the same dispensation, and aim at the same end, they are all referrible only to one.

These are only introductory hints respecting the important truth which it is my present design to illustrate, namely, the unity of God. It will be necessary to enter into a full view of the arguments by which it is evinced, and at the same time to consider the opinions which are, or are understood to be, opposed to it. The proposition which it will be the business of this lecture to establish, is, that although there are many beings to whom the name of God has been given by idolaters, and some to whom it has been given by higher authority, in a metaphorical sense, yet there is only one Being who is God by nature, self-existent, independent, and infinitely perfect.

The unity of God may be proved, first, from the contemplation of nature, and secondly, by metaphysical arguments.

The first argument is founded on the uniformity of the works of nature, and is level to every capacity. The system of creation, as far as it comes under our observation, is regular and harmonious, and furnishes no ground to suspect that there was more than one agent concerned in it. In order to perceive the truth of this argument, it will be necessary to enter into a detail of particulars.

Let us begin with the human race, which is scattered over the surface of the earth, but in all its modifications is manifestly the production of the same almighty and beneficent Author. We observe some points of difference among the families and tribes into which it is divided, in the features of the face, the colour of the skin, and I believe too, in the configuration of some of the bones. These varieties, however, may be accounted for from the operation of local causes, upon the hypothesis that they are strictly one race, descended from common progenitors ; but laying revelation at present out of the question, and admitting for a moment that they are distinct races, we shall find the argument rather strengthened than weakened ; because the sameness amidst partial diversity, the sameness in every thing essential, while the diversity relates only to minute and trivial circumstances, irresistibly demonstrates that one Being made them all. They have all the same external form, the same instruments of motion and action, the same organs of sense. When we examine their internal structure, it appears that there is the same provision of means for the sustenance of life. Blood is circulated by the same apparatus of veins and arteries ; food is digested by the same process ; and the same secretions are going on in the system. When they are viewed as intellectual beings, they present a considerable diversity, but not such as to infer a different origin. All the differences arise, not as some dreaming speculatists have imagined, from a difference of minds, but from a difference of circumstances ; and, accordingly, we find that every where men possess the powers of perception, observation, comparison, and reasoning, the power of volition, and the affections of love and hatred, fear and hope, joy and sorrow, to which we add, a sense of moral obligation.

When we turn our attention to the other inhabitants of the globe, we observe that in some respects they differ widely from men, as they differ from one another, but still we perceive a general resemblance. Although in shape quadrupeds are unlike us, yet the same component parts are found in their

bodies as in ours. They have the same organs of sense, organs of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling. In their internal organization, there is a surprising conformity. As they have teeth to seize, cut, and masticate their food, so they are furnished with a stomach in which it is lodged and digested, and with vessels for conveying the nutriment to the various parts of the body, by means of the blood with which it is incorporated, and which is circulated in the same manner as in the body of man. When the end is the same, and the contrivance for accomplishing it is the same, we cannot reasonably doubt that the Artificer is the same. Birds which fly in the air are very different from quadrupeds which walk upon the earth, and fishes which swim in water are different from both; but while their respective forms are adapted to the elements in which they are destined to move, they resemble each other in their internal organization, so far as their different kinds of life will permit, in so much that it may be confidently affirmed, that the same intelligence which contrived the quadruped, contrived also the fowl and the fish.

The analogy is not so striking in the case of vegetables; but still there are so many points of resemblance as to justify the introduction of them in the present argument. They do not possess life, as implying sensation and consciousness; but they are said to live, because they are nourished and grow like animals, and like them are subject to disease, the effects of old age, and dissolution. Fixed to the soil, they are provided with the means of drawing nutriment from it and from the surrounding atmosphere, by their roots and leaves. They are also furnished with vessels, corresponding to those in animated beings, for conveying the nourishment received by the roots to the extremities. The juices flow in them as the blood flows in our bodies; and, according to the opinion of some naturalists, circulates like the blood. The leaves serve the same purpose which lungs serve to us, by taking in and giving out air, which is necessary to the health and life of the vegetable. Lastly, all vegetables are endowed, as well as animals, with the power of propagating their kind.

Hitherto we have pursued the argument throughout all living nature. We see one Spirit working in all. When we pass to the consideration of the terraqueous globe, the proofs of the unity of God multiply upon us. Of animated beings, some are fitted to move on a solid surface, others are capable of pursuing their course in the air, while others can live only in water. To provide for this variety, the globe consists of dry land and of sea, and is surrounded by an atmosphere. Thus the habitation is accommodated to the inhabitants, and both have evidently been contrived by one Mind. The argument is precisely the same, if we suppose, as was actually the case, the globe to have been first formed, and then its inhabitants. The adaptation, in either case, suggests the same original, unless we give way to imagination, and absurdly fancy that the globe was created by one Being, and that another, finding it a useless solitude, produced a variety of creatures to fill up its vacant spaces; an idea not more probable, than it would be to say, that one generation of men built houses without any object in view, and another, discovering that they would serve admirably for dwellings, took possession of them, and furnished them.

Throughout its whole extent, our globe exhibits proof of its having been formed by the same almighty hand. Every where the dry land is composed of the same materials, and the sea has the same properties. "New countries," says Dr. Paley, "are continually discovered, but the old laws of nature are always found in them; new plants perhaps, or animals, but always in company with plants or animals which we already know, and always possessing many of the same general properties. We never get amongst such original, or totally different modes of existence, as to indicate that we are come into the province of a different Creator, or under the direction of a different will. In truth, the

same order of things attends us wherever we go. The elements act upon one another; electricity operates, the tides rise and fall, the magnetic needle elects its position in one region of the earth and sea, as well as in another. One atmosphere invests all parts of the globe, and connects all; one sun illuminates; one moon exerts its specific attraction upon all parts."*

But the argument is not confined to this globe, which constitutes a very minute part of the universe. The Being whose existence we have demonstrated, is the Author of nature in its wide extent, and proofs of his unity are furnished by the most distant regions to which our observation extends. We know but little of them; but we discover enough to convince us that they are sustained and governed by the same power which superintends the affairs of the earth. There can be no doubt, that there is one Author of the great system to which our globe belongs, since it is found to be a part of the system, a wheel in the mighty machine; for surely, it will not be supposed that it was introduced by one Being among the works of another. While it performs its annual revolution around the sun, there are other bodies revolving at the same time in their orbits, and for the same purposes, at once to enjoy his light, and to experience a vicissitude of seasons. Now, the same law which retains our earth, retains them in their respective paths, namely, the law of gravitation; and to a reflecting mind, what is gravitation but the power of God? His power then, acts from Mercury to Uranus or the Georgium Sidus; it is one Being who exerts his energy throughout this mighty portion of space. It will strengthen this conclusion to reflect, that some at least of the planets are known to be surrounded with an atmosphere as our globe is; and that the same expedient has been adopted to relieve the tedium of the night, by the provision of satellites or moons which accompany them, and supply light in the absence of the sun. The eye extends beyond our system, immense as it seems, and perceives many brilliant points, which we know to be bodies of great magnitude, that resemble the sun in being sources of light, and probably also of heat. We can hardly do any thing more than form conjectures concerning them. One thing, however, we certainly know, that the light proceeding from them is subject to the same laws with the light flowing from the sun, or from any luminous body on the surface of the earth. It is perceived by our eyes in the same manner, moves with the same velocity, is reflected and refracted like any other rays. Farther our knowledge does not extend; but here we have a proof, that he who made the sun made the stars also. This induction of particulars, we have been told, serves only to establish a unity of design; and, notwithstanding the uniformity of nature, it is possible that it is the work of more agents than one, who perfectly concurred in counsel and operation. It may be that what has been said, does not amount to a strict demonstration; but it cannot be denied, that it amounts to a high degree of probability, and even to moral certainty. It is evidence which fully justifies us in confidently drawing the conclusion, that there is one God. It does not leave the slightest ground for suspecting that there are more than one. The mere possibility that there are more, can have no effect upon the question. The possibility is lighter than a feather in the scale, is a mere nonentity, while it is presented to the mind as only a possibility, without even an attempt to prove its reality. With respect to every contingent fact, there is a possibility that it might have been different; but this possibility does not in any degree weaken our belief of it, when it is fully attested. And why should we be one whit more influenced by the statement, that the uniformity of nature proves only a unity of design? especially when, in every other case, from the unity of design we infer the unity of the Agent or Author. In a composition of great extent, and embracing a variety of topics, if we perceive the same spirit, the same train of sentiment, and the same style, supported

* Paley's Theology, chap. xxv.

from beginning to end, no man would suppose it to be the production of different persons. The critic who should give a hint that after all it might be the work of several individuals, would gain little credit by his conjecture. There is not more wisdom in telling us, that all that can be inferred from the appearances around us, is a unity of design. Sound reason concludes, without hesitation, that as nature is one, so its Author is one.

But this is not the only argument by which the Divine unity is evinced.

First, an argument is drawn from necessary existence. Necessity is simple, uniform, and universal, without any possible difference, deformity, or variety; and all variety or difference of existence must arise from an external cause, be dependent upon, and proportionable to, the efficiency of that cause. Necessity cannot, therefore, be the ground of existence of a number of beings, however similar and agreeing; because without any other difference, even number itself is a manifest deformity or inequality of efficiency or causality. This is the argument of Dr. Clarke, to which he adds, "that to suppose two or more beings existing of themselves, necessarily and independently of each other, implies this plain contradiction, that each of them being independent on the other, they may either of them be supposed to exist alone, so that it will be no contradiction to imagine the other not to exist; and consequently, neither of them will be necessarily existing. Whatsoever, therefore, exists necessarily, is the one simple essence of the self-existent being."*

Again, it is affirmed, that the existence of more gods than one is impossible. Let there be two, it has been said, and let them be called Jupiter and Mars. Neither of them can be acknowledged to be God, unless both be acknowledged to be infinitely perfect. Does then Jupiter possess the same numerical perfections which Mars possesses, or not? If you deny that he does, you do not acknowledge Jupiter to be infinitely perfect, since there are infinite perfections without him, which he cannot claim. It is necessary, if Jupiter is God, that he possess all possible perfections, and consequently those which are in Mars. But how is this possible, unless he be the same Deity with Mars, and consequently there are not two Gods; or unless Jupiter contain in himself, as the cause, the perfections of Mars, and have communicated them to him. But by this supposition, the independence, and therefore the divinity of Mars is destroyed. Hence it appears, that it is not less contradictory to assert, that there are two beings infinitely perfect, than that there are two infinite extensions. But as these could not be without mutually penetrating each other, that is, unless they be in reality one, or neither of them be true extension, so two infinitely perfect beings cannot be conceived, unless the perfections of the one be contained in the other; and consequently, they are in fact, not two, but one, or neither of them is infinitely perfect.

Further, the idea of God is exclusive of participation; it is appropriated to an individual, and does not admit of application to more than one. He is not God, who has any thing above himself, or any thing besides himself, which is not dependent upon him. What do we mean by God, but a Being infinitely perfect, who comprehends in his essence every conceivable excellence, in whom all the attributes of which the human mind has acquired an idea by reflecting upon itself, or by observing other objects, are united and subsist without limit or change? He is not only the First and the Best, but the Greatest of beings, and consequently stands alone in the universe; and when he surveys it from one end to another, can say, "Is there a God besides me? Yea, there is no God; I know not any."† The moment you suppose more than one, you degrade them all, whether few or many, from the rank of divinity. We could conceive a being greater than any of them, a being who had no equal, and was the Supreme Lord of all things in heaven and earth; and to him we should

* Clarke's Discourse concerning the Being of God, p. 47.

† Is. xliv. 8.

transfer our admiration and reverence. Two equal Gods are a chimera; the equality which is intended to preserve their divinity, would destroy it. There may be more kings than one, because royalty only implies, that each is invested in sovereign authority in his own dominions; but there cannot be a plurality of Gods, because from the nature of things, only one can be possessed of all possible perfection.

In the next place, the unity of God may be proved from this consideration, that the supposition of more than one deprives them all of independence, and, consequently, none of them would accord with the idea which we necessarily form of God as the uncontrolled Ruler of the universe. If there were two Gods, they would be possessed of equal power; for the slightest inequality on the part of either of them, would exclude him from the rank of Deity. It would be impossible, therefore, for the one to act without the consent of the other; or if he should proceed to act according to his own will, he would be immediately opposed by power as great as his own. If it be said, that as both would be perfect in wisdom, they would always concur in their views, all that follows is, that there would be no struggle between them; but still it would be owing to this concert, that either of them could act; and therefore, both would be dependent, each upon the will of the other. How different are such beings from the true God, whose will is the supreme law, who takes counsel *only* with his own wisdom, who does not wait for opportunities, but acts when he pleases, and sees all his orders readily and punctually obeyed!

In the last place, the unity of God may be maintained on this ground, that there is nothing to lead us to the supposition of a plurality of Gods. Nature, as we have seen, appears to be the production of one almighty Agent; and for all the effects which we observe, one such Agent was sufficient. It is a principle of science, that "more causes of natural things are not to be admitted, than are both true and sufficient for explaining their phenomena;" and if this rule holds good in the investigations of philosophy, it is of equal authority in Theology. Having ascertained that there exists one Being possessed of infinite perfection, why should we think of another? The existence of another would throw no light upon the system of things, explain no appearance, account for no effect. It would introduce confusion into our thoughts, as we should be unable to tell how the constitution of the universe gave notice of only one, although there were in reality two; and we should be at a loss to know, without special information, to whom we owed our existence, and the tribute of gratitude and obedience. The power of one all-perfect Being was sufficient to create the heavens and the earth; the wisdom of one Being whose understanding is infinite, is sufficient to govern them; the goodness of one Being whose resources are inexhaustible, is sufficient to supply the wants of all animated creatures. One Being possessed of these attributes is sufficient to conduct us in the path of life, to protect us from evil, to excite and realize our most elevated hopes. Another God would be superfluous and useless.

To the doctrine of the divine unity, there are opposed polytheism, dualism, and, in the opinion of some, the doctrine of the Trinity.

First, the divine unity is opposed to the opinion of heathens, ancient and modern, who, with much diversity in their respective systems, have agreed in the belief of a multiplicity of gods. Whether idolatry began before the flood, we have no means of determining from the brief history which Moses has given of the antediluvian world; but we know that it made its appearance not very long after that event, for the family of Abraham were worshippers of strange gods, at the time when he was called to leave his country and his kindred. Of its origin, or the manner in which it arose, we have no particular account. It is one of the singular opinions of Hume, that "polytheism was the primary religion of men. Mankind, in the early ages, were incapable of

such reasoning as would have led them to the belief of one Supreme Being: and when, leaving the works of nature, they traced the footsteps of invisible power in the various and contrary events of human life, they necessarily fell into polytheism, and the acknowledgment of several limited and imperfect Deities.”* His hypothesis is founded, as we might expect, upon a total disregard of the authority of Scripture; and assumes, according to the dream of some philosophers which is fit only to amuse children, that the human race originally existed in a savage state, without reason as well as without revelation; and arrived step by step at the knowledge which they at present possess. On the contrary, we believe that Theism was the primary religion of men, and that the various forms of idolatry which were gradually introduced, were so many corruptions of it. It is probable that, dazzled by the splendour of the heavenly bodies, men began to do homage to them as visible representatives of the Deity, and that from their real or apparent motions, they came to conceive them to be animated, and ascribed divinity to them. This kind of idolatry had commenced in the days of Job. “If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness, and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand, this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above.”† Imagination thus awakened, and freed from the control of reason, was active in peopling every region of the earth with its own shadowy productions. The various operations of nature were no longer understood to be the various operations of one almighty Agent, but to be carried on by a multiplicity of agents, who were distinguished by peculiar attributes, and had different provinces and offices assigned to them. One launched the thunderbolt, and another governed the winds; one ruled the sea, and another the dry land; woods, mountains, springs, rivers, gardens, fields, had all their tutelar gods. Poets, who may be called the theologians of heathenism, enlarged and embellished the system by their elegant fictions. Great additions were made to the catalogue of deities by mistaken admiration and gratitude. Those who had been distinguished by eminent talents, illustrious achievements, and actions honourable and beneficial to their respective countries, were after their death not only celebrated in songs and by festivals, but were elevated to the celestial regions, and invested with authority over the affairs of this lower world. The heaven of the ancient heathens was filled with heroes, legislators, and the inventors of useful arts.

Men not willing to retain God in their knowledge, became vain in their imaginations, and proceeded to worship and serve the creature instead of the Creator. The true God was invisible, and they wished a God whom they could see. Hence they adored the heavenly bodies, the sun, the bright ruler of the day, and the moon, the planets and the stars, whose lustre cheered the darkness of the night. But as these deities were too distant from them in nature and in place, their weakness and wants led to a greater degradation; and gods were devised who more nearly resembled themselves, corporeal gods in human shape, who were nourished with food and drink, occasionally mingled with mortals, and were actuated by the same passions which distinguished the meanest of their worshippers.

It is unnecessary to produce a single argument in refutation of heathen idolatry. It has been banished from every country, where reason has been restored to its proper authority by the aid of revelation; and subsists under various modifications, only among those nations in which gross ignorance prevails.

It is worthy of attention, that amidst the errors of the heathen world, some traces are discovered of the original belief, in the notion which generally obtained of a Supreme Deity. Even by the vulgar, who had sunk into the

* See his Natural History of Religion.

† Job xxxi. 26—28.

grossest idolatry, one Deity was acknowledged to be superior to the other objects of religious respect, and was honoured with the title of the Father of gods and men. Some of the philosophers approached nearer the truth, and conceived an idea of God as infinitely superior to the popular divinities; as a Being incorporeal, invisible, and incomprehensible, possessed of all perfections, and to be adored by devout meditation. Many passages expressive of this sentiment have been collected from their writings by the industry of learned men. Pythagoras called God Monas or Unity, and said, “*αρχὴν μὲν πάντων μονάδα*, that unity is the first principle of all things.” Plato declares that polytheism is contrary to reason, and Plutareh, that there cannot be many gods. To add no more, Maximus Tyrius informs us, “that amidst the war of opinions about many subjects, we may find this one law in all the earth, that God is one, the king and father of all, and that the many gods are his children, who rule with him. These things the Greek says and the barbarian, the inhabitant of the Continent and of the Island, the wise and the unwise.”

Secondly, the divine unity is opposed to dualism, or the doctrine of two principles, which was held by the ancient Persians, and was adopted by certain heretics, in the early ages of the church, and particularly by Manes, who incorporated with it a variety of notions borrowed from the Christian system. In general, dualism consisted in maintaining, that there were two principles, called by the Persians Ormusd and Ahriman, who were either independent beings, or were produced from all eternity by the first original Being. The former dwelt in light, and the latter in darkness. Ormusd created man capable of virtue, and furnished his habitation with the materials of happiness; but Ahriman introduced evil and misery. Hence there is a perpetual struggle between them, which will terminate in the victory of light over darkness. The following words of Isaiah are understood to refer to the religious system of the Persians, who, in the age when he flourished, believed in two independent principles or supreme beings; but Zoroaster, the reformer of their theology, introduced a superior being from whom both were derived. They are addressed to Cyrus the king of Persia. “I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God besides me: I girded thee, though thou has not known me; that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none besides me: I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace and create evil. I the Lord do all these things.”* It is probable that the system, as reformed by Zoroaster, who is supposed to have had intercourse with the Jews, was founded on the tradition of one Supreme God, and angels created by him, some of whom are good, and others bad; and that in its original form, as teaching two independent beings, of whom the one was the author of good, and the other of evil, it was a corruption of the tradition concerning God and that apostate spirit, who brought sin and death into the world. It is evident, that if this was its origin, the doctrine of Scripture was grossly misapprehended. Satan, whom the Persians called Ahriman, the principle of darkness, was not created evil, but became evil by his own choice; he is not an independent agent, but although engaged in constant opposition to God, the principle of light, is subject to his control, can do nothing without his permission, nor is able by his most violent efforts to pass the limits which are assigned to him.

The doctrine of dualism rests upon the mixed state of things in our world, as its only support. There are appearances which might lead hasty reasoners to conclude that it has originated from two opposite causes. Good and evil are blended together. If man is capable of virtue, he is capable also of vice; and indeed is so prone to it, that a general corruption of manners prevails. He is hurried headlong by his appetites to abuse the gifts of the divine bounty

* Is. xlv. 5--7.

and stimulated by his passions to deeds of violence and cruelty. Can such a creature be the work, or exclusively the work of Him, whom reason represents to us as all goodness and purity? And how can he be the Creator and sole Governor of such a world as this? The earth is encumbered with rocks, covered with barren sands, produces briers and thorns, and poisonous herbs; is infested with ferocious and venomous animals, and in many places is uninhabitable on account of heat, or cold, or pestilential vapours. Nature is subject to terrible convulsions; the ocean encroaches upon the land; rain descending in torrents inundates the fields; storms and earthquakes spread devastation over provinces and kingdoms; disease, sorrow, and death, make havoc of the human race in the northern and southern hemispheres. Is there not a malignant power at work to counteract the beneficent designs of the good Being?

It is acknowledged, that the appearance of things might create doubts in the minds of superficial observers; but it is capable of a satisfactory explanation upon the principles of sound reason, especially as illustrated and confirmed by revelation. Man is a free agent, as our own consciousness assures us; he is not fixed to a particular choice, but among the objects presented to him, he may reject one, and give the preference to another. He is, therefore, a mutable being: and although it may be difficult to trace the process by which a creature, perfectly virtuous, first deviated from rectitude, yet being acquainted with the constitution of human nature, we are at no loss to understand in general, how moral evil found its way into the world. It is not the effect of an original mixture of good and evil in our frame by two contending principles, who were both concerned in its formation, but it is the result of an improper use of the liberty with which we were endowed. Man is the work of God, and when he came from his hands, was the bright image of his holiness; moral pollution does not belong to his essence, but is an accident; he has himself stained his pristine glory, and covered himself with shame.

If the existence of moral evil can be reconciled with the belief of one God, holy, just, and good, there is no difficulty in shewing the consistency of the existence of physical evil with the doctrine of the unity. What some men would call imperfections in the works of nature, do not at present come under our consideration. It cannot be proved, we presume, that there are any such; but on the supposition that imperfections could be pointed out, they would not impeach the unity, but the power or the wisdom of the Creator. Our concern is with those facts alone which might be conceived to indicate a different agent. It is plain, that such an inference cannot be deduced from physical evils, the sterility and ruggedness of the soil, inclement seasons, and the long train of diseases and casualties to which mankind are subject; because, if moral evil exists, these are its natural consequences, or consequences which might be expected to follow it under the Divine administration. It would be absurd to expect the habitation of guilty creatures to be a paradise. Knowing their character beforehand, we should have expected it to be what it is; or rather, we should have formed the idea of a world less beautiful, and more sparingly stored with accommodations, or of one darkened by the frown of its Maker, having the signatures of his wrath impressed upon every part of it. It would never have occurred to us, that its thorns and briers, its pains and dangers, were the contrivances of a different being. It is extreme folly to go about, as some do, to soften down the evils which exist into some kind of harmony with the beneficent character of the Deity. This is not necessary to our present argument, unless it were ascertained that goodness is his only attribute; and the attempt is vain, for the things complained of have been regarded, in all ages, as evils, and were meant to be evils by our righteous Judge, as none can doubt who give credit to the testimony of Scripture. "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life" Thorns

also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee ; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground ; for out of it wast thou taken : for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”* The earth, when contemplated in the light of religion, exhibits no appearance of a divided empire, where two beings of opposite characters contend for the mastery ; it is a rebellious province, in which both mercy and severity are displayed, and the authority of the rightful Sovereign is maintained, by wholesome discipline and necessary punishments.

Lastly, the Divine unity is opposed, in the opinion of some, by the doctrine of the Trinity. The Scriptures seem to teach, and most Christians believe, that there are three persons in one undivided essence. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. To each of these persons, understanding, will, and power are ascribed, and they are farther distinguished by peculiar properties and operations. Now, say the adversaries of this doctrine, whatever countenance it may receive from the figurative language of Scripture, it cannot be true, because it is absolutely inconsistent with the unity of God ; for how is it possible to conceive three distinct persons, without conceiving them to be three distinct beings ? Hence they conclude, that the dogma of the Trinity ought to be rejected as subversive of this primary article of religion, and contrary to the clearest dictates of reason.

If we fully understood this subject, and could certainly pronounce the Trinity to be incompatible with the Unity, we should be under the necessity either of renouncing those passages of Scripture in which it is taught, as uninspired, or of putting a different interpretation upon them. It is plain that the same thing cannot be one and three in the same respect ; and were this the doctrine commonly held concerning God, there would be no presumption in rejecting it as impossible. But it is well known that this is a gross misrepresentation, and that Trinitarians believe God to be one in one sense, and three in another. There is an error into which men are in danger of falling, which is committed by the opponents of this doctrine, and it consists in transferring to the Creator notions derived from their knowledge of creatures. We find that every living creature is an individual ; that every man is a single person ; and hence the ideas of one nature and one person are intimately and inseparably conjoined in our thoughts. These ideas we carry with us, when God is the subject of contemplation ; and forgetting the infinite disparity between him and ourselves, we suppose that there can be nothing in his nature which is not in ours. It is a greater error than if a fly, endowed with thought, should make itself a standard to man, and maintain that he could possess no quality to which there was not something corresponding in its own constitution.

In some instances, we are compelled to admit that there are certain properties of the Divine nature which have no counterpart in us. We and all other creatures are limited in being and powers, and are confined to a place ; but his essence and attributes are infinite, and he is present in every part of the universe. The duration of creatures is measured by time, or a succession of instants ; but in the duration of him who is without beginning as well as without end, there can be no succession, for reasons formerly explained. These are as great mysteries, and seem to be as repugnant to reason as the doctrine of the Trinity. How long will it be till some men are convinced of the weakness of the human intellect, by considering the objects around them, none of which they are able to comprehend ? How long will it be till they learn one of the first lessons of philosophy, that we cannot penetrate into the essence of things, and must content ourselves with the simple knowledge of facts ?

If there is satisfactory proof of the doctrine of the Trinity, and what higher evidence can we demand respecting the nature of God than his own testimony

* Gen. iii. 17—19.

we are bound to receive it without disputing, and to believe that a plurality of persons is consistent with unity of essence, although we do not know how to reconcile them. It is no excess of humility in creatures, who have just begun to open their eyes and to look around them, to acknowledge that things may be, of which they can form no conception; that there may be truths which their minds cannot grasp; that between finite beings, and Him who is infinite, no comparison can be instituted; and consequently, that a conclusion founded on the supposition that the one is the measure of the other, is presumptuous and false.

The doctrine of the unity settles religion upon a firm and immovable foundation. We experience nothing of the uncertainty and anxiety which distressed the ancient heathens, who, amidst a multitude of gods, were sometimes at a loss to determine whom it was necessary to propitiate, by whose hand evils had been inflicted, and benefits bestowed. Knowing that there is only one God, we assure ourselves of his presence in every place, and of his agency in every event. If there is evil in the city, he has done it; and if good come, it can be traced to his bounty. Whithersoever we go, his eye beholds, and his power sustains us. It is his goodness which smiles around us in the fair scenes of creation; it is his inspiration which excites worthy thoughts in our minds, and devout affections in our hearts. We know to whom we should turn in the hour of difficulty, and to whom the tribute of our grateful hearts should be paid. "It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in. To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One."*

LECTURE XIX.

ON GOD.

Immensity of God: denied by some—Definition of Immensity; distinguished from Omnipresence—proofs of Immensity—Distinguished from Infinite Extension—Unwarrantable Speculations respecting it—Presence of God with his Creatures—Practical Reflections.

OUR inquiries concerning the existence and unity of God, are not mere speculations which have no connection with our duty and our happiness. Whether there is a living intelligent Being, possessed of every possible perfection, would be a point which we might spare ourselves the labour of ascertaining, if the investigation were to terminate in the simple knowledge of the fact. It is inconceivable, however, that a subject, confessedly the most sublime which the mind can contemplate, should be so barren of advantage. If there is a God, infinite in excellence, and the Parent of the universe, there must subsist certain relations between him and men, whose existence and faculties are the gifts of his bounty: there must be duties arising from those relations, which the law of our nature binds us to perform; and there are expectations excited by the experience of his goodness, which almighty power can realize. It is natural therefore to ask, Where is this great Being so worthy of our admiration and homage, that we may offer to him our tribute of adoration and thanksgiving, and, with all humility, supplicate his favour and protection? With a devout man in ancient times, we may say, "Oh that we knew where we might

* Is. xl. 22. 25.

find him ! that we might come even to his seat.”* Is he afar off, or is he near ? Is he on earth, or in heaven ? If there is some region of the universe which he has chosen as his habitation, it may be so distant that our feeble voice cannot reach it, nor can his arm be extended to us.

The heathens who multiplied their deities, conceived them to be limited beings, who were confined to particular places, and had different provinces assigned to them. We have proofs of these unworthy ideas especially in the writings of the poets. They prevailed not only among the Greeks and Romans, but among other nations ; and hence we find, that when the Syrians had been defeated by the Israelites, supposing Jehovah to be only a local Deity, they said to their king, “ Their Gods are Gods of the hills, therefore they were stronger than we ; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.”† Such of them, however, as rising above the vulgar superstition, approximated to more just conceptions of the Supreme Being, seem to have entertained some notion of his universal presence. “ Quocunque te flexeris,” says Seneca, “ ibi illum videbis occurrentem tibi : nihil ab illo vacat ; opus suum ipse implet.”‡ We meet him every where : no place is without him ; he fills his own work. Virgil too has these well-known lines :

Deum namque ire per omnes,
Terrasque, tractusque maris, cælumque profundum.§

But we should remember when such passages occur, that they admit of an interpretation different from what the words suggest to us ; for, by some of the philosophers, God was supposed to be the soul of the world, diffused through all its parts, and consequently a material Being.

Mahomet must have believed that God had a bodily shape and a local residence, since he pretended to have seen him when he was taken up into heaven, and tells us that between his eyebrows the distance was equal to a journey of three days. Some of the elder Socinians appear to have fallen into the same gross error ; and Biddle, against whom Dr. Owen wrote his book entitled, *Vindiciæ Evangelicæ*, maintained that “ God glisters with glory, and is resident in a certain place of the heavens, so that we may distinguish between his right and left hand by bodily sight.”|| In the Racovian catechism, or the catechism of the Socinian churches in Poland, the immensity of God is defined to be, “ the highest perfection of his dominion, power, wisdom, and providence, extending to all things, and excluded from no place.”¶ Nothing is said respecting the immensity of his essence.

In opposition to all these opinions, we maintain not only that God knows all things, and rules over all things, but that he is present in all places, and with all creatures at all times ; or in other words, that he is infinite in essence as well as in wisdom and power. Bodies exist in space, which has been defined to be, “ extension void of matter or body, and capable of receiving or containing matter or body.” A particular body occupies only a portion of space ; there are other portions of space where it is not. As body consists of parts, its limits are exactly defined. It has length, breadth and thickness ; and the lines terminating these constitute figure. The earth, the sun, mountains, trees, and men, fill certain parts of space, and may be seen from other parts of space, but in these they do not exist. All this is quite obvious ; but we find greater difficulty when we proceed to speak of spirits, because, as they have no parts, no dimensions and figure, we do not understand their relation to space. Of this, however, we are certain, that, to use the language of the Schools, they also have an *ubi* ; so that the question may be asked, Where are they ? and an answer may be returned, that they are here, and not there. They do not fill the place where

* Job xxiii. 3. † 1 Kings xx. 23. ‡ Benefic. Lib. iv. 8. § Virg. Georg. iv. 221.
|| Owen's Vind. Evang. Chap. ii. ¶ Catechesis Eccles. Polon. Sect. iii. *de Dei natura*, chap. i

they are, because they are not material; but they are so in it, as not to be in any other place. This is plain with respect to our own spirits. They are so connected with our bodies, that they are where these are, and no where else. In consequence of their presence in a particular place, they can perceive objects within a limited sphere; but beyond it their perception does not extend. They are insulated, and can neither act nor be acted upon by objects at a certain distance, unless they are brought near, or some mode of communication with them is established. There is no doubt, that all other created spirits exist in the same manner in a place. This we are explicitly taught concerning angels, who are represented as moving from place to place, and as at one time in heaven, and at another time on earth. But you cannot ask, Where is God? if you mean that he may be in one place and not in another. His presence is not local; it is universal. "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord."*

A distinction is made between the immensity, and the omnipresence or ubiquity of God. When we call his essence immense, we mean that it has no limits; when we say that it is omnipresent, we signify that it is wherever creatures are. These propositions are not the same, unless creation be infinite; but although we cannot trace its boundaries, and its extent surpasses all calculation, yet there is this objection against supposing it to be absolutely unlimited, that it would be to suppose every part to be finite, but the whole infinite. By the same reasoning which proves that there could not be an eternal succession of beings, each of which began to exist, it is proved that the whole mass of co-existing created beings cannot be infinite. The attributes of God are distinguished into absolute and relative. His absolute attributes are those which may be considered without the supposition of any other thing; his relative attributes are those, the exercise of which supposes the existence of other beings, to whom they have a respect. Immensity is an absolute perfection. It belongs to his essence, which, as it necessarily exists, is necessarily infinite. Omnipresence is a relative perfection; for, to say that he is present with all things, supposes that other things exist besides himself. At the same time, this statement is so far inaccurate, as it may seem to imply that immensity and omnipresence are different; for they are, in truth, the same perfection under different aspects. Omnipresence is merely the relation of immensity to the universe; and all that we assert is, that God is present wherever his creatures are, but his essence is not bounded by creation; for he is present where no creatures are, and consequently, if new worlds were created, would be present also with them.

Some have attempted to prove the immensity of God from his necessary existence. He exists by an absolute necessity of nature, and by the same necessity he is infinite. This necessity being absolute in itself, it has been said, and not depending upon any external cause, it is evident that it must be every where, as well as always unalterably the same; or to express the idea more plainly, this necessity is the reason of his existence in every place, as well as throughout all duration. A necessity which is not every where the same, is plainly a consequential necessity only, depending upon some external cause and not an absolute one in its own nature; for, a necessity absolutely such in itself, has no relation to time and place, or any thing else. Whatever therefore exists by an absolute necessity in its own nature, must needs be infinite as well as eternal. To suppose a finite being to be self-existent, is to say that it is a contradiction for that being not to exist, while its absence or non-existence may be conceived without any contradiction; which is the greatest absurdity in the world. For, if a being can without a contradiction be absent from one place, it may without a contradiction be absent likewise from another

* Jer. xxiii. 23, 24.

place, and from all places; and whatever necessity it may have of existing must arise from some external cause, and not absolutely from itself; and, consequently, the being cannot be self-existent. We can conceive no reason why a necessary being should be in one place, and not in another. To suppose it to be finite, supposes some cause which determined that it should possess such a quantity of being, and no more. That cause must either be a voluntary cause, or else such a necessary cause, the quantity of whose power is determined and limited by some other cause. But in an original absolute necessity, antecedent in the order of nature to the existence of any thing, nothing of all this can take place, but the necessity is necessarily every where alike.

I have stated this argument nearly in the words of Dr. Clarke.* Its abstruseness renders it difficult of apprehension, and altogether useless to the great majority of mankind. It has even not given complete satisfaction to some who were as profound as himself. It is plain, I think, that no reason can be conceived why a necessary being should be limited; and that limitation presupposes a prior cause, by which the measure of any thing is determined. I confess, however, that I do not understand the meaning of making necessity in the order of nature antecedent to the existence of God. Such necessity is an abstraction of which I can form no idea, and seems to me as unintelligible as the Fate of the heathens, to which gods and men were alike subject. Both, I suspect, are words, and nothing more.

I proceed to lay before you arguments which are more level to common capacities.

In the first place, it has been already observed, that when we speak of God, we mean a Being possessed of every possible perfection; because if only one were wanting, we could conceive another being still more perfect than he to whom we had first directed our attention; and that other would be God. We unite in one assemblage all the excellencies which we observe in creatures, free from mixture and limitation; we join to these every other excellence which we can conceive, although in creatures no trace of it should appear; and we refer all, whether communicable or incommunicable, to the Divine nature, as their proper and original subject. Now, the limited nature of creatures is evidently an imperfection; and it is because such is our judgment, that we consider those creatures which can, if I may speak so, enlarge their being by the power of locomotion, as having an advantage above those which are fixed to a particular place. If vegetables were sentient beings, we should deem animals superior to them, for this single reason, that they were not like them attached to the soil. And among the qualities which exalt angels above men, this is one, that although they cannot be in more places than one at the same time, yet they can pass from heaven to earth, and successively visit the various parts of creation. The limited nature of man is manifestly the cause of his imperfection. His sensations, enjoyments, and operations, are confined to a narrow sphere, beyond which events are taking place over which he has no control, and sources of happiness exist, from which he can draw no supply. Hence fancy in its dreams has sometimes, with a view to remedy this defect, invested him with a power to transport himself from place to place at his pleasure. The result is, that in our opinion it is better for a being to be in many places than in few, to be in all places than in many. To suppose, therefore, God to exist only in one part of the universe, to be in heaven but not upon earth, to circumscribe his essence within any boundaries however widely extended, would be to conceive of him as similar to his creatures. It would be easy to imagine a being still more perfect, for certainly he would be more perfect who was present at the same time in heaven and on earth. Thus it appears that it is agreeable to reason to ascribe immensity to God.

* Discourse concerning the Being and Attributes of God, p. 44.

In the second place, immensity is necessarily implied in the other perfections of the divine nature; or those perfections are such, that unless the divine nature were immense, they would not belong to it. What the perfections of God are, and that he is actually possessed of them, will be afterwards shewn; and in the mean time, we may be permitted to assume their existence. Every sound theist ascribes infinite perfections to God, infinite power, infinite wisdom, infinite goodness, and consequently must believe his essence to be infinite; for it would be a manifest absurdity to suppose a Being to have infinite perfections and a finite nature, to be limited and unlimited at the same time. It is one of our clearest conceptions, that the degree of any quality must be relative to the nature in which it is inherent, as the effect is proportioned to the cause. We are sometimes surprised to find a degree of power in certain creatures, much exceeding what their appearance had led us to expect; but we are never led to think that it may be indefinitely increased so as to be equal to every possible effect. It will be readily granted, that the divine understanding is infinite, or that God knows all things throughout the whole extent of the creation. The question of the Psalmist contains its own answer: "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?"* The source of intelligence must be an intelligent Being; the Maker of all things must be acquainted with his own works. But how should he know every thing in the universe, ample as its boundaries are, and innumerable as are the substances of which it is composed, if he had a local habitation in a particular portion of space? Some things would be too distant to be seen, or too minute to be observed, or transacted in such secrecy as to be unknown to all who were not present on the spot. The universal and particular knowledge of God, his knowledge of all creatures without the exception of the least or the most obscure, and of all the circumstances relating to them, endlessly diversified and often too subtle and slender to be the objects of human observation, presupposes his immediate presence on the scene of their existence. There is no intelligible way of accounting for his infinite knowledge, but that of the Psalmist: "Thou compassedst my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me."† I might farther illustrate this point, by shewing that the almighty power of God presupposes the infinity of his essence, but the observations which might be made will occur under the next argument.

In the third place, the immensity of the Divine Being may be proved from his works. The creation of all things out of nothing, required almighty power. The power of God is not something distinct from his essence, but is his essence itself in energy, or God himself working. But we cannot conceive any being to act where it is not; the action of every being with which we are acquainted, supposes its presence. The actions of men are confined to the spot on which they reside; and if they are said to act at a distance, it is in a figurative sense, because their orders are executed by persons employed in their service. But God made use of no ministers, or subordinate agents, in the work of creation, and must therefore have been present in every portion of space where any being exists besides himself.

If we turn our attention to the providential government of the universe, we shall be led to the same conclusion respecting the omnipresence of God. Reason and revelation concur in bearing testimony to this truth, that the system of nature is sustained by the same power which raised it out of nothing. To imagine, that after it was arranged and subjected to certain laws, it was left to itself, and that it moves, like a well constructed machine, without requi

* Psalm xci. 9, 10.

† Psalm cxxxix. 3—5.

ring the interference of the artist, is an opinion which no man would adopt after due reflection, and which in reality renders the universe independent of its Maker. The laws of nature, to which its order and preservation are ascribed, are nothing but the established and uniform methods according to which his power is exerted. But where the effect is, there also must be the cause; where we see displays of power, there we should seek for him to whom the power belongs. We observe a variety of changes taking place, and we can often discover the immediate causes or antecedents; but we do not perceive the link which connects them. We know that power is exerted; but the more we reflect, the more we are convinced that the conclusion of sound philosophy is just that it is not the power of creatures but of the Creator. All the movements which we observe in the universe, are so many proofs of a present Deity. Although he is not visible to mortal eyes, yet all nature proclaims him to be near.

Where, I ask, is the region in which God may not be found? Go to the most dismal spot upon the globe; to a spot, if such exists, where no plant vegetates, and no animal breathes; in this dreary solitude you shall trace him in the eternal snow which covers it, in the rocks which rear their dark pinnacles to the sky, and in the waves which beat upon its melancholy shores! Retire to a wilderness impressed with no mark of human footsteps, and you shall perceive him in every thing which lives, in the waving grass and the flowers which "waste their sweetness in the desert air;" for all live, and move, and have their being in him! Lift your eyes to the heavens, and contemplate the splendid bodies which are scattered there in magnificent profusion. Remark their number, their magnitude, their revolutions, and their order; and then tell me, what could sustain them, what could guide them in their course, what could prevent them from running to confusion, but the arm of Omnipotence which holds them in its grasp? Look into the abysses of space at a distance from us which overpower the imagination: who kindled the living fires with which they glow? who nourishes the flame which has burned with undiminished brightness for thousands of years? Is it not the same Being who breathed into our nostrils the breath of life? "Every thing which you see, is God," said an ancient poet. We may object to his language, as confounding the Worker with his works; but with a slight alteration we may say, that every object which meets our eye on the surface of the earth, and in the expanse above us, announces the presence of God. By him the sun shines, the winds blow, the earth is clothed with vegetation, and the tides of the ocean rise and fall. Every where he exists in the fulness of perfection. The universe is a magnificent temple, erected by his own hands, in which He whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, manifests himself to his intelligent creatures. The Divine inhabitant fills it, and every part shines with his glory.

It may occur to you, that these arguments prove only the omnipresence of God, or his presence throughout the whole creation, to know, to uphold, and to govern it. It is acknowledged that this is the amount of the evidence; but no person, I presume, who has gone so far, will choose to stop and say, This is the limit of creation, and the limit also of the Divine essence. No reason could be assigned for circumscribing it; but as we have found it in every step of our progress through the universe, we naturally conclude, that if we could pursue the search, we should find it where it exists alone. He who believes that the power of God is almighty, will not doubt that he could create new worlds, and therefore must admit, that as he could not act where he is not, he is present where no sun shines and no planet rolls. For all practical purposes, it is enough to know that he fills heaven and earth; but truth requires us to acknowledge the absolute immensity of his nature, because if he were bounded by creation, we could conceive a Being still greater, and that Being would be God.

In reflecting upon this subject, great caution is necessary to avoid ideas derogatory to the honour of God, and inconsistent with the spirituality of his nature. Immensity we are apt to confound with extension, because we are accustomed to think only of the presence of bodies which fill space by their dimensions, and can be made to occupy a larger portion of it only by being extended. Thus, light fills the solar system by means of rays propagated in all directions from the sun. In like manner, the atmosphere is diffused over the whole globe, and while it rests in the vallies, surrounds by extension the tops of the highest mountains, being a substance composed of parts placed one beyond another. This idea, so familiar to our minds, we carry along with us in our speculations concerning the Supreme Being, forgetting that as he is a Spirit, it is totally inapplicable. We believe that created spirits have a place, so that it may be said that they are *here*, but not *there*; but we cannot conceive them literally to fill a portion of space, without contradicting ourselves, and assigning to them one of the properties of body at the very moment when we speak of them as incorporeal. No man would say that the soul fills a particular part of the body, or that the place of an angel has dimensions; for it would follow that spirits, like bodies, would be greater or less, that they might be divided, expanded, or compressed; that is, that they are spirits and not spirits; or that there are no such beings as spirits, and those which are called such, are animated matter in an invisible form. To suppose, then, the immensity of the Divine essence to consist in boundless extension, is to materialize the Deity, for that which is extended has parts, and what has parts is not a spirit. Extension consists in the addition of parts, each occupying a certain portion of space. Infinite extension is impossible; the addition of parts might go on for ever, and the aggregate be always increasing, but it could never be actually infinite. When men talk of an infinite series, they cannot mean, if they reflect, a series which at this moment is actually infinite, but a series which is running on *in infinitum*, or never comes to an end. In the nature of things, it cannot be that the Divine essence is infinitely extended. When each part is finite, the whole cannot be infinite.

We must therefore form a different idea of the Divine immensity; or rather, while we deny that the Divine essence is extended, we must acknowledge that we cannot comprehend its immensity. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; it is high, we cannot attain unto it."* God, it has been said, is wholly in the whole world, yet so as to be wholly in each of its parts; he co-exists with the world, which is divided into parts, but without parts in himself, and in an indivisible manner. Wherever he is, he is wholly in all things, yet beyond all; included in no place, and excluded from none; and not so much in a place, because finite cannot comprehend infinite, as in himself; and hence the Rabbies call him *place*, to intimate that he is not contained in place, but contains all things in himself. The Schoolmen have said that God is every where present *instar puncti*, like a point. Dr. Owen remarks, that their design was to express how God is not in a place, rather than how he is.† He is not present like bodies which have dimensions. Dr. Clarke pronounces the expression to be altogether unintelligible, but adds, "that which we can most safely affirm, and which no atheist can say is absurd, and which nevertheless is sufficient to all wise and good purposes, is this: that whereas all finite and created beings can be present but in one definite place at once, and corporeal beings even in that one place very imperfectly and unequally, to any purpose of power and activity, only by the successive motion of different members and organs; the Supreme Cause, on the contrary, being an infinite and most simple essence, and comprehending all things perfectly in himself, *is at all times equally present*, both in his simple essence, and by the immediate and perfect exercise

* Psalm cxxxix. 6.

† *Vindiciæ Evangelicæ*, p. 54.

of all his attributes, to *every point* of the boundless immensity, as if it were really all but one single point.”*

Here we must stop, lest pushing our inquiries too far, we involve ourselves in confusion, and darken counsel by words without knowledge. We are in the utmost danger of doing so upon a subject confessedly mysterious; and in attempting to be profound, we may cease to be rational, and make use of expressions which neither we nor any other person can understand. God is present in every point of space after the manner of a spirit, and is present every where in all the fulness of perfection.

Some philosophers have indulged themselves in curious speculations about space. God has been called the *substratum* of space; or in other words, as space is supposed to be necessarily existing, and yet is not itself a substance, it supposes a substance of which it is a property, namely God, who exists by necessity of nature. It is true that we cannot conceive space to be annihilated, and it may therefore be said necessarily to exist; but if it were certain that there is no God, its annihilation would still be inconceivable; although in that case it would not be a property of any thing, but would subsist by itself, if it be any thing, and not merely a mode, or the relation of beings to one another in respect of situation. Some have proceeded farther, and maintained that space is God, because it is infinite, eternal, immutable, and self-existent, as well as impassible and indivisible. It has been objected, that if space be God himself, all bodies are situated in God as in their proper place, and each of them occupies a greater or less portion of his essence according to its size; that the Divine Being, although immeasurable as a whole, has millions of parts which are measurable by feet, yards, and miles, and one part of him is larger than another; that every part of space contains the Divine perfections complete, or only a part of them, according to its dimensions, a certain measure of his wisdom, and holiness, and goodness; and that as a spirit is not extended, space can neither be God himself nor a property of his essence, to which it is as absurd to ascribe extension as it would be to ascribe thought to a stone. I have deemed it proper to take notice of these speculations, because they have been broached by ingenious men. They are more curious than useful, and perhaps they would be more justly characterized as presumptuous. We can hardly, in speaking of them, avoid expressing ourselves in a manner not very consistent with the reverence due to that great and awful Being in whose presence we constantly are.

The omnipresence of God does not imply that his essence is mixed with his creatures, as the atmosphere is in contact with the various substances upon earth, enters into the bodies of animals and vegetables, and is incorporated with them. He is indeed most intimately present with them, more intimately present than they are with one another. He is around them, if we may speak so, and within them; he resides in the inmost recesses of their souls; he animates them, upholds them, and exerts his energy throughout their whole frame; but still between him and them there is a perfect and eternal distinction. His presence neither deifies them, nor makes him a partaker of their infirmities. He is not a component part of the universe, as they supposed who believed him to be the soul of the world; he holds it in the hollow of his hand, to use the sublime language of Scripture, but is as completely separated from it, as if he dwelt beyond its boundaries: he fills it, but without commixtion. It by no means follows from the immensity of God, that we may address our prayers to particular parts of the universe, as some have alleged, pleading in favour of idolatry, that creatures may be worshipped because the Creator is present in them. It is indeed a proper conclusion from this doctrine, that our worship should not be confined to a particular spot, because throughout

* Disc. on Being and Attributes, p. 46.

the whole world he is equally near to us in his essence and perfections, ready to hear us, and able to help us. But the argument, that a creature may be worshipped on account of his presence with it, is obviously false for this reason, that although he is with and in that creature, it does not partake of his essence, and is endowed with none of his perfections. God is as distinct from it as if he were separated by local distance; and the argument, by concluding too much, concludes nothing. It would convert all the parts of nature into objects of worship, because God is as much present with the meanest reptile as with the highest spirit, with the clouds of the valley as with the sun in the heavens.

Again, we must not suppose, that in consequence of his presence with creatures, God is affected by them, as we are by the objects which are near to us. Some objects are disagreeable to our senses, and cause pain or disgust; and various emotions are excited in our minds by external things as well as by our own thoughts. Our happiness is in a great measure dependent upon the influences to which we are exposed; and we find it difficult, if not impossible, to abstract ourselves from the circumstances in which we are placed. But the Divine nature is not passive, or liable to impressions; and hence, in the language of the schools, God is a pure act, always in energy but never acted upon. With respect to material objects, it is certain that their general power to affect us arises from the material organs of our bodies, and their particular effect is owing to our peculiar constitution. We cannot conceive, that if we were pure spirits, matter could operate upon us as it does at present; and it is even certain, that if our organs had been differently formed, substances and objects which are offensive to us would have been grateful. This is evident from the history of animated beings, among which we discover a great variety of habits and tastes; so that places which some shun are the favourite resorts of others, and substances which one rejects, furnish high gratification to another. No error, therefore, could be more gross than to think, that it would in any degree impair the happiness of God to be present in places which would excite uneasy sensations in us. These sensations are merely relative, and besides are excited by means of corporeal organs; and, consequently, we judge of God by ourselves, when we imagine that one place would be less agreeable to him than another. Our minds also are subject to impressions from the conversation, the conduct, and the condition of our fellow men, all which are calculated to make us cheerful or melancholy, to incite us to good or to tempt us to evil. But an infinitely perfect and independent Being, is an undisturbed spectator of human things. As a moral Being, he approves or disapproves, yet without any commotion of mind; and his peace is not more affected than ours is by the sportive flight, the contests and the sufferings of insects. The praises of mortals add nothing to his blessedness, which is already perfect; nor do their crimes and blasphemies diminish it. He is in heaven, on earth, and in hell; but independent of time and place, he enjoys the profound repose of all-sufficiency. We change him into a being like ourselves, when we fear lest his intimate presence with creatures should degrade his dignity or interrupt his felicity. "If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thy hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit the son of man."*

The doctrine of the Divine omnipresence is not inconsistent with those passages of Scripture, which represent God as peculiarly present in certain places and with certain individuals. To superficial thinkers, it may seem to be an objection that he is said to have resided in the temple of Jerusalem; to be in

* Job xxxv. 6—8.

the souls of good men, and to dwell in the heaven of heavens. A very little attention is sufficient to a right understanding of such expressions. It is obvious that they were not intended to suggest the idea that the Divine essence is confined to any of those places, because, while God is said to be in one of them, he is said at the same time to be in the others; to be in heaven, for example, while he was in the temple; to be with angels in glory, as well as with men upon earth; to be with all good men scattered over the surface of the globe, and not merely with one or two living together. The design plainly is to state, that in the places referred to, there are particular manifestations of his glory. He was present in the temple by a visible symbol, a brightness which appeared between the cherubim in the holy of holies. Go now to the spot on which it stood, and you shall see no token of him more than in the dark recess of a heathen temple; but God is still there in his invisible and mysterious essence. He is present in the souls of good men by the operations of his Spirit, who illuminates, sanctifies, and comforts them; but he is present also in the souls of bad men, although he does not reveal himself by the gracious exertion of his power. He is present in heaven by a clearer and more impressive display of his infinite excellencies, and more ample emanations of his love, than he has given in any other part of creation; but he is present also in hell, where the terrors of his power and justice are manifested in the punishment of the finally impenitent. In respect of his essence, there is no place where God is more present than in another, nor any person to whom he is nearer than to another. But, in some places, he discovers himself more distinctly to the external senses, or the internal feelings of his creatures; there are openings in the cloud, through which the rays of light are transmitted, and turning our eyes to them, we say, God is there, without supposing that he is not where we do not perceive him. I conclude with the words of the Psalmist: "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee."*

The doctrine of the Divine immensity furnishes a powerful motive to restrain us from sin. We are continually in the presence of God, and every deviation from his law exposes us to his displeasure. When men are about to commit iniquity, they retire into their closets, and shut the door, or seek out some other solitary place where there is no spectator. They look this way and that way, that there may be no witness of their unlawful deeds; and having thus secured themselves, they dismiss all fear. But let them stop, and look again. Is there not One near who has escaped their observation, because he appears only to the eye of the mind, and who is more to be dreaded than ten thousand human witnesses? Yes; there is an eye which sees them in the darkest recess, and which menaces with death and eternal misery every soul of man that doth evil. And where shall they find a refuge from his vengeance? "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them. though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down."†

Again, from the omnipresence of God there arises a powerful argument for sincerity in religion, because he is not only around us to take notice of our actions, but within us to observe our thoughts and volitions. Men may mistake our motives; but his judgment is necessarily unerring, because the whole case is before him. He approves, and will reward the upright, whatever uncharitable constructions an uncandid world may put upon their conduct: He

* Ps. cxxxix. 7—12.

† Amos ix. 2.

Authors, and will expose to public scorn the hypocrite, who gained the applause of virtue by his studied and successful imitation of it. How justly does he deserve his doom! he is guilty; and how audacious is his impiety! he is guilty of acting a base part, under the immediate inspection of the Searcher of hearts.

Lastly, to the righteous this doctrine is a source of abundant consolation. In every place they meet a friend, a protector, and a father. Does the voice of thunder, or the raging of the ocean, or the fury of the tempest, announce his presence? They have nothing to fear, for love to them presides over the commotions of the elements. Do they perceive Him in the more tranquil scenes of nature, in the silent progress of vegetation, in the smiles of the heavens, and in the regular beneficence which supplies their returning wants, and diffuses so much happiness among all classes of animated beings? Oh! how delightful the thought that He, in whom they repose confidence, is so near that they may always assure themselves of ready and effectual aid! This thought is fitted to enliven every scene, and to sweeten every condition. It will make the springs of joy burst out in the parched and thirsty wilderness, and clothe the naked and cheerless waste with verdure. It will give a relish to a dry morsel, and a cup of cold water. It will lighten the pressure of poverty, and soothe the pangs of affliction. It will dissipate the horrors of a dungeon, and console the exile from his country and his friends. How transporting the thought, that we cannot go where God is not! A good man may be bereaved of his reputation, his liberty, his earthly all; but the deadly hatred of his enemies can never so far succeed as to draw from him the mournful complaint, "Ye have taken away my God, and what have I more?" With whatever afflictions his faith and patience may be tried, and whatever change of circumstances a wise providence may appoint him to undergo, although there should be no human heart to sympathise with him, and no kind hand to perform the offices of friendship, he can express his faith and joy in the words of an ancient saint, "Nevertheless I am continually with thee; thou holdest me by my right hand. Thou wilt guide me by thy counsel, and afterward receive me to thy glory."*

LECTURE XX.

ON GOD.

Immutability of God—Proofs—Immutability of the Existence, the Knowledge, the Counsels, the Moral Perfections, and the Felicity of God—Immutability not inconsistent with the act of Creation, the doctrine of the Incarnation, or the language of the Scriptures—Practical Reflections.

WE have found that the universe is not eternal and independent, but that there is a Being distinct from it, who was anterior in existence as he is superior in dignity. He is absolutely eternal, without beginning of days or end of life, and is separated from matter by the spirituality of his essence. We have spoken of him in the singular number, because it is demonstrable that he is strictly One, existing alone without any associate. Unlike the gods of the heathen world, he is not attached to any place, but exists every where, unlimited in essence as he is in duration. To a Being, of whom immensity may be predicated, we are naturally led to ascribe all conceivable excellence. His

* Ps. lxxiii. 23, 24.

infinite nature is the proper subject, if I may speak so, of every great and good, every venerable and amiable quality in the highest degree.

I proceed to speak of his immutability, by which we understand not only that his duration is permanent, but that his nature is fixed, immoveable, unaffected by external causes; in every respect the same from eternity to eternity. That God is immutable, is a doctrine clearly taught in the Scriptures, and as we shall soon see, demonstrable by reason. "I am Jehovah, I change not."* "Of old hast thou laid the foundations of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment: as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end."† "He is the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning;"‡ a Sun shining with perpetual splendour, and not like the ruler of the day, who is sometimes eclipsed and at other times clouded, now retires from us and then returns, according to the revolutions of the year.

Mutability is characteristic of all created beings. The heavenly bodies are too distant for us to make any observations upon their external structure; and we can only perceive their real or apparent changes of place. Upon the surface of the earth nothing is stationary. Its aspect is varied by the action of the elements, and by internal convulsions; even the rocks decay, and are sometimes violently removed from their places. Trees grow and fade; animals appear and perish; and than man himself who stands highest in the scale, what is more inconstant? His body passes from the feebleness of infancy to the vigour of manhood, and then sinks into the infirmity and decrepitude of old age. His mind undergoes a similar process; its powers unfold, flourish, and decline. With respect to superior beings, it is certain from what has befallen some of them, that they too were subject to mutation; that the stability which others enjoy is adventitious, being the gift of their Creator; and that, in one respect, even they are not permanent, but are incessantly advancing to higher degrees of knowledge and enjoyment.

The immutability of God may be proved from his necessary existence. That which exists by necessity of nature, by the same necessity exists as it is, and cannot be otherwise. Absolute necessity has no relation to time; as it does not result from, so it is not affected by circumstances. Whatever therefore exists by such a necessity, must be always the same; the same now as it formerly was; the same hereafter as it now is. With respect to a contingent being, we can conceive it to undergo a change without the destruction of its essence: there is no contradiction in supposing some of its qualities to be altered, in supposing it for instance to become less wise, less active, or less virtuous than it was. The reason is, that there is nothing in the nature of such a being, which necessarily infers its continuance in a particular state. But with respect to a necessary being, we cannot conceive it to be changed, without taking away the ground of its existence, if this expression may be permitted, or losing sight of necessity. To say that it is necessarily existent and yet may be changed, is with the same breath to say, that it is not necessarily existent. For necessity extends to the mode of its existence, as well as to its existence itself. If we could conceive a being to be changed in one respect, we could conceive it to be changed in another respect; and it being thus evident, that there was no necessary ground of its existence, we could conceive it to cease to exist. Whatever, therefore, exists by necessity of nature, must be immutable in essence and in all essential properties.

Some have stated this argument in a manner somewhat different, and as they apprehend, more intelligible. "The existence of God is independent of all will and power whatsoever; from which absolute and most perfect indepen-

* Mal. iii. 6.

† Ps. cii. 25—27.

‡ James i. 17

dence follows his perfect immutability and incorruptibility. For there is no will or power, either in himself or in any other being, which can alter his existence, seeing it is not subject to any will or power," it being certain that, as he was not produced by another, so he was not himself the cause of his existence. "No will or power, therefore, can possibly produce any alteration in his existence either by adding or taking away, or in any respect making it other than what it is. When there is no cause, there cannot be an effect: but of an alteration or change in God there is no possible cause, and therefore this effect, namely, a change in his existence, is impossible; and to say that this is possible would be as absurd as to assert that he might be the cause of himself, or might arise out of nothing. There is no cause of a change; and *nothing* is as incapable of producing one effect as another, can no more annihilate or alter existence than produce it."

The immutability of God may be proved from the perfect simplicity of his essence. There is no mixture or composition in it, and consequently there can be no addition, or subtraction, or transposition of parts, by which changes are effected in bodies. This, it may be said, is undeniable, since he is an immaterial being: but we add, that even in other immaterial beings, there is something which may be called composition, but which has no place in the Divine essence. Certain qualities are indeed inseparable from their essence, as invisibility, indivisibility, incorruptibleness, and thought, but others they may or may not possess, as wisdom and holiness. The history of creatures which are immaterial, as angels and human spirits, shews that such qualities may be lost, without destroying their nature, and consequently that they are superadded, and not essential. The perfections of God cannot be considered as in this sense distinct from his essence. By necessity of nature he is what he is; and it would be as express a contradiction to suppose him to be divested of any of his attributes, or to possess them in a less or a greater degree, as it would be to suppose a thing to be and not to be at the same time. The essences in fact of all things are immutable. They may be annihilated by the power which created them; but as long as they continue in existence, they must continue what they are: a change of any kind would be the destruction of their essence. Now, God is essentially perfect, and is therefore incapable of change, fixed and immoveable from eternity to eternity.

Once more, this doctrine may be illustrated in a plainer and more popular manner. Every change is to the worse, or to the better; it is the loss of some good already possessed, or the attainment of a greater degree of excellence. We have already taken notice of the deterioration of created beings. To say nothing of the decay and dissolution of vegetable and animal substances, intelligent creatures of the highest order have fallen from their primitive innocence and glory; man has lost the image of God, the noblest ornament of his nature, and sunk into the degradation of sin; the wise and virtuous often relapse into folly and vice; genius sometimes expires like a candle burnt down to the socket; and the old man experiences a second time the mental and corporeal debility of childhood. But no cause can be conceived for a similar change in that great Being, who is not subject to the action of any external power, and contains in himself no principle of corruption. Among the wild and impious imaginations, which are daily passing through the mind, no man in his senses ever supposed that the knowledge of the Deity might be diminished, his arm might be enfeebled, his benevolence might be exhausted, or his love of truth and justice might be exchanged for a disregard of moral distinctions. We revolt from the idea with horror. It is too impious even for the atheist himself; for if he believed in a God, he would exempt him from all the infirmities of limited and dependent beings.

Creatures often undergo a change to the better. The seed ripens into a

plant, and the embryo becomes a perfect animal. The body of man advances from the feebleness of infancy to the full stature of manhood; and his opening mind admits the increasing light of knowledge, and gradually develops its powers. A similar progress takes place in the spiritual life. Existence which had a beginning is continued by a succession of moments; and endowments which were originally limited, may receive gradual accessions, and rise step by step to the summit of the scale. We have already remarked, that there is reason to believe that the state of happy beings in the world to come will be progressive; as we cannot conceive them ever to arrive at a point in eternity, beyond which there will be nothing more to be known and enjoyed. But, between finite beings and Him who is infinite, there is no analogy. Possessed, by the supposition, of all possible perfection, he cannot become wiser, holier, more powerful, and more benevolent than he is. In his nature, all greatness and all goodness are united. He is the standard of excellence to all orders of creatures, who are more or less perfect according to their degrees of resemblance to Him. To Him there is no standard. In the universe he sees nothing equal to himself, and his infinite understanding can conceive nothing more excellent.

This reasoning, which is frequently employed to prove the Divine immutability, is of ancient date, and occurs in the second book of Plato's work *De Republica*. It is in the form of a dialogue, and this is the substance of what is said by the speakers. "If any change should take place in God, it is plain that it would be effected by himself. Whether then would he change himself into something better and fairer, or something worse and baser than himself? It is necessary, that if he is changed, it should be into something worse; for we will not say that God is in any respect deficient in beauty or virtue. This is right; and such being the case, can it be thought that any being, whether God or man, would voluntarily make himself worse? It is impossible; and it is therefore impossible that God should will to change himself; but as it seems, being the fairest and the best, he always remains simply in his own form." He expresses himself in this manner, because he refers to the tales of the poets, who represented the gods as appearing in a variety of shapes.

By this general reasoning we prove the immutability of God. It is from the condition of creatures, who are subject to perpetual fluctuation, that we acquire the notion of change; but it is equally absurd to transfer it to God, as to ascribe to him other human infirmities. The Divine nature is not affected by any of the causes which alter the state and qualities of dependent beings. Let us proceed to inquire in what respect God is immutable.

First, He is immutable in his existence. He never began to be, and he will never cease to be; and in this view his immutability coincides with his eternity, which has been already demonstrated. At every point of infinite duration it may be said to him, "Thou art." There was a time, for so we must speak, when there were no created beings, but then He was; there will be a time when, it may be, this visible creation shall be annihilated, but then He will be. To the immutable duration of the Divine nature, our Saviour alluded in these remarkable words, which the adversaries of his Deity have used so many dishonest arts to explain away, but which remain unaffected by their criticisms, "Before Abraham was, I am."* The sentence is at variance with the laws of grammar; the present time is represented as preceding the past. From this apparent confusion, there is no possibility of extricating the words, but by the sublime and mysterious doctrine of the immutable existence of the speaker in his superior nature. "I AM" is the name of God; and it imports, that in his existence the distinctions of past, present, and to come, have no place. Hence our Lord did not say, I *was* before Abraham, for in this manner

* John viii. 58.

any angel might have spoken of himself; but I AM, intimating that in reference to his duration, the two thousand years which had elapsed since the days of the patriarch were annihilated. The existence of creatures is successive, and may be compared to a stream in perpetual motion, of which one part is past, and another is to come. The present moment only is our own, and it is gone while we are speaking of it. What we call the present, is the swift passage of fugitive instants. But the existence of God, as we endeavoured lately to shew, is totally different. Far as the subject is above our comprehension, yet it seems to be an unavoidable conclusion, that in duration absolutely eternal there is no succession, and that a duration measured by days and years, must have had a beginning. The terms young and old are inapplicable to Him who always is, and serve merely to express the different stages in a series, advancing farther and farther from the point at which it commenced. The title, Ancient of days, is not intended to signify that he is old, but that he existed from eternity, before all the generations of men. All the distinctions of time are set aside by the declaration of the Apostle, "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."* It is when the sacred writer in describing the transitory nature of creatures, their tendency to decay, and their final dissolution, that he takes occasion to attribute immutability to God, in a passage formerly quoted, intimating that time, which affects all other beings, has no influence upon him, and that his existence is independent of it. "They shall perish, but thou shalt endure. As a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end."†

Secondly, He is immutable in knowledge. We are so ignorant of superior beings, that we cannot speak positively and particularly concerning them; but while we conceive them to have been endowed with a large measure of knowledge from their origin, we are certain that it was not infinite, and that it therefore admitted of increase, and has since been progressive. Man comes into the world altogether destitute of knowledge. He has no innate ideas, but merely is endowed with the capacity of acquiring knowledge, which is excited by his senses, and by the other means employed for the improvement of his intellectual faculties. Thus creatures are always undergoing a change in their mental state, rising higher and higher in attainments. And this is not the only change experienced by men, who lose as well as gain knowledge, and are subject to frequent revolutions of sentiment, from right to wrong, and from wrong to right. They are misled by hasty and partial observation, imposed upon by sophistry, and reclaimed from error by more correct information, and more exact inquiry. The knowledge of God is infinite as his essence. He knows himself; he knows all things which now are, which have been, and which shall be. He knows all possible things, or all things which his power could create, and his wisdom could arrange. The whole system of creation is constantly before him, because he is intimately present with it; he can have no discoveries to make, who is already in every place where there exists any object of knowledge. "Thou compassest my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways."‡ When a man travels into a foreign country where the aspect of nature, the form of the buildings, and the manners of the inhabitants, differ much from those of his native land, we say that he acquires a stock of new ideas; but nothing is new to Him who fills heaven and earth. The language of Scripture is figurative, when it represents him as looking down, or coming down to see what men are doing upon earth; and nothing is intended but to teach us that he has a perfect knowledge of their proceedings. It cannot be doubted that the Maker of the universe is thoroughly acquainted with his own work; that as he furnished its inhabitants

* 2 Peter iii. 8.

† Ps. cii. 26, 27.

‡ Ps. cxxxix. 3

with their faculties and principles of action, he knows beforehand what they can, and will do; and that since he upholds them by his power, and arranges their circumstances, he distinctly foresees every event in their history. As his knowledge is universal, so it is infallible. The objects of his contemplation are not appearances, but realities. Every thing presents itself to Him as it is in itself, and in all its connections and consequences. He perceives the essences of things on which their qualities are founded. He cannot be mistaken, because the whole case is before him; he cannot be disappointed, because no unexpected cause will disturb the order of events; analogy, conjecture, and calculation, must not be attributed to an understanding which sees the future as distinctly as the present. To some, indeed, it has seemed impossible to reconcile the foreknowledge of God with the free agency of man, and they have chosen rather to deny the Divine prescience, than to infringe human liberty. Hence they have not hesitated to represent Him as ignorant of the future volitions of men and of the events depending upon them, as looking forward with anxiety to their determinations, and as compelled to change his procedure when the result does not accord with the plan which he had previously formed; and those passages of Scripture which ascribe to him fear, desire, expectation, disappointment, and repentance, they have understood literally, as indicating the same emotions in his mind which are caused in ours by our ignorance of futurity. But such a mode of interpretation is unworthy of any person who makes a pretension to common sense, because it rests upon expressions manifestly figurative, to the neglect of the plainest and most explicit declarations in other places, of the foreknowledge of God. The predictions of Scripture afford complete demonstration, that future events are known to him as certainly as those which are present; and at the same time, that the persons by whom they are fulfilled, retain their free agency, and are responsible for their actions. I shall refer only to the prophecies concerning the sufferings and death of the Messiah. The event was fixed, and the agents were appointed; but they were conscious of perfect freedom, and obeyed the inclinations of their own hearts, while they were doing what God's "hand and counsel had determined before to be done." "Known to him were all his works from the beginning of the world."* The whole train of events, from the creation to the general judgment, was present to his mind from eternity. In the shifting scenes of human affairs, he sees only the evolution of his own plan. Experience is daily teaching us; but to his eye, all things were open and manifest from the commencement of time. "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or, being his counsellor, hath taught him? with whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?"† He is immutable in knowledge; it is independent and underived, and always perfect.

In the third place, He is immutable in his counsels or decrees. This is a necessary inference from the immutability of his knowledge. Men change their designs, because by reflection or experience they find them to be impracticable, there being obstacles in the way which they had not taken into the calculation; or because they have discovered that they would be productive of evil instead of good, or at least would not realize the advantages which they expected from them; or because some new plan has been suggested, from which greater and more numerous benefits will result; and sometimes because they cannot long fix their attention upon a particular object, and are happy only when they are roving from one pursuit to another. But none of these causes can have any influence upon him whose knowledge is comprehensive and perfect. Among all possible ends having selected the best, and

* Acts iv. 28. and xv. 18.

† Isa. xl. 13, 14.

fixed upon the most proper means of accomplishing them, he cannot be induced to deviate from his choice. No new views can present themselves to his mind, nor is it possible that any change of circumstances should take place which might render the adoption of a different order of procedure expedient. The imperfection of our knowledge, the limited nature of our prospects, and the consequent mistakes into which we are betrayed, account for the fluctuations of our conduct.

The decrees of God have been the subject of controversy in every age. It will be acknowledged by every person who has attentively considered them, that they are mysterious, and are attended with difficulties, of some of which a satisfactory solution cannot be given. There is one difficulty which presses upon every system, namely, how to reconcile a fixed and prior purpose with the free agency and accountableness of man. There are disputes respecting the relation of the decrees to the foreknowledge of God; whether he foresees future things as certain because he has decreed them, or his foreknowledge is the foundation of his decrees. But in one thing all are agreed, who admit his omniscience and supreme dominion, that he has settled a plan in conformity to which the order of the world proceeds. In this plan no alteration is ever made. The notion of temporal and mutable decrees is founded on the supposition which is alike contrary to sound reason and to Scripture, that the future actions of men are not certainly foreknown. What an idea does it give us of Him, who, in the possession of infinite perfection, is independent upon the whole creation, to represent him as determining one thing to-day, and another thing to-morrow; as passing from one intention to another according to the capricious movements of inferior beings, who are the sport of their own fancies, and are driven by every gust of passion.

God predetermined the number of which the human race should consist, the time when each individual should come into existence, the circumstances of his lot, the part which he should act upon the theatre of the world, and his final state throughout an eternal duration. "He worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will."* Amidst the diversity in the dispensations of providence, he is steadily carrying on his own designs. Kingdoms rise and fall; war lays the earth desolate; the bad passions of the human heart have full play, and make such inroads upon the order and happiness of society, that the world may seem to be dismissed from the care of the almighty Ruler. Yet we are sure that the Lord reigns, that he directs and controls the operations of his creatures, and makes the most depraved and perverse of them subservient to his purposes. Not one of them can deviate a single step from the path marked out to him; the mightiest and most self-willed of them cannot lift his hand or move his tongue, so as to interfere with the designs of the Almighty. There is the appearance of confusion only to us, who are but a part of the extensive and complicated system, and are unable to trace its connection with the past and the future. All is order to that eye which looks at once through all space, and all duration. As there is a perfect harmony between his counsels and his works, he can with no more justice be charged with mutability, on account of the varieties in his proceedings, than it could be imputed to a man of comprehensive views and commanding influence, who, in executing a favourite scheme, should at one time employ the services of a friend, and at another take advantage of the actions of an enemy, and who, by his superior wisdom, was able to convert occurrences hostile in their tendency, into means of ultimate success. Amidst this variety of contrivances, his mind is unchanged; and the knowledge of his purpose illustrates the consistency of his conduct.

Once more, He is immutable in his moral perfections. He is essentially

* Ephes. i. 11.

just and holy; and the rectitude and purity of his nature are displayed in all his dispensations. The moral laws which he has given for the government of mankind, are never repealed or suspended. The same duties are in every age required from men in the same circumstances: it has never happened, and it never will happen, that sin shall obtain his favour, and righteousness shall cease to be the object of his approbation. The manner of transacting with men has been different, according to the difference of their circumstances. The religion of a state of innocence, could not be the same with that of a state of guilt; and the religion of sinners has varied in its external form, as we learn by tracing its history in the patriarchal age, under the law, and since the introduction of Christianity. No two things seem more unlike than the Gospel, with its few and simple institutions, and the Mosaic economy, with its numerous and splendid rites. But, when the systems are examined, we find that in all essential points they perfectly agree. Under both the same truths are taught, the same duties are enjoined, and the same end is aimed at,—the reconciliation of sinners to God, and the restoration of his image in their souls. In all ages, man has stood in the same general relation to God and to his fellow men; and love to his Maker and his neighbour has been inculcated as the principle of universal obedience.

The immutability of the moral perfections of God is evident from the Mediatorial scheme, which amidst its manifestations of love, and its wonderful contrivances for the diffusion of happiness among our lost and ruined race, discovers the strictest regard to truth, and justice, and purity, and sheds new lustre upon them. It has made no change in the law which had pronounced its curse upon us, in order to facilitate our escape from its power; it has prescribed the fulfilment of its demands as the indispensable condition of our salvation, and established it in all its rights. The immutability of God is the principle upon which this scheme rests. There would have been no occasion for the substitution and sufferings of the glorious Person who redeemed us, if it had been possible that God could have lowered the standard of duty to accommodate it to our weakness, or could have abstained from recompensing transgression according to its desert. It was not without reason that he gave this terrible example of avenging wrath to the universe. It was not simply to display his power, nor was it to gratify himself with the spectacle of agony and blood; it was to proclaim to all worlds the unbending rectitude of his nature, and his eternal abhorrence of sin.

This view of the immutability of God is necessary to the support of religion. The supposition of inconstancy would destroy our veneration for him; there would be no solid basis to sustain our hopes; we could place no confidence in his promises; there would be no fixed standard of morality; and we should be embarrassed at every step, not knowing how to secure his approbation, because the conduct which was acceptable to him at one time, might be offensive at another. But “his righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and his law is the truth.”

It is unnecessary to extend the argument to his other perfections. While the immutability of God distinguishes him from all creatures, it will, perhaps seem to us to be hardly consistent with the idea of consummate felicity. Variety appears to us to be essential to happiness; we wish for new scenes, new pleasures, and new occupations; and to have always the same objects before us, to be always drawing from the same sources of enjoyment, to be fixed in the calm and repose of contemplation, or from day to day to go over the same uniform round of actions, is accounted the description of a dull and melancholy life. The range of the Divine understanding, indeed, is not limited like ours; it sees all things in earth and heaven; it sees them at a glance; they are more familiar to it than the few objects in our vicinity are to us; and

nothing occurs which it did not always know. But we err, when we transfer to God any thing in ourselves which arises from our imperfection. We are right in ascribing knowledge to him, but are wrong if we conceive it like ours to be partial. We are right in ascribing power to him, but are wrong if we suppose that it is ever accompanied with labour and effort. It would be an error equally gross to suppose him to be influenced by the love of variety, which is the result of the limited capacity of our nature. We can admit at any given time, only a part of what may be known and enjoyed; but our Maker has formed us capable of interminable progress; and hence, we are urged forward by a powerful impulse from the point which we have gained to another which rises to view, and holds out the hope of greater advantage. What we already possess is soon exhausted, and we seek a new supply; or it creates sensations so delightful, that we wish them to be multiplied and heightened. The Supreme Being finds eternal rest and satisfaction in himself. The well-springs of his happiness are in his own nature: even his infinite understanding can conceive nothing greater and more excellent; and of every thing external he is so independent as not to be affected by its existence or annihilation. In the possession of his own resources, he is consummately and permanently blessed; and hence the Scripture calls him the happy God, the happy* and only Potentate, the Being who has in himself an inexhaustible store of felicity, and therefore needs no change as creatures do, who, possessing only a diminutive portion of good, feel the craving of desire, and hasten on from stage to stage in quest of a resting-place.

It may be objected to the doctrine of the divine immutability, that there are certain facts in the history of the divine dispensations, which seem to be at variance with it. We shall therefore briefly consider them, and endeavour to shew that the inconsistency is only apparent.

First, It may be alleged, that a change must have taken place in the Divine nature, when this earth and the heavens were created, because then God, who, if we may speak so, had rested from infinite ages, became active and exerted his power and all the other perfections which are displayed in his works. Let us beware of thinking that this rest which we ascribe to God prior to creation, was like the rest of body, which is opposed to motion; or like the rest of the soul, when its powers are suspended in a swoon or during profound sleep. A living and intelligent Being must have been always active, as our minds are when we are awake. God must have been always active in contemplating and loving himself; and let us remember, that although alone, he was not solitary, as we know from the mysterious doctrine of a plurality of persons in his essence. The only difference which creation could make, was, that now he became active *ad extra*. But let us not, in this instance, degrade him by a comparison with his creatures. We experience a sensible change when we pass from inaction to activity; we put our bodies in motion and exert our muscular strength; but it is not so with the Omnipotent, whose eternal operations imply no effort and are effected by a simple volition. The first chapter of Genesis represents all things as having been made by his word. He said, "Let there be light, and there was light." "Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, and the earth brought forth the living creature after his kind." Omnipotence does not toil and suffer fatigue. The magnificent fabric of the universe was produced out of nothing by God, more easily than we can move our arm. He underwent no change, when he proceeded in this manner to execute his plan.

In the second place, It may be thought, that although the act of creation might be consistent with the immutability of the Divine nature, yet a change must have undoubtedly taken place in it, at the incarnation of the second

* *μακκαριος*, *beatus*, happy. 1 Tim. vi. 15.

person of the Trinity, when God became man, or, in the words of the Evangelist, "the Word was made flesh." This inference would be legitimate, if it were true that the two natures of our Saviour were mixed or blended together; or that the Divine nature supplied the place of a human soul, and consequently became subject to human passions; or that it acquired by this union any new property, or suffered a limitation of its original powers; if, to use the scoffing language of blasphemers, the Deity had been imprisoned in the body of an infant, had been grieved and tormented, and had died upon the cross. But these are all erroneous views of the subject, heresies which have long since been refuted, wilful misrepresentations which we repel with the scorn which they most justly deserve. The incarnation was the union of two natures in one person, or such a union, that the assumed nature as truly belongs to our Saviour as his original one; but they remain as distinct as if they were not united. The divine was not humanized, nor the human deified; there was no communication of properties from the one to the other; both continued in their integrity, and in the possession of their peculiar qualities. This most intimate of all the relations in which the Divine nature stands to created beings, affected it no more than the relation subsisting between that nature and the other individuals of the human race.

In the third place, it may be asked, How shall we reconcile with this doctrine those passages of Scripture which represent God as having actually changed? Do we not read that it "repented the Lord that he had made man upon the earth?" and again, that "it repented him that he had set up Saul to be king over Israel?" The solution of this difficulty is very simple, and is generally known. In speaking of himself, God accommodates his language to our conceptions, that we may the more easily apprehend his character and perfections, and that the truth signified to us by metaphors and similitudes may make a deeper impression. He describes himself as clothed with bodily members, but no person supposes that he has eyes, and ears, and hands, and feet. He describes himself as awaking, but surely no man will think that ever he falls asleep. Common sense directs us to understand all such passages as figurative. Does it not also require that we should put the same construction upon other passages which attribute human feelings and passions to God? We might suspect the mind of that man to be deranged, who should imagine that he fears, expects, is disappointed, grieves and rejoices; and why then should the idea be admitted, that he literally repents? When a person adopts a new line of conduct, we conclude that he has changed his mind. It is on this ground that God is said to repent; the cause is put for the effect, by a well known figure of speech; and the change of his mind signifies merely a change of dispensation. When he destroyed the inhabitants of the earth by a flood, and transferred the right to reign from Saul to another person, he acted as if he had repented, in the one case, that he had created a race which had become exceedingly corrupt, and in the other, that he had bestowed the crown upon a man who showed himself unworthy of it. But in both cases, the repentance was only apparent; for the events upon which his change of conduct was founded, were foreseen from the beginning. God knew that the human race would apostatize from him, and that Saul would not hearken to his voice.

In the fourth place, It may be suspected that God really changes, when he hates a person whom he once loved, or loves a person whom he once hated. Of the former change, we have an example in the apostate angels and in Adam, who lost the favour and incurred the displeasure of their Creator; and of the latter, in those who, through the faith of the Gospel, pass from a state of condemnation into a state of acceptance. In these cases, a change must be acknowledged; but it remains to be ascertained in whom it has taken place. Has

* Gen. vi. 6. 1 Sam. xv. 11.

God changed? No more than the sun changes when the different parts of the earth successively come into his light, and retire into darkness. That glorious luminary continues to shine with equal splendour, but terrestrial objects are in perpetual motion. He stands still, and they pass away. To ascribe motion to him is a vulgar error, which philosophy corrects. God does not love at one time, and at another hate an individual continuing in all respects the same; for were this the case, we should be compelled to say that he is mutable. Those who are always holy, are always the objects of his love; and those who are always impure, are always the objects of his hatred. The change is in his creatures, who having lost their righteousness, have fallen under his displeasure; or having recovered it by his grace, have regained his approbation. It would be an unequivocal proof of mutability, if he entertained the same regard to a creature after it had lost its innocence as before; because the object of his regard, although physically the same, would be morally different, and could not continue to attract his love, without a change in him corresponding to the change which it had undergone. The withdrawal of his favour from a sinner, and the restoration of it to the believing penitent, supply irrefragable evidence that he is governed by an unbending principle of rectitude, and that justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne.

The immutability of God is fraught with consolation. It is a rock on which we can fix our feet, while the mighty torrent is sweeping away every thing around us. Awful indeed is the idea of a Being dwelling from age to age amidst the plenitude of perfection and felicity, to whom time is as a moment, and the universe as a span! What is man, that he should regard him? What is man, who yesterday opened his eyes to the light, and to-morrow shall close them in the grave? Yet he condescends to be our friend and protector, and consoles us by the assurance, that although we are as the flower of the field, which is withered by the passing blast, yet his mercy is from everlasting to everlasting, and his faithfulness to children's children. To Christians this consolation belongs. The permanency of his character secures to them the performance of his promises, a welcome reception when they come to him with their requests, succour in the season of need, and happiness stretching beyond the boundaries of time, uninterrupted by death itself, and prolonged through an infinite duration. "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee."*

The Divine immutability, like the elud which interposed between the Israelites and the Egyptian army, has a dark as well as a light side. It insures the execution of his threatenings, as well as the performance of his promises; and destroys the hope which the guilty fondly cherish, that he will be all lenity to his frail and erring creatures, and that they will be much more lightly dealt with than the declarations of his own word would lead us to expect. We oppose to these deceitful and presumptuous speculations the solemn truth, that God is unchangeable in veracity and purity, in faithfulness and justice. There is another delusion which this doctrine is fitted to dispel. The thought of hell, as a prison from which there is no release, is alarming; and men, unable to work themselves into a complete disbelief of its existence, have sought to relieve their minds by converting it into a purgatory, or a place of temporary punishment. The Judge will relent, and let the criminals go free. Future sufferings will prove corrective, and prepare for a universal restoration. But here again his immutability meets us. It is vain to expect from him what is inconsistent with his nature. What he is at present he will always be. As fire will always burn, so his holiness will always abhor, and his justice will always pursue with vengeance, the workers of iniquity. There can be no

* Isaiah liv. 10.

just hope of escape without a change in themselves, and it must take place before the day of doom. This life is the season of trial, the world to come is the place of recompense, and there the allotment is final. The decree by which it is fixed, is founded on the eternal principles of justice, and is as immutable as God himself.

LECTURE XXI.

ON GOD.

Division of the Divine Attributes into communicable and incommunicable—First communicable Attribute, Knowledge: proof of this Attribute—Extent of the Divine Knowledge—Scholastic distinctions respecting it—Illustration of its Perfection—Practical Reflections.

THE attributes of God are the properties or excellencies by which his nature is distinguished; and in the possession of them, he is absolutely and infinitely perfect. There are two ways of demonstrating them: *a priori* and *a posteriori*. They are demonstrated *a priori*, when having ascertained that there is a necessarily existing Being, we prove that such a Being must be eternal, immense, immutable, intelligent, and active. They are demonstrated *a posteriori*, when we prove them from the evidence afforded by his works. In the preceding lectures both kinds of reasoning have been employed.

The Divine perfections are usually divided into two classes, the incommunicable, and the communicable. The incommunicable are those of which there is no vestige or resemblance in creatures, as self-existence, absolute eternity, immensity, and immutability. Of these a nature created, limited, dependent, and consequently subject to change, is incapable. The communicable perfections are those to which there is something corresponding in creatures, as knowledge, wisdom, goodness and justice. As they do not in their nature imply the idea of infinity, although in the Creator they are infinite, they may belong in a low degree to limited beings. I say in a low degree, as faint shadows of the great Original; and on account of their comparative insignificance, the Scripture sometimes speaks as if creatures were as destitute of these, as of the perfections which are acknowledged to be incommunicable, and they were to be found in the Creator alone. He is called “the only wise God;”* and our Lord said to the young man who addressed him by the compellation of Good Master, “Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.”† When we are contemplating his underived and unbounded perfection, the excellencies of man and angels disappear, like the lesser lights in the meridian blaze of the sun.

In speaking of the attributes of God, we must remember that his nature is perfectly simple. This truth has been demonstrated from his unity, which excludes the idea of composition; from his self-existence, which imports that nothing preceded him as something does in the case of all compounds; from his immutability, which could not be predicated of his nature if it were made up of parts; and from other topics, which it is unnecessary to mention. If it has already appeared that he is an immaterial Being, it is a necessary consequence that he is not compounded, in the grosser acceptation of the term, because a spirit has no parts, and is indivisible and incorruptible. But the simplicity which theologians ascribe to God is a metaphysical conception, and

* 1 Tim. i. 17.

† Matth. xix. 17.

means that his essence and attributes are not distinct, or that his attributes must not be conceived as superadded to his essence, and hypothetically separable from it; but that his essence and attributes are one. And as they are not distinct from his essence, so they are not distinct from each other; but there is one indivisible nature, having different manifestations and relations to external things, which, according to our inadequate conceptions, appear to us to be different perfections. In themselves they are one, although to us they seem to be many.

This manner of representing the subject has been objected to, and attempts have been made to turn it into ridicule. "Here," it has been said, "are attributes, which are no attributes; which are totally distinct, and perfectly the same; which are justly ascribed to God, being ascribed to him in Scripture, but do not belong to him; which are something, and nothing; which are figments of human imagination; mere chimeras, which are God himself; which are the actors of all things, and which, to sum up all, are themselves a simple act." There is no doubt that a person, who was disposed to amuse himself on a subject so solemn, might find some ground in the language employed. The only sense in which it is intelligible is, as stated in a former lecture, that we ought not to conceive his attributes to be separable from his essence; that he is what he is, by necessity of nature; that when we speak of his wisdom, it is God himself who is wise; of his power, it is God himself who is mighty; of his goodness, it is God himself who is good. We have said that some of the qualities of creatures are not essential to them; but God never is or can be without his perfections. All this is plain to any understanding; but if there is any other sense in which his perfections are said to be himself, I confess that it surpasses my comprehension; and equally incomprehensible is the proposition, that his perfections are one in themselves, if any thing more be meant than that the Divine essence is at once intelligent, holy, just, and benevolent. I know not well what is meant by making them distinct from his essence; nor am I certain that any man ever conceived them to be distinct, however unguardedly he may have expressed himself. A physical distinction is impossible, and a metaphysical one is only a mode of thinking, which is unavoidable in considering any being simply as a being, and then as endowed with certain characteristic properties or qualities. It is enough to believe that God is by nature possessed of all possible perfections.

Having made these observations, which are applicable to the Divine perfections in general, I proceed to the consideration of those which are called communicable, because there is some resemblance of them among creatures. Let us begin with the attribute of knowledge.

Every person who believes that there is a God, readily admits that he is possessed of intelligence, without which he would be inferior to many of his own creatures. Intelligence is so manifestly essential to the First Cause, that none have doubted of it, whatever erroneous conceptions they have entertained of the Deity in the want of supernatural instruction. Some have conceived their gods to be material beings, have clothed them with human infirmities, and represented them as subject to human passions; but all have believed that they were witnesses of the actions of men, and acquainted with the events which take place upon the earth. The ancient Egyptians, who expressed their conceptions by hieroglyphics, made an eye the symbol of the Deity, to intimate that all things are open to his inspection. The prayers, and other religious services of the heathens, proceeded on the supposition that they were heard and observed by the objects of their worship; and their belief in prophets who foretold future events, and in oracles to which they resorted for counsel in matters of difficulty, implied an opinion, that from the gods nothing was concealed, and that events were subject to their control.

In proof that knowledge is one of the perfections of God, the following arguments may be adduced.

In the first place, as it necessarily enters into the idea of a perfect Being, so it is essentially connected with other attributes, which all acknowledge to belong to him, and which will be afterwards considered. We believe him to be omnipotent, holy, just, and good, and these perfections imply that he is an intelligent Being. Power without knowledge would be blind force, which would remain inactive from want of any motive to exert it, or would be exerted by mere chance, to build up or to demolish, to create or to annihilate. Such an effect as the present system of things could not have been produced by it, for it exhibits the clearest proofs of design, and must therefore be regarded as the result of a plan previously formed. Without intelligence, he could not be holy and just; for moral perfections imply a perception of the essential differences of things, the power of distinguishing good and evil, right and wrong, an acquaintance with the nature and relations of other intelligent beings, their faculties, their opportunities, their temptations, their duties, and their crimes. He could not be good, if by a blind necessity or a fortuitous act he dispensed life and its enjoyments, any more than the sun is good, because it pours light and heat upon the earth. We do not call a man good, who scatters his favours at random from instinct rather than from reason; for goodness implies a benevolent design, and a benevolent design supposes the objects of its exertions to be known, and their welfare to be intended. What excellence could we perceive in a Being, eternal, omnipresent, and immutable, if he were ignorant of every thing without himself, and even of his own existence and attributes, as he would be if knowledge were not one of the number? The meanest creature who was conscious of his own thoughts and capable of observation and reasoning, would be superior to him; and in fact, we could hardly distinguish such a Being from the material universe. We could not believe him to be a spiritual Being, because although we will not be so absurd as to confound a substance with its property, and say that thought is the essence of spirit, yet we must hold, that to a spirit it is essential to think.

In the second place, the intelligence of the Supreme Being may be inferred from its existence among creatures, since it is an unquestionable principle, that as every effect has a cause, so there can be no more in the effect than there is in the cause. It cannot communicate what it does not itself possess. We have a sure proof that there is intelligence among creatures, from consciousness and observation. We find intelligence in ourselves, and we see unequivocal evidence of it in others: our bodily senses and our mental faculties are the gifts of our Maker; if we acknowledge that we were created by his power, we cannot doubt from what source those parts of our constitution are derived. We perceive the external world; we discover the properties and relations of objects around us; we become acquainted with a variety of truths in science, morals, and religion, which do not fall under the cognizance of our senses. Passing the boundaries of our terrestrial habitation, we extend our researches to other regions, and can tell the laws by which the planets are guided in their course, and the most distant star which twinkles in the abysses of space is preserved. Limited as our knowledge is, and insignificant when compared with the omniscience of God, or even the attainments of superior beings, it extends so far as to demonstrate the strength and grandeur of our faculties. It may be presumed that the minds of superior beings are endowed with more ample powers. The discoveries which are the boast of human reason, may seem to angels as insignificant as the thoughts of a child appear to a philosopher; what is difficult to us may be easy to them, and what is mysterious may be plain. It is an obvious inference from the intelligence of creatures, that there is intelligence in the Creator, and that he possesses it in the most

perfect degree. Whence could our knowledge have proceeded but from the Father of lights? We cannot resist the force of these questions of the Psalmist, "They say, The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it. Understand, ye brutish among the people; and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?"*

In the third place, we prove the knowledge of God from his omnipresence, which has been already demonstrated. When speaking of that perfection, we shewed, that unless he were present in all places, he could not know all things; and it may seem like reasoning in a circle now to prove, that he does know all things, because he is present with them. But the proper conclusion from this mode of proceeding is, that the two perfections are necessarily connected, so that the one cannot be conceived without the other. From his presence with creation, indeed, it does not necessarily follow that he knows it, unless there be some other evidence that he is an intelligent Being; but it corroborates that other evidence, by shewing that there is no obstacle to his knowledge of all things which exist. The supposition of a local Deity would lead us, not directly to deny his intelligence, but to question whether his knowledge was infinite. We might think, that like other limited beings, he has his own sphere of perception, beyond which every thing was unknown to him. And if God were in heaven and not also upon earth, we could not believe that he was acquainted with all persons and events so remote from the place of his residence. We should be tempted to say with those ungodly men whom Eliphaz reproves, "How doth God know? Can he judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not; and he walketh in the circuit of heaven."† Some things would be too distant or minute to be seen, and others so carefully concealed as to be observed only by persons on the spot. But such unworthy notions are inapplicable to an infinite Being. Nothing is hidden from him. As there is not a point of space from which he is excluded, he knows the meanest insect as well as the lofty archangel; what is done in a corner as well as the most public transaction. He is in the closet and in the market place; and it is a saying among Mahometans, that when two persons meet together, there is likewise a third. "Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee."‡

Having proved that God is an intelligent Being, I proceed to inquire into the objects and extent of his knowledge. We shall find that it is unlimited, comprehending every thing which can be known. "His understanding is infinite."§

In the first place, God knows himself. "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God."|| He knows what his own essence is, of which we can only say that it is spiritual, without being able to affix any positive idea to the term; he knows his own perfections, with some of which we have a partial acquaintance, while there may be many others, of which we have received no intimation; he knows the harmony of his attributes, which our weak minds are sometimes at a loss to reconcile; he knows his own counsels and plans, which are too extensive and complicated to be comprehended by any created intellect; he knows, in a word, all the mysteries of his nature, at which reason stands amazed and confounded. While there can be no hesitation in ascribing this knowledge to God, we may take occasion to remark, in order to shew how much superior is his understanding to ours, that we have no reason to think that any creature is possessed of similar know-

* Ps. xciv. 7—10.

† Ps. cxlvi. 5.

‡ Job xxii. 13, 14.

§ 1 Cor. ii. 11.

|| Ps. cxxxix. 12.

ledge. With respect to man, we are certain, that after all his wonderful discoveries, he labours under much ignorance of himself. He has indeed, minutely examined the structure of his body, and instituted profound inquiries into the powers of his mind; but in the most advanced state of science, he cannot tell what is the essence of either. What matter is, and what spirit is, are questions to which the philosopher and the peasant are alike unable to return an answer. The properties are familiar; but the substance, or substratum, eludes the keen search of the eye, or the thought. Let it be further remarked, that it is properly from the knowledge of himself, that God's understanding appears to be infinite. We cannot, even in imagination, reach the limits of creation; but we are sure, that it has boundaries, and is not immense like its Maker: we cannot enumerate and classify all its constituent parts; but our reason tells us, that they may be numbered. Yet wonderful as the perfect knowledge of the universe would be, something still greater may be conceived. The creation of new worlds would open a new field for more extensive discoveries. The Divine nature is infinite, and is the only adequate object of an infinite understanding. Nothing, if I may speak so, can fill it; nothing corresponds to its capacity but infinite excellence. In its view, the universe is as a point and as nothing; but in reflecting upon itself, it finds eternal satisfaction and repose. How shallow are the apprehensions of mortals, and of creatures much higher than they! To us it is permitted only to behold the skirts of his glory, the few rays from his overpowering splendour which have pierced through the surrounding clouds. "How little a portion have we heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand?" "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?"* It will be the privilege and the joy of the blessed, dwelling in his immediate presence, to make continual progress in this study; but the delightful labour will never come to a close.

In the second place, God knows all beings besides himself, all things which have been, now are, or shall hereafter be. Thus we distinguish them according to their succession; but they are all before his comprehensive mind.

God knows all things which are past. Although they have gone by, and no memorial of them may remain, they are still present to him, as if they continued to exist, and not one of them is forgotten. By the faculty of memory, which, although familiar to us all, we cannot explain, we retain the knowledge of things which once were, but have ceased to be. The sunbeam leaves no trace of its path, nor the cloud of its place in the sky; but sensations and thoughts make an impression upon the mind, which lasts for years, and sometimes for life; and to this part of our constitution we are indebted for our mental improvement. We could make no advance, if our ideas were instantly obliterated. Since creatures possess the power of knowing the past, we must allow that there is a similar power in the Divine mind, but exempt from the weakness, and failures, and confusion to which our memories are subject. When we think of the generations which have passed away from the creation of the world; the millions who have been born and have died with the numerous incidents in their lives, the plans which they contrived, the actions which they performed, the joys and sorrows, the hopes and fears which chequered their existence, it seems to us that the recollection of so many particulars is impossible. But this notion will be corrected, as soon as we reflect upon the difference between a finite and infinite understanding. We are utterly overwhelmed when we think of it; we can form no positive idea of its capacity and must rest in the negative conclusion that it has no limits. The relation to time of a being absolutely eternal, surpasses our comprehension. If he exists without succession, it would seem that the whole events of time are always

* Job xxvi. 14. xi. 7.

present to him; and yet, as time is a succession of moments, of which some are past, and others are future, this appears to be impossible. Still we hesitate to ascribe memory to him, because it is a faculty of mutable beings, which have been carried away in their course to a distance from objects and events which were once present. As there is no distinction of past, present, and to come, in his duration, so there may be no distinction of the same kind in his knowledge. He knows all things by a glance. But in these speculations, it may perhaps be justly said, that we darken counsel by words without knowledge. This knowledge of past things God claims in proof of his superiority to the wisest of men and to the gods of the Gentiles. "Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this, and shew us former things? Let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified; or let them hear, and say, It is truth."—"Let them bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen; let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come."* Upon the past as well as the future, there rests a cloud which the eyes of mortals cannot penetrate; and the only difference is, that while futurity without the aid of prophecy is all darkness, from the past there issue a few rays of light, in the accounts of former transactions which have been preserved, but which are often mixed with fable and falsehood, and leave us in utter ignorance of millions of facts which are irrecoverably lost. Without the knowledge of the past, God could not execute the august and awful office of the Judge of the human race. At the close of time, Adam and all his descendants will appear before him, to receive their final award, and the justice of the sentence will depend upon his accurate acquaintance with their character and actions. As he was the witness of their conduct during its course, so he will recall the minutest parts of it after an interval of thousands of years: and it is to assure us that no mistake will be committed, that the Scripture, in allusion to the proceedings of men, represents books as produced and opened, that the dead may be judged out of those things which are written in them.

God knows all present things, all things that now are. In this respect his knowledge resembles our own, but is infinitely superior in degree. He tells the number of the stars, and calls them by their names; he sees in one view the various orders of creatures which people the universe; he is acquainted with every individual of mankind, obscure as he may be and unnoticed by his neighbours; he observes the minutest and most insignificant animals, and counts the piles of grass. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and yet not one of them is forgotten before God."† Nothing can be more unimportant than a hair of our head, and yet our Saviour assures us, that our hairs are all numbered, and that one of them cannot fall to the ground without the knowledge of our heavenly Father. The humblest person upon earth has no cause to fear, that amidst the multiplicity of objects which engage the Divine attention, he shall be overlooked; nor may he whose interest it would be to remain unnoticed, hope that he shall be concealed in the dark recess from the eye of Omniscience. He knows the actions of men; "for the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."‡ It is too often their sole object to maintain external decorum, in order to secure the good opinion of others; while in their absence, they throw off restraint, and display their real character. But there is a witness with them in the most secret place; there is an eye observing them, which they should dread more than the severest human judge. It is about the actions of men, that the knowledge of God as the moral Governor of the world is exercised; for in this character, he is the guardian of his laws, and observes whether they are obeyed or trans

* Is. xliii. 9, xli. 22.

† Luke xii. 6.

‡ Prov. xv. 3.

gressed. And we remark, that he alone is the competent Judge of our actions, because he alone is acquainted with our circumstances and motives, and can distinguish between the form and the substance, the specious pretence and the upright intention. There are many considerations to be taken into account in a moral estimate of conduct, which he only can combine, to whom the proceedings of the mind are as manifest as external actions are to us. And hence we are led to remark, that God knows the hearts of men, and claims this knowledge as a prerogative in which no mortal shares with him. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."* Although we easily believe such knowledge to be the attribute of a Being who is as intimately present with our spirits as with our bodies, yet we can form no adequate conception of it, because it is so different from our own knowledge of each other's hearts, which is founded upon outward signs, often of doubtful interpretation, upon analogy or a presumed resemblance between them and ourselves, and in some cases merely upon conjecture; whereas the knowledge of God is immediate and intuitive. How awful the reflection, that he is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart, that its inmost recesses are naked and opened to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do! Thoughts which are only half-formed, which are suppressed as soon as they arise, which fly across the mind and are forgotten, do not escape his observation. He traces the windings and labyrinths of the soul, and discovers latent principles and motives, of which we are ourselves hardly conscious. "His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves."†

God knows things to come. In this respect there is no resemblance of his knowledge in man, nor we presume in any creature. We perceive what is present, and remember what is past; but the future can be approached only by imagination, unless we deem it an exception, that we are necessarily led to believe that the laws of nature will always be as they have hitherto been, and that succeeding generations will be like the present in form, and in general habits and pursuits. But these vague notions leave us in perfect ignorance of the actual state of things which will afterwards take place. We know not a single individual who will be born, or a single event which will befall him. Something indeed is revealed to us concerning the future history of the world; but the light of prophecy has emanated from him, who says, "Behold the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them."‡ This subject came under review, when we were speaking of the immutability of his knowledge. A proof, that he sees the future as well as the present, is furnished by the predictions of Scripture. God announced Cyrus by name long before his parents were born, and foretold his war against Babylon, and the means by which he should obtain possession of the city. He foretold the rise and fall of the four ancient monarchies, and portrayed before hand the characters and achievements of Alexander the Great and his successors, with such particularity and truth, that Porphyry, the learned adversary of Christianity in the third century, affirmed that the prophecies must have been written after the events. He foretold the birth of Jesus Christ, the place of his nativity, and the family from which he should spring, with the principal events of his life, and his death, although it was effected not by an immediate interposition of providence, but by the unexpected combination of Jews and Gentiles. It is unnecessary to multiply instances. We formerly adverted to the difficulty which has perplexed the thoughts, and exercised the ingenuity, of the studious in every age, with re-

* Jer. xvii. 9, 10.

† Job xxxiv. 21, 22.

‡ Is. xlii. 9.

gard to the means of reconciling the foreknowledge of God with the free agency of man. What is certainly foreseen, will certainly happen; but the infallibility of the event seems to preclude liberty of action, which consists in the power of acting or not acting, and of acting in this way or in that, as at the moment the mind of the person shall determine. The discussion of this point would lead us into a digression from the present subject. It has been often remarked, and justly, that the simple foreknowledge of actions has no influence upon their existence; of which we may satisfy ourselves by reflecting, that when we have at any time ground for confident expectation that a neighbour will take a particular course, our foresight is not the cause of his conduct, which would have been the same if it had not been foreseen but this observation only removes the difficulty a step farther back. As there can be no certain foreknowledge of things in themselves uncertain, it still remains to inquire, what is the ground of certainty in human actions which renders them the object of infallible foreknowledge? If it be said to be the Divine decree, the difficulty unquestionably is not diminished. Amidst all the perplexity in which we are involved, one thing is beyond dispute, namely, that God does foreknow future events, and prophecy is a proof of it. The truth of both these principles is incontrovertible: that known to God are all his works from the beginning of the world, and that man is accountable. He is free, while he is acting the part which his Maker has assigned to him; and may be justly punished for doing what constitutes a necessary link in the chain of events. The Jews fulfilled the Divine purpose in crucifying our Saviour, and yet brought wrath upon themselves to the uttermost. It ought not to weaken our belief, that we cannot reconcile liberty and foreknowledge. Such is the condition of man and of all finite beings, that they must assent to many things, for which they cannot account. We need not wonder, that when our thoughts are directed to God, we are on all sides encompassed with mysteries.

God knows all possible things. No person can suppose, that those alone are possible, which have been, now are, or shall hereafter be; that Divine wisdom is exhausted by the plans which it has already concerted, and Divine power by the effects which it has already produced, or has determined to produce. God could have called into existence many other worlds, and many other orders of creatures. He could have arranged systems totally different from any of those which have been established, governed them by different laws, and peopled them with inhabitants of different natures and faculties. He could have made our own world the scene of a different train of events, by replenishing it with a race of holy beings, who should have never been induced by temptation to swerve from their duty, and among whom pain, and sorrow, and mortality, would have been unknown. His infinite understanding knows not only what he has done, and has purposed to do, but all that his wisdom could have devised, and all that his power could have accomplished. If any man should be so curious as to ask, why he chose the present system in preference to so many possible systems? he should be reminded, that the question is presumptuous, and that we can return no answer to it, because God has not informed us of the reasons; but that if he shall ever be pleased to disclose his counsels to us, they will undoubtedly be found worthy of eternal admiration and praise.

The knowledge of God may be distinguished into two kinds, which have been called by Scholastic Divines, *scientia simplicis intelligentiæ*, and *scientia visionis*. *Scientia visionis* has for its object all things past, present, and to come; it is said to be founded on will, because the measure of it is the will of God, as expressed in his eternal purpose. He foresees as future those things alone which he has determined to bring to pass. They were only possible, till he decreed their futurity. It is called also *scientia libera*, free knowledge.

because it depends upon his will, which is the only reason of all the events of time. As nothing could take place independently of him, so he was under no necessity to act at all, or to act in any particular manner; but all his operations, *ad extra*, are the result of free choice. *Scientia simplicis intelligentiæ* has for its object possible things, things which might have been done, but never will be done. The measure of it is omnipotence; that is, while the former knowledge is limited by his decree, this is extensive as his power. He knows all that he could do; and because this knowledge is not founded on his will but on his power, it has been called *scientia necessaria*. His infinite understanding necessarily knows every thing which his infinite power can effect. A third kind of knowledge has been ascribed to God, and called *scientia media*, as being something between the two kinds already mentioned. It is the knowledge of what will happen in certain given circumstances, the knowledge of what creatures will do, if endowed with certain qualities and placed in certain situations. But there is no occasion for this distinction, as all the objects of this new kind of knowledge are comprehended under the head of *scientia simplicis intelligentiæ*. If God by his infinite understanding, knows all possible causes and all their possible effects, he knows what would be the result in any supposable case. He knew that the men of Kiehlah would deliver up David to Saul, because he knew the state of their hearts, and the influence which the authority and solicitations of that monarch would have upon their conduct. It is objected farther against the *media scientia*, that it is unworthy of God, as it makes him dependent upon creatures for a part of his knowledge; for the distinction has been invented with a design to prove, that his knowledge of the future actions of men is not founded on his own purpose to permit them, or to bring them to pass, but in a prospective view of the manner in which they will conduct themselves. It was introduced in opposition to the doctrine of free and sovereign grace, and it proposes to account for his purpose to give grace to one and not to another, by his foresight of the use which they would make of means and opportunities.

Concerning the knowledge of God, we assert, in opposition to this opinion, that it is independent. It is not obtained through the medium of his creatures, but, so far as it respects future things, is founded on his own will. No effect can be viewed as future, or in human language, can be the object of certain expectation, but when considered in relation to its efficient cause; and the cause of all things that ever shall exist is the purpose of God, "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." As the knowledge of God does not depend upon the actual existence of objects,—for this would limit it to the present and the past,—so it does not depend upon any conditions attached to their existence. He does not know that such things will happen, if such other things shall go before; but the whole series of events was planned by his infinite understanding, the ends as well as the means; and he foresees the ends, not through the medium of the means, but through the medium of his own decree, in which they have a certain future existence. They will not take place without the means; but the proper cause of them is not the means, but his almighty will.

It follows, in the second place, that the knowledge of God is eternal. If it be independent upon creatures, and founded in his own purpose, then it is as ancient as his purpose. Were it impossible to foresee the free actions of men, much of his knowledge would be acquired in time. It would be daily receiving accessions, like our own, to which something is added every day by our observation of the conduct of those with whom we are surrounded. It has been said, "that as it implies not any reflection on the Divine power, to say that it cannot perform impossibilities, so neither does it imply any reflection on his knowledge, to say that he cannot foresee as certain what is really not certain."

but only contingent." This is true; but it remains to be proved that the actions of men are contingent in such a sense as to be uncertain. Reason will ascribe all possible knowledge to God; and that it is possible certainly to foresee the free actions of men, cannot be a matter of doubt to a believer in Divine revelation, which abounds in predictions of such actions. The knowledge of God is eternal. The doctrine of temporal decrees, of decrees made in time, as men shew themselves to be worthy or unworthy, is chargeable with the impiety of setting limits to the Divine understanding, and making the Most High fickle and mutable as man, who is of one mind to-day, and of another to-morrow.

In the next place, The knowledge of God is simultaneous, or as it has been differently expressed, not discursive but intuitive. Some parts of human knowledge are intuitive; that is, the things are perceived at once, and no process of reasoning is necessary to discover them. There are certain axioms or first principles, to which the mind gives its assent as soon as they are proposed, and the terms are understood. There are also some truths, which, although not intuitive, are nearly such, because the mind arrives almost instantly at the conclusion. But the general character of human knowledge is, that it is successive. The riches of the mind, like external wealth, are acquired by accumulation. New objects and new relations of objects, daily present themselves to our senses; and from truths which we know, we infer other truths by a longer or a shorter train of reasoning. Thus our knowledge is discursive. But the infinite understanding of God receives no accession of ideas. The term infinite, which we apply to it, proves an accession to be impossible. He sees all things, as we see axioms by intuition. Eyes are ascribed to him to denote his knowledge, and to signify that it comprehends the whole system of things, as the human eye surveys at a glance the whole visible horizon. It follows, that what is called *media scientia*, or the knowledge of events through their causes, cannot be properly attributed to him, because it is a discursive process, or implies the inference of one thing from another, and consequently a succession of ideas. There is no progression from ignorance to knowledge in the Divine mind, which was from all eternity omniscient.

Hence it is evident, that the knowledge of God is immutable, as I shewed in a former lecture; and I proceed, therefore, to remark, that it is distinct. This is true also of human knowledge, to a certain extent. We have a distinct knowledge of mathematical truths, of facts which we have witnessed, and of the existence of objects which we perceive by our senses. On the other hand, we are ignorant of the essences of all things; we have no conception of the relation between their properties and their essences, or how the former inhere in the latter; and our ideas of many things are general and obscure. But all things are naked and opened to the eyes of God, τετρακκλησιμενα as an apostle says,* as manifest to him as the interior of an animal is to us, when it has been fairly divided and spread out for inspection. An infinite understanding is incapable of oversight, of misapprehension, or of taking a hasty and inaccurate survey. Every object, every quality of every object, every relation which it bears, every thing which may be predicated of it, whether it be animate or inanimate, all is before God, and is as thoroughly known as if his attention were fixed upon it alone. Among the many millions of the human race, every individual may truly say, "Thou, God, seest me."

In the last place, The knowledge of God is infallible. There is no mistake in his apprehension of things, and there is nothing like conjecture. Future events are as certainly known as present, because, although they may be contingent in respect of the agents, or may be produced by the free volition of

* Heb. iv. 13.

men they are future, not contingently but necessarily, to him who has purposed to bring them to pass. But as this is manifest from what has been already said, any farther illustration is unnecessary.

Any passages of Scripture which may seem to be inconsistent with the Divine omniscience, will perplex only the ignorant, and are easily disposed of. When God is said to have come down to see the city and tower which were building on the plain of Babylon,* that person would be justly laughed at who should suppose, either that he could literally descend, or that it was necessary to change his place, in order to know what was going on upon earth. When, again, he represents himself as looking that his vineyard should bring forth good grapes, whereas it brought forth wild grapes,† it would be the height of absurdity to take the words in their literal meaning, and imagine that he was really disappointed. Every body knows that God is speaking of himself after the manner of men, who in order to see an object more distinctly, draw near to it, and when they have arranged the means, expect the usual result. The two passages teach us, that God was perfectly acquainted with the transaction at Babel; and that, after the pains which he had bestowed upon his ancient people, it was solely owing to their own perverseness, that they were not made wiser and better.

The consideration of the Divine omniscience is calculated to check the lofty thoughts which we are too apt to entertain of ourselves. We often see men proud of their talents, and sometimes so much elated as presumptuously to pronounce judgment upon God himself; to censure his dispensations, as if a different procedure would have been wiser; to criticise his word, and refuse to give credit to its plain declarations, because reason cannot comprehend them. Thus finite measures that which is infinite. Such is the impious arrogance of an insignificant creature, who only yesterday began to know any thing, is puzzled by the most common occurrences, and finds mysteries in a grain of sand. Let him reflect upon an infinite understanding, and shrink within himself, saying, "I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the Holy."‡

There are many important lessons which are taught by this attribute of our Creator. It admonishes us to beware of sin, since he is the constant witness of our actions; and to study sincerity in all things, and particularly in our religious profession, because our motives are distinctly seen by him. It encourages good men to put their trust in him, and to commit all their affairs to his disposal; for a particular providence, which is the source of so much consolation, is founded on his infinite knowledge. The very hairs of our heads are numbered; and as nothing can befall us without his knowledge, so every event is under the direction of his wisdom and goodness. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."§

The omniscience of God encourages humble supplication in every season of need. There is no cause of fear that the prayers of the righteous will not be heard, or that their sighs and tears will escape his notice, since he knows the thoughts and desires of the heart. There is no danger of being overlooked amidst the multitude of supplicants who daily and hourly present their various petitions, for an infinite mind is capable of paying the same attention to millions as if only one individual were soliciting its notice. The want of appropriate language, the impossibility of giving expression to the deep feelings of the soul, will not hinder their success; because before they attempt to speak, he knows what they would say. "It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."||

In a word, what a powerful excitement is it to our duty, that He is looking on who approves of every honest endeavour to please him, and will abundantly

* Gen. xi. 5. † Isa. v. 2. ‡ Prov. xxx. 3. § 2 Chron. xvi. 9. || Isa. lxv. 24.

recompense it! "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."*

LECTURE XXII.

ON GOD.

Wisdom of God: distinguished from Knowledge—Idea of Wisdom—Proofs of Wisdom in Creation: in Providence: in Redemption.

HAVING considered the knowledge of God, I proceed to speak of his wisdom. These are easily distinguishable. Knowledge is the simple apprehension of things as they are, as the eye perceives the objects presented to it; wisdom is the arrangement of our ideas in proper order, and in such a train as to produce some useful practical result. The instrument of acquiring knowledge is the understanding alone; but wisdom implies volition, or a purpose to effect an end, and the choice of the means by which it will be accomplished. In creatures they are often separated. Wisdom cannot exist without knowledge, but knowledge may exist without wisdom; and, accordingly, there are men possessing very extensive information, who in their conduct give many proofs of thoughtlessness and folly. In an all-perfect Being, they are necessarily conjoined; omniscience supplies the materials of infinite wisdom. As God knows all his creatures, all their powers and qualities, all the purposes to which they may be rendered subservient, all the relations in which they may be placed, and all the possible consequences of all possible events, he is able infallibly to determine what are the most proper ends to be pursued, and what are the fittest means of effecting them; as he is perfectly just and good, there is no principle in his nature which might prevent him from choosing what is best; and as his power is infinite, no obstacle can occur to the execution of his plans.

All nations have agreed in ascribing wisdom to the Supreme Being, and have been led to this conclusion by the obvious and manifold proofs of it, which will be afterwards considered. "Man is wise," says Cicero, "and so therefore is God;" rightly judging that a superior nature must possess what is truly excellent in man; and that if wisdom had not existed in the Creator, it would not have been found in the creature. Revelation pronounces him to be "the only wise God,"† thus seeming to appropriate this attribute to him, to the exclusion of every other being from a share in it; yet we know that men and angels are possessed of it in a certain degree, and we must therefore understand the sacred writer to speak comparatively, and to signify that their wisdom, which is dependent and derived, and his wisdom, which is necessary and essential, do not admit of comparison; and when brought into competition, that of creatures, so limited in its nature, so soon exhausted by a few expedients, is altogether unworthy of notice.

Wisdom consists in the choice of proper ends and proper means; design simply implies that the agent has some object in view, and does not act at random. But his design may be trifling or degrading; it may prove that he is destitute of sound judgment; and hence, whatever art he may discover in gaining his object, we do not give him the praise of wisdom. If a man should em-

* Mal. iii. 16, 17.

† 1 Tim. i. 17.

ploy an ingenious and complicated apparatus to effect a purpose which is not worth half the expense, or which might have been effected without any waste of time and labour, instead of thinking him wise, we should pronounce him to be a fool. The end must be worthy of the agent, and of the attention bestowed upon it. It may be said, that we are incompetent to judge what is worthy of God, what it would become a Being so far exalted above us to do, and that it would be less presumptuous in a fly endowed with intelligence, to pronounce upon the counsels and operations of man. We acknowledge our incompetence beforehand, and our inability to enter fully into his designs, even after they are revealed; but since God has endowed us with some portion of understanding, there is no arrogance in venturing to say, when we see him pursuing certain ends, that they appear to us to be suitable to the dignity of his character. There is no arrogance in maintaining, that it is worthy of him to glorify himself by the manifestation of his attributes, to communicate happiness to other beings whom his almighty power has created, to uphold the moral government of the universe, to promote the interests of righteousness and truth. Now, these are the very ends which appear to be the objects of the Divine dispensations; and we are so far from perceiving any thing in them incongruous to the idea of an all-perfect Being, that they harmonize with our conceptions of the transcendent excellence of his character.

It is not less characteristic of wisdom to choose fit means, than to aim at worthy ends. We should never account him a wise man, who formed excellent designs, but failed to execute them from not knowing what expedients it was necessary to employ, or from want of skill in arranging and applying them. It is here that a trial is made of his knowledge of the powers, qualities, relations, and tendencies of things. There are persons whose minds are fertile in suggesting what it would be of advantage to do, but who are incapable of executing their own plans, and must commit them to others, who are superior in invention and dexterity; and the subordinate details may require greater strength of intellect than the original conception. In contemplating the wisdom of God, we must take into the account the whole process, the previous steps as well as the final result. In estimating the wisdom of an agent, we first attend to the object which he had in view, and secondly, observe the method by which he effected it.

In this argument, we assume the doctrine of final causes. A final cause is that for which any thing is done, the end which an agent has in view, and to which his operations are directed. It is called a cause, because it excites him to act; and a final cause, because when it is effected his object is gained. The proofs of final causes in the universe are denied only by atheists, who wish to obliterate the evidence that an intelligent Being is its author. How they have succeeded in this attempt so revolting to reason, we have formerly seen. It may be as rationally denied, that there are marks of design in the construction of a watch, as that there are any in the system of nature; that the ultimate intention of the watch was to point out the hour, as that the ultimate intention of the mechanism of an animal body is the sustenance and motion of the animal.

Let us, in the first place, collect the proofs of Divine wisdom from the visible creation. "How manifold, O Lord, are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all, and the earth is full of thy riches."* Instances of curious contrivance present themselves on every side. We observe a wonderful adaptation of one thing to another, with a view to the production of a particular result, and the same purpose accomplished by such a diversity of means, as cannot fail to convince us, that the whole is the work of an intelligent Being, rich in expedients. As the proofs of wisdom in creation constitute only one department of the subject, we cannot go into a minute detail, but must confine

* Ps. civ. 24.

ourselves to a few particulars, and even of these give only a general account. I might refer you to the argument formerly adduced* for the existance of God from the marks of design in his works, which prove an intelligent cause; but it would be improper to pass over a topic so rich in displays of his wisdom, although we shall be led to repeat in substance the observations formerly made.

Let us attend to the arrangement of the system to which we belong. In the centre is placed the sun, the great source of light and heat, who dispenses without intermission his influences to the planets, which perform their revolutions around him. He is at rest, and they are in motion; but they are retained in their orbits by his attractive power; and the mighty machine is incessantly working without confusion, or the slightest deviation of any of its parts. How much more admirable is the solar system as now understood, than it appeared to the ancient philosophers, who imagined that the sun daily wheeled his rapid course around the earth, which, in comparison of him is so diminutive! By the motion of the earth, the purposes which were supposed to be accomplished by the motion of the sun, are effected in a more simple manner. By its diurnal motion around its own axis, the different parts of its surface are successively presented to the sun, and the vicissitude of day and night is produced, so necessary to the existence and well-being of animals and vegetables. In the day, men and animals carry on their various operations, and vegetables are nourished by his rays, and adorned with beautiful colours: in the night, all nature reposes in the shades of darkness; plants sleep as well as living creatures; and the vigour of our bodies and minds, which were exhausted by labour and thought, is recreated. Who does not see, in this case, a wise provision of our Maker? By the annual circuit of the earth, we enjoy the change of seasons, which delights us by a variety of scene, and is subservient to the purposes of vegetation, on which the life of all terrestrial animals depends. In winter the earth rests, and repairs its strength; and during the subsequent seasons, that wonderful process takes place which clothes the trees and fields with verdure, and by the multiplication of the seed deposited in the soil, rewards the labour of the husbandman. We may remark the wisdom of God also in the relative situation of the earth to the sun. It has been placed where it is, and not in the orbit of any other planet, with an exact adaptation to the nature of its inhabitants. Whether it had been brought nearer, or removed to a greater distance, excessive heat or excessive cold would have proved equally fatal to animal and vegetable life. All living beings must have perished, unless their constitution had been changed, and the water in seas, lakes, and rivers, would have been either evaporated, or frozen. Here then we have an instance of adjustment, which furnishes a new proof of the Creator's wisdom.

Let us turn our attention to the constitution of the earth itself, and we shall perceive, that by the same wisdom, it is fitted for all the purposes which it was intended to serve. It is composed of various substances, adapted to a variety of uses; but what I request you at present to observe, is the nature of the substance lying on the surface. Had the earth been covered with rock or sand, it would have been an unfit habitation for man, because it could not have afforded the means of subsistence; but the upper stratum is a soft mould, into which the roots of plants penetrate, and in which seeds find a matrix, where the vegetable principle is evolved and nourished; for it should also be considered, that the soil is endowed with certain virtues, and supplies the pabulum of plants, in consequence of which they rise to maturity, and perfect their fruit. We observe that a large proportion of the surface is covered with water; but the objection against the extent of the ocean, as encroaching too much upon the habitation of men and terrestrial animals, is absurd while there are such tracts of land as yet unoccupied, and proceeds, besides, from stupid inattention to the

* See before, pp. 164—68.

purposes which are served by the ocean. Not only does it open an intercourse between distant nations, and furnish the means of easily and speedily conveying the productions of one country to another, but it is the inexhaustible source of those exhalations which descend upon us in rain and dew. And as the quantity of these is upon the whole not more than sufficient to supply rivers and springs, and to nourish the herbs, and plants, and trees, which clothe the surface of the earth, it is evident, that if the boundaries of the ocean had been compressed, all nature would have languished, animals and vegetables would have perished, and our globe would have been converted into a dreary wilderness. We formerly took notice of the wisdom displayed in the inequalities of the earth; and we then stated, that without mountains there would have been no springs and rivers. We may now remark, that a smooth uniform plain, however much adorned, would have been far less beautiful than the scenery which now enchants us by its diversified features, at one time gentle, and at another majestic; and that room is provided for a greater variety of plants and animals, some preferring cold and elevated regions, while others seek low and sheltered spots. The whole is planned with an evident regard to different ends, and each of these is secured by expedients varied with admirable skill.

Let us, in the next place, take a view of the living creatures which inhabit the earth, and we shall perceive many proofs of Divine wisdom in their bodies, and particularly in our own, which, according to a sacred writer, is “fearfully and wonderfully made.” In considering man as related to the material objects amidst which he is placed, it cannot fail to strike us as an instance of wise adaptation, that he is furnished with organs of sense to perceive them and their qualities, the knowledge of which is necessary, not only to his comfort, but to his very existence. When we examine those organs, the ear for example, or the eye, with which we are better acquainted, both the design and the workmanship are calculated to excite the highest admiration. We cannot tell, indeed, how we see or hear by means of these organs, but we discover a contrivance, of which the obvious intention is to convey the corresponding sensations to our minds. That a body so small as the eye should perceive not only near but distant objects, should bring under our view the earth and the heavens, should make us exactly acquainted with the figure, size, colour, and relative position of so many bodies, should discern the members of a minute insect, and contemplate the host of stars marshalled in the sky; that this little organ should be capable of taking so wide a range, and performing so many wonders, is a proof that it is not the work of chance, but of a Divine artist, who is wonderful in counsel. Among the boasted productions of human art, where shall we find any thing to be compared to it? When we proceed in the examination of our bodies, the evidences of wisdom multiply upon us. What a variety of functions is performed in this microcosm! what a provision of means and instruments! how delicate and regular the process! The bones support the body, and are articulated that it may bend in different directions, and be moved from one place to another. The flesh is composed of muscles, which being attached to the bones, and possessing the power of contraction, give them the necessary motion. The waste to which the body is subject, is repaired by its capacity to receive and digest food, and to convert it into its own substance; and by a curious apparatus the aliment is distributed to every part of our frame. The expenditure is constant, and so is the supply. We cannot live without air, and respiration is carried on by the mouth and lungs. The blood circulates by night and by day, and the secretions go on with perfect regularity when not interrupted by disease. There is one proof of the wisdom of our Maker, which deserves particular attention. While some of the operations, which are necessary to our well-being, are dependent upon our will, others of equal importance are involuntary. We respire, the blood flows, and many

other processes are continued in sleep as well as when we are awake, for this obvious reason, that the suspension of them would prove fatal to life. They are therefore taken out of our hands, and reserved in his own by the Great First Cause, who never slumbers or sleeps, and who lives and acts in every point of the universe. There is manifest wisdom in this arrangement. Man is left to do what he can do for himself; but when his power would be inadequate, another agency interposes to perfect the design. In many respects, the structure of the inferior animals resembles our own; and when a difference is observable, it affords a new illustration of wisdom, because it is the result of a design to fit them for the different functions belonging to their nature, and the mode of life allotted to them. On this ground, religion may confidently triumph over atheism. Its demonstrations can be opposed only by malignity struggling against conviction; or if there is any man, acquainted but superficially with the organization of living bodies, who denies that they are the work of an intelligent Maker, we may, after the example of the Psalmist, pronounce him to be a fool.

We might strengthen this argument by a review of the intellectual and active powers of the human mind, from which it would appear with how much wisdom they are adapted to the condition of man as an inhabitant of this world, and as in a state of preparation for a future and higher existence. His mental frame is not less wonderful than his corporeal. But I shall conclude with observing, that the wisdom of God is apparent in the instincts by which the irrational animals are governed. By instincts we mean certain inclinations or propensities to act in a way conducting to a specific result, without, as we suppose, any knowledge of the result, any anticipation of the consequence. Nothing is more admirable than the sagacity with which they choose the most proper places for their habitations, the dexterity displayed in constructing them, and the care which they take of their young, brooding over them, bringing food to them, training them up for their peculiar kind of life, and defending them with courage and with art. Yet we do not suppose, that they are possessed of reason, that they improve by the experience of their predecessors, that they deliberate and concert plans, that they calculate probabilities, and look forward to the future. What then is the wisdom which we admire in them? It is not their own, but the wisdom of their Creator, who, in a manner inexplicable to us, directs them to ends of which they are not aware. It is not by its own understanding, that the bee constructs its cells with such attention to strength and capacity; it is not from its own knowledge of the approaching disappearance of the flowers from which it extracts its food, that it gathers honey in the fine season, and lays it up in store for winter. No; the bee is under superior guidance, and it is when describing the operations of this little insect, that a heathen poet gives it as the opinion of some, that bees have a portion of the Divine mind, which pervades all nature, the earth, the sea, and the heavens:

*Esse apibus partem divinæ mentis, et haustus
Æthereos dixere.**

They rightly judged, that its wonderful contrivances did not originate from itself. "Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom, and stretch her wings toward the south? Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high?"† No; in the economy of the lower animals, we perceive the wisdom of the Creator, who purposing to preserve the individual and the species, guides them by his mysterious influence, with a certainty which the superior but fallible reason of man seldom attains.

In a lecture, of which the wisdom of God in creation forms only a part, there is room for nothing more than general observations. Perhaps, a strong-

* Virg. Georg. iv. 220.

† Job xxxix. 26, 27

er impression would been made by selecting an instance or two, and giving a minute illustration of them. We should find much to admire in a pile of grass, in the wing of a fly, or in the sting of a gnat. God has been said to be *maximus in minimis*, to appear greatest in the least things ; not however, because there is more wisdom in the formation of these, than in the structure of creatures of a superior size, but because we are more astonished at the variety displayed within such narrow limits. It is truly wonderful, that in the most diminutive insect, in a mere living point, in some cases invisible to the unassisted eye, there should be combined all the parts essential to a perfect animal, organs of sight, and smell, and taste, instruments of motion, and vessels for circulating the blood and digesting its food.

Let us proceed, in the second place, to collect the proofs of Divine wisdom from providence, by which we mean God's natural and moral government of the world by his own immediate but invisible agency, and by the instrumentality of second causes. So far as providence is employed in upholding the material system, and the living creatures who are void of reason, it is the continued exercise of the power by which they were originally produced ; and any observations which might be made, have been anticipated in speaking of their motions and instincts. I shall, therefore, confine your attention to his government of men, considered as moral agents, as beings possessed of reason, will, and active powers.

First, his wisdom appears in the order which he preserves among them, notwithstanding the tendency of their nature to throw all things into confusion. It ought to be considered, that the subjects of his government are not innocent and holy creatures, who reverence his laws, and are disposed to comply with his will ; but that they are self-willed and rebellious, driven headlong by impetuous passions, proud, jealous of their rights, envious, revengeful, ambitious, and so engrossed by a regard to themselves, as to be ready to sacrifice the interests of others to their views of honour, wealth, and pleasure. In short, the human mind, as it is now constituted, contains all the elements of discord ; and we may judge what mischief these would produce if full scope were allowed to them, by observing the misery which they occasionally entail upon families, nations, and churches. Their operations are prevented or moderated, not by simple power, which would be inconsistent with moral government, as it would suspend free agency and convert men into passive instruments of the Divine will, but by means suitable to their nature, and illustrative of the wisdom of the Supreme Ruler ; by his moral laws, some regard to which remains in minds not utterly abandoned ; by conscience which retains a degree of authority, and overawes them by its remonstrances and forebodings ; by the institutions of civil society, which springing out of the circumstances of human nature, must be considered as a part of the Divine administration ; by opposing one passion to another, and so counteracting or weakening its effect, for example, withholding the revengeful man from his purpose, by the fear of evil to himself, and the sensual man by the apprehension of the loss of character or health ; or by opposing the passions of one man to those of another, so that both are impeded, and neither can accomplish his design, or accomplish it to the extent which he had meditated. In this manner, God stills the tumults of the people without a miracle, and without a visible interposition. The simplicity and efficacy of the means afford a demonstration of his wisdom. His government goes on silently and uniformly to effect its design, without any infringement of the established laws. Men retain their liberty, and yet are unconsciously subject to restraint ; and although there is much irregularity in human conduct, and sometimes dreadful disorders take place, yet the effects are mitigated, and such a degree of order is maintained, as is necessary to the preservation of our

species, and the final development of the Divine counsels. He makes the wrath of man praise him, and the remainder of it he restrains.*

In the second place, while he operates silently and secretly, his wisdom is seen mixing such events with his dispensations, as are calculated to keep alive a sense of his existence and government. Were the affairs of the world to proceed in a uniform train, he might be overlooked and forgotten, especially as the objects of sense have a powerful influence upon us, and to sinful creatures the idea of a holy and righteous Governor is not welcome. Men might easily let go a principle which they are not desirous to retain. To counteract this tendency of the human heart to atheism, is the design of those occasional interpositions of providence, which proclaim in the ear of reason, that "verily he is a God who judgeth in the earth." Of this nature are the circumstances which sometimes accompany the rise, and particularly the fall of kingdoms and empires; to which we may add earthquakes, pestilences, and desolating tempests, that for a time at least, make religious impressions upon the minds of most men; wonderful escapes from danger, favours unexpectedly and strangely conferred, and judgments executed suddenly and visibly upon notorious offenders. "The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands."† Such events are not miraculous, and a cool-headed philosopher might often be able to trace the chain of natural causes by which they are effected; but they are so disposed as to carry away the mind to an invisible Agent, to whose will all the parts of nature are subordinate. As without some sense of a superintending providence, the laws and institutions of society would be inadequate to preserve the peace of the world, the advantage of such dispensations, even to the temporal interests of mankind, is obvious. They prevent the belief of a higher Power who is friendly to justice and humanity, and is the avenger of crimes, from being utterly extinguished. At the same time, wisdom is displayed in the rare occurrence of such interpositions. The design of them is not to establish a perfect moral administration in the present life, but to give hints and notions of one. Were they frequent and regular, they might become familiar, and pass for common events; their occasional nature rouses the slumbering attention of mortals, and reminds them that there is justice in the universe, although its operations are not yet fully developed.

In the third place, the wisdom of God appears in the mode of conducting his designs. The means employed often seem inadequate; but the result shews, that the foolishness of God is wiser than men. The greatest revolution in the world was effected, as we shall afterwards see, by persons, who, in respect of character, talents, rank, and influence, were totally disqualified for the arduous undertaking. Sometimes his purposes are accomplished by a train of circumstances, the tendency of which is to defeat them; he sows the seeds of sorrow, that a full harvest of joy may be gathered; and conducs to glory by a previous course of painful and humiliating discipline. Joseph was sold as a slave, and afterwards committed to prison under a false accusation, that he might rise to the highest honours in the kingdom of Egypt; and a succession of calamities befel his father, which terminated in the preservation of himself and his family from destruction. "Joseph is not," exclaimed the afflicted patriarch, "Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me."‡ It is thus that the physician, by his consummate skill, converts substances in themselves deleterious, into valuable medicines. Sometimes his designs seem to be at the point of failure, when they are on the very eve of accomplishment, that the unexpected issue may be seen to be his own work. The family of David had been long stript of its ancient splendour, the sceptre had been wrested from it, and the royal line had sunk into obscu-

* Ps. lxxvi. 10.

† Ps. ix. 16.

‡ Gen. xlii. 36.

city and was almost forgotten, when the blessed virgin brought forth her Son, who was elevated to the throne of the universe, and shall reign for ever and ever. "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old."* Sometimes his designs are accomplished by persons who have no knowledge of them, and aim at very different purposes. Nebuchadnezzar was the rod of God's anger, with which he severely chastised his rebellious people. But the sole object of the king of Babylon was to gratify his ambition and avarice by conquest and spoil; and, in like manner, other monarchs, and millions of their subjects have been the unconscious instruments of Providence, which enlists the worst passions and the worst men in its service, and is continually bringing good out of evil. "Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and to cut off nations not a few."† Sometimes they are employed as the ministers of his will, who not only have no intention to serve him, but exert themselves to oppose and frustrate his designs. His wisdom is displayed, not only in overruling their opposition, as he could easily do by his irresistible power, but in making it hold the relation of a mean to the end, so that his design is directly fulfilled by their attempts to defeat it. It was the object of the blasphemy and persecution of the Jews, to disprove the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth, and of their putting him to death, to terminate his career; but in their whole proceedings the predictions which marked him out were fulfilled, and the world was redeemed by the effusion of his blood. "Of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."‡ In short, the wisdom of God is manifold. It attains its ends in every possible way, by likely and unlikely means, by the cheerful co-operation of some and the perverse obstinacy of others; and nothing can raise our admiration of it higher than the consideration that all creatures, with their passions and projects, are subservient to it; that it gives a plan and a harmony to the seemingly disjointed and embroiled affairs of the earth; that it superintends at once the concerns of a whole system, of a world, of a nation, of a family, and of an individual; and that the result of its varied operations will be happy and glorious.

Lastly, the wisdom of God appears in so ordering the present state of things, as to give notice of another state, and a judgment to come. We have already seen, that the occasional exercise of justice in the punishment of sin, is an indication of a moral Governor, who may be expected to reveal himself more clearly in this character, in some succeeding stage of our existence; and my present design is to shew, that there are other circumstances which corroborate this conclusion. Now this purpose is accomplished by the promiscuous distribution of good and evil, taken in connexion with the intimations already referred to, that the Supreme Being is just. Finding that justice is an attribute which belongs to him, we are unavoidably led to believe, that he would uniformly act agreeably to it, were there nothing in the present state of things to prevent him. As he is the Author of nature, we cannot suppose that the whole system is so disposed as never to afford opportunity for a full display of this perfection; but we rather infer, that there is somewhere in his wide dominions a place in which men shall receive exactly according to their deeds. Were the conduct of men evidently the ground of their present treatment, it might be thought by those whose views were not enlarged by revelation, that the plan of Providence respecting them is completed at death; but the obvious inequality of their lots suggests a different conclusion. Hence the heathen themselves, observing that there was no certain rule according to which the mea-

* Amos ix. 11.

† Isa. x. 7.

‡ Acts iv. 27.

asures of good and evil were dispensed, entertained the notion of a state beyond the grave, in which the righteous would be rewarded, and the wicked punished: "No man knoweth love or hatred by all that is before him." The constitution under which we are placed might be shewn to be on other accounts the best for the present time; but we have only now to observe, that this mixed scene is a premonition of a new order of things, and thus serves to support the authority of religion. It is a proof of wisdom, that while the present administration is adapted to the design of God respecting us in this world, it reminds us of another where our final interest lies, and is fitted to excite us to pursue such conduct as becomes accountable beings. If this is manifestly the period of trial, the judgment will come to rectify all apparent disorders.

Let us, in the third place, observe the displays of divine wisdom in redemption. As it is the last and greatest work of God, we may expect it to afford the most glorious manifestation of his character. The Scripture represents the perfection which we are at present considering as receiving a high illustration from it, when it says, that God "has abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;"* and the displays of it as wonderfully diversified, when it says further, "unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God."† In order to perceive the wisdom of a plan, it is necessary first to know the end or the ends proposed, and then to inquire what means have been employed. Now, the ends which God had in view in our redemption by Jesus Christ, were, to glorify his own perfections, to illustrate the authority of his law, and to humble our pride; and it was only in subservience to these ends that he purposed to raise our fallen race from misery to happiness. Let us observe how these ends have been accomplished.

First, God purposed to glorify himself in the redemption of man. His glory, indeed, is the ultimate end of all his works; but when we say so, we ought to beware of falling into the error of supposing that he was actuated by a desire of display analogous to the principle of vanity in man, that the manifestation of his excellencies was in any sense necessary, or that it was at all connected with his happiness. What we mean by his doing all things for his glory is, that he has acted, and could not but act on all occasions in a manner worthy of himself. In certain cases, there is scope for the manifestation only of some of his perfections, as of goodness towards innocent, and of justice towards guilty creatures; but the redemption of sinners embraced the manifestation of both. It may be supposed indeed, that the exercise of justice was not so necessary, but that it might have been dispensed with to make way for the exercise of benevolence; but, besides that this notion is at variance with the uniform language of revelation, we can see no ground in reason for thinking that the moral Governor of the universe has nothing to consult but the happiness of his subjects, and will yield up his rights when these interfere with their interests. The wisdom of men is capable only of conceiving the clumsy expedient of merging the one in the other; but the wisdom of God has given to both equal prominence, and harmonized their claims by an unexpected and admirable contrivance, namely, the substitution of a righteous person, who should bear the punishment of the guilty, and render the exercise of mercy to them perfectly consistent with justice. The thought is now familiar; but it would not have occurred to us without suggestion, and it originated in that understanding which alone comprehends the scheme of universal government, and the best methods of attaining its ends. But, where could a person be found, at once willing and qualified to interpose between heaven and earth, and to reconcile their opposite interests? As men were all involved in the same condemnation, none of them could assist his brethren;

* Eph. i. 8.

† Eph. iii. 10.

and besides that angels were too remotely connected with us to interfere in such a case, they could not die, nor would such sufferings as one of them was capable of enduring, have been admitted as an equivalent for those of the millions of the redeemed. Divine wisdom was displayed in providing a man to die for men; a man derived from the same root, yet perfectly holy, although all the other branches were corrupt; a man, who by submitting to the infliction of justice, glorified it more highly than it would have been glorified by the execution of the penalty upon us; a man, who could conquer death, and recover the forfeited inheritance of immortality. Such a man is Jesus Christ, allied to us by his participation of our common nature, yet superior to us by the possession of the divine; born without spot, of a virgin, and at the same time the Son of God. The incarnation is a great mystery; it is a new thing which God has created in the earth; an event of which no finite mind could have formed an idea beforehand; but now when the Eternal Word has been made flesh, it appears to be worthy of infinite wisdom, as being the best and the only expedient for accomplishing the ultimate end of redemption, the harmony of the Divine attributes in the restoration of a fallen world.

Secondly, God purposed to establish the authority of his law, to which men had refused submission, and in doing so, had called in question the reasonableness and equity of its precepts. This design was not accomplished by the method of human legislators, by annexing a severer penalty to the laws, for a more awful sanction could not have been conceived; death in the full extent of the term, being the greatest evil which human nature could suffer. It was effected, by giving an example of obedience to the law, in which the justice of its demands was solemnly recognized; by a great practical lesson, calculated to impress the minds of all intelligent creatures, when they saw the Son of God come down from heaven to glorify his Father by the exact fulfilment of his will. It is thus demonstrated, that the law is not an arbitrary institution, but is founded in the nature of things, the relations subsisting between God and his creatures; that it is of eternal obligation, and can on no account be dispensed with; for obedience was prescribed to a person, than whom none is greater in the universe, as the only condition on which his desire for our happiness could be fulfilled. If God is the moral Governor of men, and if it was his design, after the entrance of sin, to vindicate the righteousness, and to evince the immutability of his law, no method was so effectual to create profound reverence for it in the minds of his subjects. To men, whose notions of what is right and fit are strangely perverted, there seems to be something mean and degrading in submission to the Divine law; and hence strict conformity to moral rules is stigmatized as preciseness and monkish austerity. It is a surrender of their natural liberty; it narrows the range of their enjoyments; it betrays a servility and tameness of spirit quite contrary to the unfettered freedom with which arrogant mortals claim a right to act for themselves. How are the folly and impiety of such thoughts exposed, when the Sovereign of heaven and earth voluntarily submits to this law; when he who is the Source of happiness to men and angels, in his assumed nature prefers obedience to his ease and to his necessary food! From his voluntary subjection the law has derived greater glory, than it had suffered dishonour by the multiplied crimes of its natural subjects. He has exhibited an example to be imitated by all, and by the influence of which upon the hearts and consciences of his genuine disciples, the authority of the law is restored, and its precepts are willingly, although not perfectly obeyed. To every enlightened mind, holiness appears to be the most honourable distinction of human nature, and the restraints of religion to be perfect liberty; and the result of our Saviour's mission is the establishment of the moral kingdom of God.

Thirdly, God purposed to humble our pride, which was the cause of our

original revolt, and is incompatible with the sentiments of reverence, dependence, gratitude and submission which all creatures, and particularly guilty creatures should feel towards their Maker. He saves us; but it is not as some imagine, by a milder law, which supposes our moral power although impaired, not to be utterly lost; for in this case we should have claimed the recompense as our due; but by appointing his Son to fulfil the old law in our room, and bestowing the reward solely in consideration of his merit. He sanctifies us; but our holiness is not the result of our own exertions aided by his grace, but exclusively of the agency of his Spirit, who forms new dispositions within us as passive subjects of his power; so that the greatest saint has nothing in himself to flatter his vanity more than the most profligate sinner. The whole plan of our restoration is so contrived as to leave this impression upon our minds, that we are absolute debtors to God; that our sins are our own, but our virtues are his gifts; and that as from him our salvation originated, so to him all the glory of it should be ascribed. The lofty looks of men are humbled, and the haughtiness of man is made low, and the Lord alone is exalted.*

In all these instances we perceive wisdom in the device of worthy ends, and of the fittest means. There is another proof of the wisdom of God in redemption, to which I shall briefly advert, as it will afterwards occur in another view as a display of his power. Had he employed in the publication of the scheme of redemption, men of learning, eloquence, and worldly influence, the success of Christianity might have been attributed to natural causes, and it might have been regarded in future ages as a contrivance of the first preachers to impose upon mankind with a view to their personal interests. By committing it to the ministry of men, illiterate, obscure, and contemptible in the eyes of the world, he has demonstrated the divinity of its origin, and furnished an argument by which our faith is confirmed, and the unreasonableness of infidelity is evinced. The cause must have failed in the hands of such advocates, had they not enjoyed the patronage of heaven. Thus it appears that the foolishness of God is wiser than men, or that by means which human reason would have rejected as incompetent, the most important end has been gained; while by the opposite plan, which would have approved itself to our wisdom, the design would have been defeated. While the talents and energies of men were brought forward to view, the agency of God would have been concealed.

We should learn to be modest and cautious in our judgment of the works and dispensations of the Almighty. In examining a work of man, all the parts of which, so far as we understood them, appeared to be skilfully contrived, it would be rash to condemn those which we did not understand. Much greater is the presumption of those who subject the wisdom of God to their limited and erring reason. It requires no great humility to acknowledge that many things may be accounted for, although we cannot tell how; that what we call irregularity may be consistent with order, and that apparent blemishes may be real excellencies; that a scheme comprehending time and eternity is beyond the reach of our faculties; and that there is no searching of an infinite understanding.

In this wisdom we should confide. Vain are the thoughts and counsels of man; and vain are his anxieties about the morrow. They vex themselves in vain, who acknowledge no providence but their own foresight, and burden themselves with the care of their own happiness. None can enjoy true peace, none can feel themselves secure, but they who commit their way to the Lord. He will guide them by his counsel, and afterward receive them to his glory. We know that under his direction all things are working together for good.

* Isa. ii. 11.

LECTURE XXIII.

ON GOD.

Power of God—Idea of Power—Connexion of Cause and Effect—Some apparent limitations of the Divine Power stated and explained—Displays of Power in the Works of Creation, of Providence, and of Redemption.

SOME subjects may have no connexion with our duty and our happiness, and yet may excite no small share of curiosity. We are strongly impelled to extend the boundaries of knowledge, and to push our inquiries into regions where no valuable fruit can be gathered. Surrounded with mysteries on all sides, we may anxiously wish that the veil were lifted up, which conceals from our eager eyes the wonders of the material and spiritual world. It would gratify us to be admitted behind the scene, and to inspect the machinery by which the great revolutions in nature are effected; to discover how the immense bodies which we see pursuing their course in the fields of space, were first set in motion, and by what cause they have been retained for ages in their respective orbits, so that there is no irregularity or interference. It would be delightful to trace the process of vegetation, which is renewed from year to year, and invests the earth with beauty, while it ministers abundantly to our wants. It would be still more desirable to become intimately and fully acquainted with ourselves, to understand what the living principle within us is, and by what tie the constituent parts of our nature are so closely united, that notwithstanding the essential difference between matter and spirit, they feel a mutual sympathy, and co-operate with perfect harmony. But although success should equal our highest expectations, we have no reason to think that the enlargement of our views would in any degree fit us better for acting our part as accountable beings, and contribute to prepare us for the future state, in which our well-being will not depend upon intellectual attainments, but upon possession of genuine piety and holiness.

Our inquiries into the character of the Author of the universe are more sublime in their nature, and more important in their tendency. Every discovery is full of interest, because it is connected with our conduct and our hopes. It is therefore necessary to proceed in the investigation with the utmost caution and circumspection, lest by admitting any thing foreign into our idea of God, or leaving out any thing essential, we should weaken or extinguish those sentiments of reverence and love, in which genuine piety consists. We ought to be the more upon our guard, because we are admonished by the errors of others, who have set limits to his perfections, have given undue prominence to one, to the concealment of the rest, or have placed him at such a distance from us, as to repress all the feelings and exercises of devotion. A Being, eternal, immutable, and omnipresent, is an object of awful contemplation; but something is wanting to create an interest in him, to make us feel ourselves personally concerned in his character and proceedings. Aware that there is such a Being, we might occasionally turn our thoughts to him, but should have no motive to cultivate an acquaintance with him, if we believed that we had nothing to fear from his displeasure, or to hope from his favour. We must consider him as an active Being, who having given us life, continues to sustain us by his providence, and has us and all nature at his command. Power must enter into the idea of God, or our thoughts of him will be as cold and unaffected as are those which respect persons to whom we stand in no relation.

and on whom we are completely independent. Without power, his wisdom would be employed in arranging admirable but unexecuted plans; his goodness would expire in benevolent but ineffectual wishes; his justice would be merely a will to recompense actions according to their desert. Power is an essential attribute of God, and necessarily mixes with our practical views of his other perfections. Had not power belonged to him, his other perfections would not have been known; not a single world would have filled up a portion of the mighty void; there would have been neither man nor angel to employ his mind on the height of this great argument; nothing would have existed but himself, and he would have dwelt alone in eternal repose.

The power of God is his ability to do every thing which may be done, every thing which is consistent with the other perfections of his nature. We are led to assign this attribute to him, by what we experience in ourselves, and observe in the operations which are going on around us. It has been said, indeed, that "when we think that we perceive our mind acting upon matter, or one piece of matter acting upon another, we do in fact perceive only two objects or events contiguous and successive, the second of which is always found, in experience, to follow the first; but that we never perceive, either by external sense or by consciousness, that power, energy, or efficacy, which connects the one event with the other. By observing that the two events do always accompany each other, the imagination acquires a habit of going readily from the first to the second, and from the second to the first; and hence we are led to conceive a necessary connexion between them. But, in fact, there is neither necessity nor power in the objects we consider, but only in the mind that considers them; and even in the mind, this power or necessity is nothing but a determination of the fancy, acquired by habit, to pass from the idea of an object to that of its usual attendant." In this manner does Hume endeavour to prove that we can form no idea of power, or of any being endowed with power, much less, as he adds, of one endowed with infinite power. It is acknowledged that we do not perceive the connexion between cause and effect, and that, so far as we can distinctly trace it, it consists in constant sequence; that is, we perceive only that the one always follows the other. At the same time, it is certain that there is constant sequence where no person ever supposed the relation of cause and effect. Night follows day, or day follows night, according to the original order which we assign to them; but who ever imagined that the one is the cause of the other, that light produces darkness, or darkness produces light? It is evident, therefore, that there is something more in the relation of cause and effect than constant sequence, although this should be all that we are able to discover. It is certain, that although between the volition of my mind and the raising of my arm, I cannot explain the connexion, they are not independent events, because the one uniformly follows the other, while my volition has no effect upon any other piece of matter not belonging to my body. It is certain, that when my arm raises a stone, or when one stone impelling another, moves it from its place, the idea of power is suggested to my mind, in the one case, by the exertion of muscular strength, and in the other, by the visible change which is effected. To tell us that this is an act of imagination, which has acquired the habit of passing from the one event to the other, and that we have no idea of power, although there is not one more distinct in our minds, is to insult our understandings, and to attempt to deceive us by a palpable falsehood. It would be as much to the purpose, to tell us that we have no idea of sound and colour; but this would not serve the interests of atheism, by destroying the argument from cause and effect for the existence of an Author of nature. Power undoubtedly exists; all men believe it; it is one of their earliest and strongest conceptions; and if we do not find it in the immediate, or what we commonly call the second cause, we must seek it somewhere else

Were a man to reason fairly and consequentially from the doctrine, that the relation of cause and effect; as far as known to us, is merely constant sequence, he would conclude, that since the idea of power is forced upon us by observation and experience, since it is impossible to get rid of it, since it is absurd to resist the natural suggestions of our minds, if power is not in second causes, it must be in the First Cause; that his energy pervades all nature, and its several parts are instruments wielded by his arm. Thus, a speculation which originated in hostility to all religion, when corrected and conducted by right reason, terminates in the establishment of Theism. "Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things."*

We are conscious of possessing power over our minds and our bodies. We can direct our thoughts to a particular subject, and move our bodies backward and forward, to the right or to the left. We can produce effects upon other bodies by the exertion of our natural strength. We observe also many changes going on in the earth and in the heavens, which we refer to an adequate cause. If from the idea of power which we have thus acquired, we remove every circumstance which indicates imperfection, as effort, labour and fatigue, and if we farther conceive it to be unlimited, embarrassed by no obstacle, and capable of producing every possible effect, we have the most complete idea of the power of God which we are able to form. The proofs, that power is one of his perfections, will afterwards be mentioned. Some have doubted his goodness and justice, and some have called in question his wisdom, because in some instances they could not perceive it; but his power has been acknowledged by all who believe his existence. That it is infinite power, or omnipotence, can as little be doubted. As there is nothing in the universe which he did not create, it is impossible that he should meet with any opposition from any part of it, or at least with successful opposition. All created power is necessarily dependent upon him, subject to his direction and control, and can no more hinder his designs, than an atom could stop the motion of a planet. No man ever was so absurd as to suppose that the power of the mightiest creature is superior or equal to that of the Creator, from which it is derived. Besides, whatever extent may be assigned to power, if there are bounds which it cannot pass, effects to which it is not adequate, it is not the highest power which our minds can conceive, and consequently the being of whom it is predicated is not God.

There are some things which to superficial thinkers may seem to be inconsistent with infinite power, and to prove that although the power of God far transcends that of the mightiest creatures, it is subject to certain limitations. Of these I shall briefly take notice, before I proceed to lay before you the evidences of this perfection which are afforded by his works.

First, God cannot work contradictions, as to make a thing to be and not to be at the same time; to make a part greater than the whole; to make what is past, present; or what is present, future. It is self-evident that such things are not the objects of power. As it is no impeachment of the perfection of the eye, that it cannot see what is invisible, or of the perfection of the ear, that it cannot hear what is not audible, so it implies no imperfection in the power of God, that it cannot do what cannot be done. The reason that God cannot work contradictions, is not that he is deficient in power, and consequently could work them if his power were greater, but that the things themselves are in their own nature impossible.

Secondly, God cannot feel pain, or be weary, or die. But surely it will not be supposed that this impossibility is inconsistent with infinitude or power. Such things are proofs of weakness in those who are subject to them. The nature, therefore, of which they cannot be predicated, is the most powerful in

* Rom. xi. 36.

the universe, and possesses life and activity in the highest perfection. Passiveness cannot co-exist with absolute perfection. Exemption from every infirmity is implied in the idea of omnipotence.

Thirdly, God cannot lie, or deny himself. But this, you will observe, is not a physical, but a moral impossibility, and therefore is no limitation of omnipotence. It is not owing to the want of power to deceive his creatures, but to the incompatibility of the act with the purity and goodness of his nature. Truth is essential to him as well as power, and the exercise of power is always in conformity to truth. He is so holy, and so good, that he will not impose upon men by false representations, or excite hopes which it is not his intention to realize. We know that there is no such difficulty in the simple act of deceiving, as to require an extraordinary degree of power. It is usually the refuge of the weak, and few resort to artifice who can accomplish their purposes by direct and honourable means. No greater effort is necessary to utter a falsehood than to speak truth, and it is often easier not to perform our promises than to perform them. He who gave us our senses could render them the vehicles of fallacious perceptions, and he could pervert our mental faculties so as to lead us to the most erroneous conclusions, but he will not.

Lastly, It would be no objection against the infinite power of God, if we should discover what appeared to us imperfections in his works, if in living and inanimate substances, we should find certain parts which seemed unfinished, or useless, or not so well adapted to the end in view as we might conceive them to have been. To a modest inquirer, a doubt might occur whether he was a competent judge in such cases; and at any rate, he who considered that the hand of God made the eye and the ear, would feel no difficulty in conceiving that it was not from want of power but from design, that other parts were not executed with the same consummate skill. We observe decay and death among the works of God; and we might be led to infer, from their frail and transitory nature, that however admirably they are executed, their Maker must have wanted power to render them permanent. But, besides that this inference gratuitously assumes, that he meant to give them permanence but could not, we also observe, that although the individuals perish, the species remains; that new human beings, new animals, and new vegetables regularly come into existence; and we have a proof in their production, that decay and death are not owing to weakness, but to design or permission, because the same power which creates new beings, could have given perpetual duration to the old. Once more, moral evil has found its way into the universe, and disturbed the order which its Author had established. His laws have been violated; the exercise of his goodness to his creatures has been interrupted to a certain extent; the beauty of his works has been impaired; and disease, death, and misery, abound in the world. But no believer in revelation, or even in the doctrines of natural religion, can think that it was introduced against his will, or because he could not prevent it. There can be no doubt that he foresaw and permitted it: it would be repugnant to the idea of an all-perfect Being, to suppose that it arose unexpectedly to derange his plan, or that he attempted in vain to exclude it. Since he was pleased to make man a free agent, the possibility of the abuse of his freedom was the necessary consequence: a creature capable of acting in different ways might do wrong. God could have excluded moral evil, either by withholding liberty from man, that is, by giving him a different constitution, making him a totally different creature; or by controlling the exercise of it in such a manner as not to take it away. But he chose to make him free, and to leave him to act as his own mind should direct him. The existence of moral evil, therefore, is no evidence of a deficiency of power in the Supreme Ruler. It would be more plausible to consider it as an objection against his wisdom in forming a plan, of which evil has been the result; but here also, it would not be difficult to

shew that the objection is unfounded, and originates in presumption and impiety.

To conclude this part of the subject. When we say that God is almighty, we mean, agreeably to our former definition, that he can do every thing possible, every thing consistent with the other perfections of his nature. We might say that his power is limited only by his own nature, were there not an impropriety in the expression, because his nature is infinite. Nothing can effectually oppose his power; or rather we may ask with the apostle, "Who hath resisted his will?"* It has already done much, and much it is still able to do. It could create ten thousand new worlds; it could raise up innumerable orders of beings, with an endless variety of forms and faculties. It is not exhausted or impaired by the wonders which it has already performed; for "the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary."†

I now proceed to lay before you the proofs of the power of God which his works supply. But "who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? who can shew forth all his praise?"‡ "Lo," says Job, after an enumeration of some of them, "Lo! these are parts of his ways, but how little a portion is heard of him! but the thunder of his power, who can understand?"§

In the first place, The power of God was displayed in the creation of all things; by which we mean, that he produced them out of nothing, and did not form them of pre-existent matter. This was an act of Divine power beyond our conception, because it is totally different from the effects which our own power, or that of other creatures, can accomplish. We must have a subject upon which to operate. We must be furnished with materials for our work; and then, all that we can do, is to mix or join them together, to separate them, to change their position, and arrange them in a new order. We may compress or expand them, but we cannot add a single particle to the mass. Even in the operations of nature, we see nothing like a proper creation. Great transformations are constantly taking place, of the elements into vegetables, and of vegetables into animal substances; but no new matter enters into the composition. Hence it may seem impossible that something should have ever been produced out of nothing, as the power necessary for this purpose has nothing analogous in our experience and observation. The maxim, *ex nihilo nihil fit*, was held to be indisputable by all the ancient philosophers. A few of them were atheists, maintaining the eternity of matter, and the production of all things by chance: but even the advocates of theism joined with them in the principle now mentioned, and differed only in believing, that matter was disposed in its present order by the agency of an intelligent Being. We have formerly proved that absolute eternity implies necessary and immutable existence, which it would be absurd to attribute to a substance inert, passive, divisible, subject to perpetual change, here in motion, and there at rest. But although we have never seen an act of creation, we have evidence in ourselves that it is not impossible. We know that we began to exist; that we now are, but that there was a time when we were not. Our bodies, it may be said, were made of pre-existent materials. We acknowledge the truth of the remark; and it is not to them that we appeal as an argument. The same thing cannot be said of our souls, which are not a compound, the ingredients of which were prior in time, but a pure simple essence which was produced at the moment when our bodies were animated; for the notion of their pre-existence in another state, before they were united to our bodies, is a hypothesis without a shadow of proof. "Since this thinking conscious self," it has been justly said, "a substantial being, of whose existence we have the greatest certainty, began to be not of itself, but produced by a cause, it may be to us a satisfying proof of creating power; for what greater difficulty can there be

* Rom. ix. 19.

† Is. xl. 28.

‡ Ps. cvi. 2.

§ Job xxvi. 14.

in conceiving that God made heaven and earth, than in conceiving that he made the self-conscious soul of man within him? Is matter any more real than the principle of thought and volition? and could not the power which gave existence to the one also produce the other?" This argument, indeed, will not be conclusive to those who deny the immateriality of the soul, and hold thought and volition to be the effects of organization, as musical sounds are of the strings of an instrument; but we here assume it to be a distinct substance upon the ground of reason as well as of revelation. "Any man who calmly attends to the beginning of his own personal existence, that is, of his conscious thinking, must see in it an exertion of power of which he can form no distinct idea, and which, he cannot but be convinced, is to him as inexplicable as the creation of the material world." Although creating power is to us incomprehensible, it does not follow that it is impossible. It implies no contradiction. It is no objection against it, that it exceeds the power of creatures: and all our difficulties would vanish, if we would recollect that the power of which we are speaking is infinite. No man is able to prove, that the production of something out of nothing is impossible: all that he can say is, that it is inconceivable to him how it may be done; but he can as little conceive the absolute eternity of God, which however he must admit, if he is not an atheist.

Finding, then, that matter exists since we know that it was not eternal, we must admit that it was created; or in other words, that in the beginning God exerted a power the greatest which we can conceive, a power strictly infinite; for he who could make something out of nothing, can do all possible things. The description of the work of creation in the book of Genesis is sublime, but simple. It was effected without means, without labour, by a mere act of volition. In the language of an inspired writer, God "spake and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast."* To a mind capable of abstract reflection, it must appear that creation, whether the thing created was great or small, a universe or a world, a ball of earth or this large globe, demonstrates the omnipotence of the Maker. The evidence depends not upon the size of the object, but upon its production out of nothing; and to reason, a pile of grass will suffice as well as the solar system. There can be no doubt, that the power which could create any thing, however diminutive, could with equal ease replenish space with suns and their attendant planets. But in such a case as the present, the eye, and still more the imagination, lend their aid to strengthen the deductions of reason, and to make a deeper and livelier impression upon the mind. Let it then be considered that the Almighty fiat called into existence not only this earth, so spacious that all its regions have not yet been explored, and the sun who is a million times larger, with the planets which revolve around him as their centre, but a countless multitude of stars at an inconceivable distance from us, which probably give light to other worlds still more numerous; that thought cannot set boundaries to the universe, in which there may be luminous bodies so remote, that their light, notwithstanding the astonishing velocity with which it moves, has not yet reached us; that bodies have been discovered of such magnitude, that the sun in comparison of them dwindles into a point; that there was a time, when space, which this wonderful array fills and adorns, was a mighty void, the abode of darkness and silence; and that in a moment all arose at the voice of God. "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their hosts by number: he calleth them all by names, by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth."†

Let us proceed to other manifestations of the power of God. And I remark, that it is displayed in the preservation of all things, which has been called a continual creation. The idea intended is, that as their existence is dependent,

* Ps. xxxiii. 9.

† Isa. xl. 26.

it is prolonged from moment to moment by the same power which created them at first. Some seem to speak, as if having been once made, they had the ground or reason of their being in themselves, continued without the immediate interference of their Creator, and could only cease to be by a positive act of his will. They insinuate that it would imply imperfection if they needed his constant care and remind us of the works of man, which do not fall to pieces when the hand of the artist is withdrawn. But between the two cases there is no analogy. The works of man are not dependent upon him for their existence, but for their form; the materials of which they are composed subsist, and even the order in which they are arranged is maintained, by the laws of nature. If the motions of such of them as do move, go on after he has left them, it is not by any power which he has communicated to them, but in consequence of his previous contrivance to make some of those laws act upon them. All the honour which man can claim from his works is that of arrangement: their preservation and movements are traced to the same power which upholds the earth, and guides it in its course. It is not contrary to reason, but agreeable to its dictates, to affirm, that without the unceasing agency of the Creator, the universe would return to nothing; and the Scripture teaches the same doctrine when it says, "In him we live, and move, and have our being." * He alone has the reason of his existence in himself; all other beings are dependent upon him, as the stream is fed by a perpetual supply from the fountain. Providence, therefore, when rightly understood, gives the same display of omnipotence as creation. "He upholdeth all things by the word of his power." † The most durable of the works of man are subject to decay. The hand of time sweeps away the noblest monuments of his greatness; and towers, and palaces, and cities are laid in the dust. But the sun shines with undiminished splendour, although thousands of years have passed away since he began to give light to the world, and still rejoices as a strong man to run his race; the earth, which has supplied so many generations with food, renews its fertility every year, and displays the unabated vigour of vegetation; the various tribes of animals and vegetables are preserved, although the process of decay and destruction is going on without interruption; and the grand movements of the universe proceed with undisturbed regularity. Our world is composed of elements of mighty force, which by their occasional conflicts cause dreadful convulsions. The furious tempest levels the forests, and throws down the habitations of men; the lightning shatters the lofty monument and the magnificent palace; the earthquake lays cities in ruins, breaks rocks in pieces, and removes mountains from their place; rivers overflowing their banks spread desolation over the fields; and the sea, heaved up from its ancient bed, overwhelms the dry land with its mountainous waves. But since the beginning of time, the havoc has been partial: there has been no convulsion which has affected the globe itself, or made any material change upon its surface, except the universal deluge, which was an extraordinary act of providence for the punishment of sin. We think perhaps, that we can satisfactorily account for the constancy of the course of nature, notwithstanding these occasional deviations. We can tell, for example, why the ocean is not driven upon the land by the hurricanes which agitate its waters, or by the rapid motion of the globe around its axis. But what is the law of gravitation which holds it in its place? Who established that law, and who maintains it? What can any man conceive it to be but the power of God exerted in a regular manner for a specific purpose? Who that sees the billows sinking as they approach the shore and retiring, will not admire the punctuality with which they obey the will of their Maker? "Who shut up the sea with doors when it broke forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? who brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto

* Acts xvii. 28.

† Heb. i. 3.

shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?" * When we reflect upon the movements which are going on among the celestial bodies, how stupendous is the power by which they are conducted! The moon is driving through the heavens at the rate of more than two thousand miles in an hour; the earth, although apparently quiescent, is flying at the rate of fifty or sixty thousand; and the velocity of the comets is so great as to terrify and overwhelm the imagination; yet no confusion takes place, no mischief happens. None of these bodies is shivered into pieces by the velocity of its flight; none of them is dashed upon another; none of them makes the slightest deviation from the path marked out to it in the immensity of space. We can calculate with the utmost confidence upon their return at a fixed period to a particular spot. They are sustained and guided by the hand of Omnipotence. We say that matter is inert, that if at rest it will continue at rest, and if in motion it will continue in motion, unless its state be changed by an external cause. But do we imagine that we have thus explained the phenomena of the universe? Alas! we have merely stated a fact, but we have not accounted for it, by calling it a law of nature. Why does a body continue in motion? It is not owing to its own activity, but to the energy of the Creator's will. This gave the first impulse, and this holds on its course for ages. His power at once binds the planets as with a chain to the centre, and propels them in their perpetual career around it. "O Lord God of Hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee? Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand." †

Let us, in the next place, consider his moral government of the world. Under this division of the subject, the evidence may not appear so striking, because it is not addressed to the senses, but relates to the invisible influence exerted upon the thoughts and volitions of intelligent creatures. Yet to a reflecting mind it will be equally convincing. Wonderful are the displays of Divine power in the creation and preservation of the material system; but we know that there it meets with no opposition, whereas here, resistance is to be subdued, determinate purposes and wayward passions are to be controlled, and rendered subservient to the counsels of the Almighty. We learn from revelation, that there are spiritual beings in the universe, of strength superior to ours, of great activity, cunning, and malignity, who being in a state of hostility to their Maker, are also enemies to man, and take delight in disorder, misery, and ruin. What havoc they would make, if full scope were given to their inclinations, we may conjecture from what they have actually done, under Divine permission, by introducing sin into our world, with the dismal train of natural and moral evils which have closely followed it. Would they not blast the fair scenes of nature, and convert the earth into another hell, the abode of fear, and pain, and despair? The human heart is the seat of many violent and malevolent passions, which finding a favourable opportunity, break out into murder, treachery, injustice, oppression, and all the crimes by which public and private peace is disturbed. The occasional eruptions which take place under the most vigilant government, admonish us that we are walking above smothered fire; and we shudder at the thought of the scenes of horror which would be exhibited, if all restraints were removed. What would be our condition, if wicked men and malignant spirits were let loose upon us? The earth would no longer be a safe habitation. Could the human race long subsist, amidst the furious workings of pride, revenge, avarice, and cruelty, and the additional calamities which the malice of their invisible foes would inflict? We are preserved then by the power of God, who holds men and devils in chains; and the excesses which he sometimes permits, should remind us how much we are indebted to his providence, to which alone it is owing that we are not consumed. Of the influence by which unholy beings are withheld from their purposes, or are prevented

from adopting measures congenial to their depraved dispositions, they are often insensible; and at other times they are hindered by obstacles which second causes have placed in their way; but every circumstance is ordered by a higher hand. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."* We perceive also proofs of the power of God in the overthrow of states and nations, which shews that he rules in the kingdoms of men; in the extraordinary success and elevation of individuals, in the face of untoward circumstances, and of opposition which was more than sufficient to have crushed them; in the feeble means by which great designs are sometimes accomplished, and the inadequate causes by which schemes well concerted and vigorously supported are defeated; in the unaccountable courage with which men are inspired at one time, and the equally unaccountable fear which seizes upon them at another; in the sudden failure of their wisdom, as if they had been infatuated by some mysterious influence; in the sudden change of their counsels, for which they are not themselves able to assign a satisfactory reason; and in many other instances which proclaim that there is an invisible power which disposes of human affairs according to its pleasure, and turns the hearts of men as the rivers of water. They establish the fact of a supreme dominion in nature, from which no creature is exempt, and to the designs of which living and inanimate beings are subservient. There is no counsel or might against the Lord. He who boasts of his independence, cannot move his tongue without permission; he who dares to say, "Who is the Almighty that I should serve him?" is compelled to execute his orders; he who sets himself to oppose the designs of Heaven, is sometimes the person whom Heaven has chosen to fulfil them. "His kingdom ruleth over all."

The power of God has been displayed in the work of redemption. It is frequently described as a new creation, to signify that in the recovery of mankind from guilt there is a glorious display of omnipotence, as well as in the original production of the heavens and the earth.

The power of God was manifested in the conception of our Saviour, whose mother was a virgin, in the mighty works which he performed, and in his resurrection from the dead. These are all represented as manifestations of this attribute. It may be remarked, however, from a regard to accuracy of ideas, that strictly there was no greater power exerted in his conception, than in that of any other man according to the established law of generation; and in his miracles, than in the ordinary operations of nature. The power was not greater, but the display of it was more sensible and impressive. It is a false idea of miracles, that they are more difficult than other works. It is equally easy to God to act in opposition to the laws of nature or according to them; just as it is as easy to a man to walk in a by-path as on the highway, the same muscular strength being sufficient in both cases. There is no difference between a miracle and another event, but that the one is unusual and the other is common; in the one, second causes are excluded, in the other, they are admitted. But in a miracle, the power of God is more distinctly seen, and excites greater attention. When a child was born without a father, when a body which had been deposited in a sepulchre was restored to life, when, at the command of a man, the blind received sight, the lame walked, and lepers were cleansed, nothing but the obstinacy of prejudice could have hindered any person from recognizing the finger of God.

The power of God was manifested in sustaining our Saviour in his dreadful sufferings; I mean not those of his body only, but also his mental agony, which would have overwhelmed the firmest mind, having only its own fortitude to support it. To this cause he ascribes the patience with which he endured them. "The Lord God will help me, therefore shall I not be confounded,

therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed." * He said to his disciples, "Behold the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." †

The power of God is displayed in the conversion of sinners. When we consider the change effected at the return of a sinner to God after a long apostasy, and the opposition which is made to it by the most active principles of his nature; the influence upon his mind, by which it admits views totally new, and the revolution which takes place in his feelings and affections; the sacrifices which he makes, the connexions which he abandons, the conditions to which he submits, and the new course of life upon which he enters; in a word, the entire alteration in the moral habit of his soul, we must be convinced that a higher cause was requisite than reasoning and eloquence, and that nothing less than Omnipotence could have made "old things pass away, and all things become new." Hence the conversion of a sinner is called in Scripture a creation, and a resurrection from the dead; and God is said to fulfil in them "all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power." ‡

What I would chiefly request you to consider, is the power of God manifested in the propagation of the Gospel, which will appear truly worthy of admiration, if ye reflect upon the nature of the religion published to the world, the obstacles which stood in the way of its progress, and the persons by whose ministry the opposition was subdued. The religion was the least likely to succeed by its intrinsic merits of all that have been proposed to mankind; not because it wanted high excellence, but because it was not of a kind to be generally perceived and relished. It is pronounced by one of the apostles to have been a stumbling-block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks. § It offered to both salvation by a man who had been crucified; salvation, not from poverty, oppression, and disease, but from sin, which men loved too well to have any desire to be delivered from it; it demanded the renunciation of their present habits and pursuits, the sacrifice of worldly honours and pleasures, and conditionally of life itself; it prescribed humility, the mortification of appetite, and a course of circumspect and patient obedience; and the promised recompense lay in another world, of which they could have no knowledge but by implicitly depending upon the word of its Author. To whom was this religion addressed? To the Jews, who had conceived a very different idea of the character of the Messiah, and expected him not to die but to reign, and to call them, not to repentance but to victory and glory; to the Gentiles, whose minds were preoccupied by the speculations of philosophical wisdom, and were prejudiced against the lowly doctrine of the cross by the pride of virtue; to men sunk in ignorance and vice, who were devoted to the worship of false gods, and felt no interest in any concerns but those of this transitory life. When Christianity demanded their attention, and claimed to be received as the only true religion, nothing could exceed their surprise and indignation. The philosophers despised it as an absurd and arrogant superstition; the priests denounced it as impious and offensive to the gods; statesmen regarded it with a jealous eye, as dangerous to the public peace; and the rabble rose against its preachers, loaded them with abuse, and subjected them to every kind of injurious treatment. To whose care was the propagation of the Gospel committed? Who were appointed to publish it amidst hardships, sufferings, and death, and to defend it against acute and learned antagonists? They were taken from the lowest ranks, and from the meanest occupations; they had not received the advantages of education, and knew nothing of worldly wisdom; they had no power, or wealth, or influence; their appearance, their language,

* Isaiah i. 7.

† John xvi. 32.

‡ 2 Thess. i. 11.

§ 1 Cor. i. 23.

their manner of address, were all unfavourable to their cause. Notwithstanding the utter improbability that such a religion should succeed in such circumstances, its progress was great and rapid. During the life of its first preachers, it found its way into the provinces and cities of the Roman empire, and made converts of the rich and the poor, the learned and the illiterate. It afterwards went on extending its conquests till it gained the ascendant, and was triumphantly established in almost every region of the civilized world. Now, as the human means employed in the propagation of the Gospel were manifestly inadequate, we must attribute its success to supernatural agency. It is a species of miracle which does not strike the eye, but the mind. Something has been effected, not indeed without means, but above them; and is as truly wonderful as was the flowing of water from a rock, when Moses smote it with his rod. A power was exerted upon the minds of men, as plainly omnipotent as the power exerted in the creation, or in the various modifications of matter. "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence." * The same writer says in another place, "We have this treasure," namely, the Gospel, "in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us;" † that is, the dispensation of it is committed to us, who are manifestly incapable of giving it efficacy, that the world may be compelled to acknowledge its success to be the work of God.

An almighty Being demands the profound reverence of his creatures. Shall they not fear him "who removeth the mountains, and they know not; who overturneth them in his anger; who shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble; who commandeth the sun, and it riseth not, and sealeth up the stars; who alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea; who doth great things past finding out, yea, and wonders without number?" ‡ His friendship should be diligently cultivated, for if God be for us, who can be against us? Upon him we should confidently rely, who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think. "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that therein is, who keepeth truth for ever." § "The Lord is thy keeper, the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night." ||

LECTURE XXIV.

ON GOD.

Goodness of God—Idea of this Perfection: display of Goodness in the Creation of the Universe: and in his dispensations to Mankind—Existence of Physical Evil consistent with the Divine Goodness—Origin of Moral Evil—Display of Divine Goodness in Redemption.

By the goodness of God, we do not understand the general excellence of his nature, but that particular property or principle, which disposes him to communicate happiness to his creatures. It is in this sense that we pronounce it to be one of his essential attributes. It is necessary in conjunction with other

* 1 Cor. i. 27—29. † 2 Cor. iv. 7. ‡ Job ix. 5—10. § Ps. cxlvi. 5, 6. || Ps. cxxi. 5, 6.

attributes, to complete the idea of an all-perfect Being, and is the foundation of the trust, and love, and hope, with which he is regarded by men. We could think of him only with distant reverence, if we conceived that he took no interest in the well-being of his creatures; and the supposition that he was actuated by a principle of malevolence, would create dread of one infinitely superior to us, from whose pursuit it was impossible to escape. We should tremble at his power, which could torment and destroy us; at his wisdom, the contrivances of which for our injury we possessed no means of evading; at his immensity, which forced upon us the alarming thought, that to whatever place we might flee for refuge, we should be always in the presence of an enemy. Goodness throws a mild and tranquillizing lustre over the majestic attributes of his nature. It presents them to us under a friendly aspect; associated with it, they appear as so many powers, by which its benignant designs will be carried into full effect. We look up to him not only as a Sovereign, but as a Father; we feel emotions of gratitude rising in harmony with sentiments of veneration; we are emboldened to supplicate his favour, and to resign ourselves to his disposal. Goodness has been considered as one of his attributes by men of every nation, conducted no doubt to this conclusion by the proofs of his beneficence in the natural course of events. The ancient heathens called him the Best, as well as the Greatest of Beings. If some believed in the existence of a malevolent Being, because they observed much evil in the world, and knew not how otherwise to account for it, they also acknowledged another Being of an opposite character, the author of order and beauty, by whose bounty the wants of living creatures were supplied.

Goodness being a disposition to communicate happiness, regulated, however, in an intelligent Agent by wisdom, and in a moral Agent by a regard to purity and justice, we learn that it belongs to God from a survey of his works and dispensations.

The goodness of God is clearly deducible from the act of creation. We can conceive no other reason, in subordination to his glory, for the exertion of his power in giving life to so many orders of creatures, and fitting up the earth to be a convenient habitation for them. This argument consists of two parts: the formation of sensitive beings capable of happiness, and the adaptation of the circumstances in which they are placed to promote it. The production of the earth, with its division into sea and dry land, its vegetable covering, and its springs and rivers, would have afforded a proof of power, but not of goodness, if it had not been replenished with inhabitants who could be benefited by this arrangement; so that in reasoning concerning the goodness of God, we constantly refer to the provision made for the well-being of animals, rational and irrational, according to their respective natures and capacities. He did not create by a necessity of nature, as the sun gives light, or a fountain pours out its waters; but, being a free Agent, he exerted his power in consequence of counsel and design, and exerted it to such an extent, and in such a variety of ways, as were agreeable to himself. He did not create with the same view which leads a man to collect a retinue of friends and dependants, that he may be cheered by their company, and aided by their services; for he was sufficient to himself, infinitely and immutably blessed in the enjoyment of his own excellence. As we are confessedly not competent judges of the Divine counsels, it might be presumptuous to affirm that benevolence was the only motive of the creation, and it has been thought more proper to say, that the end was the glory of the Creator. But this is a general reason for all his works, and consequently throws no light upon a particular one. When we say that God does any thing for his glory, if we affix any distinct sense to our words, we must mean that he does it for the manifestation of his perfections. There is no inconsistency, therefore, in maintaining that

goodness was the motive of creation, for this is only to say, that God purposed to display the benevolence of his nature in giving existence to other beings besides himself. It is true, that creation has eventually served to glorify all his perfections in the great scheme of providence, of which fallen men are the objects; but considering it by itself, and in its first intention, we are authorized to assert, that its primary design was the diffusion of happiness. What other idea is suggested by the contemplation of a system so regular and beautiful in all its parts, and teeming with life and enjoyment? Had not the Divine nature been communicative, God would have remained for ever alone; but now he beholds from his throne a scale of beings, ascending from the insect and the worm to the seraph and the archangel, all rejoicing in conscious existence, and partaking of the riches of his liberality. The eternal fountain has overflowed, and the universe is refreshed and gladdened by its stream. It is the saying of a heathen philosopher, that when God was about to make the world, he transformed himself into love.

The goodness of God may be inferred from the state in which living creatures are made. They are relatively perfect: that is, they are fitted for their place in creation, their peculiar mode of life, and the purposes which they were designed to serve. Nothing is wanting which is necessary for the preservation of life, for defence, the procuring of food, and motion from place to place. As this adaptation is a proof of wisdom, when considered in the relation of means to an end, so it is also a proof of goodness, as the obvious intention of it is the well-being of the animal. Had we found living creatures destitute of any of those members and organs of sense upon which their safety and comfort depend, birds without wings, fishes without fins, beasts without legs, we might have supposed that they were the productions of a Being who meant that they should languish in misery and perish. The contrary conclusion must be drawn from the intention which has been evidently paid to their comfortable subsistence. He who has bestowed life, has rendered it a gift worthy of himself, by associating with it a variety of conveniences and pleasures. "If he had wished our misery," says a celebrated writer, "he might have made sure of his purpose, by forming our senses to be so many sores and pains to us, as they are now instruments of gratification and enjoyment, or by placing us amidst objects so ill suited to our perceptions, as to have continually offended us, instead of ministering to our refreshment and delight. He might have made, for example, every thing we tasted bitter, every thing we saw loathsome, every thing we touched a sting, every smell a stench, and every sound a discord. If he had been indifferent about our happiness or misery, we must impute to our good fortune (as all design by this supposition is excluded) both the capacity of our senses to receive pleasure, and the supply of external objects fitted to produce it. But either of these (and still more both of them) being too much to be attributed to accident, nothing remains but the supposition that God, when he created the human species, wished their happiness, and made for them the provision which he has made, with that view, and for that purpose."* These observations are applicable to the inferior animals as well as to men; and the adjustment of their constitution to their circumstances, so that they are capable of enjoyment from the objects around them, proves in the most satisfactory manner, that their Maker is a benevolent Being.

The goodness of God is displayed in the abundant provision which he has made for the wants of his creatures. "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing."† With the care and bounty of a parent, he provides for the members of his family. The various species of

* Paley's Moral Philosophy, B. ii. c. 5.

† Ps. cxlv. 15, 16.

animals differ from each other, as much in their taste as in their form, inasmuch, that the food which sustains one will not nourish another, and what one eagerly seeks another rejects with disgust. Substances which to us seem useless, and offensive to our senses, and if taken into our stomachs would be noxious, furnish wholesome and delicious nutriment to creatures differently constituted. The goodness of God is seen in the production of such a variety of substances, that none of the tribes of animals which it has seemed meet to his wisdom to create, might want its appropriate aliment. The guests at the table of providence have no community of interests and feelings, but they all find entertainment; not one of them goes away disappointed. Many parts of the earth are not inhabited by men, yet in them the process of vegetation goes on from year to year; the sun shines, the rain falls, and the earth brings forth herbs and plants. It is not, however, to be thought that this is a mere waste, like the profusion of the spendthrift, who scatters his bounty where no good will be done. In the deserts there are myriads of insects, and birds, and quadrupeds, which He who made them does not deem unworthy of his care; and as our Lord says, "our heavenly Father feedeth them." If on digging into the earth, or penetrating into the fissures of the rock, you find living creatures to which such places afford a convenient abode, you also find, that he who assigned them these stations has not left them without the means of subsistence and enjoyment. What a delightful view of the Divine goodness is given by the regular succession of the seasons, the opening buds and blossoms of spring, the luxuriant growth of summer, the matured fruits and rich harvests of autumn! It is by this succession, that God prepares the ample and various feasts to which all his living offspring are invited. For them the sun pours out a flood of light and genial heat; for them the earth is endowed with unceasing powers of fertility; for them the winds bear life and health on their wings. "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches." His riches are not exhausted upon the earth; the ocean which surrounds it is also replenished with inhabitants, to whom his bounty extends. "So also is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships; there is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good."*

Once more: The goodness of God is manifest in the variety of natural pleasures, which he has provided for his creatures. By associating these with existence, he has made it truly a blessing, and acted in the character of benevolence, which happy itself, delights to see others happy. There seems, indeed, to be a high degree of pleasure attached to simple existence, as we may judge from the lively motions of young animals—the frisking of a lamb, for example—which appear to have no specific object, and to proceed from a certain indescribable satisfaction which they experience in the possession of life and activity. When in summer the air is filled with myriads of insects, which are almost constantly on the wing, wheeling in sportive circles, we have an evidence of the delight with which they pass their transitory duration, and a proof, not perhaps much attended to, but calculated to affect a reflecting mind, of the beneficence of the Deity. Their enjoyment is merely sensitive, but it is the only kind of which they are capable; and it is goodness, rich in its treasures, and minute in its attentions, which thus adapts itself to every living nature. His goodness is farther displayed in the pleasure which animals derive from their food. This is a distinct consideration from the nourishment which it yields. It might have nourished without producing any agreeable sensation. We experience that food not only satisfies the appetite of hunger, but also gratifies our taste; and we have reason to think, that this gratification

* Ps. civ. 24—28.

is enjoyed by the inferior animals, in an equal or a superior degree. Now this pleasure is not at all necessary to the great design of food, the sustenance of the body; the substances which we use might have been as tasteless as water, without any diminution of their nutritive quality; the taste is super-added by our Maker to render our food pleasant as well as useful, and clearly shews attention to our animal comfort. We may draw the same conclusion from the means which he has provided for gratifying our other senses of sight, smell, and hearing. The earth might have been as fertile as it is, although its surface had not been so delightfully variegated, and its productions had not been moulded into such elegant forms. We might have lived, although there had been no blossoms and flowers painted with the most beautiful colours, and exhaling sweet perfumes. We might have walked in the fields and woods, imbibing health and spirits from the pure atmosphere, although our ears had not been saluted with the music of birds, and other pleasing sounds. Whence this loveliness, this charm diffused over the face of nature? Whence those graces so profusely scattered around us, those agreeable accompaniments of natural objects, which do not render them more useful, but more attractive; which do not sustain life, but impart a higher relish to it? Surely we may say, that "the tender mercies of the Lord are over all his works;" that there are every where indications of a studious attention to the happiness of his creatures; that having designed this world for our habitation, he has furnished it with all conveniences and ornaments, to remind us how good he is, and how well entitled to our grateful homage.

What has been said chiefly relates to the lower animals, but has been mixed up with some observations illustrative of the Divine goodness to man. There are some things, however; which may seem to lead to the opposite conclusion, as the prevalence of disease and death among them, and particularly the fact, that some of them prey upon others. No man, I presume, will plead for the gift of immortality to the inferior creatures, and maintain that God cannot be good in bestowing a happy life, unless he prolong it for ever. Were not their numbers thinned by death, the earth would be overstocked, and leave no room for human inhabitants; and they themselves would perish for want of subsistence, or in the furious conflicts to which the scarcity of food would give rise. If for wise reasons they are doomed to die, disease naturally results from this appointment, as the means of effecting dissolution, and cannot be objected to but on such grounds as might be alleged against their mortality itself. It is part of the system, the unavoidable attendant of a body liable to decay and destruction. It is observable, that health is the rule, and disease is the exception, and that in the whole life of the animal, such is the overbalance of good as to make the evil almost disappear. Some animals prey upon others. But, not to mention that this could have been prevented only by not creating carnivorous animals, and that we are too imperfectly acquainted with the reasons of things, to pronounce that they might have been wanted without any injury to the system; I remark, that if animals were to die, this mode of terminating their life is not more inconsistent with goodness, than death by disease or by old age. The pain is not greater, and in many cases is less; and we mistake if we think that the fear of it disquiets their lives. Even men in countries abounding with ferocious animals, do not pass their time in continual apprehension, but grow familiar with danger; and still feebler is the impression upon irrational creatures, who have no forethought, and seem not to feel fear till danger is apparent. I do not say that these observations are a full solution of the difficulty; but if the facts on which the objection is founded, be considered as forming a small deduction from the sum total of goodness in this part of creation, attention to the other facts which have been mentioned, will leave no doubt in our minds, that this world is the work of a benevolent Being.

I now proceed to bring proofs of the goodness of God, exclusively from his dispensations to man. And here it will be necessary to turn our eyes from the present scene, although it exhibits many tokens of Divine benignity as we have partly seen, and to contemplate, by the light of revelation, the state in which man was originally placed. Although he was last created, yet he was not least. A high rank was assigned to him in the scale of being: "God gave him more understanding than the beasts of the field, and the fowls of the air." He not only endowed him with reason, which is so much superior to instinct, but he communicated to him the most excellent wisdom, consisting in the knowledge of himself and his Maker, the relations subsisting between them, the whole extent of his duty, the true nature of happiness, and the hopes which he was authorized to entertain as a being made for immortality. His goodness was manifested in the moral or spiritual powers with which man was furnished, in the innate rectitude of his dispositions, his love of holiness, his desire for the chief good, and his supreme delight in it; in consequence of which he was capable of enjoying felicity, incomparably superior in kind and degree to that of the inferior creatures, and did actually enjoy it under the smile of his Maker. It appeared in the dominion with which he was invested; a dominion which imparted not only pre-eminence, but authority and power, so that the other creatures were subject to him, and might be used for his good according to the will of the Universal Parent. "God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." Thus he was constituted lord of this lower world, and of all its riches; and it might be said, that as man was made for God, so the earth was made for man; every thing in it being placed at his disposal, and being intended to minister to him. Again, the goodness of God appeared in the covenant which he made with man, promising to reward his obedience with everlasting felicity. To such a recompense his obedience could not have entitled him independently of this stipulation. Obedience was a debt which he owed to his Creator, to whose service he was bound to devote the faculties which he had received from his bounty: so that, although he had fulfilled the whole law, he should have done only what it was his duty to do, and should have had no claim to a remuneration. This transaction, therefore, displayed great condescension, and also great benevolence, as regard to the happiness of man, which it would have probably augmented, and certainly could have rendered immutably secure; for when the term of trial was past, the Divine faithfulness and justice would have been pledged for its perpetual duration. It was the love of a father holding out to his son the highest reward which he could confer, for doing what he was previously under the most sacred obligations to perform. Through his folly, man lost the noble prize set before him; but the event does not in any degree obscure the evidence of the benignity from which the offer of it proceeded; and at this distance, we ought to look back with grateful emotions upon the hope which animated our great progenitor in the commencement of his career, and the blessedness which might have descended as an inheritance to his children. The original state of man was a state of happiness. Peace and joy then reigned in his bosom, and a bright interminable prospect rose to his view. External nature was in harmony with his feelings, and shone with the glory of his Maker. In paradise, which the hand of God had prepared for him, all was beauty, and melody, and delight. This was the golden age of which poets have sung, when there was perpetual spring, the gentle breezes fanned the spontaneous flowers, the unploughed earth yielded its delicious fruits, the rivers flowed with milk and nectar, and honey distilled from the oak. But, as poets also tell, a new order of things succeeded, with a change of seasons, frost and burning heat, and

stubborn soil, from which man gained his subsistence by painful exertion.* Yet even in this new state, which we know from Scripture to have been superinduced by sin, there are not wanting many proofs of the goodness of God.

When man transgressed the law of his Creator, a dispensation of unmixed wrath might have commenced. He had forfeited any claim to the blessings of life. Having been expelled from paradise, the abode of innocence and peace, he had no right to expect elsewhere a comfortable habitation, and might have found every region blasted by the curse which had been pronounced upon the earth for his sake. God, who for wise reasons had suspended the infliction of the threatened penalty and permitted him to live, might have doomed him and his posterity to a life of misery. When he condemned him to earn his bread with the sweat of his brow, he might have appointed his labour to be still more oppressive. He might have impressed upon every object the signatures of his displeasure, to call up at every step the remembrance of our guilt, and to keep us constantly in fearful apprehension of the day of vengeance and recompense. The earth might have continued to yield its various productions, but these might have been so changed as to afford no pleasure to our senses. Our situation might have resembled that of a criminal shut up in a gloomy dungeon till the day of execution, counting with sorrow the hours as they pass, and unvisited by a single ray of consolation. There might have been no intervals of ease, no sensations of joy; horror might have surrounded us in terrific forms, and the presence of our fellow-men might have added to our torment. How different is the earth, smiling under the influences of heaven, teeming with abundance, and furnishing from its surface and its bowels the materials of varied enjoyment! The proofs of the Divine goodness formerly adduced, become more striking and impressive, when it is considered, that the place in which they are displayed is a rebellious world; that the objects of this beneficence are sinful creatures, who never suffer a single day to pass without offending their Benefactor, and many of whom seem to have forgotten that he exists, except when they introduce his name to blaspheme it, and make no other use of his bounty but to outrage his laws, and plunge themselves deeper and deeper in depravity. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."†

From this view of the present state of men, it is easy to account for some facts which appear to be inconsistent with the goodness of God, and have much perplexed those who are ignorant of revelation, or did not choose to be assisted by its light in their inquiries. From the existence of evil in creation, some have inferred the existence of a malignant being, who is continually employed in counteracting the designs of the principle of good; but this exploded doctrine has been already considered, and need not retard us in our progress. Men are subject to pain, disease and death. Care and toil are necessary to procure a subsistence, and they not unfrequently prove abortive, from causes over which human power has no control. We experience inclement seasons, and dreadful havoc is made by tempests, earthquakes, and inundations. Such is the diversity of climate, that in one region intense cold prevails, and in another excessive heat, so that both are rendered unfit for the habitation of man. Some countries are barren, others are possessed by ferocious beasts and venomous reptiles. Here swarms of insects devour the fruits of the field; and there they so sting and torment the inhabitants, that they are compelled to abandon them, or spend their life in a state of continual discomfort.

The proper mode of answering this objection, is not to attempt to shew, that some of these are not evils, that others admit of alleviation, and that upon the whole they are conducive to good. It would not be difficult to prove, that there are evils to which none of these suppositions is applicable. To tell us

* Ovid. *Metamorph.* lib. i. fab. 2, 3.

† *Matth.* v. 45

that venomous creatures are useful, because they extract poison from the earth in which it is lodged, is to trifle with us, by substituting a childish fancy for fact. To say that pain is useful, because it admonishes us of danger and excites us to take precautions against it, is to state what in many cases is true, but is not a satisfactory answer, because it may be replied, that benevolence might have adopted a different method, and we can have no idea that pain would have been necessary for this purpose in a state of innocence. The amount is, that pain is an evil, but is overbalanced by the good of which it is productive. But we are at present inquiring, why there is any evil at all? To insinuate that it is the effect of general laws, is to throw out a reflection upon the wisdom and the power of the Creator, as if he could not have established a system of laws which would not have thwarted and crossed one another. It is something like the solution of the ancient philosophers, who ascribed the existence of evil to the malignity or the stubbornness of matter. If evil was unavoidable, God is not omnipotent; if it might have been avoided, it is not enough to say that it is subservient to good, because we feel as much difficulty as ever to reconcile the admission of it with the idea of perfect benevolence. Those who attend to the true state of the case, will reason in a different manner. Acknowledging that there are real evils, they will contend that their existence is not inconsistent with the benevolence of the Author of nature, because the world in which they are found is inhabited by sinful beings. Had man continued in his original state, these evils would have been unaccountable; but no person who believes that God is just, can wonder that suffering should be the attendant of guilt. The character of God is moral, that is, he is holy as well as benevolent; and his goodness ought to be considered, not as a disposition to confer happiness indiscriminately, but to confer it upon the proper objects. It is a mixed dispensation under which we are placed, a dispensation of mercy and of judgment. While God exercises much patience and long-suffering towards men, he gives also tokens of his displeasure; and the true ground of surprise is, not that there is a portion of evil in their lot, but that there is so much good, because they deserve the one, but are altogether unworthy of the other.

With all the evils which belong to our condition, there can be no doubt that the balance of physical good greatly preponderates. The amount will be estimated in different ways, according to the temperament of different individuals. The cheerful man gives the colour of his own feelings to the surrounding scene, and all nature smiles to his eye; but to the melancholy man, it appears enveloped as in a dark shade. Judging soberly, and admitting all necessary deductions, we cannot but acknowledge that there is more happiness than misery. In general, the days of health are many, and those of pain and sickness are few. Our sorrows admit of much alleviation, and although keenly felt at the time, grow weaker and weaker, and at last cease to disquiet us. Enjoyment of one kind or other is within the reach of all; and even in conditions which seem the most unfavourable to it, there are sources of satisfaction of which others are not aware, as we see from the contentment, the cheerful looks, and the lively conversation of those who are placed in them. There is a pliability in the human mind, which adapts itself to circumstances, and makes the most of them, so that the poor have their pleasures as well as the rich, the labouring classes as well as those who are living at ease. All esteem existence a blessing, and suicide is committed only when the mind is diseased, or the instinctive love of life is overcome by the extremity of pain, or the dread of approaching intolerable evil. The state even of fallen man bears ample testimony to the goodness of his Maker. It is, upon the whole, a happy world in which we live, although it is a world of sinners. God displays before our eyes the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and long suffering.

Physical evil is the consequence of moral evil. On this ground, God is justified in inflicting it, and its existence is not inconsistent with his goodness. But here a more formidable difficulty presents itself. Whence comes moral evil? How has it found a place among the works of God? and is the admission of it reconcileable to his goodness? Moral evil is the consequence of the abuse of moral liberty: if there had been no creatures endowed with free agency, its name would have been unknown. The question then is, whether it was consistent with his goodness to create free agents? and since it must be answered in the affirmative, because he has actually created them, it follows that they alone are responsible for the consequences. If they have used the power which he gave them for evil and not for good, which was the original design of it; if instead of employing this power to secure their own happiness as he commanded them, they have perverted it so as to subject themselves to suffering, no blame is imputable to him. He has done nothing which can impeach the benevolence of his nature. It is not the fault of a man, that the objects of his beneficence do injury to themselves by his gifts, which would have been of advantage to them, if they had applied them to the purpose which he intended. But if moral evil would be productive of disorder and misery, would it not have been suitable to the character of a benevolent Being to have prevented it, as it was undoubtedly foreseen? In answer to this question, I will not say with some, that God could not have prevented it without destroying liberty, and changing the nature of man; for the contrary is manifest from the state of the righteous in the world to come, who will be free, but no longer liable to sin. It has been asked, "whether, upon the narrow view which we have of the works of God, and the whole system of the universe, we can pretend to judge that the present constitution, in this branch of it which relates to free agents, is inconsistent with the wisdom and moral perfections of the Supreme Being? Shall we take upon us to say that the order of the creation, and the ends for which it was made, did not require that there should be such a rank of beings in it, constituted as we are, with understanding, liberty, and moral affections, but capable of sin, tempted to it, and thereby in danger of becoming unhappy through their own fault?" This may be called an appeal to our ignorance; but there is no occasion on which it may be made with greater propriety, than when we are inquiring into a fact in the Divine administration, the effects and consequences of which will last through an eternal duration, and may extend directly or indirectly to other worlds besides our own. In such a case, we may well acknowledge that the reasons of it are unknown to us, and it is better to avoid attempting to explain the permission of moral evil, than to give such an account of it as would represent the Maker of all in the light of an arbitrary Sovereign, who has sacrificed the happiness of a portion of his creatures to his own glory, or to give such an account as would impeach his justice and his goodness. Ignorant then, as we are, of the reason why moral evil was permitted, we cannot reasonably oppose the fact of its entrance into the world to the manifold proofs of the benevolence of the Deity. Let us rest upon what we know and feel, instead of perplexing ourselves with what we do not understand. It will, in the mean time, afford some relief to reflect that his wisdom has over-ruled it for the best and noblest ends, although we must beware of attributing to him what is so severely reprobated in man, the principle of doing evil that good may come. But good has come out of evil, the highest glory to God, and the highest happiness to man; and the brightest display of the Divine benevolence, is given in the plan from which such consequences have resulted.

The remaining part of this lecture will be devoted to some remarks upon the goodness of God in redemption. As manifested in this work, it is expressed by the terms, love, grace, and mercy, which exhibit it under different as-

pects. Love is the same with benevolence or good will, a desire for the happiness of others giving rise to the use of due means for accomplishing it. Mercy presupposes sufferings, and is goodness exercised in relieving the miserable. Grace denotes its freeness, and represents its objects as guilty beings, who were utterly unworthy of it. It is also called the philanthropy of God, because he has passed by angels, and extended his favour to man.

Redemption originated in the goodness of God, as well as creation. If we cannot conceive any reason why he formed man at first, but a disposition to communicate life and happiness, we are led, *a fortiori*, to attribute to the same cause his interposition to save him from a state of misery. Man was not necessary to his Maker, who had existed alone from eternity. He could derive no benefit from his services, and the loss of our whole race could have been immediately supplied by the production of another. His purpose respecting him was antecedent to his fall and to his creation, for it was foreseen from eternity what use he would make of his liberty; and that the purpose was perfectly free, a spontaneous act of benevolence, is evident, because it was founded on the knowledge that he would so act as to subject himself to the curse. The permission of moral evil does not imply an approbation of it. The evils which it brings upon man in the present life are a testimony of the Supreme Ruler against it; and when we turn to his word, we find him speaking of it in terms of the utmost abhorrence. We must take into the account its contrariety not only to his will but to his nature, his infinite hatred of it, the just resentment which he must have felt at the insult of his authority implied in it, and the disorder which it had caused among his works, before we can form a due estimate of the goodness which prompted him to resolve upon the deliverance of the perpetrators of an evil of such magnitude, and upon their deliverance by such wonderful means. Misery, we are authorized to believe, excites his compassion; and this fact is a decisive proof of the inconceivable benevolence of his nature, since it is certain, that he sees no misery in our world, which men do not most justly suffer, no misery which they have not incurred by their own voluntary forfeiture of his favour. Perhaps, our admiration of his goodness is lessened by the thought, that being his own creatures they had some sort of claim upon his compassion, or that it was beneath his majesty to pursue with relentless vengeance such insignificant offenders. This is undoubtedly the meaning of the language which we often hear, that he is too merciful to mark every thing amiss in the conduct of frail and erring mortals. But, if men were condemned by a just sentence, the notion of any obligation to relieve them must be given up; and whatever art may be used to alleviate their guilt, and to reduce it to a venial infirmity, their crimes, as estimated by his law, assume a different character, are acts of treason against his government, attempts to establish an independent dominion by which creatures shall rule, and their will shall be the law. The redemption of the human race redounds to the glory of God, which is the ultimate end of it as of all his works; but this view does not obscure the evidence of the disinterestedness of his love. It is necessary that if God act, he should act in such a manner as is worthy of his infinite perfections; but he does not act from necessity, but in consequence of the sovereign determination of his will. He chooses this manner of manifesting his glory, and in the present case, might have displayed the severity of his justice instead of the riches of his grace. The former method was preferred in his treatment of apostate angels. Men might have been involved in the same condemnation; or if it be supposed, that it became him to manifest his pardoning goodness in some region of the universe, salvation might have visited their dark abode, and the earth might have been left under the curse. The reasons of this distinction are unknown; but in his conduct towards us, he has shewn that he has no

pleasure in the death of the wicked. It is a grateful spectacle to him, to see his creatures rejoicing in his love; and it is to love alone, to unsolicited and generous love, that we must attribute the last and best of his works, the redemption of a perishing world.

The means by which it was accomplished serve to demonstrate, how agreeable to him is the happiness of his creatures, and how earnestly he desires it. Could a word have saved us from perdition, it would have been highly benevolent to pronounce it, as it was a proof of benevolence to call us and other living creatures into existence by a word, or a simple act of his will. But although nothing is difficult to his power, there are cases in which it cannot be immediately exercised; because other perfections of his nature are concerned in the effect, and a harmony among them must be previously established. Redemption is not an act of omnipotence alone, nor of love alone. It is not an act of creation, but of moral administration; and hence it exhibits a provision and combination of means, illustrative of the riches of his wisdom. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."* The person employed in accomplishing this design, the circumstances in which he appeared, and the work assigned to him, are so many distinct proofs of the incomprehensible goodness in which it originated. The title, Son of God, represents him not only as the object of strong and tender love, but as a divine person, and infinitely superior to the highest spirit in the scale of created being. Such was the Minister of mercy to our world; but his condition in it by no means accorded with his essential dignity. It was a condition of poverty and suffering, and it terminated by a death accompanied with every circumstance of cruelty and ignominy. By these surprising means was the benevolent purpose of Heaven carried into effect. The price of our redemption was blood, human blood indeed, but enhanced in value above all calculation, by the personal greatness of the victim. It is only when we look beyond the external appearance, and contemplate the intrinsic excellence of the sufferer, that we can make an approach to a just conception of the transcendent love which provided such a sacrifice for the worthless race of man. And reflecting upon the character of our Saviour, and the relation in which he stood to our offended Creator, we must be sensible, that by appointing him to die for us, he has given a higher demonstration of love, than if the whole system to which we belong had been offered up as an atonement for our sins.

The argument will be strengthened by a view of the design which such means were employed to accomplish. If we could tell what is implied in salvation, how many and how great are the evils from which we are delivered, how many and how great are the blessings with which we are enriched, we should be able to estimate the love from which it has emanated. Think of the miseries under which human nature now groans, and of the greater miseries which the guilty mind forebodes in the state of retribution; and remember, that it was to rescue us from these, to abolish the curse, and chase away the shades of sorrow and despair, that the Son of the living God expired upon the cross. Think again of the good which man desires, and is capable of enjoying; of the peace and hope which tranquillize the heart, and cheer it with the opening prospect of glory; of the perfection which we shall hereafter attain, the transports of the righteous in the immediate presence and fruition of God, and of an eternity of pleasures always fresh and perpetually increasing; and remember, that it was to procure this inconceivable felicity for worthless men, to gladden the souls of thousands and millions, that the Son of the Blessed endured the agonies of death. Contemplating in thought what time would

* John iii. 16, 17.

accomplish, we see the last and dreaded foe vanquished, and stript of his spoils; the grave giving up its dead, who leaving all their infirmities behind them, shall appear fair as in paradise, and fairer still than in that happy place; the earth purified and renovated to be once more the abode of innocence and joy, the choice of all generations united in one glorious assembly; angels associated with man, and God himself come down to dwell with them. "And I heard a great voice out of Heaven, saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away."* Such is the delightful scene, to which our eye is directed by the light of prophecy. It is the reign of order and happiness, succeeding ages of turmoil and sorrow; it is an eternal spring after a long and dreary winter; it is the triumph of almighty love. Thus will terminate the revolutions of time, and the dispensations of heaven. Goodness infinite will fill all holy creatures with never-ending joy. It will be the jubilee of the universe. Everywhere will be heard the sound of praise, the songs of the redeemed, echoed by the happy spirits before the throne of God: "Blessing and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."†

"O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" Gratitude is the return justly expected from the objects of beneficence; but it is often withheld from our great Benefactor, for the strangest of all reasons, because his goodness is constant and abundant! It is lightly esteemed, because it is exercised towards us in the common course of events; it is not felt, because we daily experience it! The character of benevolence is impressed upon all his works. His goodness is a reason why men should love, and cheerfully obey him; and it renders those inexcusable who live without any acknowledgment of him, or dare to accuse his dispensations of unkindness. Sufferings they undergo, but not in such a degree as they deserve; mercies are bestowed upon them, of the least of which they are unworthy. Ours is a sinful world, but much happiness is enjoyed in it, and we have the hope of more, through the generosity of a Friend indeed, who has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel.

LECTURE XXV.

ON GOD.

Justice of God: distinguished into Absolute and Relative—Remarks on the notion of Absolute Justice—Relative Justice respects Creatures: implies the giving of a Righteous Law, its enforcement with adequate Sanctions, and its Impartial Execution—Testimonies to this Attribute by Conscience, by Events in Providence, and by Redemption—Manifestation of it at the Last Judgment.

IN treating of the Divine perfections, it is an obvious remark, that they are all essential and necessary to complete the idea of God; that is, of a Being possessed of every possible excellence. Not one of them could be wanting, without changing his character; so that if any of them is unintentionally or designedly omitted, the object of contemplation is not the true God, but a be-

* Rev. xxi. 34

† Rev. v. 13.

ing who owes his existence to human misconception. While reason requires us to acknowledge them all, and to adore the fulness of the Godhead, they are calculated to make different impressions upon our minds, all leading, however, to sentiments of admiration, reverence, and love. Some are objects of pleasing, and others of awful contemplation. Wisdom delights us by the excellence of its ends, and the fitness of its means. Goodness charms us by the richness and variety of its gifts. It sheds a loveliness and an interest over the works of God; and emotions of joy and gratitude are felt while we look at nature smiling under his influence, and displaying the care and beneficence of a parent. But when we turn our thoughts to the unspotted purity of his nature, and the justice which presides in his moral government, a new order of sentiments arises. In the apprehension of guilty creatures, he seems no longer to smile, but to frown upon his works. The easy, placable disposition, so soothing to our minds, so consoling when conscience obtrudes its fears upon us, in which we portrayed him from the consideration of his goodness alone, gives place to sterner features, and we tremble before him as an offended Ruler and a Judge. We have no wish to cultivate close intercourse with him; we are repelled by the severity of his countenance, and would willingly withdraw to any distant place where we should be sheltered from his presence. Innocent creatures are affected in a different manner. In their eyes, justice gives a firmness and consistency to his character, and, if I may speak so, invests all his other perfections with an air of grandeur and majesty. But the criminal dreads justice; and Divine justice is more formidable than that of man, because it is associated with knowledge from which offenders cannot conceal themselves, and with power which they are unable to resist. From this cause have originated the attempts which have been made to deprive God of his attribute, or to soften it down into a form which will create less alarm; to prove that it is not so inflexible as some persons of harsh and gloomy minds believe; that it does not mark our sins with extreme strictness, that it will not rigidly insist upon its demands, and that when moved to displeasure it is easily pacified. But the speculations of men, which are suggested less by their reason than by their wishes, are an unsafe ground on which to rest our religious system. In all subjects, and particularly in one of so much importance as the character of Him with whom we have to do, truth should be our aim, and the interests which might interfere with it should be dismissed from our thoughts. If we follow the guidance of unsophisticated reason, it will lead us to the same conclusion with the Scriptures, that God is just, as well as wise and good; that he is not only the Maker and Preserver, but also the Ruler of the world; and that as power and wisdom are required to guide and sustain inanimate matter, and creatures without reason, so justice is indispensable to the government of intelligent and moral agents, who are the proper subjects of law, and may deserve to be rewarded or punished. To deny his justice, is to wrest the sceptre from his hand, and to expose his government to contempt and insult by proclaiming impunity to his subjects. The many distinctions and relations, the knowledge of which justice supposes, must all be present to his infinite understanding, and we cannot conceive him to be, like his blind, weak, and miscalculating creatures, under any motive to disregard them. Now, when we take away ignorance, passion, and self-interest, real or imaginary, we remove all the causes of injustice.

The justice of God has been distinguished into absolute and relative, universal and particular. By the former is understood the rectitude of his nature, which leads him on all occasions to do what is right and equal; and the latter respects him in the character of a moral Governor, who will render to his subjects according to their desert. I do not see very clearly the nature of this distinction, which is not satisfactorily explained by those who adopt it, unless

It be this, that absolute justice is expressive of what he is in himself, but relative justice considers him as standing in certain relations to his creatures, and acting according to the law which he has given to them.

It is certain, that God has an absolute dominion over his creatures. He might have created them or not, according to his pleasure; he might have given them a different nature, and have placed them in different circumstances. With respect to these things, there was no necessity that he should act or not act, that he should act in one way rather than in another. It is also certain, that he who created, had a right to annihilate his works; and might have done so, not only to inanimate matter, and living beings destitute of reason, but also to man, prior to any promise or engagement to prolong their existence. We surely will not deny to him who is Supreme, the liberty which we ourselves claim, to bestow our gifts for a limited time, and to resume them at pleasure. The gift of existence conveyed no right to the continuance of it. Creation was a free act of power, which did not lay the Creator under an obligation to exert it for ever, or for any definite period, in upholding what he had made. He gave man an immortal spirit; but we can conceive no reason, why he might not have given him a spirit which, like that of the lower animals, would be extinguished at the death of the body. The spirit of man is endowed with nobler powers, and is capable, as we apprehend, of endless improvement; but although its high rank is associated in our minds with the notion of its immortality, we are not able to prove that there is any necessary connexion between them. In consequence of those powers, man was qualified to perform rational service, to yield moral obedience; but might he therefore claim a right to live forever? This idea cannot be entertained, without forgetting that he is a creature, who owed all because he had received all, and after the best employment of his faculties was an unprofitable servant. If we reflect upon the absolute dependence of a created being upon the author of his existence, we shall be convinced that he never could acquire a claim to any thing more than what he actually enjoyed, and that at every moment, the right of the Creator to withdraw his support, and leave him to return to nothing, remained unaltered.

Thus far, I think, we may safely proceed; but when we venture farther, and inquire, whether God had a right to subject his creatures to suffering, considered merely as his creatures, we are involved in a conflict between opposite opinions. Some deny, and others affirm, and have not hesitated even to maintain, that by his absolute justice and dominion, God could inflict the greatest torments, even those of hell, upon the most innocent creature. We do indeed find that innocent creatures suffer, namely, the lower animals who are incapable of sin, and yet are subject to disease, and torture, and death. I acknowledge that there is difficulty here; but although the Scripture does not fully explain it, yet it gives a general notice that they suffer in consequence of their connexion with men. This is perhaps the meaning of these words. "The creature (or the creation) was made subject to vanity."* We are not competent to say, how far, consistently with justice, those evils may have come upon them, as consequent parts of a system, on which a curse was pronounced for the sin of man, to whom that system was subservient, and who was placed at the head of it. Leaving out this case, as for the reason now stated, not distinctly an example of absolute dominion, we may say, that it seems harsh and revolting to affirm, that God might without injustice inflict everlasting misery upon an innocent creature. The addition of the epithet *absolute* to justice, does not alter the nature of the thing; it is still justice although absolute; and I would ask them, what idea they entertain of justice, which could treat the innocent in the same manner as the guilty? If this is

* Rom. viii. 20.

justice, I would say, what then is injustice? How does the one differ from the other? Surely men impose upon themselves, when they make use of a term in a sense directly the reverse of what in all other cases it conveys. There never was such an abuse of language, as to say, "This absolute justice or dominion"—observe how strangely dominion is substituted for justice, as if these were equivalent terms—"this absolute justice or dominion regards not any qualities or conditions of its object; but God can by virtue hereof inflict the highest torments on his innocent creature, and exempt from punishment the most nocent." *

Absolute justice is defined to be the rectitude of his nature, by which all his proceedings are regulated. All his acts are conformable to his infinite purity and perfection. Those who maintain, that he may subject an innocent creature to the greatest sufferings, are chargeable, in the first place, with transmuting rectitude into mere power, which is not a moral attribute; and in the second place, with forgetting that power is not his only perfection. In respect of power, God might do any thing, because he is omnipotent; but there are other properties of his nature, by which the exercise of power is limited. I do not mean to insinuate, that creatures have any claim upon their Creator, and hold it to be high presumption to make use of any expression, which imports that he is bound to bestow any favour upon them, prior to his own voluntary engagement. But God, if I may speak so, is a debtor to himself; that is, he will never do any thing which does not become him, which is not agreeable to his infinite perfection. Now, in the case which we are considering, his power is limited by his wisdom and goodness. As a wise Being, he would not inflict everlasting sufferings upon an innocent creature, because this would lead to the conclusion that righteousness was not more pleasing to him than unrighteousness, and that the punishment of the guilty was rather an effect of arbitrary will than of justice. As a good Being, he would not render his own offspring miserable without a cause; and to suppose that he might subject them to misery, and still be good, is to confound the ideas of malevolence and benevolence, as the hypothesis which we are combating confounds those of justice and power. It is strange that some men should take an unnatural pleasure in giving awful and forbidding representations of God, and should imagine, that they do honour to him by exalting one attribute at the expense of another, and exhibiting him in the character of an Almighty Despot.

Relative justice respects the relation in which God stands to his creatures as their moral Governor, and comprehends all the acts of his moral administration. Justice is distinguished into commutative and distributive. Commutative justice takes place in the exchange of one thing for another, and observes a strict proportion, giving and receiving an equivalent. It enters into human transactions, and ought to regulate all contracts and bargains between man and man. It cannot be ascribed to God, who can receive no equivalent from his creatures for any thing which he bestows upon them, all that they possess being already his own. "Who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?"† Distributive justice consists in bestowing rewards and inflicting punishments according to an established rule. This justice belongs to God as the Governor of men, who will treat them according to the law under which they are placed. Avenging justice comes under this division. It is justice exercised in taking vengeance upon sinners, or punishing them for their transgression of the law. Whether it is essential to God, is an important question, which we shall find another opportunity to discuss.

The justice of God implies the three following particulars: That the laws which he has given to us are right, or suitable to our nature and relations; that they are enforced with proper sanctions; and that they are impartially ex-

* Gale's Court of the Gentiles, part iv. B. ii. c. 5. § 4.

† Rom. xi. 35.

eruted. If these particulars concurred in the administration of an earthly ruler, if his laws were founded in equity, the recompense annexed to them proportionable, and rewards and punishments bestowed without respect of persons, we should pronounce his government to be just. We must conceive justice in God to be, upon the whole, of the same nature with justice in men, in the same manner as we conceive an analogy between his wisdom, goodness, and power, and those qualities in ourselves.

In the first place, the justice of God consists in giving righteous laws to men, laws suited to their nature, powers, and relations. Some affirm, that every thing which he commands is just, merely because he commands it, and make this the origin of moral distinctions; but from this opinion it would follow, that if he had given laws totally different, and even contrary to those which he has given, they would have been equally just. But here again justice and power are manifestly confounded; good and evil, right and wrong, have no existence in the nature of things, but are arbitrary differences. If we trace this notion to its consequences, it may be said, that falsehood might have been a virtue, and truth a vice; that it might have been lawful to steal, murder, and commit adultery; that men might have worshipped idols and not sinned; have lived without prayer, and have loved the creature more than the Creator. It would follow that there is no such thing as eternal and immutable morality. We maintain that, in general, things are not just because God has commanded them, but that he has commanded them because they are just. Our meaning is, that there was a reason for them in the nature of things, and that therefore, he has enforced them by his authority. There may be some precepts or parts of precepts in the decalogue to which we cannot apply this remark, but this is its general character. His law is summed up in these two injunctions, love to God and love to our neighbour; and how reasonable these are, no person can be at a loss to perceive. Our supreme regard is justly due to our Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, in whom every excellence is found which can excite esteem or affection. The obligation to love him evidently arises from his nature and the relations which he bears to us. As men are his offspring, and resemble him in their moral and intellectual powers, and as we are all sprung from the same stock, and have common feelings and interests, it is plain, that we ought to be well affected to those around us for his sake, and as constituting with us a family of brothers. That saying of our Lord which he delivered as a compend of morality has obtained universal admiration, by its obvious accordance with the dictates of reason and humanity. "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so unto them; for this is the law and the prophets."* Our present limits will not admit an inquiry into the justice of particular precepts. Objections may be made to them, by those who feel that they are opposed to their corrupt inclinations, as thieves and murderers object to the laws of the land of which every honest man approves; but an unprejudiced and upright mind will cordially assent to them as admirably adapted to our circumstances, and enjoining nothing which it is not fit that we should do, nothing which is not conducive to our individual interest upon the whole, and to the general good. It was no extravagant praise, when the Psalmist pronounced the statutes of God to be righteous, and declared, that he esteemed them concerning all things to be right† If the righteousness of the law should be called in question on this ground, that its demands are too high for the present infirm state of our nature, it should be considered, that this disproportion did not exist from the beginning, for in that case there might have been ground for complaining of injustice; but that it has been superinduced by a cause, for which the Author of the law is not responsible. It fully vindicates the Lawgiver, that his law was adapted to our nature at its original formation.

*Mat. vii. 12.

† Ps. cxix. 128.

Had man wanted power to fulfil the law, there would have been no justice in subjecting him to it, and to have punished him for not fulfilling it would have been cruelty; but the loss of that power, since it was not forcibly taken from him, but voluntarily parted with, does not invalidate the claims of the Lawgiver. No act of ours can divest him of his supreme dominion; nor can it be supposed, with any appearance of reason, that our allegiance ceases as soon as we have disqualified ourselves for performing the duty which we owe to our Sovereign.

I have said that moral duties are enjoined because they are just, or because they are founded in the nature of things. But there are also duties which become just, solely because they are commanded. These are positive duties which have been prescribed to men, in a greater or less number, under every dispensation. Such was the prohibition of the tree of knowledge in paradise; such were the ritual observances of the ancient law; and such are baptism and the Lord's Supper under the gospel; to which may be added the appointment of one day in seven to be a holy rest, and the fixing of the day to the seventh, or to the first. The difference between these classes of duties is thus explained by Bishop Butler. "Moral precepts are precepts, the reasons of which we see; positive precepts are precepts, the reasons of which we do not see. Moral duties arise out of the case itself, prior to external command. Positive duties do not arise out of the nature of the case, but from external command; nor would they be duties at all, were it not for such command received from Him, whose creatures and subjects we are." He adds the following observation, to which some thoughtless declaimers on this subject would do well to attend. "As it is one of the peculiar weaknesses of human nature, when, upon a comparison of two things, one is found to be of greater importance than the other to consider this other as of scarce any importance at all; it is highly necessary that we remind ourselves, how great presumption it is to make light of any institution of Divine appointment; that our obligations to obey all God's commands whatever are absolute and indispensable; and that commands merely positive, admitted to be from Him, lay us under a moral obligation to obey them, an obligation moral in the strictest and most proper sense."* According to this reasoning, positive duties are as really binding as moral, and the performance of the latter will be no compensation for the neglect of the former. Let it be observed that the obligation to both arises from the authority of God; for even moral duties, which are founded in the nature and relations of things, become strictly and formally duties in consequence of a law. That only is obedience which is done from respect to the will of a superior. When we perform certain actions solely because they are consonant to reason, or because we perceive them to be fit and proper in our circumstances, we merely adapt our conduct to the order of nature. As it is certain that our Maker has a right to propose any test of our obedience, the reasonableness of positive duties cannot be denied; and their goodness is evinced by their connexion with our interests, as they contribute to promote the great ends of religion.

In the second place, the justice of God consists in enforcing his laws with proper sanctions. By the sanction of a law, we mean something distinct from its precepts, which is added the more effectually to secure the obedience of the subjects. A simple command would be obligatory, if the person issuing it were possessed of legal authority; but it would not materially differ from a counsel or advice, if the lawgiver contented himself with enjoining obedience, and made no inquiry whether his will was respected or despised. The law of God is enforced by rewards and punishments, and justice is concerned in fixing the proportion of these. In cases where reward is due, it may be greater than the service deserves, without any violation of justice, but it cannot be less

* Analogy of Religion, Part ii. c. 1.

No wrong is done when a person receives more than he is entitled to, but he sustains an injury if the recompense does not correspond to the value of the work. With respect to punishment, justice requires that it should be exactly adjusted to the crime. To punish with too great severity is cruel; to punish with too little, is contrary to moral rectitude, if the end of punishment is recompense, and defeats in some measure the purpose, if the end be to deter others from transgression. It is, however, necessary to observe, that justice does not strictly require that God should reward the obedience of his creatures, because their powers, natural and moral, being derived from his bounty, the exercise of them can give them no claim upon him; and they are bound to employ them in his service, although there were no prospect of a recompense. Men are led into a gross error by transferring ideas arising from their relations to one another, to the relation which subsists between them and their Maker. We are, in a certain sense, independent of one another, masters of our time, our skill, and our strength; and if, at the request of our neighbour, we devote these to his benefit, it is right that he should give an equivalent. But, in the present case, the obligations are all on our part; the creature is the property, and at the disposal of the Creator; we have already received more favours from him than we are able to repay; our services are previously due, and after we have performed them, we are still in debt. Merit is a word without meaning when connected with the obedience of men; it is impossible in the nature of things. Justice exercised in remunerating our services is founded on a gracious convention. The claim results not from the intrinsic worth of our obedience, but from an act of God himself, by which he has engaged to recompense it. If he has promised to reward our works; if he has entered into an agreement, binding himself to bestow certain favours in consideration of them, justice requires, that the terms on his part should be fulfilled, when the condition on our part has been performed. It is on this ground that the apostle says, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name."* Punishment admits of a different statement. It is the recompense strictly due to transgression, and God is righteous in inflicting it, independently of any previous stipulation. "Is God unrighteous, who taketh vengeance? God forbid; for how then shall God judge the world?"† If the law of God is just, as being founded on the nature of things, and on his will, which is holy and wise, there must be an intrinsic demerit in sin, which ought not to escape with impunity. However partial we are to ourselves, we cannot but see, that actions which imply contempt of the supreme authority, and directly aim at disturbing the moral order and government of the universe, deserve to be animadverted upon with the greatest severity. We cannot consider punishment in this case as an arbitrary exercise of power; we perceive a fitness in it, a relation of one thing to another, which appears to a reasonable mind to be natural and necessary.

Theologians have been much divided in sentiment with respect to the question, whether avenging justice is essential to God; that is, whether the punishment of sin flows from the purity and rectitude of his nature, or is an effect of his will. Hence some have maintained, that he might have pardoned sin without an atonement; and others maintain, that he could not. The language of Scripture on this subject is strong: "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity." "Thou art not a God that hast pleasure in wickedness; neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight; thou hatest all the workers of iniquity." "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord." "Our God is a consuming fire."‡ To suppose that nothing is intended, but that God has formed a resolution to punish sin,

* Heb. vi. 10. † Rom. iii. 5, 6. ‡ Hab. i. 13. Ps. v. 4, 5. Prov. xvii. 15. Heb. xii. 29

while he might have pardoned it, is to give a strange turn to expressions which certainly suggest at first view a very different sense. The obvious inference from them is, that sin is contrary to his nature; that there is an eternal repugnance between them; that he can never be reconciled to sinners considered in themselves; that he is led to punish them, not by the same necessity by which fire consumes combustible materials, but by a moral necessity as natural and irresistible. It is allowed that there is intrinsic demerit in sin. This postulate all will grant, who are not atheists, or who, not much better than they, imagine a Deity to whom human actions are indifferent, and subvert all religion by denying moral distinctions. If there is intrinsic demerit in sin, it is just to punish it; and to suppose that it might not be punished, that God, if it had seemed good to him, might have suffered it to pass with impunity, is to suppose that he might have done what is not consistent with justice. Men impose upon themselves when they talk of justice, which may punish or not according to its pleasure. The admission of this alternative destroys the idea of justice. What is called justice is not justice, but will, sometimes exerting itself in acts of kindness, and at other times in acts of severity. It is expedience, consulting not what the case abstractly demands, but what will be the best mode of managing it, with a view to a particular end. The world according to this hypothesis, might have been redeemed without the blood of Christ; but the wisdom of God judged, that it would be better to make his sacrifice the means; that the designs of his moral government would, in this way, be more fully answered, a more impressive lesson, a more effectual warning would be given to check the perverseness of mankind, and to inspire them with reverence for his law. But how does this theory agree with the statement, that it was the design of God in setting forth Christ to be a propitiation for sin, to declare his righteousness in the remission of it? * There is no display of righteousness in his death, if we might have been saved without his substitution. The plan is illustrative rather of prudence than of justice.

It is to no purpose to object, that as men may forgive one another's offences without satisfaction, so may God pardon sins committed against himself. What is a law to creatures, is not necessarily a law to the Creator. We may forgive offences without wrong to ourselves, or to the public; without wrong to the public, whose interests may happen to be in no way connected with the offence; without wrong to ourselves, because if we are content to forego the demand of reparation, no other person is injured. To avenge ourselves is not our province: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord."† He has taken it out of our hands into his own; but this reservation implies that punishment is agreeable to his nature; is an exercise of power which becomes him as the moral Governor of the world. This is the light in which he ought to be considered, and it is a gross mistake to compare his procedure with that of a private individual. We should compare him with a magistrate, who is the guardian of the laws, and ask, whether it would be just in a civil ruler to permit crimes to pass unpunished. If all agree that such conduct would be unworthy of his station, that such misjudging clemency would endanger the interests of society, shall we ascribe to God what would be condemnable in man? We believe that the Judge of all the earth will do right, and must therefore believe, that avenging justice is essential to him in this character.

In the third place, the justice of God consists in the impartial execution of his laws: I mean, that he distributes rewards and punishments, not under the influence of favour and displeasure originating in no moral cause, but with an exact regard to the characters and actions of men. Their actions are considered solely in the relation of conformity or disconformity to the law, and are recompensed according to a rule previously laid down, and rigidly adhered to.

* Rom. iii. 25.

† Rom. xii. 19.

Under his administration, viewed in its whole extent as comprehending the present and the future state, no such disorder takes place as we sometimes observe under human governments, where law is made to bend to private interests, and while one man is punished for a crime, another, who has committed the same offence, escapes with impunity. Read the Scriptures from beginning to end, and you shall find this to be the immutable principle of his dispensations, that he who obeys shall live, and the man who transgresses shall die. The causes which obstruct the course of justice among men, cannot influence the proceedings of the Supreme Judge. No person is so great as to set his justice at defiance, and none is so artful as to elude it. A guilty king has no advantage at his tribunal above the meanest of his subjects; and the most obscure individual, who performs his duty in silence, is as much under his eye as the man of rank and talents, who excites the admiration of the world by the splendour of his deeds. A law founded in justice knows no person, and is concerned with actions alone; so that if the innocent suffer, and the guilty are acquitted, the evil must be traced to the corruption of those by whom it is administered. The moral law having emanated from the nature of the Lawgiver, is under his own guardianship, and the love which he bears to it as an expression of his essential holiness, ensures its application without distinction of persons. "Hearken unto me, ye men of understanding: Far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity. For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways. Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment."* It may seem to be an objection against the justice of the Divine government, that good and evil are in many cases distributed according to no fixed rule, and that often the good falls to the lot of the wicked, and the evil to the lot of the righteous. I shall afterwards consider this objection, and at present only observe, that it is founded on the false supposition, that the ends of the Divine government are accomplished in this world. It may also be accounted an objection, that by the dispensation of grace certain persons are selected as the objects of the love of God, and enjoy the advantages of this choice, although they have no better claim than others who are excluded; and that they are saved without performing the obedience which the law originally required as the indispensable condition of happiness. With respect to the first article in this objection, it is obvious that there is no injustice in the disposal of favours according to the will of the donor, whose right over his own property is indisputable, and who may be regulated by his own views in selecting the objects of his beneficence, when no person has a claim to be preferred to another. This is not a case in which justice has any concern. With respect to the second part of the objection, let it be observed, that although believers are not saved by the law, it is presupposed in their salvation that its demands have been respected and satisfied. A substitute has been admitted, who, having placed himself under its authority, has fulfilled all its requisitions. As he sustained the character of a representative, his obedience is imputed or transferred to them by the Lawgiver, who admitted this exchange of persons; that is, they are legally and justly treated as if the obedience had been performed by themselves. Justice is displayed even in this transaction. The law is not repealed, but established. Its terms are not altered, but rigidly maintained. Those who are saved, are considered as righteous; and although in respect of them the reward is of grace, it is a reward of justice in respect of the Saviour. "Him hath God set forth to be a propitiation for our sins through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness (or justice) for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his justice, that he might be just,

* Job xxxiv. 10—12.

and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.”* Justice, then, presides over all the Divine dispensations. The law is the eternal rule of right, and men are rewarded and punished according to its sanctions.

The consciences of men bear testimony to the justice of God. Conscience is that faculty which distinguishes right and wrong in actions, approves and disapproves, and anticipates the consequences whether good or evil. We do not call it the moral sense, because this account detaches it too much from the rational part of our nature, and makes it a passive and instinctive perception of the differences of things. It is not a mere feeling of impropriety, like that of which a person is conscious, when he has violated the rules of decorum; or a mere taste analogous to the sensations of sweet and bitter, or to the mental power which gives us the notions of order, fitness, and beauty. It is an act of the mind, comparing our conduct with the law of God, or what we apprehend to be his law, and pronouncing sentence according to its conformity or disconformity to the standard. It has been called the deputy or vicegerent of God. It performs the office not only of a monitor, by reminding us of our duty, and exciting us to attend to it, but also of a subordinate judge, summoning us before its tribunal, and pronouncing us to be innocent or guilty. Its sentences proceed on the assumption, that there is a law, holy, just, and good, with the demands of which men are bound to comply. It often exposes the vanity of our most specious pretences; and convicts us of sin, at the moment when we are employing our eloquence and sophistry to justify our conduct. In this manner, the right of God as the Supreme Governor to give law to men, is maintained amidst their attempts to invalidate his authority, and to free themselves from his yoke. This advocate for his claims accompanies sinners in all their changes of place; is near to them in solitude and in company, disturbs them in their pleasures, and checks them when they are meditating wicked designs; hesitates not to upbraid those whom men would not dare to reprove, and utters a voice, which makes kings tremble on their thrones. Hence a belief of the Divine justice has prevailed in every age and country; and without revelation the Gentiles have been a law to themselves, “their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts accusing or else excusing one another.”† Under the influence of this principle, they understood certain events to be instances of retributive justice, and remarked the punishment of individuals in the calamities which befel them. Their histories abound in facts which were construed to be divine judgments, interpositions of the gods to avenge themselves upon those who were guilty of fraud, murder, and impiety. They erred in attributing these acts of justice to beings who existed only in their own vain imaginations; but they were right in interpreting them as proofs, that there is a moral government which will not permit crimes to escape with impunity. The institution of sacrifices, whatever was its origin, was expressive of a conviction that crimes were offensive to the gods, and that justice demanded satisfaction. It was an acknowledgment, that the guilty deserved to suffer; and the substitution of the devoted animal was founded on the hope that justice would accept of this compensation. The notions which they entertained of a future state, and of judges before whom departed spirits appeared to have a place assigned to them according to their deeds, in Elysium or in Tartarus, derived their authority from conscience, which told them that justice presided over the affairs of men, and that, if it suspended its decisions in this world, it would exert its power in the next. Conscience lends its effectual aid to preserve right ideas of religion. It corrects the loose notions which men are so ready to adopt on no better ground than their wishes, or from conclusions founded on partial observation. The benignity which is so manifest in the course of providence is assumed as a proof that God is all

* Rom. iii. 25, 26.

† Rom. ii. 15.

goodness, and will be very gentle in the treatment of his erring creatures; but conscience disturbs these speculations, and alarms the secure transgressor by the unexpected and unwelcome admonition, that “the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.”*

Let us inquire, whether there is any thing in the dispensations of providence, which tends to confirm the dictates of conscience. Providence implies the preservation of creatures, and the government of them according to their respective natures. Are there any indications of a moral government over men? Experience informs us, that pleasure and pain are dispensed; and the question at present is, whether these appear to be allotted to men in any degree according to their conduct, considered as morally good or evil? It is, indeed, said, that “no man knoweth love or hatred by all that is before him;”† and we seem to be precluded by these words from any attempt to collect proofs of Divine justice from the present state of things. But besides that Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes sometimes personates an objector against religion, and adopts the language of the profane, the words now quoted, if considered as expressive of his own sentiments, must be understood merely as stating the general character of the Divine dispensation, not as absolutely denying that there are any instances of retributive justice. That this is the light in which they ought to be viewed, will be evident upon reflecting, that the Scriptures do record many examples of the justice of God in the punishment of transgressors. Of these I may mention the destruction of the inhabitants of the old world by the flood; the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah; the calamities which befel the Jews, and particularly their transportation to Babylon, and their subsequent dispersion by the Romans; and we may add the judgments executed upon individuals, as Pharaoh, Sennacherib, and Herod. Similar instances of Divine interference may be still observed, and will not be overlooked by those who are attentive to what is passing around them, and piously believe, that not a sparrow can fall to the ground, nor a hair of our head perish, without the knowledge of God. Without being guilty of the presumption and uncharitableness which our Saviour reprobated, when speaking of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices, and of the persons on whom the tower of Siloam fell, they will sometimes be constrained to acknowledge, that “verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.” They will see the sins of men called to remembrance by the nature of their punishment; they will see the sinner smitten with the rod of anger in the moment of guilt, in the very act of transgression. It may be objected, that the distribution of rewards and punishments is not regular, and that upon the whole, the treatment which men experience from providence is little connected with their character and conduct. The prosperity of the wicked and the afflictions of the righteous, have, in all ages, been a topic of declamation. But the occasional instances of retribution which we witness, are hints and notices, that justice is concerned in the actions of men, and are calculated to excite an expectation, that at some period, it will be more openly revealed. As we cannot doubt from what we see, that justice is one of the attributes of the Supreme Governor, the conclusion to which we are naturally led is, that there are reasons why he does not now more fully display it, and that when these reasons have ceased, or in another state where a new order of things will exist, an exact distribution will take place, and every man will be recompensed according to his works. There are many circumstances in the present order of things, which favour the idea of the moral government of God. The inward sentiments of approbation and disapprobation, which accompany the performance or the neglect of our duty, arising from the constitution which our Maker has given to us, ought to be considered as a declaration by himself, that the one is acceptable, and the other is displeas-

* 1 Sam. ii. 3.

† Eccl. ix. 1

ing to him. The same inference may be drawn from the health, and peace, and success, which are the consequences of virtuous conduct, and the troubles and diseases which are the consequences of vice; for if providence directs the course of things, these consequences are not owing to chance but to appointment, and are, therefore, a proof that God has a respect to the moral nature of actions in his dealings with men, or in other words, is just. As civil government is in this sense a Divine institution, that it arises from the nature and circumstances of men as social beings, and was therefore intended by Him who gave them that nature, and placed them in those circumstances, the protection which it affords to the obedient, and the punishment which it inflicts on the disobedient, are virtually acts of his administration, and admonitions of a judgment to come. The prosperity which sometimes falls to the lot of wicked men, will not be deemed a proof of the approbation of heaven by those who observe how little it contributes to real happiness, how much misery they often feel amidst the fulness of external enjoyments, and the usual effect of it in leading them to multiply crimes, and thus to aggravate their final doom. On the other hand, the Divine disapprobation cannot be inferred from the afflictions of the righteous, since they are accompanied with the consolations of religion, which make them joyful in tribulation, and are productive of salutary effects both in this life and the next. Upon the whole, providence bears witness to the justice of God: but as several causes obscure the evidence, we look forward to another state, in which there will be a clear revelation of his righteous judgments.

In the next place, let us inquire what evidence of justice is afforded by redemption. It is a maxim of reason and of Scripture, that guilt precedes suffering, and is the cause of it. We cannot conceive a benevolent Being to subject innocent and obedient creatures to pain, or to inflict it arbitrarily, in the mere exercise of sovereignty. Yet we find that a person who is acknowledged to have been free from the slightest stain of impurity, and of whose moral conduct Heaven itself testified an unqualified approbation, spent his days in such affliction, and closed his career so unhappily, that he is emphatically called "a man of sorrows." This case seems to present an objection against the justice of God, which it is impossible to solve on the common principles of reason; but the light of revelation clears up the difficulty. It is natural to suppose, that since he was personally innocent, he must have been somehow connected with the guilty, so as to suffer on their account; and such we are informed was the fact, for he sustained the character of the legal representative of sinners. It may be thought, however, that this explanation is by no means satisfactory: and, accordingly, some reject the idea of substitution as at variance with this first principle of justice, that every man should stand or fall for himself. This objection, however, is not supported by the general sense of mankind, among whom suretiship is held to be justifiable in certain cases, and upon certain conditions, and is frequently admitted. The first intention of the law of God and the laws of man, is that the subjects shall be personally responsible for their conduct; but it has been judged expedient occasionally to relax this rigour, and to allow the obligation to be transferred to another with his consent. It should be remembered, that he, who presented himself as the surety of sinners, possessed a power which belonged to no other man. He was complete master of his own life; and as the possession of it was the consequence of his own voluntary act in assuming our nature, so he held it for the purpose of surrendering it as a ransom for others. It being evident that he might dispose of it according to his pleasure, there can be no doubt, that the Lawgiver might accept it instead of the forfeited lives of transgressors. If, by the sacrifice of an innocent person, to whom no injury was done because he suffered from choice, God's hatred of sin would be manifested—a demonstration given of its demerit

to all intelligent creatures, and the authority of his government maintained. all the ends of justice would be gained.

If it be admitted, that the substitution of Christ was consistent with justice, it is evident, that this expedient has served to give a full and awful display of that perfection. It can hardly now be a question, whether avenging justice is essential to God, when we see it taking its course on an occasion which would have prevented the exercise of it, if such a thing had been possible. If God could have permitted sin to escape with impunity; if the determination to punish it had not proceeded from his nature, but merely from his will, he would not have subjected his own Son to a cruel and ignominious death. He would not have delivered him up after his earnest and repeated prayer, that, if it were possible, the cup might pass from him. Has he any pleasure in suffering for its own sake? Would it have been agreeable to him, to see a person so dear to him bleeding and dying without a sufficient cause? No; the unavoidable conclusion is, that the death of Christ was the indispensable condition of the redemption of the world; that the designs of mercy, abstractly considered, were at variance with the demands of justice; and that, to establish harmony between them, it was necessary that justice should be satisfied. This was the most solemn display of justice; the highest proof that it is as truly an attribute of the Divine nature, as power and wisdom. It no longer admits of a doubt, that there is a necessary connexion between guilt and punishment. Who can hope for impunity if the Son of God did not escape?

In the last place, the justice of God will be openly manifested at the end of time, when the present administration will terminate. The ends of justice, so far as it consists in retribution, would be answered by the sentence pronounced upon every individual immediately after death; for it is enough that the state of men in the future world, correspond to their characters and conduct in the present. But the general judgment is designed for the manifestation of justice, to bring it out of the obscurity and uncertainty in which it is involved during this life, that all may see it, and be convinced that there is no respect of persons with God. It is for this purpose, that the whole human race will be convened before the tribunal of Christ, the sentence upon the righteous and the wicked will be publicly pronounced, and their works will be produced as evidence, that they are treated as they ought to be. "When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats."* Of the proceedings at the grand assize, the description is figurative, and borrowed from the proceedings before a human tribunal. There will be no examination of witnesses to establish the facts; but it is said, that books will be opened, and the dead will be judged out of those things which are written in them.† This is not to be literally understood; there is no written record of human actions; nor is it necessary, as the Judge is omniscient, and what is past, is as distinctly before him as what is present. It is to assure us of the strictness and impartiality of the judgment, that books are mentioned; to signify, that the final estimate of every man's conduct, will be as correct, as if a register had been kept of his actions during the whole course of his life. No crime will be imputed to any man, which he did not commit; nor will any be omitted, of which he was guilty. His advantages and disadvantages, his talents and opportunities, his difficulties and temptations, all the circumstances which influenced his conduct, will be taken into the account; and judgment will proceed upon this equitable principle, that much or little should be required of men, according to what they received. "As many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law; in the day when God shall judge the secrets of

* Matth. xx. 31, 32.

† Rev. xx. 12.

men by Jesus Christ.”* The result will be a universal conviction that all is right; a conviction in the mind of every man with regard to himself and to others. Not even the guilty will dare to accuse the justice, by which they are condemned: however reluctant, they will be compelled to acknowledge the righteousness of their doom; and their sufferings will be heightened by the sad reflection, that they are the fruits of their own doings: “Just and true are thy ways, O thou King of saints.”†

LECTURE XXVI.

ON GOD.

His Truth and Faithfulness—Truth of his Communications to Man through the Senses, Reason, and by Revelation—Faithfulness of his Promises—Remarks respecting the Promises—Examples of Performance—Faithfulness of his Threatenings—Sincerity of his Invitations to Sinners—The Nature of God incapable of Error or Deceit.

I PROCEED now to consider the truth and faithfulness of God. When we call him the true God, we distinguish him from those to whom this designation has been improperly given, and affirm, that he has not only the name, but the nature and perfections of God. “The idols of the nations are silver and gold, but our God is in the heavens.” When we call him the God of truth, our design is not to assert his Divinity, but to illustrate his character; and we declare that an undeviating regard to truth marks all his communications to mankind; that he never deceives them, but treats them with the same openness and sincerity which they are required to observe in their intercourse with one another. Did we not believe that truth is an attribute of God, we should be involved in the utmost uncertainty, and driven to absolute scepticism. For aught that we could tell, human life might be a dream. Truth would be known, if known at all, only as a thing unattainable; and wandering in endless doubt and perplexity, we should close our comfortless existence, without being able to tell whence we had come, and whither we were going. A Divine revelation would afford no satisfaction, because amidst the subversion of all evidence, it would be impossible to ascertain that it had proceeded from the Author of our being; and even although this point were settled, we could not determine whether its statements were worthy of credit. The truth of God gives validity to the deductions of reason, and is the foundation of faith. “Let God be true, but every man a liar.”‡ In this emphatic manner does an apostle affirm that truth is essential to God. Whatever may become of the veracity of men, who may be induced by temptation to deceive, the Divine veracity shall never be justly impeached.

When we speak of truth as one of his perfections, we assume, that the communications which have been made by him to men accord with the nature of things, and are genuine expressions of his views and intentions. Falsehood consists in designed misrepresentation of the subject of discourse, and in creating expectations which we do not mean to realize, in affirming that that is which is not, and that we will do what we have resolved not to do. There are different ways in which God has made declarations to us; by our senses, by reason, and by revelation. On each of these we shall bestow some observations; and with respect to the last, in which we are so deeply concerned, I shall consider the doctrines which it proposes to our faith, the

* Rom. ii. 12, 16.

† Rev. xv. 3.

‡ Rom. iii. 4.

promises which awaken our hopes, the threatenings which are addressed to our fears, and shew that these, as well as the invitations, entreaties, and exhortations with which the Scriptures abound, are characterised by veracity and sincerity.

In the first place, God is true in all his declarations. These are made to us, first, through the medium of our senses, by which we acquire the knowledge of external objects. We are impelled by the law of our nature, to give implicit credit to their testimony, to believe that objects exist without us, that they are invested with certain forms, and endowed with certain qualities, and arranged in a certain order. The evidence of sense has indeed been controverted, and what is there that vanity and ill intention have not endeavoured to perplex? and some philosophers have maintained that matter does not exist; that the sun, the earth, trees, men, and animals, are merely ideas in our minds. Their arguments may have puzzled those who could not readily detect their fallacy, but have not, I presume, produced conviction in a single instance. Their reasoning had no effect upon themselves; and while they pretended that the universe was a phantom, they were as careful as other men not to throw themselves into fire or water, or to leap over a precipice. It is acknowledged, that our senses do not make us acquainted with the internal nature of objects; but this can only be called an imperfection, and does not invalidate the certainty of the information which they do give us. As far as they go, they are faithful instructors, who convey to us the knowledge of the qualities or properties of things, but leave us in ignorance of their essences, because the knowledge of these, if we were capable of it, would be of no real utility. We may be content not to know what matter is, since we know its primary and secondary qualities, for this knowledge is sufficient for all the purposes of life. Our senses do indeed sometimes deceive us; but it is only when they are in a diseased state, or when they are disadvantageously situated for making observations, or when we are too hasty in drawing conclusions. When all the requisite conditions are provided; when the eye, for example, is perfect, the object is at a due distance, and the degree of light is sufficient to exhibit it clearly, and when we take a deliberate view of it, it appears to us exactly as it ought to appear according to the laws of vision. We find ourselves safe and comfortable in acting according to the notices of our senses, and under their guidance, in subservience to reason, the human race has been preserved for thousands of years.

God also communicates knowledge to us by the medium of reason. It must be acknowledged that reason often errs, but it is not therefore a fallacious faculty. It discovers many truths, physical and moral, in which the mind rests with full confidence. There were philosophers in ancient times who avowed universal scepticism, maintaining that certainty was unattainable upon any subject and that the utmost at which we can arrive is probability; but their system has been rejected by all rational men. Truth may often lie at the bottom of a well, but in most cases we are furnished with the means of drawing it up. The fallibility of reason is, however, indisputable, and the many mistakes into which men have been betrayed are proofs of it. Yet if we give due attention, we shall perceive that these are not so much owing to the faculty itself, as to the abuse of it. If we employ it upon subjects which lie beyond its sphere, we shall be led into the region of hypothesis and conjecture. If we proceed hastily, without going through the process of regular investigation; if we draw general inferences from partial premises; if we begin with prejudice, and are guided by passion, we have no right to complain that we have gone wrong, for we have voluntarily turned into a devious path. Reason, properly used, is a guide to man in all matters which belong to its jurisdiction; but as it was not intended to suffice for all purposes, nor bestowed that he might be independent of his Maker, he ought to look up to the

Source of wisdom, and receive with gratitude the extraordinary or supernatural discoveries, with which he has been pleased to favour him.

With respect to these communications, we affirm that they are true in all their parts; that whether they relate to doctrines or to facts, they are free from the slightest mixture of falsehood. That the Scriptures are the word of God, is not a point to be believed upon their own naked testimony, any more than a man is to be believed in any matter relating to himself simply upon his own affirmation. A book, indeed, may contain internal marks of divinity, in the sublimity of its doctrines, the holiness of its precepts, the harmony of its parts, and its power to affect the conscience and heart; or it may betray its human origin by the meanness of its sentiments, its licentious tenets, its manifest errors and contradictions. But although we may be convinced by internal evidence, that the Scriptures are a revelation from God, and every man, who is enlightened and renewed by the Holy Ghost, has the witness in himself that they are true; yet our belief of their heavenly origin rests, in the first place, upon external evidence, upon ancient and catholic tradition, referring them to the times when, and the persons by whom, they are said to have been written, upon the miracles by which the commission of the prophets and apostles was attested, and upon the prophecies which have been fulfilled, or are at present fulfilling. Having ascertained in this manner, that God has made a declaration to mankind upon subjects of importance, and in what documents it is contained, we are bound to receive it with profound respect. And here it is proper to remark, that the office of reason in reference to a revelation, is not to discuss its contents, to try them by its own standard, and to approve or disapprove, as they agree or disagree with it; for this would be to treat it as if it were not a revelation, at the moment when we acknowledge it to be such, or to insinuate that the word of God, although known to be his word, is not entitled to credit, unless it be supported by independent proof. The sole province of reason is to examine the evidence exhibited, to shew that it is his word, and to investigate its meaning by the rules which are used in determining the sense of any other book. These preliminaries being settled, the state of mind which a revelation demands is faith, implicit faith, to the exclusion of doubts and objections; the subjection of our understandings to the authority of God, entire submission to the dictates of infinite wisdom. The reason is, that his testimony supplies the place of all other evidence. Our senses are here of no service, because the subjects revealed are past and future, invisible and spiritual. Our reason furnishes no data from which they can be deduced, because they belong to a supernatural order of things, which mere reason was not intended to contemplate. But if human testimony convinces us of the truth of many things which we have not seen, and have no means of proving, the testimony of God is the ground of the highest assurance. There may be doctrines in revelation which are new and strange, which we in vain attempt to comprehend, which are at variance with our previous conceptions, and the common notions of mankind. But the difficulty which we feel in assenting to such doctrines, should yield to the reflection, that they are attested by Him whose understanding is infinite, while ours is bounded by very narrow limits; and that they relate to subjects, of which a small portion of humility might make us sensible that we are not competent judges; his nature, and counsels, and dispensations. On attentively perusing the Scriptures, we find, that although they consist of many books, which were composed in different ages, and by persons of different habits and tempers, they harmonise in their views and statements, and no real contradiction has been discovered. We find also that the historical parts of them are confirmed by other authentic records, and that the doctrines and precepts, as far as we are able to judge, are agreeable to the purest dictates of reason. Having these evidences of their truth, we are bound in reason to believe, that those articles

which are mysterious and incomprehensible, are equally true, and appear such to beings of superior understanding. Candour would require, that if a book were distinguished by the justness of its sentiments and the accuracy of its details so far as we could read it, we should believe that it maintained the same character throughout, although the remaining portions of its contents were written in a language which we did not understand, or were so obliterated that we could not fully make out the sense of the Author. Nothing is more equitable in such a case, than to judge of what is unknown from what we do know. The ascertained truth of some parts of Scripture, is a voucher for the truth of other parts, which we have been prevented from subjecting to the same test. At the same time, this is only a subsidiary argument; and we should remember that we have the highest evidence for the truth of every part, in the testimony of God himself. The whole proceeds from the same source; and the most exact and learned inquiries have terminated in establishing their entire credibility, and demonstrating that the Bible is the only book on which we can depend for information respecting the nature and government of God, the conduct we should pursue, and the hopes which we may entertain. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work." "The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times."*

Besides those declarations by which knowledge is communicated, there are engagements with men into which God has entered by pledging his word for good or evil, according to their conduct. His truth in relation to these is properly called faithfulness, and comes to be considered in the second place. The obvious division of them is into promises and threatenings.

God is faithful in his promises. They are expressive of an intention to bestow the blessings exhibited, and will be performed to those who have a claim to them: "Faithful is he who hath promised, who also will do it." To prevent misapprehension and to obviate objections, it is necessary to remark that the promises are distinguishable into two classes, absolute and conditional. An absolute promise is one, the performance of which is suspended upon no condition, and is to be expected solely from the faithfulness of the promiser. It is significant of God's determinate purpose to bestow some blessing, or to bring to pass some event pregnant with good. The failure of such a promise would imply a direct violation of truth: "But God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent; hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"† Of this nature was the promise of a Saviour, which flowed from his sovereign love, and did not depend upon the conduct of men. It was therefore performed at the appointed season, although the nations of the world had for ages provoked him by their idolatry and their other crimes, and among the Jews faith could hardly be found when the Messiah appeared. Of this nature too, was the promise to him of a spiritual seed, in consequence of which those who are dead in trespasses and sins are quickened by the Divine Spirit, who begins to operate upon them when they are unworthy of his care, and instead of soliciting his agency, are disposed to resist it. Other promises are conditional; I mean that they suppose some action or course of action as necessarily preceding the performance, some previous state of mind in the person upon whom the blessing is to be bestowed. The promise of salvation is not made to all who hear the gospel, but to those alone who believe it. There is a difference between the publication and the making of a promise. The publication simply and generally announces the fact that there is such a promise; the making of it respects individuals and declares that upon them the promised good will be

* 2 Tim. iii. 16. Ps. xii. 6.

† Numb. xxiii. 19

bestowed. The promise of salvation is published to all, but the persons to whom it is made are specified in the following words, "He that believeth shall be saved."* From zeal for the doctrine of free grace, some have been betrayed into the mistake of representing the promises in general as absolute, and have not attended to the difficulty in which they involve themselves. If their view of the promises were correct, every man to whom they are addressed, would have a claim to salvation, as a promise of pardon to all the criminals in a kingdom would entitle them all to life and liberty. It is idle to say, that they will all be saved if they believe; for this is to retract what has been affirmed, or rather is to maintain a self-contradictory proposition, that the promise is at once absolute and conditional. If God had promised to save all men, without specifying any condition, or term, or qualification, or previous state of mind, his faithfulness would require that they should be all saved without a single exception. But a conditional promise may not be performed without any impeachment of his truth, since the cause of its non-performance is not a failure on his part, but on the part of men. The Israelites who came out of Egypt, were not admitted into the land of Canaan, into which God had promised to conduct them. Had he changed his intention? Had he recalled his word? No; but they had proved a disobedient and ungrateful race, and so had forfeited all claim to the inheritance. "After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years; and ye shall know my breach of promise."† An apostle referring to this case says, "We see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."‡

Examples of the faithfulness of God in performing his promises, are frequent in the history of the saints. They are recorded in Scripture for his honour, and as an encouragement to faith. We see him fulfilling his word at the appointed time. The promise of the Messiah was made immediately after the fall, and was renewed on different occasions; but there was an interval of four thousand years before the seed of the woman appeared to bruise the head of the serpent. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."§ The descendants of Abraham were long strangers in Canaan and slaves in Egypt; but the promise by which they had been sustained did not fail, and the prefixed time of their deliverance was punctually observed. "And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out of the land of Egypt."|| These instances enforce the exhortation, "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."¶ We see, besides, in the history of the saints, the Almighty fulfilling his word when obstacles insurmountable by human power and wisdom stood in the way, and realizing the hopes of his people when all circumstances seemed to justify despair. The case of Abraham furnishes a striking illustration. A son was promised to him by Sarah, who was barren; but the time passed on till both had arrived at such an age, that according to the laws of nature there could be no hope of posterity; and when Isaac was born, Sarah was ninety, and Abraham was a hundred years old. The stedfast faith of the patriarch while there was not a single thing to encourage him, and what was improbable at first had become physically impossible, was truly wonderful, and is mentioned in the Scriptures in the highest terms of commendation: "He was strong in faith, giving glory to God."**

* Mark xvi. 16.

† Numb. xiv. 34.

‡ Heb. iii. 19. iv. 1.

§ Gal. iv. 4, 5.

|| Exod. xii. 41.

¶ Hab. ii. 3.

** Rom. iv. 20.

Heaven and earth may pass away, but his word shall not pass away. If ordinary means will not suffice, miracles will be wrought that his declared purpose may be accomplished. We may therefore confidently expect, that his other promises respecting the church, and the interests of the individual members of it in this world and the next, will be performed with the same punctuality, and that "there shall not fail one good word of all that the Lord our God hath spoken."

Again, God is faithful in his threatenings, or his denunciations of evil against the transgressors of his law. His faithfulness in respect of these implies these two things; his intention to inflict the evil denounced, and the actual infliction of it if no just cause occur to prevent it. The same distinction, however, is necessary, which we made when speaking of the promises. These threatenings must be considered as absolute or conditional; as absolute, when they express the unalterable purpose of God to punish the guilty; as conditional, when they express his purpose to punish hypothetically, or on the supposition of continued disobedience and final impenitence. Of the former, we have examples in the case of the rebellious Israelites, who were doomed to perish in the wilderness; in the case of the Amalekites, concerning whom the Most High declared with an oath, that he would utterly put out their remembrance from under heaven; and in the case of the antichristian Church, which is irremediably devoted to destruction. In none of these cases was room left for repentance on the part of God, or of the objects of his wrath. An example of conditional threatening is found in the history of Nineveh. When Jonah proclaimed in its streets, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown," no condition was expressed; but it appears from the event to have been implied, that the doom of the city would be suspended by the repentance of the inhabitants. God himself has taught us to account upon the same principle for other threatenings which are not executed. "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them."* To the same class of threatenings belong those which are directed against sinners living under the dispensation of the gospel. It is evident that they are only conditional declarations of God's intention to punish them; for the guilty are provided with the means of escape, and many through faith in Christ obtain the pardon of their sins. Hence, although it is certain that every sin deserves eternal condemnation, and final perdition of the hearers of the gospel is ascribed to unbelief, because it is a rejection of the offer of mercy. "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth upon him."† But although the faithfulness of God does not require the execution of his threatenings when a change has taken place in the character and conduct of men, it does require that they should be executed when circumstances continue the same. His denunciations are not vain terrors, intended to keep us in awe, but which a man of courage may disregard with impunity. The day of retribution will demonstrate how presumptuous are the hopes of the guilty; and their state in the world to come will be a solemn and impressive testimony to all intelligent creatures, that the judgments of the Lord are righteous and true. "When he that heareth the words of this curse, shall bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst; the Lord will not spare him; but then the anger of the Lord, and his jealousy, shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in his book shall lie upon him and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven."‡

Some maintain that God ought to perform his promises, because they have

* Jer. xviii. 7, 8.

† John iii. 36.

‡ Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

created an expectation, and conferred a right to the blessings promised; but that there is no obligation to execute his threatenings, because no injury will ensue, but on the contrary an unspeakable advantage. There is, however, a fallacy in this argument. It supposes that there is no moral good in truth itself, nothing in its nature to make it sacred and inviolable, and that the obligation to respect it is resolved into utility. It confounds two things closely allied, yet perfectly distinct, truth and justice; and represents a person as bound to fulfil his word, not because he has pledged it, but because others have acquired a right from his engagement, like that of a creditor to the payment of a debt. But as men ought to speak truth for its own sake, and without any respect to the consequences, which can be considered only as motives to what was previously a duty, so God is led by his nature to speak truth, and to redeem every pledge which he has given, not so much for the sake of his creatures, as from a regard to himself. It is not because men have obtained a conventional right to certain blessings that he will bestow them, but because he will not deny himself; and for the same reason, he will not fail to give effect to his denunciations of evil. The design of this reasoning is to make it probable, that notwithstanding the explicit declaration of his purpose to punish transgressors, he may relent, and suffer them to escape with some temporary correction; but, besides that the reasoning is founded on a false principle, it forgets that the threatenings originated in the justice of God, and consequently, that not to execute these would be inconsistent with his essential rectitude as well as with his veracity. If truth were a matter of expedience, it might yield to occasion and circumstances, but its character is immutability and it will maintain its honour in the treatment of both sinners and saints.

Lastly, God is sincere in the admonitions which he addresses to men, in his expostulations, his intreaties, and his invitations. We find him remonstrating with them for their folly and wickedness, warning them of the consequences of sin, and beseeching them to embrace the offers of salvation. Have we any reason to suspect that he is not in earnest? Why should we not give the same credit to him, which we should give to a person of known integrity and benevolence, who spoke to us in affectionate terms, and expressed great solicitude for our welfare? It is objected to his sincerity in this case, that he addresses himself to persons who, he knows beforehand, will pay no regard to his words, who are in fact incapable of attending to them, because they are in a state of moral insensibility and death, and to whom he will not give his effectual grace, to awaken them to serious consideration. Why does he dissuade them, it is asked, from that which will certainly take place, and express a desire for the salvation of those whom it is not his intention to save? It cannot be denied, that this is a difficulty of which we should endeavour, if possible, to obtain a solution, for the glory of God as well as for our own satisfaction. Let it be observed, that the calls, invitations, and intreaties of Scripture may be considered as so many notices of our duty, as intimations to sinners that it is incumbent upon them to return to God by repentance, to believe the revelation of his grace, and to engage in the work of their salvation. As it will not be denied that this is our duty, so it cannot be doubted that God may enforce it in whatever manner his wisdom judges to be best, although he knows that we will not comply, because his right to command does not depend upon our disposition or our actual ability to obey, but upon the relation in which we stand to him as his creatures and subjects. Again, the counsels and expostulations of Scripture may be considered as declarations of what is agreeable to him, and in this view cannot be suspected of insincerity, with whatever earnestness they are expressed. The obedience of all men would be pleasing to God, who necessarily loves holiness and hates sin. Their happiness would be as pleasing to him as their holiness, because he is a bene-

volent Being, and cannot will their misery abstractly considered, or under the notion of an ultimate end. He has sworn by his life, that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they should turn to him and live.* If he does subject many of them to death, he is compelled to this severity for the honour of his government, as a good ruler among men, who desires the welfare of all under his authority, is compelled to punish the breakers of the law. In a word, the design of those parts of Scripture may be to render sinners inexcusable, to show that their perdition is imputable to themselves alone. They cannot plead that they were destitute of the means of knowing their duty, that their attention was not called to it, and that motives of sufficient efficacy were not employed to excite them. It will appear that the fault was in themselves. Their own perverseness frustrated the methods which were used for their good. They were so eagerly bent upon sin, that no obstacles could stop them. God had done much to restrain them, and more than he was under any obligation to do.

It may be said that these observations do not meet the difficulty directly, and are applicable only to a partial view of it. It is not denied, that in any way which he chooses God may remind men of their duty, that their obedience would be pleasing to him, and that admonitions and reproofs render the impenitent inexcusable; but the perplexing question remains unanswered, How is the use of means for saving men consistent with a previous decree to exclude them from salvation? I am not aware that the question admits of an answer perfectly satisfactory. And what is the reason? Is it any real opposition between the decree of God, and the call of the gospel? or, in other words, is it a fact that God is insincere? No; the cause is our ignorance of the true nature and relation of the things which are to be reconciled. We know little about the decrees of God, much less than we are apt to imagine; and when they are the subject of discussion, we reason in the dark. But we understand what the Scriptures say respecting our duty, and the offer of salvation. Let us be content with this knowledge, which is all that is necessary for practice, and permit no speculation upon a subject beyond our comprehension to interfere with our belief of the Divine veracity, which is the only foundation of our faith and hope. We have full proof of it in all other cases; and it is surely reasonable to believe, that nothing hinders us from distinctly perceiving it in this case, but our own limited views. Let it be remembered, that whether we hold absolute or conditional decrees, the difficulty is the same, it being as impossible for the Arminian to reconcile the external call of the word with certain foreknowledge, as it is for the Calvinist to demonstrate its harmony with an independent and immutable purpose.

None of those reasons which lead men to deviate from truth, can have any influence upon God.

Men sometimes speak what is not agreeable to truth from ignorance, and misconception of the subject of discourse. It is unnecessary to state that a Being, whose knowledge is infinite, is liable to no misapprehension.

Men often tell lies for convenience, supplying by this expedient their want of power, or of other means to accomplish their purposes. Omnipotence stands in no need of stratagems, but goes straight forward to its end; it has the command of all means which wisdom may deem it fit to employ, and it can always effect its designs without them. It sometimes happens that men do not perform their promises from pure inability; they want the power which they possessed when they made them, or had a reasonable prospect of possessing. But there are no real obstacles to the performance of his promises; they are obstacles only in our apprehension. "He quickeneth the dead, and calleth the things which be not as though they were." "Hast thou not known, hast thou

* Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

not heard, that the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary?" *

Men sometimes deceive others from malignity, that they may be amused with their errors, and derive an infernal pleasure from the disappointment of their hopes. God has his creatures at absolute command, and could entangle them in a snare from which their own sagacity could not extricate them. He could confound their faculties, make them mistake imaginations for realities, and pronounce good to be evil, and evil to be good; but he will not employ his power for such purposes, although he may, for the just punishment of those who receive not the truth in the love of it, deliver them up to strong delusion to believe a lie. He is not, however, the author of such delusions, which originate in their own minds, or in the artful representations of other wicked beings. Men would not be deceived if they would commit themselves to his direction, and attend to the instructions he has given in his word.

Men sometimes deceive others from fickleness of disposition. Sincere when they make promises, they change their intentions; and the expectations which were founded on the presumption of their steadiness are not realized. Immutability is an attribute of God, immutability of counsel as well as of nature. No new object or circumstance can occur to him; but every thing which will exist at the time when the promise is to be performed, was foreseen at the time when it was made. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."† He will be of the same mind to-morrow as he is to day; for "he is in one mind, and who can turn him?"‡ The promises which were recorded in the Scriptures hundreds and thousands of years ago, are as sure a foundation of faith and hope as they were at the moment when they were first published to the world.

No man, I presume, who believes that there is a God, will suppose him to be capable of falsehood and insincerity; and if objections are made, they can arise solely from certain statements of his proceedings in the Scriptures. Some of these have been anticipated and answered. If the supposed contradictions in the Scriptures should be objected, it would require more time than can be at present afforded, to shew how they are reconciled; and it is sufficient to observe, that if the contradictions were real, they would prove, not that God is without veracity, but that the writings in which they are found falsely pretend to be a Divine revelation. But on the supposition that the Scriptures were dictated by his Spirit, it may be asked, what is to be made of particular passages? We hear the prophet Jeremiah saying, "O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed."§ Admitting the translation to be right, we may consider the words as the exclamation of a good man in a moment of weakness, who has met with unexpected trials, and had hastily presumed that God would preserve him from them. He complains of being deceived, because his groundless expectations were disappointed. But the words may be rendered, "thou hast persuaded me, and I was persuaded;" for this is, in other places, the sense of the original term פרה; and then the meaning is, that God had irresistibly impelled him to perform the duties of his office, by which he had brought upon himself reproach and violence—had impelled him contrary to his own resolution to desist. Accordingly he adds, "Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name: but his word was in my heart as a burning fire in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I would not stay."|| By another prophet, God is represented as sending a lying spirit to be in the mouth of the prophets of Ahab, and as saying, "Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth and do so."¶ But Micaiah is relating a vision, in the interpretation

* Rom. iv. 17. Isa. xl. 28.

† Jer. xx. 7.

‡ Acts xv. 18.

§ Ibid. 9.

|| Job xxiii. 13.

¶ 1 Kings xxii. 22.

of which every part of the description is not literally understood, and the general design is alone to be considered. God is often said to do what he only permits to be done. It is evident that nothing more was intended than to admonish Ahab that his prophets, who encouraged him to go to Ramoth-Gilead to battle, were deceiving him with the promise of victory; and this admonition so plainly expressed, this notice beforehand, is a proof that God had no immediate concern in deceiving him. As God is said to have directed the Israelites to borrow jewels from the Egyptians, which were not to be returned, and borrowing implies a promise to restore, it may seem that he authorised deceit in this instance. But the difficulty arises from a mistranslation, for the word *לשאל*, rendered to *borrow*, signifies simply *to ask*. He merely directed the Israelites to ask these things from the Egyptians, and disposed the latter to comply with their request by his secret influence upon their minds, as Moses informs us in these words: ‘And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required, and they spoiled the Egyptians.’* The only question which arises out of this case, relates to the justice of the transaction; and of this there will be no doubt, if we reflect that all human property being the gift of God, he may transfer it from one to another according to his pleasure, in the ordinary course of affairs, or by a miraculous interference; and that, when the Israelites were enriched at the expense of the Egyptians, they only recovered the wages of the long and laborious services which they had performed for the benefit of that people, and of which the due recompense had been hitherto withheld. It was right that they should be put in possession of a part of the wealth which their industry had so eminently contributed to produce; and if more fell to their share than was strictly due, the Egyptians were compelled to atone in this manner for their injustice.

LECTURE XXVII.

ON GOD.

His Holiness—Meaning of this term in Scripture—Definition of Holiness—Instances of its display in God’s Works and Dispensations—General Reflections from the preceding Review of his Attributes, on the Incomprehensibility, All-sufficiency, and Sovereignty of God.

IN Scripture, holiness is often attributed to God; and there are some peculiarities attending it, of which it will be proper to take notice in the introductory part of this lecture. He is said to be glorious in holiness, as if it constituted the distinguished excellence of his nature, and diffused a lustre over his other perfections. He swears by his holiness, and thus holds it out as the inviolable pledge for the truth of his promises, the most complete security that they shall be punctually performed. It is brought forward to enforce his commands, to guard his institutions against profanation and pollution, and to excite us to a watchful care of our thoughts, and words, and actions. It is represented as impressed upon all his works and dispensations, which are thus rendered both amiable and venerable. It was singled out as the subject of praise by the seraphim who surrounded the throne of Jehovah, when he appeared in the temple to the prophet Isaiah; and its solemn effect upon them and upon him, is too memorable to be passed over in silence. “In the year that king Uzziah

* Exod. xii. 36.

died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.”*

✓ The terms *holy* and *holiness* bear a variety of senses in Scripture, which it is not necessary at present to enumerate. ✓ There is one sense which is worthy of attention, because it frequently occurs. When applied to God, holy seems to signify august and venerable; and this is the meaning in more cases than we are apt to suppose, perhaps not much seldomer than it denotes purity, which is the idea commonly attached to it. ✓ I know not whether the passage quoted above may be considered as an example, but Jehovah appears to be pronounced thrice holy, because he was seated upon a lofty throne, was attended by the noblest creatures in the universe as his ministers, and his glory was displayed in every region of the earth. When the Psalmist pronounces his name to be “holy and reverend,”† the second epithet may be understood to be explanatory of the first; and when he says, that “his holy arm hath gotten him the victory,”‡ there is no direct reference to moral excellence, but to majestic force, ✓ to irresistible power. The command to “sanctify the Lord,” is a command to treat him with all the reverence which is due to his transcendent greatness, and is thus explained by Isaiah: “Sanctify the Lord God of hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.”§ He is a being separated or distinguished from all other beings by his infinite excellence, as sacred things are separated from such as were common; possessed of every perfection intellectual and moral, in the highest possible degree, and therefore entitled to the most profound veneration of angels and men. His name should never be mentioned but with awe; and our whole conduct should testify that we are deeply sensible of his presence, and that there is nothing which we are so anxious to obtain as his favour, nothing which we so much dread as his displeasure.

While the holiness of God does certainly suggest, in many instances, the idea of greatness or majesty, which is an object of fear rather than love, it is not less certain that it is expressive, in other instances, of the purity of his nature. This is obviously the meaning of the concrete term in the following passage: “As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy.”|| There would be no force in the exhortation, if the holiness ascribed to God were not of the same nature with that required from us, for the one is referred to as the reason and the pattern of the other. Hence, when we call God holy, we mean that there are in his nature certain moral qualities or principles, analogous to those on account of which men are pronounced to be virtuous or holy; that he is perfectly pure, free from the slightest taint of pollution; that his will is always conformable to the rectitude of his nature, so that sin is the invariable object of his hatred, and righteousness the invariable object of his approbation. His holiness has been defined to be “that virtue or perfection, by which he wills and approves whatever is conformable to his essence and perfections, and disapproves and rejects whatever is contrary; or that perfection which determines him to do nothing which is not worthy of himself, and to suffer nothing in his creatures which has not the same character, that is, to prevent it by his grace, or to punish it by his justice.”

The holiness of God is commonly represented as a perfection as distinct from

* Isa. vi. 1—5. † Ps. cxi. 9. ‡ Ps. xcvi. 1. § Isa. viii. 13. || 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

the other properties of his nature as wisdom, power, and immutability are from each other. But this I apprehend is a mistake, and has led to the use of words without any precise idea annexed to them. Holiness is a complex term, which does not express a particular attribute, but the general character of God as resulting from his moral attributes. The holiness of a man is not a distinct quality from his virtuous dispositions, but signifies the state of his mind and heart as influenced by these. When we proceed to analyse his holiness, or to shew in what it consists, we say that he is a devout man, a man of integrity, a man of humanity, a man faithful to his engagements, and conscientious in all his relative duties; a man who abhors sin, and abstains from the very appearance of it. The holiness of God is not, and cannot be, something different from the moral excellencies of his nature which were formerly illustrated, but is the general term under which these particulars are comprehended. To call God holy, is to affirm, that he renders to his creatures their due, and governs them by laws adapted to their nature and relations; that he is full of benevolence, and takes pleasure in communicating happiness to the proper objects of his goodness; that he deals sincerely with them, and never amuses them with fallacious hopes, nor terrifies them with imaginary fears. As a just Being, he abhors fraud, robbery, oppression, every infraction of the rights of one man by another, and every attempt to deprive him of his due; as a good Being, he abhors selfishness, hard-heartedness, malignity, cruelty, and all the thoughts, and words, and deeds, which are contrary to charity; as a God of truth, he abhors falsehood, perjury, treachery, calumny, and in short, every species of deceit. As a holy Being, he loves every thing which is conformable to his law, and hates every thing which is contrary to it. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."* His nature is pure as that fluid when it issues from its source. Sin is as offensive to him as a disgusting taste is to our palate, or a loathsome object is to our eye. "He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and he cannot look upon iniquity."†

Reflection will convince us, that this view of the holiness of God is correct. It may be objected, that it is sometimes distinguished from the moral perfections of which it has been said to be the sum. In particular it is distinguished from justice in the following words: "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works."‡ But those who have attended to the nature of Hebrew poetry, know that it consists of parallelisms, or corresponding lines, of which the second, in many cases, conveys the same idea with the first, but in terms somewhat varied. Hence the righteousness or justice of God in the first part of this sentence, is his holiness in the second; and the only difference is, that in the latter a more general term is employed. We cannot go over all the passages in which these terms occur; but it would not be difficult to shew, that the distinction between them is that between a part and the whole. Holiness, then, is the general name for the moral excellence of the Divine nature; and for this reason, I have deferred the consideration of it till I had illustrated its constituent parts, justice, goodness, and truth. Whatever may be resolved into these principles God loves and requires; whatever is contrary to them he hates and forbids. Holiness in men and angels is agreeable to him; between his nature and sin there is an eternal repugnance.

The holiness of God is manifested in his works and dispensations.

It was displayed in the formation of man. He was not only made a living soul, and endowed with intellectual powers, but there was impressed upon him the image of his Maker, consisting in the perfect rectitude of his mind, in the order and harmony of his faculties, in pure and heavenly affections. The ray is bright as the sun from which it emanates; and man, when he came from the hands of his Creator, was resplendent with the glory of his moral excellence.

* 1 John i. 5.

† Hab. i. 13.

‡ Ps. cxlv. 17.

There was not any weakness in his constitution, any irregularity of desire, any proneness to sin, as some blasphemers of the works of God have affirmed. His appetites were not at war with reason, and struggling to get free from the restraints which it imposed: there was a law in his mind, to which all his internal and external movements were conformable. "God made man upright."* The state in which he found himself at his creation, he might have retained. His moral ability was sufficient for all his purposes. He might be tempted, but there was no principle within him which could co-operate with temptation, and facilitate its success; and when he was actually exposed to a trial, his Maker did not abandon him, but upheld in their integrity those powers which fitted him for resistance, and by the due exercise of which he would have triumphed. To suppose that his power was not adequate to his circumstances, or that it was withdrawn or impaired, would be to make God the author of sin. The fall of man was not owing to the want of any thing which God ought to have done for him. He yielded to solicitation, not because his understanding was not sufficiently acute to detect the sophistry of his adversary, or because the sensitive part of his nature was too strong for the rational. His compliance in either of these cases would have been necessary, and therefore not culpable. He yielded because he attended to the temptation alone, and disregarded the considerations which would have counteracted its influence. Man was less than nothing in comparison of God; but he was a point which reflected a beam of the sun, a diamond resplendent with light. Hence he was the crown and glory of this lower world, as angels were of the superior regions. When God had finished his works, they were all perfect, all worthy of their author, and he pronounced them to be good. Sin was known only as a possible evil, which might enter and mar their beauty.

Let us take a view of the law which was given to man at his creation, and we shall be furnished with an additional manifestation of the holiness of God. ✓ Its design was to retain him in a state of purity and innocence, by the proposal of such considerations as were calculated to operate upon his rational nature. While it impressed him with a sense of duty, it stimulated him to obedience by the prospect of reward, and opposed to the temptations which might assail ✓ him the fear of punishment. In the placing of man under a law, thus strengthened by promises and threatenings, we see a proof both of God's care of him, and of his regard to holiness, the interests of which he took measures at this early period to promote; for the law, in the language of Theology, was con-created with man; that is, the knowledge of it was communicated to his mind, and a sense of its authority was impressed upon his heart, in the first moment ✓ of his existence. He was not suffered to live for a day or an hour without a moral rule; and the first exercise of his faculties was an act of obedience. The holiness of God appears not only in the general design of the law, but also in the nature of its precepts. It is not a code of arbitrary prescriptions, which require minute and cautious attention, but do not improve the heart; it is not a system accommodated to the wishes and inclinations of man, and compensating slight restraints by general indulgence; it is a strict, unvarying rule, enjoining the observance of every thing true, and just, and lovely, and of good report. Its tendency is to produce in us, according to our measure, the same moral excellence which is the glory of our Maker. It is a representation of the holiness of his nature; and when impressed upon the soul, stamps it with his image. He who loves and obeys this law, is an imitator of God.

The purity of the law appears from its forbidding sin in all its modifications, in its most refined as well as in its grossest forms; the taint of the mind, as well as the pollution of the body; the secret approbation of sin, as well as the external act; the transient look of desire, the almost unperceived irregular emo-

* Eccl. vii. 29.

tion. While it commands us to place a guard upon the avenues by which temptation might enter, it enjoins the strictest care of the heart; and calls upon us to destroy the seed before it has grown. "The law is holy, and the commandment holy."* Such it has been shewn to be by our Saviour, who came not to promulgate a new law milder and more adapted to the infirmity of human nature, but to free the old and unalterable law from the loose interpretations of corrupt men, who were the professed teachers of religion. He has taught us that nothing less will satisfy its demands than perfect purity; and that in vain do we wash the outside of the cup, if within it be full of uncleanness. This is the law which God has given to mankind. It informs us what he is, and what we ought to be that we may please him. "The statutes of the Lord are right; the commandment of the Lord is pure; the fear of the Lord is clean; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. Moreover by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping them there is a great reward."†

If we direct our attention to the dispensations of providence, we shall see farther proofs of the holiness of God, in the moral government which he exercises over mankind, and the means which he employs to maintain the authority of his law. It may be remarked, in the first place, that amidst the ruin of our moral nature by the fall, there remain some fragments of his image; or at least, that conscience continues to lift its voice in favour of the righteousness and goodness of his law, calls men to the performance of their duty, and punishes their sins by remorse and fear. The operations of this faculty, both when it excites him to the cultivation of holiness, and when it renders him uneasy for not obeying its admonitions, are an evidence that man was created a holy being, as the faculty of reason proves that his nature was originally intelligent. I may mention, in the second place, the means which have been employed to give more extensive and commanding authority to conscience. Such were the precepts of morality which were transmitted from age to age by tradition, or which thoughtful and contemplative men in the heathen world discovered, and which with all their imperfections, served in some degree to set bounds to the prevalence of vice. We add, that from time to time God raised up among his favourite people, holy men and prophets who republished his neglected and almost forgotten law, in a manner fitted to arrest the attention of the most inconsiderate, denounced his judgments upon the profane and wicked, and enforced obedience by strong and urgent motives. It is of some importance to take notice, in the next place, of the natural checks which he has placed upon sin, and the natural encouragements which he has held out to the practice of our duty; for in these we clearly perceive his regard to the interests of holiness. As he is the Author of nature, of the human constitution, and of the state of the world, in which chance has no place, but all events are ordered by his wisdom, we believe that the system of things is subservient to his designs. Now we find, that men cannot commit sin without experiencing internal uneasiness, exposing themselves to reproach and danger, injuring their health, and in some cases involving themselves in temporal ruin. Consequences of an opposite nature result from the performance of duty: they enjoy peace of mind, are loved and honoured, and receive the reward of industry and temperance in health and competence, and in a tranquil old age. In what light can we view this natural order of things, but as a declaration by the Author of nature, that virtue is pleasing, and vice is displeasing to him; that he is the friend of righteousness and the enemy of sin? We may collect his intentions from his works as well as from revelation, and ought confidently to conclude that holiness is the object of his approbation, when we find good connected with the practice, and evil with the neglect of it, in the course of his provi-

* Rom. vii. 12.

† Ps. xix. 8—11

dence. In a word, the dispensations in which his justice has been revealed, are also manifestations of his holiness, of his infinite abhorrence of sin. Why has he acted, as if his own works were so offensive, that he could not bear to look upon them, and be delighted in destroying what it once gave him pleasure to create? Why did he overwhelm the former earth with the waters of the deluge? Why did he consume cities with a shower of fire and brimstone from the clouds? Why has he called for famine and pestilence to sweep away the human race by thousands? Why does he command the sword to come out of its scabbard, and bathe itself in the blood of the slain? What meaneth the heat of this great anger? The cause is sin; and the design is to remind us, that notwithstanding his usual patience, his detestation of it is undiminished, and will not permit him always to be silent; that the notions which men entertain of him as an easy and indulgent Being are false, and that he is a consuming fire to the workers of iniquity.

The holiness of God shines with peculiar lustre in redemption. It has dispelled the cloud which sin had spread over the character of God, and revealed him in all his glory, as the moral Governor of the world. Let me remind you, that one design of this dispensation, was to shew us what human nature originally was, and what it must become, that it may be acceptable to God, and be admitted into his communion. With this view he sent his own Son into the world, in the likeness of sinful flesh, but without the slightest stain of depravity. Upon this man the image of God, with which Adam was adorned, was fully and distinctly impressed, so that all the virtues were exhibited in their highest perfection, and he is the great example to which other men are destined to be conformed. That which was conceived in the womb of the virgin was "a holy thing." The holiness of God was displayed in the public approbation of our Saviour by a voice from heaven proclaiming that the Father was well pleased with him; for this testimony was borne to him because he was holy. But let us consider more particularly his death. The immediate design of it was to make atonement for sin; but the ultimate design was the sanctification of men, their restoration to that state of purity from which they had fallen. The means were of the most wonderful and unexpected kind, the substitution, obedience, and sufferings of a divine person, the crucifixion of the Lord of glory; and from them we judge of the importance of the end. We infer that holiness is infinitely acceptable to God, since he resorted to this extraordinary method of manifesting it to the universe, and re-establishing it in our world. "He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."*

By satisfying justice, he removed the obstacle to the gracious exercise of almighty power, for rectifying the disorder of our nature and restoring its primitive beauty. Let us trace the consequences of his death. A new scheme begins to be executed; a new intercourse is opened between heaven and earth; new means are employed; a new agent commences his operations upon the soul. The Holy Ghost, who moved upon the dark abyss and impregnated it with the seeds of life, performs the nobler work of the second creation. Old things pass away, and all things become new. What is the aim of those convictions of sin which he awakens in the conscience, of the spiritual light which he causes to shine into the mind, of his mysterious influence upon the thoughts, and volitions, and feelings; of the comforts with which he refreshes the soul; of his admonitions, and counsels, and reproofs: of his excitements to prayer, and vigilance, and activity; what is the aim of these varied operations, but to produce a gradual assimilation to our Maker; to refine us from moral pollution, that we may finally appear before him, without spot or blemish? He is the regenerating Spirit, and is conducting his plans with a view

* Tit. ii. 14.

to the blessed consummation announced in these words of an apostle: "Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."* All the holiness which is found in our degenerate world, proceeds from his inspiration. He will not cease to exert his power till his work is finished; and then man will be fair as in paradise, bright as the angels, and glorious even in the eyes of God himself. Redemption will terminate in the everlasting triumph of holiness. "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."†

Lastly, It is a proof of the holiness of God, that he has made purity of heart an indispensable qualification for eternal happiness. His grace frees the believer from the guilt of sin; but its pollution continues the object of his abhorrence, and must be removed that men may be admitted into fellowship with him. Hence they are partially sanctified in this world, and at death are made perfect in holiness. Nothing is more injurious to the character of God, than to suppose that the design of the mission of Christ was to repeal the moral law, or to relax the severity of its demands. He endured the curse, and abolished it in respect of believers, but he made no change in the precepts. Their obedience, although imperfect, is indeed acceptable to their heavenly Father; but it is not because a higher degree is not required, but in consideration of the perfect righteousness of the Redeemer, upon which only their title to the divine favour is founded. But infinite as is his merit, and powerful as is his intercession, they avail not to any who continue in sin. He acknowledges none to be his disciples but those who do honour to him as their Lord: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."‡ The faith with which salvation is connected, is not a mere assent to the doctrines of the gospel, but associates the heart with the understanding, and diffusing a living influence over the powers of the soul, enlists them all in the service of God. Such also is the influence of hope, for he who is possessed of it, "purifies himself even as Christ is pure." It has no place in an unregenerated man; it is a counterfeit, a base imitation of it, with which those are amused who are attached to the pleasures of the world. The beatific vision is promised only to the saints: "The pure in heart shall see God."§ In this world there is a mixture of moral good and evil; but heaven, the region of light, is separated by an impassable gulf from the kingdom of darkness: the felicity of its inhabitants will result from their perfection, the order of their faculties, and their exercise upon the noblest objects; in the love of God, and the love of one another: "There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie."|| There is no promiscuous admission into heaven; the society is select; the members are fitted for their place and their employment; and when the throne of God is surrounded by millions of angels who have kept their first estate, and of human beings who have been redeemed from corruption by the blood of his Son and the operation of his Spirit, he will once more rejoice in his works, and pronounce them to be good.

I have endeavoured to shew in what sense God is said to be holy, and have produced proofs that this excellence is justly attributed to him.

* 2 Peter iii. 13.

† Matt. v. 8.

‡ Matt. xiii. 41—43.

|| Rev. xxi. 27. xxii. 14, 15.

§ John xv. 14.

From this review of his perfections, it appears, that he is an incomprehensible Being; and lost in admiration of his infinite greatness, we are constrained to adopt the words of Zophar the Naamathite: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." * His existence we are able to demonstrate by arguments which carry full conviction to our minds; but the manner of it surpasses conception. All creatures had a beginning; but as he always will be, so he always has been. What do we know of a past eternal duration? When we turn our thoughts to this subject, we are confounded. An eternal succession which is past, seems to us to be impossible; and when we speak of an unsuccessive duration, we use words to which we can affix no distinct meaning. We believe that he is present in all places; but we do not believe that his essence is extended, because it is immaterial. Here also our minds are overwhelmed. Presence without extension is inconceivable to us, and in our apprehension, imports the occupation of a certain portion of space. He is omniscient; but while we readily assent to this proposition, we are beset with difficulties, and are utterly incapable of understanding how he can certainly foreknow events which are called contingent, or depend upon the free agency of men. He is almighty; but we can form no idea of creating power,—power which produces something out of nothing. Mysteries present themselves when we are considering all his perfections, even those of which we find a resemblance in ourselves, because there is no proportion between finite and infinite.

The incomprehensibility of the divine nature is not a reason why we should desist from inquiry, and devote our whole attention to other subjects. It would surely be folly to say, 'We cannot acquire perfect knowledge, and we will therefore make no effort to attain it in any degree.' Partial knowledge is beyond all doubt better than ignorance, and in the present case, is of infinite importance. There is no subject which we thoroughly understand. Our senses give us clear notions of external things, and we are conscious that there is a thinking active principle within us; but we have no acquaintance with the essence of either matter or spirit. Yet, although we cannot tell what they are the knowledge of their properties convinces us of their existence, and suffices for all practical purposes. Shall we say that God is not almighty and omniscient, because we cannot find out his power to perfection, and this knowledge is too wonderful for us? Or shall we disbelieve the moral character of God, merely because difficulties occur to us respecting the existence of moral evil, and his concern in sinful actions? Would it be justifiable to neglect and undervalue principles, of the truth of which we have the clearest and most satisfying evidence, and which are capable of being improved to the most important practical purposes, solely because we do not comprehend them in their full extent, and in all their bearings?

But the incomprehensibility of the divine nature should teach us humility, caution, and reverence. When in the course of our investigations, we arrive at a conclusion which astonishes and confounds us, we ought not for this reason to reject it as illegitimate and false; and when revelation informs us of some fact which reason could not have discovered, and by which it is perplexed, it would ill become us to pronounce it to be impossible. It is confessed by all, that we have no knowledge of the essence of the Deity: on what ground then are some men so bold as to affirm, that there can be no distinction in it to which there is nothing analogous in created beings; that its unity is inconsistent with a plurality of persons? The same reflection should silence our objections against any of his perfections or dispensations. Let us **no**:

* Job xi. 7—9.

presume to apply our short line to immensity. "Surely," said Agur. "I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy. Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his Son's name, if thou canst tell?"*

Between the knowledge of God in this life, and that which will be enjoyed in the state of vision, the difference is great; but as the former should not be undervalued because it is imperfect, the latter should not be magnified beyond the reality. Some Scholastic Doctors have maintained, that although our present knowledge is only apprehensive, as they call it, or partial; yet in the world to come, it will be comprehensive or perfect. It is indeed said, that then "we shall see face to face, and know even as we are known;" but to infer that we shall know God as fully as he knows us, is to be misled by the sound of words, and to disregard the restriction of the sense which the subject necessarily requires. The saints in heaven will see God with the eye of the mind, for he will be always invisible to the bodily eye; will see him more clearly than they could see him by reason and faith, and more extensively than all his works and dispensations had hitherto revealed him; but their minds will not be so enlarged as to be capable of contemplating at once, or in detail, the whole excellence of his nature. To comprehend infinite perfection, they must become infinite themselves. Even in heaven, their knowledge will be partial, and at the same time, their happiness will be complete, because their knowledge will be perfect in this sense, that it will be adequate to the capacity of the subject, although it will not exhaust the fulness of the object. We believe that it will be progressive, and that as their views expand, their blessedness will increase; but it will never reach a limit, beyond which there is nothing to be discovered; and when ages after ages have passed away, he will still be the incomprehensible God.

From the review of the perfections of God, it farther appears, that he is an all-sufficient Being; and this implies, that he is all-sufficient to himself, and all-sufficient to his creatures.

He is all-sufficient to himself. As the first of Beings, he could receive nothing from another, nor be limited by the power of another. Being infinite, he is possessed of all possible perfection. When he existed alone, he was all to himself. His understanding, his love, his energies, found an adequate object in himself. Had he stood in need of any thing external, he could not have been independent, and therefore would not have been God. He created all things, and is said to have created them for himself; but it was not that any defect might be supplied by them, but that he might communicate life and happiness to angels and men, and admit them to the contemplation of his glory. He demands the services of his intelligent creatures, whom he has endowed with powers which qualify them for the duties enjoined; but he derives no benefit from their good offices, and all the advantage redounds to themselves. "I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats of thy folds." "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof."† With respect to moral duties, which have a greater intrinsic value than sacrifices and gifts, hear how the Scripture speaks: "Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him that thou makest thy ways perfect?"‡ He expects glory from his creatures; but is he like a poor mortal, who lives upon the admiration and praise of his fellows? The glory which he requires, is merely the devout

* Prov. xxx. 2—4.

+ Ps. i. 9—12.

‡ Job xxii. 2, 3.

acknowledgment of the infinite excellencies which he possessed before there was an eye to behold them, or a tongue to speak of them; and what are the thanksgivings and adoration of ten thousand worlds to him, who pronounces them all to be vanity, and less than nothing? He makes use of instruments and means to accomplish his ends; not, however, from a deficiency of power, but in some cases, to display it more strikingly through the inadequacy of the means, and in all, to maintain the order of the created system, and the dependence which he has established of one thing upon another. He loves his creatures, but there is no mixture of selfishness in his love: he desires their happiness, but it is from benevolence, and not from any respect to his own. An infinitely perfect Being has all his resources in himself. Creatures can give him nothing, because all that they possess is already his; and they can take nothing from him whose existence is necessary and immutable.

God is all-sufficient to his creatures. They live in him, and move in him. His arm sustains, his goodness supplies, and his wisdom guides them. It is owing to his care that the universal system is upheld, and its laws continue to operate for the general good. All the happiness which is enjoyed by creatures of different kinds, emanates from his bounty. Happiness of the most common kind, the happiness which is experienced through the medium of the senses, is the fruit of his beneficence. He has created objects to delight the eye, the ear, the smell, and the taste; he gives a relish to life, and crowns it with abundant blessings. The all-sufficiency of God appears in the ample, and I may say, profuse distribution of good. All are furnished with the means of enjoyment; not even the meanest creature is neglected. And this bounty is never exhausted; it is continued from day to day, and from year to year: when a new generation come forward, the store-house of Providence is as well replenished for them, as it was for their predecessors.

The all-sufficiency of God may be considered in relation to man, and to the better part of his nature, the soul. Its true happiness consists in the enjoyment of God. His favour is life, and his loving-kindness is better than life. He is called the "portion of the soul," to intimate that the impressions of his love, the manifestations of his glory, are the chief objects of its desire, and the source of its highest satisfaction. Hence his favour is preferred by the saints to the choicest and most abundant earthly delights. "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased."* He who is possessed of this portion, has better reason than the philosopher who had made an important discovery in science, to exclaim in a transport of joy, 'I have found it, I have found it.' He has found that good, of which the wise men of ancient times talked and dreamed, but the nature of which they did not understand; that good which the soul of man was created to enjoy, and for which it feels a thirst that all the waters of creation could not quench; that good which is comprehensive of all good, with which no other is worthy to be compared, after which no other will be desired, and which will continue in every stage of our existence to impart joy ever full and ever new. So satisfied is he who has obtained it, that he envies no man, however prosperous, because he knows no man who has such reason to be happy as himself, but he who has been equally prudent in his choice. He never says to the worldly man, "Oh that my condition were like thine, that I were rich, and crowned with honours as thou art!" but wishing him to share in his blessedness, which admits of being communicated without suffering diminution, he earnestly invites him to become a partaker: "O taste and see that the Lord is good." In the absence of external comforts, in poverty, affliction, and destitution, when no ray of earthly

* Ps. iv. 6. 7.

hope breaks the gloom, and all is lost that the heart once loved, and the world still prizes, he is inspired with triumphant joy by the thought of his interest in God: "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."* Although heaven and earth were annihilated, and nature presented a universal blank, the christian would not be forlorn. He could say, while surrounded by the dreadful vacuity, 'My inheritance is entire. They have perished, but thou, O Lord, shalt endure; they have vanished away, but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth whom I desire besides thee.'

The all-sufficiency of God secures the undecaying and never-ending felicity of the saints. An earthly portion is wasted by use; and many a man who spent the former part of his days in abundance, suffers want in old age. Infinite perfection cannot be exhausted. Giving doth not impoverish it, and withholding doth not enrich it. If it be true that the saints will not be stationary in the world to come, their progress will be from good to better and better; an expansion of their noblest faculties, and a perpetual accession of bliss. There is a fountain of living water in heaven, because God is there in the fulness of his love; a fountain which sends forth its pure and refreshing stream unimpaired and uninterrupted in its course. "The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."†

Lastly, From this review of his perfections, it appears that God is the Sovereign Lord of the universe. No dominion is so absolute as that which is founded on creation. He who might not have made any thing, had a right to make all things according to his own pleasure. In the exercise of his uncontrolled power, he has made some parts of the creation mere inanimate matter, of grosser or more refined texture, and distinguished by different qualities, but all inert and unconscious. He has given organization to other parts, and made them susceptible of growth and expansion, but still without life in the proper sense of the term. To others he has given not only organization, but conscious existence, organs of sense and self-motive power. To these he has added in man the gift of reason, and an immortal spirit, by which he is allied to a higher order of beings who are placed in the superior regions. He might have created a world composed of different materials, and peopled it with beings different in form and in qualities. He might have bestowed upon man a less or a greater portion of intellect, and adapted his situation to the change. Over the world which he has created, he sways the sceptre of omnipotence. "I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"‡

A creature, considered simply as such, has no rights. He can demand nothing from his Maker; and in whatever manner he may be treated, has no title to complain. But in speaking of the dominion of God, we ought not to lose sight of his moral perfections. He is just and good, and will not subject his creatures to sufferings without a cause, and punish the innocent as if they

* Hab. iii. 17, 18.

† Isa. lx. 19, 20.

‡ Dan. iv. 34, 35

were guilty. His own nature sets limits to the exercise of his power. We are under a moral Governor, who will do what is right. But within these limits, there is ample room for the exercise of sovereignty towards men in their present state of depravity. God may assign any condition to any individual. He may bestow good upon one, and inflict evil upon another. He may distribute good and evil in all different proportions. He may place one man in advantageous circumstances, and expose another to difficulties, temptations, and disappointment. He may make one a freeman and another a slave, one noble and another base, one rich and another poor, one healthy and another diseased. He may take away one in infancy, and permit another to live to old age. When we turn to the actual state of things, which is not the effect of chance, but of his over-ruling providence, we observe all these instances of sovereign disposal; and our objections are answered by the question, "Who art thou, O man! that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?"*

I have endeavoured, in the preceding lectures, to demonstrate the existence, and to illustrate the perfections of God. Comparatively little has been said upon a subject so ample, and nothing suitable to its transcendent dignity. Who is worthy to declare the glory of God but himself? yet from the humble thoughts and grovelling language of a mortal, faintly attempting to portray infinitude, you may perceive, that of all beings God is the greatest, and the most wonderful; one of whom we should never think without the deepest awe, and whose approbation it should be the object of our most anxious solicitude to obtain. Wherever we are, this Being is present with us, whether we dwell in the city or in the wilderness; present at the midnight hour when we are shrouded in darkness, and in the secret place to which we have retired from human observation. As he is now a Witness, he will hereafter exercise the office of a Judge, and his sentence will be final and irresistible. He is an enemy more to be dreaded than hosts of men, and legions of devils: he is a friend in whose wisdom and power we shall have a sure resource amidst distresses and perplexities, and in all conditions an immovable foundation of hope. He is the God of those who believe in his Son; their shield and their exceeding great reward. His infinite perfections are engaged on their side, and are working out their present and future good. Let us look up to him as reconciled through the atonement, and beseech him to regard us with a gracious eye. Let us commit ourselves to his merciful disposal during our transitory existence upon earth; and when the hour of death comes, let us throw ourselves into the arms of his love.

Now unto the King Eternal, Immortal, and Invisible, the only Wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

* Rom. ix. 20, 21.

LECTURE XXVIII.

ON THE TRINITY.

Meaning and Origin of the term, Trinity—Traces of the Doctrine among the Heathens—Evidences of it in the Old and New Testament.

God is the most wonderful of all beings; and we have proceeded but a short way in our inquiries, when we are compelled, by the mysterious nature of the subject, to exclaim, “Who can by searching find him out? who can find out the Almighty to perfection?” There is some proportion between our conceptions of the most excellent creatures and the objects of thought, because, although exalted above us, they are still finite like ourselves; but of Him who is uncreated, self-existent, and all-perfect, we can obtain only faint and partial glimpses. Of the imperfection of our knowledge, we must have been frequently convinced during the preceding review of the nature and character of our Maker; and it may be, that in not a few instances, when our ideas appear to ourselves to be sublime, they are mean and grovelling in the estimation of such of our fellow-creatures as are possessed of superior understanding; and that our reasonings are erroneous when we are most confident that they amount to demonstration. But we are now to enter upon a subject which, if we may speak of degrees where all is beyond the range of our faculties, is still more incomprehensible than any which has yet engaged our attention. The self-existence of God, his underived, independent, necessary existence, undoubtedly baffles our utmost efforts to conceive it, because there is nothing analogous to it among creatures; but we understand that he does exist, and the fact is established by arguments clear and satisfactory. Of some of his natural, and all his moral perfections, there is a faint resemblance in ourselves; so that we do not use words without meaning when we speak of his power, his knowledge, his goodness, and his justice. We also understand our own words when we speak of his unity, and affirm, that there is one Being possessed of all possible perfection, and that there are not, and cannot be more than one. But the next step which we take under the conduct of revelation presents a mystery which astonishes reason, and upon which no exertion of intellect can throw a single ray of light. You remember the story of the philosopher, who being asked, what God is? requested time to consider, and after repeated delays confessed, that the more he meditated the more he was perplexed. We are not surprised that he found it impossible to answer the question, when we reflect that he had no better guide than the light of nature, and besides was embarrassed by the vain and false speculations which abounded among his countrymen. Even revelation, although it has corrected many errors, has not solved all our doubts; nor could it have been possible for any revelation to enable a finite to comprehend an infinite Being. It may even be said to have augmented the difficulty, by at least one discovery so new and strange, that reasoning is useless and presumptuous, and the doctrine can be received only by a humble faith. We are satisfied by the arguments for the unity of God, that there is only one Being who created the heavens and the earth, and is entitled to the religious homage of their inhabitants. But as soon as we open the Bible, a doctrine meets our eye which seems opposed to this primary truth; for while our arguments for the unity are confirmed by its most express declarations, and polytheism is everywhere condemned, the true God himself is represented as, in some respect, more than one. This at least is the view which we take of many passa-

ges; although great efforts have been made to put a different sense upon them. As these efforts shew that this is the apparent sense, the sense which naturally occurs to the reader, for they would have been uncalled for if there had been nothing in the mode of expression which could be construed to imply plurality, so it is remarkable that in this light they have been regarded by the great majority of Christians, and the doctrine of the Trinity has been an article of faith in every age of the church. This single circumstance is a reason for inquiring into the subject. It is surely of some importance to ascertain whether so many wise, and learned, and holy men, who have maintained this doctrine, with the countless thousands of less distinguished individuals who have professed the same faith, were right or wrong in their conclusions. It is a higher consideration, that our conceptions of God should in all things be conformable to the notices which he has given of himself; that if the Scriptures associate in their account of him the ideas of unity and plurality, we are bound to admit the fact, however incapable we may be of understanding it; and that on the hypothesis of such an association, the notion of absolute unity, unity of person as well as of essence, is false, and the Being of whom it is predicated exists only in the imagination. If the Scriptures teach that there are three persons in the Divine Essence, and we believe that there is only one, our God and the God of revelation are not the same.

The doctrine which I am about to illustrate, is thus expressed in our Confession of Faith. "In the unity of the Godhead, there be three persons, of one substance, power and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son."* The sum of this definition is, that while there is only one Divine nature, there are three subsistences or persons, called the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, who possess not a similar, but the same numerical essence; and that the distinction between them is not merely nominal but real. The term which has been chosen to express this doctrine is Trinity, a compound Latin word, signifying *three in unity*. The Greeks use the word *τριάς* which serves the purpose; although it does not so explicitly convey the idea of a three-fold distinction in unity, its proper meaning being *numerus ternarius* or *ternio*, the number three. Some think that the word Trinity was first used in a synod which met at Alexandria in the year 317; but others assign to it an earlier date, and give as the author Theophilus of Antioch, who flourished about the year 162. "He was the first," says the translator of Mosheim, "who made use of the word Trinity, to express the distinction of what divines call persons in the Godhead. The Christian church is very little obliged to him for his invention. The use of this and other unscriptural terms, to which men attach either no ideas or false ones, has wounded charity and peace, without promoting truth and knowledge. It has produced heresies of the very worst kind." Reflections of this nature you will meet with in many books: they are apt to gain upon the unexperienced, by an apparent desire to guard the word of God against human corruptions, and to regulate our conceptions and expressions in religion solely by the unerring standard. But beware of being imposed upon. A little attention will convince you, that the principle, admitted in its full extent, would set aside all human explanations of Scripture; and that the real objection is, not to the terms which have been invented to express certain doctrines clearly and concisely, but to the doctrines themselves. This is the true cause of the outcry against *τριάς*, *ἁμοιούσιος*, and other words and phrases which have been employed in stating the articles of faith in opposition to heresies. Had Theophilus invented the doctrine in question, the indignation of this author would have been

* Westminster Confession, chap. ii. § 3.

justifiable, and much stronger language might have been properly used in condemning him; but the contrivance of a convenient term to express what we know to be a scriptural truth, was surely quite harmless, provided that the term was appropriate, and could excite displeasure only in the minds of men, who were affected to the Trinity itself.

As the Trinity is confessedly a doctrine of revelation, all our arguments for it must be derived from the Scriptures. It is remarkable, however, that some traces of it are to be found among the heathens. These will not prove the doctrine to be true; but they are curious, and if properly authenticated, will lead to the conclusion, that they had been conveyed to them by tradition, for we can account for them in no other way; and consequently, that the Trinity was a doctrine of the primeval religion. Zoroaster, the reformer of the Persian religion, is said to have taught that the first divine Agent created all things by his wisdom and love; "which names," it has been observed, "are so correspondent to the characters of the second and third persons of the Trinity exhibited in the Bible, that we cannot doubt but they must have been derived from some remains of divine revelation, afforded to the patriarchs from the beginning." The Magi maintained that the Deity existed in a first, a second, and a third mind. "The first was super-essential in itself, and the principle of all essence; the second was the filial mind, generated by the first, the Creator of the material world; and the third was the efficient wisdom and power of the other two." The person called Thoth, Theuth, or Hermes Trismegistus, who was celebrated among the Egyptians as the author of their learning and arts, is said to have obtained his title of 'thrice greatest,' chiefly on account of his doctrine concerning the Deity. He held, we are informed, "that there were three principal powers, virtues, or forms in God, and that the name of the ineffable Creator implied one Deity." This was his name, "I am all that will be, is, and was;" and it is the same with Jehovah, which is explained in the New Testament by this periphrasis, "He that was, and is, and is to come."* Among the Romans, I know not whether we should suppose their three principal gods who ruled over all nature, Jupiter, Neptune, and Pluto, and their triform images, to be vestiges of the primitive doctrine. They are so faint, and so remote from the truth, that it is hardly proper to mention them. There is one passage in the writings of Seneca, which is too remarkable to be passed over. "Believe me," he says, "this is done by him, whoever he was, that formed the universe, whether the Almighty God himself, or the incorporeal Reason," for so the Latins translated *λογος*, "which was the artificer of those vast operations," the *δημιουργος* of the Greeks, and the all-creating Word of the Christians, "or the Divine Spirit, diffused through the least as well as the greatest of all things."†

It is unnecessary to enumerate all the semblances of this doctrine which have been pointed out in the creeds of different nations. The Cabiri or Mighty Ones of Sanchoniathon might be mentioned. They were three in number, and the name Cabiri is evidently of Hebrew origin. In the book of Job, God is called אל-נביר, *El-cabbir*, "the mighty God,"‡ and Cabiri or Cabirim is the plural. I shall only add, what has chiefly engaged the attention of critics on this subject, the Platonic Trinity as taught by Plato himself, and more fully by his followers. These philosophers held that there were three principles in the Divine nature, the first *το αγαθον*, the second *δυνος* or *λογος*, and the third *ψυχη*, corres-

* Rev. i. 8.

† Seneca Consolatio ad Helviam, 8. The whole passage is as follows:—"Id actum est, mihi crede. ab illo, quisquis formator universi fuit, sive ille Deus est potens omnium. sive incorporealis Ratio ingentium operum artifex, sive Divinus Spiritus per omnia maxima ac minima, æquali intentione diffusus, sive fatum et mutabilis causarum inter se coherentium congeries; id inquam, actum est," &c.

‡ Job xxxvi. 5.

ponding to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. These were all included in the *το Θεον*, or the Divine nature. Dr. Priestley maintained, in his controversy with Dr. Horsley, “that it was never imagined that the three component members of the Platonic Trinity, are either equal to each other, or strictly speaking, one.” To this his antagonist replied, “They are more strictly speaking, one, than any thing in nature of which unity may be predicated. No one of them can be supposed without the other two. The second and third being, the first is necessarily supposed; and the first (*Αγαθον*) being, the second and third (*Νους* and *ψυχη*) must come forth. Concerning their equality, I will not say that the Platonists have spoken with the same accuracy which the Christian Fathers use; but they include the three principles in the Divine nature, in the *το Θεον*; and this notion implies the same equality which we maintain; at the same time I confess, that the circumstance of their equality was not always strictly adhered to by the younger Platonists.”*

We can hardly doubt, that a notion prevailed in the heathen world, not only of a plurality of gods, for this was openly avowed, but of some distinction in the nature of him who was called the Supreme God, and of whom contemplative men entertained more sublime ideas than the vulgar. It is surprising that they should have in any degree approximated to the truth, that they should have obtained a glimpse of the subject; and we cannot wonder at their mistakes and inaccuracies, when we reflect upon their general ignorance relative to religion, and remember that all their knowledge was derived from tradition. The Trinity is, as we have said, a doctrine of pure revelation; it is a secret of the Divine nature of which not a suspicion would have been entertained, if God had not been pleased to disclose it; it is not made manifest, like his existence, and wisdom, and goodness, by the works of creation and providence.

Our first step is to search the Scriptures, with a view to ascertain whether this doctrine is found in them. Let us begin with the Old Testament, in which we may expect to meet with some traces of it at least, if it should not be so clearly revealed as in the New.—Many have considered the plural names of God as an intimation of a plurality of persons in the Godhead. One of these names occurs in the first verse of the Bible. “In the beginning *אלהים*, *Elohim*,” literally the *Gods*, “created the heavens and the earth;”† and it is construed with a singular verb *ברא*, *bara*. It would be endless to enumerate parallel passages; for in fact this name is rarely used in the singular, *אלה*, *Eloah*. It is plural throughout the whole first chapter of Genesis, where it is so often introduced, and in a thousand other places. The singular is not preferred, even when the design is to assert in the most solemn manner the unity of God: “Hear, O Israel, *יהוה* our *Elohim*, *אלהינו*, is one *יהוה*.”‡ This is not the only name which assumes the plural form when it is applied to the Supreme Being. “Let Israel rejoice in Him that made him,” *בַּעֲשֵׂי*, in *his Makers*.§ “For thy Maker is thy husband,” *בַּעֲלִיךָ עֲשֵׂיךָ*, *thy Makers is thy husbands*.|| “Remember thy Creator,” *אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּרֵאשִׁית*, *thy Creators*, “in the days of thy youth.”¶ In places which it would be tedious to cite, God is called *אֲדֹנַיִם*, *Adonim* or Lords. Many learned men, however, as Calvin, the two Buxtorfs, and others, have maintained that these names afford no satisfactory proof of a plurality in the Divine essence; and that they are to be accounted for by a peculiarity in the Hebrew language, which expresses in this manner dignity and majesty, a variety of powers, and a multitude of operations. They object, that when *אלהים* *Elohim* in the plural number is applied to God, it cannot always be understood to denote a plurality of persons, because it is used exclusively of one person. “*אלהים* *Elohim*, *Eloheih*, God, thy God hath anointed thee.”** This is evidently the Father. “Thy throne, *אלהים*, *Elohim*, O God,

* Tracts in controversy with Priestley, p. 247. edit. 1812. † Gen. i. 1. ‡ Deut. vi. 4

§ Psalm cxlix. 2.

|| Isa. liv. 5.

¶ Eccl. xii. 1.

** Psalm xlv. 7

is for ever and ever.” * This is spoken of the Son. Now if אֱלֹהִים, *Elohim*, signified the Trinity, it could not be properly used of one Divine person, as distinguished from the other two. It could not be said, the Father is the Trinity, the Son is the Trinity, the Holy Ghost is the Trinity. They object again, that this name, in the plural number, is given to other individuals in whom there is no Trinity or plurality, as to the Golden Calf, and to the heathen gods, Dagon of the Philistines, Ashteroth of the Sidonians, Chemos of the Moabites, Milcom of the Ammonites. What Trinity or plurality can it denote in these cases? If this holy mystery is implied in it, is it probable that it would have been employed to designate vile and contemptible idols? Farther, if this name is significant of a Trinity of persons, as Jehovah is of unity, propriety would have required, not only that it should be appropriated to God, but that it should have been always expressed in the plural number; whereas in several places it occurs in the singular, when the three persons must be understood. Lastly, it is objected, that while the name is sometimes joined with plural adjectives and verbs where an individual is evidently spoken of, it is also construed with verbs and adjectives singular when the true God is spoken of; and that from all this it appears, that nothing can be inferred but a peculiar idiom of the Hebrew, which admitted the plural and singular indifferently.

To these objections answers have been returned. It has been shewn that there is ground to call in question the grammatical rule of the Rabbies, “that substantives of dignity, honour, and dominion, are put in the plural form, although denoting only a singular object, and are joined in agreement with verbs or adjectives in the singular.” The plural noun בָּגְדִים, *baghalim*, Lords or Masters, is used to signify the proprietor of an ass or a well, in which case the idea of dignity and majesty is ridiculous. “It is not a little remarkable,” it has been said, “that such a circumstance” (the use of the plural noun *Elohim*, to denote the true God) “should exist in the sacred books of a people who were separated from all other nations for this express object, that they should bear a public and continual protest against polytheism; a people whose whole system of religious, political, and domestic usages was calculated, with consummate prudence and wisdom, to be a perpetual preservative from polytheistic notions; a people who are charged by the Eternal God to destroy every statue, structure, and grove that might recall the memory of idolatrous rites, and to extirpate every thing that could be extirpated, which had been associated with idolatry, or might be converted into an instrument of its revival or of its slightest palliation; who were enjoined to abolish every name of city, village, or place, which was compounded with the name of a heathen deity, and to substitute new appellations; who were not even to pronounce those names unless necessity compelled;—is it not, we may well say, a little remarkable that, in the sacred books of such a people, books whose very words, in many cases at least, were selected and dictated by the inspiration of Jehovah, the ordinary name and style of the Only Living and True God should be in a *plural* form? Did some strange and insuperable necessity lie in the way? Was the language so poor, that it could furnish no other term? Or if so, could not the wisdom of inspiration have suggested a new appellative, and have for ever abolished the hazardous word? None of these reasons existed. The language was rich and copious. The names of the Deity in general and constant use were more numerous than in either of the beautiful languages of classical antiquity, or in the most cultivated tongues of modern Europe. Besides “that glorious and fearful name JEHOVAH,” the appropriated and unique style of the true God, and besides other unexceptionable terms, there was the *singular* form, *Eloah*, of the very word in question. There was no shadow of necessity, difficulty, or even inducement, for the adoption of a phraseology

* Psalm xlv. 6.

which *on Unitarian principles* every candid mind must confess, can with difficulty, if at all, be defended from the charge of pernicious example, and very dangerous tendency.* It cannot be denied, that there is considerable force in these observations; but as the arguments are strong on both sides, it is best to pass over this proof of a plurality in the Godhead, and to proceed to others which are less liable to objection.

There are several passages of the Old Testament in which God speaks of himself as more than one: "Let *us* make man in our image, after our likeness." "Behold the man is become as one of *us*." "Whom shall I send, and who will go for *us*?" "Let *us* go down, and there confound their tongue."† They are certainly remarkable, when taken in connexion with the uniform doctrine of Scripture, that there is no God but one. The reasoning which we have lately heard concerning the plural name of God, is applicable here in all its force. If the use of a plural name to denote an individual was a peculiarity of the Hebrew language, it would be understood, and no danger would arise from it; but it is quite a different thing to introduce a person speaking of himself as more than one, using plural pronouns to designate himself. We have no example in Scripture of such phraseology in reference to any being but God, although plural names are used of other individuals; and we are necessarily led to suppose that there is a reason for this usage which does not exist in any other case. God might have accommodated himself to the idiom of the people whom he addressed, and have allowed himself to be called by a plural name; but we cannot conceive him to have spoken of himself in a manner which would suggest the idea of plurality, although it was his express purpose to teach them his unity. Why should he have said, without any cause, "Let *us* make?" Would it not have been as easy, more correct, and better adapted to his design, to say, "Let *me* make?" It is vain to tell us, that on these occasions the Almighty adopted the style of monarch, who say "We" and "Us." We have no reason to think, that this style was known in the days of Moses; there are no examples of it among the nations of antiquity; it seems to be a modern invention. It is vain to pretend that he addressed angels, or included inferior beings. This is a figment of the Jews, so absurd, and even impious, that Christians should have been ashamed to make it their own; and we venture to affirm that not one of them would have done so, had he not been disposed to grasp at any thing which would help him to evade this argument for a plurality of persons in the Godhead.

Another proof has been drawn from the blessing which Aaron was commanded to pronounce upon the children of Israel. "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."‡ The proof is founded on the three-fold repetition of the name JEHOVAH, and the correspondence of the whole with the Christian benediction, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all."§

We may put the same construction on the three-fold ascription of holiness to God by the seraphim whom Isaiah saw in the temple:—"Holy, holy, holy is JEHOVAH God of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."¶ We may the more readily refer it to a plurality of persons in the Godhead, when we consider that on this occasion the Lord said, "Who shall go for *us*?" and observe that in the New Testament, the Son and the Spirit are represented as having been concerned in this vision. The Evangelist John says, that Isaiah saw the glory of Christ at this time;¶ and Paul, that it was the Holy Ghost

* Dr. Pye Smith's Scripture Testimony to the Messiah, b. ii. ch. iv. § 34.

† Gen. i. 26. iii. 22. Isaiah vi. 8. Gen. xi. 7.

§ 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

¶ Isaiah vi. 3.

‡ Numb. vi. 24—26.

¶ John xii. 41.

who spake these words:—"Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not."*

The following passages have been considered as giving indications of a plurality of persons: "Then JEHOVAH rained fire and brimstone from JEHOVAH out of heaven." "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by JEHOVAH their God." "Now, therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake."† In all these passages there seems to be a distinct reference to two persons: in the first, to one who from another, or in concurrence with him, destroyed the cities of the plain; in the second, to one who would save the Israelites by the agency of another; in the third, to one who is intreated by Daniel to hear his prayers for the sake of another; and in all these cases, both are spoken of as Divine.

In the forty-fifth Psalm, we find these words addressed by one divine person to another: "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever."‡ We have the authority of an inspired commentator for saying that the speaker is the Father, and the person spoken to is the Son;§ and it is worthy of attention, that the Father gives him the appellation of God in a sense in which it never was given to creatures of the highest order. Must we not infer, that, although the Divine nature is one, there is some mysterious distinction in it, by which only such language can be satisfactorily explained?

"Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I; and now the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me;"|| or more correctly, "the Lord God hath sent me and his Spirit." There is mention made in this passage of three persons, one who sends, and two who are sent. The speaker is God; for he assumes the name, and titles, and works of God, calling himself the First and the Last, the Creator of heaven and earth; but at the same time he says that he was sent by God; not surely sent by himself, for such language would have no meaning, but by a distinct person. That person is represented as having sent also another, who is called his Spirit; which is not a name for an influence, energy, or operation, but for a living intelligent agent, as will afterwards appear when we come to speak of him particularly, and is plain to every candid reader of the Scriptures. It was he who in the beginning moved upon the face of the waters; it was he who garnished the heavens; it was he who spoke by the prophets, and gave them the knowledge of future events; and to him the Psalmist ascribes the attribute of omnipresence: "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?"¶

In a word, the Messiah is represented as a distinct person from Him who promised to send him, and the Jews never entertained any doubt of his personality. Yet the manner in which he is spoken of, renders it absolutely certain that he was superior to all the prophets, higher than the kings of the earth, and possessed of proper divinity. He is called the Son of God,** and if we believe an apostle,†† in a sense which excludes all creatures from a claim to the same relation. He is called "the Mighty God,"‡‡ and dignified with the incommunicable name, the name expressive of self-existence, independence, and eternal duration: "In those days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is the name whereby he shall be called, JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."§§ It is remarkable, that in a passage which evidently refers to him, and is applied in the New Testament to the treachery of Judas it is JEHOVAH who speaks: "And JEHOVAH said unto me, Cast it unto the potter

* Acts xxviii. 25, 26.

§ Heb. i. 8

†† Heb. i. 5.

† Gen. xix. 24. Hos. i. 7. Dan. ix. 17.

|| Isa. xlviii. 16.

‡‡ Isaiah ix. 6.

¶ Ps. cxxxix. 7.

§§ Jer. xxiii. 6.

‡ Ps. xlv. 6.

** Ps. ii. 7.

a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord.”*

These are some of the notices of the plurality in the Godhead, which we find in the Jewish Scriptures: but we may expect clearer manifestations of the doctrine in the New Testament, which is the completion of the Old. “The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.” In this manner the Evangelist expresses the superiority of the present to the former dispensation.

I proceed to lay before you the evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity, which is furnished by the Christian Scriptures. I begin with the celebrated passage in the fifth chapter of the first Epistle of John, verse 7. “There are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one.” Three persons are mentioned as distinct witnesses, and at the same time are affirmed to be one; although some think that the apostle refers not to a unity of essence, but of testimony, or that nothing more is meant than that, like the three earthly witnesses, they agree in one. I need not tell you that the genuineness of this passage has been disputed; the controversy is so important, and has engaged so much attention, that none of you can be ignorant of it. It is now generally acknowledged by critics to be spurious; and in doing so, they proceed upon the following grounds. In the first place, it is affirmed by Griesbach, that in no library of Europe does there exist any Greek manuscript in which this verse is found. He qualifies this assertion, however, by referring to one or two manuscripts in which it does appear; and it ought to be observed, that he can be understood to speak only of manuscripts which have been collated, for there are many hundreds which have not been examined. There are three in which it occurs, the Codex Guelpherbytanus, the Codex Ravianus, or Berolinensis, and the Codex Britannicus, or Montfortianus, or Dublinensis, for it is known by all these names. But they are of no authority. The first is a manuscript of the seventeenth century, for it contains the Latin translation of Beza; the second is a transcript of the Complutensian edition of the New Testament, with some various readings from Stephen’s third edition, and cannot therefore be older than the sixteenth century; and the last was written, according to some, in the twelfth or thirteenth century, or according to others, in the fifteenth or sixteenth. It is therefore of very little value, and its testimony is as nothing when opposed to the silence of all other manuscripts. In the second place, it was not admitted into the earliest printed editions of Erasmus, nor into the version of Luther. It first appeared in the edition of Complutum, and is said to have been translated from Latin into Greek; from that edition it was afterwards adopted by Erasmus, and thence found its way into the editions of Stephens and Beza, and last of all into the Elzevir edition of A. D. 1624, after which all our common editions are printed. In the third place, the verse is omitted by all the Greek Fathers, although they quote the words which precede and follow it, collect proofs of the Trinity from all quarters, and even apply to this subject the next verse concerning the earthly witnesses, endeavouring to deduce from it and the context the divinity of the Spirit. Two or three passages have been produced which seem to refer to this text; but they are supposed to be taken from ecclesiastical formularies, or the technical language of the church; and although it were certain that they are quotations, nothing more could be justly inferred, than that in the days of the authors the text was not altogether unknown, but was generally considered as spurious, and hence, with an exception or two, no person appealed to it. In the fourth place, it was wanting in the ancient versions, the Syriac, the Arabic, the Coptic, the Ethiopic, the Armenian, the Sahidic, and the Slavonic. It was wanting originally in all these, although it now appears in some of them, having

* Zech. xi. 13. Matt. xxvii. 9.

† 1 John ii. 8.

been inserted by modern editors; but this interpolation does not weaken the argument in the slightest degree. It was not in the copies from which those translations were made; and some of them are of very high antiquity. We must except the Latin version, in most manuscripts of which the text is found but not in them all. It is wanting in all the manuscripts written before the ninth century, and in most of those which are ancient though posterior to that date. Where it has found a place, it stands on the margin, or is interlined by a different hand; or if originally belonging to the text, it differs in words and position in different manuscripts. In a word, it is omitted by several of the Latin Fathers on occasions when it would have been pertinent to their design, and they might have been expected to quote it. But on the other hand, it is cited by many of them, who seem to have entertained no doubt of its genuineness. This, however, only proves, that it was in their copies; but we should remember, that they used a translation, which might be interpolated; and they cannot be admitted as witnesses of equal authority with the Greek Fathers, who knew and quoted from the original.

For the reasons now stated, the verse is considered by most learned men to be an interpolation, and accordingly is excluded from the text in the edition of Griesbach. There are some however, who are disposed to think it genuine on the ground, not only of its being quoted, perhaps by one or two of the Greek, and by so many of the Latin Fathers, but because it appears to them that there is internal evidence in its favour. It seems necessary to complete the sense, by giving the witnesses in heaven as well as the witnesses on earth. Two arguments are founded on the grammatical construction. If we leave out the disputed passage, and read only—"There are three that bear witness on earth, the Spirit, the water, and the blood," we have *τρεις οι μαρτυρουντες* in the masculine gender, agreeing with three neuter nouns, *το πνευμα, το υδωρ, και το αιμα*, contrary to one of the common rules of syntax; while concord is preserved, if we admit after them, *ο πατηρ, ο λογος, και το αγιον πνευμα*, because the first and second are masculine, and the adjectives or participles agreeing with them must be of the same gender. It may be objected, that the same difficulty occurs, if we retain the disputed passage; for the apostle repeats *τρεις οι μαρτυρουντες*, before *το πνευμα, το υδωρ, και το αιμα*. It is replied, that if *τρεις* and *μαρτυρουντες* were first used with *ο πατηρ* and *ο λογος*, they might be used again in the next verse although the nouns in concord were neuter, without any violation of syntax, according to the figure called *attraction*, which made them agree with the nouns which preceded, instead of those which followed; whereas, when the passage is corrected by the omission of the seventh verse, *τρεις* and *μαρτυρουντες* are ungrammatical, there being no masculine nouns with which they may be construed. To take away the force of this argument, it has been said, that the nouns *πνευμα, υδωρ, and αιμα* are personified, being represented as witnesses, and consequently, that *τρεις* and *μαρτυρουντες* are properly used, as they refer not to their gender but to their import. Another argument, or rather doubt, arises from the use of the article in the end of the verse which speaks of the earthly witnesses, *και οι τρεις εις το εν εισιν*. The article, according to the laws of the Greek language, refers to a former mention of the subject, and could be easily accounted for, if the seventh verse were genuine; but if it be rejected, there is a reference in the article, but no antecedent. If *εν* in the seventh verse be excluded, we cannot understand how it appears for the first time, accompanied with the article *το*. The doubt has been proposed by Dr. Middleton, who concludes by saying:—"I am not ignorant, that in the rejection of the controverted passage, learned and good men are now, for the most part, agreed; and I contemplate with admiration and delight the gigantic exertions of intellect, which have established this acquiescence; the objection, however, which has given rise to this discussion, I could not consistently with

my plan suppress. On the whole, I am led to suspect, that though *so much* labour and critical acuteness have been bestowed on these celebrated verses more is yet to be done, before the mystery in which they are involved can be wholly developed.”* It is evident, that in the present state of the controversy respecting this text, we can make no use of it, to prove the doctrine of the Trinity.

The transaction at our Saviour’s baptism has been appealed to as a proof of the Trinity, because the three persons were then manifested; the Son who came to be baptized, the Holy Ghost who descended like a dove and lighted upon him, and the Father who spoke with an audible voice. But before this proof could be admitted, we must know who Christ was, and what was the import of the title, Son, by which he was designated, and likewise who the Spirit was, and whether the emblem signified a person or an influence. This information is gathered from other passages; and therefore the transaction itself is not a proper proof of a Trinity in the Godhead, although it may be an illustration of it.

A more satisfactory argument is founded upon the institution of baptism, and the form of administration:—“Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”† Baptism is a religious ordinance, which it would be contrary to all our ideas of religion derived from reason and Scripture, to suppose administered in any name but that of the object of worship. It is a dedication to the service of God; and according to the Unitarian hypothesis, we are dedicated at the same time to the Creator and to two of his creatures, or to a man like ourselves, and a Divine influence or operation! The initiatory rite of Christianity is evidently intended to teach us, that while there is one God, there are three persons of equal dignity and authority, who are severally concerned in the work of our salvation, and to whose glory we are bound to consecrate our bodies and our souls.

Another proof of a Trinity is furnished by the apostolical benediction. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.”‡ This is evidently a prayer, which it would be impiety and idolatry to address to any other but God. Yet three persons are distinctly addressed, and consequently are recognized as possessed of Divine perfections; as knowing our wants and hearing our requests, and able to do what we ask; as the fountain of all the blessedness implied in the terms, grace, love, and communion.

The Book of Revelation commences with these words:—“Grace be unto you, and peace, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before the throne; and from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness.”§ This also is a prayer to the Father and the Son. But who is meant by the seven Spirits? I presume that no Protestant will say that they are created spirits. There is reason to believe, that agreeably to a Hebrew idiom which uses the number seven to express what is perfect, the seven Spirits before the throne signify the Holy Spirit in the fulness and variety of his gifts and influences; and if so, all the three persons are acknowledged to be Divine, separately and conjunctly the object of worship, the source of grace and peace, of spiritual and heavenly blessings.

I shall quote only one passage more. “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.”|| The subject of discourse is the dispensation of grace, in which there are three distinct agents, obviously exercising equal authority, the Spirit, the Lord, and God or the Father.

* Middleton on the Greek article, p. 652. edit. 1808.

† 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

§ Rev. i. 4, 5.

‡ Matt. xxviii. 19

|| 1 Cor. xii. 4—6.

There is a general argument, upon which I cannot enter fully at present, lest I should anticipate what will be more properly introduced in another place. It is this, that in the New Testament, two persons besides the Father are mentioned in innumerable places, and mentioned in such terms as elevate them above the condition of creatures, and import their proper Divinity. Not only is the one called the Son, and the other the Spirit of the Father, to denote their intimate relation to him, but both receive the names of God and Lord without qualification, are invested with Divine attributes, have works ascribed to them which finite power could not have performed, and as we have seen, are conjoined with the Father as objects of religious worship and obedience. Shall we say that the sacred writers have indulged in a figurative and ornamented style; that instead of words of truth and soberness, they have given us highly coloured descriptions, and that too in treating a subject of the greatest importance, which demanded the utmost precision of sentiment and expression? They may say so who deny their inspiration, and looking upon them as common men, do not hesitate to accuse them of prejudices, mistakes, and illogical reasoning. But if we believe that they were moved by the Holy Ghost, we will also believe that they were in no danger of being misled by imagination, but rigidly adhered to the simple truth; and that if they had felt any inclination to wander into the regions of fancy, it would have been controlled. They have represented two persons besides the Father as Divine; and as, at the same time, they maintain the unity of God, the necessary inference is, that in their judgment this unity is consistent with personal distinctions. In other words, they have taught the doctrine of the Trinity.

LECTURE XXVI.

ON THE TRINITY.

Particular Statement of the Doctrine of the Trinity—The Unity of the Divine Essence—Distinctions between the Persons—Opinions respecting a Subordination of Persons considered—Nature of the Sonship—Heresies opposed to this Doctrine: Sabellianism; Arianism; Tritheism—Notice of some Objections.

I HAVE already stated the doctrine in the words of our Confession of Faith, which it is unnecessary to repeat. I shall add in this place the words of the Athanasian Creed, after observing, that it was composed long after the age of Athanasius, but goes under his name because it is understood to teach the doctrine, which he held and strenuously maintained against the heretics of his time, and particularly the Arians, who were then the predominant party. It has been ascribed to Vigilius, an African Bishop in the sixth century, or to Hilary of Arles in France in A. D. 450. "The Catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance: for there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal."—"The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise, the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord; and yet not three Lords, but one Lord. For, like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every person by himself to be God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the Catholic religion to say that there be three Gods, or three Lords."

In the first place, we assert that there is only one essence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; that they have the same *numerical*, and not merely the same *specific* essence. It may be proper to explain the difference between these two words as they are used in speaking of this subject. Numerical signifies one in number, and specific, of the same species. When we say that the essence is numerically one, we mean that the same essence belongs to all the persons in common; but were we to attribute to them the same specific essence, we should mean nothing more than what we affirm of three men, when we say that they have all a nature of the same species, or are all partakers of human nature. In the former case, we maintain that there is only one God, although there are more Divine persons than one; in the latter, we should maintain that there are three Gods. To express the unity of the essence, the word ὁμοουσιος was employed by the Council of Nice, A. D. 325, and the Son was declared to be ὁμοουσιος or consubstantial with the Father. It had been used in the same sense by some writers before the meeting of the Council. It is remarkable, however, that it had been rejected by the Council of Antioch, A. D. 263, on account of the inference which Paul of Samosata pretended to draw from it, namely, that if Christ and the Spirit were consubstantial with the Father, it followed that there were three substances, one prior and two posterior derived from it. To guard against this inference, the Council declared that the Son was not ὁμοουσιος τῷ Πατρὶ. Paul seems to have explained the term as signifying *specific*, or *of the same species*; and it is certain that this sense had sometimes been given to it. Thus Aristotle calls the stars ὁμοουσιᾱ, meaning that they were all of the same nature. But in the Creed of Nice it is expressive of unity of essence, and was adopted after considerable discussion, as proper to be opposed to the Arians, who affirmed that the essence of the Son was different and separate from that of the Father. Thus the unity of substance was established as an article of faith in the Catholic church; and the doctrine was confirmed by subsequent councils. The Council of Constantinople, A. D. 381, says in an epistle addressed to the bishops assembled in Rome:—"The faith of the Nicene fathers ought to be approved by us, and by you, and by all who do not pervert the word of truth, which is the most ancient, and is agreeable to our baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, namely, that there is one divinity, power, and essence of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, that they have equal dignity and co-eternal dominion, and that they co-exist in three perfect hypostases or persons."

In the second place, we assert that in this one essence there is a three-fold distinction, which we express by saying, that there are three persons. This word is derived from the Latin term *persona*, but the Greeks used ὑποστασις and προσωπον. The first occurs in the beginning of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the Son is called, χαρακτηρ ὑποστασεως of the Father.* In our version it is rendered *person*, but some think that it should be translated *substance*. We might ask them in what sense Christ could be the image of the Father's substance, unless his own substance were different? and then we must concur with the Arians, who objected to the term ὁμοουσιος, but were willing to admit ὁμοιουσιος, *of a similar substance*, and might plead the authority of the apostle. He who is the image of another's substance, does not certainly possess that substance, and is therefore a separate being. Necessity seems to require, that whatever may have been the original meaning of ὑποστασις, it should here be translated *person*. At the same time, it must be acknowledged, that it was understood by many of the ancients to signify *substance*. It was frequently used in the sense of οὐσιᾱ or *essence*; and the application of it to designate a distinction in the Godhead was objected to, as leading to the unscriptural conclusion of three substances, and consequently three Gods. The objection was made by

* Heb. i. 3.

some of the Greeks, and by the Latins, who translated *ὑποστάσις*, *substantia*. Still, however, the word was retained to express a distinction in the one Divine nature, and the use afterwards became general. The Synod of Alexandria, A. D. 362, decreed, "that any person was at liberty to maintain, that there was only one hypostasis in the Godhead, provided that a three-fold distinction in it was preserved, or to maintain that there were three hypostases, provided that only one substance was meant." The Greeks employed another term to denote this distinction. *Πρῶτον* properly signifies *the face*, and occurs in this sense in several passages, as *τότε δὲ πρῶτον πρὸς πρῶτον*, "but then face to face."* But it is used also both in the New Testament, and by profane writers, to signify *a person*, and hence was preferred by some to *ὑποστάσις* as less ambiguous. "When we speak of God," says Gregory Nazianzen, "we are surrounded with a light which is one and three-fold; three-fold in respect of the properties, or the *ὑποστάσις*, if any one chooses to use this term, or the *πρῶτα*, for we do not contend about the names if they agree in meaning; but one in respect of the essence or divinity."

In the common acceptation of *person*, it denotes a separate and independent being, whose existence and actions have no necessary connexion with the existence and actions of any other being. It has been defined to be a thinking substance which can act by itself, or an intelligent agent who is neither a part of, nor sustained by another. We must be cautious in transferring to the Deity, definitions which originate in the state and circumstances of created beings. The cases are totally dissimilar. Three human persons have the same specific nature, but three Divine persons have the same numerical nature. Antitrinitarians affirm, that by holding three Divine persons we necessarily make three Gods, because they most unfairly maintain, in the face of our solemn protestations, that we affix the same idea to the word *person*, which it bears when used in reference to men. But we deny that it has this meaning. We do not teach, that there are three distinct essences mysteriously conjoined; that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit possess, each of them separately from the others, a Divine nature, and Divine perfections. What we believe is this, that there is a distinction in the Godhead, to which there is nothing similar in creatures, who are one in every sense of the term; and we employ the word *person*, to express that distinction. It may be objectionable, because being applied to other beings, it is apt to suggest an idea which is inconsistent with the unity of God; but this is the unavoidable consequence of the imperfection of human language; and we endeavour to guard against the abuse by declaring that, in this application, it must be qualified so as to exclude a separate existence. We must cease to speak of God, if we wait till we find terms and phrases adequate to the subject. We are obliged to take common words, and if they are not exactly suitable to the subject, we are surely at liberty to define them, to fix the sense in which we intend to make use of them, to enlarge or restrict it as the case shall require. Now when we say that there are three persons in the Godhead, the word *person*, signifies a distinction which we do not pretend to explain, but which does not intrench upon the unity of essence. I shall quote a few sentences from a recent work on the Trinity and the Divinity of Christ, by Professor Stuart of Andover in America. "What, you will doubtless ask, is that distinction in the Godhead, which the word *person* is meant to designate? I answer without hesitation, that I do not know. The fact that a distinction exists, is what we aver: the definition of that distinction is what I shall by no means attempt. By what shall I, or can I, define it? What simile drawn from created objects, which are necessarily derived and dependent, can illustrate the mode of existence in that Being, who is underrived, independent, unchangeable, infinite, eternal? I confess myself unable

* 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

to advance a single step here in explaining what the distinction is. *I receive the fact that it exists, simply because I believe that the Scriptures reveal the FACT.* And if the Scriptures do reveal the fact, that there are three *persons* in the Godhead; that there is a distinction which affords ground for the appellations of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; which lays the foundation for the application of the personal pronouns *I, thou, he*; which renders it proper to speak of *sending and being sent*; of Christ *being with God, being in his bosom*, and other things of the like nature; and yet, that the Divine nature belongs to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; then it is, like every other fact revealed, to be received simply on the credit of Divine revelation.”*

Some have attempted to give us an idea of this distinction, but the success of the experiment is extremely questionable. Dr. Chauncey, a celebrated divine of the last century, proposes this question, “How may this great mystery be a little illustrated to our understandings, so as to have a glimpse of a little part of it?” and gives the following answer:—“The first Being living a most perfect life of fruition in communion, and being but one infinitely pure act, doth most transcendently comprehend and conceive himself, beholding his own most glorious image by his infinite understanding, reflecting on himself as the chiefest good, which he enjoys in the highest mutual love and delight.” This, I confess, is not very intelligible; but he goes on:—“God reflecting upon and conceiving himself, is God in the person of the Father; God conceived as his own most glorious image, is God in the person of the Son; God enjoying himself as his own chiefest good in relation of Father and Son, with ineffable love and delight, is the third person, the Holy Ghost.” It is surprising that this worthy man did not perceive that this is a metaphysical Trinity, for the Son is an idea, and the Spirit is joy or love. There is no other distinction here than what exists between the mind and its thoughts and emotions. There is nothing which corresponds to personality. I presume that no man will be made wiser by this pretended explanation, which tends rather to confound, and to make us think, that if this is really the Trinity of the Scriptures, it amounts to nothing, and God is still one in every sense of the term. Such is the fate of attempts to go beyond our limit, to intrude into things which we have not seen. We are either utterly lost, and amused with words in the room of ideas, or we are involved in obscurity and heresy. Dr. Chauncey is not the only person who has been led away by this strange speculation. It is as ancient as the days of the Fathers, and has been adopted by persons of high name in modern times. Dr. Horsley, who in learning and talent had few equals, has pursued it, as we see from the manner in which he states the sentiments of Athenagoras:—“The Logos hath existed from eternity in union with the Father; ‘because God, being eternally rational, ever had the Logos in himself.’ The sense is, that the personal subsistence of a Divine Logos is implied in the very idea of a God. And the argument rests on a principle which was common to all the Platonic fathers, and *seems to be founded in Scripture*, that the existence of the Son flows necessarily from the Divine Intellect exerted on itself, from the Father’s contemplation of his own perfections. But as the Father ever was, his perfections have ever been, and his intellect hath been ever active. But perfections which have ever been, the ever active Intellect must ever have contemplated; and the contemplation which hath ever been, must ever have been accompanied with its just effect, the personal existence of the Son.”† This fanciful theory, for it deserves no better name, has found patrons and advocates among Protestants and Papists. and among the latter has received the sanction of the Church.‡

* Stuart on the Trinity and Divinity of Christ, in answer to Channing, letter iii.

† Horsley’s Tracts in controversy with Dr. Priestley, p. 61. Edit. 1812.

‡ Ibid: Disquisition fourth.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are persons, and are distinguished from each other by their personal properties. Divine perfections are common to them all, eternity, immutability, power, wisdom, and goodness; but a personal property is something peculiar to each, something which may be affirmed of one, but cannot be affirmed of the other two. The appellations Father and Son, imply a relation between the persons. That a relation is also implied in the designation of the third person is not so certain, unless we suppose, that as the word *πνευμα* signifies also *air in motion* or *breath*, it refers to his procession, from the Father according to the Greeks, or from the Father and the Son according to the Latins. This, however, is a faint and doubtful analogy. By those relations the subsistences in the Godhead are distinguished from each other: but in all other respects there is the most perfect similarity. Paternity is the personal property of the first person, filiation of the second, and procession, or as the Schoolmen speak, spiration, of the third. The first person begat the second, the second was begotten of the first, and the third proceeded from both. "The Father," says the Athanasian Creed, "is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding." These properties distinguish the persons of the Trinity, they characterize them individually, so that we can speak of one without speaking, at the same time, of another; but the properties themselves we do not understand. If it should be said, that, in this case, we use words without meaning, the same objection may be made to us when we speak of the self-existence and the immensity of God. We can affix no positive ideas to these terms, but they deny that God had a beginning, and that he is confined to a particular place. The same purpose is served by those personal properties; they enable us to affirm that the Father is not the Son, and that the Holy Spirit is a different person from both.

The persons of the Trinity are farther distinguished by their operations. The Divine nature, indeed, is the common principle of operation in the external works of creation and providence; but revelation gives us some notices of the distinct agency of the persons. Thus, in the beginning the Spirit moved, or exerted his influence, upon the dark and undigested mass which had been produced out of nothing; and from other passages we learn that it was the Son whose omnipotent fiat all things obeyed, for by him the Father made the worlds. The Father is not immediately concerned in any external operation, but exerts his energies by the Son and the Spirit. To this subject, we may refer the words of our Lord concerning the cure which he had wrought on the Sabbath. He justified himself against the charge of having profaned that day, by the plea that all his works were performed in concurrence with his Father: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise."* In redemption, the persons are clearly distinguished by offices and works, which are respectively assigned to them. It is said, that the Father sent the Son, but never that the Son sent the Father; that the Son sent the Spirit, but not that the Spirit sent the Son. We find, indeed, the Messiah saying in one of the prophets, "The Lord God and his Spirit have sent me:"† but the proper translation is, "The Lord God hath sent me and his Spirit." It was the Word who was made flesh, the Son who assumed our nature; this act of ineffable condescension is never attributed to the Father or to the Spirit. On the other hand, it was the Father whose voice was heard at his baptism, and on the Mount of Transfiguration, proclaiming him to be his beloved Son; and

* John v. 17, 19.

† Isaiah xlviii. 16.

it was the Spirit who descended in a visible form, and rested upon him. We do not understand how, the nature being one, acts are performed by one person which cannot be ascribed to another: but the fact is stated in the Scriptures, and it is the office of faith to receive its testimony without disputing.

The Father is called the first person, the Son the second, and the Holy Ghost the third. This is the order of their subsistence, and it is pointed out by their internal relations; but beware of thinking that it implies the priority of one to another, in time or in dignity. "In this Trinity," I again quote the words of the Athanasian Creed, "in this Trinity, none is afore or after other, none is greater or less than another; but the whole three persons are co-eternal together, and co-equal. So that in all things the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped."

Some Trinitarians are of opinion, that three co-ordinate persons would be three Gods, and therefore maintain the subordination of the Son and the Spirit. This subject is discussed at considerable length by Bishop Bull, in his learned work, entitled *Defensio Fidei Nicenæ*, where he lays down, and supports by the authority of the Fathers, the three following propositions: "First, the Catholic doctors, who lived before and after, have approved the doctrine of the Council of Nice, that the Son is *θεος εκ θεου*, God of God; for they have all taught with one mouth that the Divine nature and perfections belong to the Father and the Son, not collaterally or co-ordinately, but subordinately; that is, that the Son has the same Divine nature with the Father, but communicated by the Father; so that the Father alone has the Divine nature from himself, or from no other; but the Son from the Father, and that therefore the Father is the fountain, origin, and principle of the Divinity which is in the Son."* He goes on to shew that the ancient doctors called the Father *αρχη*, the *principle* of the Son; meaning by *αρχη*, that from which any thing takes its origin, whether in time or in eternity; that they called him *αιτιος* or *αιτια*, the *cause* of the Son; *πηγη*, or *fountain*, and *auctor*, *author*, a word used by the Latins. "Secondly, the Catholic doctors determined with unanimous consent, that the Father was greater than the Son in respect of his Divinity, not in nature or in any essential perfection which is in the Father and not in the Son; but solely by authority; that is, by origin, since the Son is from the Father, not the Father from the Son."† "Thirdly, the ancient doctors judged, that the doctrine concerning the subordination of the Son to the Father as his origin and principle, was very useful, and evidently necessary to be known, for this reason, that chiefly in this way the divinity of the Son is so asserted, that the unity of God and the divine monarchy are preserved entire; for, although the name and nature of God are common to two, the Father and the Son, yet, since the one is the principle of the other, from whom he is propagated, and that by an interior not an external production, it may be justly said that there is only one God. The ancients believed that the same reason was applicable to the divinity of the Holy Spirit."‡ But although these views are recommended by the authority of the Fathers, and have been very generally adopted by modern divines, I cannot bring myself to agree with them. It is dangerous to speak of a subordination among the persons of the Trinity, and it is almost impossible to avoid the idea of inferiority in the subordinate persons: It seems also absurd, while we admit at the same time, that the persons equally possess the divine nature and perfections. What puzzles me most of all, is to perceive how subordination is necessary to preserve the unity of God; because it should seem to me, that nothing was so calculated to make us doubt the unity as subordination of any kind, and that it is more easily conceived, if all the persons are equal in every respect. The unity is maintained, by excluding the idea of division or separation, and assigning the same numerical essence to

* *Defensio Fidei Nicenæ*, sect. iv. cap. 1.

† *Ibid.* cap. 2.

‡ *Ibid.* cap. 4.

all the persons. It occurs to me, that, after all this learned talk about communication, origin, principle, fountain, and cause, nothing more is meant than what we all acknowledge, that the nature of the Son is the very same with the nature of the Father, which certainly is necessary to preserve the unity; but such terms are unhappily employed to express it. Bishop Horsley, who was of the same opinion with Bishop Bull and the Fathers, might well call the subordination of the Son, mysterious; for a subordination among equal persons, a subordination of one who is truly God, is indeed a mystery, a thing perfectly unintelligible.

What has led so many to maintain the subordination of the Son, is the notion, that the relation, which this name implies, is founded on the communication of the divine essence to him. Hence they object to the application of the term *αυτοθεος* to the Son, if it mean any thing more than that he is truly God; and they affirm that it is contrary to truth, as well as to the usage of the church, to say that he *αυτοθεος*, if the word import that he is God of himself, because he derived his divinity from the Father. This is the doctrine of the Nicene Creed: Πιστευομεν εις ένα κυριον Ιησουν Χριστον τον υιον του θεου γεννηθεντα εκ του πατρος μονογενη, τουτεστιν εκ της ουσιας του πατρος. Θεον εκ θεου, φως εκ φωτος, θεου αληθινον εκ θεου αληθινου.

This will be the proper place to introduce some observations on the Sonship of Christ. In modern times, different reasons have been assigned for this appellation, partly by the opponents of his Divinity—with whom we have at present no immediate concern—and partly by some Trinitarians, who think that it is not founded on a natural, but an official, relation to the first person in the Godhead. The motive, I apprehend, by which they have been led to deny his eternal generation, is the difficulty of conceiving any thing, in the Divine nature, analogous to the process which the term denotes in its application to creatures. But the difficulty is created by themselves, when they take it for granted, from the use of the term, begotten, that it was designed to suggest a resemblance between Divine and human generation. Ought not men to have paused before they drew this inference? Might it not have occurred to them that, as the subjects were so different, the term must have a different meaning? Would it not have been wise, instead of proceeding to explain the one by the other, to have acknowledged that the relation between the Father and the Son was altogether above our comprehension; that the words, *Son* and *begotten* were intended solely to express a distinction of persons and a mutual relation and that the only conclusion which we could safely draw from them is, that the second person of the Trinity has the same nature with the first, is his perfect image, and the object of his infinite love? Were human ideas discarded; were we content to believe, without pushing our inquiries into the region of mystery, the eternal generation of the Son would be admitted, provided that sufficient evidence of it were found in the Scriptures.

When God calls our Saviour his own Son, *ὁ ἑαυτοῦ υἱός, ὁ ἰδιος υἱός*, one should think, that sound criticism would require us to believe, that he is his Son as truly as one man is the son of another, although we know not the manner of the relation; his Son literally and not metaphorically, unless it can be shewn that such filiation is impossible, or that the Scriptures have explained it in a different sense. His Sonship, indeed, seems to be founded on his miraculous conception in these words of the angel to the virgin:—"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."* But the common answer, that the "holy thing" or his human nature became the Son of God by its union to his Divine Person, is quite satisfactory, especially if other passages place his Sonship upon a different foundation. I do not think, that his miraculous conception would justify the

* Luke i. 35.

epithet, only-begotten ; because the creation of Adam, although in some respect different, was equally *miraculous*, if this term may be used in reference to an event which took place before the laws of nature began their course ; and, on account of it, he also is called the Son of God. Were a man, who had never heard of the controversy relative to the origin of his Sonship, to read such passages as these ; “ God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son,” “ When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son,” he would be surprised, I presume, that it had ever been the subject of dispute. He would say—it is plain that the person who was sent, possessed this character prior to his mission ; and would be astonished to be informed by some modern divine, that this was a mistake, for that he was made the Son of God by being sent. It would never enter into any man’s mind, when he was told that a king had sent his son to negociate with his enemies, that his son meant only a favourite, or an extraordinary ambassador. If it should be said, that, in this case, the meaning of the word Son is determinate, being ascertained by common usage, I would ask, what makes it less so, when it is applied to our Saviour ? Not any thing in the phraseology of Scripture, but the impossibility under which some men labour of conceiving, how God can have a Son by an essential relation. But do not Unitarians, on the same ground, explain away the passages which teach the divinity and atonement of Christ ? And how can those Trinitarians condemn them, who make the incomprehensibility of a doctrine an objection against it ? I cannot conceive what object they have in view, who admit the Divinity, but deny the natural Sonship of our Saviour, unless it be to get rid of the strange notions about communication of essence and subordination which have prevailed so much ; and in this case, like too many disputants, in avoiding one extreme they run into another. Their opinion appears to me to be contrary to the plain and natural meaning of Scripture ; and I am disposed to maintain, with the Catholic church in all ages, that the Son was begotten by the Father before all worlds, or is the Son by necessary and eternal generation.

But, while on this point I hold the faith of the church, I cannot assent to the common opinion, that the generation of the Son consisted in the communication of the Divine essence and perfections to him ; because, although the terms Father and Son indicate a relation analogous to that among men, yet as, in the latter case, it is a relation between two material and separate beings, and in the former, is a relation in the same spiritual essence, the one can throw no light upon the other ; and to attempt to illustrate the one by the other, is equally illogical and presumptuous. We can conceive the communication of a material essence, by one material being to another, because it takes place in the generation of animals ; but the communication of a spiritual, indivisible, immutable essence is altogether inconceivable, especially when we add, that the supposed communication does not constitute a different being, but takes place in the essence communicating. I have often doubted whether those, who use this language, affix any idea to it. I suspect, that it is retained, partly in deference to the Fathers, who were not always the most accurate in their conceptions, and partly as a convenient mode of seeming to say something upon a subject which we do not understand. I must confess that, to me, it has always been unintelligible. Let us be content with the knowledge of the fact, and with the language of Scripture, which simply tells us, that the Son was begotten by the Father, but does not tell us how he was begotten. If we cannot explain how a plant grows, and an animal is formed, we can much less comprehend this mystery ; and were we as modest and diffident as reflection upon our own ignorance should make us, we would regard every attempt to render the subject clearer than the Scriptures have made it, as a new proof that vain man would be wise, though he is born like the wild ass’s colt.

To avoid the incomprehensible notion of the communication of essence, and its consequence in making the Son dependent upon the Father, as a stream is dependent upon the fountain which supplies it, some maintain, that the first person of the Trinity did not beget the second as God, but as Son; or did not beget the essence, but the person. This is another attempt to be wise above what is written. I can form no conception of their meaning; I know not what it is to beget a person, as distinct from his essence. It seems to me, that now we have passed from obscurity into the deepest shades of midnight.

The relation of the Holy Spirit to the Father, according to the Greek church, or to the Father and the Son, according to the Latin church, is called *procession*. Although the term is different from generation, we cannot give the reason of the difference, because we do not understand what is meant by either the one or the other. It is called by the Greeks *ἐκπρευσις* and *ἐκπομύσις*. Those who think that generation implies the communication of essence, must attach a similar idea to procession. We are content to use the word without pretending to explain it. I shall have occasion to say something more on this subject, when I come to consider the Divinity of the Holy Ghost.

We cannot be surprised that the doctrine of the Trinity, which appears to be inconsistent with the unity of God, and is so mysterious, should have met with opposition, and that various opinions should have been broached with a view to remove the difficulties with which it is attended, and to reconcile it to the dictates of human reason, which cannot understand how three can be one. In the second century, Praxeas taught, that there was no real distinction between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and that the Father, sole Creator of all things, united to himself the human nature of Christ. His followers were called Monarchians, because they denied that there were more persons than one in the Godhead, and Patripassians, because, according to them, it was the Father who suffered on the cross. The same doctrine was taught, about the beginning of the third century, by Noetus; and with some variations, several years after, by Sabellius, an African bishop or presbyter, from whom this heresy has derived the name of Sabellianism. He maintained that God was one person only, and that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, were different aspects or manifestations of the same Being. There was no real Trinity, but God was *τρισυνθετός*, or had three names. He appeared as the Father at one time, as the Son at another, and as the Holy Ghost at another, as different occasions required. He was the Father as Creator, the Son as Redeemer, and the Holy Ghost as Sanctifier. Praxeas and Noetus affirmed that the Father united himself to the man Jesus Christ; but Sabellius held that an energy or a portion of the Divine nature was communicated to him, and that the Holy Ghost also was a portion of the Father.

The next heresy opposed to the doctrine of the Trinity, is that of Arius and his followers, who acknowledged three distinct persons, but not three equal persons subsisting in one undivided essence. They rejected the word *ὁμοουσιος*, *consubstantial*, and would go no farther than to admit that the Son was *ὁμοιουσιος*, of a like nature to the Father. While they were not sparing in giving him high sounding titles to avoid public odium, and to impose upon the simple, they maintained that he was a creature, who owed his existence to the will and power of the Father; and they held the same sentiments respecting the Holy Spirit. Arius himself asserted, as Alexander his Bishop informs us, “that the Father was not always Father, but there was a time when he did not sustain this character; that the Logos did not always exist, but was made out of nothing; and that therefore there was a time when he was not,” *ἕως καὶ νῦν ποτε, ὅτε οὐκ ἦν*. This system has undergone several modifications, but the most celebrated is that of Dr. Clarke in his book on the Trinity. According to him, the Father alone is self-existent and independent, and to him the

Scriptures refer when they speak of the one God, or God by way of eminence. The Son has existed with him from the beginning, but is not self-existent because he derived his being and perfections from the Father. He derived them, too, not necessarily, but by an act of the will and power of the Father. The same account is given of the existence of the Holy Spirit. It is evident, that although he carefully avoids saying that the Son was made out of nothing, it follows from his system that he might not have existed; for, if he was begotten by the will of the Father, and yet not necessarily, the Father might not have willed his existence, and might have remained for ever alone. The difference between Dr. Clarke, and those Trinitarians who explain generation by a communication of essence, is this, that they believe this generation or communication to have been necessary, and consequently, although agreeable to the will of the Father, yet not dependent upon it. Although Dr. Clarke has not explicitly stated, whether or not he considered the essence of the Son and the Spirit to be numerically the same with that of the Father, the train of his reasonings leads us to conclude, that he believed it to be different.

The last heresy opposed to this doctrine is Tritheism, or the doctrine of three Gods. Mention is made of it in the sixth century. It is ascribed to a person called John Ascunage, a Syrian philosopher; and it was supported by John Philoponus, a philosopher and grammarian of Alexandria. They imagined in the Deity, three natures or substances, equal in all respects, and therefore held in reality that there were three Gods. I find this doctrine revived, or at least proposed as a theory well worthy of attention, in a *Calm and Sober Inquiry concerning the possibility of a Trinity in the Godhead*, published anonymously in the end of the seventeenth century.* The substance of it is, that the three persons in the Godhead are three distinct uncreated Spirits mysteriously conjoined so as to be one. "There is a spiritual created Being," says the author, "as a human soul confessed to be in hypostatical union with the uncreated Spiritual Being of God—in the person of the Son. Why shall it be thought less possible, that three uncreated Spiritual Beings may be in so near an union with each other as to be one God, as that a created spirit (and body too) should be in so near union with one of the persons in the Godhead only, as therewith to be one person? Will it not hereby be much more easily apprehensible, how one of the persons (as the common way of speaking is) should be incarnate, and not the other two? Will not the notion of person itself be much more unexceptionable, when it shall be supposed to have its own individual nature? And why is a natural, eternal union of uncreated natures (with continuing distinction, or without confusion) sufficient unto the unity of the Godhead, less supposable than a temporal contracted union with a created nature (without confusion too) that shall be sufficient to the unity of a person? Will it be any thing more contrary to such simplicity of the Divine nature as is necessarily to be ascribed thereto? or will it be Tritheism, and inconsistent with the acknowledged inviolable unity of the Godhead? It is unnecessary to examine this passage; but it must be obvious to you all, that the charge of Tritheism, to which it is liable, is not repelled by asserting that the union is so close as to constitute the three natures, one; for three Divine natures, however intimately conjoined in counsel and operation, retain their individuality, and consequently are three Gods.

It would be tedious to enter into a minute detail of the objections to the doctrine of the Trinity, and to give answers to them. I shall content myself with adverting to two or three of a general nature.

First, the great argument of the opponents of this doctrine is, that it is inconsistent with the unity of God, which is so clearly taught in the Scrip-

* The Author was the celebrated non-conformist, John Howe. See the edition of his whole Works by Hunt, 1822, vol. iv.

tures But, while passages are collected which declare that God is one, it should not be forgotten that there are other passages which point out a plurality of persons, and in particular, give the name of God to the Son, and the Holy Spirit, without qualifying its meaning, and ascribe to them Divine perfections, and Divine works. Hence we are reduced to this alternative, either that the Scriptures contradict themselves, and therefore are not inspired, or that there is some mode of reconciling their different statements, that God is one, and yet is more than one. The only mode of reconciling them is the doctrine which has been illustrated; the doctrine of one Divine essence with personal distinctions. Deny it, and the Bible is one of the strangest books in the world, at perpetual variance with itself, establishing one thing in one page, and another thing in another, affirming and retracting with the same breath. Admit the doctrine in question, and the appearance of discordance vanishes; the Bible is a consistent, but mysterious, revelation of the incomprehensible JEHOVAH. If you ask what is the nexus, the connecting link of the two doctrines in question? I confess my utter inability to point it out, any farther than by saying that the essence is one; but I add, that my ignorance, or the ignorance of any other man, is not a proof that to harmonize them is impossible, till it is proved that his understanding, or mine, is the measure of truth, or that a thing cannot be unless we perceive how it is.

This leads me to a second objection against the doctrine of the Trinity, that it is contrary to reason; for what can be more repugnant to its clearest dictates, than to affirm that the same Being is one and three? This objection proceeds, in some cases, from a designed, and in others, from an unintentional, misrepresentation of the doctrine. If we should assert that God is one and three in the same respect; that he has one nature and three natures, or one person and three persons, it would be impossible to utter a more palpable contradiction. But when we say that God is one in respect of his essence, but three in respect of some unknown distinction in his essence, I do not see that we can be justly charged with maintaining a contradictory proposition. There is but one God, because there is but one Divine essence; but there may be three distinctions in his essence of which we can form no conception, and to which there is nothing analogous in our nature, or in that of any other creature. Some men do not hesitate to pronounce that this is impossible; but I appeal to you—Who have reason on their side, those who determine what is, or is not, in God by their own ideas, or those who humbly think that the perfect knowledge of an infinite Being is too high for them? As the eye has its prescribed range, and although adequate to the purposes of life, cannot discern objects in the moon and stars; so reason is able to discover the existence of God, but was not intended to scrutinize the mysteries of his nature. To maintain that a doctrine is contrary to reason, because it is above it, is to forget its limited capacity; it is to constitute it the standard of all truths, while it ought to judge of those alone to which its power is commensurate. It is to place God and man upon a level. What man can comprehend, God may possess, but nothing more; no property, no act, no counsel, must be ascribed to him, which man had not previously conceived, or cannot now understand. We comprehend nothing, not the generation of an animal, the growth of a plant, the cohesion of a pebble; and yet there are disputers who cavil at the Trinity, and other dogmas of revelation, because they are not shaped according to the rule and square of reason.

In the last place, it is objected that the doctrine of the Trinity is a speculative point, which has no influence upon practical religion, and is, therefore, unworthy of attention. This senseless cant we often hear in reference to several of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, which the ill-affected endeavour to bring into discredit, by representing them as useless. But, from those

who so freely indulge in this style, we have a right to demand proof instead of confident assertions. Can they shew that the doctrine of the Trinity is a mere speculation? It serves one good purpose by reminding us of the weakness of our faculties, and thus promoting a spirit of humility. Here is a fact remote from human apprehension, at which reason is confounded, and yet it is true. It increases our reverence for God, as a Being infinitely exalted above our conceptions, to whom none can be compared in heaven or in earth, and the mode of whose existence is enveloped in impenetrable darkness. To these considerations it must be added, that, without the knowledge of this doctrine, it is impossible to understand the grandest of the works of God, Redemption, in which the three persons act distinct and conspicuous parts. We are called to contemplate the love of the Father, the condescension of the Son, and the gracious operations of the Spirit. Redemption is not the work of a solitary agent, but of three, all concurring in the salvation of our perishing race. Hence we owe gratitude to each of the persons of the Godhead distinctly, and are bound to give, to each, the glory to which he is entitled. We are baptized in their name, and consecrated to their service; and our prayers are addressed, not to God absolutely considered, but to the Father, through the Son, and by the assistance of the Holy Ghost. It appears, therefore, that the Christian system of duty is founded upon this doctrine, and that without the belief of it there can be no acceptable religion. So far is it from being useless, that it is the very foundation of practical piety. In a word, this doctrine furnishes an argument for union among the disciples of Christ. Reflecting that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are one in essence, one in love, one in counsel, one in working, how strongly they are incited to cultivate peace, and friendship, and brotherly communion! And then the prayer of their great Master will be answered, "that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."*

LECTURE XXX.

ON THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

introductory Remarks—Observations on the general Language of Scripture respecting Christ—
Evidence of his Pre-existence—His Divinity inferred from the ascription to him of the title,
God; Instances.

THE result of our observations on the doctrine of the Trinity, is that there are three persons in the Divine essence, or that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are the same in substance, and equal in power and glory. The inference is so obvious as not to require to be pointed out to any person of common capacity, that each of them is truly and properly God; for it is evident from the oneness of their nature, that, in this respect, there can be no difference. If we have succeeded in the proof that a Trinity is revealed in the Scriptures, we might proceed without delay to other subjects; fully assured that he who redeemed us with his blood, and he who is the Author of our holiness and consolation, are not to be ranked among creatures, but are entitled to the same religious honour which, by the consent of all, is due to the Father. But there are various considerations which point out the propriety of suspending our

* John xvii. 21.

progress, and engaging in a more minute inquiry into the divinity of the Son and the Spirit. The deity of our Saviour will be the subject of this and some other lectures; and I request your attention to the following preliminary remarks.

First, The divinity of Christ is a fundamental article of our religion. No question which may come under our notice is of greater importance and interest than this, whether the founder of Christianity is God or man, the Creator or a creature? It does not relate to a subordinate circumstance, but to the very essence of the religion, and the whole system is affected in whatsoever way it is decided. Those who believe Jesus Christ to be God, and those who maintain that he is only a human being, profess two religions totally different, as it were easy to show by a detail of particulars; they disagree in every thing, even in those articles which both verbally acknowledge, because they do not entertain the same views of them, and they hold them upon different grounds. The adversaries of his divinity are more allied to Jews and Mahometans, than to those who are usually denominated Christians; and to give them this name, is a misapplication of it equally gross as it would be to call him a Newtonian, who denied gravitation, or him a Cartesian, who laughed at the doctrine of vortices. Dr. Priestley was highly offended at David Levi, the Jew, for telling him, that when he looked into the New Testament, he clearly saw that Jesus of Nazareth was represented there as God, and that, for this reason, he could not consider the Doctor as a Christian. But Levi was right, and the reply of Priestley, that every man is a Christian who acknowledges Jesus to be the Messiah, was feeble and ineffectual; for the Evangelists and Apostles teach that he was not only the Messiah, but the Son of the Living God.

Secondly, The divinity of Christ is a doctrine of great practical influence. Nothing is more common with some men, than to represent certain doctrines as speculative points, as subjects merely of curious and unprofitable inquiry, with a view to lessen our respect for them, and to prepare the way for the easy reception of the opposite errors. We might say to them, If they are only speculations, why are you so eager to refute them? Why do you not allow us quietly to hold our harmless belief? Their zeal betrays them, and shews that they regard these points as much more important than they find it expedient to confess. But, besides the irreverence and impiety of such language, when used in reference to any thing which is contained in revelation, it is obviously false, although it may produce the intended effect upon such persons as suffer themselves to be imposed upon by confident assertion and vague declamation. No man can call the divinity of Christ a speculative point, who does not use words at random, without attending to their meaning, or whose understanding is raised but a few degrees above that of a child. If Jesus Christ was only a man, it may be our duty to remember his works with admiration, and his benevolent labours for the good of mankind with gratitude; but how feeble are these emotions, in comparison of the high and holy affections which will be excited by the belief of his Godhead! On the supposition that he is God, he is entitled to our supreme regard, to love not inferior in strength to that of which the Father is the object: we ought to repose unreserved and unshaken confidence upon him, committing to his care, for time and eternity, our bodies and our souls; we owe a respect to him which no prophet could claim, and are bound to receive his doctrines upon his own testimony, and to obey his commands solely in consideration of his authority. In a word, upon the question of his divinity it depends, whether we shall honour him with religious worship, or merely with civil respect; for nothing higher is due to the person of a created being, with whatever office he is invested, and with whatever qualifications he is furnished. To a Saviour who is God, we may offer up prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings; but if he is only a man, the

worship which he has received from his followers in every age since the days of the apostles is idolatry, and thousands of the best and holiest men whom the world ever saw, have gone down into the grave under the guilt of this damnable sin.

Lastly, the divinity of our Saviour is a controverted point; although admitted by the great body of Christians, it has been impugned by various individuals and sects. It would be tedious to enumerate the opinions respecting the person of Christ, which were propagated in the early ages of the Church. Truth is one, but error is infinite; for, having no fixed standard to regulate its conclusions, it runs into as many wild and fantastic forms as the imaginations and wayward reasonings of men of corrupt minds may devise. The heretics of former times, disputed among themselves concerning the rank and dignity which ought to be assigned to Jesus Christ; but in one thing they all agreed, that he was inferior to the Father, and could be called God only in a subordinate sense. His divinity is still denied by the Jews, who have renounced the faith of their ancestors, and maintain, that as there is one God, so there is but one person in the Godhead. It is denied by Mahometans, who acknowledge him to be a prophet, but nothing more, inferring from the doctrine of the Unity, which they lay down as the fundamental article of their religion, that there is no distinction in the Divine Essence, and that God reigns without an equal or a Son. It is denied by those among ourselves who were formerly called Socinians, from Socinus the founder of their sect, one of the boldest blasphemers that ever appeared, but who now assume the name of Unitarians, to express the nature of their doctrine. It signifies believers in one God, and in this sense they mean it to be understood; but it is unjust and arrogant to appropriate this name to themselves, since they well know that, on this head, our creed is equally precise. Their design is to exhibit Trinitarians as holding a plurality of Gods, although the latter disavow the charge; and to persuade the world, that, of all Christians, they alone adhere to the first principle of natural and revealed religion. But we are all Unitarians, and assent to the truth solemnly inculcated upon the peculiar people, "Hear, O Israel, **JEHOVAH** thy God is one **JEHOVAH**." The only condition on which we will agree to call the followers of Socinus exclusively Unitarians is, that the name shall be understood by all parties, to denote believers in only one person in the Godhead. The doctrine of those who lay claim to it is, that Jesus Christ was a mere man, the Son of Joseph and Mary, who was commissioned by God to teach morality, and to reveal clearly a future state, and that, having sealed his testimony with his blood, he rose from the grave to give us the hope of immortality. This is the sum of their Christianity; and as it differs little from what is called Natural Religion, it seems to be a matter of no importance whether a man be a Unitarian or an infidel. There is reason to suspect that this pernicious doctrine has spread beyond the boundaries of the sect by which it is openly avowed; that it has found its way into churches professedly orthodox, and is taught by unprincipled men, who have solemnly pledged themselves to preach a different faith. To these adversaries of our Saviour's Divinity I might add Arians, who allow that he is more than a man, but maintain, that he is a creature, notwithstanding the magnificent titles with which they honour him, and the high functions which they represent him as performing. This sect was once predominant, but it gradually declined, and is now almost extinct. It has still adherents, but they are few in number; the greater part of those who had rejected the proper Deity of Christ, having sunk into the lowest depths of Socinianism.

In opposition to these heresies, we affirm that our Saviour is a Divine Person in the strict sense of the term; that he is God by nature, and not merely by title or office; that in the words of Paul, he is "God over all, blessed for

ever." This proposition I shall endeavour to establish. As the Divinity of Christ is a doctrine of pure revelation, unassisted reason can give us no aid, and we must have recourse to the Scriptures for the only evidence by which it can be proved.

Before entering upon the direct proof of this most important truth, I would call your attention to the general language of the Scriptures concerning our Saviour, to which I formerly alluded in speaking of the Trinity. We have heard a Jew affirming, that the impression made upon himself and his brethren by reading the New Testament was, that Jesus is there represented, as not only greater than a man, but as a Divine Person; and there is no doubt that every individual, who was not pre-occupied with the contrary idea, and thus prepared to explain away the strongest expressions, would rise from the perusal of it with the same conviction. This is virtually confessed by Unitarians, when they are at so much pains to soften terms and phrases, and to put a meaning upon them the most remote imaginable from the obvious import of the words; for their elaborate criticism would be altogether unnecessary, if the sacred writings had not the appearance of teaching the doctrine, which they are so anxious to disprove. It is admitted that the Scriptures often describe our Redeemer as a man; and if this were all, there would be no controversy among christians respecting his person; but it is certain that they give names and titles, and ascribe attributes and operations to him, which are applied to the Supreme Being both in the Old and in the New Testament. Now we demand from our opponents a satisfactory account of this strange phenomenon. If the Evangelists and Apostles knew that he was a man like themselves, why have they indulged in descriptions of his character, calculated to create a very different idea? It is vain to tell us of oriental idioms, and rhetorical figures; because the question recurs, Why did they make use of such figures and idioms in composing books, which were designed to instruct the nations of the west as well as of the east? They could not but be sensible, that such language was fitted to mislead; why did they not avoid it? Did they use words at random? or were they careless of the effect? Not to say that such a supposition sets aside their inspiration, it would farther prove them to have been totally incompetent for the task, which they undertook, of giving to the world the true history of Christ and his religion. One professed object of their writings and their preaching was to reclaim mankind from idolatry; and was it the proper method of gaining this end, to talk of their Master in such a hyperbolical style, as was calculated to make men believe that he is a God, and has actually led thousands and millions into this error; so that, if they have succeeded in abolishing one species of idolatry, by their unguarded manner of expressing themselves they have established another, and the Son of Mary has been, ever since, associated with the Creator of the Universe as the object of religious worship? Unitarians have asserted, that the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ was borrowed from the Platonic philosophy by some of the early Fathers, and introduced under their authority into the church. But, instead of resorting to this foreign source, we can account for its adoption in a more simple and natural way. The Fathers themselves tell us that they derived it from the Scriptures, and appeal to them for the proof of it. No person can be at a loss to know where this doctrine, whether true or false, was found. If the immediate followers of our Saviour did not mean to teach it, they have been most unfortunate; for the great body of Christians for eighteen centuries have been fully persuaded that they have taught it; and we ask, what other method they could have taken, what other terms they could have chosen, if it had been really their design to persuade us of his Deity?

According to Unitarians, Jesus Christ was only a prophet. It is admitted that he was superior to Moses; but Moses, it is acknowledged, was

next to him, no individual in the long succession of prophets being worthy to be compared with the man by whose ministry the law was given to the Israelites : and by that people he was held in the highest veneration. Yet, in reference to him no such language is used as is frequently applied to our Lord. He is never called the " Son of God," and " God over all ;" he is never said to have " created the world," and to " uphold all things by the word of his power." Greatly as the Jews revered him, and zealous as they were for his honour they would have accounted it blasphemy to speak of him in this manner. They never thought of deifying and worshipping him : they regarded him as the greatest of men, but still as merely a man. The reason is obvious. There is not a single sentence in his own writings, or in the other books of the Old Testament, which would lead them to entertain a more exalted idea of him. Why does the New Testament speak so differently ? Why does it elevate Jesus, not only above the prophets, to whom it is granted that he was superior, but above angels and all created beings ? Why does the style change, when he is the subject ? Is it possible to account for the new train of expressions, if he was only a man like Moses, although possessed of higher qualifications ? Will this difference, which does not affect his person or nature, justify the inspired writers in portraying him with the prerogatives and attributes of Godhead ? It is impossible that any person of judgment and candour can think so. We are unavoidably led to suspect that there is some more substantial reason. In short, we are compelled to come to this conclusion, either that the Evangelists and Apostles were fools who knew not what they were saying, or that they were verily persuaded that their Master, although a partaker of the same flesh and blood with themselves, possessed a superior nature, to which all perfection belonged. They described him as God, because they believed him to be God ; and in this belief they could not be mistaken, because it was founded upon a long and intimate acquaintance with him, and upon information which they had received from himself.

These general observations upon the language of the New Testament, furnish at least, a strong presumption in favour of the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ. The argument, indeed, is conclusive, if the authority of the Sacred writers be admitted in matters of this kind, and it appear that they give such an account of our Saviour, as can be true only on the hypothesis that he is God as well as man. Let us proceed to consider, more particularly, what is their testimony concerning him.

Unitarians maintain, that our Saviour began to be when he was born or was conceived in the womb of his mother, like another man, who prior to that period existed only in the elements of his being. But on looking into the Scriptures, we meet with many passages which obviously imply his pre-existence. I appeal to those texts which represent him as " having come down from heaven," " having come from above," " having come forth from the Father, and come into the world." * " To come into the world," simply denotes being born, and the phrase is used in reference to men in general ; but " to come forth from the Father, and come into the world," is different, and implies existence with the Father prior to his birth. Having been first with the Father, he afterwards entered into the habitation or the society of men, not by a change of place, but by the assumption of their nature. We would not tolerate such language from any other person, and should think the man insane who should say, I came forth from God, and am come into the world. It would be natural to ask, How were you with God before you were born ? The phrases *coming from above*, and *coming down from heaven*, are determinate ; they obviously import, that our Lord had his residence above, or in heaven, before he manifested himself in the flesh. It is acknowledged, that

* John iii. 13, 31 ; vi. 38 ; xvi. 28.

when blessings are said to come from above, nothing more is meant than that God is their Author; and the reason of such phraseology is, that as the Scriptures always speak of a local heaven, it is natural to represent the gifts of his bounty as descending from it. But to say that a person came down from heaven, merely because he was a messenger from God, would be apt to mislead us by giving a false idea of his origin, and would not be conformable to the language of Scripture on similar occasions; for we nowhere find the expression applied to the mission of any other person. It is not said that Moses, or Elijah, or the Baptist, came down from heaven. Since, then, Christ alone is spoken of in this manner, there must be a peculiar reason for it; and what can it be but his prior existence? He has himself settled the meaning by his words to the Jews, who were offended at his calling himself, the living bread that came down from heaven. "What if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?"* As we know that he really ascended to heaven, there can be no doubt that he really descended from it.

The pre-existence of our Saviour is evidently implied in the phrase "to come in the flesh," which we find in the first epistle of John.† It is not simply expressive of his participation of human nature, but of his assumption of it. It signifies an act by which he became man, and necessarily supposes the possession of another nature by which that act was performed; as, when it is said of a man that he came in state, or came in disguise, it is intimated that he was previously a living agent capable of choice. Let the same expression be used concerning any other person, and see what would follow. Were we told that some one had come in the flesh, preaching a new religion, we should immediately ask, what does this mean? He has come in the flesh: could he have come in any other way? Was it in his power to come without flesh? Might he have appeared as an angel? Does it depend upon men themselves whether they shall be men, or beings of a different order? These questions, which would be perfectly natural in any other case, are proper in the present; and the only satisfactory answer to them is, that Jesus Christ did exist before his incarnation, and had power to take, or not to take, the nature of man. It could not have been said, that he came in the flesh, if, like all other human beings, he had been made man without his consent and without his knowledge.

The next passage to which I shall direct your attention, is in the Gospel of John. "In the beginning was the Word, ὁ λόγος, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God."‡ The word ἀρχή, here translated *the beginning*, signifies the commencement of any period or series of actions; but here, I apprehend, it denotes *eternity*, because it appears from the context to have preceded the creation. In the same sense it is used in the eighth chapter of the Proverbs, where wisdom says, "I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, ere ever the earth was;"§ according to the Septuagint, ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸ τοῦ τὴν γῆν ποιῆσαι. It is enough, however, for our present purpose, that the beginning is anterior to the appearance of our Saviour upon earth. That *he* is the λόγος, there can be no doubt with any person who reads the following verses, in which the λόγος is described as the true light to which John was sent to bear witness, and John was the forerunner of Christ. Unitarians, indeed, give us a view of the passage which would deprive us of an argument from it for the pre-existence of our Lord. According to them, "the beginning" is the commencement of his ministry. In this beginning, he was with God, that is, as the older Socinians said, he was taken up into heaven to be instructed in the will of God; or, as the moderns say, he withdrew from the world to converse with God in retirement. It ought to be observed that the Evangelist affirms, in a solemn manner, and repeats the affirmation, not only that the Word was with God, but that he was or existed; or, in other words,

* John vi. 62.

† Chap. iv. 2, 3.

‡ Chap. i. 1, 2.

§ Prov. viii. 23.

he affirms that Jesus Christ, the Author of the new dispensation, existed at the commencement of that dispensation. An important piece of intelligence truly! which we should not have known, if his beloved disciple and familiar friend had not been pleased to inform us, that Jesus Christ was in being when he began to preach. Can any man believe that an inspired Apostle was guilty of such trifling? Do Unitarian commentators believe it themselves? No; but this perversion of the sense serves the purpose of supporting their favourite doctrine, that our Saviour did not exist till he was born.

Another passage in the Gospel of John is worthy of particular attention. Our Saviour had said to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad." They said unto him, "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" He had not asserted that he had seen Abraham, or that Abraham had seen him, but only his day; but his hearers understood him to speak of co-existence with the patriarch; and as this interpretation of his words was just, he confirmed it: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am."* There is a striking peculiarity in these words, and an apparent violation of grammar, the present time being put before the past. The reason may be, that the Speaker, in his Divine nature, exists in a mysterious manner; that time is nothing to him, in whose sight a thousand years are as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night—that in this permanent, unsuccessive duration, there is no distinction of past and future. Be this as it may, the words clearly import, that although our Lord was not fifty years old, and about two thousand years had elapsed since the death of Abraham, he might have seen, and had actually seen him, for he was in existence before the patriarch *was, was made, or was born*; for in all these ways the verb γενέσθαι has been translated, and any of them expresses its meaning. Strange methods have been employed to evade the evidence of this text. The elder Socinians gave this interpretation: "I am or exist before Abraham is made;" that is, before he, who was originally called Abram a high father, shall become truly Abraham the father of many nations, or before the calling of the Gentiles. Was this an answer to the objection of the Jews? Could it serve any purpose for Christ to affirm with emphasis of himself, what was equally true of every person who heard him? for they all existed before the gospel was preached to the nations of the world. Contemptible as this evasion is, Socinus tells us that his uncle Lælius obtained this view of the text from Christ himself by many prayers. Justly might one of his contemporaries say to him, that never in the course of his life had he met with a more perverted interpretation of Scripture. The modern Socinians give a different comment. 'Before Abraham was, I may be said to have existed as the Messiah, because I was appointed to this office by the Divine decree;' and they have the countenance of Grotius. It seems, then, that things may be said to exist thousands of years before they exist, because God has determined to bring them to pass. I may say that I existed before the flood, and we may all say that we existed from eternity; but it will be wise to refrain from such language, if we wish to escape the charge of folly or insanity. Again I ask, how was this answer to the purpose? What light did it throw upon the subject of discourse? How did it meet the inquiry of the Jews? What did our Lord affirm of himself, which was not true of every other prophet? But taking the words in their plain, natural meaning, they are an answer to the question, Hast thou seen Abraham? Yes, I have seen him, for I was before him.

I shall mention only one other passage: "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."† In this passage, our Lord speaks of glory in reference to the future and the past. He refers to the future, when he prays that his Father would

* John viii. 56—58.

† John xvii. 5.

now glorify him, that is, after his sufferings; he refers to the past, when he says that he had glory with the Father before the world began. The import of the prayer is, that his original glory might be manifested in a particular manner, or after a temporary obscuration. We have here an answer to an objection, that Christ cannot be conceived to pray for the same state of glory which, on the supposition of his pre-existence, he enjoyed before his humiliation, because it had never been lost. But it had been concealed from the eyes of men by his voluntary abasement, and it would be displayed in a new light, by his exaltation in our nature to the throne of the universe, and by the result of his administration in the perfection and eternal happiness of his people. Unitarians, and some others, have held that this, as well as the former passage, refers to the Divine decrees, and understand "the glory which he had with the Father before the world was," to be the glory which the Father had purposed to confer upon him. But the same reasoning may be opposed to both interpretations. Things future are sometimes represented as present, particularly in the prophetic style; but it is contrary to the laws of language, especially in a narrative of facts, to describe things present, or on the eve of accomplishment, as having taken place many ages before. How would it sound if a good man, who had the hope of immortality, should say, I was glorified in the presence of God, before I or any created being existed? Let us not put words into the mouth of our Saviour which would be extravagant and absurd if uttered by any other person.

The pre-existence of Christ is sufficiently established by the passages quoted; and the Unitarian doctrine of his simple humanity is proved to be unscriptural. But more is necessary to demonstrate his Divinity. Arians allow that he existed before his manifestation in human nature, but they do not admit that he is God in the proper sense of the term. The doctrine of the founder of the sect was, that there was a time when Christ was not, and that he was created before all worlds. They have this advantage, that they are not under the necessity of explaining away, by dishonest criticism, many passages which press upon the Unitarian system. They can understand literally those texts which we have considered, and say without equivocation or mental reservation, that Christ was with God in the beginning, and had glory with him before the foundation of the world; that he existed before Abraham; that he came down from heaven, and came in the flesh. Those things, which are affirmed of him, are strictly true according to their system, which is more plausible than that of Socinians, and thus far agrees with the plain meaning of Scripture. It is therefore surprising that so many of its friends should have abandoned it, and adopted the doctrine of the simple humanity of Christ, which is embarrassed with so many additional difficulties. An Arian can not only go along with the Scriptures, when they assert that our Lord existed before his incarnation, but can give him the high titles which he receives, and ascribe to him the mighty works which are there represented as having been performed by him. He does not hesitate to say that the Son created the world, and appeared to the patriarchs, and governed the Church under the old dispensation; nor to call him the image of the invisible God, and the first-born of every creature, the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person. He can use such language with a nearer approximation to the truth than a Socinian, who is compelled to fritter it away into mere inanity; to reduce the pompous display of metaphors and similes into humble and creeping sense. Yet the distance between us and Arians is immense. This Being, whom they portray in such magnificent terms, is a creature superior to angels, but alike indebted for his existence to the will and power of the Almighty, a God not by nature, but by office. In the following discussion, therefore, we shall have to contend with them as well as with Unitarians, while we endeavour to prove, in oppo-

sition to both, that Jesus Christ is truly and properly a Divine Person, a partaker of the same nature with the Father, and possessed of all his perfections

In prosecuting this design, I might go over the Scriptures in regular order, selecting such information as they supply with respect to his personal dignity. It would not be necessary to confine your attention to the New Testament, because the Old is a part of the same revelation, and amidst its notices and predictions may be expected to give us some knowledge of his character, as well as of the work which he had undertaken to accomplish. But this method would be tedious, and would require more time than can be allotted to this department of our course. There is a classification of the proofs which we may commodiously adopt, because it is a comprehensive one, and, arranging them under distinct heads, leads the mind, by a clear and successive induction, to the conclusion. Jesus Christ is proved to be God equal to the Father, by the ascription of the same names, and perfections, and works, and worship to him.

In the first place, Let us attend to the Divine names which are given to him in the Scriptures. That he is called, God, is so well known, that it is almost superfluous to produce particular passages. Now, it is acknowledged, that the name is sometimes given to creatures, to magistrates and angels; and Moses is said to have been a god to Pharaoh.* In the latter case, the meaning evidently is that Moses was in the room of God to Pharaoh, delivered God's commands to him, and denounced his judgments. The name, as we shall see, is used concerning Christ in a quite different manner. It may be observed, that when creatures are called gods, we are led to a figurative sense, not only by the plural number—which shews that their real divinity cannot be meant, because it is a fundamental doctrine of religion that there is only one—but by some adjunct or circumstance which qualifies the term; whereas in its application to our Saviour, the laws of just reasoning require it to be literally understood. If it is said to earthly princes, “Ye are gods,” it is added in the same breath, “but ye shall die like men;”† and when angels are addressed as gods, they are at the same time commanded to acknowledge their inferiority by worshipping the first-begotten of the Father;‡ but the Godhead of our Saviour is expressed in such terms, and associated with such attributes and operations, as demonstrate it to be absolute.

“The Word was God.”§ *He was made a God*, say the Socinians; but the deification of a creature is a notion which receives no countenance from Scripture, and it may be pronounced to be impossible. How was it done? Was a divine nature given to him? or were divine perfections communicated to him? Not a word of these things is to be found in the Bible, and either supposition is grossly absurd. How could a man be changed into a God? or how could a limited nature be endowed with omniscience and omnipotence? Modern Socinians translate the passage thus, *The Word was a God*; but how strange is it to the ears of christians to speak of more Gods than one, as if, like the heathens, we had subordinate deities! No; they say, our meaning is that he is a figurative god, like magistrates and Moses. But besides that, in the following verses, the Evangelist ascribes to him a work which is peculiar to the true God, namely, the creation of all things,|| the original does not admit of this translation. ¶, they reply, is without the article, and ought therefore to be rendered *a God*. But here the idiom of the Greek language is violated, and scholars know, that while the subject of a proposition admits, the predicate rejects, the article, and that the proposition, “The Word was God,” could have been expressed only as it is, ¶ *ὁ λόγος*. It is evident, that although ¶

* Exod. vii. 1.
§ John i.

† Ps. lxxxii. 6, 7.
|| John i. 3.

‡ Compare Ps. xcvi. 7. with Heb. i. 6

stands first in order, it is the predicate of the sentence, and denotes what *ὁ λόγος*, the subject, is. This criticism, then, proves only the ignorance of those who have made it.

“Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.”* To evade the evidence of this text, Unitarians tell us that it may be translated, “God is thy throne;” because the words rendered *O God*, are not *ὦ Θεε*, in the vocative, but *ὁ Θεός*, in the nominative. They ought to have remembered, that this is a Greek idiom, and that in the Attic dialect, the nominative is frequently put for the vocative. God is said to be a shield, a rock, and a fortress to his people, and as in these cases it is signified that he protects and defends them, there is nothing inconsistent with his dignity and supremacy. “But it is the reverse in the case before us. A throne,” it has been justly remarked, “derives its dignity from the character and dominion of the sovereign who sits upon it. To call the Eternal Majesty the throne of a creature,” as the Messiah is supposed to be, “seems little suitable to the reverence which is ever to be maintained towards the Creator, and which is one of the most distinguishing characters of the Scripture style.”† The design of the Apostle, in quoting these words of the Psalmist, is to prove the superiority of Christ to the heavenly messengers. He begins well, by shewing that God makes the winds his messengers, and flames of fire his ministers, thus reducing angels to the condition of servants; but he does not end well, if he say only that God is the throne of Christ, or the support of his authority. Where is the contrast? If he has given power to our Saviour, and upholds him in the exercise of it, he has done the same thing to angels and other ministers of his will; and how does his pre-eminence appear? If we read, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever,” the point is decided, for he is God, and they are creatures; but the new translation destroys the force of the argument, and must therefore be false. The ancient versions agree with ours; and as far as I know, the new translation was not thought of till modern times, when arguments against the divinity of Christ were eagerly sought and collected from every quarter. We may rest satisfied that this is another passage, in which our Saviour is called, God, in the proper sense of the term.

The Apostle Paul, when enumerating the privileges and honours of the Jews, thus expresses the last and greatest of them:—“And of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is God over all, blessed for ever. Amen.”‡ This single passage furnishes a decisive answer to the question respecting the divinity of our Saviour. The adversaries of this doctrine, fully aware that it is fatal to their system, have tried every possible method of destroying its force. “Of whom Christ came,” *ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐπὶ πάντων Θεός*. *Ὁ ἀνὴρ* connects *Θεός* with *Χριστός*, and is used for *ὡς ἐστι*. To evade this evidence that he is God, they have proposed a different reading, *ᾧ ἐ*—*of whom*, namely, the Jews, *is God over all*; that is, he is their God. But besides that, if this were the genuine reading, the article must, by the laws of the language, have been prefixed to *εὐλογητός*, (*ᾧ ἐπὶ πάντων Θεός ὁ εὐλογητός*) which it is not; the alteration is made without the authority of a single manuscript, in order to silence the testimony of Scripture in favour of a particular doctrine. It is a mere conjecture, which Griesbach has mentioned among his various readings, while it would have been more worthy of him to have passed it over with contempt. We have said more than enough of it, and proceed to another attempt to annihilate the evidence, by converting the words into a doxology; as if the Apostle, while reviewing the instances of divine goodness to his nation, had felt the spirit of devotion arise, and burst forth into an expression of praise, “God over all be blessed for ever!” It is an overwhelming objection, that the words can-

* Heb. i. 8. † Dr. Pye Smith's Scripture Testimony to the Messiah, Book ii. c. 4. § 14.

‡ Rom. ix. 5

not be so translated without a violation of the idiom of the language. In all the doxologies where *ευλογητος* occurs in the New Testament and in the Septuagint, (and more than forty instances have been observed,) it is placed at the beginning of the sentence. If, then, Paul had intended a doxology, he would have said, *ευλογητος ο ων επι παντων Θεος εις τους αιωνας*. As he has placed the words in a different order, they are plainly and necessarily an affirmation concerning the person last spoken of, namely Christ, who is pronounced to be God. And you will observe, that there is no room for the pretext which is employed in other places, that he may be called God in a figurative and subordinate sense; because he is denominated *ο Θεος επι παντων*, the Supreme God, or the Most High God over all the earth. That he may and ought to be so designated, will be readily admitted by those who believe, and entertain just notions of, the Trinity; for if the nature is the same, the persons must be equal, and one of them cannot be greater than another.

When Jesus shewed the wounds in his hands and his feet, Thomas said unto him, "My Lord, and my God."* We are told that this was merely a sudden expression of surprise and admiration. But to use the name of God on such occasions is profane; it is the practice of irreligious men, and would not have been imitated by a follower of Christ in the presence of his Master; or if he had inadvertently fallen into it, he would not have passed without reprehension. We have no evidence from the Scriptures that the Jews indulged in such exclamations, although they are too common among Christians. It has been said again, that they are an ejaculation addressed to the Father, "My Lord, and my God, how great is thy power!" or, "My Lord and my God has done this." We need only reply, that according to the Evangelist the words were not addressed to the Father, but to Christ, "Thomas said unto him," &c. It follows that Christ was acknowledged by Thomas as his Lord and his God; and surely if he had been in an error, his Master would have set him right.

Besides the passages which have been quoted, there are several others in which the name of God is given to our Saviour, but the evidence does not appear to common readers, in consequence of the manner in which they have been translated. It is a rule laid down by some late critics, that when two or more personal or attributive nouns, joined by a copulative or copulatives, are assumed of the same person or thing, before the first attributive the article is inserted, before the remaining ones it is omitted. It follows, that when two or more attributives occur with the article prefixed only to the first, they ought to be understood as referring to the same individual. For example, if we find *Χριστος* and *Θεος* coupled by the conjunction *και*, and *ο* before *Χριστος*, but not repeated before *Θεος*, we must not explain them as referring to two persons but to one, and as asserting that he who is Christ, is also God. This canon has been established by examples from the classics, from the New Testament, and from the Fathers; so that we are fully authorized to apply it for the correction of some passages, in which, in consequence of not attending to it, our translators have misrepresented the sense. Dr. Wordsworth, who has examined the subject with great care, says, "I have observed more, I am persuaded, than a thousand instances of the form *ο Χριστος και Θεος*, some hundreds of instances of *ο μεγας Θεος και σωτηρ*, and not fewer than several thousands of the form *ο Θεος και σωτηρ*; while in no single case have I seen, where the sense could be determined, any one of them used but only of one person."† The Fathers are good authority, as they certainly were acquainted with the idiom of their own language. When the same phrases, therefore, occur in the New Testament, we are bound to understand them as they were understood by the Greeks. On this ground we beg leave to differ from the received version in some texts, and

* John xx. 28.

† Six Letters to Mr. Granville Sharp, p. 36, &c.

to give a translation more conformable to the original:—"Looking for the glorious appearing of the Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ,"* ought to be, *the appearing of our Great God and Saviour Jesus Christ*; του μεγάλου Θεου και σωτηρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. "That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ,"† should be rendered, *according to the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ*; του Θεου ἡμῶν και Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. "No whoremonger—hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God,"‡ *in the kingdom of the Christ and God*; εν τη βασιλειᾳ του Χριστοῦ και Θεου. "I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ,"§ *before the God and Lord Jesus Christ*; ενωπιον του Θεου και Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. "Through the righteousness of God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ,"|| *through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ*; του Θεου ἡμῶν και σωτηρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. "Ungodly men, denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ,"¶ *denying Jesus Christ the only Lord and our Lord*; τον μονον δεσποτην και κυριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστον.

Enough has been said to prove that, according to the New Testament, Christ is God in the true and proper sense of the word. But this is not the only name expressive of his divinity, and in the next Lecture I shall shew that he is also called JEHOVAH.

LECTURE XXXI.

ON THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

Divinity of Christ inferred from the ascription to him of the title Jehovah; Instances—Inferred from the ascription to him of Divine Perfections as Eternity, Omnipresence, Omniscience, Immutability, and Omnipotence—Inferred from the ascription to him of Divine Works; Instances.

I PROCEED to another name which is given to our Saviour. God revealed himself to his ancient people by the name JEHOVAH, derived from the verb הוה, *to be* or *to subsist*, and therefore signifying *Ens, Existens ab æterno et in æternum*, or the self-existent and eternal Being. Its import shews that it cannot be given to a creature, but is appropriated to God; and accordingly he makes an exclusive claim to it in Scripture. As the name of a man distinguishes him from all other men, so the name, JEHOVAH, distinguishes the Most High from all other beings. "Seek ye him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; JEHOVAH is his name."** The Psalmist says, "That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most High over all the earth."†† These passages are instances of the exclusive ascription of this name to the Creator and Governor of the universe, and prove that it is peculiar to him. I shall, however, add one quotation more, in which he takes it to himself, with a solemn declaration that he will not give it, and consequently that it ought not to be given, to any other: "I am JEHOVAH; that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images."‡‡ It implies something in which no other can share: the glory of underived and independent existence belongs to no man or angel.

* Titus ii. 13. † 2 Thess. i. 12. ‡ Eph. v. 5. § 1 Tim. v. 21. ¶ 2 Pet. i. 1.
¶ Jude 4. The word Θεοῦ, *God*, in our translation of this last verse, is omitted by late critics.
** Amos v. 5. †† Ps. lxxxiii. 18. ‡‡ Isaiah xlii. 8.

Now, the argument which we found upon these passages is this, that if this name is given to Jesus Christ, he is not a created or a nominal God, but a divine person, distinct, it is acknowledged, from the Father, but united with him in the same self-existent essence. It is objected, that there are several instances in which this name is given to a creature. To mention one, he who appeared to Moses in the burning bush is called JEHOVAH, and yet is said to have been an angel. But before this passage can be fairly alleged against us, it must be proved that he was a created angel, contrary to the belief of the Church in all ages, that this was the same person who was afterwards manifested in human nature as the Messenger of God, and was then the Guide and Guardian of the peculiar people. It is objected, that Moses called an altar which he had erected JEHOVAH-nissi, *my banner*;* and that, when the ark was taken up to be removed to another place, he addressed it in these words, "Rise up, JEHOVAH, and let thine enemies be scattered;" when it rested again, he said, "Return, O JEHOVAH, unto the many thousands of Israel."† But these passages are cited to no purpose, because it will immediately appear, that they are not parallel to those in which our Saviour is described as JEHOVAH. It is evident that inanimate objects could be so called only in a figurative sense, and could be considered in no other light than as memorials of him after whom they are denominated. The altar was not JEHOVAH, but was dedicated to his honour; the ark was merely a symbol of his presence; and Moses addressed his words not to it, but to Him who appeared above it, between the cherubim. We give the same account of the passage in Ezekiel, which says, "The name of the city from that day shall be, JEHOVAH is there:"‡ of which the meaning obviously is, that the city shall be the residence of JEHOVAH, who will manifest his presence in it by the operations of his power and grace. The application of the name to our Saviour suggests totally different ideas. He is a living person, and is throughout the Scriptures represented as possessing the attributes, and performing the works, of God; and hence we are authorised to consider it as applied to him in the true and literal sense of the term. If it is proved that he is God, because he is called God, it will be proved that he is JEHOVAH, if it is found that he is called JEHOVAH without a figure.

In the sixth chapter of the prophecies of Isaiah, we have an account of a vision in which he saw the Lord high and lifted up, and heard the seraphim adoring him:—"Holy, holy, holy is JEHOVAH of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."§ If we turn to the twelfth chapter of John, we shall find him quoting the words which JEHOVAH addressed to the prophet on the occasion, and then adding, "These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him."|| Whose glory did he see? Christ is the subject of the Evangelist's discourse, and to him only can the pronoun refer. Isaiah therefore saw the glory of Christ, when he saw JEHOVAH in the temple; he saw it, not with the eye of his mind, contemplating future scenes, but with his bodily eyes. Is it not then certain, that Christ is JEHOVAH?

Isaiah xl. 3.—"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of JEHOVAH, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Hear what an Evangelist says: "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea."—"For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."¶ To these verses we may join the words of the angel to Zacharias concerning his promised son: "He shall go before him," the Lord God of the children of Israel, "in the spirit and power of Elias, to—make ready a people prepared for the Lord."** We

* Exod. xvii. 15.

† Numb. x. 35, 36.

‡ Ezek. xlvi. 35.

§ Isaiah vi. 3.

¶ John xii. 41

¶ Matt. iii. 1, 3.

** Luke i. 17.

see the prophecy, and we see its fulfilment. “The voice crying in the wilderness” was the voice of the Baptist; “the way of JEHOVAH” was prepared by his ministrations, while he excited, in the minds of the people, an expectation of the appearance of the Messiah; and consequently the Messiah is JEHOVAH. The inference is so obvious, that all evasion is vain.

Jer. xxiii. 5, 6. “Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called, JEHOVAH our Righteousness.” It is admitted by Jews and Christians that this is a prediction of the Messiah. Some read, *this is the name which Jehovah shall call him, our Righteousness*; but the most distinguished interpreters contend for our translation; and so it seems to have been understood by the author of the Greek version, who, however, has not given the sense of the two Hebrew words יהוה צדקו, but has joined them together as belonging to the same person, και τουτο το ονομα ο κλησεται αυτον κυρις Ιωσεδεκ. The corresponding passage in chap. xxxiii. 16, is wanting in the Vatican and Alexandrine manuscripts of the Septuagint, but is found in some others, thus: Τουτο εστι το ονομα ο κληθησεται Κυρις δικαιοσυνη ημων. It is objected that, in this latter passage, the name is given to Jerusalem. “This is the name wherewith she shall be called, JEHOVAH our righteousness.” But the words have been rendered, *this is he who shall call to her, Jehovah our righteousness*. The word *name* is not in the original Hebrew. It is supposed by some critics, that the passage has sustained an alteration, and that it was originally the same as in the twenty-third chapter, and as it is found in several manuscripts. There is little reason to doubt that the Messiah is here announced as JEHOVAH, and as our Righteousness, in allusion to the inestimable benefit resulting to us from his mediation. “He brought in an everlasting righteousness,” and “of God is made to us righteousness.”

Isaiah viii. 13, 14. “Sanctify JEHOVAH of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence, to both the houses of Israel; for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” But these words are applied to Christ in the 8th verse of the second chapter of the first Epistle of Peter.—Isaiah xlv. 21—23. “Who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I JEHOVAH?—I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.” When we find an apostle representing it as the design of the exaltation of Christ, that every knee should bow at his name, and every tongue confess that he is Lord;* and quoting this passage as a proof that we shall all appear before his judgment seat,† can we doubt that he was considered by Paul as the JEHOVAH who speaks in the writings of the prophets?—Zechariah xii. 10. In the preceding context, the speaker is JEHOVAH, and he says, “I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced.” The last words are quoted by the Evangelist John on the occasion of our Saviour’s side being pierced with a spear.‡ But JEHOVAH declares that it was he who was treated in this manner. How could this be, since the Divine nature is impassible? The words are intelligible upon our hypothesis, and upon no other, that he, who suffered on the cross, was greater than he seemed to be, was the Son of God as well as the Son of Mary, the eternal and living One, and a man of flesh and blood.

These passages are sufficient to shew that our Saviour receives the name of JEHOVAH; and as God appropriates it to himself, and declares that he will not

* Phil. ii. 9—11.

† Rom. xiv. 11, 12.

‡ John xix. 37

give it to another, it follows, that although he was born in Bethlehem, and died on Calvary, he is fitly described by the name which is expressive of eternal and independent existence.

In the second place, We prove the Divinity of Christ from the ascription of divine perfections to him. We know nothing of any being but by its properties. What matter and spirit are, we cannot tell; but there are certain qualities by which they are distinguished, and when we discover those of the one class or the other, we pronounce that the subject, in which they inhere, is matter or spirit. Properties are inseparable from essences. A stone does not think, nor is a mind tangible and divisible. Sensation, motion, and instincts distinguish the inferior animals; reason is characteristic of man; and ascending to the highest Being in the universe, we conceive him to possess perfections, of which there are either no traces in his creatures, or only faint lineaments which preclude all comparison, and place them at an immeasurable distance from him. Infinite as they are, they could not exist in a finite nature; for it would be an express contradiction to suppose a being to be limited and unlimited; to be bounded in essence, but unbounded in energies; to be confined to a portion of space, and yet to operate throughout all space. If, then we find that divine properties are ascribed to any person, by authority which proves that they do actually belong to him, we must believe that his nature is divine. Absolute eternity, immensity, omniscience, and omnipotence, are incompatible with the idea of a creature.

First, Eternity is ascribed to Christ, by which I mean, not merely an existence which will have no end, for in this sense angels and human spirits are eternal, but an existence which had no beginning. He is said to have been "in the beginning with God," that is, as the Evangelist explains himself, "before any thing was made;" "to have been before all things," and "to have had glory with the Father before the world was."* It may be objected that these expressions prove only his pre-existence, and that he might have been created before all worlds, as Arians believe. But, to affirm of any person that he existed before any thing was made, is to exempt him from the number of creatures; and, if there had been no prejudice in the way, would have been universally so understood. If, however, our antagonists demand something more explicit, I would remind them that, in his first Epistle, John calls him "that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested" to the world;† pretty plainly signifying, that before his incarnation he possessed an eternal existence. In the Book of Revelation, he says of himself, "I am the First, and the Last, and the Living One." "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last."‡ The same idea is here thrice repeated in different terms, and this, added to the solemnity of the language, unavoidably leads us to regard it as an important one. I cannot conceive how any man could persuade himself, that such language might be used of a creature. It does not admit of being explained as signifying any thing less than an eternal duration; and God applies it to himself in the Old Testament: "Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I JEHOVAH, the First, and with the Last; I am he." "I am the First, and I am the Last, and besides me there is no God." "I am he; I am the First, I also am the Last."§ There is another passage in the Revelation, the application of which has been disputed, but in which there is reason to think that Christ is the speaker. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord," or, according to Griesbach's corrected text, "*the Lord God, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.*"|| In the

* John i. 2, and xvii. 5.

† Isaiah xli 4, xliv. 6, xlviii. 12.

‡ 1 John. i. 2.

§ Rev. i. 8.

¶ Rev. i. 17, 18, and xxii. 13.

preceding verse, Christ is expressly mentioned; and after the two next verses, he announces himself in the same words: "I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last." If he is a different being from the Lord God, why does he immediately assume his style? Would it have been dutiful and reverent to proclaim himself by the titles under which the Creator had revealed himself a moment before? At any rate, if the speakers are different, they are both possessed of the absolute eternity which the titles denote.—The last passage which I shall produce is in Micah: "But 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 of old, from everlasting."* An existence which should commence in time, and an existence which had no beginning, are both ascribed to the Messiah. To assert that his goings forth were from everlasting, because God had made an eternal decree concerning him, (in respect of which there was no difference between him and every other Bethlehemite), is so gross a perversion, that it is unworthy of farther attention. "Though the two principal terms," (עולם and קדם), says Dr. Smith, "taken separately, are occasionally used to denote a limited yet to present and human apprehensions, a very long and hidden) period; the proper and usual meaning of each is a REAL ETERNITY; each occurs in passages evidently intended to be the most solemn assertions of Infinite Duration, and the combination of the two furnishes the strongest expressions for that purpose, of which the Hebrew language is capable."†

In the second place, Another divine perfection which is ascribed to Jesus Christ, is omnipresence. I need not say that this is a perfection peculiar to God, and of which there is not even a shadow in any creature, because it implies immensity of nature. "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord."‡ We cannot remove from his presence; but whether we ascend to heaven, or descend into hell, or fly on the wings of the morning to the ends of the earth, he is there to meet us. Now, let us observe whether any thing is said in Scripture concerning our Lord, which implies the possession of this perfection; and as there can be no doubt among Christians that he knows his own nature, and is the faithful and true Witness, I shall lay before you his own words. "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."§ The meaning of the first part of this verse has been differently explained, not being quite obvious, because it refers to an ascension to heaven as a past event. He had said to Nicodemus, who was astonished at the doctrine of the new birth, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?"|| He adds, that he only was qualified to give information concerning these things, for no man, but himself, had been in heaven to acquire the knowledge of them, by immediate intercourse with God. It is not affirmed that he had ascended to heaven, but that no other man had. Unitarians give a figurative meaning to the whole verse, and express it thus: "No one has ever been admitted to a participation of the Divine counsels, except the Son of man, Jesus of Nazareth, who has been commissioned to reveal the will of God to man, and is perfectly instructed and qualified for this purpose." But what strange language do they put into the mouth of our Lord; language calculated to mislead, while it would have been equally easy to express the matter plainly, and much better, as all danger of mistake would have been prevented. He who has no end to serve by perverting the words, will acknowledge that they teach a literal descent from heaven, and,

* Micah v. 2.

† Jer. xxiii. 23, 24.

‡ Scripture Testimony, B. ii. chap. 4. sect. 27.

§ John iii. 13.

|| Ib. v. 11, 12.

what is more directly to our purpose, his presence in heaven at the time when he was addressing Nicodemus: "The Son of man who *is*" not who *was* "in heaven." He had descended from it, economically, by assuming our nature; but he had not left it in respect of his essence. He had another nature besides that which was visible, a nature which was not confined to one place. By declaring that he was on earth and in heaven at the same time, he assumed that Divine perfection which is expressed in the words formerly quoted: "Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?" The evidence of this passage presses hard upon the opponents of his Divinity; and Dr. Priestley was driven to his last shift, when he ventured to express a suspicion, that either John's amanuensis mistook what he dictated, or that John himself, being old when he wrote his Gospel, had forgotten what his Master said. Surely the man must have spoken against the conviction of his own mind.

Our Lord promised, that "where two or three were gathered together in his name, he would be in the midst of them."* It is an arbitrary assumption, that this promise was confined to the Apostolic age, as there is the same reason for the presence of Christ with his people, in all ages of the world. To say, that he would be present with them in spirit, as Paul was with the Corinthians, or would be present with them by his authority delegated to them, is to put a sense upon the words which they would never suggest to an honest man, who had no object but to ascertain their real meaning. Unitarians speak of a corporeal presence of Christ with his followers, and appeal to the case of Stephen, who saw him at his death, and of Paul, to whom he appeared in the way to Damascus. Granting that there was a bodily presence of our Saviour on those occasions, we ask for proof that the first christians, to whom they would restrict this privilege, were always favoured with it in their religious assemblies. We say that this was impossible. How could he be present at the same time, in a thousand congregations, held in Judea, in Asia Minor, in Greece, and in Italy? If he was in one, he could not be in another; but he promised to be in the midst of them all. Do Unitarians believe, with Lutherans, the ubiquity of his human nature, or, with Papists, the doctrine of transubstantiation? Our Lord promised to be in the midst of his disciples in the same sense in which God was in the midst of his ancient people, namely, by a real but invisible presence. Once more, when he gave his Apostles a commission to teach and baptize all nations, he said, "Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."† *ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος*. Some translate, *to the end of the age*, or the end of the Jewish dispensation. It is certain, however, that the phrase occurs where it must signify the end of the world, and I can see no good reason for giving it here a different sense. In particular, I am at a loss to conceive what Unitarians would gain by the new version, and their efforts to establish it are a waste of criticism; for if, according to their hypothesis, Christ could be with his disciples to the end of that age, he could as well be with them to the end of the world; and we may, with perfect safety, admit the one interpretation as well as the other. But the truth is, that if he had been a mere man, he could not have performed his promise even for a short period, as we have shown above; and it is a mere imagination to think that the difficulty is lessened, by abbreviating the time. How could Christ, if he was not a Divine person, be present with his followers in all places of the world, in the plain import of the promise? It would have availed them little that they had his authority and approbation, or even that he knew what they were doing, if he had not been near to direct, assist and defend them.

In the third place, The Scriptures teach that Jesus Christ is omniscient. "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."‡ We

* Matt. xviii. 20.

† Matt. xxviii. 20.

‡ Matt. xi. 27.

may remark by the way, that there must be something peculiar about the Son, something which distinguishes him from all other persons, since he is known, fully understood, and comprehended only by the Father. But what is to be observed in those verses for our present purpose is, that the knowledge of the Son by the Father, and of the Father by the Son, are commensurate, that is, the Son as thoroughly knows the Father as the Father knows the Son. There is no distinction of degrees, but the one knowledge is as perfect as the other. It may be objected, that others are represented as knowing the Father, and therefore, that the knowledge of the Son is not necessarily perfect more than theirs, although it may be granted to be superior. But observe this difference, that the knowledge which they possess is communicated by his revelation; whereas his knowledge is not revealed to him, but is natural and underived, like that of the Father. As the latter knows the Son, so the Son knows the Father by intuition. Knowledge is in him, as water is in a lake or reservoir; but is in others, as water in a stream, inferior in quantity as well as dependent upon the source. The simple consideration, that their knowledge is secondary, sets aside the idea of equality. *He* has such knowledge of the Father as the Father has of him; *they* have such knowledge of the Father as the Son is pleased to communicate.—“Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, on the feast-day, many believed on his name when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them,” or placed no confidence in them; and for what reason? Had they exhibited any external evidence of insincerity? Had they, by word or deed, given him any ground to suspect them? The Evangelist lets fall no hint of this kind; but adds, “because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man.”* The persons spoken of were struck by his miracles, and acknowledged him to be the Messiah. Any other man would have been satisfied with their profession; but he was not, because he was acquainted with their sentiments and feelings, and knew that nothing more had been produced by his miracles than a transient impression. It is plainly affirmed that he saw their hearts, although they were concealed from other eyes by fallacious signs; that he saw the hearts not of those alone, but of all men; and that his knowledge was immediate and intuitive. He needed no testimony, but knew in himself. Is not this the knowledge of God? knowledge which he claims exclusively to himself. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.”† In accordance with the words of the Evangelist are those of our Saviour himself in the book of Revelation. “All the churches shall know that I am he that searcheth the reins and hearts; and I will give unto every one of you according to his works.”‡ It is worthy of attention, that, with a slight alteration, these are the words of God which have just been quoted from Jeremiah.—“Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.”§ An attempt has been made to prove that these words do not imply omniscience, because John says to Christians in general, “Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.”¶ But expressions are to be explained by the connexion. The apostle in this latter passage is speaking of false teachers, antichrists as he calls them, who were endeavouring to draw away the disciples from the faith; and he consoles them by the consideration that they had received an anointing, the influences of the Holy Spirit, to enable them to distinguish between truth and error, to know all the subjects in dispute, or all the essential doctrines of religion. It

* John ii. 23—25. † Jer. xvii. 9, 10. ‡ Rev. ii. 23. § John xx. 17. ¶ 1 John ii. 20.

is perfectly evident that the universal phrase, *all things*, must be so limited. But Peter, in his reply to Christ, refers, not to the knowledge of doctrines or actions, but to the knowledge of the heart. Jesus had thrice asked whether Peter loved him. The repetition of the question after it had been answered in the affirmative, seemed to imply a doubt of his sincerity, and he said, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." "Why dost thou put the question so often? There is nothing concealed from thee, not even the secrets of the heart. Thou needest not to be told that my affection to thee is genuine." This is plainly to ascribe omniscience to Christ, who was so far from correcting the apostle, as he would have done if he had deified him being only a man, that he gave a virtual sanction to what he had said, by subjoining, "Feed my sheep."

Farther, Immutability is ascribed to him, which is a divine attribute incommunicable to a creature. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, and for ever,"* or the same in all ages, past, present, and to come. This proposition was intended, as appears from the context, either to excite the Hebrews to imitate the conduct of their rulers who had died in the Lord, by an assurance of the same happy result to themselves, founded on the unfailing love and power of the Redeemer; or to engage them to constancy in the faith, because the Author of the Gospel is unchangeable in his authority to command, and in his ability to protect and reward. Whatever is the connexion, it is solemnly asserted that he is a person, of whom perpetual identity of nature and character may be predicated. If he is only a man, it is impossible to conceive with what propriety these things are spoken of him. His history is full of changes. Not only did he pass through those which commonly happen to men, but he was once in a state of profound humiliation, and now he is raised to great dignity and authority. According to Socinus and his followers, he experienced the most wonderful of all changes, for having been a man, he has since been made a God. To ascribe immutability to his person, if merely human, would be absurd and contrary to fact; and on this hypothesis, such passages as convey that idea can be understood only of his doctrine. But his person is certainly the subject of the following address, and he is contemplated in his uncreated nature. "And thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thine hands; They shall perish, but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail."† There can be no doubt to whom these words should be applied, because they are quoted in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, to prove the superiority of the Son to angels. They refer immediately to his immutable duration; but this attribute is peculiar to one who exists by necessity of nature, which implies the perpetual possession of every possible perfection.

Lastly, Divine power is ascribed to him. He is called the mighty God, when he is announced by a prophet as a child to be born, and a Son to be given to us;‡ and "his kingdom ruleth over all." But the consideration of his omnipotence leads me to the next part of our division. .

In the third place, It was proposed to prove the Divinity of our Saviour from the works which are ascribed to him, and which are evidently such as no mere man, and I may add, no creature could perform. Of this our adversaries are aware, and accordingly employ their arts of criticism to prove, that he did not perform them.

I begin with a passage, in which he evidently claims Divine power, and represents his own works as of equal extent with those of his Father. "But

* Heb. xiii. 8.

† Heb. i. 10—12.

‡ Isa. ix. 6.

Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he had not only broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. Then answered Jesus, and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.* The occasion of these words, was a charge brought against him of having profaned the Sabbath, because he had cured a lame man upon it. How does he justify himself? Is it by the plea, that works of mercy are not a violation of the sacred rest of that day? No: it is by alleging the example of God, who carries on the operations of providence upon all the days of the week, and intimating very plainly, that he had the same right to work whenever he pleased. The example of God is appealed to in vain, if he did not possess the same authority, and was not equally independent of the law of the Sabbath. No mere man could plead, without impiety, this reason for working on the first day of the week. How should we be shocked if any person presumed to say to those who reproved him for breaking the Sabbath, God works, and therefore I may work? It is to be observed farther, that he represents himself as doing the same works which are done by the Father, and he expresses himself without any reservation: "What things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." Every work performed by the one, is performed by the other. But this was impossible without an equality of power; and our Lord must be understood as, in the most explicit terms, claiming omnipotence. It may be objected, that he says, "the Son can do nothing of himself." But, if we should not be able satisfactorily to explain these words, still it is clear that, in concurrence with the Father, he is capable of producing every possible effect. The words probably refer to the mysterious union of the Father and the Son, in consequence of which the one does not work without the other, but both carry on their operations in concert; and he might refer to this fact in order to repel the accusation of the Jews; for how could he be guilty of profaning the Sabbath by a work, which he had performed in concurrence with the Author of the Sabbath? I proceed to particulars.

First, The creation of the universe is ascribed to him. "All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."† *Παῖτα* is a universal term, and is so to be understood, unless circumstances obviously require it to be limited in its meaning. Our opponents would restrict it, not from any necessity arising from the context, but because they must get quit of this proof of the Divinity of Christ. By *all things*, then, we are to understand, according to them, the moral world, or the Church. *All things are reformed by him*, say some, for he introduced a new religion, to correct the errors and vices of mankind; or, *all things were done by him*, as other critics choose to render the word *ἐγένετο*. He did all things in the New Dispensation; he preached the gospel, and gave a commission to the Apostles, and enacted laws for the government of his followers. The Evangelist happens to say soon after, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not."‡ The translation of *ἐγένετο*, which was proper in the third verse, will be proper also in the tenth, which we must read thus: "He was in the world, and the world was done by him." Whether the world means the earth, or its inhabitants, it would puzzle Oedipus himself to explain the proposition, "*The world was done by Christ.*" To say, that *all things* are the church, or the human race as reformed by the Gospel, is liable to this objection, that the Evangelist uses *the world*, in verse 10, as an equivalent term to *all things*, in verse 3; and *the world* never, in the sacred writings, signifies the Church, although *the world to come* sometimes denotes the New

* John v. 17—19.

† John i. 3.

‡ John i. 10.

Dispensation. Besides, how could it be said, that Christ was in this world, and it knew him not? The reformed world always knew him, for it was reformed by the Gospel which revealed him. This Unitarian comment may be dismissed as unintelligible. The most distinguished critics have understood the words in the literal acceptation, and rejected the figurative sense as absurd. We formerly referred to this passage as a proof of the pre-existence of our Saviour; and, taking into one view the various attempts which have been made to explain away all the particulars in it, we may say with Dr. Owen, "I think, since the beginning, place it where you will, the beginning of the world, or the beginning of the gospel, there never was such an exposition of the words of God or man." Christ was in the beginning of his own ministry; a fact, no doubt, which we should not have known, if the Evangelist had not informed us of it; he was with God, or he retired to converse with him, and to receive instructions for his ministry; he was a God, or, in truth, was not a God, but a mere man; and he made all things, that is, he made nothing, but reformed some things. Such are the wonderful discoveries of Unitarian criticism.

Colos. i. 16, 17.—"For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." One should think that this single passage would be sufficient to settle the dispute. It is a commentary, or amplification of the words of the Evangelist, "And without him was not any thing made that was made." It will be acknowledged, I think, by every person of candour, that, if it had been the design of the Apostle to inform us, that Jesus Christ created the world, he could not have selected terms more proper for the purpose. The universe is described by "all things in heaven and in earth, visible and invisible," for every thing is comprehended in this classification; and thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers, are specified that no room might be left for imagining, that he was concerned in making only the subordinate parts of it. If it should be asked, how he, who was born about sixty years before the date of this Epistle, could give being to this material and intellectual frame, which, according to the Hebrew chronology, had existed for four thousand years? it is stated, that *he was before it*, before it in time, in respect of his superior nature, of which abundant proof has been already produced. Lest it should be alleged, in order to evade the evidence of his proper Divinity, that he acted by delegated power, and was not the primary agent, but a minister of God, it is added, that as all things were created, *δι' αὐτοῦ*, by him, so they were created, *εἰς αὐτὸν*, to him, or for him. He is the last end of the creation, as the Father is said to be, "who made the world by Jesus Christ," and of whom it is said, *ἐξ αὐτοῦ, καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ, καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα*, "of him, and through him, and to him are all things."* Now, *he* must be considered as a principal in the work, for whose glory it was wrought. It may be objected, that, in the preceding verse, Christ is called *πρωτογενὴς τῆς κτίσεως*, the *first-born* of the *whole creation*,† and is thus numbered among creatures. But, this inference is directly at variance with the verses following, for if all things, without exception, were created by him, how can he be one of them? Did he create himself? Unless we are disposed to charge the Apostle with a palpable blunder, a gross contradiction, we must understand *πρωτογενὴς*, either, according to the explanation of some, as signifying the *first-begotten* or the *producer* of all things, or as used here (as it is on some other occasions) metaphorically, to denote a person holding the chief place, the Lord of the whole creation, as the first-born in a family was lord and possessor of the inheritance. This sense of the term agrees with the words following, for undoubtedly he is Supreme

* Eph. iii. 9. Rom. xi. 36.

† Colos i. 15.

over all things by whom "they were created." Here, again, that species of criticism which seeks not to illustrate but to obscure, not to interpret but to pervert, has employed its usual arts to evade the evidence. The passage, we are told, signifies a new moral creation effected by the Gospel; the things in heaven and on earth are the Jews and Gentiles, who have been enlightened and reformed by it; and things visible and invisible, are the present and future generations of men. Was a commentary so far-fetched, and so different from the natural sense of the terms, ever given before? We might ask Unitarians, whether they actually believe this to be the real sense of the passage? Or, if it be said that we have no right to bring them to confession, we may ask them, whether it would have occurred to any person who had not first determined to reject the literal meaning, and then tortured his brains to find out another more suitable to a preconceived system? It is a discovery of modern date; for ages the words were understood as we explain them; and the Greek Fathers, who read the New Testament in their vernacular language, considered the Apostle as describing a proper creation.

In the second place, The preservation of all things is ascribed to him. "By him all things consist," * *συνεστηκε*, are kept together, or preserved from falling into confusion or annihilation. This is surely a divine work; and it could not be said, consistently with reason and piety, that the universe is sustained by a creature. The same thing is taught in another place:—"Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power,"—*φεραν τα τα παντα τω ρηματι της δυναμεις αυτου*,—"sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."† *Τα παντα* signifies the universe, which the Son of God bears up, or sustains, by his mighty word. The expression excludes the idea of labour or difficulty, and imports that the creation is continued in existence and order by his efficacious will. "Thou even thou, art JEHOVAH alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all," or "makest them all to live."‡ "JEHOVAH, thou preservest man and beast."§ When we find similar language used concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, there can remain no doubt that he also is JEHOVAH, unless we will venture to say, that the sustentation of living and inanimate beings is falsely ascribed to him by the Apostle, or that God has, since the time when the Psalmist and Prophet wrote, admitted a creature to co-operate with him in the administrations of providence.

In the third place, The resurrection of the dead is ascribed to him. It will be universally acknowledged that this is exclusively a work of God. He only who first framed the human body, and connected with it a living spirit, can restore that body after it has undergone dissolution in the grave, and bring back the soul from the invisible world to its original abode. Agreeable to this dictate of reason is the declaration of Scripture, that it is "God who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were."|| Jesus Christ raised the dead while he was sojourning on the earth; as the daughter of Jairus, the widow's son at Nain, and Lazarus, besides many others not named; and it is he who will appear in the end of the world, and restore to life the millions of the human race who are sleeping in the dust. "The hour is coming, in which all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."¶ It may be objected, that this work is not a decisive proof of his Divinity, because the dead were raised by some of the Prophets, and by all the Apostles, who received power to this effect when they were sent forth to preach, "Heal

* Colos. i. 17.
§ Ps. xxxvi. 6.

† Heb. i. 3.
|| Rom. iv. 17.

‡ Neh. ix. 6
¶ John v. 28, 29

the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead.”* The simple fact, that *they* received this power from our Saviour, is sufficient to convince us of his superiority. What they did, they did in his name; and, consequently, we cannot justly consider him and them as possessing an equality of power. Let it be farther observed, that while the Prophets raised the dead in the name of the God of Israel, and the Apostles in the name of their Master, he performed this miracle in his own name, that is, by his own power, and spake of himself in terms, which no Prophet or Apostle would have presumed to employ:—“I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead yet shall he live.”† Still it may be said, that the power which he displayed upon earth, and will more gloriously manifest at the general resurrection, is not his own, but is the power of God, with the exercise of which he was entrusted for the purposes of his mission. But the delegation of omnipotence to a creature is inconceivable and impossible; the supposition of delegated power is inconsistent with the performance of the work in his own name, and it is directly opposed to his express declaration, “As the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.”‡ These words are an explicit assumption of equal power with the Father, and of the same uncontrolled and sovereign exercise of it in the restoration of life.

In the last place, The final judgment is ascribed to him. The Scripture says, that “JEHOVAH is our judge;”§ but it says also, that “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.”|| “When the Son of Man shall come in his glory,—all nations shall be gathered before him.”¶ The inference is plain, that Jesus Christ is God. It may be said, (and this is the language of Scripture itself,) that God will judge the world *by him*; but let us not be carried away by the sound of words, without attending to their meaning. The visible Judge will be a man, it is acknowledged; but will he be a mere man? Is a creature to decide the fate of other creatures? Was it his law which they obeyed or transgressed? Has a creature the reward of heaven and the punishment of hell at his disposal? These questions suggest a negative answer to every person not divested of reason and piety. Every one must give an account of himself to God, and who but God is qualified to receive the account? Omniscience is necessary to him who pronounces the final sentence, as well as omnipotence to execute it; for it will proceed, not merely upon the external actions of men, but upon their motives and their thoughts, which are known to him alone who sees not with eyes of flesh, but searches the hearts and tries the reins. Christ will indeed act in concurrence with the Father, who is hence said to judge the world by him; but the high office necessarily supposes him to be possessed of infinite perfecti-
on.

* Matt. x. 8.

§ Isa. xxxiii. 22.

† John xi. 25.

|| 2 Cor. v. 10.

‡ John v. 21.

¶ Matt. xxv. 31, 32.

LECTURE XXXII.

ON THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

Divinity of Christ inferred from the Religious Worship and Honour rendered to him ; Instances—The Doctrine of his Divinity shewn to be interwoven with the Scriptural Scheme of Redemption—Objections stated and answered.

I PROCEED, in the fourth place, to prove the Divinity of Christ from the religious honours which are given to him.

Reason and Scripture concur in appropriating religious worship to God, who alone is possessed of those perfections which are presupposed in the object of our prayers and thanksgivings, and the sentiments and affections which these are designed to express, as supreme respect, love, trust, hope, and resignation. It is an understood condition, that he whom we address has a perfect knowledge of our situation,—comprehending our dangers, our temptations, our afflictions, and our desires ; that he has resources adequate to the supply of all who make application to him ; and that he is able to afford us effectual assistance in every possible case. We believe him to be omniscient, omnipotent, and infinite in goodness. To worship a creature is as great an absurdity as it would be to intreat a poor man to make us rich, or a subject to pardon us, while the remission of punishment is the exclusive prerogative of the sovereign. It is sacrilege, a robbery of God, from whom we take the honour to which he has an exclusive right, and transfer it to a being who, in comparison with him, is less than nothing and vanity. It is the idolatry which is prohibited under the severest denunciations, and which consists in giving that glory to another, which is due to God alone. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”* “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”† The Gentiles are condemned for erecting temples and altars, offering sacrifices, and addressing prayers to others besides the Creator of heaven and earth, and are pronounced guilty because “they did service to those who by nature were not gods.” From these, and innumerable passages, it appears that religious worship should be given to the self-existent and all-perfect Being alone ; that he will not permit, and still less command, us to worship a creature ; that a creature cannot acquire by rank, or dignity, or office, a right to the honour which is peculiar to Him who derives nothing from others, and gives to all the life which they enjoy, and the qualifications by which they are distinguished.

That religious worship is given to Jesus Christ, we shall afterwards see ; but in the mean time, I remark, that from a perception of the necessary connexion between Divine worship and the Divinity of the object, Socinus maintained that our Saviour, although a man by nature, had, since his exaltation, become *Verus Deus*, true God, having received supreme dominion over heaven and earth, and being made a partaker of the Divine perfections of omniscience and omnipotence. But upon this point, there was a division among his followers, some of whom denied that Christ could be lawfully worshipped, while Socinus defended the contrary opinion, and refused to acknowledge those who differed from him to be Christians. The controversy was carried on with much keenness, and Socinus, impelled by intolerant zeal, which, it seems, is not peculiar to the orthodox, complained to the Prince of Transylvania, who committed his principal antagonist, Francis David, to prison, in which he died

* Exod. xx. 3.

† Luke iv. 8.

If Socinus agreed with the Scriptures, in asserting that Divine honours should be paid to our Lord, he was at variance with his own fundamental tenet of his simple humanity, and sought in vain to reconcile the two statements by the inconceivable notion of his subsequent deification. David and others who joined with him (for he was not alone) saw more clearly, or avowed more honestly, the consequences of the opinion which they held in common concerning the person of Christ: for certainly, if he was only a man, they reasoned justly when they affirmed, that by no change of state could he become entitled to the same honour with God. Religious worship is not founded in arbitrary appointment, but in the nature of things. It is not due to God, merely because it is commanded, but because, possessing all perfection, he is worthy of it, and we are his creatures, who hold all by his bounty, and are dependent upon his care. This reason of worship is wanting in all created beings, in the highest as well as in the lowest. Hence Francis David and his friends had the advantage in their dispute with Socinus, and urged him with arguments, to which he could not answer in a satisfactory manner.

I proceed to the proof, that Jesus Christ is the object of religious worship, and begin with his own general declaration: "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son; that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him."* Observe the occasion on which these words were spoken. It was when the Jews, who were offended because he had profaned the Sabbath, as they thought, by curing a lame man upon it, now accused him of blasphemy in making himself equal to God. If our Lord had been a mere man, he would have repelled the charge, and shewn that his pretensions were not higher than a creature might have made without arrogance and impiety. But does he utter a single word to this effect? No! his whole discourse is a repetition of his claim, and the words now under consideration are not the least remarkable part of it. We cannot conceive a more explicit assertion of his equality with the Father. He claims equal honour, and would he have done so, if his dignity had not been equal? The honour which is given to the Father, is to be given also to the Son. Now the honour which we give to the Father consists in adoration, praise, unreserved confidence, humble submission, and, in a word, the dedication of soul and body to his service. We are therefore to adore the Son, to make him the object of our trust and hope, to resign ourselves to his disposal, and to yield implicit obedience to his commands. There is no mention made here of supreme and subordinate honour, but in every respect it is the same. And it is enjoined by the Father himself. But if Jesus Christ is a mere man, as Unitarians affirm, how can the will of the Father, in this case, be reconciled with his general declaration, that he will not give his glory to another? Has he revoked it in favour of the Son of Mary? Is the God of the New Testament at variance with the God of the Old? It is in vain to compare the words of Paul, "He that despiseth us, despiseth not man, but God;"† for they are totally different. There is no demand of the same respect to the apostles, which belongs to God himself, but a simple and intelligible declaration, that as they were the messengers of God, the contempt with which some might treat their message would ultimately terminate upon Him. No Apostle ever said, It is the will of the Father that all men should honour us, even as they honour himself. They would have deemed it impious to speak so: and they guarded against such an idea, by saying to those who were disposed to admire them, "Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?"‡ "Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."§

* John v. 22, 23.

† 1 Thess. iv. 8.

‡ Acts iii. 12.

§ 1 Cor. iii. ~

That Jesus Christ was worshipped by the primitive Christians, is a fact so clearly established in the New Testament, that nothing but prejudice, blinding the mental eye, can hinder any person from perceiving it. The truth is, that this worship was so general, and so publicly known, that it is used as a description of his followers, who are more than once denominated those *who called upon his name*; a phrase which often occurs in the Scriptures, and signifies invocation or prayer. “He hath authority to bind all that call upon thy name.”*—*πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους τὸ ὄνομα σου*. “To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,” *συν πᾶσι τοῖς ἐπικαλουμένοις τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*.† It has been asserted, indeed, that the words may be rendered, *who are called*, or, *who call themselves* by thy name, that is, who profess to be the disciples of Christ. It has been observed, however, that in Scripture, when it is designed to express the idea of denominating, or calling after another, a different form is used, and the name of the one person is then said to be *called upon* the other. “The house upon which thy name is called.” “My people upon whom my name is called.”‡ It has been farther observed, that in the translation of the Seventy, when a tense of the verb *ἐπικαλέω* occurs in the middle voice, it has an active signification, and denotes calling upon another. The phrase, *ἐπικαλεσθαι τὸ ὄνομα*,—*τον θεόν*,—*μέ*,—*αυτον*, occurs often, and is expressive of the act of invocation. Even those critics, who would give a different translation when the verb is used in reference to our Saviour, render it in the sense of calling upon, when passages are quoted from the Old Testament in which the object is understood to be the Father; thus shewing, that their occasional deviations in translating it, are not founded upon the settled meaning of the term, but upon the necessity of their system. It is convenient to conceal this decisive proof of the divinity of Christ, and to represent the primitive Christians as not calling upon, but calling themselves by, his name, as the ancient philosophical sects adopted an appellation derived from their respective founders. In short, *ἐπικαλεσθαι* is a complaisant word, and changes its meaning on all necessary occasions, to serve the cause of Unitarianism. The first disciples were worshippers of Christ; and there is one eminent instance which well deserves our attention. “And they stoned Stephen, calling upon and saying,” (this is the literal translation, and the word *God*, which our translators have inserted, is an unnecessary and improper supplement,) “calling upon and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”§ It has been said, that “this solitary example is of itself no sufficient warrant for a practice contrary to the precepts of Christ, and the doctrine of the Apostles.” That it is contrary to the precepts of Christ, and the doctrine of the Apostles, we deny; and that it is not a solitary example has already appeared; but it is thus that Unitarians, those masters of reason, draw conclusions without premises, and assume as certain what remains to be proved. Is this their respect for a holy man and a martyr? Was the last act of his life an act of transgression? Did his expiring breath utter the language of idolatry? How, then, was he “full of faith and of the Holy Ghost?” It has been said again, that the invocation of Stephen was justifiable, because Christ was really present, and the martyr saw him; but that our case is very different, because Christ is now at a great distance from us in heaven. But we would ask those who make use of this argument, whether it would be lawful to pray to our Saviour, or to invoke his aid, if he were present? If they answer in the affirmative, then we tell them, that it is lawful for us, as well as for Stephen, to pray to him, because it has been proved that, in his divine nature, he fills heaven and earth. But, as they allege

* Acts ix. 14.

† 1 Kings viii. 43. 2 Chron. vii. 14. *marg̃in*.

‡ 1 Cor. i. 2.

§ Acts vii. 59. 60.

that he was only a man, we ask again, whether Stephen, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, would address such a prayer to him, even when he was present? What was it to "receive his spirit," but to admit him into the region of everlasting peace? What was it "not to lay sin to the charge" of his murderers, but to repeal the sentence of the divine law, and grant them impunity? Were these blessings to be asked from a creature? What greater could he have asked from God? Can a creature pardon our sins, and bestow eternal life? It would be wise to abandon these miserable subterfuges. The passage is plain; and no man of candour will rest in any other view of it, than that Stephen, enlightened and guided by the Spirit of grace and supplication, died in the act of adoring his Saviour, and, therefore, that the Saviour is God.

In the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, verse 6, the Apostle, among the proofs of the pre-eminence of the Son, quotes the following passage, and applies it to him: "Again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." The words are taken from the ninety-seventh Psalm, where they run thus: "Worship him all ye gods." The term *Elohim* is sometimes applied to created beings, and we have the authority of the Apostle for considering this as an instance. Those who are called gods in the Psalm, are called angels in the Epistle. They are addressed while a description is given of the reign of JEHOVAH, on account of which the earth is summoned to rejoice, and the multitude of the isles to be glad. We should not have known that the reference is to the reign of the Messiah, if Paul had not informed us; but, believing that he was under the direction of the Holy Spirit, we follow with confidence when he leads the way. The gods, then, are angels, and the object of their worship is Jesus Christ. It is a mere evasion to say that "the angels are the former prophets and messengers of God, who are summoned to do homage to Christ in consequence of his resurrection from the dead, and to acknowledge him as their superior." If celestial beings are not mentioned in this chapter, we can find them nowhere in the Scriptures; and that it is not simple homage, but religious worship which is demanded, is evident from this consideration, that he, whom they are called to worship, is, according to the Psalmist, the JEHOVAH "whose righteousness the heavens declare, and whose glory all the people see."

"Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."* "I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."† All these things belong to our Saviour, and are ascribed to him by the holy worshipping assembly. The spirits of heaven, and the redeemed from the earth, unite in celebrating his praise. They worship him in the same manner as JEHOVAH is worshipped. "Give unto the Lord, ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; bring an offering, and come before him: worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth, is thine."‡ As he is honoured with the same ascriptions as the Father, so he is joined with him in the same act of adoration and thanksgiving. "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."§ Can Unitarians produce another instance in which the name of a creature is thus associated with that of God, in the

* Rev. i. 5, 6. † Pev. v. 11, 12. ‡ 1 Chron. xvi. 28, 29. xxix. 11. § Rev. vii. 10

devotions of his people? They will not find it in the Scriptures; they must seek for it in the litany of the Church of Rome; and even there, although divine honours are given to creatures, care is professedly taken not to elevate them to the same rank with the Supreme Being, as Jesus Christ is elevated by an inspired writer in the passages quoted.

I conclude with the argument derived from the form of Christian Baptism, which is administered "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."* If we suppose *eis το ονομα* to be used for *εν τω ονοματι*, we are baptized by the authority of the Son, as well as of the Father: But how can this be, if the Son is only a man? Do religious ordinances emanate from the Creator and a creature, as a common source? Do the commands of a creature bind our consciences as much as the commands of the Creator? If we translate *eis το ονομα* literally, *to the name*, baptism is our solemn dedication to the persons in whose name it is administered. Are we dedicated to the service of a creature? Who is Jesus Christ, if he is only a man, that we should obey him? It is said, indeed, that the Israelites "were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea."† The word Moses sometimes signifies the religion which Moses delivered as the minister of God. "When Moses is read to them," that is, the books of Moses, or the laws of Moses, "the veil is upon their hearts."‡ All agree that the meaning is, that the Israelites, by passing through the Red Sea, were separated to the service of God, as enjoined by the ministry of Moses. But the meaning of the words used in Christian baptism is manifestly different, unless we choose to say that we are baptized in the name of the Father, and in the name of the Christian Religion. It is plain, that in the same sense in which we are consecrated to the Father, we are consecrated to the Son; and consequently, that we are laid under an obligation to worship and serve the one, as well as the other. We never read that the Israelites were baptized in the name of JEHOVAH and of Moses. The Lord and the servant are not joined together as objects of equal respect, as the Father and the Son are. The cause of the difference is this, that the Son is himself a Divine person, and therefore entitled to the same honour with the Father.

I have gone over, in order, the proofs which are usually adduced to establish the Divinity of Christ. It is wonderful, that a point so clearly taught in the sacred writings, should have ever been made the subject of dispute; it is still more wonderful that, after the ample discussion which it has undergone, it has not been settled to the satisfaction of all parties. There is something unaccountable in the opposition which it has met with from persons professing to receive the Scriptures as the standard of their faith. If the arguments which present themselves in such abundance, whether consisting in express testimonies, or in legitimate and obvious inferences from them, are deemed insufficient, it would puzzle a wiser man than I pretend to be, to tell what would convince. The doctrine could not have been stated in plainer terms. He who runs may read it, if he will open his eyes. It is probable that, in whatever terms the doctrine had been delivered, some men would have objected. Human language, the only vehicle of Divine communications to human beings, is not proof against Unitarian criticism, which wrests words from their natural sense, and affixes any meaning to them, however harsh and remote, which suits the design of the critics. All that we can gain by our controversy with them, is to expose their unfairness to the world, that the simple and inconsiderate may not be seduced: of convincing them we have no hope, unless that power be exerted which casts down imaginations, and every high thing, and brings all the thoughts into captivity to Christ.

* Matt. xxviii. 19.

† 1 Cor. x. 2.

‡ 2 Cor. iii. 15.

To the arguments which have been stated, nothing needs to be added. But for your complete satisfaction, I shall lay before you some considerations, arising from a different view of the subject, and showing that the Divinity of Christ is interwoven with the scheme of Redemption. It is a sort of *a posteriori* reasoning, which, from the character that he sustains in that great work, and the part that he acts, proves that he must be a person superior in dignity to all men, and to all creatures.

First, Let us consider him as the Revealer of the Divine Will, the Instructor of the human race. In this general office, men were associated with him, as the Prophets of the old dispensation, and the Apostles of the new; and hence he bears the same names, being called "the Prophet whom God raised up according to his promise," and "the Apostle of our profession." His pre-eminence, however, is undisputed; and it will be acknowledged by all, that no other person was ever so gifted, or possessed of equal authority. It belonged to him in this character, to complete and close divine revelation; to make known to the world the whole counsel of God; to publish truths which eye had not seen, ear had not heard, nor had it entered into the mind of man to conceive; and further, internally to illuminate the minds of men, to remove the veil of prejudice and error, to impart a vivid and commanding perception of invisible things, to dispose them to receive truths humiliating to the pride, and revolting to the corrupt propensities of the heart. If it be granted that the latter part of this statement was comprehended in his office, it cannot be consistently denied that he was greater than a human teacher; for no mere man has an absolute control over the minds of others, and can guide their movements according to his pleasure. But even the communication of a perfect knowledge of the Divine Will, which was effected by his own ministry, and by that of his Apostles whom he qualified for the work, seems to have required greater powers of understanding than could fall to the lot of a creature; an understanding commensurate to the subject, which has a height and a depth, a length and a breadth, not to be measured by a limited capacity. If it should be said, that God might have illuminated his mind, as he illuminated the minds of other Prophets, and fitted him for his duty by successive revelations, we should recollect that, according to his own testimony, he had the same knowledge of the Father which the Father had of him. "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son."* We should recollect, that the Evangelist John ascribes a knowledge to him quite peculiar, when he says, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."† Would he have used such language of any creature? To see God, is to know him perfectly; to be in his bosom, is to be the intimate associate of his counsels. More is meant than that the man Jesus Christ had a greater degree of knowledge than other men; the words evidently import, that he had knowledge of a totally different kind, arising from immediate vision, and perpetual communion. No Prophet or Apostle is ever said to have enjoyed such means of knowledge, even in an inferior degree. None of them had seen God; none of them was in his bosom. The voice from the excellent Glory made a clear distinction between him and all other teachers. "'This is my beloved Son: hear ye him.'" The Father substituted him in his own room, as the instructor of the human race; he pointed him out as the object of the attention, and faith, and obedience of the world; he commanded us henceforth to learn wisdom from his lips, and to regulate our conduct by his authority. Did he ever give such a command concerning any other person? Was it ever said concerning any other, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life."‡ "Every soul, which will not hear this

* Matt. xi. 27.

† John i. 18.

‡ John iii. 36.

Prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.”* We are informed that “the people were astonished at his doctrine, because he taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes;” but we rise a step higher and say, not even as the Prophets. Between his manner, and theirs, there is a very remarkable difference. They, in fact, claimed no personal authority, and delivered their instructions in the name of the Lord; while he spoke in his own name: “Verily, verily, I say unto you.” Who is this that requires men to take him as their supreme guide in religion? who is this that makes his own testimony the foundation of faith? Would a human messenger have ventured to advance such pretensions? Could he have adopted this lofty style without impiety? In conformity to this claim, when he gave the Apostles a commission to teach the nations, he gave it in his own name. They were his ambassadors; they were to produce his warrant for the doctrines which they taught, and the laws which they enjoined; they were to subject men to him as the Lord of their consciences. Was it a mere man who issued such orders, and demanded the homage of all people, and kindred, and tongues? I shall mention one circumstance more which is a proof of his Divinity, that he inspired those ambassadors, gave them the Holy Ghost, and invested them with the power of working miracles, to attest the truth of their message. The Apostles, it is true, also communicated supernatural gifts; but, there is this essential difference, that what they did, was done confessedly in his name, and, therefore, instead of weakening, strengthens the evidence of his power; whereas he acted with independent authority, dispensing, as a Sovereign, gifts over which he had absolute control. “He breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.”† Surely this is the voice of a God, and not of a man.

In the second place, Let us consider him in the character of a priest, whose office it was to offer a propitiatory sacrifice, for the whole human race, as some maintain, or for the elect, according to others, composing a multitude which no man can number. By offering a propitiatory sacrifice, I mean, that he was to suffer death for them, that the claims of justice being satisfied, the moral Governor of the universe might release them from the penalty of sin. Now, this transaction supposes, that his sufferings were an equivalent for theirs; that the ends of punishment were as fully answered by his death, as if the transgressors had died; that the divine authority was upheld, the divine righteousness was asserted, the divine holiness was manifested in unclouded splendour. Would these designs have been accomplished by the death of a mere man? There is a manifest disproportion between the means and the end. It is unaccountable upon any principle of moral calculation, that the blood of one man, whatever value it might be conceived to have derived from his virtues and endowments, should have been accepted as a full compensation for the debt which millions owed, for innumerable violations of the law! Its acceptance as such, would have lowered the divine government in the estimation of its subjects; it would have confirmed them in the opinion, that its demands were not high, that it felt little resentment against crimes, and that it wanted only the shadow of a pretext for dismissing them with impunity. But the Scriptures teach, that the death of Christ was a true and proper atonement for sin, and was so complete, that God is just, although he remit the sins of those who believe; and that the highest glory redounds to his moral perfections, from the dispensation of grace. There must, therefore, be a greater worth in the blood, and greater efficacy in the sufferings of Christ, than in the blood and sufferings of any other person. No such effect is ever ascribed to the death of a prophet, an apostle, or any other martyr; it is not said, that they expiated their own guilt by the sacrifice of their lives, and still less, that they expiated the guilt of their brethren. Had our blessed Lord been only a man, his blood would not

* Acts iii. 23.

† John xx. 22.

have redeemed us from the curse of God, any more than the blood of Stephen, and Peter, and Paul. Of this our antagonists are sensible; and accordingly they deny that his death was vicarious, and affirm that the sole design of it was to give us an example of patience, and to attest his doctrine: thus maintaining the consistency of their own system, although they are directly a variance with the doctrine of Scripture. Such, you may observe by the way, is the intimate connexion of the truth which I am defending, with other articles of christianity, that the denial of it is the removing of the foundation, in consequence of which the whole structure falls to the ground. We, who believe the Divinity of Christ, can account, without difficulty, for the great and happy effects which are ascribed to his death. We can understand, how the sufferings of a man, who was personally united to the Son of God, were of greater value, in a moral estimate, than the sufferings of the actual transgressors. We can see, how this single sacrifice answered all the ends of justice, and demonstrated in the most solemn manner, the righteousness and holiness of the Universal Governor, the unspeakable evil of sin, the immutable purity and unbending rigour of the law. I shall not appeal to the words, "Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood,"* because there is a various reading which substitutes *Lord* for *God*; but surely the same Apostle meant to convey a higher idea of our Saviour than that of a mere man, when he said, "Had they"—the Princes of this world—"known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;"† and again, "The law maketh men high-priests, which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore."‡ They are more blind than the princes of this world, who, amidst the light of revelation which now shines, can perceive upon Calvary no greater scene than a common martyrdom. Strange, that notwithstanding the preternatural darkness, the earthquake, and the opening of the graves, they should be more insensible than an ignorant heathen, who, convinced by the signs in heaven and on earth, that the supposed malefactor was no ordinary sufferer, exclaimed, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Let us, in the last place, consider him as sustaining the character of universal Lord. He is represented as invested with supreme authority over the church, and all persons and things upon earth; and likewise over angels, principalities, and powers in the invisible world, the noblest and mightiest creatures in the universe. Besides his own declaration, "all power is committed to me in heaven and on earth," let us attend to the words of an Apostle, who, having informed us, that, though "he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God," yet "he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," adds, "wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."§ One should think, that his investiture with unlimited dominion over the creation, would prove to the satisfaction of every reflecting mind, that he is not a creature, that he is not a mere man, but a person, in whom the fulness of the Godhead resides; for it is impossible to conceive that he could hold that dominion, and perform the various acts which it implies, unless he were possessed of divine perfections. It is certainly necessary, that he should be acquainted with all his subjects, and all their circumstances; that he should be capable of conducting the whole system of affairs with order, and to its destined ends; and that he should be able to keep every being in his proper place, to restrain wayward movements or confine them within due bounds, and to make the mightiest and

* Acts xx. 28.

† 1 Cor. ii. 8.

‡ Heb. vii. 28.

§ Phil. ii. 6—11.

the most refractory bend to his purpose. In other words, he could not govern the universe without infinite knowledge, infinite wisdom, and infinite power. It would be a mockery to place a creature upon the throne, to whom the extent of his kingdom would be unknown, and whose proceedings would be at one time marked by error, and at another embarrassed by opposition. The duties arising from the relation in which we stand to him as our Sovereign, are such as we owe to him alone, who is God over all. We are bound by express command, to trust in him, to worship him, to obey him, to submit to his disposal, to expect from his lips the sentence which will decide our eternal state; and what more do we owe to the Father? And we have already seen, that it is His will, that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour himself. Unitarians get quit of this argument, by the usual expedient of figures, as if the sacred writers, as soon as they began to speak of our Saviour, had been hurried away by some unaccountable impulse, into the region of metaphor, simile, and hyperbole. All this magnificent language concerning his kingdom, we must be careful not to understand literally, lest we fall into the great error of supposing, that he is actually placed at the head of affairs. Let us not be so simple as to adopt this idea. Nothing more is meant than the moral influence of the Gospel; and the reign of Christ is like the reign of any other man over his followers, who have embraced his doctrines, and submitted to his institutions. "The subjection of all mankind to the rules of piety and virtue delivered by Christ, is shadowed out under the imagery of a mighty king, to whom all power was given in heaven and earth." So say our antagonists; but they only will receive this interpretation, who have been given over to strong delusion, to believe a lie.

I have laid before you a variety of arguments, by which the Divinity of Jesus Christ is evinced; and in doing so, I have endeavoured to obviate such objections as are made to the passages quoted. I shall conclude by bringing under your notice some other objections, with answers to them.

It is objected, that the supposed Divinity of Christ is inconsistent with the doctrine of the Unity of God; and those passages which affirm that there is one God, and that there is no God besides him, are confidently brought forward to refute our opinion. But we know those passages as well as our opponents, and are as fully persuaded of the truth which they inculcate. We hold at the same time, the Unity of God and the Divinity of Christ, without at all thinking that we are liable to the charge of self-contradiction; for our doctrine is, not that the Father is one God, and the Son is another, but that, while there is only one Divine nature, the Father and the Son are distinct persons in that nature. It is absurd, therefore, to allege the acknowledged Unity of God as subversive of our doctrine, till it is proved, and not merely asserted, that personal distinctions in one Divine nature are impossible. For a more complete answer to this objection, I refer to our illustration of the Trinity.

It is objected, that whatever may be implied in the title or designation, Son of God, it is a fair conclusion from it, that he is not God himself. It is admitted, that the son of a man as such, is also a man; why is it denied, that the Son of God is also God? We grant, indeed, that the two cases are different, because a man and his son are two separate beings, have the same specific, but not the same numerical nature; but the title leads us to conceive, that he who is the Son of God, has the nature of God, and, since the nature cannot be divided or multiplied, that the same nature is common to both. The title implies a community of essence; and all that we can legitimately infer from it is, that he is a distinct person from the Father.

It is objected, that our Lord excludes himself from the honour of divinity, in these words, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true

God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”* But surely a single passage, instead of being set in opposition to an hundred other passages, should be explained, if possible, in consistency with them. We grant that our Lord would have denied his own Divinity, if he had said that the Father only is God, to the exclusion of himself; but it is quite evident that he merely distinguishes his Father from other pretenders to Divinity. He does not say, “Thou only art the true God,” but “Thou art the only true God.” When the Scripture calls the Father, “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords,” the design is obviously to except, not Jesus Christ, but the ‘lords many’ of the Gentiles; and accordingly, Jesus Christ receives the same title in other places, being designated “King of kings, and Lord of lords,” and the “Prince of the kings of the earth.” “The Socinian argues,” says Bishop Middleton, “as if in our Saviour’s days there had been the same controversy about the *nature* and *essence* of the One True God, which arose afterwards; whereas the dispute then was, whether there were a *plurality* of gods, or only *One*: The Jews held the latter opinion, and the whole pagan world the former. Our Saviour, therefore, keeping, if I may so call it, this controversy in view, tells his hearers that eternal life is to be obtained only by a knowledge of the One True God, and of Jesus Christ, thus at once directing the mind to the truths both of natural and of revealed religion; and the hearers of our Lord could not possibly have understood him in any other sense. It is, therefore, perfectly frivolous to introduce this passage into the Trinitarian dispute; and the stress which has been laid on it, can be accounted for only from the extreme difficulty of giving to the opposite hypothesis any thing like the sanction of Scripture.”† Besides, there is a passage in one of the Epistles of John, from which it appears that the words before us are not exclusive of the Son, because what is here affirmed of the Father, is there affirmed also of him. “And we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.”‡ It is certain, that the Father is often called God, and our Saviour is mentioned, at the same time, as distinct from him. The reason is, that, in the economy of redemption, the Father sustains the majesty and maintains the rights of the Godhead, while Christ acts as Mediator. By him we come to the Father, but we do not hold him, personally considered, to be subordinate. We worship the Son also; but the usual order is to draw near to the Father in the name of the Son. Keeping this economy in mind, we can easily understand the passage before us, and others of a similar nature. “To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.”§

It is objected, that our Saviour himself acknowledged his inferiority to the Father, and cannot, therefore, be God in the proper sense of the term. “My Father is greater than I.”|| But there is another passage which we shall do well to take into consideration at the same time. “Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.”¶ The words have undergone much criticism, which it would be tedious to detail; but, whether we translate *οὐχ ἀρπαγμον ᾔσχετο*, *he thought it not robbery*, or, *he did not seize as a prey*, or catch at equality to God, the result is the same, namely, that he was really equal; for, if this had not been the case, there would have been no humility in declining to display his equality for a time; and, as an example of humility, the case is introduced. It would be a strange recommendation of the humility of a creature, to say that he did not aim at equality to God. Now we are sure, that the Scripture does not contradict itself; and hence, when two parts of it appear to be at variance, there can be no doubt that there is a

* John xvii. 3.

† 1 John v. 20.

‡ Middleton on the Greek Article, p. 372. ed. 1808.

§ 1 Cor. xiii. 6.

|| John xiv. 28.

¶ Phil. ii. 6.

able of reconciling them, which we should endeavour to find out. Our Saviour is exhibited in two characters, as the Son of God, and as Mediator. In the former, he is described as possessing all the perfections of Deity; but in the latter, as the servant of the Father, acting in obedience to his will. In this latter character the Father was greater than he, not essentially, but economically, as he who sends is in this respect greater than he who is sent; and it is evident from the context, that this was the character in which our Saviour spoke when he declared the superiority of his Father. The subject of conversation was his ascension in human nature, his return to the Father, to receive the promised reward of his labours upon earth; and on this occasion he appeared to be inferior, as the ambassador is to his Sovereign, who confers honour upon him for the wisdom and fidelity with which he has fulfilled his commission. “Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.”

This explanation is connected with another objection founded on the assignment of a subordinate character to him, while he is described as the servant of God:—“I came—not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me.”* It is certain, that although two persons be of equal rank, the one may consent, for a specified time and a particular purpose, to act the part of a servant to the other, without any diminution of his dignity, and, in this case, is inferior only in office. Notwithstanding this subordination, his rights are preserved, because it is entirely voluntary, and is intended to last only for a limited period, after which he will appear in his original equality. The application is obvious to our Lord, who being in the form of God, took upon him the form of a servant, and having emptied himself of his visible glory, was found in fashion as a man. Yet this humiliation, although profound, was not such as entirely to conceal his true character. While he held the place of a servant, he acted as a Lord, exercising sovereign authority over the elements, the bodies and souls of men, and the invisible world. It was evident to all who had eyes to see and minds to reflect, that he was quite different from the other messengers of God. “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and seas obey him?” In connexion with this argument, his own words have been referred to as inconsistent with his Divinity, because they are expressive of subordination and dependence:—“Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do.”† But we have already considered them among the proofs of his Divinity, and undoubtedly they furnish a very strong argument for it, because they are an explicit claim of omnipotence, for he immediately adds, “What things soever the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.”

On the same general principle, we may reply to the objection, that he called God, his God, that he prayed to him, that he had a different will, saying, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.”‡ The answer is, that, while we believe his Divinity, we hold also that he was a man, and as such stood in the same relation to God, and owed the same duties as other men; and that, having assumed the character, he acted in all things as the servant of the Father.

An objection is drawn from his answer to the person who said to him, “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?”§ The objection is this, God is good, and therefore, he who denies that this epithet ought to be applied to himself, is not God. Griesbach, whom Unitarians consider as infallible authority in settling the text, gives a different reading, “Why dost thou ask me concerning good, or the good?” But unluckily he retains the usual reading in two other gospels, and the result of his

* John vi. 38.

† John v. 19.

‡ Matt. xxvi. 39.

§ Matt. xix. 16.

critical labours is to introduce a contradiction among the Evangelists. We may presume, that originally they all agreed, although now there is a difference in several manuscripts, particularly as this alteration of the text renders it in a great measure unmeaning. "Why callest thou me good?" Our Lord adapted his answer to the notions which the inquirer entertained of him, plainly looking upon him as merely a human teacher,—as a prophet, perhaps, but not greater than a prophet. He would not allow flattering titles to be given to men, not even to himself when he was supposed to be only one of them. What right had a man to be called good, in the full acceptation of the term, since goodness can be predicated of him alone who possessed infinite perfections? Jesus does not speak of himself agreeably to what he really is, but according to this person's apprehensions; and nothing is more unfair than to conclude that he denied his own Divinity, because he refused to be addressed in language which should be appropriated to God, by one who believed him to be a creature.

It is objected, that Jesus Christ is expressly called a man, and such passages as the following are produced, as containing an unanswerable argument against his Divinity:—"There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." "Jesus Christ, a man approved of God among you by miracles." "After me cometh a man, which is preferred before me." "But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth."* We know all these passages, and if it would serve any purpose, would lend our aid to Unitarians in collecting many others of a similar strain; but they prove only, what we are always ready to acknowledge, that our blessed Saviour was a partaker of our nature, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. They do not prove that he was a mere man, unless it be ascertained to be impossible that he, who is man, may at the same time be God. This our adversaries affirm; but we demand demonstration, which they are unable to give. It was foretold, that a "virgin should conceive and bear a son," or that the Messiah should be a man; but it was added, that his name should be Immanuel, which signifies, God with us.†

As for the assertion, that if we maintain the Divinity of Christ, we must admit that the Deity was born, was imprisoned in the body of an infant, and suffered pain and death, it is unworthy of a serious refutation. Let Unitarians indulge, if they will, in coarse and vulgar declamation, which can injure only themselves, and is a pitiful attempt to prejudice the minds of men against a cause which their arguments have failed to overthrow. They know well that we disclaim such consequences, and that our doctrine stands clear of them. The Deity was not born, but the man was born who is united to the Deity; the Deity was not imprisoned in the body of an infant, but He was a child in his human nature, who, in his Divine, fills heaven and earth; the Deity did not die, but we have the authority of Scripture for saying, that when Jesus of Nazareth suffered, the Lord of glory was crucified.

* 1 Tim. ii. 5. Acts ii. 22. John i. 30. John viii. 40.

† Isa. vii. 14.

LECTURE XXXIII.

ON THE DIVINITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Proof of the Personality of the Holy Spirit—Reason of the name, Spirit—His Divinity inferred from the ascription to him of the Names, the Perfections, and Works of God; and from the Worship rendered to him—The Relation of the Holy Spirit to the other two Persons of the Godhead—Difference between the Eastern and Western Churches.

HAVING endeavoured to prove, in some preceding lectures, the Deity of our blessed Redeemer, I purpose to lay before you the proofs of the Divinity of the Holy Ghost.

I begin with observing, that, although conclusive, they are not so numerous as in the former case; but it is not necessary that they should be equally ample. The great difficulty in admitting the Divinity of any other person but the Father, arises from the doctrine of the Unity, with which a plurality of subsistences in the Godhead seems to be inconsistent. As among men, three distinct persons, although partakers of a common nature, are not numerically one in essence, we are apt to apply this analogy to the Divine nature, and to think nothing clearer than that the supposition of two or more persons infers its division into as many parts. Trinitarians have, on this account, been frequently pronounced to be Tritheists. The only way of removing this difficulty, is to shew from the infallible declarations of Scripture, that however incomprehensible the doctrine is, and whatever repugnance may be imagined in it to the dictates of reason, the Son is God, as well as the Father. We thus oppose positive proof to presumptions, and set aside the bold and ignorant conclusions of our finite minds concerning an infinite essence, by the express testimony of Him to whom that essence belongs. If we succeed in establishing the fact that the Son is God, we prepare the way for the admission of a third person in the Trinity, not without proof, but upon evidence not equally luminous and diversified. The great objection against believing that there is a plurality in the Divine nature, is removed by shewing that it is reconcileable with the Unity, because it actually exists; and, being compelled to acknowledge the Deity of the Son, we are the more easily persuaded to acknowledge that of the Spirit. My meaning will be illustrated by reminding you, that it would require more evidence to convince us of a first fact different from any which we had experienced, and therefore apparently incredible, than it would require to convince us of a second fact of the same kind, although, with respect to the second, we should still demand that the evidence be sufficient. This I consider as the reason why the Scriptures, while they teach the Divinity of the Holy Ghost, do not speak so fully upon it as upon the Divinity of the Son.

The point which it is necessary to consider, in the first place, is the personality of the Spirit. In other words we must inquire whether he is a person, intelligent and active, or merely, as some affirm, an influence, virtue, or divine operation. It is admitted, that this is sometimes the meaning of the word, Spirit, in the Scriptures; or that, by a metonymy, the name is used to denote the effect which the Spirit produces upon the soul. Thus, the passages which speak of the "pouring out" of the Spirit, of his being "received," and of being "filled" with him, have been understood to signify nothing more, than that miraculous or sanctifying gifts are bestowed upon men. But, allowing that this view of such passages is just, I observe, that there are many places

of Scripture in which he is manifestly spoken of as a person, or properties and actions are ascribed to him, which could be predicated only of a person. Understanding and volition are assigned to him; the first, when he is said to “know the things of God,” and to “search all things, yea, even the deep things of God;”* the second, in the following words: “But all these,” that is, the gifts enumerated in the preceding verses, “worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.”† Affections are figuratively attributed to him as well as to the Father, when, for example, we are exhorted not to “grieve the Holy Spirit of God.”‡ Who ever heard of the grief of a quality? We are informed, that “the Spirit maketh intercession for the saints with groanings which cannot be uttered;”§ and we can understand, it has been remarked, what are interceding persons, but have no apprehension of interceding and groaning qualities. “The Comforter,” says our Lord, “which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”|| “When the Comforter is come—he shall testify of me; and ye also shall bear witness.”¶ “When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.”** In this passage, he is represented as performing many personal acts. He teaches the disciples of Christ, and enables them to recollect what they had heard from the lips of their Master; he testifies of Christ as literally as the Apostles testified of him; he guides believers into the truth; he speaks what he has heard; he gives them the knowledge of future events.

It is acknowledged by the adversaries of the Divinity of the Holy Ghost, that, in these and other passages, which might have been mentioned, he is spoken of as a person; but they evade their force by alleging that, in the style of the Scriptures, personal properties and actions are sometimes ascribed to things. Hence it is said of charity, that it suffers long and is kind, envies not, vaunts not itself, is not puffed up, seeks not its own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil,†† &c. These things are attributed to charity, which is a quality, because they are true of the charitable man. In like manner, the Holy Ghost is represented as performing personal acts, although he is not a person, but the power or virtue of the Father, because it is the Father who performs these acts by his own power, which is called the Holy Ghost. But this answer, however plausible, is not satisfactory. It might be worthy of attention, if all the acts which are attributed to the Spirit, might be performed by the power of the Father; but, if some of those acts are such as cannot be predicated of the Father, if he cannot be said to do by his own power all that is done by the Spirit, then it follows, that the Holy Ghost is a person. There is nothing in the account of charity, which is not descriptive of the charitable man; but there are some things affirmed of the Holy Ghost, which are not true of the Father; and hence it appears that he is personally distinct from him.

To make intercession, is the act or work of a person, and is attributed to the Spirit, who “makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”‡‡ It is plain that he makes intercession for them to the Father, and equally plain that it would be absurd to speak of the Father as making intercession to himself. With this absurdity the hypothesis of our opponents is chargeable, because they maintain that the Spirit is merely the power or operation of the Father; but, upon our supposition, every thing is clear, because there is one person who intercedes with another. To come in consequence of a

* 1 Cor. ii. 10, 11.

§ Rom. viii. 26.

** John xvi. 13, 14

† 1 Cor. xii. 17

] John xiv. 26.

†† 1 Cor. xiii. 4, &c.

‡ Eph. iv. 30.

¶ John xv. 26, 27.

‡‡ Rom. viii. 27

commission received from another, is a personal act, and is attributed to the Spirit in the passages quoted above. But it could not be said of the Father, that he comes as the messenger or missionary of another, for there is no other by whom he can be sent; and there would be an evident impropriety and confusion in representing him as coming in the name of the Son, while the Son is uniformly described as coming in his name; not as sending him, but as sent by him. If any man shall suppose the meaning to be, that the Father sends his power by the authority, and under the direction of his Son, and that his power, thus sent, teaches, guides, and compels, he must admit, that he has made a discovery which requires no small degree of ingenuity, and that a book, to understand which such an unnatural interpretation is necessary, is written in defiance of the ordinary rules of composition, and apparently with an intention. Again, the Spirit is said to speak and hear; but these personal acts are attributed to him in a sense in which they cannot be attributed to the Father. *To hear*, when affirmed of him, signifies that he is commissioned by the Son to make certain communications concerning him to the world. "He shall receive of mine."* But how could such a thing be affirmed of the Father? The Spirit does not speak of himself, but speaks what he hears.† But the Father does every thing of himself; and therefore it is not true that the Holy Ghost is said to do these things because he is the power of the Father. It is plain, therefore, since acts are attributed to the Spirit which cannot be attributed to the Father, that the attempt to evade the argument from the passages formerly cited, is abortive; and that the Holy Ghost is not a quality or energy, but has a personal subsistence.

It may be proper, in this place, to inquire into the reason of the name or designation which is appropriated to the third person of the Trinity. He cannot be called the Spirit, on account of the spirituality of his essence; for as it is common to all the persons, one of them could not be denominated from it more than the others. "God is a Spirit." Whoever, therefore, has assigned this as the reason of the name, has given a proof of inaccurate thinking. *Spirit* is a Latin word adopted into our language, and synonymous with the Greek word, πνευμα. Both literally signify, *breath* or *wind*. There cannot be conceived any allusion to their original meaning, when they are applied to the Divine essence, or to angelical beings; but breath has been supposed to be alluded to, when the third person in the Godhead is called the Spirit. This word is understood to refer to the mode of his subsistence, of which we shall afterwards speak, and which is usually termed *procession*, (from the words of our Lord, which we shall soon have occasion to quote) but by the Schoolmen was named *spiration*. As the second person is said to have been "begotten," so the third is said to have "proceeded," as the breath proceeds from the mouth. This idea is supposed to be authorised by the action of our Saviour, who "breathed upon his disciples, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost."‡ The Spirit is the breath of the Almighty. I make a similar remark upon the epithet, *holy*, as upon the term, *spirit*, that it is very inaccurate to suppose that it denotes the holiness of his nature, because holiness, being a property of the divine essence which belongs equally to all the persons, cannot be attributed to one of them by way of eminence or distinction. It would be as improper as always to call one of them wise, or almighty, or just, or good, while no such adjunct was connected with the names of the others. There can be little doubt, that the epithet, *holy*, refers to his official character. He is the Author of all the holiness which adorns the creation, and particularly in the economy of redemption he sustains the character of the Sanctifier: "We are saved by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour."§ He comes forth from the

* John xv. 14.

† Ibid. 13.

‡ John xx. 22.

§ Titus iii. 5.

Father, to restore his image in the soul of man; and all the virtues and graces are the effects of his mighty operations.

Having proved the personality of the Holy Ghost, I proceed to inquire, whether there be evidence in the Scriptures that he is a Divine person, and not a creature, as some who admitted his existence have affirmed. The author of this heresy was Macedonius, Patriarch of Constantinople in the fourth century, who maintained, that the Spirit was not a partaker of the same honours with the Father and the Son, but was their *minister and servant*, *διδάκωνος καὶ ὑπηρέτης*, as the angels are. It is thus that his doctrine is stated by Sozomen, in his Ecclesiastical History.*

I shall begin with shewing you, that the same names are given to the Spirit, which are given to the Father and the Son. JEHOVAH, you know, is the incommunicable name; and, importing underived, independent, and immutable existence, it does not admit of application to a creature. The evidence is not so distinct as in the case of our Saviour; but, that the Spirit is called JEHOVAH, may be inferred from the following passages. Compare Exodus xvii. 7, with Heb. iii. 9. In the former place, it is said, that “the name of the place was called Massah and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted JEHOVAH, saying, is JEHOVAH among us, or not?” In the latter you read, “wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the day of temptation, when your fathers tempted me, and proved me.” Compare, again, Isaiah vi. 8—10, with Acts xxviii. 5. “I heard the voice of JEHOVAH saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” The prophet answered, “Here am I, send me. And he said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, and understand not: and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes.” Now, observe how the Apostle Paul quotes the passage: “Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive,” &c. Compare, once more, Jeremiah xxxi. 31—34, with Heb. x. 15—17. The passages are too long to be quoted; but, in them, as in those already recited, what is spoken by JEHOVAH in the Prophet, is said by the Apostle to have been spoken by the Holy Ghost. I do not affirm, that the argument from these passages is perfectly conclusive, and particularly from the passage in Isaiah, which is expressly applied to our Saviour by the Evangelist John; but the regular substitution of the Holy Ghost for JEHOVAH in them all, affords some ground at least, for believing that he is entitled to the former name, and, consequently, is that mysterious Being, who comprehends in himself the past, the present, and the future.

That the Holy Ghost is called God, I shall prove from two passages. The first is in the fifth Chapter of the Acts, where Peter, having said to Ananias, “Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?” asks again, “Why hast thou conceived this thing in thy heart? Thou hast not lied unto men but unto God.” According to Peter, to lie to the Holy Ghost, is to lie to God; to lie to the Holy Ghost is not to lie to man, because the Holy Ghost is not man; and not to lie to an angel, because the Holy Ghost is not an angel; nor to lie to any creature, because the Holy Ghost is not a creature; but to lie to God, because the Holy Ghost is God. If the Spirit were not God, the Apostle might have said, “thou hast not lied unto the Holy Ghost, but unto God,” for this would have been the proper manner of distinguishing them, and also of pointing out the greatness of his sin. But, since he first told him his sin, which was lying to the Holy Ghost, and then declared its aggravation, that he had not lied unto men but to God, it is plain that the Holy

* Lib. iv. c. 26.

Ghost, to whom he lied, is God. In the first Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul says to them, “Know ye not, that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”* and in another place, “What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?”† From both passages it is plain, that the reason why they were the temple of God was, that the Holy Ghost dwelt in them. But the inference would not be just, if the Holy Ghost were a creature; they might be his temple, and not be the temples of God. A temple is the habitation of the Deity; but there is no way in which we are his habitation, except by the presence of his Spirit. Now, if the presence of the Spirit is the presence of God, it follows, that the Spirit is God. It is evident, that he is so denominated by the Apostle, who in one verse calls believers the temple of the Holy Spirit, and in another verse, the temple of God.

The next argument for the Divinity of the Holy Ghost, is founded upon the ascription of Divine perfections to him. Where the qualities or properties are found, there is the essence to which they belong. He is represented as possessing the attribute of eternity in the following words: “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God!”‡ There is a difference of opinion about the words, “the eternal Spirit,” by which some understand the Divine nature of Christ, through which he offered himself, that is, through which his oblation was rendered infinitely valuable. But his Divine nature is not so expressed in any other passage of Scripture: this sense of the phrase is not the natural one, or the sense which would first present itself to our minds; and the connexion does not necessarily lead to it, but rather suggests the idea of the Holy Ghost, through whose sanctifying influences he offered himself without spot, or his human nature was made a pure immaculate sacrifice. He is the eternal Spirit, from everlasting to everlasting God.—Another attribute of Deity, is immensity, or omnipresence, which, if I may speak so, is a modification of immensity, or the infinite essence of the Deity considered in relation to the system of created things. God is present in every part of the universe. It is certain, therefore, that the Spirit is God, for these are the words of the Psalmist: “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there: If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.”§ Wherever God is, the Spirit is. The Father and the Spirit co-exist throughout all time, and in all space.—A third Divine perfection, of which the Spirit is possessed, is omniscience. “The Spirit,” says Paul, “searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”|| That searching here signifies knowing, is evident from the preceding part of the verse, in which it is said that God had revealed to the Apostle the mysteries of salvation by the Spirit; and from the next verse, in which Paul obviously intends to explain his meaning: “The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.”¶ Omniscience is expressly ascribed to him, when he is said to search or know all things; but lest any person should suspect that these are only created things, he adds, yea, the deep things of God, the secrets with which none was acquainted but himself. When the Apostle asks, “Who hath known the mind of the Lord?”** we must answer, no man knows it, nor any angel; but it is known to the Spirit, and therefore he is God.—I might mention also, almighty power; but the illustration of this particular will be given under the next division, to which I proceed.

* 1 Cor. iii. 16.

† 1 Cor. vi. 19.

‡ Heb. ix. 14.

§ Ps. cxxxix. 7—10.

|| 1 Cor. ii. 10.

¶ Ib. 11.

** Ib. 16.

The third argument for the Divinity of the Spirit, is taken from the works which he performs, and which pre-suppose the Worker to be omnipotent. Some passages of Scripture represent him as concerned in Creation: "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."* As the original word signifies both spirit and wind, some have supposed that nothing more is meant by the inspired historian, than that a mighty wind, in the Hebrew idiom a wind of God, agitated the newly created chaos. Wind is the atmosphere in motion; but, it is questionable whether the atmosphere existed at this time, and its production seems rather to have been the work of the second day, when the firmament was made; for the firmament, or expanse, as the word may be rendered, seems to be the air, from the office assigned to it, namely, to divide the waters from the waters. This separation is effected by the atmosphere, which bears aloft the water that has been exhaled from the ocean and the surface of the earth. If these remarks are just, it was not a wind, but the Spirit who moved upon the face of the deep; and, whatever is implied in this motion, it is certain that he was active in the formation of the material system. I quote another passage from the Psalms: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth;" or rather, "by the Spirit of his mouth."† The Fathers thought (and many moderns are of the same opinion) that this verse refers to the co-operation of all the persons of the Trinity in the creation. The Word of the Lord, is not his simple command, but the Logos of the New Testament, his essential Word, by whom the Father made the worlds; and the breath of his mouth, is the Spirit of his mouth, the Divine person proceeding from him, of whose agency in this work Moses has given us a general account. By him the host of heaven was made, comprehending the angels of light, and the glorious orbs which shine in the firmament. This sense of the words agrees with another passage in Job, where it is said, that "by his Spirit, God hath garnished the heavens,"‡ or adorned them with all their splendour.—That Providence also is his work, has been inferred from the following words: "Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth."§ Creatures fade and die when their Maker withdraws his support; but as soon as the Spirit, the great vivifying principle, the Author of life natural and spiritual, imparts his influences, they revive.—But I proceed to remark, that miracles are represented as performed by his power: "If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you."|| "To another are given the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles;—all these worketh that one and self-same Spirit, dividing to every one severally as he will."¶ A miracle is a suspension or alteration of the laws of nature, which God established in the beginning, and over which none has control but himself. It is as impossible for a creature to work a real miracle, as it is to create a world. We say, indeed, that they were performed by Prophets and Apostles; but we speak loosely, and according to appearance, for they were only the instruments by which superior power was exerted, and the real Worker of all miracles was God. If, then, miracles were wrought by the Spirit, he is greater than any creature, because the person is manifestly Divine who possesses the attribute of omnipotence.—Lastly, the resurrection of the dead, which is appropriated to God in the Scriptures, is ascribed to him. The true God is called "God who quickeneth the dead;" and no person ever supposed that any created power is capable of reuniting the dust of the grave in its original form, and restoring the principle of life. This, however, the Holy Ghost will do at the last day. "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus

* Gen. i. 2.

§ Ps. civ. 30.

† Ps. xxxiii. 6.

|| Matt. xii. 28.

‡ Jer. xxvi. 13.

¶ 1 Cor. xii. 9–11.

from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”*

The last argument for the Divinity of the Holy Ghost, is founded on the religious worship which is given to him. We are baptized in his name, as well as in that of the Father and the Son. His equality in dignity is declared by his association with them in this solemn act of religion. It is performed by his authority, as well as by theirs; and we are dedicated as expressly to his service as to that of the other persons of the Trinity. We have an example of prayer to him in the following words, which are still used in the solemn benediction of the church: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.”† Here, he is acknowledged as the source of spiritual blessings, as well as the Father and the Son, and is invoked in the same spirit of devotion. It is vain to call this merely a wish; it is as distinctly a prayer as any other which occurs in the Epistles; and there would be no question about its nature, if there were no design to evade the evidence of his personal dignity. The words of John, in the beginning of the Revelation, are also considered as a prayer to the Spirit: “Grace be unto you, and peace from him which is, and which was, and which is to come, and from the seven spirits which are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first-begotten from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.”‡ The Father and the Son are distinctly mentioned; but who are the seven spirits that are conjoined with them? If you say that they are created spirits, I would call upon you to produce an instance in which a creature is thus associated with God, and, as in the present case, is placed between two Divine persons as their equal. Besides, I would ask, what grace and peace a creature has to bestow, that he should be called upon to extend his favour to the church; and whether idolatry would not be carried to the greatest possible height, if a creature were set upon the throne of the living God, addressed in the same invocation, and pronounced to be equally able to bless us? Nothing more needs to be said, to prove that the seven spirits which are before the throne are not created spirits. It appears, then, that they cannot be understood to mean any other than the Holy Ghost. If you ask why he is represented as Seven Spirits, I answer, that seven is a favorite number in the Scriptures, and seems to be the number of perfection; and that this representation was probably intended to signify that the influences of the Holy Ghost are inexhaustible, and are suited to all the exigencies of the people of God. Perhaps the number alludes to the seven churches of Asia, to which the introductory chapters of this book are addressed.

To sum up the arguments which have been advanced in support of the Divinity of the Holy Ghost: if he is designated by names peculiar to God, if Divine perfections are ascribed to him, if he has performed such works as manifestly surpass created power, and if religious worship is addressed to him, we are warranted to affirm that he is not a created spirit, but God over all, blessed for ever.

It remains to speak of the relation of the Holy Ghost to the other persons of the Godhead. His relation to the Father is called his procession from him; and the term is founded upon these words of our Saviour:—“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father,”—ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται, —“he shall testify of me.”§ Hence the Greeks call it ἐκπορεύσις, and sometimes προέσις. No man can tell what “proceeding from the Father” means; it is equally unintelligible as is the generation of the Son. Attempts have been made to explain both terms; but, in doing so, ideas borrowed from material

* Rom. viii. 11

† 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

‡ Rev. i. 4, 5.

§ John xv. 26.

substances have been generally applied to the incomprehensible nature of a spiritual Being. The generation of the Son, and the procession of the Spirit, have been understood to import that both “received their essence” from the Father. This mode of expression is common in the writings of the Fathers, and has been adopted from them by many modern Divines. I acknowledge that I am unable to conceive what idea they affix to the words: but, whether they be mere words without signification or not, they seem to suggest a notion incompatible with the absolute eternity and perfect equality of all the persons of the Godhead. If the Divine essence was communicated to the Son and the Spirit, the Father must be conceived as prior to both, whatever ingenuity may be displayed in talking of eternal emanations, and proving that the existence of the rays of the sun is co-eval with that of the sun himself. The subject is beyond the reach of our faculties; and it is presumptuous to attempt to explain it, especially by the introduction of terms which either mean nothing, or are calculated to mislead. We do not know what is the procession of the Spirit. Let us be sensible of our ignorance and acknowledge it, remembering, that as this is our duty, so it is more honorable than to indulge in vain babbling, and to darken counsel by words without knowledge. It is a proof of the folly of this mode of expression, that, being used with respect to the Spirit as well as to the Son, it makes the relation of both to the Father to be the same, while the Scripture plainly states a distinction between them, saying, that the one was begotten and the other proceeded. God must speak to us in our own language; and if he is pleased to give us any information respecting the mysteries of his essence, he must do so by terms to which we are accustomed. But it would be absurd to suppose, that they bear their usual sense in their new application. The utmost that can be conceived is an analogy, and that too a very faint one between things finite and infinite. It is therefore a part of wisdom to abstain from explanations and commentaries, and to confine ourselves to the words of inspiration.

The Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father. But it is nowhere said, that he proceeds from the Son; and hence it has been a subject of inquiry and dispute, whether he stands in the same relation to him as to the Father. The Greek Fathers strictly adhered to the language of Scripture, and affirmed, that the Spirit proceeds from the Father, but did not say, that he proceeds from the Son. They, however, did not hesitate to say, that he “receives” from the Son. This expression the Latins understood to imply the same thing which they meant by procession, namely, that the Spirit received his essence from the Son; and accordingly they did not hesitate to make use of the term, when speaking of the Spirit as well as of the Father. Their words were different, but their ideas were substantially the same. But as this was one of the points which afterwards divided the Eastern and Western Churches, it is necessary to inform you how the controversy arose.

After Macedonius had vented his new heresy, denying the Divinity of the Holy Ghost, the Council of Constantinople, A. D. 381, judged it necessary to make an addition to the article of the Nicene creed, “I believe in the Holy Ghost;” which was enlarged thus, “I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord, the Author of life, who proceeds from the Father.” This creed was received by the Catholic Church; and it was afterwards enacted by the Council of Ephesus, that no addition should be made to it. But in process of time the question began to be discussed in the West, whether the Holy Ghost proceeded from the Son as well as the Father; and it being decided that he did, the new article was inserted in the creed by the Latins:—“*Credimus in Spiritum Sanctum ex Patre Filioque procedentem.*” Hence, a violent controversy arose between them and the Greeks; which, being heightened by other grounds of dispute, terminated in their open separation from the communion of each other.

the Greeks condemning the Latins for adding to the Creed an article contrary to the authority of the Councils, and the truth of which they suspected or denied; and the Latins obstinately retaining it, because it was sanctioned by the Pope, and expressed in their opinion a doctrine agreeable to Scripture, which the Greeks themselves had once admitted in different words.

In adding the words "*Filioque*" to the Creed, the Latins thought themselves justified by plain Scripture reasoning. Although the procession of the Spirit from the Son is not literally asserted, yet it is implied in some things which are said of him in relation to the Son. The same expressions, which are used concerning the Holy Ghost in reference to the Father, because he proceeds from him, are used in reference to the Son; and hence it seems warrantable to conclude that the reason is the same. The Holy Ghost is called the Spirit of the Father, because he proceeds from him: "It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you."* But he is also called the Spirit of the Son; and there seems, therefore, to be no valid ground why we should not believe that the same relation is expressed in the one case and in the other: "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts." "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."† Again, the Holy Ghost is sent by the Father, because he proceeds from him,—it being suitable to the order of subsistence in the Godhead, that the Father should send him, not that he should send the Father. Our Lord speaks of him as the Comforter, whom the Father would send. But he is also sent by the Son:—"When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you." "If I depart, I will send him unto you."‡ If his mission by the Father is the consequence of his procession from him, may we not conclude, upon the same ground, that he also proceeds from the Son?

Such are the reasons assigned by the Western Church for deviating from the language of the East and of the ancient creeds. There is a degree of probability in the reasoning; but at the same time candour requires me to say, that, as we do not know what procession means, we perhaps venture too far when we positively affirm, that the expressions which we have quoted are equivalent to that term. It is only when we thoroughly understand a subject, that we have authority to pronounce that different modes of expression convey exactly the same idea. I presume that no man will affirm that he is thus qualified to decide the present controversy. He who is called the Spirit of the Father, and the Spirit of the Son, does certainly appear to stand in the same relation to both; and, if no other language had been used, there could have been but one opinion on the subject. But, when we find that this person is said to proceed from the Father, and is not said to proceed from the Son, we need not be surprised that some should hesitate whether it can be truly affirmed that he proceeds from the Son. If they acknowledge that he is true God, and is the Spirit of the Son, their refusing to say that he proceeds from him, should be accounted a venial error, and, if censured at all, should be censured with gentleness, as having arisen from a principle, which cannot justly be condemned, of scrupulous adherence to the language of Scripture. The Greeks might be wrong, in their violent condemnation of the Latins for adding the words *Filioque* to the creed, but the Latins were at least as culpable, in accusing the Greeks of heresy, because they preferred their ancient phraseology. The Latins had arguments on their side, deduced from the interpretation of particular passages; the Greeks had on their side the express language of Scripture itself. It was a controversy which, if it could not be avoided, both parties should have carried on with mildness, and in which they should have mutually exercised the spirit of forbearance. There was no heresy on either side; both were sound in the doctrine of the Trinity, and their difference re-

* Matt. x. 20.

† Gal. iv. 6. Rom. viii. 9.

‡ John xv. 26, and xvi. 7.

lated to a point which neither understood. Legitimate inferences from Scripture, are of the same authority with Scripture itself. But, when the inference is attended with a degree of doubt; when it is deduced from premises which are rather assumed than proved, it may be proposed to the consideration of others, but their assent to it should not be imperatively demanded. It may be true that the phrase, "the Spirit of the Father," is equivalent to the phrase, "proceedeth from the Father;" but, as this cannot be demonstrated, it would have been wiser not to have made a doctrine, founded upon the idea that they are equivalent, an article of faith. We have seen the grounds upon which it rests; but, while there is reason to believe that the Spirit proceeds from the Son, we should deem it rash to condemn the man who would not assent to this proposition, for this reason, that he could not find it so expressed in the Scriptures.

LECTURE XXXIV.

ON THE DECREES OF GOD.

Connexion between the Knowledge and Decrees of God—Nature and Objects of the Divine Decrees—They are Eternal, Wise, Free, Absolute, and Unconditional—Unconditional Decrees not inconsistent with human Responsibility.

HAVING spoken of God and his perfections, of the Holy Trinity, and the Divinity of the Son, and the Holy Ghost, I now proceed to speak of the Acts of the Divine nature.

Of these, according to systematic Divines, there is a threefold distinction. First, there are immanent and intrinsic acts which have no respect to any thing external. Such are the acts which are implied in the generation of the Son, and the procession of the Spirit: and such are the acts of the Divine persons towards each other, of which their mutual love may be mentioned as an instance. The Divine nature, although single, is not solitary; it is the soul, if I may speak so, of communion more intimate and delightful than the closest fellowship among creatures; and thus it enjoys in itself a perpetual source of infinite blessedness. Secondly, there are extrinsic and transitive acts, which are not *in* God, but *from* God efficiently, and in creatures subjectively; or, to express the matter more intelligibly, are exertions of his power terminating upon creatures as the objects of them. To create, to uphold, and to govern, are acts of this kind. Thirdly, there are immanent and intrinsic acts in God, which have a respect or relation to things without him; and these are his Decrees, to which I shall direct your attention in this lecture.

The decrees of God are his purpose or determination with respect to future things. I call them purpose or determination, in the singular number, because there was only one act of His infinite mind about future things; although we speak as if there had been many, in reference to the process of our own minds, which form successive resolutions, as thoughts and occasions arise, or in reference to the objects of his decree, which being many, seem to require a distinct purpose for each. But, an infinite understanding does not proceed by steps, as they necessarily do whose knowledge, like light, advances by degrees, and whose ideas come in a train; it perceives all things by a single glance. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." *

This seems to be the place, in which it is proper to introduce a distinction which is usually made, of the knowledge of God into the knowledge of simple intelligence, or natural and indefinite knowledge, *scientia simplicis intelligentiæ*; and the knowledge of vision, *scientia visionis*, which is also called free and definite. The former is the knowledge of things possible, and is called indefinite, because God has defined or determined nothing concerning them. God knows all possible causes, and all their possible effects. The latter is the knowledge of future things, of things which shall take place, and is called definite, because their existence is determined. They differ, you see, in their object; that of the former, being all things that might exist; that of the latter, being only such things as are to exist. The first kind of knowledge is founded on the omnipotence of God; he knows all things which his power could perform. The second kind of knowledge is founded on his will or decree, by which things pass from a state of possibility to a state of futurity. God knew of innumerable worlds and orders of creatures which his power could have brought into being; but he knew of them, not as things which were to be, but as things which might be. But, he knew of the universe which actually is, as certainly to have a future existence, because he had determined to create it. Lastly, these two kinds of knowledge differ in their order, because the former preceded his decree, and the latter is subsequent to it. Of the things which his Almighty power could accomplish, he purposed to do this and not that; and consequently, the one became certain, and the other remained only possible.

There is a third kind of knowledge, which some Divines have ascribed to God, and which is called *scientia media*, because it lies in the middle between the two kinds already explained, and differs from both. It differs from natural and indefinite knowledge, because it is conversant not about possible, but about future things; it differs from free and definite knowledge, because it is not founded upon the decree of God, but upon the actions of his creatures, which he foresees. He knows how men will act if placed in particular circumstances, if endowed with certain talents, if favoured with certain opportunities, if exposed to certain temptations. His knowledge is not the effect of his own purpose, but of the foresight of their character and condition; it is not derived from himself, but from his creatures. The design of introducing this distinction, was to give support to the doctrine, that the divine decrees which relate to men are conditional; or that, for example, men were chosen to eternal life upon the foresight of their faith and obedience; and hence it has been strenuously opposed by the advocates of unconditional decrees. They have endeavoured to shew, that it is a useless distinction, this middle science being comprehended in the knowledge of simple intelligence, or the knowledge of all possible things; that it solves no difficulties, but leaves the question, how God is not the author of sin? unanswered, since he placed Adam in circumstances in which he knew certainly that he would fall; that it renders God dependent upon his creatures, from whom part of his knowledge is derived, and by whose conduct his determinations are regulated; and that it exempts men from the control of their Maker, leaving them to act independently of any act of his will, or any prior arrangement of his wisdom, solely in the exercise of their own liberty. Some of these objections appear to have weight but, perhaps, this *media scientia* might be so explained as to free it from them and render it quite consistent with orthodoxy. Whether you give a distinct name to it or not, you might, one should think, say with the utmost safety, that God, whose understanding is infinite, knew in what manner men would act if placed in particular circumstances, and did place them in such circumstances, with a view to accomplish the design of his administration.

You will understand, by what has been said, the connexion between the

knowledge and the decrees of God. When he decreed, he selected, if I may speak so, from the infinity of possible things, those which his wisdom judged proper to be done; and the things thus selected were henceforth future and certain.

No man will deny, that there are divine decrees, who believes that God is an intelligent being, and considers what this character implies. An intelligent being is one who knows and judges, who purposes ends and devises means, who acts from design, conceives a plan, and then proceeds to execute it. Fortune was worshipped as a goddess by the ancient heathens, and was represented as blind, to signify that she was guided by no fixed rule, and distributed her favours at random. Surely no person of common sense, not to say piety, will impute procedure so irrational to the Lord of universal nature. As he knew all things that his power could accomplish, there were undoubtedly reasons, which determined him to do one thing, and not to do another; and his choice, which was founded upon those reasons, was his decree. Upon this subject, we cannot avoid speaking of him after the manner of men; because, in endeavouring to conceive the acts of his mind, we necessarily refer to the operations of our own, however great is the difference between infinite and finite. When various plans are laid before us, and we prefer one to the rest, this act of our minds is a decree or purpose by which our subsequent conduct is regulated. The works of God, in like manner, necessarily presuppose a decree, as the plan of which they are the developement. It will certainly be admitted, that God intended to create the world before he actually created it; that he intended to make man before he fashioned his body, and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils; that he intended to govern the world which he had made, according to certain laws; and it will be farther admitted, that when he resolved to create the world, and to make man, and to establish laws physical and moral, he had some ultimate object in view. Having constructed a machine, and set it in motion, he knew what would be the result; and this result was the true reason, or the final cause, why the machine was constructed. This intention of the Deity is his decree. To this general idea of a decree no man can object, whatever difficulties may occur in the detail of the doctrine, because it is as simple, and as necessarily forced upon our minds, as the idea of a purpose in the mind of a wise man, preceding an enterprise in which he embarks, or a particular mode of life which he adopts. In fine, the decree of God is his will, in which the exertions of his power, and the manifestations of his other perfections, originated. When we speak of his decreeing or purposing, we mean nothing mysterious and profound, but merely, that before he acted, he willed to act, that his operations *ad extra* were not the effects of necessity, but of counsel and design.

The Scriptures make mention of the decrees of God in many passages, and in a variety of terms. They speak of his foreknowledge, his purpose, his will, the determinate counsel of his will, his good pleasure, and his predestination: Christ, says an apostle, “was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.”* “Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate.”† “He hath made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself.”‡ “He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”§ It is unnecessary to multiply quotations. There are two remarks which I would make upon the language of Scripture. First, when it represents the decrees of God as his counsel, the word is not to be understood in its usual acceptation, as implying consultation with others, or reflection, comparison, the deduction of inferences from premises, and the establishment of a conclusion as the result of the previous process. This slow procedure suits our limited faculties, but the decisions of an infinite mind are

* Acts ii. 23.

† Rom. viii. 29.

‡ Eph. i. 9

§ Ibid. 11.

instantaneous. His decrees are called his counsel, to signify that they are consummately wise. Secondly, when they are called his will, it is not meant to insinuate that they are arbitrary decisions; but merely, that in making his decrees, he was under no control, and acted according to his own sovereignty. When a man's will is the rule of his conduct, it is usually capricious and unreasonable; but wisdom is always associated with will in the divine proceedings; and accordingly his decrees are said to be the "counsel of his will."

A question has been agitated upon this subject, which is very abstruse, and of which I almost despair of being able to convey a clear idea to you, as I am not sure that I distinctly understand it. It relates to the manner in which the decrees are in God, whether essentially, or inhesively and accidentally. The first is accounted the orthodox opinion. I know not how to explain it; but it is affirmed that the decrees of God are not different from himself, and are identified with his essence, and that he never was without his decrees. If I have any glimpse of the meaning, it appears to be this, that in God there is nothing analogous to thought in man, which is not his soul itself, but an act of his soul. It is easy to put together words, which shall express this proposition; but I doubt much whether any man can affix a distinct idea to it, with whatever confidence he may repeat it. You may say, that the decrees of God are God himself decreeing, and you may say the same thing of a man, that his decrees are the man himself decreeing: the decrees, however, are not more identified with the essence in the one case, than in the other. We do not indeed understand the operations of an infinite mind, and they must be very different from those of our own; but we would persuade ourselves and others that we do understand them, although it frequently happens, (and the present case, I think, is an instance,) that we darken counsel by words without knowledge. What is the meaning of decrees which are God himself? or what can we infer from the assertion, that God could not be without his decrees, but that they were as necessary as his existence, and consequently, that it was necessary that the world should be created, and all the events should happen, which have taken place, or will take place throughout an endless duration? There have been distinctions invented to support this opinion, and to answer objections; but I may spare myself and you the trouble of retailing them, as they would neither entertain nor instruct you.

The decrees of God relate to all future things without exception; whatever is done in time, was fore-ordained before the beginning of time: His purpose was concerned with every thing, whether great or small, whether good or evil; although, in reference to the latter, it may be necessary to distinguish between appointment and permission. It was concerned with things necessary, free, and contingent; with the movements of matter, which are necessary; with the volitions and actions of intelligent creatures, which are free; and with such things as we call accidents, because they take place undesignedly on our part, and without any cause which we could discover. It was concerned about our life, and our death; about our state in time, and our state in eternity. In short, the decrees of God are as comprehensive as his government, which extends to all creatures, and to all events. God did not merely decree to make man, and place him upon the earth, and then to leave him to his own uncontrolled guidance: he fixed all the circumstances in the lot of individuals, and all the particulars which will compose the history of the human race from its commencement to its close. He did not merely decree that general laws should be established for the government of the world, but he settled the application of those laws to all particular cases. Our days are numbered, and so are the hairs of our heads. We may learn what is the extent of the Divine decrees from the dispensations of providence, in which they are executed. The care of Providence reaches to the most insignificant creatures, and the most minute

events, the death of a sparrow, and the fall of a hair. Some, indeed, talk of a general providence, by which I know not well what they mean, unless it be to save the Almighty the trouble of entering into details, and to burden him only with the office of upholding the general system. Hence they wisely tell us, that he takes care of the species, but not of the individuals; not perceiving that it is hardly possible to express a greater absurdity in fewer words. A species is a general name by which the common and distinguishing qualities of a number of individuals are denoted. The species is nothing but the individuals under a particular classification. How then can the species be taken care of, if the individuals be neglected? In the same way, to allude to a familiar instance, in which a man would take care of his pounds who took no care of his pence. The notion of a general, to the exclusion of a particular providence, is irrational, as well as unscriptural. It is only by attending to individuals, and the regulation of minute affairs, that the business of the world can be carried on. We may say of providence, as the Psalmist says of the sun, that nothing is hidden from its heat, that its influence pervades the whole system of things. As God works all things according to the counsel of his will, we infer from his works what his counsel is, as we judge of an architect's plan by inspecting the building which was raised under his directions.

I proceed to lay before you some of the properties of the Divine decrees. And, in the first place, I remark, that they were made from eternity. This is readily granted with respect to some of the decrees, those, for example, which relate to the creation of the world and of man, and to the mission of Jesus Christ; but, it has been maintained, that those, which relate to things dependent upon the free agency of man, are made in time. This opinion, however, is so far from receiving any countenance from Scripture, that it is directly contradicted by it. It is expressly affirmed that believers were chosen in Christ, and that grace was given to them, "before the world began."* When an Apostle says, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world,"† he virtually teaches that his decrees are eternal; for his words import, that at the commencement of time the plan was arranged, according to which his works were to be executed. It is manifest that, if they had not been determined upon, they could not have been foreknown as certain. To suppose any of the Divine decrees to be made in time, is to suppose that some new occasion has occurred, some unforeseen event or combination of circumstances has taken place, which has induced the Most High to pronounce a new sentence, or form a new resolution. If he knew from eternity all that he knows in time, no reason can be assigned why he should have delayed his arrangements so long. Temporal decrees suppose the knowledge of the Deity to be limited, and that he is receiving accessions to it in the progress of time. He comes to a resolution respecting men, after he has found what part they would act in particular circumstances. No man, who believes that the Divine understanding is infinite, comprehending the past, the present, and the future, will ever assent to the doctrine of temporal decrees. And is there any thing which God does not know? Is he ignorant of events which depend upon human volitions? No; he has foretold them in innumerable instances; prophecy is founded upon his infallible prescience, and shews that all things were certain to him from the beginning, and were so settled that they could not be charged. Although we cannot understand what is meant by identifying God's decrees with his essence, yet we have no hesitation in fixing their date in eternity.

In the second place, The divine decrees are wise. Wisdom is discovered in the selection of the most proper ends, and of the fittest means of accomplishing them. That this character belongs to the decrees of God, is evident from what we know of them. They are disclosed to us by their execution, and

* Eph. 1. 4. 2 Tim. i. 9.

† Acts xv. 18.

every proof of wisdom in the works of God, is a proof of the wisdom of the plan in conformity to which they are performed. It is indeed, but a very small part of them which falls under our observation; but, we ought to proceed here as we do in other cases, and judge of the whole by the specimen, of what is unknown, by what is known. He who perceives works of admirable skill in the parts of a machine, which he has an opportunity to examine, is naturally led to believe that the other parts are equally admirable. In this manner we should satisfy our minds, when doubts obtrude themselves upon us, and repel the objections which may be suggested by some things which we cannot reconcile to our notions of what is expedient and proper. As far as we can go, every thing is worthy of God; why should we not believe, that beyond the point which bounds our researches, there is the same order, the same beauty, the same correspondence with the Divine character and attributes? Convinced as we are by experience, that the plans of the Almighty are the result of consummate intelligence, ought we not, while we stand at the brink of the abyss which we cannot fathom, to exclaim in the language of profound reverence and humble adoration: "O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"* Incomprehensible as are the counsels of God, we may be assured that no part of them is the effect of caprice, or of mere will, but that to his mind there appeared a sufficient reason for every thing which he purposed to do. Some have said, that as his knowledge is infinite, and his wisdom perfect, he must have discerned among possible events which was the best, and have chosen accordingly; and consequently, that the actual system of things is the best possible system. In this manner, they account for the permission of moral evil, and for the creation of such a being as man, although God foresaw that he would abuse his liberty, and involve a whole race in guilt and misery. A system pregnant with such consequences, was preferred, because it was, upon the whole, better than any other. When we reflect upon the wonderful dispensation which has resulted from the fall, and by which God is glorified in the highest, we are almost disposed to assent to this theory; but it seems to be a speculation beyond the reach of our faculties. It is an attempt to soar to a region too pure and sublime for us to breathe in it. Let us be content to move in a lower sphere, and to trace the evidences of wisdom with which we are surrounded there, and by which we shall feel this truth deeply impressed upon our minds, that God is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.

In the third place, The decrees of God are free: "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or, being his counsellor, hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?"† He was alone when he made his decrees, and his determinations were influenced by no external cause. He was free to decree, or not to decree, and to decree one thing, and not another. This liberty we must ascribe to Him who is supreme, independent, and sovereign in all his dispensations. In settling the notion of human liberty, Calvinistic divines maintain against Arminians, that it does not consist in a power to act with motives, or without them, or in opposition to them; but in the power of acting according to the prevailing inclination, or according to the motive which appears strongest to the mind. Human volitions are not arbitrary, but are influenced by the previous state of the mind. A man chooses what appears to be good, and he chooses it necessarily, in this sense, that he could not do otherwise. The object of every volition, is to please himself; and to suppose a man to have any other object, that is, to will any thing which does not please him in itself, or in its circum-

* Rom. xi. 33.

† Isa. xl. 13, 14.

stances, is absurd; it is to suppose him to will, and not to will at the same time. He is perfectly voluntary in his choice; but his willingness is the consequence of the view which his mind takes of the object presented to it, or of his prevailing disposition. If we apply this reasoning to God, it will follow that his decrees are not the result of mere will, but of will under the direction of wisdom; and as, in human deliberations, the strongest motive prevails, so in the Divine counsels that system of things was preferred which appeared to be best. Advance a step farther, and you will say, that God could not have chosen any other system, more than a man can act in opposition to the strongest motive, while he is feeling the full force of its influence. Observe now the consequence of the conclusion at which we have arrived. It is this, that the decrees of God could have been different from what they are. But, are we prepared to admit this conclusion? Shall we believe that God could not have made this world, in any respect, different from what it is; that he could not have placed man in such circumstances as would have prevented his fall; and that, when man had fallen, he could not have abstained from glorifying himself by his salvation? Surely we have cause to suspect the reasoning which leads to a belief so contrary to Scripture, and so injurious to the feelings of piety. God might, or might not, have created the world; he might have confirmed man in a state of holiness, as well as have permitted him to fall; he might have withheld his Son, his only-begotten Son, and left the human race to perdition; and having given his Son, he might have saved more, or saved fewer, than shall be actually redeemed by him. We are ignorant of the reasons of his choice, but we cannot persuade ourselves that they are such, that no other choice could have been made. We assert, then, that the decrees of God are free. No necessity can be supposed to influence the procedure of a self-existent and independent Being, except the necessity arising from his infinite perfections, of always acting in a manner worthy of himself. To his infinite understanding there must have appeared more than one way of doing so; and although there were undoubtedly reasons for the choice which he has made, it would be boldness, not to be vindicated from the charge of impiety to say that he could not have adopted another.

I remark once more, that the decrees of God are absolute and unconditional. The execution of them is not suspended upon any condition which may, or may not, be performed. Here we have many opponents, Lutherans, Arminians, Jesuits; all, in a word, who have not adopted those views of the subject which are usually called Calvinistic. It is granted, that some of the decrees of God are conditional, in this sense, that something is supposed to go before the event which is the object of the decree, and that, this order being established, the one will not take place without the other. He decreed, for example, to save Paul and the companions of his voyage to Italy; but he decreed to save them only on condition that the sailors should remain in the ship.* He has decreed to save many from the wrath to come; but he has decreed to save them only if they believe in Christ, and turn by him from the error of their ways. But these decrees are conditional only in appearance. They merely state the order in which the events should be accomplished; they establish a connexion between the means and the end, but do not leave the means uncertain. When God decreed to save Paul and his companions, he decreed that the sailors should be prevented from leaving the ship; and accordingly gave Paul previous notice of the preservation of every person on board. When he decreed to save those who should believe, he decreed to give them faith; and accordingly we are informed, that those whom he predestinated he also calls into the fellowship of his Son.† That any decree is conditional in the sense of our opponents,—that it depends upon the will of

* Acts xxvii.

† Rom. viii. 30

man, of which he is sovereign master, so that he may will or not will as he pleases,—we deny. “My counsel,” says God, “shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.”* But he could not speak so, if his counsel depended upon a condition which might not be performed. He might desire the event for his own glory or the good of his creatures, and take measures to accomplish it; but, as the ultimate determination depended upon the human will, over which he had no control, it would be uncertain till the moment arrived what the issue would be. He might wish to save a particular person; but, as that person might believe or not believe, it could not be known beforehand how he would act, and the design of God with respect to him might be frustrated. If you assert conditional decrees, you must suppose that God is ignorant of the result, that the event is not in his power, or that he has determined nothing concerning it, and has left it to chance. But “known unto him are all his works from the beginning of the world.”† It is evident that they could not be known, if they had not been unconditionally decreed; because, on the contrary supposition, they would be the objects, not of knowledge, but of conjecture. “He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”‡ But this could not be, if the will of his creatures sometimes counteracted his will, if the execution of his purposes was suspended upon a co-operation which it was in their power to withhold. It will be shewn afterwards, that those acts of the human will, upon which his decrees are supposed to be suspended, are under his direction, and are comprehended in his decrees; which, as we have already observed, while they appointed the end, also provided the means.

Here we come to a question which has engaged the attention, and exercised the ingenuity, and perplexed the wits of men in every age. If God has fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass, the whole series of events is necessary, and human liberty is taken away. Men are passive instruments in the hands of their Maker; they can do nothing but what they are secretly and irresistibly influenced to do; they are not, therefore, responsible for their actions; and God is the Author of sin. To this objection it is replied, that the divine decree is extrinsic to the human mind; that it exerts no force or influence upon our faculties; and that, while it insures the futurity of events, it leaves them to be accomplished in the exercise of our liberty. While it determines that some things should be brought to pass necessarily, it determines that other things should be brought to pass freely. God has decreed, not only that men should act, but that they should act freely, and agreeably to their rational nature. He determined the act; but men being free agents, it was possible, in respect of their liberty abstractly considered, that they might act differently. When, however, you have reflected upon this answer, and stripped it of its technical form, you will find that it amounts to nothing. It just says, that, notwithstanding the decree of God, man retains his liberty of action; and, consequently, puts us off with an assertion under the pretext of giving us an explanation. Believing that all things are immutably fixed in the divine counsels, we wish to know how the predetermination is consistent with liberty. To what purpose is it to tell us, that God has decreed that some things shall take place necessarily, and other things freely? What information does this answer give us? what doubt does it solve? Still the question remains, How can those actions be free, which were so fixed that they could not be avoided?

It is a more intelligible method to explain the subject by the doctrine, which makes liberty consist in the power of acting according to the prevailing inclination, or the motive which appears strongest to the mind. Those actions are free which are the effect of volition. In whatever manner the state of mind which gave rise to the volition has been produced, the liberty of the agent is neither greater nor less. It is his will alone which is to be considered, and

* Isa. xlv. 10.

† Acts xv. 18.

‡ Eph. i. 11.

not the means by which it has been determined. If God fore-ordained certain actions, and placed men in such circumstances that the actions would certainly take place agreeably to the laws of the mind, men are nevertheless moral agents, because they act voluntarily, and are responsible for the actions which consent has made their own. Liberty does not consist in the power of acting or not acting, but in acting from choice. The choice is determined by something in the mind itself, or by something external influencing the mind; but, whatever is the cause, the choice makes the action free, and the agent accountable. If this definition of liberty be admitted, you will perceive that it is possible to reconcile the freedom of the will with absolute decrees; but we have not got rid of every difficulty. By this theory, human actions appear to be as necessary as the motions of matter according to the laws of gravitation and attraction; and man seems to be a machine, conscious of his movements, and consenting to them, but impelled by something different from himself.

Upon such a subject, no man should be ashamed to acknowledge his ignorance. We are not required to reconcile the divine decrees and human liberty. It is enough to know that God has decreed all things which come to pass, and that men are answerable for their actions. Of both these truths we are assured by the Scriptures; and the latter is confirmed by the testimony of conscience. We feel that, although not independent upon God, we are free; so that we excuse ourselves when we have done our duty, and accuse ourselves when we have neglected it. Sentiments of approbation and disapprobation in reference to our own conduct or that of other men, would have no existence in our minds if we believed that men are necessary agents. But the tie which connects the divine decrees and human liberty is invisible. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; it is high, we cannot attain unto it." * If every thing in religion were level to the comprehension of reason, there would be no room for faith. It is better to believe humbly, than to reason presumptuously. And presumptuous all those reasonings may be called, which lead to the denial of the immutability of the divine counsels, or of the freedom of the human will; which make man a machine, and God the author of sin.

It is worthy of attention, that the great objection against unconditional decrees, that they are inconsistent with the liberty of action, is not removed by denying them, if it be granted at the same time, that our actions are fore-known. The foreknowledge of God is not conjecture, or probable calculation, but distinct and infallible prevision of future events. Whatever is the foundation of his foreknowledge, what he does foreknow will undoubtedly take place. Here, then, the actions of men are as unalterably fixed from eternity, as if they had been the subject of an immutable decree. I would ask, therefore, how they are more free in one case than in the other? Absolute decrees are objected to because they render human actions necessary; that is, having been fore-ordained, they must take place, and cannot be avoided. But there is the same strong necessity, in consequence of fore-knowledge. Actions which were certainly foreknown, will certainly take place; and it is as impossible to avoid them, as it is to pluck the sun from the firmament. Thus, in endeavouring to escape one difficulty, we run into another equally formidable. *Incidit in Scyllam, qui vult vitare Charybdim.*

The rejection of absolute decrees is intended to pave the way for the establishment of that kind of liberty which consists in the self-determining power of the will, or is the consequence of the admission of such liberty. Arminians maintain, that after all motives have been presented to his mind, a man retains the power of complying with them or resisting them, that the will remains in a state of indifference, and inclines to the one side or the other by its own sovereign choice. Absolute decrees overturn this notion of liberty

* Psalm cxxxix. 6.

from the foundation. It is evident that actions are not contingent; that is, it is not true that they may or may not be, if they are predetermined. But it is equally evident that they are not contingent, if they are foreknown. If God foresees that an event will take place, its future existence is necessary; that is, it is impossible that it should not take place. It was certain from all eternity that a good man would perform a virtuous action yesterday, as it is now certain that he did perform it. How, then, could that action be subject to the arbitrary decision of his will? How could it still be equally possible that he might or might not perform it? On the supposition of simple fore-knowledge, even without any positive decree, the Arminian notion of liberty falls to the ground. It were well if the abettors of this system would consider, that the consequences, with which they charge the doctrine of absolute decrees, arise equally from their own doctrine of fore-knowledge. The objection, that they necessitate human actions, would cease to alarm them, and their minds would be disposed to assent to the doctrine of our Church, that "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass."*

LECTURE XXXV.

ON PREDESTINATION.

Predestination defined—Systems of the Supralapsarians, Sublapsarians, and Arminians—**Decree of Election**—Its Eternity, Sovereignty, and Immutability—Its connexion with the Mediation of Christ—This Decree not the Rule of human conduct.

THE preceding Lecture was devoted to the consideration of the decrees of God. I endeavoured to prove that there are Divine decrees, or that God has fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass, and to illustrate their properties or distinguishing characters. I shall now proceed to speak more particularly of those decrees which relate to his intelligent creatures.

They are commonly comprehended under the general title of Predestination. It is applicable, indeed, according to the import of the term, to all the purposes of God which determine beforehand what is to come to pass; but it is usually limited to those purposes of which the spiritual and eternal state of man is the object.

It is evident from reason, that the Divine decrees relate also to angels, and it is inferred from that passage of Scripture in which the elect angels are mentioned.† As they were created by the power of God, so it was not without an act of his will that some of them stood, and others were permitted to fall. We cannot suppose the angelical order to have been left out of his plan, any more than the human race, or created will to have acted with more independence and sovereignty in the one case than in the other. But, as the Scriptures have said little on this subject, we should have no assistance in pursuing the inquiry but the feeble light of our own minds, and should be encumbered by greater difficulties than those which attend the decrees of God in relation to man. We shall therefore pass to the consideration of the latter, on which our information is more ample, and which it is manifest are not, like the former, a subject of mere speculation; for, although the decrees are not a rule of conduct to us, they are calculated to awaken sentiments of piety, and are represented as furnishing ample grounds of admiration, gratitude, consolation and hope to believers.

* West. Conf. chap. iii. § 1.

† 1 Tim. v. 21.

The term, predestination, includes the decrees of election and reprobation. Some, indeed, confine it to election; but there seems to be no sufficient reason for not extending it to the one as well as to the other, as in both the final condition of man is pre-appointed, or predestinated. Upon a subject so abstruse, it is not wonderful that there should be a diversity of opinion, especially when, instead of implicitly acquiescing in the dictates of revelation, men begin to reason and to judge of the proceedings of an infinite Being by their own notions of wisdom and fitness. I shall lay before you a short account of the different systems which have been espoused by divines of different denominations.

The first is that of the Supralapsarians, who maintain, that, as what is last in accomplishment is first in the intention of a wise man, the object of God in his eternal decrees was the manifestation of his infinite perfections, and particularly of his mercy and justice, in the happiness of some of his creatures and the misery of others. To accomplish this design, he decreed to create man after his own image, but to place him in such circumstances that his fall would necessarily follow; to send his Son to die upon the cross for the salvation of those whom he had chosen, and to give them effectual grace to convert and sanctify them, while the rest should be delivered up to blindness and impenitence. According to this system, as the name of those by whom it is adopted imports, the Divine decrees had no respect to the fall of man, except as it was the means of executing them. Men were elected or rejected without any consideration of the fall, and were viewed by God, not as sinners, but simply as creatures. God thought only of his own glory, and all the events which take place in time, the creation of man, his apostasy, and his recovery, are so many steps in the process. While we must concede to this system the praise of consistency, by which I mean the regular disposition and close connexion of its parts, our minds revolt from the idea of such absolute sovereignty as appears in the destination of intelligent creatures to everlasting misery, not only before they had actually committed sin, but prior to the consideration of it. We startle at the thought of the destruction of immortal creatures being appointed by God, solely for the purpose of glorifying his name, and at the formal and direct introduction of sin as the fittest expedient for exhibiting him in his various characters of excellence to the admiration of the universe. We begin to grow giddy at the elevation to which we have ventured to soar. We experience a confusion of ideas, and know not well what to think. We are at a loss to determine whether justice in God be the same in kind with justice in man, and whether we should regard him as the affectionate and bountiful Parent of the human race, or as a despot, whose arbitrary will is his law, and who sports with their interests and feelings solely for his pleasure.

The Sublapsarians agree with the Supralapsarians in holding, that God has chosen some to life, and doomed others to death; that he decreed to send his Son to die for the former, and to give them his effectual grace; and that this purpose was eternal; but they differ from them with respect to the character in which the objects of his purpose were considered, affirming that they were regarded, not simply as creatures, but as sinners. God, having foreseen from all eternity that man, whom he intended to create after his own image, would fall from a state of innocence, elected some of the human race to everlasting life and left the rest to perish in their sins. The advantage which this system proposes is, that, the objects of the decree being considered as guilty, the same objection cannot be urged against the rejection or preterition of some of them, as in the former case, where all were considered as innocent. It is alleged, indeed, by Supralapsarians, that it admits a conditional decree, predestination being founded upon the foresight of what man would do, and consequently, that it is encumbered with all the difficulties which accompany conditional decrees; or that the decree is conditional only in appearance, God having pre-

viously decreed to permit man to fall. Future events cannot be foreseen, unless they be certain; they cannot be certain, unless God have determined to bring them to pass. If, then, the fall of man was certainly foreseen, it was infallibly decreed. It was fixed from eternity; it was a link in the chain of events, which was to terminate in the manifestation of the Divine glory. The Sublapsarian scheme removes no difficulty, but merely speaks in terms less offensive. It is virtually the same thing to say, that God decreed that Adam should fall, and then decreed to save some of his posterity, and leave others to perish; as to say that God first decreed to save some, and condemn others, and then, in order to accomplish this design, decreed the fall of Adam, and the whole human race in him. As both parties appear to hold the same ideas upon the subject, it does not seem to be material in what order they are arranged. Whatever truth there may be in such observations, the Sublapsarian scheme has a milder aspect; and although we cannot solve every difficulty, and reply to every objection, it seems wiser to adopt that mode of speaking on a subject so little understood, which is most consonant to our notions of the moral character of God.

The third system is that of the Arminians, or Remonstrants as they are also called, who deny absolute and unconditional decrees, and maintain, that whatever God has decreed respecting man, is founded upon the foresight of their conduct. Having foreseen without any decree, that Adam would involve himself and his posterity in sin and its consequences, he purposed to send his Son to die for them all, and to give them sufficient grace to improve the means of salvation; and knowing beforehand, who would believe and persevere to the end and who would not, he chose the former to eternal life, and left the latter in a state of condemnation. There has been a diversity of opinion among the holders of this general system; and some of them, who have gone so far, in support of their idea of the freedom of the will, as to maintain that human actions, being contingent, cannot be certainly foreseen, have been led to affirm, that the decrees of God respecting men are not eternal, but are made in time; that men are elected to eternal life after they have believed, but that, if they fall into a state of unbelief and impenitence, the sentence or decree is reversed.

The doctrine of our church is so expressed, that, without putting any unnatural construction upon the words, it might be supposed to be agreeable to the Supralapsarian scheme. I refer to the third chapter of the Confession of Faith, and to the explanation of the decrees in the Larger Catechism. The Shorter Catechism may be supposed to be modelled after the Sublapsarian scheme, as the fall is mentioned before election, and election seems to be represented as an act of God, following in order the consideration of the fall. We may therefore conclude, that it was not the intention of the Church to give any decision upon this controversy, and that every man is at liberty to arrange the decrees in that order which appears to him most agreeable to the language of Scripture, and to the views which it gives us of the perfections of God. And it is well, that there has been no attempt to dictate to us upon a subject so abstruse, and in a case where a difference of opinion may be held, not only with a good conscience, but without the slightest injury to the interests of piety and holiness. Supralapsarians and Sublapsarians are agreed in ascribing to God the glory of Supreme dominion and sovereign grace, and in acknowledging, that his unmerited love is the source of all our blessedness in this world, and of all that we hope to enjoy in the world to come; “for by him, and through him, and to him, are all things.”*

It will be the business of the subsequent part of this lecture, to shew that God did actually choose, before the foundation of the world, some of the human race to eternal life, and that he left the rest to perish in their sins.

* Rom. xi. 36.

Let us begin with Election, which may be defined to be the choice which God, in the exercise of sovereign grace, made of certain individuals of mankind to enjoy salvation by Jesus Christ. This definition may be illustrated and confirmed by the following particulars.

First, God has chosen some to salvation in preference to others. Nothing would be more absurd, than to oppose this proposition, in the first instance, as inconsistent with the impartiality of the Supreme Being, or with his justice and goodness, while we have a safer mode of ascertaining whether it should be received or rejected, by examining the Scriptures. Is it contained in them, or may it be deduced from them by plain and necessary consequences? Now, I may appeal to every candid person, whether it is not the obvious import of those passages which speak of certain persons under the character of the elect, as chosen in Christ,* as chosen to salvation,† as predestinated to the adoption of sons,‡ and to be conformed to the image of God's Son,§ as elect according to the foreknowledge of God,|| as vessels of mercy whom he hath before prepared unto glory.¶ Whatever else such phrases may imply, they manifestly refer to some act of God in relation to the persons designated, by which they are distinguished from others. When a choice is made, we must conceive that, of a number of persons, some are taken, and others are left. There can be no such thing as the election of a whole class, viewed as separated from every other class. Election is a relative term, and necessarily involves the idea of rejection. The election of which we speak cannot be considered merely as a general purpose to furnish mankind with the means of salvation. The term can bear no such meaning; and to use it in this sense, would be an example of abuse or perversion, to which it would not be easy to find a parallel. It is an express purpose to confer salvation upon certain individuals. It is not an election of characters, but of persons; that is, it is not a general design to give eternal life to those who shall believe and repent, but a specification of those who shall actually enjoy it. Hence their names are said to be written in heaven,** and to be written in the book of life.†† They are a class of persons, whom God foreknew; whom, in consequence of his foreknowledge, he calls, and distinguishes in his dispensation of grace, as he had previously distinguished them in his purpose. "Even so at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded."‡‡ God, who is independent, and owes nothing to his creatures, may give or withhold his favours according to his pleasure. If men have forfeited all claim to his regard, if they have fallen under his wrath, and might have been doomed to hopeless misery, there is not the shadow of injustice in the exercise of his mercy only to a portion of the criminals. When one man is exempted from punishment, no injury is done to his companions in condemnation, who are left to the vengeance of the law, because they richly deserved to suffer it, and do not become less guilty, because he is pardoned. The cry against election, as if it made God a respecter of persons, is a senseless one, and proceeds either from stupidity or malignity. He only is a respecter of persons, who confers favours upon some, and withholds them from others equally deserving; not he, who, where none has a claim upon him, disposes of his gifts, in the free exercise of the power over them which naturally belongs to him. May he not do what he will with his own?

Secondly. The election of certain persons to eternal life was made from eternity. Some indeed, as we have already mentioned, speak of an election which takes place in time; and only such an election is consistent with the

* Rom. xvi. 13.

§ Rom. viii. 29.

** Heb. xii. 23.

† 2 Thess. ii. 13.

|| 1 Pet. i. 2.

†† Phil. iv. 3. Rev. xiii. 8.

‡ Eph. i. 5.

¶ Rom. ix. 23.

‡‡ Rom. xi. 5. 7

other parts of their system. God, they say, purposed from eternity to send his gospel to men, and to save such of them as should believe it; but, as the determinations of the human will are sovereign, the persons who will obey the gospel must be unknown, until they are ascertained by the event, and their actual faith must precede their proper election. You perceive that this is the opinion of those who are led by their extravagant notions of liberty, to deny the Divine prescience of what they call contingent actions. But, to take no notice of the strange and impious tenet, so inconsistent with the absolute perfection of the Divine understanding, I observe, that an election in time is at direct variance with the doctrine of Scripture. "We are bound," says Paul to the Thessalonians, "to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth."* Some understand by "the beginning," the beginning of the gospel, and suppose the Apostle to mean, that they were elected at the time when the gospel was first preached to them, and they believed it. But the absurdity of this opinion is manifest. Who can suppose that all the Thessalonians to whom the Epistle is directed, believed from the moment that the glad tidings were first proclaimed to them? Did it not happen in Thessalonica, as in other places, that some believed at first, and some afterwards, and that those who were to be saved, were gradually added to the Church? It is worthy of attention, that the words in the following verse—"Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ"—evidently import, that their call to the enjoyment of salvation was subsequent to their election; for the Apostle distinguishes between the two facts, asserting that they were chosen to salvation from the beginning, and then called to it by the gospel. It seems, therefore, more consonant to the whole passage, to assign to the term beginning, the sense which it bears in other passages, where it signifies eternity. "In the beginning was the Word."† "I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was."‡ But the following passages are more explicit, and their evidence can be set aside, only by such criticism as perplexes what is simple, and darkens what is clear. "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."§ "He hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which were given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."|| Infinite knowledge is a divine perfection. The eye of God sees at one glance the past, the present, and the future. No event occurs which he did not foresee; no circumstance takes place, which did not enter into his plan. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."¶ All things relative to every individual of the human race were settled, long before man was created; the number of the inhabitants of heaven was fixed, "while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest parts of the dust of the world."

In the third place, In the election of certain persons to eternal life, God did not proceed upon the ground of their foreseen qualifications. The choice was an act of his sovereignty. I would not be understood to insinuate, that the procedure of the Almighty was arbitrary, or that there was no reason why he preferred some to others, because he who acts without reason, acts without wisdom; but I affirm, that the preference was not owing to any difference in the moral character of its objects. Many, who admit the doctrine of election, which is so clearly taught in the Scriptures, maintain that the decree was conditional. God, they say, having purposed to send his gospel to this and the other nation,

* 2 Thess. ii. 13.

§ Eph. i. 4.

† John i. 1.

‡ 2 Tim. i. 9.

§ Prov. viii. 23.

¶ Acts xv. 18.

foresaw in what manner each individual would conduct himself in reference to it. He foresaw, that while some, under the influence of pride of understanding and worldly affections, would treat it with neglect and contempt, others would embrace it with a sincere and upright heart, and live in obedience to its precepts; and these, he appointed to salvation on the ground of their foreseen faith and good works. The decree of God, although prior to time, is posterior in order to the actions of men, and is dependent upon the determination of their will. But, to this opinion, so derogatory to the supreme dominion and absolute authority of God, the doctrine of Scripture is directly opposed. Election is ascribed to grace, to the exclusion of works; and these two causes are represented as incompatible and mutually destructive. "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work."* How is it possible to reconcile with these words, the opinion that the foresight of men's good works was the cause of their election? Besides, it is worthy of particular attention, that faith and holiness, which the advocates of conditional decrees make the causes of election, are expressly said in Scripture to be effects of it. "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth;"† not for your faith and holiness, but through them as the means, by which the Divine purpose is executed. A passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians must be cited again. "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."‡ Here the order is exactly the reverse of that which is laid down in the system of our opponents. Men are not first holy, or foreseen as to be holy, and then chosen; but they are first chosen, and then holy, their holiness being not the cause, but the end of the decree. In the ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, Paul produces the case of Jacob and Esau as an illustration of the subject, and traces the predestination of individuals, to happiness or misery, to the sovereignty of God without any consideration of their works. "When Rebecca had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac, (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth,) it was said unto her, 'The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.'"§ As the lot of the two sons of Isaac was settled prior to their personal conduct, so the Apostle signifies, that the appointment of particular persons to salvation depends solely upon the good pleasure of God. It is, indeed, impossible to conceive, that God could foresee faith and holiness in men previous to their election, because, human nature being totally depraved, they can have no existence but as effects of divine grace; and if there be any thing clear in the Scriptures, it is this, that the communication of grace is the consequence of the love of God before the foundation of the world. This eternal love is the source, from which proceed those heavenly influences that purify the human soul. But how, it may be asked, does it happen, that in the face of all this evidence, so many should maintain conditional election? The true answer is, that the sovereign exercise of mercy renders us absolute debtors to our Maker: it leaves not a vestige of merit, it humbles us in the dust. How contrary this procedure is to our natural inclinations, you need not be informed. Man, fallen and degraded as he is, would still be great; and nothing comes with more reluctance from his lips than the right answer to this question, Who maketh thee to differ from another? He wishes to find some ground for saying, I have made myself to differ, and fondly embraces any theory which makes him

* Rom. xi. 5, 6.

† 2 Thess. ii. 13.

‡ Eph. 1. 4.

§ Rom. ix. 10—13.

the arbiter of his destiny, and suspends his final doom upon his own determination.

In the fourth place, The purpose of God respecting his elect, is immutable. It cannot be reversed. Some, indeed, have maintained, that the decrees of God are subject to change, like the purposes of men; and that a person who is one of the elect to-day, may become one of the reprobate to-morrow. This notion is in unison with their ideas of the freedom of the will, which, possessing a power to act in opposition to the influence of motives, may disappoint the calculations which had been made of its decisions, and render ineffectual the means employed to regulate its choice. Hence there may be sudden transitions from faith to unbelief, from the love of God to the love of the world; in consequence of which the name of the unworthy persons shall be blotted out of the book of life. This is the doctrine of Arminius and his followers, in whose writings we meet with such expressions as these: "It is false to say that election is confirmed from everlasting;" "men may make their election void;" "they do sometimes, of elect, become reprobate, and of reprobate, elect;" and "as they change themselves from believers to unbelievers, so the Divine determination concerning them changes." As it is evident that this doctrine is calculated to impair the consolations of the people of God, and to fill them with perplexity and fear; so it is in direct opposition to his word, which declares, that "the counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations."* But besides this general assurance of the immutability of his counsel, it is affirmed in particular, that "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his."† There is no reason to doubt that "the foundation of the Lord" here signifies his decree, which is the ground of his knowledge of those who are his; and when we consider, that the words are introduced in connexion with the mention of false teachers who had erred concerning the truth, and overthrown the faith of some, we are led to infer the stability of the Divine purpose respecting the elect, and their subsequent security against the danger of total and final apostasy. We find our Saviour saying to his Father concerning his disciples, "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me.—Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition;"‡ but that he was not properly an exception, is manifest from the words immediately subjoined, "that the Scripture might be fulfilled," which import that his perdition was foreknown and predetermined. In a word, the immutability of the decree is evident from the close connexion established between election and final salvation, by a process, all the steps of which are inseparably conjoined. "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."§ You perceive that a chain stretches from eternity to eternity, not one link of which can be broken. The purpose of God, according to election, shall stand. The rage of the world, the malice of devils, and the will of man, froward and perverse as it is, shall not be able to overthrow it. "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."||

This, then, is the sum of what has been said on the subject of election; that God did make choice of certain individuals to enjoy salvation in preference to others; that he chose them before the foundation of the world; that in doing so, he acted according to his sovereign will, and was not influenced by the foresight of their good qualifications; and that this decree is immutable, it being impossible that any of the elect should perish.

* Ps. xxxiii. 11.

§ Rom. viii. 30.

† 2 Tim. ii. 19.

‡ Isa. xlv. 9, 10.

¶ John xvii. 6, 12.

There is one particular which remains to be considered, namely, what is the connexion between the decree of election and the mediation of Christ. Had God any respect to it, in choosing some men to salvation? If he was not influenced by the foresight of their faith, was he influenced by the view of their future relation to the Saviour? In other words, were they predestinated to life for his sake? And is this the meaning of the Scripture when it says, that they were chosen in him before the foundation of the world?—To this question I return an answer in the negative. Whatever is the sense of the phrase now quoted, this cannot be its meaning. We must explain one passage of Scripture in consistency with another; and, as we find that the mission of our Saviour was the effect of the love of God, or, to use his own words, that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,”* we conclude that his mediation was not the cause, but the consequence of election. The end is first in intention, and then the means are appointed. The end in this decree was the salvation of the elect, and the means were the incarnation, and death, and intercession of our Lord. In the Divine mind, there is no succession of thoughts; but according to our analogical mode of conceiving its operations, the appointment of certain persons to salvation, was prior to the appointment of the means by which they should be saved. The phrase, chosen in Christ, signifies, I apprehend, that God had a respect to the mediation of his Son, not as the reason of their election, but as the expedient by which his purpose would be executed. When he chose them, he gave them to Christ, as he himself speaks. He constituted him their Head; he set him up from everlasting as their Representative and Surety, by whom all would be performed which his justice required as the condition of their final happiness. Hence, grace is said to have “been given them in Christ Jesus, before the world began,”† and eternal life is called the promise “which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began.”‡ In both passages there is an obvious reference to Christ, to whom eternal life and all the blessings of grace were promised, as the federal head of the elect. But they were first chosen and then given to him, agreeably to his own declaration, “Thine they were, and thou gavest them me.”§

Election, being the purpose which God purposed in himself, an intrinsic act of the Divine mind, remains unknown till it be manifested in its execution. No man can read his own name, or that of another, in the Book of Life. It is a sealed book, which no mortal can open. We are assured that there is such a decree, by the express testimony of Scripture; but of the persons included in it, nothing is known or can be conjectured, till evidence be exhibited in their personal character and conduct. An Apostle points out the only means by which this important point can be ascertained, when he exhorts christians to “give all diligence to make their calling and election sure.”|| To make sure, signifies in this place to ascertain, to render a thing certain to the mind. Now, the order of procedure is, first to make our calling certain, or to ascertain that we have been converted to God, and thus our election will be sure, or manifest to ourselves. It is the same kind of reasoning which we employ, in tracing out the cause by the effect. The operation of divine grace in the regeneration of the soul, is a proof that the man in whom this change is wrought, was an object of the divine favour from eternity. The love of God is the source of all the blessings conferred upon believers. In particular, that operation of his power, by which they are brought into the fellowship of the Gospel, is declared to be the consequence of a prior purpose to save them. “Whom he did predestinate, them he also called.” The evidences of regeneration, therefore, are evidences of election: but there is no other process by which the latter may be proved. The Scriptures give us no information on

* John iii. 16. † 2 Tim. i. 9. ‡ Titus i. 2. § John xvii. 6. || 2 Peter i. 10.

the subject: it cannot be known by special revelation, for God makes no disclosure of such secrets; nor is it to be inferred from impressions or feelings of the mind, for these are the effects of fancy, and no wise man will attend to them. 'Till the decree bring forth, no created being can tell what are its contents. For "who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?"

As no man can know his election till he believe, it is plain that the decree ought to have no effect upon his conduct in reference to the Gospel. What is unknown can have no moral influence upon the mind, any more than what does not exist. The rule of our duty is the word of God. The only subject into which we should inquire, is the declaration of his will respecting us; and no inference, which we may draw from the doctrine under consideration, will justify us in neglecting our duty. God has not told us whom he has chosen to salvation; but he has told us, that all to whom the Gospel is preached should believe it, and that every man who does believe shall be saved. We have a law plain and express, and a promise encouraging obedience to it, which, having been made by Him who is incapable of deceiving us, will certainly be performed. This should satisfy us, and put an end to our disputes. "Secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but things that are revealed to us and to our children for ever."*

The doctrine of election is attended with difficulties; but, if it is delivered in the Scriptures, as I trust has been proved, we are bound to receive it. All that we ought to expect with regard to subjects so profound, is sufficient evidence of their truth; it is impossible that, to our limited faculties, they should be made so clear as to supersede all objections. The proper office of faith is to assent to the doctrines of religion upon the Divine testimony alone; and its strength is never so fully displayed, as when it receives no aid from sense or reason, and, although both should ask with an air of scornful triumph, How can these things be? rests with unshaken confidence upon the word of Him who cannot lie. Let us never forget that, it is not reason, but revelation, which is our guide in religion, and that, when the latter speaks, it is the province of the former to listen and acquiesce.

LECTURE XXXVI.

ON PREDESTINATION.

Decree of Reprobation—Proof that there is such a Decree—The Ground of it; and wherein it consists—Practical Utility of the Doctrine of Predestination—Objections to it.

HAVING considered, in the preceding Lecture, the decree of election, I now proceed to speak of that of reprobation. Our Church gives the following account of it:—"The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice."† To reprobate is to disapprove, or to reject; and the term is used to express that act of God by which, when all mankind were before the eye of his omniscience, he rejected some, while he chose others. Some are disposed to prefer the word preterition, not only because it

* Deut. xxix. 29.

† West. Conf. chap. iii. § 7.

is a softer term, but because they conceive that there was no positive act of God in reference to those who were left in their sins, but that he merely passed them by. His procedure towards them, they consider as a simple negation of the favour which he extended to others. But, although there is no reason for employing terms unnecessarily strong, upon a subject which in itself is very awful, and we would not imitate those who have chosen to express themselves in the harshest and most offensive manner, as if they had felt some strange delight in painting it with the darkest colours; yet I do not see how we can suppose nothing more than a sort of inactive preterition, as there was undoubtedly an act of the will of God with respect to the reprobate as well as the elect. When, out of many objects which are presented to him, a person makes a selection, he as positively rejects some as he chooses others. He does not pass by any without taking notice of them; but, having them all at once, or in succession, under his eye, he takes and leaves, for reasons which are satisfactory to himself. Not to choose, is a negative phrase, but it does not imply the absence of a determination of the mind. It is not to words, but to things, that we ought to attend; and any man, who reflects upon the operation of his own mind in a similar case, will perceive that the will is exercised in passing by one object, as much as in choosing another. There seems to be no reason, therefore, for denying, that what is called reprobation was a positive decree as well as election. Some distinguish reprobation into negative and positive; calling it negative, as it consists in withholding from the objects of it the favour which is extended to the elect, and positive, as it consists in a purpose to permit them to be hardened in sin, and to punish them for their final unbelief and impenitence.

Without dwelling upon these niceties, let us proceed to shew, that there is such a purpose of God as is commonly called reprobation. It appears from what has been already said, that it is necessarily implied in the idea of election, so that, having proved the one, we have virtually proved the other. Election and rejection are correlative terms, and men impose upon themselves, and imagine that they conceive what it is impossible to conceive, when they admit election and deny reprobation. When of several objects some are chosen, the rest are rejected. It is to no purpose to say that nothing has been done to them, but that they are left in the state in which they were found. In one sense this is true, and in another it is not true; because, as they might have been chosen but were not, there has been an act of the mind refusing to choose them. The person to whom they were presented has said, ‘These I will take, and those I will not take.’ There are many passages of Scripture in which this doctrine is taught: we read of some whose names are “not written,” and who consequently are opposed to those whose names are written, “in the book of life;”* who are “vessels of wrath fitted to destruction,”† who were “before of old ordained to condemnation,”‡ who “stumble at the word, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed;”§ of persons whom God is said to hate, while others he loves.¶ Let any man carefully and dispassionately read the ninth and the eleventh chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, and he will entertain no more doubt that some are ordained to death, than that others are ordained to life. He will see a distinction stated between the children of the flesh and the children of the promise, and traced up to its source in the sovereignty of God, who will “have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom he will have compassion; so that it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will

* Rev. xiii. 8. † Rom. ix. 22. ‡ Jude, 4. § 1 Peter ii. 8. ¶ Mal. i. 2, 3.

have mercy. and whom he will he hardeneth.”* He will find, that some have not obtained righteousness or salvation, but that others have obtained it: and that the former are called “the election,” and the latter “the rest,”† *οἱ λοιποὶ*, the remainder, or those who were left. However awful and revolting to our feelings the doctrine may be, however liable to objections it may seem, and whatever startling inferences our perverse reason may deduce from it, it is impossible, with any appearance of fairness, to deny that it is delivered in the Scriptures.

If we inquire into the reason why God passed over some in his eternal decree, while he extended mercy to others, we must content ourselves with the words of our Lord, which were spoken in reference to the execution of his purpose:—“Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.”‡ It may be supposed, indeed, that we need not resolve the decree of reprobation into the sovereignty of God, as a sufficient reason for it may be found in the moral character of its objects, who, being considered as fallen and guilty creatures, may be presumed to have been rejected on this account. But although this may seem at first sight to have been the cause of their reprobation, yet upon closer attention we shall see reason to change our opinion. It is obvious that, if they had not been considered as fallen, they would not have been rejected, unless we adopt the Supralapsarian hypothesis, which affirms that they were viewed only as creatures, and that, by that uncontrolled power which may make one vessel to dishonour, and another to honour, their appointment to perdition, for the glory of Divine justice, was prior to the purpose to permit them to fall. There is something in this system repugnant to our ideas of the character of God, whom it represents rather as a despot, than the Father of the universe. But, although their fall is pre-supposed to their reprobation, it will appear that the former was not the reason of the latter, if we recollect that those, who were chosen to salvation, were exactly in the same situation. Both classes appeared in the eyes of God to be guilty, polluted, and worthy of death. Their sinfulness, therefore, could not be the reason of rejection in the one case, since it did not cause rejection in the other. If it was the reason why some were passed by, it would have been a reason why all should be passed by. As, then, it did not hinder the election of some, it could not be the cause which hindered the election of others. You ought not to think that there is too much refinement and subtlety in this reasoning. If you pay due attention to the subject, you will perceive that, as the moral state of all was the same, it could not be the cause of the difference in their destination. If there was sin in the reprobate, there was sin also in the elect; and we must therefore resolve their opposite allotment into the will of God, who gives and withholds his favour according to his pleasure:—“He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.”§

In this decree of God, the two following things are to be distinctly considered. The first is the purpose to withhold from the objects of it that grace which he would extend to the elect. He would send his Son into the world to seek and to save that which was lost, but he did not intend him to be the Saviour of the reprobate; for, to say that he did, would be to say that he intended what is not accomplished, and consequently that he is disappointed. He would make his gospel be preached to them, or at least to many of them; but he would not accompany it with those supernatural influences which would illuminate their minds, and change their hearts, and enable them to yield the obedience of faith. He would lay restraints upon them by his providence, so that the wickedness of their hearts would not find an opportunity of exerting itself in all its activity and virulence; but he would leave them in all other cases, to follow their own inclinations. Is there unrighteousness with God in

* Rom. ix. 15—18.

† Rom. xi. 7.

‡ Matt. xi. 26.

§ Rom. ix. 18.

this procedure? God forbid. How can there be unrighteousness in lenying a favour to which there is no claim? There is certainly no law by which he is bound to deliver his apostate creatures from guilt and its consequences. Having transgressed, they are amenable to his justice; and if justice take its course, who has a right to find fault? God found men in sin: and in leaving them there, he did no wrong, and was chargeable with no cruelty, if sin is a voluntary evil, and deserves the pains and penalties which are denounced against it in his word.

The second thing to be considered is, the purpose to subject the objects of this decree to everlasting punishment. They are "appointed unto wrath:"* "Whosoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the lake of fire."† Of this part of the decree, we must admit sin to be the proper cause. It is not the cause, as we have seen, of their preterition; but it is the cause of their destination to perdition. As this is an act of God in the character of a judge fixing beforehand the punishment of the guilty, the sentence must be preceded by the consideration of their guilt. There can be no will in God to punish any but sinners; nor could the intention to punish be just, without a respect to disobedience. God does not arbitrarily, or in the exercise of sovereignty, consign any of his creatures to damnation. In a case of this nature, sovereignty has no place; it is justice alone which decides; and if there were no fault, justice would inflict no suffering. It is for their sins against the law, if they lived under it alone, or for their sins also against the gospel, that they are doomed to destruction.

I am disposed to doubt, notwithstanding the opinion of Divines to the contrary, whether this purpose is any part of the decree of reprobation, which properly consists in passing by its objects, or rejecting them. The dooming of them to perdition seems to belong to a different decree, especially as it is founded on a different cause. They were appointed to wrath for their sins; but it was not for their sins, as we have shewn, but in the exercise of sovereignty, that they were rejected.

This is all that I have to say on this part of the subject. I have endeavoured briefly to explain my views of it, and to prove that they are agreeable to Scripture; but we must close this inquiry with the words of the Apostle: "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"‡

The doctrine of the Divine decrees relative to the final destination of men, is not a barren speculation. There are practical purposes to which it may be applied; and in particular, it is calculated to inspire sentiments of reverence and gratitude towards God.

First, It exhibits him in the august character of the Supreme Lord of the universe, who doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and whose arm none can stay, saying to him, What dost thou? We do not ascribe to him an absolute power to consign his creatures to misery, without any consideration of their guilt, because we do not wish to exalt his authority at the expense of his goodness and justice, and because such a Being could never be the object of our confidence and love. At the same time, we acknowledge that he does exercise a sovereign power over his creatures, considered merely as his creatures, for he has made some angels, some men, and some irrational animals. But it is to his uncontrolled sway over his creatures, as fallen, that the present subject directs our attention. They were all before his eye in a state of pollution, and under a sentence of death. He might do with them what he would; and he has done according to his pleasure. He has not left all under their doom, nor extended mercy to all: but has distinguished between objects, in which there was no ground of dis-

* 1 Thess. v. 9. 1 Pet. ii. 8. Jude 4

† Rev. xx. 15.

‡ Rom. xi. 33.

tion, and said to some, Ye shall live, and to others, Ye shall die. His will is the law, and from his sentence there is no appeal. It is by a view of his supreme dominion that the Apostle silences the murmurs and complaints of impious men: "O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?" *

Secondly, It affords an illustration of the exceeding riches of his grace. It may be thought, indeed, that it rather represents him as severe and terrible, in consigning so many of the human race to perdition; but, although it is acknowledged that it does so, as we shall afterwards see, let us remember that there are two aspects under which the subject may be viewed, and that one of them is of the most pleasing and consoling nature. In the destination of a portion of the human race to the enjoyment of everlasting felicity, God appears in the character of the God of love. It is love of the purest and most disinterested kind, as it flowed out spontaneously towards its objects, while there were, not only no qualities in them to attract it, but every thing was repulsive. It strikes us the more, because its date is so ancient; because it anticipated the existence of its objects, and provided for their relief as soon as their necessity was foreseen; thus proving that love is essential to the Deity, and that nothing is more agreeable to him than the exercise of benevolence. As the whole series of events was open to his all-seeing eye, the riches of his grace appear still the more wonderful, because the communication of them to the objects of his favour could not take place without a sacrifice, (if I may be permitted the use of this expression on such an occasion), without a sacrifice on the part of God, which nothing but infinite love could have made. The incarnation, the humiliation, the sufferings, the death of the Son of God, were the consequences of his purpose to bestow eternal life upon the unworthy objects of his choice. And when we add, that election is but the first step in the dispensation of mercy to mankind, that it is the first link of a chain which runs into eternity, and has no end, may we not say, How great is the goodness which thou hast wrought for them that fear thee? "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." †

Lastly, It gives a solemn and impressive view of his justice and severity. We have seen that sin was not properly the cause of reprobation, because, upon this ground, the whole human race would have been rejected. But sin rendered it just in God to pass by such as he pleased, and to doom them to everlasting misery. While we speak of his sovereignty in choosing some, and leaving others, let us not forget to think of his justice, because, when it is admitted as a principle of his procedure in the final allotment of the ungodly, some of the objections which are advanced against predestination will fall to the ground. The rejection of so many of the human race is a proof that God is holy and just; that sin is contrary to his nature, and the object of his abhorrence; so that, notwithstanding his essential goodness, which disposes him to promote the happiness of his creatures, he will not suffer it to pass with impunity. His justice appears the more awful and inflexible, because it is manifested at the same time with his love. Behold the goodness and severity of God; his goodness to the chosen, his severity to the rejected. This is such an association as we find in the proclamation of his name, to which the men-

* Rom. ix. 20—23

† Rom. viii. 30.

tion of this terrible attribute, after the celebration of his mercy in language studiously varied, gives a solemn close. "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." O! how great is he who sits upon the eternal throne as the arbiter of life and death, and pronounces the dreadful sentence upon many (how many we cannot tell) to display his power, and proclaim to the universe, that, full as his heart is of benevolence to his sentient creatures, the honour of his own character and government is dearer to him than their happiness! "Who would not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy."

If the doctrine of predestination has a practical tendency, the question, whether it should be publicly taught, admits of an easy solution. It seems impossible, indeed, to assign a good reason for attempting to suppress any truth which is contained in the Scriptures. If it were useless, and still more, if it were dangerous, God would not have revealed it. But, as the subject is so difficult, and lies so far beyond our range of thought, it is plain that it is not to be attempted by every sciolist, who, with a few common notions of Theology in his head, may deem himself competent to engage in the most profound discussions; and farther, that it calls for modesty and diffidence in the best informed, and for the utmost care, to avoid human speculations, and to adhere as much as possible, to the language of Scripture. When we allow reason to be our guide in these abstruse matters, we are not sure of the way, and may seem to ourselves to be treading on the high road, when we are wandering in a devious path. It may also be safely laid down as a rule, that it should not be frequently introduced, because, although it has a relation to the faith and practice of christians, there are other subjects of which the influence is more immediate and extensive, and which ought therefore to occupy a more prominent place in a course of instruction. I should not entertain a favourable opinion of the wisdom of a minister who often declaimed upon these high mysteries, while he might spend his time more profitably to himself and his hearers, in speaking of the simple doctrines of the gospel, by which men live, and in which is the life of their souls; and I am disposed to suspect, that we should find him and his followers more distinguished by pretensions to superior knowledge and disputatious zeal, than by humble faith and spirituality of mind. Attention should likewise be paid to times and circumstances in teaching this doctrine. None but a thoughtless zealot would bring it forward to meet the view of an inquirer into the truth of our religion, and thus take the direct method to disgust him at the outset: a wise man would begin with the elements or first principles, and then go on to the higher branches of the science, giving milk to babes, and reserving strong meat for men. It would be imprudent and cruel to obtrude the subject upon a person who was depressed with a sense of sin, and the fear of never enjoying the favour of God: unless we wished to increase his perplexity, and to drive him to despair, we would have recourse to different topics, to the freeness of Divine grace, the infinite value of the Saviour's blood, and the unlimited offer of salvation. It would betray great unskilfulness in the work of righteousness, to intermix this subject with an exposition of the common doctrines of the gospel; when we are speaking of the death of Christ as a sacrifice for sin, to be sure uniformly to add, that he died only for the elect; when we are inviting sinners to come to him, not to let pass the opportunity of reminding them, that unless they are elected, they never will believe; when we call upon men to repent, to take care not to omit, that if they be among the reprobate, they will not repent, as they are given up to hardness of heart. This sort of preaching, I should consider as injudicious in the highest degree, and as calculated to defeat the design of the

preacher, if his design were the salvation of souls. We have no example of it in the Scriptures, nor do I think it consistent with common sense. I conclude with quoting the words of our Confession of Faith: "The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men, attending the will of God revealed in his word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation, to all that sincerely obey the gospel."*

I shall conclude by taking notice of some of the objections which are advanced against the doctrine of predestination.

First, It has been often said, that it represents God as a respecter of persons. In order to ascertain whether there is any force in this objection, it is necessary to inquire what respect of persons means. I suspect that this is a point which our objectors have not been at pains to settle, and that they ignorantly suppose the preference of one to another to be the same with respect of persons, while there are not two things in the world more distinct. "Of a truth," said Peter to Cornelius, "I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."† From these words you perceive, that respect of persons is the preferring of one man to another, although both were equally entitled to regard, on account of some accidental circumstance, as, for example, his belonging to a particular nation. It is to give him the advantage above another, not for the superiority of his worth or the justice of his claim, but for some consideration altogether foreign to the man and his cause. Thus a judge is chargeable with respect of persons, when he is induced to pronounce an improper sentence, either by pity for a poor man, or by adulation of the rich. To this very case the law of Moses refers: "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour."‡ It has been laid down by Divines as a maxim, that respect of persons has no place in acts of bounty, in relation to which a man may do as he pleases, but has place in acts of justice, with regard to which there is an obligation upon him who distributes, to render to every one his due. It is absurd, therefore, to call God a respecter of persons in predestination, because, in his eternal purpose, he acted not as a judge but as a sovereign, as one who owed nothing to his creatures, and was guided by his own views of fitness and expedience, without any external consideration. As the whole human race was fallen and guilty, there was nothing in any of them which could influence him to prefer them to others; he was moved solely by his own wisdom, and cannot therefore be called a respecter of persons.

Secondly, It is objected, that the doctrine of predestination supposes men to be laid under the necessity of sinning, and consequently makes God the author of their sin. I acknowledge that this horrible inference seems to be naturally deduced from the Supralapsarian scheme, which represents the introduction of sin as the appointed mean of executing the purpose of the Almighty, respecting the final doom of his creatures. But it does not follow from our scheme, which presupposes sin as the groundwork of predestination, and makes the act of God towards the reprobate to be nothing more than his purpose to leave them in their sin, and to withhold his grace, which he was under no obligation to communicate. God does not will the sins of man, or effect them by any operation of his power; he merely arranges his plan with a view to them, and overrules them for his glory. I confess that the statement may be objected to as not complete; that there are still difficulties which press upon us; that perplexing questions may be proposed, and that the answers which have been re-

* West. Conf. c. iii. § 8.

† Acts x. 34, 35.

‡ Lev. xix. 15.

turned to them by great Divines are not so satisfactory in every instance, as those imagine who do not think for themselves, and take too much upon trust. The subject is above our comprehension. There are two propositions, of the truth of which we are fully assured,—that God has pre-ordained all things which come to pass, and that he is not the author of sin. There can be no doubt about either of them, in the mind of the man who believes the Scriptures. He may not be able to reconcile them, but this ought not to weaken his conviction of their truth. Instead of suspecting the one or the other, it will be wise in him and in us to suspect our own reasonings from them. We are sure that they harmonize; but, if our reasonings terminate in making them appear contradictory, we have ground to call their accuracy in question. By our reasonings, I mean our application of human ideas to the Divine decrees, and the inferences which we deduce from them.

Thirdly, It is objected against the doctrine of predestination, that it supersedes the use of means. If a man has been elected, he shall be saved, although he should give himself no concern, and even should live in sin: if he has not been elected, all his efforts to obtain eternal life will prove unavailing. But, of all objections, this is the silliest, although it is brought forward with great confidence, and by many is deemed very formidable. It is not an objection at all against the Scriptural doctrine of predestination, but against a spurious kind, hatched in the brains of ignorance, or concocted by malignity to bring odium upon the truth. The predestination to which this objection would be applicable, is an absolute pre-appointment of an end, without any regard to the means. But such predestination cannot without impiety be attributed to God, because it would be disgraceful to one of his intelligent creatures. Whoever reasons against this kind of predestination, is at perfect liberty to bring all the arguments which he can muster up to bear upon it, till he has fairly driven it off the stage. He must allow us, however, to tell him, that he has given himself a great deal of unnecessary labour; that he has been contending with a chimera, and has gained an empty triumph, as our doctrine remains untouched. The predestination which we maintain, is a purpose which embraces means and ends, fixes the means as surely as the ends, and so connects them, that without the former, the latter cannot take place. If God has elected some persons to eternal life, he has chosen them to it through faith and holiness as the means of salvation; if he has appointed other persons to wrath, his sentence is founded on their impenitence and unbelief. This is the doctrine of Scripture; and if you will still assert that it renders all means unnecessary, you may with equal reason maintain, that a man who has been assured that, by the use of a certain medicine, his life will be prolonged, may justly take occasion from this assurance to neglect the medicine, and, at the same time, expect to live. Paul was assured, by a vision, of the lives of all that were in the ship with him, but still he said to the centurion, “Except the sailors abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.” And why did he say so, but because God had determined that the company should be saved by the skill and activity of the sailors? The man who says that the decrees of God supersede the use of means, does not know what he is saying. The means are an essential part of the decree, and are as necessary as the end. I mean, that it is not more necessary, that those who were chosen to life should be saved, than it is, that they should repent and believe. You would say, that the decree of God had failed, if any of the elect should perish; and I would say with equal truth, that it had failed, if any of them were saved in a state of carelessness and indolence. The uselessness of means, in consequence of the doctrine of absolute decrees, is a topic of vulgar declamation, which every man who wishes to maintain the credit of his understanding, should leave to sciolists and fools.

Lastly, It is objected, that the doctrine of predestination is inconsistent with

the invitation of the gospel; for how could God offer salvation to men, if he had excluded them from it by an immutable decree? and how could he earnestly entreat them to believe, although he had determined to withhold his effectual grace? There is a greater difficulty here than orthodox Divines sometimes seem willing to acknowledge, and the mode in which they meet it, is not always satisfactory. A distinction between the secret and revealed will of God must be admitted, and in many instances is perfectly intelligible; but it is not easy to reconcile them, when, in revelation, he declares, that he is no willing that any should perish, but by his secret counsel, has left many to perish. He who sees no difficulty here, has not, as he probably imagines, more understanding than other men, but less. It may be remarked, however, that this objection does not press upon the system of absolute decrees alone, but meets every man, who simply admits the Divine prescience of future events; for how, it may be asked, can God in sincerity invite, beseech, and expostulate with men, evidently with a design to effect a change of their sentiments, although he knows infallibly before-hand, that they will never change? I know what may be said in answer to the objection; but I confess my inability to give complete satisfaction to myself or to you. Let us suspect our own views of the subject, rather than suspect the sincerity of God. Of the latter we are certain; it is essential to his moral character, and is the foundation of our faith in his testimony, and our dependence upon his promises. We can never be certain that we understand the subject of predestination, so well as we understand that God is sincere. The latter truth, therefore, let us hold fast, whatever may become of our speculations respecting the former. Here we may err, because the subject is mysterious; but on the other point, we cannot be deceived. The gospel is preached to every creature. All are commanded to believe, and encouraged by the promise of salvation. God would "have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."* If doubts respecting these comfortable declarations of Scripture should be suggested to us from any quarter, let us repel them as hostile to our own peace, and subversive of religion, and say with the Apostle, "Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar."†

In this and the two preceding lectures, I have considered the Divine decrees, first generally, and then more particularly, as they relate to men, and their eternal state. The doctrine which I have endeavoured to establish is, that God, before the beginning of the world, pre-ordained whatever comes to pass; or that, in the works of creation, providence, and redemption, he acts according to a plan previously settled in his own mind. To this general view of the subject there can be no objections, but as soon as we proceed to the application of it to human affairs, difficulties present themselves, which we are unable to solve. Two things are certain, that there are Divine decrees, which will be infallibly executed, and that man is responsible for his actions; but how to reconcile them is a question which has perplexed thoughtful men in every age, and to which a satisfactory answer has not yet been discovered. In this case, our duty is, not to reject either of those points, but to call in the assistance of faith, when reason fails, and to believe, that by a mysterious link, God, as the poet expresses it,

"— binding nature fast in fate,
Left free the human will."‡

It can serve no great purpose to muster up objections against the infallibility of the Divine decrees, or the responsibility of man; to listen to them when proposed by others; to revolve them in our minds; to perplex ourselves with attempts to answer them, and to allow ourselves to be disquieted and to doubt

* 1 Tim. ii. 4.

† Rom. iii. 4.

‡ Pope.

because our endeavours are not successful. Although we should prove to our satisfaction, as many have done to theirs, that the decrees of God are not absolute, or that man is not free, all that we have gained is, to confirm our minds in the belief of a falsehood; for both doctrines must be true, as they are expressly declared in the Scriptures. To their authority let us bow; and by their decision let us regulate our thoughts and our conduct. If we still oppose our reasonings to their dictates, we must take our course; but let us beware lest we dispute ourselves into infidelity or atheism, and seek a refuge from our doubts in the rejection of revelation, because it inculcates truths which to us appear contradictory, or in the cheerless conclusion, that we live in a fatherless world, where chance bears sway, that man is the phantom of an hour, the sport of accident and passion, and that, as he knows not whence he came, so he cannot tell whither he is going. In opposition to this comfortless and impious conclusion, let us hold fast the creed which is consonant to reason as well as to revelation, that the Supreme Being manages the affairs of the universe which he created; that all creatures are dependent upon him, and all events are subject to his control; that while good men obey him from choice, the wrath and wayward passions of the bad are subservient to his design; that, while his almighty power bends them to his purpose, he is a moral Governor and Judge, whose righteousness will be displayed in punishing transgressors, even for those actions which were the means of executing his own decrees.

LECTURE XXXVII.

ON CREATION.

Idea of Creation—Evidences that the Universe was Created—Illustration and Defence of the Mosaic Account—God's Design in creating the Universe.

God works all things according to the counsel of his will, or, in other words, his external operations are conformable to the plan which was arranged by his wisdom from eternity. We are therefore naturally led, after having considered his decrees, to speak of their execution in his works. Our attention shall be directed, in the first place, to Creation, in which the execution of his purposes commenced.

In entering upon this subject, it is necessary to ascertain what is the precise idea of creation, or in what sense the term is used, when it is employed to denote the agency of God in the production of the universe. In this inquiry, we can receive no assistance from the consideration of the terms *ברא* and *κτίσις*, by which it is expressed in the Scriptures. Compound words are significant in themselves, because they are made up of terms to which a meaning has been previously affixed; but simple words are arbitrary sounds, which convey no idea to the hearer till he has been informed of what notion they are appointed to be the signs. Now, we find that the words under consideration have several acceptations in the Scriptures; and in particular, that the former signifies to make something out of nothing, to make something out of materials already existing or to give them a new form and arrangement, to revive and re-invigorate, and, lastly, to effect a change in the moral qualities of the soul, as when a new heart is said to be created within us. It is evident that the term is used in the first of these senses in the first chapter of Genesis, when God is said to have "created" the heavens and the earth. The subsequent verses of that

chapter give an account of the order in which matter already existing was disposed, while, in our world the sea was separated from the land, and the earth was clothed with herbs, and filled with inhabitants; and in the higher regions, the luminaries had their stations and revolutions assigned to them. The manifest design is, to inform us by what steps God brought the mass of rude matter into that beautiful assemblage of parts which excites the admiration of every beholder. The first verse, therefore, must be understood to refer to the original production of matter by his almighty power. "In the beginning," or at the commencement of time, he made out of nothing the matter of which the heavens and the earth were composed, and upon which their present form was afterwards superinduced. This, I think, is the natural way of explaining the words; and, according to this view of them, the Bible opens with an ascription of the act of creation to God, in the highest, or rather, the only proper sense of the term.

There is another passage which will assist us in ascertaining the sense in which God is said to have **created** the world. "Through faith, we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God; so that things which are seen, were not made of things which do appear,"* *μη εκ φαινομένων, τὰ βλεπόμενα γεγενῆσθαι*. Now, remark, that the Apostle would have suggested a different idea, had he used the phrase, *εκ μη φαινομένων*; for he would have intimated, that visible things were made of things invisible, which might have been supposed to signify the dark original chaos of the Heathens. But the expression, *μη εκ φαινομένων*, imports something very different, a denial that the universe was formed out of pre-existing matter. In other words, the worlds, according to the Apostle, were made out of nothing. Even the chaos of the ancients was invisible only because no sun, as Ovid says, gave light to the world, and the evening moon did not then repair her new horns;† it would have been seen, if there had been a medium through which it might be perceived. "The things that appear" are matter, which light has rendered visible, or matter which may be seen; and of this matter, Paul assures us the worlds were not framed.

Different arguments have been employed to prove that the universe had a beginning, and, consequently, that it was created by the power of God. To suppose the universe to be eternal, is to suppose it to be self-existent. But, besides that there is nothing in matter, which is inert, passive, divisible, and subject to perpetual change, to suggest the idea of its self-existence, it should be remembered, that whatever is self-existent, is necessarily existent. But as this necessity is the same every where, it follows, upon the supposition, that matter must have existed every where, or must have filled every portion of space, and have been infinitely extended. But this is absurd, and contrary to fact. There is another consequence which is equally false, that, if matter exists necessarily, it must exist either in a state of motion or in a state of rest, as necessity will determine every part of it to be in the same state. It would be impossible that, as is actually the case, one part of it should be in motion and another at rest. The necessity of its existence would extend to all its modifications; and, indeed, if we closely consider the subject, we shall find that it could have no modifications, but that, under the influence of necessity acting uniformly every where, it must have presented every where one uniform mass. How contrary this is to the actual state in which matter appears, we all know by observation.

Another argument against the eternity of the universe, is founded in the nature of time, which is a succession of moments. We can conceive time to commence at any given period, and to run on *ad infinitum*, or never to come to an end; but we cannot conceive it to be actually infinite. An infinite duration can

* Heb. xi. 3.

† Ovid. Metamorph. lib. i. v. 10.

never be made up of finite parts; because as each of those parts has an end the sum which they compose must also have an end. As it is impossible that an infinite succession of moments can be past, it is impossible, that the universe can have existed from eternity. Further, if matter has existed from eternity, it must have existed, as we have seen, in the same form which it at present sustains, for this is the consequence of its necessary existence. The earth on which we dwell, and the heavens above us, are eternal; and the same motions have been incessantly going on in the immense regions of space. The earth has been revolving on its own axis, and, as well as the other planets, has been performing its circuit around the sun. Its revolutions upon its axis have been infinite; and so have been its revolutions in its orbit; and so have been the revolutions of Saturn. Mark the consequence. We have here three infinities, which are made up of unequal parts; an infinity made up of the revolutions of Saturn, the time of which is twenty-nine times less than the infinity made up of the annual revolutions of the earth, and many thousand times less than the infinity made up of the diurnal revolutions of the latter. Thus we are landed in a palpable absurdity, from which we can only escape by renouncing the untenable hypothesis of the eternity of the universe, and admitting the Scriptural doctrine of its creation.

Another argument against the eternity of the world is founded on the recent date of authentic history. If, indeed, the accounts of some nations were to be credited, we should believe, that our earth has existed for many millions of years; but these are the dreams of poets, or of men of wild and undisciplined imaginations, and have been satisfactorily proved to be false. No credible history reaches farther back than the period which Moses has assigned for the creation; and profane history has nothing to relate but fables and rumours till the age of Herodotus, who flourished about five hundred years before the christian era. The silence of history with respect to any event prior to the time when we suppose the world to have been created, is unaccountable, if it had existed for eternity, or even for millions of years. How does it happen that not a hint has come down to us of innumerable former generations? Surely, the human race must have possessed letters and science long before the date which we assign to them. How have all their monuments perished? How is it that to us thousands and thousands of generations are as if they had never been? And how is it that civilization and learning can be traced back only to a period which is but as yesterday, if the earth and its inhabitants had no beginning? The want of all records of a higher date, the recent origin of nations, and the late invention of arts, all concur to shew, that only a few thousand years have elapsed, since our earth and its inhabitants came into existence. This argument was employed long ago by Lucretius, a follower of Epicurus, who, although an atheist, maintained, according to the doctrine of his master, that the present system had a beginning, in respect at least of arrangement and form. If the heavens and the earth are eternal, why have the actions of illustrious men so often sunk into oblivion? Why does no record remain to perpetuate their fame? Why does history begin with some facts of comparatively modern date?

*Cur supra bellum Thebanum et funera Trojæ,
Non alias alii quoque res cecinere poetæ? **

Notwithstanding these arguments, none of the ancient philosophers, not even Lucretius or his master, had any proper idea of the creation of the universe. They all believed the eternity of matter. Ocellus Lucanus, in his treatise *Περὶ τοῦ παντός*, maintains the eternity of the universe by this argument, that what will have no end had no beginning; drawing a confident conclusion

* Lucret. de Rerum Nat. Lib. v. 327.

from a mere assumption, and taking for granted two things, which any person was at liberty to deny, and for which he could not produce the shadow of proof, that the universe will last for ever, and that it is impossible for a being to last for ever which had a beginning. It is impossible, he says, for any thing to be produced out of nothing, *ἐκ τῶν μὴ ὄντων*, or to be resolved into nothing.* He does not speak of a Being distinct from matter, by whom it was reduced to order. The doctrine of Plato was, that there were two principles of the universe, both self-existent and independent, matter and God; and that God wishing all things good, and as far as his power extends, nothing evil, having received matter in a discordant state, brought it from disorder into order, judging this to be preferable. Even Soerates treated as fools and madmen those who attempted to solve the question, whether all things were generated and perished, or were eternal and indestructible. Epicurus admitted, that the heavens and the earth had a beginning in respect of their present form, and, as we may infer from his disciple Lucretius, seems to have considered their origin as not very remote; but he maintained, in common with other philosophers, the eternity of the matter of which they were composed. According to his fanciful theory, it existed in the form of atoms, which moving in the immensity of space, met at last, and formed that stupendous and beautiful system, which no man can contemplate without admiration and delight. In order to accomplish this design, Epicurus was under the necessity of making many gratuitous assumptions. He supposed that his atoms were in motion, although no reason could be assigned why they were once in motion, and are now at rest; that their motion up or down, was not perpendicular but somewhat inclined, so that there might be a possibility of their meeting; and that, small as they were, they were not of a uniform shape, but that while some were smooth, others were hooked, and so could lay hold of their neighbours, and coalesce into a palpable body. Furnished with these postulates, he was ready to show how the universe was framed by mechanical causes, without the intervention of an almighty and intelligent Agent. His theory has been repelled by heathen and christians writers; but the ravings of wild speculation never deserved a serious answer. You will observe, that as Archimedes could not move the earth, as he promised, because he could not find a place on which to rest his lever, so without atoms Epicurus could have done nothing. Like the other philosophers, he conceived it impossible that the heavens and the earth should have been made, without pre-existing materials.

It is, then, with propriety and justice, that an Apostle declares, that "through faith" we understand, that the worlds were framed by the word of God. It is revelation which has informed us, that all things had a beginning, and reason assents to the doctrine as true, and derives from its own reflexion new arguments to support it.

The act of creation, which we ascribe to God, is the production of something out of nothing. The power by which creation was effected, we may not be able to conceive, because it is different from the power which we exert, or which we have seen exerted by others. All that we can do is to operate upon materials already existing; and even here, the sphere of our activity is very limited. But there is no reason why we should deny or doubt, that there is such power in God; for it is one of the first dictates of reason, that we ought not to measure him by our standard. As there is nothing to limit the perfections of the First Cause, we believe his power to be infinite, by which we mean, power which can perform every thing that does not imply a contradiction, or which can perform every thing possible. It is plain, I think, that the production of something out of nothing implies no contradiction; and to say, therefore, that God could not create, in the sense already explained, would be to say, that his

power was not the greatest conceivable, that he was finite in one of his attributes, and consequently finite in them all.

In speaking of the creation of the universe, the sacred historian adopts the common and obvious division of it into two parts, the earth and the heavens. The earth, indeed, is but a very small part of the universe, like a drop to the ocean; but, as it is the allotted habitation of the human race, it was worthy of distinct mention, and a particular description. At first, it seems to have existed in a fluid form, without order and beauty, or to have been covered with water. "The earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep: and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."* As the word rendered Spirit, signifies also wind, some have supposed, that in this place it may be so translated; and that Moses meant to inform us that a mighty wind, called in the Hebrew idiom, a wind of God, agitated the unwieldy mass. But this view of the passage is destitute of any foundation. Wind is air in motion; but at this period, it would seem the atmosphere did not exist. It appears to have been the work of the second day, when God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters; and let it divide the waters from the waters."† The word רָקִיעַ, which is translated by the Seventy στερεωμα, and in the Vulgate *firmamentum*, from which our "firmament" is derived, signifies an expanse; a term which very aptly denotes the atmosphere, capable as it is of being so much expanded by heat, and extending to a great distance from the surface of the earth. Besides, the office assigned to the firmament, of dividing the waters from the waters, belongs to no part of nature which we know, but the atmosphere, in which the water exhaled from the earth and the sea is suspended, till, condensed by cold, it falls down in dew and rain. Whatever, then, may have been the operation to which Moses refers, it was the Spirit of God who moved upon the face of the waters.

It is unnecessary to enter upon a particular detail of the successive steps by which the earth was brought into its present form. On the first day, light was created; on the second, the atmosphere was formed; on the third, the water was collected in the seas and lakes, and the dry land appeared, which was immediately clothed with grass, and herbs, and trees; on the fourth, the sun, and moon, and stars were made, or became visible; on the fifth, the waters and the air were replenished with inhabitants; on the sixth, terrestrial animals were produced, and man, last of all, appeared to have dominion over this lower world.

I shall take notice of only one particular in this narrative, which, to those who are acquainted with the actual system of the universe, may seem to render it incredible. The sun is the great fountain of light to the inhabitants of the earth; but, according to Moses, light existed prior to the sun. The objection supposes us to know what we certainly do not know, that light is necessarily dependent upon the sun. But, although it now comes to us principally from him, yet he is not the only source from which it flows. There is light produced by the ignition of combustible substances, light struck out from hard bodies by percussion or friction, phosphoric light, and electric light, of which we sometimes see a brilliant display in the Aurora Borealis. As there is light, even at present, without the sun, what difficulty or improbability is there in conceiving light to have been without him at the beginning?

We cannot tell whether it now proceeds from his body or from his atmosphere; and on this subject, philosophers are divided in opinion. We know not, indeed, what light is, although we are acquainted with its laws and properties; but whatever is its nature and its connexion with the sun, I would understand the making of that luminary on the fourth day, not to be the creation of the matter of which it consists, but the collection of light in him as its grand

* Gen. i. 2.

† Gen. i. 6.

repository. My reason for doing so is, that God is said at first to have created the heaven as well as the earth, and that the six days were employed merely in arranging them in their present form. This view will obviate another objection which may occur to a philosophical mind,—that the earth could not have occupied its proper place in the system, if it had been made before the sun, by which it is retained in its orbit. But, if the law of gravitation had then been established, and the planetary movements had begun, the matter can be satisfactorily explained, by supposing that the sun was created at the same time with the earth, but that it was not till the fourth day that he became a luminous body. The influence which he exerts upon the motion of the earth, depends not upon his light, but upon his solid mass.

All the other parts of creation are comprehended under the name of the heavens, which, in the plural number, signifies in the language of the Jews, the region where clouds and meteors are formed, or the air; the region of the sun, moon, and stars; and lastly, the heaven of heavens, the habitation of the blest. We have spoken of the first, which properly belongs to the earth, in our remarks upon the firmament or expanse. The sun, we have already seen, is the great source of light to our system; and the moon, although probably created as soon as the earth, is said to have been made on the fourth day, because then only it became visible by reflecting the rays of the sun. Under the denomination of the stars are included not only those luminaries, which are properly called so, but the planets also which belong to our system. Our Bibles give us no farther account of them, than that they were appointed for signs and for seasons; and any additional information respecting them, is founded on observation and reasoning. The discoveries of modern science make no part of Theology; but they are worthy of attention, because they exalt our ideas of the might and beneficence of our Creator. As the planets are removed from us by many millions of miles, they could not be visible unless their magnitude was great. How much greater is the magnitude of the fixed stars, the distance of which from the earth is such, that it seems but a step to the utmost planet which revolves around the sun! It is natural to ask, for what purpose they were placed in the heavens? It was not surely to give light to the earth; for all their light is of little account, and more would be furnished by a single additional satellite of a size far less than the moon. It is not to mark the revolution of the year, and the progress of the seasons; for this is ascertained by the motion of the sun, and the changes which take place upon the surface of the earth. Shall we then suppose that they were created in vain? Shall we suppose that a Being of infinite wisdom, who made the little ball which we inhabit for great purposes, and made that star which we call the sun, to give it light, has lavished his power in the production of thousands and millions of suns for no assignable end? Why are such vast bodies so situated as to appear to us only as points? Was their surpassing splendour, which attracts, indeed, the eye of a spectator upon earth, but darts upon it only a faint and ineffectual ray, bestowed to be wasted on the barren fields of ether? We cannot for a moment admit a conclusion which seems to charge the Lord of nature with folly, and is at variance with the proofs of intelligence and design which are so amply supplied by his other works. The opinion, that around those suns planets revolve, the inhabitants of which rejoice in their light, and are cheered by their influences, is something more than a flight of fancy. It rests upon strong grounds of belief; and while it vindicates the wisdom of God in replenishing with so many bodies the wide regions of space which would be otherwise useless, it fills us with admiration of his inexhaustible goodness, which has diffused life and happiness far beyond the reach of the eye, and the more extended range of imagination. It may be mentioned as a corroboration of this theory, that in the heavenly bodies which lie nearer us, we observe certain phenomena, which indi-

cate that they are destined for some other purpose than to give light to the earth. The surface of the moon, like that of our globe, is diversified by hills and vallies, which we cannot conceive to be of any use, if the moon is a solitude. In three of the planets, we observe a provision similar to what is made for us, to alleviate the darkness of the night, in the satellites which move around them, in different times, and at different distances. Why are they accompanied with moons, if there are no inhabitants to whom their light would be grateful in the absence of the sun? To us they can be of no use, because they are invisible to the unassisted eye. There is another wonderful fact, from which, however, we cannot reason so certainly, the ring of Saturn, because we are unacquainted with its use; but we may be confident that it was not placed there in vain. If it was intended for ornament, there must be some spectators nearer than the inhabitants of this globe, to whom it was unknown till modern times, and of whom scarcely one in a hundred thousand has ever seen it, and then very imperfectly through a telescope: if it was intended for accommodation, it was the accommodation not of the planet itself, which no more needed this appendage than Jupiter or Mars, but of the beings who reside upon its surface. Upon the whole, it is highly probable, that as the fixed stars are luminous bodies of an immense size, or in other words, suns, they are surrounded, like our sun, with planets, which are not deserts, but the seats of life, and activity, and enjoyment. Thus, the universe opens upon us in all its magnificence and extent; and lifting up our thoughts to Him, at whose fiat it arose out of nothing, we feel ourselves constrained to express our admiration and praise in the words of the Psalmist, "How manifold, O Lord, are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches."

The heavens signify, in the last place, the region of peace, and purity, and joy, where God manifests himself in all his glory to his perfect creatures. It must be a place, because human bodies at present dwell in it, and it is the destined abode of the just after the resurrection; and it must therefore, have been created. We can say little more about it; but we may bestow a few words in passing, upon its original inhabitants, the angels, although no mention is made of them in the Mosaic account of the creation. We know that they are creatures, who, as an Apostle informs us, were called into existence by our Saviour, who created things visible and invisible, probably at that time when the heavens were made, with all their host. We are told, that when God laid the foundation of the earth, "the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy."* They are pure spirits, although they have occasionally assumed a visible form. They were created in a state of holiness and felicity, from which some of them fell through pride, and have been cast down into darkness, where they are "reserved in chains unto the judgment of the great day."† They excel in wisdom and strength, are possessed of knowledge far superior to that of man, and of power which his mightiest efforts could not resist. They are employed by God in the affairs of his government. They execute judgments upon the wicked, and minister to them who are the heirs of salvation. Although we do not see them, yet they are well known to us by means of the Scriptures, which make frequent mention of them, and give a detail of their offices and operations. But I shall not enlarge upon this subject at present: it is sufficient to have referred to angels as a part, and a distinguished part of the creation.

Our next inquiry relates to the time when the world was created. According to the Hebrew chronology, as ascertained by Archbishop Usher, the creation took place four thousand and four years before the birth of Christ; but according to the Septuagint, nearly six thousand years. There can be little doubt which of these computations should be preferred. The original, when all the

* Job xxxviii. 7.

† J de 6.

copies agree, is surely higher authority than a translation. With me, the authority of the version would go but a short way; and I cannot conceive for what reason some learned men are disposed to pay such deference to it in this and in other matters, as it is full of mistakes and blunders, and is probably the most inaccurate of all translations. But, here we are encountered by the pretended discoveries of modern science; and the observations which have been made upon the structure of the earth, are supposed to contradict the Mosaic account, by proving that it must have been created at a more distant period, if it was created at all; and that it must have undergone many revolutions prior to what we call the beginning. Some reject the account of Moses entirely; and others conceive that it tells us, not of the original creation of the earth, but of the changes which took place upon it after some terrible convulsion. Thus, according to the words of a celebrated poet,—

“Some drill and bore
The solid earth, and from the strata there
Extract a register, by which we learn
That He who made it, and revealed its date
To Moses, was mistaken in its age.”*

This is manifestly a subject beyond the reach of our faculties; and geology, as sometimes conducted, is a monument of human presumption, which would be truly ridiculous were it not offensive by its impiety. “Where wast thou,” said the Almighty to Job, “when I laid the foundation of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding.”† Our philosophers do not pretend to have been present when the earth was founded; but they profess to shew us how it was made, and that a much longer period was necessary to form its rocks and its strata, than the Scriptures assign. Thus puny mortals with a spark of intellect, and a moment for observation, during which they take a hasty glance of a few superficial appearances, deem themselves authorised to give the lie to Him who made and fashioned them, and every thing which they see. It happens, however, that forsaking the only safe guide in such high speculations, and following the faint and deceitful light of reason, they wander in the mazes of error and uncertainty. Their theories are different; what one builds up, another destroys; and amidst the conflict of opinions, all equally false, the narrative of Moses stands unmoved, like the rock amidst the waves, resting on the solid basis of all the proofs by which the genuineness and inspiration of his writings are demonstrated. “From the endless discordance in the opinions of philosophers on this point,” says a learned Professor; “from the manifest inadequacy of the data we are at present in possession of; and from the physical impossibilities which must forever be a bar to any thing more than a superficial knowledge of the earth’s structure,—it is preposterous to suppose, that that high decree of moral evidence on which the credibility of Scripture rests, can with any justice be weakened by our interpretation of phenomena, the connexion of which among themselves even, we certainly are at present, and probably ever shall be, incapable of explaining.”

The vanity of the reasoning of modern geologists, may be made manifest, and the basis of their theories overturned, in a very easy way. They talk of primitive formations, and ascribe the origin of rocks to precipitation and crystallization. Looking at a piece of granite from the mountains, they point out the characters of aqueous or igneous fusion, and say that it was formed by the agency of water or fire, carried on through a long process, which it required ages to complete. It is not denied that the substance might have been produced by the laws of chemistry, but is it certain that it was so produced? Those laws are at present operating throughout our world; but, if it was not eternal, they must have had a commencement. Why may we not

* Cowper’s Task, B. III.

† Job xxxviii. 4.

suppose that their Author anticipated their operation, and immediately created substances of such a texture or composition, as would have resulted from them in the natural order? Why may we not suppose, that he made rocks at first such as they would have been made by precipitation and crystallization? No geologist can deny that the thing was possible, unless he be an Atheist, and then we have nothing to do with him or his theory; and if it was possible, his argument from primitive formations against the comparatively modern date of the earth, vanishes into smoke. We say that, although certain substances might have been produced by secondary causes, God could and did produce them at once. That there was a first man, will be denied by none but an Atheist. Now, if we were in possession of one of his bones, we should find that in all respects it resembled the bones of his posterity; and reasoning according to our geologists, we should conclude that at first its fibres were soft, that they gradually became cartilage, and last of all acquired the hardness of their perfect state. But we should reason falsely, because that bone was made solid and firm in a moment. If we saw one of the first trees, we should perceive no difference between it and a tree of more recent date. On being cut across, it would exhibit the same folds or circles, indicating the growth of successive years, and increasing in hardness as they were nearer to the centre. The theory of the geologist would justify us in maintaining that it had originally sprung from a seed, and required many years to bring it to maturity; while the fact would be, that it was the work of an instant. In both cases, we have all the apparent effects of the processes of ossification and lignification, while it is certain that the processes never took place. We have therefore demonstration of the authority of a rule which has been laid down, and effectually destroys all the geological systems which represent second causes as immediately concerned in the formation of our earth. It is this, that sensible phenomena cannot alone determine the mode of formation. We have no occasion to convert each of Moses' days into thousands of years, and to conceive the chaos as an immense laboratory, from which, after the operations of ages, the earth came forth as we now see it. There was a power adequate to create it at once, which formed the primeval rocks without the aid of fire or water, as it made perfect bones, and perfect trees, independently of the second causes, by which they are at present produced.

God created the heavens and the earth about four thousand years before the Christian era. The materials were produced out of nothing in an instant; but it is related, that six days were employed in arranging them in their present form. Some are of opinion that these were not natural days, but periods of an indefinite length; because they think that the world must have been created at an earlier date than Moses has assigned to it, and ages were necessary to give rise to those appearances which are observed in its structure. But, besides that this opinion is objectionable on the ground, that it puts a meaning upon the word day, although it is distinctly defined by the evening and the morning, which it bears no where else in simple narrative, it remains to be proved that there is any necessity for such interpretation. Although the Mosaic account gives no philosophical explanation of material phenomena, yet it informs us that the earth was at first in a state of fluidity, and that it was covered with water again more or less, for a year at the deluge, when it underwent a terrible convulsion, perhaps by the operation of internal fire, of the existence of which we have proofs in so many volcanoes. The crust of the earth seems to have been then entirely shattered, when the fountains of the great deep were broken up. It is impossible for us to conceive the changes which must have been produced in its structure by this awful catastrophe, and the irresistible action of such an immense body of water as submerged the whole globe. If we cannot answer particularly all the objections of geolo-

gists, neither can they satisfactorily shew that the appearances, upon which they found their theories, were not caused by that event, and by the state in which the earth existed before it was brought into its present form. We may, therefore, understand the words of Moses literally, when he says, that in six days God created the heavens and the earth. As he could have perfected them at once, we cannot conceive any reason why he proceeded by degrees, but that he might exhibit his power and his wisdom more distinctly to us, who should be afterwards informed of the process; and that he might confirm, by his own example, the command to work on six days, and rest on the seventh.

There is a question which is more curious than useful, and which, like some other questions which have been proposed, does not admit of a satisfactory answer—respecting the season of the year when the world was created. On this point, men, as we might have expected, have been divided in opinion; but many have imagined that it was created in autumn, because then the civil year of the Jews commenced, as well as their Sabbatical year, and the year of Jubilee; and chiefly because autumn is the season when the fruits are ripe, and consequently provision was ready for the use of man, and other animals. I do not think that there is any force in either of these reasons; and with regard to the latter, it is obvious, that it leaves the matter as unsettled as before, because autumn is a local term, which varies in its application to different countries, according to their geographical situation. Even upon our side of the Equator, harvest is beginning in some countries when the seed-time is scarcely over in others; and hence, unless we know the place of paradise, to say that the world was created in autumn, gives no information at all with respect to the time when it was made.

Whether God ceased to create when he had made the heavens and the earth, is another question which we are not competent to answer. We cannot, without presumption, affirm or deny that he has since exerted his creating energy in other portions of space. It is certain that, although he is said to have “rested” on the seventh day, he was not fatigued, nor were his resources exhausted: “The Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary.” Nothing more is implied in that expression, than that he produced no new species of creatures, and effected no new arrangement in the visible universe, or at least, on our earth. In strict language, the act of creation was confined to the first day, when the matter, of which the heavens and the earth are composed, was produced. The work of the following days consisted in separating it into its component parts, assigning to each of them its place and office, and combining them into a harmonious whole. The subsequent production of vegetables and animals is not properly a creation, but a new arrangement of matter already existing; which, however, required the same Almighty power that at first brought matter out of nothing. It must be granted, at the same time, that God continues to exert his creating power in producing the living principle in animals, and, in particular, the soul of men; which, being a spiritual substance distinct from the body, derives its existence immediately from the will of the Almighty.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their host. The magnificent fabric was erected to be a monument of the power, and wisdom, and goodness of its Maker. His glory shines in every part of it; but it would have shined in vain, if there had been no creature to contemplate it with an eye of intelligence, and celebrate the praises of the Divine Architect. Man, therefore, was introduced into the habitation which had been prepared for him,—a being of a higher order than those which were already made, endowed with an understanding to know his Creator, and with moral powers to be employed in his service.

If it is inquired, what was God's design in the creation of the universe? we must answer, that in this, as well as in all his other works, his ultimate end was his glory. God hath made all things for himself. Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things. In the things which he has made, his power, and wisdom, and goodness are displayed. When we say that he made all things for himself, as it is evident that we do not mean that they were necessary to him, or that he derives any benefit from them, so it is not to be understood that his purpose was to make a naked manifestation of his excellences, to be looked at, and admired by his creatures. We cannot, consistently with the greatness and dignity of his character, conceive this to be an object worthy of him, and sufficient to have induced him to exert his Almighty energy in the production of external things. We should thus separate his interests from those of his creatures, and convert the act of creation into an exhibition, and men into mere spectators of its magnificent scenery. The Maker of the universe is the Parent of its living inhabitants, and particularly of those who were endowed with intelligence; and in giving them existence, was influenced by the principle of benevolence. While other perfections are revealed in the fabric of creation, we must refer its origin to the goodness of the Deity, who, enjoying infinite happiness in himself, was willing to diffuse happiness around him. It may be objected that, if this was his design, it has been frustrated by the introduction of sin, with its consequence, misery. But, besides that still even in our world there is a copious, I had almost said, a profuse distribution of the riches of his liberality, the remedial scheme of redemption, which is intended to restore the happiness forfeited by sin, seems to confirm our idea of the diffusion of happiness being the design of creation; and it should farther be considered that, as the universe fills the unknown regions of space, and, we have reason to believe, is peopled with innumerable sentient beings, what has happened in our diminutive planet, and among the celestial spirits, may be a deduction from the general good not greater than that of a unit from millions. By what motive can we conceive Him, who is independent and self-sufficient, to have been influenced to scatter through the mighty void suns and worlds, teeming with life, but that he might contemplate the spectacle, which must be pleasing to his benevolent nature, of countless myriads rejoicing in his bounty, blessed by the emanations of his love, and rendering to him the willing tribute of gratitude and praise?

LECTURE XXXVIII.

ON ANGELS.

Existence of Angels—Date of their Creation—Their Nature—Divided into two classes—Characteristics of Good Angels—Their Offices in the affairs of Providence; and, in particular, their Ministry to the Saints—Are there Guardian Angels?

IN my last Lecture, in speaking of the heavens, I slightly adverted to the Angels as the inhabitants of that glorious region of the universe, in which God manifests himself in the full splendour of his perfections. The history of this higher order of creatures, is of too much importance to be dismissed with an occasional notice, and is peculiarly interesting to us, as our affairs are intimately connected with the agency of Angels, whether they have retained their integrity, or have apostatized from God, and become corrupt and malignant.

I begin with the common observation, that the word Angel is a name, not of nature, but of office. It signifies literally a messenger, or a person sent. This is the primary meaning of *αγγελος* in Greek, and *מלאך* in Hebrew, whether it is used in reference to human beings, or to invisible agents. It seems on one occasion at least, to denote persons invested with authority over others, and the Angels of the seven churches are probably their bishops or presidents.

That there are such beings as those whom we call Angels, in the common acceptation of the term, it might seem impossible for any person to deny who had read the Scriptures, and considered them as worthy of credit. Yet Luke informs us, that the Sadducees said that there was no resurrection, neither Angel nor Spirit.* It has caused no small surprise, that while they acknowledged the inspiration of the sacred books of the Jews, they should have ventured to controvert a fact so explicitly asserted in them; and curiosity has been excited to discover by what reasoning, or what pretexts, they justified their unbelief. It has been supposed that they explained all the passages in which Angels are mentioned, in a figurative sense; or that they understood them to be temporary appearances, caused by the power of God, which vanished as soon as the purpose intended by them was accomplished. It is probable that Justin Martyr refers to the Sadducees, when he says, in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew, that some said that God, when he pleases, makes his power come forth, and again draws it back to himself, and that in this manner he made Angels. According to this opinion, they were not real and permanent substances, but spectres which, after a short time, dissolved into air, or disappeared like the colours of the rainbow. There have been moderns who coincided with the Sadducees in denying the existence of Angels, and affirmed that good Angels signify good thoughts, and bad Angels sinful thoughts. The opinion of at least some Unitarians respecting the former is, that they are manifestations of Divine power; the idea of such beings as devils is generally, if not universally, exploded by them; and in the usual manner, the language of Scripture is wrested to favour this hypothesis. It is not, surely, necessary that we should enter upon a formal refutation of the doctrine of either the ancient or the modern Sadducees. There would be no end of disputation, if every thing which might be said without the slightest appearance of reason, were deemed worthy of a serious answer. We feel no disposition to contend with a fool, who denies that the sun is shining at mid-day. If we can believe our own eyes when we peruse the sacred pages, and trust that we understand the meaning of words, we can entertain no more doubt of the existence of Angels than of that of man; and if some choose to spend their time in elaborate attempts to prove, that what is, is not, we may leave them to amuse themselves as they please.

To the question, When were Angels created? we can return only a general answer. Moses has not made mention of them, unless, with some, we suppose them to be included in the hosts of heaven; but these seem rather to signify the celestial luminaries, the sun, moon, and stars. Different reasons have been assigned for this omission, of which I know not whether any is satisfactory, as, indeed, is not to be expected, when men attempt to point out the motives of a writer who lived more than three thousand years ago, and particularly of a writer who was guided in the composition of his works by the Spirit of inspiration. We have no reason, however, to think that the creation of Angels preceded the time to which Moses refers in the first chapter of Genesis. A prior date was assigned by many of the ancients, and some moderns have concurred with them; but it is a mere conjecture, and seems to be at variance with the general language of Scripture, which represents the creation of the visible universe as preceded by eternity, when the Almighty existed.

* Acts xxiii. 8.

alone. To affirm that Angels were created before the earth, and the heavens stretched over it, destroys the argument for the eternity of our Saviour, which the Apostle draws from these words of the Psalmist as addressed to him, "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth and the heavens are the work of thine hands;"* and that priority to the visible creation is equivalent to eternity, is evident from the ninetyeth Psalm, which is intitled, A Prayer of Moses, the man of God:—"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."† The sacred historian does certainly teach, that the heavens were created at the same time with the earth; and although he takes no notice of the inhabitants of the heaven of heavens, there is ground to believe that that was the date of their existence. On what day they were created, is a question of mere curiosity. The following words have been understood to signify that they were created on the first day. "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding;—when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy."‡ It appears that they were present when this mighty fabric was reared, and celebrated the praises of the Divine Architect; and farther it is to no purpose to inquire.

Angels are spiritual beings. As such they are represented in a passage of the Psalms, which is quoted in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire."§ A modern critic has translated it thus: "Who maketh the winds his messengers, and flaming fire his ministers," in contradiction to the known usage of the Greek language, which, by prefixing the article to the noun *αγγελους*, clearly marks them out as the subject of discourse, and *πνευματα* as the property or quality affirmed of them. Angels are spirits; and no better definition, although it is of the negative kind, can be given of a spirit than that of our Saviour, who said to his terrified disciples, "Handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have."|| It is vain for us to inquire into the essence of a spirit. It eludes our search; but not more than does the essence of body, of which we know only the properties. Nothing is more foolish, and I may say unintelligible, than the definition of some philosophers, that the essence of spirit consists in thought. They might with equal propriety say, that the essence of matter is colour, taste, or extension. But as every person, whom false philosophy has not deprived of common sense, perceives that colour supposes something coloured, and extension something extended, so, it is equally evident that thought implies a thinking substance. A materialist, who supposes thought to be the effect of the organization and motions of matter, may allege that he is unable to conceive the existence of a pure spirit; but, for the same reason, he must believe the Divine essence to be material; and it is but a step from thence to atheism, or the belief that the Deity is merely the unknown cause of attraction and gravitation, and the other laws and affections of body. To us who are convinced, by reason and revelation, that there is an immaterial principle in man, there is no difficulty in admitting an order of incorporeal beings, who inhabit the higher regions of the universe. It is no objection to the spirituality of their essence, that they are, and must be understood to be, in a particular place. Locality is the necessary attribute of a creature: it has an *ubi*, as the Schoolmen speak: if it is here, it is not there. We, indeed, are accustomed to think of place only in relation to body, because we are corporeal beings, and perceive objects and relations by means of our senses. But reason tells us that spirits also must have a place, although it can give us no assistance in conceiving how they are in it. At the same time, there is a fact familiar to us which confirms this dictate of

* Heb. i. 10, and Ps. cii. 25.

§ Heb. i. 7, and Ps. civ. 4.

† Ps. xc. 2.

|| Luke xxiv. 39

‡ Job xxxviii. 4, 7.

reason, and we find it in ourselves; for if we have souls as well as bodies, they are confined to a place, as our experience assures us. Our thoughts may wander to the most distant regions, and pass in a moment from heaven to earth, but we ourselves remain in a particular spot. Nor is it any objection to the spirituality of Angels, that they have often appeared, and performed such actions as we perform by means of our bodies. We read also of appearances of God, but do not infer from them that he has corporeal members. In all such cases, a body was formed by the power of God, that his ministers might be seen, and might hold intercourse with men; and when it had served its purpose, it was no doubt laid aside.

Angels are immortal spirits; as we may infer from those words of our Lord, in which he announces the future condition of the righteous: "Neither can they die any more: for they are like," or rather equal to, "the Angels," * *ισαγγελοι*. It may be supposed, that their immortality is the natural consequence of their immateriality. Not consisting of parts, they are not liable to be dissolved. But the proper ground is the will of God, upon which the continuance either of matter or of spirit depends; and this will be more evident, if we reflect, that the laws of nature are nothing but the permanent agency of the Creator in a determinate manner; that it is his power which sustains the universe, and prevents it from returning to nothing; and that conservation, as we formerly showed, is not improperly called a continual creation. The human body does not die by crumbling into pieces, but by causes which put a stop to the motions upon which life depends. Sometimes, indeed, it is previously wasted by disease, and its vital parts are consumed; but often it falls in full vigour, and without any preparatory process. There is an inaccuracy and a false statement in representing death as owing to the divisibility of matter, as is always done when the indivisibility of spirit is assigned as the cause of its immortality. The dissolution of the body is not the cause, but the consequence of death. Had Adam been obedient to the voice of his Maker, his body would have been immortal as well as his soul; and although the future bodies of the saints, however highly refined, will still be material, yet, we have heard, that they will be "equal to the Angels." It is not, therefore, the spiritual essence of the latter which accounts for their immortality, but the will of God. He willed that they should never die, even although they should be guilty of sin; but in this respect they have no pre-eminence above the souls of men, which are not injured by the stroke of death, but merely separated from that portion of matter, which they had animated for a time, and are destined to animate again.

The following observations relate exclusively to good Angels; and I shall reserve what I have to say concerning the Angels of darkness to another occasion.

First, They are intelligent creatures, and are endowed with a high degree of knowledge and wisdom. That this was the belief of the Jews, is evident from the words of the woman of Tekoah to David: "As an Angel of God, so is my Lord the King, to discern good and bad." And again she says, "My Lord is wise according to the wisdom of an Angel of God, to know all things that are in the earth."† She expressed, no doubt, the common belief of her country respecting Angels; and although in itself it is not decisive, yet we are led to assent to it by a consideration of the case. They are confessedly creatures of a higher order than men; they enjoy opportunities of discovery which we do not possess; and they are free from those impediments to which we are subjected by our connection with the body, which limits our range of observation, and lays us under the necessity of receiving knowledge by the medium of the senses. A degree of knowledge was originally communicated to them proportionable to the superiority of their nature and rank, by which they were

* Luke xx. 30.

† 2 Sam. xiv. 17, 20.

qualified for the service of their Maker. It has since been augmented by observation and experience, and by immediate revelations; and, it may be presumed, will go on progressively for ever. There is no doubt that the highest attainments of men, when compared with theirs, are like those of children; that subjects which we grasp after a tedious and painful investigation, are perceived by them at a glance; that many things, which to us are mysteries, to them are plain; and as they are represented as inquiring into redemption,* and learning wisdom by the Church,†—not, you will observe, from its lessons, but from the Divine dispensations towards it,—that wonderful scheme presents itself to them with a glory, of which the most enlightened saint upon earth can form only a faint conception. Still, however, it must be considered, that their knowledge is limited, and on this ground, we have stated it to be progressive. They could not know all things, unless they were equal to God; they do not know the secrets of the heart, which are open only to his eye. We might indulge in curious speculations concerning the mode in which they acquire knowledge, and hold communication with one another; but we could not arrive at any thing satisfactory. Our own spirits being united to a body, and perceiving external things by the senses, we can form no idea of the operations of a pure spirit, nor understand how it is made sensible of the existence, and qualities, and motions of matter and material beings.

Secondly, They are holy beings. Such they must have been when they came from the hand of God, pure like the ray of light when it issues from the sun; and such, many of them have continued, although others have fallen into sin. Hence they are called the holy Angels,‡ and the ministers of God who do his will;§ and they are exhibited as patterns to us in the prayer which Christ taught his disciples: “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” They have now existed during almost six thousand years; but not in one instance have they done any thing which was displeasing to God, nor has a single sinful thought arisen in their minds. They were once tempted; but they indignantly resisted the solicitation of counsel and example; they have witnessed many a foul display of human and angelical depravity, but have not received the slightest moral taint. Their constant employment is to praise God and to serve him; and his commands are always listened to and cheerfully obeyed. Their piety is manifested in their reverence and humility; and the holiness of the Divine nature is contemplated by them with reverence and delight. They cover their faces with their wings, and cry, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”|| It is on this account, that although they are benevolent beings, they feel no reluctance to execute the judgments of God upon his enemies; and they will perform, with pleasure, the final office of this kind, by gathering “out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity,” and casting “them into a furnace of fire.”¶

Thirdly, They are beings of great activity and strength. We connect activity with the idea of a spirit, especially a spirit not encumbered with material organs. That of the Angels is represented by the description of them as creatures who have wings and fly. It is manifestly figurative, because they are pure spirits; but it is intended to express the speed with which they execute their commissions, as of all visible creatures, those move with the greatest velocity which have wings. A created spirit must exist in some definite portion of space, and its motion must consist in its removal from one place to another; but what is the motion of a spirit we cannot tell. It is swifter no doubt than that of bodies; and there is a passage in Scripture, which shews how rapidly they can transport themselves from heaven to earth. As soon as

* 1 Pet. i. 12.

§ Ps. ciii. 31.

† Eph. iii. 10.

‡ Isa. vi. 3.

‡ Matt. xxv. 31, &c.

¶ Matt. xiii. 41, 42

Daniel began his supplication recorded in the ninth chapter of his Book the command was given, and the Angel Gabriel, being caused to fly swiftly, touched him while he was yet praying about the time of the evening oblation. "Thinkest thou," said our Lord to Peter, "that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of Angels?"* In strength they are said to excel,† and in Scripture they are called mighty Angels.‡ We connect our idea of strength with that of bodily organs, as the instruments by which it is exerted; but we should reflect that the seat of strength is in the mind. It is the mind which moves the members of the body, and puts forth its energies by them. All that we know is, that when the soul wills, the body moves; we see the effect, and know the cause, but the relation between them we cannot explain; and there is reason to believe that, if such had been the will of God, our soul might have acted with equal power upon any other piece of matter, either constantly or occasionally. The relation between soul and body, in consequence of which they influence each other, is unquestionably an arbitrary constitution. We can therefore feel no difficulty in conceiving spirits without bodies, to be endowed by the Creator with power to act upon matter in general, just as our souls have power to act upon our bodies; and the *modus* is not more inconceivable in the one case than in the other, or rather is equally inexplicable in both. We know, that Angels are possessed of this power, for they are represented in Scripture as defending the bodies of some, and inflicting plagues upon those of others; and as performing stupendous works, which far exceed human ability. But there are limits to their power as well as to ours. We must not attribute to them the power of working real miracles, or suspending the laws of nature, for this is the province of Omnipotence. They cannot call back the separated spirit from the invisible world, and raise the corrupted body from the ground: It is "God who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were."§

Lastly, They are happy beings. The recollection of the past creates no uneasiness, and the prospect of the future awakens no fear or anxiety. They have always served God with fidelity, and they will always enjoy his love. Their usual residence is heaven, the region of bliss; but their felicity is not impaired by their visits to the earth. There they behold many an offensive scene, which must excite strong disapprobation; but no disquieting emotion is felt. They have acts of vengeance to perform; but, as we have already observed, they detest sin, and glow with zeal for the glory of God, and perform, therefore, with pleasure any service which will redound to his honour. "In heaven, the Angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."|| They enjoy the beatific vision, and must, therefore, be happy; but let us not think that they are deprived of it when they are sent on errands to other parts of the universe. God is still near to them, and they retain a full sense of his love.

We know little concerning the external economy of those glorious spirits; but from some passages in Scripture it has been inferred that there are different ranks and degrees among them. The Platonic philosophers divided their genii or demons into three orders, the supra-celestial, the celestial, and sub-celestial. The same number of orders has been assigned by the Jews; and a similar division has been adopted by some christian writers. Among these the chief place belongs to Dionysius, the Areopagite, or rather to the person who assumed his name and, under its authority, gave to the world his revelations respecting the heavenly hierarchy. According to him, there are three classes, the supreme, the middle, and the last: the supreme comprehending cherubim, seraphim, and thrones; the middle comprehending dominions, virtues, and powers; and the last comprehending principalities, archangels, and

* Matt. xxvi. 53. † Ps. ciii. 20. ‡ 2 Thess. i. 7. § Rom. iv. 17. || Matt. xviii. 10

angels. Each of these classes is subdivided into three, so that upon the whole, there are nine orders. This is a baseless fabric of fancy, which could obtain credit only among those, who, believing the author to be the real Dionysius, were persuaded that he had derived his knowledge from immediate revelation, or from the mouths of the Apostles.

Whoever was the author of these pretended discoveries, he was unquestionably chargeable with intruding into things not seen. We cannot safely proceed a single step farther than the Scriptures lead us. All that we learn from them, is the different names which are given to the spirits of light;—cherubim, seraphim, thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers, angels and archangel in the singular number, for I do not find that it ever occurs in the plural. But we cannot tell what is the ground of these names; whether they are expressive of a difference of rank, or of office, or originate in some other cause; or why it is that one is called a cherub, and another a seraph. The different names, thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers, may be used simply to denote the dignity and power of angelical beings, as they are expressive of the highest degrees of honour and authority among men. It has been a subject of dispute, whether the title Archangel is descriptive of a created Angel, or is a designation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the prince or ruler of principalities and powers. By many he is supposed to be meant in the book of Revelation,* when Michael and his Angels are said to have fought against the dragon and his Angels; and in the book of Daniel, where it is said, “At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people.”† In the epistle of Jude, Michael is called the Archangel: “Yet Michael the Archangel, when contending with the devil, he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke thee.’”‡ But this passage has been considered as unfavourable to the hypothesis, that the Archangel was the Son of God, because it represents him, long prior to his incarnation and humiliation, as under the authority of law, and abstaining from opprobrious language from reverence for God. The Archangel seems to be plainly distinguished from our Saviour in the following words, “The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God;”§ for if the voice of the Archangel means the voice of Christ himself, we can see no reason why it should be spoken of as the voice of a different being. Besides, in the tenth chapter of Daniel, Michael, who is elsewhere called the Archangel, is said to be “one of the chief princes;”|| a title which could not with propriety be given to our Lord, who is not one of the Angels, but above them all, the head of all principality and power. The phrase “one of the chief princes;” if there is a reference to Angels, as the name Michael implies, would lead us to think that there are several chiefs or leaders of the army of heaven; and consequently, that there is a subordination established among them, although the details are unknown. It is remarkable, however, as I have already observed, that Archangel is always used in the singular number. We must leave the question undecided, and may be content to remain in uncertainty, as it is not an article of faith.

God employs Angels in the administration of the affairs of providence; not, however, because he stands in need of their assistance, but for reasons with which we are not fully acquainted. This was represented to Jacob in a dream, when he saw “a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reaching to heaven; and behold the Angels of God ascending and descending upon it.”¶ This representation justifies the saying of our great epic poet, that

* Rev. xii. 7.

§ 1 Thess. iv. 16.

† Dan. xii. 1.

|| Dan. x. 13.

‡ Jude 9.

¶ Gen. xxviii. 12.

“Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth
Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep.”*

We do not suppose that by them the great laws of nature were established, and are upheld; for in these we acknowledge the immediate agency of Almighty power; but that they are concerned, by the direction of the Supreme Ruler, in particular events. There are many passages of Scripture which prove this fact; some of which will be mentioned when we come to speak of their ministrations to the saints. Angels were employed in the Divine dispensations towards the Israelites, and particularly while they were residing in the wilderness. When God was offended with them after they had set up the golden calf, and worshipped it, he told Moses that he would not go up in the midst of them, but would send an Angel before them.† Upon the earnest prayer of Moses, this threatening was revoked, and the Lord said, “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.”‡ But when, on a former occasion, God promised to send an Angel before them,§ neither Moses was alarmed, nor the people, for this was not a created Angel, but the Angel of the covenant, and consequently God himself; and accordingly it is added, “My name is on him;” and he is represented as possessed of Sovereign power, to pardon or not to pardon their transgressions. What has been now said is a digression; but it serves to reconcile two passages which seem to be at variance, as what is announced as a favour in the one, is viewed as a punishment in the other. But, although God did not send a created Angel before the Israelites, yet those glorious spirits were the ministers of his providence to them. We have explicit notice of their agency in the most solemn transaction in the wilderness, the promulgation of the law with such awful pomp from Mount Sinai. It is called in one place, “the word spoken by Angels,”|| and in another is said to have been received, *ὡς διαταγὰς ἀγγέλων*;¶ a difficult expression, signifying “by the disposition of Angels,” or “by the ministration of Angels,” or, “amidst ranks of Angels.” “The Lord came from Sinai,—and he came with ten thousands of saints; from his right hand went a fiery law for them.”** The interference of Angels in the affairs of the world, is pointed out in the tenth chapter of Daniel; when the person who spoke to him, and was undoubtedly an Angel, informs him that he was opposed by the prince of the kingdom of Persia; and that Michael, one of the chief princes, came to his assistance.†† There is another example of the agency of Angels, in the destruction of the army of Sennacherib, who had defied the living God. “It came to pass that the Angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.”‡‡ It has been supposed that the instrument was the hot wind which is known in the east, and causes sudden death; and that it is figuratively called the Angel of the Lord, because it was sent by him. But there is no occasion for this attempt to strip the narrative of, what would be called, its poetical machinery, and to render it as agreeable as possible to the principles of philosophy, by bringing forward to view only natural causes. There is the same reason for believing, that a real Angel was concerned in this as in any other case where Angels are mentioned; and whether his purpose was effected by corrupted air or by lightning, it was under his management and direction. Many events which take place in such a manner as to appear quite natural, may yet be brought to pass by the ministry of Angels. To them, for aught that we can tell, may be referred the unaccountable impressions upon the minds of men; the presentiments of futurity; the sudden resolutions, and unpremeditated movements, which seem

* Par. Lost, B. iv. l. 677.

§ Exod. xxiii. 20.

** Deut. xxxiii. 2.

† Exod. xxxii. 34.

|| Heb. ii. 2.

†† Dan. x. 13.

‡ Ib. xxxiii. 14.

¶ Acts vii. 53.

‡‡ 2 Kings xix. 35.

in themselves to be of little or no moment, but which are followed by consequences of the greatest importance to them, and those with whom they are connected. We are ignorant, in a great measure, of the means by which God governs the world, and particularly the minds of men; and in this department there may be ample scope for the interference of invisible beings.

I shall devote the remainder of this lecture to the ministry of Angels to the saints. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"*

First, They have been employed in revealing the will of God to his people. I might produce the instances of Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Daniel; but as I do not mean to enlarge upon this particular, I only observe, that the Revelation, that prophetic history of the Church to the consummation of all things was dictated to the beloved disciple by an Angel. "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his Angel unto his servant John."†

Secondly, It has been supposed that they suggest good thoughts to the saints. It is acknowledged that we can produce no positive proof from Scripture in favour of this hypothesis; and some have objected to it as entrenching upon the work of the Holy Ghost, whose office it is to enlighten and sanctify the soul. But this is a very weak objection, as it would equally exclude all the assistance which men give to one another in religion, by suggesting topics of pious meditation, and endeavouring to excite holy affections. Reasoning from analogy, would lead us to adopt the affirmative; for, if the spirits of darkness stir up evil thoughts and passions in the minds of men, why should we not conceive that the spirits of light are equally active in exciting such as are good?

Thirdly, It is more certain that Angels are appointed to watch over the saints, and to preserve them from dangers. In two passages of the Old Testament this office is expressly assigned to the Angels:—"There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling; for he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone."‡ In another place the Psalmist says, "The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."§ The same doctrine is taught by our Saviour when he urges the care of the Angels over those who belong to him, as a reason why the meanest of them should not be despised or ill treated:—"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their Angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."|| The design of their ministry is not to defend the saints from every evil or calamity, because it is the will of God that often they should suffer affliction, and trials are over-ruled for their good; but from such other calamities as would not be subservient to this end, they are preserved by their vigilant guardians. They are with them when they lie down and rise up, when they sit in the house and walk by the way. Their agency is not visible and miraculous, like that of the Angel who delivered Peter from prison;¶ it is secret, and is carried on without disturbing the order of nature.

Fourthly, They are employed, as we have seen, to execute divine judgments upon the enemies of the saints, and thus minister for them, by enfeebling, disarming, and destroying those by whom they would be injured. I have already given an instance in the fate of the Assyrian army which had invaded Judea; and I may remind you of another, recorded in the Acts, the miserable end of Herod the persecutor, who was smitten by an Angel.** In the Revela-

* Heb. i. 14.

† Rev. i. 1.

‡ Ps. xci. 10—12.

§ Ps. xxxiv. 7.

|| Matt. xviii. 10.

¶ Acts xii.

** Ib. 23.

tion of John, which is, indeed, highly figurative, but foretells real events and their causes, Angels are represented as the agents in the terrible revolutions by which the wicked will be punished, and the Church will be delivered. We are not permitted to see them, as David was, who beheld an Angel standing over Jerusalem, with a sword in his hand;* their operations are concealed from us by the veil of natural causes. But it is consoling to the saints to be assured, by testimony which is not to be disputed, that those who are for them are more in number and greater in power than those who are against them; and that not only is their cause, and that of truth and righteousness, patronized by the Supreme Ruler of the universe, but there are upon its side myriads of glorious spirits, one of whom could crush the combined potentates of the earth.

Fifthly, It is their office to convey the souls of the saints into the mansions of bliss. Having attended them during the journey of life, or at least from the moment of their conversion, they are present at the closing scene; and when their spirits have escaped from the earthly prison, they fly away with them, and deliver up their precious charge. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, it is said that the latter died, and was carried by Angels into Abraham's bosom.† Notwithstanding the figurative character of the composition, it may be presumed that our Lord intended this fact to be literally understood. To our natural feelings, a death-bed scene is revolting and afflicting. We behold a helpless human being, emaciated by disease, panting for breath, and convulsed with pain; his countenance pale, his lips quivering, and his brow bedewed with a cold sweat; and, with his expiring groans, are mingled the lamentations of his disconsolate friends. But, were not the spiritual world hidden by a veil, we should see the glorious inhabitants of heaven surrounding his bed, and sympathising with the sufferer,—for even the Lord of Angels has a fellow-feeling of the infirmities of his people—yet rejoicing at his un murmuring patience, and his stedfast hope, which looks at a brighter world; and when the struggle was over, bearing his spirit away to their own abode, where “there is no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain.”

Lastly, The Angels will minister for the saints at the second coming of Christ. We know, from Scripture, that they will be his attendants, and we learn also, that they will have important services to perform. By them the saints will be “caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.”‡ At the great harvest of the world, as our Lord has taught us, the angels will be the reapers; and as they will then pluck up the tares, and throw them into the fire, so they will gather the wheat into the garner.§ “He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”||

When we are speaking of the ministry of angels, the question naturally occurs, whether there is any foundation for the opinion not only of the Jews, but of many Christians in ancient and modern times, that there are guardian angels; or in other words, that there is assigned to each individual a particular angel, who attends him during the whole course of his life. Some seem to consider this opinion as almost heretical, and reject it as dangerous; although where the danger lies, it is not easy to perceive. It appears to me to be a very harmless opinion, and to be by no means unnatural, as, according to our ideas, a multiplicity of affairs is best managed by a division of labour, and by allotting to each of those who are engaged in it, his particular department. The great objection is, that we have no evidence of its truth. The Scriptures do not enter into details upon the subject, and only say, “He shall give his angels charge over thee,”¶ representing the care of the saints as a general concern. There are, indeed, several instances in which a single angel was employed;

* 1 Chron. xxi. 16.

§ Matt. xiii. 39.

† Luke xvi. 22.

|| Mat xxiv. 31.

‡ 1 Thess. iv. 17.

¶ Psalm xci. 11.

but it does not hence follow that this was his exclusive province. Our Lord says concerning his disciples, that their angels beheld the face of his Father;* but nothing can be fairly inferred from this passage, except that the heavenly hosts are appointed to watch over them. The strongest argument is founded on the words of the disciples, who were praying for the deliverance of Peter on the night before his expected execution, and when the servant affirmed that it was he who was knocking at the gate, exclaimed, "It is his angel;"† for they could not believe that it was Peter himself. Attempts have been made to evade this argument, by giving a different meaning to the words; but I think they are absurd. There is no doubt that these disciples, being Jews, did believe that there were guardian angels; but, we do not know that any of them were inspired men, and therefore we are not bound to adopt their sentiments, unless they be supported by higher authority.

Christians should be grateful for the care of God exercised towards them by the ministry of Angels, and should admire that wonderful economy which has united the two great families of heaven and earth, which sin had separated, and inspired with aversion and hostility. What a high honour is conferred upon them, in having such guardians! How safe are they under their protection! and with what caution and reverence should they act in the presence of witnesses so august and holy!

LECTURE XXXIX.

ON ANGELS.

Fallen Angels—Remarks on their Fall—Its effects upon their Moral and Intellectual Qualities, and upon their State or Condition—Their subordination to Satan—Their Employment—Their Power over the Bodies of Men—Demoniacs—Power of Fallen Angels over the Minds of Men, considered.

It appears from Scripture, that there are two classes of Angels, the same in nature, but distinguished by their moral qualities, their employments, and the usual place of their residence. Those of the one class are holy, are engaged in the service of God, and inhabit the regions of light. Those of the other class are depraved, are active in propagating sin and misery among the human race, and are doomed to dwell in the region of darkness and sorrow. Of these I purpose to speak in this Lecture.

I begin with observing, that the whole angelical order was created pure; and this position is not only countenanced by Scripture, but is necessary to vindicate the character of God. The question concerning the origin of evil, caused much perplexity to the speculative men of the heathen world; and in order to account for it, they had recourse to the hypothesis of the malignity of matter, or to that of the existence of an Evil Being, who was independent upon the Author of good. But as the latter supposition is repugnant to reason, as well as to revelation; so the former, which, by the bye, is unintelligible and absurd, is totally inapplicable to the case of spiritual beings, who have no connexion with matter, and therefore could not be tainted by it. They must, therefore, have existed in a state of innocence; for, were we to admit the idea, that they were originally corrupt, we should charge their sin upon their Maker. But, as he is essentially holy, it was impossible that there should be the slightest stain of sin upon any intelligent creature, when it came

* Matt. xviii. 10.

† Acts xi. 15.

from his hands ; as only pure light can proceed from the sun. The angels of whom we are speaking, are said not to have kept their first estate ;* from which words it is plain, that they were once in every respect similar to the angels who stand in the presence of God.

How long they retained their integrity, we are not able to determine, as Scripture is silent ; but, as we have no reason to think that angels were created before our world, we may say of them as well as of men, that “being in honour, they abode not.” It was by the agency of one of them that our first parents were seduced ; and although it is absurd to suppose that the fall of man took place in the same day on which he was made, yet there is good ground to suppose, that paradise was only for a short time the abode of purity and peace.

When we think of the mode in which sin could find admission into the mind of a creature perfectly holy, we perceive that much obscurity rests upon the subject. If, as is necessarily implied, the understanding were free from error, and clearly apprehended the nature and relation of things, how could it form a false judgment, or be imposed upon by the sophistry of others ? If the heart was full of love to God, and under the uncontrolled influence of his authority, how could any representation excite a wayward affection, or a desire which it was improper to indulge ? The difficulty is greater in the case of angels than in that of man ; for, as he was connected with matter, and subject to the influence of the senses, his attention might be diverted, and his judgment biassed, by allurements addressed to them, while pure spirits were secured against any such temptations. But, it is vain to bring forward arguments to prove that a fact is impossible or improbable, if we have it in our power to shew that it has actually taken place. As men sinned in the earthly paradise, through the subtilty of a tempter, so angels sinned in the heavenly paradise, without a tempter ; for although we do not possess a history of their apostasy, yet we know that they were not solicited, as man was, by some being of superior artifice, because they were the sole inhabitants of heaven.

There has been a diversity of opinion with respect to the sin of the angels. Some of the ancients imagined that it was lust, having given this sense to these words in Genesis, “The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair ; and they took them wives of all which they chose.”† It is not possible to conceive a more ridiculous opinion, since, besides other absurdities, which are so obvious that it is not necessary to point them out, it makes the fall of angels long posterior to the fall of man, in direct contradiction to the Scripture, which affirms that he was seduced by the devil. A modern author, Cocceius, has maintained that, as we read of no prior sin of the angels, their first sin consisted in tempting our first parents ; not perceiving, that he mistakes the effect for the cause, as it is plain that they must have sinned, before the idea of seducing others could have entered into their minds. Others have thought that their sin was envy ; envy either of those angels who were superior to them in rank and dignity, or of man whom God had created in his own image, and invested with dominion over this lower world. Lastly, the most common opinion is, that their sin was pride, and it is founded on these words of an Apostle : “Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil.”‡ But how pride arose, it is not so easy to tell. There was no being to solicit them to it, or to suggest it. But their own rank might be their temptation. Concentrating their thoughts upon their own excellences, and admiring them, they might gradually forget their relation to God as their Creator. They might lose the sense of their dependence upon him ; and as soon as this feeling was suspended, humility was at an end, and a train of arrogant imaginations and claims would occupy its place. They would then see only themselves ; their self-importance would be flattered by

* Jude 6.

† Gen. vi. 2.

‡ 1 Tim. iii. 6.

the view; and having erred in heart, they might proceed openly to renounce their allegiance to God. Milton has supposed that their pride was excited by a command to all the heavenly powers to do homage to the Son of God as their Lord; that Satan, who was higher than the rest,

“could not bear
Through pride that sight, and thought himself impaired:”*

and that the armies under his command listened to his counsel, and joined in his revolt:

‘ Will ye submit your necks, and choose to bend
The supple knee? Ye will not, if I trust
To know ye right, or if ye know yourselves
Natives and sons of heaven.”†

His powerful imagination has wrought out a sublime description of the apostasy and overthrow of angels, from a single passage in the book of Revelation, which, however, relates to a different subject. “And there was war in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought, and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world; he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”‡ Amidst this diversity of opinion, the most probable is that which makes pride the first sin of angels; but the means by which it was excited, and the mode in which it operated, are unknown.

Angels were not placed under a federal head, like the human race, which existed in the beginning solely in its progenitors, and was to be deduced from them in successive generations. As they were all created at once, each individual seems to have been committed to his own care, and was to stand or fall according to his personal conduct. The only effect which one could have upon another, was by example and counsel, and excitation to good or evil. Had there been a federal representation among angels as among men, the whole order would have shared alike in its consequences. The individuality of the moral agency of angels, if I may speak so, is manifest from the fact, that while some revolted, others maintained their allegiance. Hence arises a new subject of speculation. It does not appear that the apostasy of angels was successive, or that some apostatized at one time, and some at another; but we have some reason to believe that the revolt was simultaneous. How, then, was the concurrence of a multitude obtained? It is incredible that the same thought should, at the same moment, have suggested itself to myriads; or that, without any external cause, the same temptation should have affected so many independent minds. It is probable, therefore, that, as on earth, the woman being deceived enticed her husband, so in heaven one angel, or a few angels, having admitted sin into their thoughts and affections, exerted their influence with success upon others; and that, although the address to his followers, which our great poet has put into the mouth of Satan, is a mere creation of fancy, yet by some similar means a general conspiracy was formed. The Scriptures favour the conclusion, that there was one angel with whom it originated, by the pre-eminence which it assigns to him, and by speaking of “the devil and his angels.”

It is impossible to tell how many angels were engaged in this revolt. They are represented as many; but nothing is said about their number. The idea that they amounted to a third part of the inhabitants of heaven, has arisen from a mistaken view of a passage which relates to a different subject. “And his tail,” that is, the tail of the dragon, “drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth.”§

* Par. Lost, B. v. 664.

† Ib. 787.

‡ Rev. xii. 7—9.

§ Rev. xii. 4.

The fall of angels effected no change in their nature. With respect to their essence, they are still pure spirits, immortal, and possessed of great power and activity. But a change has taken place in regard to their qualities, intellectual and moral. Originally of a higher order of creatures than man, they retain their superiority in mental ability, although it cannot be doubted that it is greatly impaired. Man did not, in consequence of his fall, cease to be a rational creature; he has even now more understanding than the beasts of the field, and the fowls of the air, and is capable of high exertions of intellect. Yet, his knowledge is more laboriously acquired than it would have been, if sin had not shed its malignant influence upon his body and mind, is far more limited, and is mixed with many errors arising from the illusions of sense, and the influence of prejudice. It is agreeable to analogy to conceive, that the intellectual powers of fallen angels have been blighted; that their understandings are obscured, and perverted by their passions; and that their wisdom, which has degenerated into cunning, often leads them astray, and involves them in perplexity and confusion. Their moral qualities have undergone a total change. Of their original holiness, not a vestige remains. Sin is now so natural to them, that it seems almost to be their essence; it is the element in which they live and move. Sin is the subject of their thoughts, and gives a character to all their actions. Evil is their only good. There is an important difference between them and men, which is worthy of particular attention. The depravity of men is, in some degree, checked and concealed by certain natural feelings and affections, which, although not virtuous, have the effect of virtue in restraining them from acts of malice and cruelty, and leading them to perform deeds of justice and beneficence. The wisdom of God has permitted these to remain, because the earth would have been turned into a scene of confusion, society would have been dissolved, and the human race would have been extinguished, if the propensities of the human heart had been permitted to operate without control. But we have no ground to believe that there is any thing analogous to these affections and feelings in apostate angels. Sin rages in them unrestrained; every malignant and furious passion boils within them: and if they experience any relief from their sufferings, it consists in wreaking their malice and cruelty upon man. We may judge how sin produced immediately its full effect upon them, from the conduct of the tempter. He had been recently expelled from heaven, and what was his first work? He visited our earth with the most nefarious and vindictive design, to mar its beauty, and to poison and destroy human nature in its source; and he accomplished it by a train of deliberate falsehood and systematic cruelty. There was no relenting at the thought of a whole race being involved in eternal misery; his dark mind rejoiced in the prospect of myriads for ever enduring the same agonies with himself. "He was a 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."* This passage is strong, and illustrates in a very striking manner the depravity of fallen angels; for what is said of one, is true of them all. The devil is a murderer and a liar, cruel and false. It is his nature to be so. He does not learn falsehood from another, nor is he solicited to it by another; it comes spontaneously from himself; he brings it from the evil treasure of his heart; "when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own."

Various names are given to fallen angels in the Scriptures, which are descriptive of the depravity of their nature. They are called evil spirits, unclean spirits, lying spirits, spiritual wickednesses, and the rulers of the darkness of this world. Their leader is denominated Satan or the adversary, the devil or

* John viii. 44.

the accuser, Apollyon or the destroyer, the prince and god of the world the dragon or the old serpent, and he who has the power of death.

The existence of such beings has been denied by many, and all that is said concerning them in Scripture has been explained in a figurative manner. It has been objected, that the common notion of a devil, having other wicked spirits under his command, is a modification of the doctrine of two principles, which was held by some nations in the east, and was adopted by the Gnostics and Manichees, who, in the first ages, gave so much trouble to the church. It seems to some men to be inconsistent with just ideas of the Almighty power and moral character of God, to suppose that there are malignant spirits continually employed in opposing his designs, and seducing his creatures. But all our reasonings concerning the fitness or unfitness of any thing, are superseded by an authoritative declaration of Scripture. The attempt to explain away its testimony is irreverent, and completely fails; for we may as well deny the existence of good as of bad angels, and turn into allegory any historical narration. It is not more repugnant to the honour of God, that there should be invisible agents who oppose his designs, than that the same thing should be done by embodied spirits, or by men, who daily trample upon his laws; or that we should be tempted by them, than that we should solicit one another to sin. The Christian doctrine concerning the devil and his ministers is very different from that of the ancient Persians, or of those sects who held that there was an evil being co-existing with the good, and carrying on perpetual war against him. Besides that it is not liable to the difficulty involved in the idea of a being originally and necessarily evil, it preserves the absolute supremacy and independence of the Creator; for the devil is represented, not as self-existent, and exempt from his authority, but as one of his creatures, who, having become wicked by his own choice, is permitted to live and to act according to his depraved inclinations, but is under the constant restraint of Divine power, so that there are limits beyond which he cannot pass, and his ultimate designs are counteracted and frustrated. The evil, which prevails in the creation, does not exist in spite of the Creator, but because he did not choose to prevent it; and it will be over-ruled to his glory. The devil is his subject, and his minister; for he makes his wrath, as well as the wrath of man, to praise him, and the remainder of it he restrains. It is probable that the oriental doctrine of two principles originated in the traditionary account of an evil being who had revolted from the Creator; and that the extravagant stories of the Gnostics concerning *Æons*, as they called them, who existed in the *pleroma* of the Deity; the creation of the world by one or more of them; the corruption of the human race by their influence; and the continual opposition which they made to the Supreme Being; were a distorted representation of the fact, that some of the angels of heaven had fallen, and seduced mankind to join in the rebellion.

The angels who sinned were expelled from heaven, as being unworthy to enjoy its felicity, and incapable of taking any part in its employments. "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment."* He cast them into *Tartarus*, for Peter uses the word *ταρταρος*. Neither the verb, nor the substantive *ταρταρος*, occurs in any other place of the New Testament, although frequent in Greek writers; and it is, therefore, from them, that we must learn its meaning on this occasion. Now by *Tartarus*, they understood the lowest of the infernal regions, the place of darkness and of punishment; in which those, who had been guilty of impiety towards the gods, and of great crimes against men, were confined and tormented. The word, as adopted by the Apostle, conveys the same general idea. Whatever mistakes the heathens committed with respect to the local situation of *Tartarus*, and the nature of its

* 2 Peter ii. 4.

punishments, Peter, retaining the radical sense of the term, undoubtedly uses it in this passage as equivalent to hell. That is the region assigned to the apostate spirits: and in the sentence of the last judgment, by which wicked men are also doomed to it, it is said to have been "prepared for the devil and his angels." It is represented as a region of darkness and sorrow. Darkness and light, when spoken of in relation to spirits, are metaphorically used; since, not having bodily senses, they are not affected, as we are, by the presence and absence of the sun. The darkness of Tartarus is therefore significant of the deprivation of all joy, and all hope. Having incurred the wrath of their Creator, the fallen angels can experience only evil, and must utterly despair of any favourable change. The positive misery of their state, is also described by figurative language. It is "everlasting fire," which is prepared for the devil and his angels; but spirits can no more be affected by fire than by light. But, as fire applied to the human body causes the most excruciating pain, this image has been chosen to awaken the idea of the most dreadful torment; and that the mind can suffer without the body, or while no injury is done to it, and there is no derangement of its parts, we all know by experience. The fallen angels are wretched as well as wicked. The passage, indeed, which I have quoted, represents them as reserved to the judgment of the great day; and in the Gospels we hear them asking our Saviour, why he had come to torment them before the time; but we are not to infer that at present they are exempt from suffering. These words merely imply that the time of vengeance is not fully come, and that there is reserved for them a more dreadful punishment than that which they are at present enduring.

Although the angels are said to have been cast down into Tartarus, and there to be reserved in chains, we are not to conclude that they are constantly confined to that place. The term, chains, is evidently figurative, and signifies the irreversible sentence by which they are doomed to perdition, or the Almighty power of God by which they are secured. It appears from their history, that they are prisoners at large. The work assigned to them is carried on upon earth; and they must therefore be permitted frequently to visit it. Yet we say, that their proper habitation is Tartarus or hell, as heaven is the habitation of the good angels, although they are much in our world, and may be employed in various offices, in other regions of the universe. After the final judgment, they will be shut up for ever in their dismal dungeon. There will then be a complete separation between the kingdom of darkness, and the kingdom of light. The latter will be the scene of righteousness and peace; no evil shall ever sully its purity, or disorder disturb its harmony; the tempter shall not find entrance into the celestial paradise.

We have seen that it is not perfectly certain that there is a subordination among the angels of light; but that it exists among the angels of darkness, is manifest from such expressions as these: "the devil and his angels," and "the prince of the devils," and by the appropriation of the name, Satan, to an individual, and the mention of "his kingdom," of which all other wicked beings, human and angelical, are subjects. It has been remarked by a late critic, that the word *δαιμόλιος*, which is rendered *devil* in our version, but properly signifies an *accuser*, is used in the plural number in reference to men, but never occurs in that number when spirits are the subject of discourse. Among these there is only one *δαιμόλιος*; and other impure spirits are expressed by a different name, and are called demons. The distinction is lost in our translation, where both words are indiscriminately rendered devil; but it ought to be attended to, as there was undoubtedly a reason for it, although we are not able to shew in what the difference consists. The words *δαίμων*, and *δαίμονιον*, were used by the Greeks to designate an order of beings who were accounted divine, but inferior to the higher gods, and were the objects of religious worship. To this order

belonged the souls of heroes, legislators, and other great men, who were deified after their death. Of the demons acknowledged by the heathens, some were good, and others were bad; but, in their writings, the word generally occurs in a favourable sense. It is in a bad sense that the word is used in the New Testament; in all those cases at least, which relate to the spirits who are associated with the devil, and are under his direction. The fact, then, that there is one devil, and that the rest are called demons, that these demons are his angels, and that the kingdom which they are endeavouring to uphold and extend, is his kingdom, leads to the conclusion, that a monarchy is established among them. With respect to its origin, we cannot tell whether it is founded on a subordination, which existed prior to their fall; or is the result of their voluntary submission; or is an arrangement imposed by the will of Providence, for some end to us unknown. We are equally ignorant whether, while one is evidently chief, there may not be a gradation of ranks; as in the kingdoms of men, some, although inferior to the sovereign, are superior to their fellow subjects.

It remains to inquire, in what manner evil angels are employed; and it will appear that their work corresponds with the depravity of their nature, and the malevolence of their dispositions. It is their perpetual aim to dishonour God, and to injure men; and in prosecuting their designs, they submit to no restraint but Almighty power.

We learn from the Scriptures, that they are permitted to exercise power over the bodies of men, and over other things which may have an effect upon them. I might appeal for proof to the first chapter of Job, in which, licence is represented as having been given to Satan to make trial of that good man, and a series of calamities to have ensued, that terminated, as we see in the second chapter, in a painful and loathsome disease, which must be considered as having been caused by the agency of that malignant spirit. That it is a true history, is evident from the references to it in other parts of Scripture, which are altogether inconsistent with the supposition that it is an allegorical description, or dramatic representation, of more recent events. But, if there should be any doubt to what extent the narrative is figurative, I may appeal, in the next place, to the possessions related by the Evangelists, which are instances of power exercised by evil spirits upon the bodies of men, and of the infliction of diseases by them. It has been alleged, indeed, that these were not cases of real possession; that the patients laboured under common diseases, as madness and epilepsy; that the Jews believed that these were caused by the influence of evil spirits; that the Evangelists accommodate their account of them, and of the cure, to the popular belief; and that the patients are called *δαμονιζόμενοι*, and are said *δαμονιον εχειν*, solely because the vulgar thought so. But it has been justly observed, that “when we find mention made of the number of demons in particular possessions, their actions so expressly distinguished from those of the men possessed, conversations held by the former in regard to the disposal of them after their expulsion, and accounts given how they were actually disposed of; when we find desires and passions ascribed peculiarly to them, and similitudes taken from the conduct which they usually observe, it is impossible to deny their existence, without admitting that the sacred historians were either deceived themselves in regard to them, or intended to deceive their readers.”* We must proceed still farther, and say, that our Lord himself favoured the deception, encouraged the people in a foolish superstitious notion, and gave a false representation of the nature of his miracles. It is objected against the credibility of possessions, that they were peculiar to that age, and that we have no certain accounts of them in any prior or subsequent period. It is beyond doubt, however, that they have been suppo-

* Campbell on the Gospels. Preliminary Dissert. vi.

sed to exist in other ages ; but, granting that they were confined to the time of the ministry of our Lord and his Apostles, would it not be sufficient to say in answer to the objection, that they were then permitted to furnish an opportunity for displaying the power of our Saviour over the spirits of darkness, and to give sensible attestation to the general design of his coming, which was to ‘destroy the works of the devil?’* To affirm that there never were possessions at any other period, is to reject the testimony of the Jews and other nations, not upon the authority of more credible testimony, but upon presumptions and abstract reasoning. “It is probable,” says Dr. Macknight, “that the possessions mentioned in the Gospels, were diseases carried to an uncommon height by the presence and agency of demons. And if this is allowed to have been the true nature of these possessions, there will be found, without doubt, abundant examples of the like possessions in all ages. For there is nothing absurd in supposing that there always have been, and still are in the world, many incurable diseases, which, though commonly attributed to natural causes, are really the effect of the invisible operation of devils, who have power given them for that purpose.”†

That the fallen angels exercise power over the minds of men, is an alarming truth, which is proved, in the first place, by the seduction of our first parents ; and, in the second place, by many facts, and declarations, and admonitions, in the Scriptures. The mode of their agency is concealed ; and as it would be vain to make an attempt to discover it, so it would serve no valuable purpose to indulge in conjectures. Of one thing we are certain, that they have no such control over men as to compel them to obey ; for such a power would be destructive of moral agency, and would therefore in a great measure defeat their own design, which is to involve us in guilt ; they can succeed only by influencing the volition, through the medium of the understanding, and imagination, and passions.

The devil was the lying spirit in the mouth of the false prophets under the Mosaic dispensation ; and his concern in the idolatry which prevailed over the whole earth, with the exception of Judea, prior to the incarnation of Christ, may be inferred from his declaration when the seventy disciples returned from their mission, and related their success, “I beheld Satan as lightning falling from heaven.” He anticipated the result of the preaching of the gospel, which would effect the overthrow of all the false religions of mankind ; and by representing this event as the fall of Satan, he intimated that he patronised them, and by their means, upheld the interests of his kingdom. “We wrestle not,” says an Apostle, “against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”‡ He may be understood to speak of the conflict which is going on in all ages, between fallen angels and the followers of Christ ; but he refers, I presume, in a particular manner, to the contest in which the Apostles were engaged with them, while the former attacked, and the latter defended the various systems of error and corruption, by which the knowledge, and worship, and laws of God had been almost banished from the earth. The powers of darkness did not assume a visible form, and wage open war with the servants of Christ ; but they influenced the minds of their own votaries, and excited a vigorous resistance by all the arts and all the force of which they were possessed. During the reign of heathenism, Satan was emphatically the god of this world, over which he ruled with uncontrolled dominion. Princes, priests, the common people, and philosophers, were his subjects : for all had departed from the true God, and wandered in the mazes of error and vice. It is a curious question, whether evil spirits had any concern in the heathen oracles ; and while some affirm, others deny. It would be absurd to

* 1 John iii. 8. † Macknight’s Harmony. Essay on the Demoniacs. ‡ Eph. vi. 12

suppose, that they could predict future events, of which the causes were no then in existence, and which depended upon the volitions of free agents; for, of such future things they are as ignorant as man, and it is the prerogative of God to declare the end from the beginning. Some future things, however, men may foretell, because they are in a train to be accomplished, and the sagacity of spirits is greatly superior to ours. If it could be proved that the heathen oracles ever revealed any thing secret, any thing which was done at a distance, any thing which the priests could not have known by natural means, we should be under the necessity of admitting supernatural agency. But their responses were commonly obscure, ambiguous, clogged with conditions, on the failure of any of which the credit of the oracle was saved, although the event did not take place; and in general, there is reason to believe, that they were managed by the dexterity of the priests. In whatever manner we decide this question, there can be no doubt that the monstrous fabric of paganism was upheld by the artifice of Satan and his ministers. Its overthrow is described in the Revelation by a war between Michael and his angels, and the dragon and his angels, and the expulsion of the latter from heaven.

There is the same authority for affirming that he was active in the great apostasy from the truth, which prevailed over Europe in the dark ages, and still subsists in many of its kingdoms. When the devil is cast into the bottomless pit for a thousand years, it is with a design that he should no more deceive the nations;* from which it appears that it was he who formerly deceived them. It is the old dragon, the old serpent, who gives to the beast "his power, and his seat, and great authority;"† and the coming of the man of sin is said to be "after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness;"‡ that is, the man of sin came in the same manner as Satan came when he seduced the nations into heathen idolatry; and he acts in concurrence with him, and by his assistance. If heathenism was his offspring, he may justly be considered as the father of popery, which is paganism revived, and, with the change of some of its tenets, and the substitution of new names for the old, retains its idolatry and its ritual observances. The signs, and powers, and lying wonders by which it is supported, are not real miracles, (for if evil spirits could perform these, they would be no criterion of a divine commission,) but appearances of miracles effected by superior knowledge of nature, by sleight of hand, and by other contrivances; which, however, may be said to be after the working of Satan, because, by such arts, he had deceived men in former ages, and they are arts which no man could use but by his instigation. Whether evil spirits ever interposed any farther for the maintenance of the antichristian system, I pretend not to say; but, if all the stories in their legends are true, it cannot be doubted that they have. One thing, however, is certain, that such of the miracles as have been subjected to examination, have been discovered to be tricks of worthless monks and saints, to impose upon an ignorant credulous people.

In ancient times, the heathens were addicted to magic, and the profane science obtained credit among the Jews, who pretended that they had been taught it by Solomon. It was founded on a supposed intercourse with demons, by whose aid men were enabled to perform many wonderful works. But there is every reason to think, that there was nothing real in it, and that the whole was a system of delusion and imposture. In more modern times, a similiar art has been known by the name of witchcraft, which avowedly consists in a correspondence with wicked spirits. The dealers in this art were supposed to have entered into a compact with the devil, by which they engaged to be his servants, on condition that he should invest them with preternatural power, of

* Rev. xx. 7, 8.

† Ib. xiii. 2.

‡ 2 Thess. ii. 9 10.

the effects of which marvellous stories are current among the vulgar. Their ideas seem to receive countenance from the Scripture, which makes mention, at least in our translation, of wizards and witches, and dealers in familiar spirits. But, besides that it is difficult to ascertain the precise import of the original terms, it is uncertain whether the persons were really possessed of the art which they professed, or were only pretenders to it. The story of the Witch of Endor favours the former supposition; but there are some circumstances, which will lead an attentive reader to suspect, that she exceeded her art on the occasion referred to, and that the effect was beyond her expectation. Whatever may be determined with respect to those of former times, the more recent tales of wizards and witches are rendered improbable by this circumstance, that, in proportion as knowledge has advanced, such characters have disappeared, and that their existence is now credited only by the most illiterate. There is therefore ground of suspicion, that their whole history may be traced to the ignorance of the ages in which they flourished.

Nothing is more plainly taught in the Scriptures, than that evil spirits are employed in tempting men to sin. The devil is called "the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience;"* the wicked are said to be "of their father the devil,"† and to do his works; and it is affirmed that "he who committeth sin is of the devil."‡ It was Satan who tempted Judas to betray his Master,§ and put it into the heart of Ananias and Sapphira to agree together to lie to the Holy Ghost.|| His efforts are, in a particular manner, directed against the saints, who are the objects of his envy and hatred, because they have been restored to the favour of God, and are engaged in his service. Our Lord told his disciples, that Satan had desired to have them, that he might sift them as wheat;¶ and an Apostle says in the name of all his brethren, "We are not ignorant of his devices."** With respect to both saints and sinners, he is represented as "a roaring lion, going about, and seeking whom he may devour."††

These, and many other passages, fully prove that fallen angels are employed in endeavouring to draw men into sin, and justify us in believing their agency, although we cannot explain it. It would be endless to attempt to give a particular account of their temptations, which are greatly diversified, and adapted, we may presume, with consummate art, to the varieties in the tempers and circumstances of individuals. They solicit men to pride, to profaneness, to avarice, to sensuality, to malignity; to every evil, in a word, which will dishonour God, and bring ruin upon their souls.

There are two extremes, which, when speaking upon this subject, we should be cautious to avoid. Some seem to ascribe so much influence to Satan, as to represent the human heart as a mere passive instrument in his hand, and trace to him all its wickedness, as if, without his instigation, it would have adopted no errors, and committed no crimes. To him the blame of all its vices and extravagancies is transferred by a sweeping sentence. Others exclude him from having any concern in the depravity of human nature, and find, in man himself, the origin of all the corruptions in principle and practice, which have prevailed on the earth. The Scriptures adopt a middle course; and while they speak, in the strongest terms, of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the heart, they affirm, that its appetites and passions are excited, and drawn forth into action, by an invisible Tempter. When the Prince of this world came to our Saviour, he failed in his design, because he found nothing in him, who was perfectly pure; but, when he comes to us, he finds materials upon which he operates with success.

Hence it appears, that men are in continual danger, and that it assails them

* Eph. ii. 2
† Acts v. 3

‡ John viii. 44.
§ Luke xxii. 31.

¶ 1 John iii. 4.
** 2 Cor. ii. 11.

§ John xiii. 2.
†† 1 Pet. v. 8.

from a quarter of which many entertain no suspicion. Christians alone are apprised of it by divine admonitions, and feel the necessity of vigilance, and prayer, and exertion. They are not left to struggle with their active and powerful adversaries; but, while heavenly grace is ready to assist them, they are amply provided with the means of defence, and earnestly exhorted to use them. "Put on," therefore, "the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore, take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked, And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." *

LECTURE XL.

MAN IN HIS STATE OF INNOCENCE.

Mosaic Account of the Creation of Man—Pattern after which he was made the image of God—His resemblance to it in the Spirituality of his Soul; the Authority with which he was invested; his Knowledge; and his original Righteousness—Happiness of Man's Primal State—Its Duration.

WHEN the earth was prepared by the hand of the Almighty, adorned with its sublime and beautiful scenery, and enriched by his liberality, man was introduced into it as his dwelling, and placed at the head of its other inhabitants. In vain, as we have already remarked, should God have displayed the wonders of his power and wisdom, if no being had been raised up to contemplate them, and to offer up the just tribute of praise. All his works glorify him: but they do so, by manifesting his excellencies to intelligent creatures, who are capable of perceiving the tokens of his presence, and of feeling the devout impressions which these are fitted to make. A world which was a mere solitude, or was inhabited only by animals possessed of no higher powers than instincts and the external senses, would have existed to no purpose worthy of its Maker; and the art displayed in the arrangement of its parts would have seemed to be a waste of skill. But it appears to be a work worthy of its Author, when we find it peopled by a race of a higher order, who see him in the objects which surround them, and are led by the gifts of his bounty to love and adore the Giver. Heaven is his throne: "but the earth hath he given to the children of men." †

The creation of man took place on the sixth day, and was delayed till that time, that the earth might be prepared for his reception. Having made "the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth, after his kind," God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth,

* Eph. vi. 11—18.

† Psalm cxv. 16

and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him: male and female created he them."* It is thus that Moses relates the origin of the human race.

There are two things in these words which deserve particular attention. There is an unusual solemnity observed at the creation of man. While, on the other days, nothing is heard but the simple and majestic command, which is instantly obeyed, "Let there be light," "Let the waters under heaven be gathered together unto one place," "Let the earth bring forth grass;" on this occasion there is something like what we call deliberation and consultation; a sort of preparation for the work, as if it were of superior importance. This surely may be inferred from the peculiarity of the form, that the creature about to be made, was of a nobler species than the other inhabitants of the earth, and destined to a higher purpose. God was now to crown his lower works, by bringing forward the last and the best of them. The earth being fashioned and furnished, only one thing remained to complete his design; and he therefore said, Let us now make man.—The other thing remarkable, is the use of the plural instead of the singular pronoun. God said not, "Let *me* make man," but "Let *us* make man after our image." Different methods have been adopted to account for this unusual mode of expression. He spoke, say the Jews, to the earth, to the heavens, to the elements. I presume that these are words without meaning; and simply to state this opinion, is to refute it. When we are informed what is meant by God's speaking to the elements, or summoning them to join with him in the creation of man, and how man was made after their image, that is, when nonsense is proved to be sense, the opinion will deserve to be considered. Others say that he spoke to the angels; but, as he said, "Let us make man," it follows, upon this supposition, that he called upon them to co-operate with him in the production of his noblest work. Is not this opinion as unintelligible as the former? Did God need the assistance of angels? And what assistance could they give him? The Scripture declares that we have all one Father, and that one God created us;† but now it seems that this information is not correct, and that we have many Creators, the angels having been concerned as well as he, to whom alone we supposed ourselves to be indebted for existence. This fancy being evidently absurd, others have maintained, that God spake in the style which is used by kings; who, although individuals, employ the plural number for greater dignity, or because they are the representatives of the people over whom they reign. But it ought to be considered that this style was altogether unknown in ancient times, and is of modern date; and, consequently, that there would have been an obvious impropriety in using it more than five thousand years prior to its introduction. It would have been misunderstood; it would have been supposed to import that there were more beings, more gods than one, concerned in the creation; and thus, merely for the sake of anticipating a mode of expression which had nothing to recommend it, an occasion would have been presented of leading mankind into the fundamental error of polytheism. The mode of expression, I say, had nothing to recommend it. When strictly examined, it is inaccurate, and cannot be excused on the plea of dignity or majesty, because the singular form is evidently more dignified, as it represents the authority of a sovereign, as concentrated in his single person, and not shared by any other individual upon earth. The most natural and satisfactory account of the use of a plural word, on this occasion, is to suppose a reference to a plurality of persons in the Godhead; which some conceive to be implied in the plural name of God, Elohim, and which is manifestly signified in several other passages of the Old Testament, that were quoted when I was illustrating the doctrine of the Trinity. With this doctrine the people of

* Gen. i. 26, 27.

† Mal. ii. 10

God, under the ancient economy, were acquainted; and the language under consideration was not calculated to mislead them. They knew that God, on this occasion, consulted with himself; and inferred from his words, that all the Divine Persons were concerned in the creation of man.

The body of man was made of the dust, or of the earth, and hence the name Adam seems to be derived. The reason for forming it of such mean materials, seems to have been to teach him humility, when, amidst the honours which were to be conferred upon him, as Lord of the inferior creatures, he should reflect that, in one respect, he had the same origin with the beasts of the field. It was calculated also to awaken sentiments of devotion, while he contemplated in his own body an admirable proof of the wisdom and goodness of God, who had constructed a frame of such curious workmanship, out of the dust which our first parent was daily treading under his feet. "I will praise thee," says the Psalmist, "for I am fearfully and wonderfully made marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well."* No description can do full justice to its wonderful mechanism; and whether we consider the form and articulation of the bones, or the muscles by which they are moved, or the nerves which convey feeling and activity to every part, or the circulation of the blood, or the various organs of secretion and digestion, or the action of the lungs, or the senses by which it communicates with the external world, or its external symmetry and features, we must pronounce it to be, in every respect, worthy of its divine Author, and fitted to serve the various purposes of the sentient and intelligent being to whom it belongs. I remark, in passing, that it is only in a secondary sense that the body of man is said to have been created. It was not made of nothing, but pre-existing matter; but equal power was necessary to produce, out of that matter, flesh, and blood, and bones.

When the body of man was fashioned, "The Lord God," says the sacred historian, "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."† The language is figurative; for breathing cannot be literally ascribed to God, who is not a corporeal being. The words import at least, that God caused the air to enter into his body, that its several parts might begin their functions, the lungs to respire, the heart to beat, and the blood to circulate. But, although this process may be considered as mechanical, we know that it cannot be carried on merely by mechanical causes. If a body be dead, the introduction of air into the lungs will not set them and the other parts of the system in motion. A living principle is wanted, distinct from the body, upon which its operations depend, as the motion of a machine constructed by human skill is caused by something different from the machine, as water or steam, or wind. Hence, although we may not be able to prove, that breathing into man the breath of life necessarily implies the communication of this principle, yet the case requires us to understand the words in this sense, especially as the effect is said to have been, that man became a living soul. As we know that the nature of man is compound, consisting of a soul as well as of a body, and no mention is made of the former in any other part of the narrative we may reasonably conclude that Moses, who certainly would not omit a particular of so much importance, here refers to its creation. The body which was made of dust, is plainly distinguished from the soul, when the wise man informs us, that at death, "the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."‡ The living soul of man was created, in the proper sense of the term. It is not a quality, but a substance; and as it did not previously exist, it must have been produced out of nothing by the Father of Spirits.

These two constituent parts of human nature were joined together by an

* Psalm cxxxix. 14.

† Gen. ii. 7.

‡ Eccl. xii. 7.

invisible and mysterious tie. Although they possess no quality in common, and it might seem, therefore, that they could no more operate upon each other than if they were separated by an interval as wide as the space between heaven and earth, yet, by the will of God, which is the cause of all relations and connexions between created things, the soul moves the body, and the body affects the soul by its organs of sense, and all its modifications. Thus united, they constitute one individual, as really as if the essence of man, like that of the angels, had been perfectly simple. We cannot explain the fact, but we are all assured of it by experience.

When Adam had been created, there was not found "a help meet for him."* Among all the living inhabitants of the earth, there was not one who resembled him in shape or in mental endowments; there was not one who was fit to be his associate. Surrounded with creatures of different species, he was placed in a solitude, affording no scope for the exercise of his distinguishing faculties, no means of intellectual intercourse, no objects to awaken the tender sensibilities of the heart. To supply this want, "the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof. And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man."† Upon this narrative it would be useless to attempt a commentary, as we are altogether incapable of advancing a single additional idea to illustrate it. God seems to have chosen this mode of making the woman, instead of forming her also out of the dust, to constitute the closest conjunction between her and Adam, who was destined to be her husband; to be an image of the intimacy of the conjugal relation; and further, to derive the whole human race from one common stock, or to make them all literally of one blood. "And Adam said, 'This 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.'"‡ This simple fact, like many other passages of Scripture, has been made the foundation of allegory. Adam sleeping, is a type of Jesus Christ dead upon the cross, and Eve is a figure of the Church, which is consecrated and purified by the blood and water which flowed from his wounded side. But such interpretations of Scripture are fanciful, and although they may please for a moment, will not bear the examination of sober judgment. We have no authority for them but that of their authors, and shall do well not to indulge in them.

Let us proceed to consider the declaration of Scripture, that man was made in the image, and after the likeness of God. I shall not stop to inquire, what is the distinction between image and likeness, or whether there be any difference of meaning: the important truth which we are evidently taught is, that man was so formed, as to bear a resemblance to his Creator. It is almost unnecessary to remark, that it did not consist in his external form, because God having no bodily parts, any configuration of matter could not constitute the impress of his image. When Solomon says, that "God made man upright,"§ he does not refer to his erect posture—the *os sublime* of the poet—but to the state of his mind.

First, The image of God may be conceived to consist in the essence of the human soul, which is spiritual like the Divine essence. God created matter, but it was not made after his image, because he is not himself material. But the soul resembles him, because it is uncompounded, indivisible, immortal, capable of thought and activity. The opinions respecting the nature of the soul have been various. Some have supposed that it was fire; some, that it was air; some, that it was a material substance highly refined; and some have

* Gen. ii. 20.

† Ib. 21, 22.

‡ Ib. 23, 24.

§ Eccl vii. 29.

denied that there is any soul at all, and have affirmed that sensation and thought are the effects of corporeal organization. But certainly the known properties of matter are the most remote that we can conceive from intelligence; and in the most refined states in which it is found to exist, as in the solar light, or the electric and magnetic fluids, it approaches no nearer to thinking and willing, than in its rudest and dullest form. No man can conceive perception to result from the mere arrangement or the motion of particles of matter, because these things are *toto cælo* different, and have no more connexion with thought than colour has, or sweetness, or sound. But it would be superfluous to attempt to prove the immateriality of the soul by a process of reasoning. To christians the point admits of no doubt, since revelation has decided the question, and pronounced the soul to be a spiritual substance, so independent upon the body, that, when the latter dies, it shall survive in a state of consciousness and activity. In the invisible and nobler part of his nature, man resembles his Maker, who is a Spirit.

Secondly, The image of God in which Adam was made, consisted in the authority with which he was invested. "Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."* This dominion implied that all things were placed in a state of subjection to man, and were subservient to him. It has been questioned whether he had a right to make use of the lower animals for food; some supposing that this right was not given till after the flood, when it is first expressly mentioned. Without entering into this controversy, it may suffice to observe, that man was constituted the lord of this lower world; that all the creatures were inspired with respect for him, and submitted to his government; and that he was at liberty to employ them for such ends as an innocent being could desire to accomplish. He might be said to have been created in the image of God, because he was his representative and vicegerent.

I proceed to observe, in the third place, That the image of God principally and properly consisted in the qualities of his soul, which were similar to the perfections of his Maker. The words of Moses which we are considering, are illustrated by those of an Apostle, who, addressing christians on the subject of their restoration to the state from which Adam fell, says. "Ye have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him;"† and again, "Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."‡ From these passages we learn, that the image of God, in which Adam was created, consisted, not merely in intellectual endowments, but also in holy dispositions. As a mirror reflects the brightness of the sun, so did his soul exhibit a counterpart of the moral attributes of God, according to its limited capacity. He who made all other creatures perfect in their kind, did not withhold from man what constitutes the chief excellence, the noblest ornament of his nature. It was as impossible that he should have come from the hands of his Maker with a mind labouring under ignorance, or a heart tainted with impurity, as that darkness should proceed from light, or evil from good.

The understanding of man, in his primeval state, was illuminated with all necessary knowledge. In speaking upon this subject, there are two extremes which should be avoided. Some reduce the knowledge of the first man almost to nothing, represent him as a child in understanding, although his body was in the maturity of manhood, and maintain that he was left to acquire wisdom by degrees, in the exercise of his faculties upon the objects around him, and under the tuition of experience. But this opinion supposes him to have been less perfect than the lower animals, who were no doubt endowed at once with

* Gen. i. 26.

† Col. iii. 10.

‡ Eph. iv. 28.

all their peculiar instincts in perfection; is at variance with the Scripture, which affirms that he was created in the image of God, of which, according to an Apostle, knowledge was a constituent part; and places him in a situation in which he could not, for some time at least, fulfil the design of his creation, and must have been unavoidably exposed to the danger of error. Is it not more rational to believe, that all the knowledge, which was necessary in his circumstances, was at once infused into his mind? Others give an extravagant account of his knowledge, as if it had almost equalled that of angels, and our first parent had been acquainted with all the arts and sciences which have been slowly acquired by his posterity. The truth lies between these extremes. He was neither so ignorant as the former affirm, nor so enlightened as the latter would persuade us. It is enough to maintain, that he possessed all the knowledge that was necessary to him as an intelligent and moral agent. We may presume that his faculties were stronger and more active than those of any of his children; and it may be inferred, from his naming the inferior creatures when they passed in review before him, that his acquaintance with natural objects was extensive and accurate. But the knowledge which chiefly distinguished him in his original state, and was an essential part of the divine image, was the knowledge of God and his will, of every thing which it behoved him to know, in order to fulfil the end of his creation. He knew himself; he knew his relations to his Maker; he knew the duty which he owed to him; he knew what he had to fear from sin, and what to hope from obedience. This knowledge was not obtained by observation, and inquiry, and reflection, but by immediate inspiration; it was a light from heaven, which shone into his mind from the first moment of his existence. It may be justly called perfect knowledge, because it was distinct, accurate, and full. Man was not ignorant of any thing in which he was concerned; he was not mistaken in any of his notions; he did not, in a single instance, suppose good to be evil, or evil to be good; and as he was sensible of his dependence upon the Author of his being, and looked to him as his guide, so God was always ready to grant to him such new discoveries as might be conducive to his happiness. More knowledge he might have acquired, and would have acquired, by natural means or supernatural revelation, if he had continued in innocence; but his present knowledge was sufficient for his present condition. This is the only perfection in knowledge of which a creature is capable, either upon earth or in heaven. Knowledge absolutely perfect is omniscience, which is an incommunicable attribute of the Creator.

It has been a subject of inquiry, whether our first parents were endowed at once with the knowledge of language, or were left to form a language for themselves. Those who maintain the latter opinion, are compelled to admit that they understood the words in which they were addressed by God, and afterwards by the serpent; but they conceive that the other words in their vocabulary were of their own invention. To state this hypothesis, is to expose it as whimsical and ridiculous. If God inspired them with the knowledge of some words, what good reason can be assigned for supposing that he stopped here, and did not go on to finish what he had begun? Is there any advantage gained by the supposition? Is there a single hint to favour it in the narrative of Moses? Is it more rational than the other opinion, or more analogous to other parts of the Divine procedure? It is a mere conjecture, and a conjecture so manifestly arbitrary, that it deserves rather to be laughed at than seriously refuted. For a time, our first parents must have been mute, except that they could repeat the few words in which God had instructed them; for a time, they must have been incapable of celebrating the praises of their Maker, and of carrying on intercourse between themselves, but by signs, like the speechless savages, who never existed except in the brains and writings of dreaming philosophers.

Can we allow ourselves to think that man, the chief of God's works was brought upon the stage in a state so imperfect? No; we believe that he, who infused knowledge into his mind, taught him how to express it in articulate sounds

I proceed to observe, that another feature of the Divine image consisted in the rectitude of his will, by which I mean, that he was fully disposed to the performance of his duty, or to act according to the light which shone in his mind. As he was a moral agent, we must hold that his will was free; and that it was so, is manifest from the event, for he did turn aside from the path of duty, and make a choice which proved fatal to himself and his posterity. "God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions."* By freedom of will, however, I do not mean that his mind was in a state of suspense, or of indifference to good and evil. I believe such a state to be impossible, unless it be preceded by complete ignorance of both; and, if possible, to be criminal, because our knowledge of what is right and good should immediately determine the choice. His mind was not *in equilibrio*, like a balance, the scales of which are pressed down by equal weights; he was averse to evil, and inclined only to good; but he might reject the good, and choose the evil. He was not confirmed in purity, as angels and glorified saints are; he was a mutable creature, and might change by an act of volition, and in this consisted his freedom of will. The rectitude of his will is implied in the uprightness which is predicated of him in his original state. His will was in unison with the will of God. He had no desires or inclinations of his own which he was disposed to gratify; his pleasure arose from doing what was pleasing to his Maker. This seems to be that righteousness which the Scriptures affirm to be an essential part of the image of God, and which, at the same time, they distinguish from knowledge and holiness, meaning probably, by the latter, the pure thoughts, and affections, and actions, which resulted from it. The state of man in innocence may be illustrated by contrasting it with that of his descendants, in whom there is found an opposition between their convictions of duty and their inclinations. This internal conflict, this rebellion of the will against reason or conscience, was observed and lamented by the Heathens; and every scholar knows the confession or complaint of the poet, that he perceived and approved what was right, but pursued what was wrong:

"Video meliora proboque,
Deteriora sequor."

The Apostle Paul shews, from his own experience, that this conflict takes place even in the regenerated, in consequence of the remains of depravity. "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members."† Hence it is that virtue, although eloquently recommended, and praised in rapturous strains, is often in practice totally disregarded. Notions floating in the head, and, it may be, slightly affecting the conscience, are too feeble to subdue the strong and inveterate aversion of the heart. In the soul of the first man, the most perfect order reigned. His knowledge was not speculative, but practical. His will obeyed the dictates of his enlightened understanding. His perceptions of duty were accompanied with perfect submission to the authority by which it was enjoined. What the first Adam was, we may learn by contemplating the Second, all whose powers harmonized in the service of God, and who accounted it his meat and his drink to do the will of his Father, and to finish his work.

Some have affirmed that man did not at first possess this righteousness, but that it was afterwards infused into him. He was innocent, they say, or free

* Eccl. vii. 29.

† Rom. vii. 23.

from sin, when he was created, but was not positively holy. As, in this state, a conflict might have taken place between the inferior and the superior part of his nature, between appetite and reason, righteousness was superadded to check and restrain every disorderly movement. An obvious consequence of this opinion is, that the loss of this righteousness has only placed him in his original circumstances; and that we come into the world just such creatures as Adam was, having as much liberty of will to choose good, and refuse evil, and equally capable of acquiring virtuous habits. It is true that he was subsequently placed in a more advantageous situation, when he was endowed with supernatural gifts; but, wanting these, we are on the same footing on which he stood when he came from the hands of his Maker. It is obvious that this opinion overthrows the Scriptural doctrine of original sin. In opposition to it, we maintain that, although man may be conceived as being without righteousness, yet, in point of fact, Adam never wanted it; that from the beginning, it was an endowment of his nature; that he was holy as soon as he became a living soul; and we found our assertion upon the declaration of Scripture, that God created man in his own image. He did not stamp his image upon him after he was made, but it was the pattern according to which he fashioned him at first.

To illustrate further the subject of original righteousness, I observe that, at his creation, the will of man was holy and only inclined to good. Had there been any bias of his nature to evil, any tendency to it, however faint, any appetite or passion which was not completely under the government of reason, or rather of the Divine law, he would not have been upright in the full and perfect sense of the word. What we now assert, is opposed to the opinion already stated, that there was a conflict between appetite and reason in man, that he was subject to concupiscence or desire excited by the objects around him, which it might be necessary in some cases to resist. Our appetites and passions, it is said, are not in our power, and do not wait for our permission, but are often moved before we are aware. Now, the constitution of Adam being the same with ours, he must have occasionally felt desires which could not have been gratified with innocence, but which, being involuntary, would not be imputed to him as sin. In a word, it is maintained, that there was from the beginning a struggle in the human breast, similar to that which takes place in the regenerated, according to the description of an inspired writer, "that the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh;" and these are contrary the one to the other.* This may pass with some men as conclusive reasoning; but it is much of the same kind as if we should say, a man infirm and diseased is never free from pain; and, therefore, a man of a sound constitution, and in good health, is never perfectly at ease. The primeval state of man was so different from his present state, that it would be downright folly to argue from the one to the other. There was then a harmony, a subordination among his faculties, which we can hardly conceive who have daily experience of their disorder. There was such light in his mind, and such love to God in his heart, as retained his appetites in a state of complete subjection. No wandering thoughts or irregular desires found admission into his holy soul. The dominion of the law of God over all the principles of his nature was absolute. It is the effect of the fall, that the connexion established between the intellectual and active powers of the soul is unsettled; that reason and conscience often dictate in vain, and the will rebels against both; that the affections rush headlong upon forbidden gratifications; and man, with all his knowledge, and all his resolutions to the contrary, is hurried away by their violence. But this is a description only of fallen man. In a state of innocence, his soul was like a curious machine, all the parts of which moved

* Gal. v. 17.

in harmony by the force of one master spring, the love of God, which actuated and sanctified all its powers.

It is true, then, that God made man upright, that he was a creature worthy of the Author of his being, the fair image of his excellencies, a mirror from which the unspotted purity of the divine nature was reflected.

Man, being holy, enjoyed all the felicity which was suitable to his nature and his circumstances. His body contained no seeds of disease, and was not subject to languor or pain. The objects around him, arrayed in the freshness of youth, and beautified by the hand of the Creator, were calculated to delight his senses. Work was prescribed to him; but it was of the easiest kind, and served merely as an agreeable recreation. He was placed in the garden of Eden, where nature appeared in all her loveliness; a garden which God himself had planted, and in which grew "every tree which was pleasant to the sight, and good for food." I shall not stop to inquire in what region it was situated, although many learned men have amused themselves with the inquiry. Some hints are given in the history of Moses; but they are too general to enable us to come to a certain conclusion. In the midst of abundance man experienced no present want, and felt no anxiety respecting the future; for unconscious of guilt, he looked up with confident expectation to the goodness of his Maker. And this leads me to remark, that it was not from external objects that his happiness was chiefly derived, but from the intimate fellowship with his Creator to which he was admitted. He rejoiced in his glory, which his enlightened eye contemplated in the splendour of the heavens, and the varied scenery of the earth: he rejoiced in a sense of his favour, in a feeling of His love; and assured of his friendship, he reposed without suspicion upon his wisdom and benevolence. All was calm within, and all was peaceful without. He was happy now; and he should be happy always, if he continued to perform the easy service which was enjoined upon him. Easy it may be justly called, for it consisted in yielding to the bent of his own will, which was inclined only to good, and exercising the holy faculties with which he was endowed. Obedience was natural to him; and what is conformable to nature is attended with pleasure. How delightful must have been his emotions, while he was employed in admiring, and loving, and praising, and executing the orders of that Being who had lately called him into existence, and showered innumerable blessings upon him! The life which he led in Paradise was like the life of angels.

The Scriptures have not informed us how long our first parents retained their innocence, and enjoyed the delights of their primeval state. There is room, therefore, for conjecture; and in this, as in other cases, there have not been wanting theologians, who have filled up the void with the suggestions of fancy. Some have thought, that they fell on the same day on which they were created, and have even appealed to the authority of Scripture. "Man being in honour abideth not," says the Psalmist, "he is like the beasts that perish."* Now, the word translated *to abide*, signifies *to continue for a night*. Hence these profound critics, presuming that there is an allusion to the first man, boldly conclude that he did not continue for a night in the honour of his original state; and some of them have supported the conclusion by arguments of the most ridiculous nature. It is quite sufficient to remark, that the view which they have taken of the verse is perfectly unnatural, and would have occurred only to an interpreter who was in search of proofs to support a favourite opinion. It contains obviously a general reflection upon the transitory nature of fallen man, and the instability of his enjoyments. His wealth and glory vanish like a vapour; and he himself, after a short interval, returns to the dust from which he came. We have no reason to think that the period of human innocence was

* Psalm xlix. 12.

of long duration; but we have also no reason to believe that it lasted only for a few hours. Was there not one day of purity and peace? Was the work of the Almighty marred as soon as it was finished? The narrative of Moses seems to be inconsistent with this supposition. The business of the sixth day was so various as to occupy, we should think, the whole of it. First, quadrupeds and reptiles were created; next Adam was made; then the command was given respecting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; afterwards the various animals passed before him, and he gave them names; again he was cast into a deep sleep, and Eve was formed of a rib taken from his side; last of all, the woman was brought to him, and they were joined together by God himself in the conjugal relation. This was the busiest day of the six, but it were still more crowded with events, if the fall took place upon it; for then we must suppose that Adam and Eve, who had so lately met, separated almost immediately, although for what reason it is impossible to conceive; that Eve had a conversation with the serpent, by whom she was persuaded to eat the forbidden fruit; that she then went in search of her husband, and prevailed upon him to imitate her example; that they then discovered themselves to be naked, and clothed themselves with fig-leaves; and that all this happened before the cool of the day, probably the afternoon, when the sun was declining, and the air was refreshed by a gentle breeze. We must add to these transactions the procedure of God as a judge towards them and their tempter, and their expulsion from Paradise. This simple detail of facts is sufficient to shew, that the opinion under consideration is destitute of the slightest probability: but I go a step farther, and say that it is manifestly false; for at the end of the sixth day God saw all his work that it was good. But how could this be, if sin had introduced misery and death into our world; if man had become a rebel, and a curse had been pronounced upon him, and upon the earth for his sake? It is evident from the narrative of Moses, that the temptation and fall of man were subsequent to the seventh day, on which God rested from all his work which he had made.

God pronounced his work to be good, because sin had not entered to mar its beauty, and disturb its order. The heavens were resplendent with the glory of their Maker, and the earth was full of his praise. The trees and herbs of the field displayed his wisdom and goodness; the inferior animals were perfect in their kind; and man, placed at their head, was enlightened by reason, and adorned with every moral excellence. There never was so lovely a sight as our world bearing the recent impress of the hand which fashioned it. The memory of its original state, conveyed down by tradition, suggested to the heathen poets their descriptions of the golden age, when the earth spontaneously yielded its fruits, the manners of its inhabitants were simple and virtuous, and life flowed on smoothly in innocence and peace. The whole creation declared the glory of God; and man, as the priest of nature, gave a voice to its silent homage, and offered up to the Universal Parent, the pure sacrifices of adoration and thanksgiving.

LECTURE XLI.

ON PROVIDENCE.

Doctrine of Providence—A Providence inferred from the acknowledged Perfections of God; from the dependent nature of Creatures; from the Order maintained in the Universe; from the existence of Moral Sentiments; and from various Facts in the History of our Race—Particular Providence.

WHATEVER elevated conceptions the wiser and more contemplative heathen philosophers might entertain of the Deity, they could not rise to that sublime view of him which is exhibited in revelation. They might conceive of him as One, Invisible, and Perfect; but not knowing him in the proper character of Creator, they could not feel all that reverence for him which his power in the production of the universe is calculated to inspire, nor those emotions of love and gratitude which are awakened by the display of his creative benevolence. Some of them, indeed, did speak of him, as the Artificer of all things; but it should be recollected that, according to their undisputed maxim of the impossibility of creation in the proper sense of the term, his office was limited to the arrangement of pre-existing materials; and that over matter, which was eternal as himself, he had not absolute control, but was under the necessity of executing his designs only so far as its nature would permit. How different is the God of Jews and Christians, who, subsisting alone from infinite ages, manifested himself in the beginning of time, by calling out of nothing that immense and glorious system, which fills the regions of space! Of the work of creation we have already spoken, and have illustrated the Mosaic account of it, and endeavored to vindicate it from the objections of infidelity and of modern science, whether they seek to prove, that there is no vestige of a beginning, and no prospect of an end, or that its origin must be traced to a period far beyond the limits of history, and anterior by thousands or millions of years to the date assigned to it in the Scriptures.

We have seen that, at the command of the Almighty, the material system arose out of nothing; and by subsequent exertions of his power, under the direction of his wisdom, was arranged in that order which astonishes us by its magnificence, and delights us by its beauty. Whatever speculations we may indulge respecting the other parts of creation, which are too remote to be subjects of minute observation, we know that the earth was not intended to be a solitude. While the land, the sea, and the atmosphere, were filled with living creatures of various kinds, man was formed to be the spectator of the wonders with which he was surrounded, and to proclaim the glory of God, which they could only passively display. Distinguished from them all by his erect posture, and the gift of reason, he was still more highly elevated by his moral endowments, which being a transcript of the divine excellencies, properly constituted the image of God, with which he was adorned. But this state of things was of short duration. Sin finding admission even into paradise, the sacred seat of innocence and bliss, caused a sudden and melancholy change; and while man was divested of the glory of his nature, his offended Creator was provoked on his account to blast the earth with his curse; so that, though still lovely, it is but the faded image of what it once was, and the marks of heaven's anger may be traced in the ruggedness, and sterility, and unhealthiness of many parts of it, as well as in the turbulence and desolating fury of the elements. This revolution, which seemed to defeat the design of God in creation, could not have taken place without his knowledge, nor without his permission; for there is no

doubt that, as he could have prevented our first parents from being tempted, so he could have enabled them to resist the strongest temptations. Mysterious as the subject is, we must believe that, although we cannot say that God willed sin, he willed not to hinder it, and that it was his purpose to overrule it for an end worthy of himself. It follows, that his Providence was concerned in the fall; although we may not be able to describe the nature and extent of its agency. Before, therefore, I proceed to a particular consideration of the fall and its consequences, I shall endeavour, in some lectures, to explain the doctrine of Providence.

It may be remarked at the commencement, that men have not been more generally agreed in the belief that there is a God, than in the persuasion that the universe is under the direction and control of superior power and wisdom. In this sentiment, I may say, all nations have concurred. It seems to be a natural deduction of reason from the idea of a Deity; and to be suggested to a reflecting mind by the appearances of nature, and the course of events. Certain philosophers, indeed, have denied that the affairs of mortals are under the Divine superintendence; and of these some have doubted or denied the existence of a God; while others, granting it in words, have with manifest inconsistency cut off all intercourse between him and his creatures, and shut him up, as it were, in the solitude of heaven. To this latter class belonged Epicurus, and his followers, who were Atheists in reality, although Theists in profession: *Re tollit*, says Cicero of Epicurus, *oratione relinquit, Deos*.* The Divine nature, according to the Epicureans, as the philosopher Sallustius observes in his book *de Diis et Mundo*, “is neither itself disturbed, nor does it give disturbance to others.” The same opinion is ascribed to them in Cicero’s first book *de Natura Deorum*: “That which is happy and eternal gives no trouble either to itself or to others, and is susceptible neither of anger nor of favour, because whatever is subject to such emotions, is weak.” Happiness, as they imagined, consisted in doing nothing, in being engaged in no occupation, in performing no work; and their God rejoiced in his own wisdom and virtue, and in the assurance of always enjoying the greatest delights. The God of other philosophers, whose task was to govern the world, maintain the courses of the stars, the changes of the seasons, the order and revolutions of the universe, to contemplate the lands and seas, support the life and supply the wants of men; this God appeared to them to be necessarily unhappy, because he was involved in irksome and laborious operations. Thus they denied a Providence, and by doing so, as the wiser heathens remarked, subverted the foundations of religion. “If God is such,” says Cicero, “that he feels no good will or love towards men, away with him! for why should I say, Let him be propitious? He can be propitious to no person, since as you say, favour and love are proofs of imbecility.”†

The word Providence, which we have derived from the Latin word *Providentia*, and the Greek word *Προνοια*, are used to express the action or conduct of God towards the universe, which he upholds by his power, and regulates by his wisdom. The question concerning Providence is whether, as there is a Creator, there is also a Ruler of the world; or whether the heavens and earth are under the superintendence of him who brought them into existence. Providence, is the care which God takes of all things, to uphold them in being, and to direct them to the ends which he has determined to accomplish by them, so that nothing takes place in which he is not concerned in a manner worthy of his infinite perfections, and which is not in unison with the counsel of his will. More particularly we may observe, that two things are included in the notion of Providence; the preservation and the government of all things. Preservation immediately respects things themselves, which by his power are

* De Nat. Deor. lib. i.

† Ibid.

sustained, or continued in existence. Government respects their actions and motions, which by his almighty influence are disposed in a certain order, and are rendered subservient to certain ends. In particular, the objects of Providence, as exercised in this world, are men, whose proceedings, partaking as they do of a moral character, are in themselves of so much importance; and whose thoughts, and volitions, and operations, are the means by which the Supreme Ruler carries on his designs.

The first argument which I shall produce in proof of a Providence, is drawn from the acknowledged perfections of God. As these prove that he is qualified to undertake the management of his creatures, and all their affairs, so they furnish sure ground for the conclusion, that he has not, and will not, dismiss them from his care. Manifold as his works are, they are all under his eye, for omniscience is an attribute of his nature; and consequently, the minutest objects are as well known to him as the greatest, and the most secret actions as well as those which are performed in the light of the sun. And, although a finite understanding would be perplexed and burdened by the countless myriads of creatures, it costs him no labour to attend to them, for he surveys the immense field of creation at a glance. His power is adequate to all the purposes of his government, whether natural or moral, because it is as unlimited as his knowledge; and it can be exerted upon any object wherever it is situated, or upon ten thousand objects at the same moment, because his power, if I may speak so, is commensurate with his essence, and he is equally present in every part of the universe. He who called it into existence by his simple command, is able to uphold it by the word of his power. Of the sufficiency of his wisdom for the regulation of affairs, no doubt can be entertained, after what has been said of his knowledge. Knowledge furnishes the materials which wisdom arranges. And can he, to whom all the component parts of the universe are perfectly known, and who is intimately acquainted with their situations, their powers, and their uses, be at any loss to adjust them to one another, and to dispose them in such a manner as to accomplish those ends which will promote his glory, and the general good? I may ask again, would it have been worthy of his wisdom, to have created an immense system of material and immaterial beings, and then to have left it to itself? In this case, we could not conceive what purpose he had in view, or by what motive he was influenced in the production of it. Why did he fill the regions of space with innumerable worlds, and people them with various orders of inhabitants, and then withdraw his attention from them, or look on an unconcerned spectator of their movements and actions? But another argument may be drawn from his goodness, which was conspicuous in creation itself, but would seem to have been exhausted by this effort, if a Providence be denied. The benevolence which prompted the Deity to call the universe into existence, would surely prompt him to extend his protection to it. There could not be a higher impeachment of his character, than to suppose him to have abandoned his own works; to have deserted his rational offspring, and to have delivered them up as helpless orphans to chance, or to the blind operation of general laws; to the dubious guidance of their feeble reason, and to the arbitrary rule of their wayward passions. What a revolting idea do they give us of the First and Greatest of all beings, who would persuade us that he is indifferent to countless myriads of creatures, whom he himself formed with desires and a capacity for happiness, but who are now the sport of accident, and tossed up and down for no determinate end, like atoms in a sun-beam? How much more amiable and august is the Deity, whom reason and revelation exhibit as the Parent and Guardian of all that live, as caring for the meanest of them, and scattering his gifts among them with a munificent hand! Lastly, as justice is one of his perfections, it follows that he must exercise a moral government over his creatures.

Their actions cannot be indifferent to him; nor can he permit them to go on without interfering to restrain or to encourage, to reward or to punish, in such a degree as is consistent with the present, which is not our final state; to defeat, in some instances, the purposes of the wicked; to prevent the full execution of them in others; and, in all, to overrule them so as to promote the ultimate end of his administration, the triumph and establishment of righteousness. The denial of a Providence, indeed, is so manifestly inconsistent with the belief that God is good and just, that the Epicureans, as we have seen, laid it down as an indisputable maxim, that the Divine nature is susceptible neither of favour nor of anger. There is no moral principle in that being who is not inclined to interpose, and does not actually interpose when he can, to patronize virtue, and to check the progress of vice.

A second argument in favour of Providence, is founded on the dependent nature of creatures. We affirm that they not only derived their being from God, but that it is solely by his power that they are sustained; and consequently, that the continued existence of the universe, and the motions which are going on in it, whether mechanical or voluntary, are proofs of a Providence. Nothing can be stronger, and more exclusive of the idea of independence on the part of creatures, than the following words of Scripture: "In him we live, and move, and have our being;" * and of the same import is the declaration of an Apostle, that our Saviour, who is God, "upholds all things by the word of his power." † The assertion of Divines, that the preservation of existence is a continual creation, is not merely a rhetorical figure, importing that the power of God is as truly admirable in preserving all things as in creating them, but is a literal statement of a fact. God alone exists by necessity of nature, or, in other words, has the ground of his existence in himself; the existence of all other beings is contingent. It is the result of an act of his will; and as it might not have been, so it may cease to be, there being nothing in the nature of things to ensure its continuance. Thus they touch upon nothing on all sides, upon the nothing which preceded, and the nothing which may follow. As the ground of their existence is not in themselves, it is evident that they cannot, by their own will and power, prolong it for a single moment; and consequently, that it depends upon the will and power of God, as the flowing of the stream depends upon an uninterrupted supply of water from the fountain. They exist by the immediate concurrence of his power, which prevents them from returning to nothing, from which they came, and to which they are always near; for, as the universe was created in a moment, in a moment it might be annihilated. The expression formerly quoted, that God upholds all things by the word of his power, is worthy of particular attention, and will enable us to form a just idea of the subject at present under consideration; for, as there is no need of a positive exertion to make a thing, which we bear up in our hand, fall to the ground, but it is sufficient to permit it to fall, by no longer supporting it, so, God has only (so to speak) to withdraw his hand, and the whole system of created things would instantly perish. It was his will which made, and it is his will which sustains them.—It is certain, and evident to reason, that any given moment in the succession of time does not depend upon any other moment; for time is not like a line composed of one continuous substance, but like a line formed by placing a number of separate parts one after another. Now all created beings exist in time, that is, their existence is measured by moments. If, then, one moment has an existence independent of that of another; if the first moment is independent of the second, the second of the third, and the third of those which succeed, it follows, that the existence of any created being in one moment does not necessarily imply its existence in another, or that, because it ex-

* Acts xvii. 28.

† Heb. i. 3.

ists now, it must exist the next instant. Hence it appears that the operation of the same cause, to which its present existence is owing, is necessary to its future existence. In other words it is necessary that the power of God, which gave it being, should uphold it in every stage of its duration. As the same power which brought it out of nothing must be incessantly exerted to prevent it from returning to nothing, there is evidently ground for affirming that the upholding of all things is a continual creation. As, however, this term is commonly applied to their first production, the word preservation, or conservation, is more frequently used.

It has been objected against this view of the absolute dependence of all things upon God, that, while it seems to honour him by giving an exalted idea of his power and dominion, it implies a reflection upon his wisdom, as if he had executed a work so imperfect, as to require his constant interference to prevent it from running into confusion and perishing. Even men can construct works which, when finished, have no farther need of their care. A house will stand although the builder should never see it again; and a watch, or clock, will point out the hour when it has passed out of the hands of the maker. But it should be considered that, in such cases, men merely give a particular form or arrangement to certain materials which were ready for their use; they neither make them, nor uphold them in being; and consequently, there is a wide difference between the office which they perform, and that which we assign to God, when we affirm that his interposition is necessary to preserve his creatures in existence. They merely put matter in a particular shape and order; but they could not retain it in that state for a single moment if it had a tendency to annihilation. The durability of their works plainly depends upon some other cause than their own power, because they continue after they have entirely abandoned them. With respect to those works which are intended to perform certain motions, and do perform them without the presence of the artists, as a watch or clock, or any other piece of machinery, let it be farther considered, that the process is not owing to men, in any other sense, than that they have made a proper disposition of the parts. It is the effect of the laws of nature, which experience has enabled them to apply to a particular purpose. The moving power is not in the machine itself, but in the elasticity of a spring, or the influence of gravitation, or the expansive force of the atmosphere. To represent, therefore, the works of God as being, on the supposition of the constant care of providence, more imperfect than the works of man, serves only to betray our ignorance. "The full answer to this objection," says Dr. Price, "is, that to every machine or perpetual movement for answering any particular purpose, there always belongs some *first mover*, some *weight* or *spring*, or other power, which is continually acting upon it, and from which all its motions are derived; nor without such a power is it possible to conceive of any such machine. The machine of the universe, then, like all besides analogous to it, of which we have any idea, must have a *first mover*.—It follows, therefore, that this objection is so far from being of any force, that it leads us to the very conclusion which it is brought to overthrow. The excellence of a machine by no means depends upon its going properly *of itself*, for this is impossible, but in the skill with which its various parts are adjusted to one another, and all its different effects are derived from the *constant action* of some *power*"* which is not in the machine.

A third argument in favour of Providence, is founded on the order which is maintained in the universe. It is composed of many parts, endowed with different qualities, in some instances contrary to, and destructive of each other; but they are all retained in their proper places, and perform their peculiar functions; and a harmony is established among them, the result of which is

* Price's Dissertation on Providence, sect. ii.

the general good. In this immense and complicated machine, no part ever goes wrong: the motion is never suspended or embarrassed; its operations are carried on with such regularity, that they are the subject of calculation, and the same effects are constantly produced. The revolutions of the heavenly bodies are performed in their appointed times, notwithstanding the boundless regions which their orbits embrace; and although some of them go their rounds in eccentric paths, which cross those of other revolving bodies, they never meet, or drive one another from their course. No comet has ever rushed into the sun, or infringed upon a planet, or produced any other effect, than to excite the curiosity and astonishment of men of science, and to terrify the ignorant with direful forebodings of disastrous changes. The sun, the source of light and heat, although he has ministered to the system of which he is the centre, for thousands of years, has lost no portion of his splendour and his influence. It is only in the descriptions of poetry that he grows dim with years. The seasons succeed each other in the order which they have observed since the beginning of time; the earth retains its productive powers at the close of many generations, who have been supported by its produce; the sea continues within its ancient boundaries, and leaves the dry land to be the abode of terrestrial animals. The various classes of animals and vegetables, notwithstanding the ravages of disease, of violence, and of inclement seasons, have propagated themselves; so that the earth is still stocked with inhabitants, and with ample provision for their wants. Shall we not infer that there is a superintending Deity by whom this order is maintained? If we saw a house in which every thing was found in its proper place, every office was regularly performed, and every thing was provided which was wanted for the accommodation and comfort of the family; we should conclude that it was under the direction and command of a wise, active, and vigilant master. If we saw a state in which just and beneficial laws were established, every order of the citizens was secure in the possession of its peculiar privileges, all the arts of life were cultivated, and wealth and happiness abounded; we should immediately conclude that it enjoyed a regular government, and that those, by whom it was administered, were worthy of their high office. These examples were brought forward by heathen writers; in support of the doctrine of Providence, and furnish an analogy from which it may be fairly deduced. When we contemplate this immense system, so wonderful in its contrivances, so constant in its movements, so admirably balanced, and proceeding from age to age without the slightest confusion; can it be imagined by any man in his senses, that there is no presiding mind by which it is governed? The evidence is still stronger to those who are more intimately acquainted with nature, and know that, in the motions of some of the heavenly bodies, there are occasional apparent irregularities, but that means are provided for correcting them, so that they return to their proper place.

It may be objected, that the order which prevails throughout the universe, may be accounted for by the laws of nature, without an immediate interposition of the Deity, and proves only the wisdom of its original constitution. But as, before we attempt to remove an objection, it is necessary to understand it, I ask, what is meant by the laws of nature? It is not enough to remind me of the law of gravitation, the laws of motion, the laws of light, and other laws mentioned by philosophers; because, after the most complete enumeration of them, the difficulty remains, what is the meaning of *a law*, in the present application of the term? I am disposed to think that, in using it, many impose upon themselves, as well as upon others. In its primary signification, it is a rule established and enforced by authority, and obviously implies intelligence and power; but, when it is transferred to inanimate things, there is a change of the sense. It then signifies merely the stated, regular order in which

they are found to subsist. Thus, finding that bodies near or on the surface of the earth tend towards its centre, and the planets belonging to our system tend towards the sun, we call this the law of gravitation; and in like manner, we speak of other laws by which matter is governed. But the truth is, that these are only facts, and are called laws solely on account of their uniformity. After all our observation and experience, we have merely discovered the fact, that bodies gravitate to a centre, and that the rays of light are subject to refraction and reflection; but we have not advanced a single step in explaining the phenomena of nature, or in shewing what is the true cause by which it is moved and sustained. Do we suppose that nature possesses intelligence, or activity, or power of any kind? Let us not confound ourselves by words, and forget that inertness, or a total incapacity of exertion, is an acknowledged property of matter. It is confessedly inactive. It can neither put itself in motion, nor stop itself when in motion; and every modification which it undergoes, is the effect of some external power. What then are laws of nature? They are the particular modes in which the Deity exerts his power, which, being uniform, are accounted natural, while any deviation from them is pronounced to be miraculous. If this be a just description of them, (and it is ignorance, or philosophy falsely so called, which gives any other,) it follows, that they are so far from accounting for the order which is maintained in the universe, that they necessarily imply the actual and constant interposition of the Creator, and as irresistibly suggest the idea of a Lawgiver, as do the laws of any human society. The truth is, that the laws of nature, if understood to be different from the operation of the Deity, are a name and nothing more, with which simpletons may be amused; but certainly no man of common sense, who is inquiring into the cause of the stability of the universe, will deem it satisfactory to be answered with a sound. "The philosopher," says that great man, Maclaurin, "who overlooks the traces of an all-governing Deity in nature, contenting himself with the appearances of the material universe only, and the mechanical laws of motion, neglects what is most excellent; and prefers what is imperfect to what is supremely perfect, finitude to infinity, what is narrow and weak to what is unlimited and almighty, and what is perishing to what endures for ever." "Sir Isaac Newton," he adds, "thought it most unaccountable to exclude the Deity *only* out of the universe. It appeared to him much more just and reasonable to suppose that the whole chain of causes, or the several series of them, should centre in him as their source; and the whole system appear depending on him, the only independent cause."*

A fourth argument in favour of Providence, arises from a variety of facts in the history of mankind. I take notice, in the first place, of those moral sentiments and feelings which exist in the mind of every human being, who has received any degree of cultivation. "The Gentiles, who have not the law," says an Apostle, "are a law to themselves, and shew the works of the law written in their hearts."† In whatever way men acquire notions of morality, there is a principle within them which distinguishes not only between truth and falsehood, but also between right and wrong; and hence arises that train of feelings, of which we are all conscious, and which are the sources of pleasure or pain, of peace or disquiet. Although the language is figurative, yet there is a manifest propriety in calling conscience the deputy or vicegerent of God in the soul. If it is natural to men, as we may infer from its universality, it was planted in the human breast by the hand of God; and its proper office is to remind us, not only of his existence, but of his government; to recognize him as presiding over our affairs, and taking notice of our actions; to re-echo his voice; to pronounce, in his name, a sentence of approbation or disappro-

* Account of Sir Isaac Newton's Discoveries, Book iv. chap. ix. sect. 1. and 5.

† Rom. ii. 14. 15.

bation; and to summon us to his tribunal, where the sentence will be ratified. If there were no Providence, conscience would be an illusive faculty; its decisions would have no better foundation than the hopes and terrors of superstition; but, if it be an original principle of our nature, it bears testimony to the moral administration of our Maker, and presupposes a supreme law, the commands and sanctions of which it proclaims and inculcates. There would be no place for the operations of conscience under such a deity as Epicurus fancied, who took no concern in our world, and regarded all its affairs with indifference.

While speaking of the moral sentiments and feelings with which mankind are inspired, I am led to point out another proof of the doctrine of Providence, arising from the fact, that we find, by experience, that we are actually at present under a government which dispenses rewards and punishments in a natural way. Thus we find that vicious actions are immediately, or at least speedily, punished, by involving the guilty in disgrace, by reducing them to poverty, by subjecting them to bodily diseases as well as to mental suffering, and by bringing them to an untimely end. On the other hand, we find that virtuous actions are not only the source of inward peace and satisfaction, but lead to respect, to success in business, to health and long life, to a more equitable and regular, and consequently a greater, degree of enjoyment than is derived from the unbounded, and consequently short-lived, indulgences of intemperance. All this, it may be said, is the consequence of the constitution and course of nature; but, as these words mean nothing, unless they signify the order which God has established and upholds by his power, all this proves, that, as he is the Creator, so he is the Governor of his intelligent offspring.

The experience of individuals furnishes proofs of a Providence. Where is the man to whom events have not occurred which have led him irresistibly to acknowledge the hand of God? He has seen it in the wonderful turns in the course of his affairs, in his successes and disappointments, in his escapes from danger, in the sudden thoughts and unaccountable suggestions which have sometimes led to most important results. If he has been an attentive observer, he must have seen it also in the circumstances of others around him. It is displayed before the eyes of all men upon the great theatre of the world, where scenes are acted which extort, even from the thoughtless, occasional expressions of devotion. The rise of mighty kingdoms, from small beginnings to extensive and uncontrolled dominion, and their subsequent fall into decay and dissolution, may be accounted for by the operation of second causes, but are often accompanied with circumstances, which point to Him who lifts one up and casts another down. This is particularly the case of the revolutions of the great monarchies of ancient times, when viewed in connexion with the prophecies concerning them; for who can doubt that they were accomplished by Him who foretold them ages before they took place, and while those monarchies had not even been founded? And when we see order rising out of confusion, and disastrous events producing good, like the tempest which purifies the atmosphere, that man must have a dull understanding, or a hard heart, who feels no emotion of reverence and gratitude towards the great Being whose mysterious wisdom and unbounded beneficence presides over the affairs of mortals.

An additional proof of a Providence is derived from the judgments which are occasionally executed upon notorious transgressors. There is, indeed, a danger of presumptuously explaining events, by hastily concluding, as did the friends of Job, that he is a great sinner who suffers singular calamities. A little sober reflection, and particularly a reverent attention to Scripture, will be an effectual guard against such an abuse. It is certain that, in general, "no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them;"* and conse-

* Eccl. ix. 1.

quently, that we ought not to be judge of the virtue or the vice of individuals by their external circumstances. But our caution must not be carried so far as to benumb our understandings. The fall of tyrants, the tragical fate of persecutors, the punishment of blasphemers while the language of impiety is issuing from their lips, the discovery of crimes which had long eluded the search of every human eye, the manifest retribution which takes place when the cup which the sinner had administered to others is forced to his own lips; these, and similar events, can be viewed by a reflecting mind in no other light than as evidences, that “verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.”* “The Lord is known by the judgment which he executes.”†

Before I conclude, I shall mention two facts in the history of our species, which are well worthy of attention. The first is the proportion between the sexes, which are so well balanced, that, if there be any difference, it is on the side of the males; provision being thus made for the greater waste of them, by war, and the various accidents to which they are exposed by sea and by land. Here, then, is a double proof of Divine wisdom, in taking care, that the number of the two sexes should be nearly equal for the regular continuation of the species, and that the small excess, which has been observed, should be in that sex where it was manifestly wanted to keep up the proportion. No inquirer into nature can account for this fact. If any man should be so stupid as to assert, that the production of human beings is the effect of the mechanism of the bodies of their parents, he surely will not advance so far in absurdity as to maintain, that it is owing to mechanism that in one age or country they are not all born males, and in another females; and that, whatever may take place in particular families, the result is always what we have already stated. It is impossible to evade this evidence, that the affairs of the world are still under the direction of Him who made it.

The other fact to which I referred, is the variety in the human countenance. Its features are few, but they are so wonderfully altered and combined, that, in a million of men, you shall not find two who are exactly alike. The advantages which result from this diversity are great, but are not always attended to. If the faces of all men were alike, or if instances of this kind were frequent, much inconvenience and confusion would ensue. Impositions would be daily practised; opportunities would be afforded of prying into the secrets of others, of entering into their houses, of assaulting them when they have no suspicion, of committing innumerable crimes with facility, and of eluding discovery. How does it happen that, although all men resemble one another in the general configuration of their faces, they are, at the same time, so different? How does it happen that this dissimilarity is observed even among those who are descended from the same common parents? No reason, I presume, can be assigned but the will and power of God, who, in this as in every other instance, has provided for the safe and comfortable intercourse of mankind.

The arguments which I have brought forward, are sufficient to establish our minds in the belief of the doctrine of Providence, which was acknowledged by the wiser Heathens, and is explicitly and fully taught in the Scriptures. By Providence, I do not mean merely a general superintendence of the affairs of the Universe, but a particular care exercised towards every constituent part of it. Some maintain only a general Providence, which consists in upholding certain general laws, and exclaim against the idea of a particular Providence, which takes a concern in individuals and their affairs. It is strange that the latter opinion should be adopted by any person who professes to bow to the authority of Scripture—which declares that a sparrow does not fall to the ground without the knowledge of our heavenly Father, and that the hairs of

* Ps. lviii. 11.

† Ps. ix. 16.

our head are all numbered—or by any man who has calmly listened to the dictates of reason. If God has certain designs to accomplish with respect to or by means of, his intelligent creatures, I should wish to know how his intention can be fulfilled without particular attention to their circumstances, their movements, and all the events of their life? I confess, that I do not distinctly understand what is meant by a general, to the exclusion of a particular, Providence. If it mean, that God takes care of the world, but not of particular things in the world, of the human race, but not of individual men, I am not surprised that I do not understand it, because it is absolutely unintelligible. How can a whole be taken care of without taking care of its parts; or a species be preserved if the individuals are neglected? “We cannot conceive of any reasons that can influence the Deity to exercise any providence over the world, which are not likewise reasons for extending it to all that happens in the world. As far as it is confined to generals, or overlooks any individual, or any event, it is incomplete, and therefore unsuitable to the idea of a perfect Being.”*

It is urged as a formidable objection against a particular Providence, that it is inconsistent with the liberty of man, and the general laws which divine wisdom has established. It supposes the occasional suspension of those laws, and such interference with human agency, as is subversive of freedom. But this objection, as Dr. Price observes, “shews narrow views. It would indeed be impossible, if a man, for example, happens to be under a wall when it is falling, to prevent his being killed, without suspending the law of gravitation; but how easy would it have been, had his death been an event proper to be excluded, or which was not consistent with exact order and righteousness in the regulation of events; how easy, I say, in this case, would it have been to hinder him from coming too near the dangerous place, or to occasion his coming sooner or later, by insensibly influencing the train of ideas in his mind, and in numberless other methods, which affect not his liberty. And since this was *easy* to be done, and yet *was* not done, we may assuredly conclude that it was not *right* to be done, and that the event did not happen without the counsel and approbation of Providence. In general, every person, whenever any event, favourable or unfavourable, happens to him, has the greatest reason to own the Divine hand in it; because, it appears, as far as we can judge, that had the Deity so pleased, it might have been prevented by a secret direction of natural causes, and of the thoughts of men, without offering any violence to them. How plainly may we perceive, that if we ourselves had a greater acquaintance with the powers of nature, and nearer access to the minds of men, we could easily over-rule and direct many events not at present in our power, agreeably to our own purposes, without the least infringement of the general laws of the world, or of the liberty of mankind! But how much easier must it be for that Being to do this absolutely and perfectly, to whom all the powers of nature are subject, who sees through all dependencies and connexions, and has constant access to the heart of every man, and can turn it whithersoever he pleases! Where, then, can be the difficulty of believing an invisible hand, an universal and ever attentive Providence, which guides all things agreeably to perfect rectitude and wisdom, at the same time that the general laws of the world are left unviolated, and the liberty of moral agents is preserved?”†

As the doctrine of a particular Providence is agreeable both to Scripture and to reason, so it is recommended by its obvious tendency to promote the piety and the consolation of mankind. To a God who governed the world solely by general laws, we might have looked up with reverence, but not with the confidence, and gratitude, and hope, which arise from the belief, that he superintends its minutest affairs. The thought, that he “compasses our paths, and is acquainted with all our ways;” that he watches our steps, orders all the

* Price's Dissert.

† Dissertation on Providence, sect. i.

events in our lot; guides and protects us, and supplies our wants, as it were with his own hand; this thought awakens a train of sentiments and feelings highly favourable to devotion, and sheds a cheering light upon the path of life. We consider him as our guardian and our Father; and reposing upon his care, we are assured that, if we trust in him, no evil shall befall us, and no real blessing shall be withheld. The doctrine of a particular Providence is eagerly embraced, and fondly cherished, by the humble and pious; while a general Providence is espoused and maintained by cold-hearted speculatists, whose science, falsely so called, turns from the Author of nature, to the more congenial contemplation of the operation of mechanical laws, and the play of human passions.

LECTURE XLII.

ON PROVIDENCE.

Objects of the Divine Providence—Its concern in the Preservation and Government of all things; in the Life, and Death, and in all the Actions of Man—Providence the Source of all Good Actions—Discussion of the question, How far Providence is concerned in Sinful Actions—Distinctions of the Calvinistic Theology on this subject.

In the preceding lecture, I endeavoured to prove that there is a Providence, by several arguments. In giving a definition of it, I remarked, that it signifies in general the Divine care, direction, and control, which may be arranged under two heads, the preservation of his creatures, and the government of them.

First, He preserves his creatures. They are as dependent upon him for the continuance of their being, as life in the branch is upon the juice which flows from the trunk, or the growth of the members of the human body is upon the blood which is propelled from the heart. No idea can be more false than to suppose, that the communication of being renders that, to which it is communicated, independent. What is derived is not self-existent. It is, indeed, perfectly distinct from its Maker, as any other work is from the workman; but, if I may speak so, he pervades its essence, and upholds it by the word of his power. But enough was said upon this subject, when we were demonstrating the doctrine of Providence, from the dependence of all created things upon the power which produced them.

Secondly, He governs his creatures, that is, he exerts an influence upon them, unseen and unfelt, and by their means produces certain effects; but, as they differ widely in their properties and their functions, the general term will admit of various modifications of its meaning, in its application to particular subjects. He governs the material system according to those laws which account for the order established, and regulate the movements which are continually going on in it. Hence, in figurative language, he is said to command the sun to rise, the stars to shine, and other natural events to take place. It is his hand which keeps the sun in his place, and wheels the planets around him in their orbits; it is his hand which fixes the mountains on their bases, and confines the ocean within its ancient boundaries. And if those laws are, as we have stated, only the regular modes of his agency in the production of effects, it is evident that the exertion of his power upon the material system is immediate. He governs the vegetable tribes by those laws which relate to the formation and generation of the seed, the protrusion of the stalk or stem, the expansion of the leaves and flowers, and the concoction of the fruit. He so

governs them, that not only are the different species preserved, but they continue distinct although growing together, with occasional varieties arising from climate, and soil, and cultivation. Wheat never produces rye, nor oats rice; but from age to age any particular seed multiplies itself, so that the husbandman can calculate with certainty, if not upon the quantity, yet upon the nature of the crop. He governs the lower animals by their instincts, which prove a surer guide to them than even reason is to man. Impelled by those instincts, they choose fit habitations, select their proper food, avoid dangers, rear their young, act in appearance at least prospectively—for instance, when they lay in provisions for winter—and often discover a skill which excites our admiration, although a moment's reflection will convince us, that it is not the wisdom of the animal, but of its Maker. The Scripture makes mention of many facts, from which it appears, that they are absolutely under his control. Thus frogs, lice, and flies, were his instruments in punishing the Egyptians; ravens were his ministers to supply the Prophet Elijah with food; and as, at one time, lions were sent to plague the idolatrous nations, who had taken possession of the vacant seats of the ten tribes, so at another, they were as harmless as lambs, when for his piety towards God, the holy man Daniel had been cast into their den. By their subservience to his will, “beasts, and all cattle, creeping things, and flying fowl, praise the Lord.”

The divine government of men, being more important in itself, and attended with greater difficulties, demands closer attention, and a more extended illustration. I begin with observing, that Providence is concerned in the birth of each individual. God has not only appointed that human beings shall be produced according to a general law, but has further settled the number, and the time and order, in which they shall appear. When a man plants a tree, or drops a seed into the ground, he does not know how much fruit it will yield; but the exact sum of the human race is known to him, who is the Former of our fates, and the Father of our spirits. Hence, children are promised in the Scriptures as a blessing, and barrenness is mentioned as a reproach and a punishment; to intimate that both were subject to his disposal. We find too, that the birth of certain persons was foretold before they were conceived in the womb; and we may hence infer, that the birth of all other persons is regulated by the counsel and will of the Almighty. And this will be still more evident, if we consider, that every individual is not a solitary unit, but a link in a chain; and consequently that his appearance at a particular time is necessary to continue the series, to preserve the course of events unbroken, and to secure that other individuals, who are to spring from him, shall appear at the proper season to act their part upon the theatre of the world.

Again, Providence is concerned in our death, as well as in our birth. The natural causes of death are various; as old age, accidents, and diseases slow or rapid in their progress. Nothing is more precarious than human life. It has indeed been made the subject of calculation; but the reasoning proceeds upon general principles, and does not admit of a confident application to particular cases. Life is like a vapour which is dissipated by the wind, or a flower which is chilled by frost, or crushed by the casual tread of the passenger. Yet we cannot doubt, that it is under the direction of Him, without whose knowledge a sparrow does not fall to the ground. Surely it is not by chance that a gift so precious is taken from those upon whom he had bestowed it; that the course of service and trial, through which they are passing, is terminated; that their spirits are dislodged from the habitation which he had assigned to them, and called into his presence, to give an account of the deeds done in the body. The time, the place, and the manner of our death are appointed. No man can evade his doom. Till the fixed period arrive, he is immortal, to whatever dangers he may be exposed; when it comes, all the precautions of wisdom

and the contrivances of art cannot save him. "The days of man are determined, the number of his months is with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass." "All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come." "Thou prevailest for ever against him, and he passeth; thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away."* These pious reflections of Job upon the closing scene of life, will appear to be well founded when we reflect that, as the death of every man takes place in consequence of the original sentence pronounced upon us at the fall, it must be considered as inflicted by the hand of our Maker, in the character of a righteous Judge. It is no objection, that some men are said not to live half their days, and others to have their lives prolonged; because the meaning obviously is, that, in the one case, they die sooner than others of the same standing, or sooner than might have been reckoned upon from the strength of their constitution, by the effects of intemperance or by some natural cause; and that, in the other, they survive diseases which threatened to be fatal, and reach a good old age. In both cases the ultimate cause is the will of God, who wounds and heals, who kills and makes alive.

Providence is concerned in all the events of our life. Man has been said to be the artificer of his own fortune; and the saying is founded upon the influence which his conduct is frequently observed to have upon his temporal condition; but it is more worthy of a Heathen or an Atheist, than of a believer in the Scriptures, which declare, that our lot is ordered by the Lord. We find, indeed, that certain actions are commonly followed by certain consequences; and it is right that it should be so, because we should otherwise be like a ship in the wide ocean without a compass, and should have no motive to act in one way rather than in another. This regularity is so far from invalidating the argument for the divine interference in human affairs, that it confirms it, like the order maintained in the material system. But, in human affairs, order does not prevail with equal steadiness. There are frequent deviations from it, which compel us to acknowledge, somewhat in the same way as miracles do, the controlling power of God. "The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong."† In many cases, industry is frustrated of its reward, and the plans of wisdom prove abortive. Worldly wealth is apportioned according to no fixed law with which we are acquainted, and falls to the share of the weak as well as the worthless, while men of superior talent contend for it in vain. The same remark may be applied to earthly honours; and hence, in the language of worldly men, temporal blessings are called the gifts of fortune, to intimate that in appearance they are distributed blindly, and without any regard to merit. But these things are disposed by the sovereign will of God. "The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the Maker of them all."‡ "Promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge; he putteth down one, and setteth up another."§

Here I would remark that, although the terms, fortune and chance, are frequently used, they are exceedingly improper, unless they are intended merely to express our ignorance of the causes of events. No rational being, who allows himself to reflect, can suppose that any thing takes place without a cause. As every motion of matter is the effect of impulse, so every action of intelligent creatures is the effect of some motive, or of some previous state of the mind. The turning up of a particular side of a die, is as certainly the result of the laws of nature, as the fall of a heavy body to the earth; and our most careless and unpremeditated actions are as certainly the consequence of thought and volition, as the proceedings which are founded on mature deliberation. But as we cannot trace the motions of the die, we say that it exhibits a certain number by chance; and to chance we ascribe our own actions, when the thoughts

* Job xiv. 5, 14, 20.

† Eccl. ix. 11.

‡ Prov. xxii. 2.

§ Ps. lxxv. 6

which led to them passed so rapidly and lightly through our mind as to leave no impression behind them. By chance, we went to a particular place; by chance, we met with a particular person. But there was no chance in the case; for, if we could recal the previous train of thought which is irrecoverably gone, we should find, that our going to the place was as natural as the motion of a ship in a given direction, by the force of the tide or of the wind, and that all the consequences are so many links in a chain of causes and effects. Chance, indeed, is impossible under the government of God; unless we should suppose his government to be partial or imperfect, and that there are some events to which its power does not extend. Nothing seems to be more a matter of chance than the decision of a lot; yet the Scripture says, “the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.”* An arrow shot at random may fall to the ground, or may kill one man as well as another; but in the case of Ahab, it had received a commission, and pierced the bosom of the impious and devoted monarch.† If then, we will speak of chance, let us affix to the term an idea consonant to reason and religion, and let it express solely our ignorance of the causes of events.

With regard to the particulars now mentioned, every person will readily assent to them, as soon as they are accurately and clearly stated. A part of the subject which remains, namely, the divine government of the actions of men, is more difficult, because it involves the question respecting the consistency of the agency of the Creator with the liberty of his creatures. The general fact, that he is concerned in their actions, is manifest from their absolute dependence upon him, in whom they live, and move, and have their being, and from many declarations of Scripture. “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water; he turneth it whithersoever he will;”‡ and the same thing may surely be said of the subject of kings.

That his Providence is concerned in the good actions of men, will not be denied. Their goodness may seem to justify his interference; and the assistance which he gives will be deemed worthy of the purity and benevolence of his character. It will be readily acknowledged that he excites men to good actions; that he presents to them proper objects and proper motives; that he strengthens their faculties; that he imparts an agreeable feeling to their minds, while they are engaged in them; that he encourages them to persevere amidst difficulties and obstacles; and that he enables them, in many instances at least, to accomplish what they intend. The Scripture asserts, “that God works in us, both to will and to do of his good pleasure,”§ and on this ground calls upon us to be thankful and humble. Against the doctrine of efficacious grace, which is plainly taught in this, and many other passages of Scripture, the common objection is, that it leaves nothing to the human will but a simple concurrence with the motions of grace; and consequently, takes away its power of choosing or refusing, according to its own determination. Without entering into this controversy at present, I observe, that the influence which God is conceived to exert in good actions, is, in some respects, analogous to that which one man exerts upon another, without being suspected of at all intrenching upon his liberty. If one man excite another to a good action; if he lay before him strong inducements to engage in the performance of it; if he strengthen his faculties by culture and exhortation: if he give him every possible assistance, and endeavour to make his duty agreeable to him, we never doubt, when the latter complies, that the action is his own, and that all its merit is imputable to him, although strictly it did not originate with himself, and he perhaps would not have thought of it, unless the former had been his monitor and counsellor. We never dream that he is less free in this, than in any other action which he spontaneously performed, because in whatever way his consent

* Prov. xvi. 33. † 1 Kings xxii. 2 Chron. xviii. ‡ Prov. xxi. 1 § Phil. ii. 13.

was obtained, he did consent, and the action was perfectly voluntary. There is no difference between the Divine agency upon men, and the agency of one man upon another, except that God is conceived to exert immediately some power upon the minds of his creatures, which one creature cannot exert upon another. Whether this power is any infringement of their liberty, we cannot determine by abstract reasoning, because we are ignorant of its nature and operation. The question must be decided by experience, which assures those who are the subjects of this influence, that they retain perfect freedom of choice, and by Scripture, which declares that God makes them willing in the day of his power. It is certain, that its operation is in strict accordance with the nature of man; that it does not compel, but inclines him; that it takes away nothing which is essential to moral responsibility, because, whenever choice is exercised, a man is accountable. The concern of Providence in good actions will be admitted by all, but those who, carrying their notions of liberty to an extravagant height, would exempt the human mind from the government of God, and constitute man an independent sovereign, who sways the sceptre of his will without control.

The concern of Providence in the sinful actions of creatures cannot be so satisfactorily explained, because it is difficult to ascertain how far the Divine agency may proceed, without having any part in the sinfulness of the action. The followers of Manes or Manicheus solved the difficulty by maintaining, after the ancient Persians, two principles, the one good and the other evil; and some individuals and sects have not hesitated to affirm, that God is the Author of sin. These impious errors we indignantly reject; but while we speak of them with abhorrence, let us beware lest, in attempting to explain the subject before us, we unwittingly fall into them, or say any thing which may imply, that our sins are chargeable upon God.

First, God permits sinful actions: "My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up to their own hearts' lusts: and they walked in their own counsels."* "In times past, he suffered all nations to walk in their own ways;† that is, to practise idolatry, and to live in those sins with which the heathens were polluted. The permission of sinful actions does not import that he approves of them; for, as he is infinitely holy, sin must always be the object of his abhorrence; and accordingly, we find him testifying against the sins into which he permits men to fall, denouncing his threatenings against them, and actually punishing the sinners. Nor is permission to be considered as an inactive sufferance of events to take place, without knowing them beforehand, or without being able to hinder them. Either of these suppositions is unworthy of God; the one impeaches his omniscience, and the other his omnipotence. As things future are known to him, as well as things present, and as he declares the end from the beginning, so he is able, in many ways, to prevent creatures from acting. He can influence their thoughts and volitions; he can withhold opportunities; he can deprive them of ability; he can place obstacles before them, which it is not possible to surmount. Hence we may perceive what is implied in the permission of sinful actions. God does nothing to prevent them, except that he testifies against them by conscience, and by his word, which is full of dissuasions from sin and of considerations which have a moral tendency to restrain men from committing it. He does not keep them out of the way of temptation; he does not take away the means of effecting their purposes; he does not, by any influence upon their minds, repress their desires and inclinations; he does not represent to them, in a strong and efficacious manner, the wickedness of their conduct. or terrify them with an apprehension of the consequences; he does not employ other men to oppose them; he does not, as he could do, change their

* Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12.

† Acts xiv. 16.

hearts, and turn them to the love and practice of holiness. It follows that, as they are left to themselves, in circumstances which afford full scope for the exercise of their natural dispositions, the sinful actions which God has permitted do not fail to take place. They are not in the number of contingencies, or of things which may, or may not happen: there is a certainty of the event, without which it could not be the object of the Divine foreknowledge. It has been said, that the permission of sinful actions is so far from being merely an inactive sufferance of them, that it implies a positive act of his will, in as much as he wills to permit sin for ends worthy of himself. And here this distinction is made, that God does not will sin considered in itself, but the permission of sin, because evil itself cannot be the object of his will, but he must always will what is good. If sin is said to be the means of manifesting the Divine glory, it does not follow that God, who wills the end, must also will the mean considered in itself. Sin is in this case called a mean, not causally or effectively, but materially and objectively, as it furnishes an occasion of glorifying God. It is a mean, not in itself, for its natural tendency is to dishonour him, but by accident, or in consequence of his wisdom, which brings good out of evil. He who wills the end, wills also the means, but not always with the same kind of will; for, if the means are of a different nature from the end, he may will the latter effectively because it is good, but the former only permissively because they are evil; the object of his will being not properly the means themselves, but the use of them. I know not whether you have clearly apprehended this distinction, nor am I sure that it will throw much light upon the subject; but I have mentioned it, because it has been considered as important by some theological writers.

Secondly, He limits sinful actions; for, we are not to suppose that, when he permits men to sin, or leaves them to themselves, he exempts them entirely from his control. Such a supposition would be inconsistent with the dependent condition of creatures, and with the character of God as the Governor of the world. They are at all times under his superintendence, and subject to such restraints as it may seem proper to his wisdom to impose. Were the elements let loose, and suffered to exert all their fury, to mingle and conflict with unbridled rage, the earth would exhibit a scene of confusion and devastation, and the whole human race would be swept away in one general ruin. Similar would be the effect, if the appetites and passions, emancipated from physical and moral restraints, should display all their violence and malignity. If ambition, and avarice, and lust, and cruelty, and oppression, knew no bounds, the earth, where so much peace and comfort are enjoyed, would be transformed into the image of hell; with this difference, that its inhabitants, being mortal, would gradually melt away by the calamities which they mutually inflicted, and the race would become finally extinct. The designs of the Almighty could not be carried on without the application of checks and restraints; they would be embarrassed and defeated by the wayward movements of the wicked, driven hither and thither by the wild and tumultuary fluctuations of their passions. If the revengeful man had always an opportunity to gratify his resentment, how many lives would be lost, the preservation of which is necessary, not only for the comfort and prosperity of families, but for the continuation of the succession in a particular line, and for other important purposes, which the individuals thus preserved are appointed to accomplish! If despotic power were suffered to gather strength, and to extend its sway according to its lawless wish, the most flourishing regions of the earth would, in the progress of time, be characterized by the same stagnation of the human mind, the same decline of agriculture and the arts, the same degradation and consumption of the human species, which are seen in the fine countries that groan under the iron yoke of the Turkish dominion. Had persecutors been able to carry into

full effect their plans of destruction, the church of Christ must have long since existed only on the bloody page which recorded the fate of its martyrs. But Providence opposed various obstacles to the rage of the Heathen emperors in the early ages, and to the still more diabolical procedure of Antichrist and his followers; so that, although thousands and tens of thousands were the victims of their unhallowed power, a remnant was always saved, the succession of the friends of truth was secured; and the prediction of our Saviour was fulfilled, that "the gates of hell should not prevail" against his church.* "The remainder of the wrath of men thou restrainest." God says to the wicked, as to the waves of the sea, "Hitherto shall ye come, and no further." Their strength or courage fails; difficulties arise which deter them; or their passions are kept at bay by the opposing passions of others; or they change their intentions, and of their own accord abandon their work before it is finished. Such means are always at the command of Providence; and there is still another way in which it can set bounds to the wickedness of men, by depriving them, through disease or a sudden stroke, of bodily or mental ability, so that they can sin no more; or by cutting them off in the midst of their projects, like Herod the persecutor, who was smitten by an angel, and perished in a miserable manner.

Thirdly, He over-rules sinful actions, so as to accomplish great and good designs by them; and thus he makes the wrath of man praise him. The envy of the sons of Jacob against their brother Joseph, which prompted them to sell him into Egypt, was the occasion of his elevation to the highest authority in that kingdom; in consequence of which he saved alive his father and his family, in a famine which afterwards took place. "As for you," he said to them, "ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring it to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."† The reproach and persecution of the ungodly, which cause much disquiet and distress to the people of God, are made the means of exercising and strengthening their graces, and of fitting them more and more for a state of perfection. God "hastens them" in this and in other ways, "that they may be partakers of his holiness;"‡ and "their afflictions work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."§ The introduction of sin into the world, which was followed by the fall and all its dreadful consequences, has given rise to the brightest manifestation of the glory of God, and the highest exercise of his benevolence, in the mediation of Christ, and the salvation of the guilty through his blood. But although God turns evil to good, it by no means follows that men may do evil that good may come. His procedure is like that of a skilful physician, who, finding poison in existence, so proportions and mixes it with other ingredients, that it proves medicinal; while they are like the man, who should first make a poison, and then administer it with a rash and presumptuous hand. The natural tendency of sin is only to evil; and under the management of creatures, nothing but evil will result from it. No man, therefore, should commit sin with a view to good, not only because the mean which he employs is absolutely forbidden, but because it is calculated to produce exactly the reverse of what he professes to aim at. The end is beyond his reach; the process by which good is deduced from evil, can be carried on only by infinite wisdom and almighty power. God finding sin in the world, renders it subservient to the purposes of his moral administration; but this does not justify our first parents, who introduced it, or those who continue to practise it, any more than it would excuse a man who had violated the laws of society, that his crime had somehow contributed, through dextrous management, to promote the public good.

Thus we have seen, that God permits the sinful actions of his creatures: that he limits them; and that he over-rules them. But we are not yet done

* Matt. xvi. 18.

† Gen. i. 20.

‡ Heb. xii. 10.

§ 2 Cor. iv. 17.

with this important and mysterious subject. The most difficult part remains—the physical agency of God in sinful actions. We have endeavoured to shew, that creatures are absolutely dependent upon God, and that, as he upholds them in existence, so it is by his secret influence that they are enabled to exert the faculties with which they are endowed. It seems to follow from this position, that he is the first cause of all their operations; and, consequently, that whether they do good or evil, they cannot act till they are first acted upon by him. Some give this explanation of the matter, that, although God preserves his creatures and their faculties, by the same power which was exerted in creating them, yet he leaves to them the right or wrong use of those faculties, that they may be the proper subjects of praise and blame, reward and punishment; and that thus their sins are imputable to themselves alone. It is owing to Providence that men exist, and are possessed of certain powers; but, that they use them improperly is owing to themselves, since God gave them liberty of will; and therefore their sins are not chargeable upon him. This view of the subject, which is adopted by many modern Divines, is as ancient at least as the days of Origen. God, he says, has made us living creatures, and furnished us with the power of moving our members, our hands and our feet. We ought not however, to say, that we have from God the specific motion to strike or kill another, or to take away his property; but only that we have received the general principle of motion, which we use to good or bad purposes, as we please. In like manner, we have received from God the general power of willing and acting, as we are living creatures; but it depends upon ourselves alone to will and to do good or evil.

It is an objection against this opinion, that it is inconsistent with what has been already proved respecting the absolute dependence of all creatures upon the Creator. It asserts, indeed, their dependence upon him for their being and faculties; but it plainly exempts their actions from his control. The matter is explained in a different manner by Calvinistic Divines, who maintain, in common with many of the Schoolmen, a Divine concourse, by which they mean, not only that God assists his creatures, but also that he excites as well as enables them to act. It is distinguished into *prævius vel prædeterminans*, previous or predetermining, and *simultaneus vel concomitans concursus*, simultaneous or concomitant concurrence. The former is that act of God, by which he influences causes and principles; excites his rational creatures, of whom we are now speaking, moves them to act, and to do one thing rather than another. It is sometimes called *præcursor*, which seems to be a more proper term for expressing the idea than *concursum*. The latter is the continued influence of the Deity upon them, by which they are enabled to perform the action to which they have been excited; and this continued influence is maintained, to preserve the dependence of creatures upon the First Cause. If, like a ball which, being impelled in a particular direction, moves without receiving any new impulse from the hand, they proceed to perform the action without his continued agency upon them, the effect could be attributed to God only in part, and remotely, and consequently he would not be its immediate and principal cause. The chief difficulty is in relation to the former *concursum prædeterminans*; and accordingly, even Calvinists have been divided in their sentiments, some admitting previous concurrence only to good works, and simultaneous concurrence in reference to works of a different character; while others admit previous concurrence in works of every kind, that the doctrine of Providence may be properly explained.

The difficulty which must here present itself to every person of reflection, is, that this previous concurrence seems to make God the author of sin; for if a rational creature performs a sinful action, and performs it in consequence of a divine influence upon him, by which he was excited to it, the action may be

fairly traced back to God as the prime mover, and its guilt must be charged upon him. *Causa causæ est etiam causa causati*; the cause of a cause, say the Schoolmen, is also the cause of its effect. To remove this difficulty, it has been said, that although the divine *præcursor* extends to bad as well as to good actions, it does not make God the author of sin, because the previous concurrence relates to actions considered materially and entitatively, but not morally;—such is the language of the schools;—that is, it relates to the substance of the act, but not to its pravity. It is not new to view an action in two different lights, physically and morally; nor that the same action should have two different causes. The soul, for example, moves the body, by acting, we may presume, upon the brain. If a particular person be lame, his halting gait is not owing to the action of the soul upon the brain, and through the nerves upon the muscles, but to the natural or accidental defect in his limb. If a man play upon a musical instrument, the impulse which he gives to the strings is the cause of the sound, but not of the discord which is produced by their not being properly stretched. If a magistrate orders a criminal to be executed, he is the cause of his death, but not of the malevolence which the man may feel, who is employed in carrying the sentence of the law into effect. It is no objection, that as pravity is necessarily and inseparably annexed to the action, he who is the cause of the action, seems to be the cause of its pravity, because the will of the creature is no otherwise the moral cause of the evil, than as it is the material cause of the action, with which moral evil is necessarily connected. But this statement of the concern of the will in moral evil is false, for the will, as a physical agent, is the physical cause of the action, but as a moral agent, is the cause of its sinfulness, not simply by performing the action, but by performing such an action as is contrary to the law to which the person is subject. The cause that moral evil is ascribed to a man's will, is not, that as a physical agent it performs a physical action, but that as a moral agent it performs the action forbidden by the law, which the man is bound to obey. The moral evil does not arise from the action considered as a natural action, but from the defect or corruption of the will.

Two things ought to be carefully distinguished, an action and its quality. The action is from God: its quality, if at least it be evil, is from man. To render the point still clearer, Theologians have maintained that actions, abstractly considered, are neither good nor bad, but become such according to circumstances; volitions are mere natural acts of an intelligent being, and are in themselves indifferent; unless we should say that they are good in the metaphysical sense of the term, according to which, goodness is predicated of simple existence, and the modes of existence. In this view, the agency of God in causing volitions and actions subsequent to them, is not more inconsistent with the purity of his nature than his agency in causing the motions and modifications of matter. In both cases something is produced; but as it is invested with no quality, but is considered as a simple existence, it is not the proper object of a moral judgment. I know not how far you have apprehended these distinctions, nor what satisfaction they have communicated to your minds on this intricate and perplexing subject. The design of them is to maintain on the one hand, the dependence of creatures upon their Maker, and, on the other, to vindicate him from the suspicion of being the Author of sin. It is certain that, when discussing this subject, we walk in a very narrow and a very obscure path, and are in constant danger of stepping aside to the right hand or to the left. Whether it be possible to pursue it without deviating, is questionable; and those who have made the trial with the most humility, will be the least disposed to boast of their success.

A little acuteness is sufficient to invent distinctions, by which a difficulty may be evaded, and an opponent may be silenced, if not convinced; but it is

not so easy on a subject so obscure and embarrassed, to give full satisfaction to a dispassionate, inquiring, and reflecting mind. A man may surely be pardoned, or at least not severely censured, if, after having perused the arguments of Scholastic Divines, he should acknowledge himself to be at a loss to understand how God, who is infinitely holy, can by an immediate influence excite rational creatures to actions, which, whatever they may be in themselves, are and must be sinful as performed by them who are corrupted in all their faculties. He may be excused also, if he should be tempted to think, that a physical act, abstracted from all circumstances, which has been barbarously called the substrate matter of sin, is a metaphysical conceit, an airy nothing without a local habitation. He may be wrong in this opinion; but the subject is so abstruse, and so subtle, that his mistake is entitled to indulgence. An intention to take away life, it is said, is indifferent in itself, and is good or bad according to circumstances. God therefore may excite this intention, without doing any thing impure or unjust. But I would ask, is it a simple intention to take away life, without the specification of an object, which is excited in the mind of a murderer? Does such an abstract intention exist *in rerum natura*? And if it did exist, would it be innocent? A private man can never innocently form the general design to take away life, nor indeed can any man, either private or public. The general intention to take away life is necessarily criminal; it is an intention to do what, abstractly considered, no creature has a right to do; it becomes lawful only when the object is specified and is in particular circumstances. Here, I presume, is a case, and others might be mentioned, which demonstrates the falsity of the maxim, that actions and volitions are indifferent in themselves, and become good or bad by their circumstances. I should like to hear, from some person who is master of the subject, how God could, without being the author of sin, excite a man to blaspheme his name. Some of the distinctions which would be resorted to on this occasion, may be conceived; but it would be a hard task to digest them.

My design in these observations is, not to controvert the doctrine of Calvinistic Divines, but to convince you, that this is a subject too high for our faculties. We know, that God is concerned in all the actions of his creatures; that nothing takes place without his permission; that men are dependent upon him, and cannot move, or breathe, or think without his assistance. But the exact limit between the actions of the Creator and the actions of his rational creatures, we cannot define. Let us be content with what we know, and make a practical improvement of it. Let us adore that mighty Being who rules over all. Let us implore his direction and aid; and let us remember that, whatever theories speculative men may adopt, conscience and Scripture, and reason declare, that we are accountable creatures; and that he who is the constant witness of our conduct, will hereafter sit in judgment upon us and reward or punish us according to our works.

LECTURE XLIII.

ON PROVIDENCE.

Examination of the Language of Scripture respecting the Agency of God in Sinful Actions—God's Peculiar or Gracious Providence—Objections to the Doctrine of Providence considered.

IN the two preceding lectures, I laid before you the proofs of a Providence, and its objects. In general it is the divine government of all created things; but it was obviously proper to consider it chiefly in relation to ourselves. After shewing that its care extends to all the events and circumstances of our life, I entered more fully into the inquiry, how far it is concerned in human actions. With respect to good actions, there can be no hesitation in admitting, that it both assists and excites us; but there is great difficulty in settling the extent of its influence in respect to such as are sinful. I stated to you the opinion of Calvinistic divines on this intricate subject, and pointed out the distinctions, by which they endeavoured to prove, that, while God excites to actions which are sinful, and assists in the performance of them, he is not the author of sin. Objections, as I hinted, may be brought against those distinctions; but they have been deemed satisfactory by many persons of judgment and learning, or at least they have been proposed as the best which occurred to them, and as furnishing the only solution of the difficulty.

Let us not be surprised, that we cannot throw such light upon this and many other points, as shall dispel every shade of obscurity. Perfect knowledge is not given to man, the range of whose faculties is very confined, and who often encounters moral as well as physical impediments in the investigation of truth. It seems to have been the will of his Creator, that he should be furnished with as much knowledge as should suffice to direct him in the path of duty, and in the way to eternal life; but not with the means of gratifying his curiosity, and disclosing all the arcana of the universe. But he is not content with this (as he is apt to think) scanty allotment. The desire which led to so fatal an issue in the case of our first parents, is still prevalent, and operates with great power on their descendants—the desire “to be as Gods, knowing good and evil.” There is no subject which we do not wish to comprehend, and we are unhappy and restless, as long as there is any one thing in nature or in grace, which we are unable to explain. There is no doubt that, in many instances, this impatience has led not a few persons to push their speculations too far, forgetting their incompetence, and ceasing to regard with becoming reverence the sacred barriers which the will of God has opposed to their progress.

There are two ways in which we may go wrong; we may assume false principles as the foundation of our argument, and we may reason unfairly from true principles. In the present case, the ground on which we proceed seems to be good—that, as creatures are absolutely dependent upon God, they cannot think, and will, and move, without him; but, as we are unable to define with exactness the mode and degree of his operations upon them, we are not sure of all the consequences which we may draw from the principle. There is a danger of ascribing too much or too little to creatures; of representing them, on the one hand, as independent of God, and sovereign lords of their actions, or, on the other, of turning them into machines, which have as little concern in their own movements as a clock or a steam engine, and consequently of laying all the responsibility upon God. None of us will pretend to tell how God

acts upon inanimate matter, so as to move it according to the laws of gravitation and attraction; and none of us should pretend to tell how he acts upon spiritual beings. It would be wise to confess our ignorance, and to rest in the general acknowledgment that he is the First Cause, without entering into a minute explanation.

I now proceed to consider some passages of Scripture, in which the agency of God in sinful actions is mentioned.

I begin with an expression which is used on several occasions, particularly by the Apostle Paul, who says concerning the vessels of wrath, that "whom he will, God hardeneth;"* and by Moses, who informs us more than once, "that the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh." There is something awful and startling in these words, and they seem to import an agency on the part of God, which is at variance with his acknowledged holiness, and justice, and goodness. With respect to Pharaoh, we may remark, that the command to let the Israelites go, was one with which he could not be supposed to be ready to comply, because it interfered with the sovereign authority which he claimed in his own dominions, would deprive him of a great proportion of his subjects, whose labours were profitable to the state, and was delivered by Moses, a man whom he did not know, in the name of *JEHOVAH*, whom he did not acknowledge as God; that when the commission of Moses was confirmed by miracles, they were at first such as were imitated by the Egyptian magicians, and therefore seemed to indicate no superior power, to which he was bound to submit, or of which he had reason to be afraid; that when other miracles were wrought which exceeded the power of the magicians, their effects were soon removed, so that Pharaoh would think that the danger was past, and probably flatter himself that each judgment would be the last; that when he gave his consent that the people should go into the wilderness to sacrifice to their God, Moses rejected the grant, unless they were permitted to take their flocks and herds along with them; that the destruction of the first-born, by which he was compelled to yield, must have left a strong feeling of resentment and revenge in his bosom; and, finally, that the situation of the Israelites, who were entangled in the wilderness, having the sea in front, and the mountains on either hand, appeared to present a favourable opportunity of punishing them for all the calamities which they had brought upon his country, and of retaining them under his yoke. All these events were ordered by the Providence of God; but, in not one of them did he exert any direct or immediate influence upon the mind of Pharaoh, either to infuse wickedness into it, or to confirm his proud and rebellious disposition. Hence it is plain, that when God is said to have hardened his heart, the expression must be understood in a qualified sense. He hardened it, not by any positive act, but by a series of dispensations, from which, being previously corrupt, it took occasion to persist in disobeying his commands. God placed him in certain circumstances, and left him to act according to his natural inclinations.

In a similar manner we must explain the expression when it is used concerning other sinners. God does not create wicked dispositions in their hearts, but he does not restrain by his Providence or his grace, those which already exist. He does not keep them out of the way of temptation; but, as they go on heedlessly, he permits them to encounter and to fall over stumbling-blocks. He does not hinder Satan, and other men like themselves, from laying snares for them, and soliciting them to sin. He withholds his grace, which would have converted them, but which he was under no obligation to communicate; and he even removes the checks which he had put upon them, because they submitted to them with impatience and murmuring, and discovered an eager desire to get rid of them. The consequence is, that their hearts are hardened,

* Rom. ix. 18.

that their wickedness increases, and grows into a confirmed habit; but it is evident that the hardening of their hearts is their own work, and is ascribed to God only indirectly. He does not impel them to commit sin, nor would his dispensations of themselves lead them to it; that is, unless there were a previous inclination or tendency to it. He does not prevent them from committing sin; but he cannot on this account be called the author of it, unless it could be proved that he is under an obligation to impart effectual grace to all men, without distinction.

In like manner, we must explain those passages in which God is said to blind the eyes, or the minds of men. What has been already said, is obviously applicable to them; and indeed although the expressions are different, the subject to which they relate is the same. The same effect is pointed out by the hardening of the heart; the blinding of the eyes: the giving of men over to a reprobate mind; the delivering of them up to their own lusts, to walk in their own counsels. Nothing more is intended, than that God withholds his grace from them, leaves them under the power of corrupt inclinations, and does not prevent them from being exposed to temptation. With respect to the blinding of the mind, it is worthy of attention, that while at one time it is represented as the act of God, it is attributed at another to the agency of Satan. "The god of this world," says Paul, "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 into them."* Now, as both representations must be true, and God and Satan must both be concerned in the effect, it seems to be the proper way of reconciling them, to suppose, that while God withholds his Spirit, who would illuminate their minds, he permits Satan to use his arts to deceive them. Although we are ignorant of the mode in which Satan acts upon the mind, yet we are certain, from the testimony of Scripture, that he possesses the means of strengthening its prejudices, and stirring up its passions in opposition to the truth. But there is nothing positive in the part which God takes in this matter, except that his Providence may so order the circumstances of sinners, that, being already averse to spiritual things, they shall hence find an occasion of being confirmed in their dislike. He does not blind them by weakening or confounding their understandings, or by suggesting objections against the gospel; these come from themselves, or from the secret insinuations of the spirit of error and falsehood.

When God is said to tempt man, there is no difficulty, because the word may be used in a good, or in a bad sense. It is used in a good sense, when the Scripture says, that "God did tempt Abraham;"† for the meaning is, that by commanding him to offer in sacrifice his only son, upon whose life the performance of the promises depended, he made trial of his faith, and gave him an opportunity of manifesting it, to the glory of Divine grace and his own honour, as well as for an example to succeeding generations. It is used in a bad sense when it expresses the methods employed to entice men to sin; and to apply it to God in this sense, would be blasphemy: "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."‡

What shall we make of the following words? "If the prophet be deceived, when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet."§ After the remarks already made, we cannot suppose that, strong as this language is, it imports that God had actually deceived him; but it must be understood to mean, that, if the idolatrous Jews, who are mentioned in the context, had consulted a person calling himself a prophet, and he, fancying himself to be what he pretended, and imposed upon by his own imagination, had delivered a prediction which proved to be false, God was to be considered as having a right

* 2 Cor. iv. 4.

† Gen. xxii. 1.

‡ James i. 13.

§ Ezek. xiv. 9

eous hand in this transaction, and making use of the presumption of this man to punish his rebellious people. God had deceived him, because he had permitted him to be the dupe of his own pretensions, and refused to impart to him a true revelation, as he had formerly done to Balaam for a particular purpose.

But we hear similar language employed by a true prophet with respect to himself: "O Lord," said Jeremiah, "thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived."* To evade the difficulty, the words have been rendered, "Thou hast allured me, and I was allured." 'It was thou who didst persuade me to undertake the prophetic office; it was by thy powerful influence upon my mind, that my reluctance was overcome, and I consented to engage in it, notwithstanding the opposition and danger which I foresaw as the consequence of doing my duty.' Without changing the translation, the words may be explained hypothetically. 'If I have been deceived, as my enemies allege, who do not acknowledge me to be a true prophet, I have been deceived by thee, by whom I was called to the office.' But the latter being impossible, the former was not true; and consequently, the charges against Jeremiah as if he had spoken lies, terminated upon God who had sent him. If neither of these views of the words should be deemed satisfactory, we may set them down to the account of human infirmity. Perhaps they were uttered by Jeremiah, when his mind was ruffled by the contradiction and reproaches of his countrymen; and if this is the true state of the case, whatever is their meaning, he alone is answerable for it. They are a rash and unfounded charge against God, similar to that which was made by that peevish and irritable prophet Jonah, who presumed to say, in answer to the question of his Maker, "Doest thou well to be angry?—I do well to be angry, even unto death."†

It is easy to apply these observations to other passages which speak of the agency of God in the sinful actions of men, as when he threatened "to take David's wives, and give them to his neighbour, who should lie with them in the sight of the sun,"‡ and when he is said to have "bidden Shimei curse him,"§ "to have put a lying spirit into the mouths of Ahab's prophets,"|| and "to have turned the hearts of the Egyptians to hate his people, and to deal subtilly with his servants."¶ Some allowance should be made for the oriental style, which admits a boldness of expression, not so suitable to the more correct and philosophical languages of the west. When transferred into our language without qualification, it conveys ideas different from those which were intended by the original writers. Hence, I cannot but think that those Divines have greatly erred, who imagined that Scripture authorized them to make use of the strongest and harshest terms in speaking of this mysterious subject. It would have been wise, since nothing is more certain than that God is not the author of sin, to have carefully avoided every term which seemed to lead to this impious conclusion. All the passages which have been quoted, and others of a similar nature, may be explained by admitting, that God permits sin, and upholds sinful creatures in the exercise of their faculties. This is surely safer, and more consonant to our conceptions of his character, than to say with Calvin, that the devil and wicked men act by his command, and that they are so completely in his power, that he compels them to act.

I have considered the objects of Providence, and have shewn that it extends its care to all created beings, and in particular, is concerned in the actions of intelligent creatures. Before leaving the subject, it will be proper to say a few words with respect to what has been called God's peculiar, or more accurately perhaps, his gracious providence, the objects of which are his own people. It may be observed in general, that it implies a difference, not so much in its acts

* Jer. xx. 7.

§ 2 Sam. xvi. 11.

† Jonah iv. 4, 9.

|| 1 Kings xxii. 23.

‡ 2 Sam. xii. 11.

¶ Ps. cv. 25.

towards them, as in its design. It is not miraculous; it does not suspend the laws of nature in favour of its objects, although it occasionally did so in former times; it does not consist in visible interpositions. I acknowledge that remarkable things do sometimes take place in the experience of the righteous, which fully satisfy them that they have been wrought by the hands of their heavenly Father; but still they are not deviations from the laws of nature, so far as we are acquainted with them. I make this limitation, because, although we have ascertained the laws by which the material system is governed, we are, in a great measure, ignorant of the laws of the spiritual world. Hence our views of Providence are imperfect, because many of its operations are carried on, not only by the instrumentality of the thoughts and volitions of men, but also by the agency of invisible beings. To them the care of the righteous is entrusted, and they are said "to minister to them," "to encamp about them," "to bear them up in their hands, lest they should dash their foot against a stone." Yet, when we look at the persons who are thus favoured, we see that they are placed in the same external circumstances with other men, and that similar events occur in the course of their and other men's lives. They are rich or poor; they are sick or in health; they meet with successes and disappointments; they have their sorrows and their comforts; but these things are ordered by unerring wisdom, and are rendered subservient to their most important interests. They mortify their sinful inclinations, exercise their graces, excite them to duty, and train them up in a course of progressive holiness, to eternal life. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are the called according to his purpose."* In short, this department of Providence is a uniform dispensation of love. The glory of God in the salvation of his people is its ultimate end, to which, the evils of life as well as its good things, the opposition of adversaries as well as the co-operation of friends, contribute by a mysterious process. It might be illustrated by an appeal to the Scriptures, which are a history of Providence in relation to the world at large, but particularly of its procedure towards the Church and its genuine members. "All the saints are in the hand of God," and "he keeps them as the apple of his eye."

I proceed, in the last place, to take notice of the objections against the doctrine of Providence. It is not surprising that, in a mind disposed to cavil, objections should occur, as the subject is manifestly too extensive and complicated to be fully understood. We may see a part of the scheme, but cannot comprehend the whole. Now, as it may happen with respect to the plans of men, of which we have an imperfect idea on account of their intricacy and extent, that they shall appear to us defective or confused, although they have been arranged with consummate wisdom; much more may we be tempted to draw this conclusion concerning the mighty plan, which embraces the affairs of the visible and the invisible world, and reaches from the beginning to the end of time. "Lo, these are parts of his ways; but how little a portion is heard of him! but the thunder of his power who can understand?"† There are difficulties in many subjects, which are not considered as sufficient to make us doubt or disbelieve if the evidence in their favour preponderates. It would not be consistent with the character of rational creatures to give our assent without evidence; but we must often be content with partial evidence, by which I mean, evidence that may be justly considered as amounting to a proof, although it does not fully remove every objection. In such a case, instead of setting the evidence aside on account of the difficulties, we should make the difficulties yield to the evidence. In this manner we proceed in many of the most important affairs of life; and there is no reason why we should not pursue the same method in matters of religion.

* Rom. viii. 28.

† Job xxvi. 14.

Some of the most formidable objections against the doctrine of Providence, have been anticipated; namely, those which are founded on the existence of moral evil, the agency of God in the sinful actions of men, and its supposed incompatibility with human liberty. Of these I have attempted to give a solution, and shall not, therefore, consider them again. Let us direct our attention to other objections.

The first objection which I shall mention, would not occur to any person who entertained a worthy idea of God, but has been advanced both in ancient and in modern times. It is, that the doctrine of Providence supposes God to have his attention occupied and distracted with a multitude of cares; of which some are in danger of being neglected, and all are inconsistent with the enjoyment of undisturbed felicity. This was the great argument of the Epicureans; and it may still seem to have force, to those who apply the standard of humanity to the Divine nature. Those who are affected by this objection, must be persons of a very shallow understanding. With regard to the multiplicity of objects about which Providence is conversant, we may reason from analogy. We find that the human mind is capable of attending to a considerable number at once, or in quick succession, and of managing different concerns, although they are of a complicated nature. If we should suppose its powers to be greatly enlarged, to be raised, for example, to an equality with those of angels, we could conceive its sphere of observation and activity to be extended, without in any degree increasing its labour. Now, if we suppose an infinite understanding, which reason and Scripture attribute to the Deity, it must be capable, not only of attending to all the affairs of the world and the universe, but of attending to them without an effort; for the labour which accompanies the exercise of man's intellectual faculties, is the consequence of their imperfection. We must inquire, and compare, and judge; we must pass from one subject to another; and in this way we feel fatigued, whether the feeling arises from mind itself, or from the influence of the body upon it. The knowledge of God being infinite, embraces all things which exist, however obscure and minute; and being intuitive, is as easy to him as to man is a glance of his eye. All created things are before him; they are naked and open in their essences, their properties, their operations, their thoughts and designs. It costs a man no labour, when the sun is shining, to look at the objects on the table at which he is sitting; it costs no more labour to God to know all the creatures and all the events in the universe, because he is intimately present with them all. If it be objected, that Providence implies not only the knowledge, but the care of all things, I answer, that this care is not burdensome to the Deity, because his power is almighty, as his understanding is unlimited. There can be no resistance to almighty power: and its purposes are accomplished without exertion. This is manifest from the idea of infinite power, and is confirmed by the Scriptures, which represent him as performing all his works by his word, that is, with the same ease with which we pronounce a word. "The Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary."* Hear how even a heathen philosopher, Aristotle, has expressed himself on the subject. "What a pilot is to a ship, a charioteer to a chariot, a chief musician to a chorus, the law to a city, a general to an army; all this is God to the universe; but with this difference, that to those persons the management of their respective departments is toilsome and painful, while it costs God neither labour nor pain to govern the universe."

In the second place, it has been objected, that the doctrine of Providence degrades the majesty of God, by representing him as extending his attention and care to objects altogether unworthy of him; to creatures the most insignificant, to a fly, a mite and an animalcule, which the human eye cannot per-

* Isa. xl. 28

ceive without the assistance of a microscope. It is a fact, however, that *such* creatures exist; and it will be acknowledged by every Theist, that they exist by the will of the Creator. If, then, it was worthy of God to give them being, how is it unworthy of him to uphold them? We cannot assign the reason why such creatures were made, because we are ignorant of the purpose which they serve; but the simple fact of their existence is a proof, that there was a sufficient reason why God exerted his power in their production. The objection, therefore, against Providence, founded on their apparent insignificance, arises from the most stupid inattention; for a moment's reflection would convince any ordinary understanding, that the objection, if made at all, should be made not against the care, but against the existence of such creatures; and that, after they have been brought into being, there is not the shadow of an argument from the dignity of the Divine nature, against the continuance of their life. To a man of piety, such creatures would rather furnish matter of admiration and praise. He would extol that Being who has been said to be "*maximus in minimis*," and whose power does certainly astonish us in the least, as in the greatest of his works. In a fly or a mite, or an animalcule, there are muscles, and nerves, and vessels for circulating the blood, and organs of digestion, and organs of sense; and these are assembled in a point indiscernible to the keenest human eye. If meditation on these wonders of Divine skill awaken devout sentiments in any bosom, such creatures have not been made in vain; and what a sublime idea does it give us of the goodness of God, to think that it communicates itself, not only to the angelical hosts, to the rational inhabitants of our globe, and to the lower animals, which daily fall under our observation; but to myriads of living particles, nestling on a leaf, or swimming in a drop of water, or burrowing in a grain of sand! Cold and impious is the heart of that man, in whose eyes it does not exalt the Deity, to conceive of him as the bountiful Parent of innumerable orders of creatures; as the Guardian and Benefactor of the meanest of his offspring; as diffusing his beneficence over the whole extent of creation, and making the extremities of being teem with life and enjoyment! "The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." *

In the third place, it is objected against the doctrine of Providence, that there are many facts which appear to be inconsistent with the wisdom and benevolence of an almighty Ruler of the world, namely, all the physical evils which impair the beauty and happiness of the creation; the barrenness of many places of the earth, the profusion of weeds and noxious plants which it yields, the excesses of heat and cold, of moisture and drought, by which its valuable fruits are destroyed; to which may be added, all the other calamities to which mankind are exposed. It is a common answer to this objection, that the evils complained of, or some of them at least, are the consequences of general laws; and that, although when viewed by themselves, they may seem to impeach the goodness and wisdom of the Deity, yet they cease to appear in this light, when considered as the necessary result of laws, which are the foundation of the regularity of nature, and a source of innumerable blessings to men. This answer, I do not consider as at all satisfactory; for it supposes, that those evils are necessary attendants of the system; that they could not have been avoided; and that, although not the objects of the primary intention of the Deity, they were contemplated by him, and admitted in the formation of his plan. It would seem, that they could not have been excluded; that they were inseparable from the plan which he adopted; and that they were chosen on account of the greater good with which they would be associated. They are not properly a part of the plan, but an imperfection adhering to it,

which could have been avoided only by a different arrangement. They arise from what is good, but in themselves they are pure evils; and being, as we may say, accidental, they promote no particular design, and constitute no part of the moral administration of God.—This answer to the objection leaves it in all its force; for it accounts for the existence of physical evil in a way which does not, in the least degree, dispel our doubts of the wisdom and benevolence of the Creator. Where is his wisdom, if he could not have contrived a system of laws, from which no such consequences should have ensued? And where is his goodness, if, being able to contrive such a system, he did not prefer it? The answer certainly exhibits God too much in the light of a human Artist, who is limited in his means, and has no choice but to employ them, notwithstanding the inconveniences with which they are accompanied. Another method of repelling the objection, is to turn round upon the objectors, and deny that those are properly evils, or at least to shew, that they are ultimately productive of good. Plausible things may be advanced in support of this theory. It may be proved, that in some instances evil leads to good; that volcanic eruptions, for example, prevent earthquakes; tempests purify the atmosphere; the sterility of the soil and the uncertainty of the seasons excite industry, and quicken ingenuity. But it is only to a limited extent that this explanation can be carried; and even as far as it goes, it does not satisfy our minds, but leaves a suspicion of the imperfection of the divine wisdom or goodness, as if the one could not attain its end without the instrumentality of evil, or the other preferred it without necessity. There is a radical error in this method of vindicating Providence. It proceeds upon inattention to the moral character of our species. Those who adopt it, seem to think, that they are called upon to account, in a manner consistent with the goodness of the Deity, for the existence of real or apparent evil, in a world where unmixed happiness might be looked for; that is, in a world of innocent beings. How different is the actual state of mankind, our own experience will inform us. This world is a rebellious province, and is there any reason to be surprised, that there should be some tokens of the displeasure of its Sovereign? The existence of evil is so far from being inconsistent with his goodness, that it tends to illustrate it; since we find there is still goodness exercised with much liberality to creatures, who being sinful, are altogether unworthy of it. But we should remember, that wisdom and goodness are not his only attributes. He is just, and as the Ruler of the world, might display his justice in the punishment of offenders, that the authority of his law may be maintained. Hence it follows, that the evils which are found in the world, instead of disproving the doctrine of Providence, confirm it; in the same manner as the penalties inflicted upon criminals in any part of a kingdom, prove that there the Sovereign exercises his authority. Consider mankind as a rebellious race, and the earth as lying under the curse of the Creator for their sake, and the objection will appear lighter than vanity. Those facts and occurrences, which are supposed to imply a want of benevolence, will instantly be seen to be in exact accordance with moral rectitude; and after all this deduction, there will remain abundant evidence, that “the tender mercies of the Lord are over all his works.”

The last objection which I shall mention, is founded on the afflictions of the righteous, and the prosperity of the wicked. As it is a fact, that vice often triumphs, while virtue is depressed, that the guilty escape with impunity, while the innocent are treated as if they were guilty; a doubt may arise as it has actually arisen, whether God exercises a moral government over mankind. “How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?”* “I have often,” said a heathen, “been at a loss to determine, whether God or

* Ps. lxxiii. 11

chance presides over the lot of men, since the good fall into misfortunes, which overwhelm them; and persons of an opposite character enjoy in their families a brilliant prosperity, contrary to all expectation." On the same ground, arguments and insinuations have been thrown out in modern times, to obscure the evidence, and subvert the authority of religion. With regard to the righteous, I may say that they are imperfect beings, chargeable with many failings and transgressions, which render them worthy of correction. Pure virtue, if it existed upon earth, might expect to have a portion of pure felicity assigned to it; but mixed virtue has no reason to complain, although it should be presented with a cup containing bitter as well as sweet ingredients. I believe that no good man will, in an hour of calm and solemn reflection, make his own condition, however hard it may be, an argument against Providence, because he will readily acknowledge that he is less than the least of God's mercies, and deserves all the evil which has befallen him. I may say further, that happiness is not to be judged of solely or principally by external circumstances; for that although these, if disagreeable, will necessarily cause a deduction, yet it may be compensated by internal satisfaction, flowing from a sense of the divine favour, and the hope of future rest and joy. While the world is pitying an individual, and pronouncing that he is hardly dealt with, he may be elevated above a sense of sorrow, by the strong consolations of religion. Lastly, I may say, that the afflictions of the righteous are so far from disproving the care and goodness of Providence, that they are the surest evidences of its love; because their express design is to purify them from the stain of sin; to prepare them for the reception of blessings to be afterwards bestowed in the present life, and to train them up, by salutary discipline, for a state of perfection. "When you see the virtuous," says Seneca, "groaning with pain, toiling with the sweat of their brows, and struggling with adversity, consider, that God acts from the same principle as we do, when we wish that our children should be modest and discreet, while we leave vile slaves to themselves. The interest which he takes in a good man does not permit that he should live in delights; he tries him, and hardens him for labour, and thus prepares him for himself."

The prosperity of the wicked may be accounted for in various ways. In some instances, God may have a merciful design; for although they often "despise the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads to repentance,"* yet his grace, concurring with his external dispensations, may excite them to consider and glorify their Divine Benefactor, and to consecrate themselves and their possessions to his service. At other times, he may give them prosperity, not on their own account, but for the sake of those who are connected with them, making use of them as channels by which his bounty is communicated to their families, their dependants, their neighbourhood, and their country. Once more, under the specious appearance of prosperity, the displeasure of God against them may be concealed. While all things are succeeding according to their wish, means and opportunities are afforded of indulging their unholy desires; and, becoming secure and careless, they are prepared for the destruction which will finally overtake them. The tendency of prosperity is to estrange the human heart more and more from God, and to induce an insensibility to the concerns of eternity; and in this view it is not a blessing, but a curse. Asaph was perplexed with the difficulty which the external condition of the wicked presents, but he was relieved by this consideration:—"Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them on slippery places; thou

* Rom. ii. 4.

castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.”*

An equal dispensation appears necessary to the objectors, to establish the doctrine of an over-riding Providence. Let us consider what is meant by an equal dispensation. It is an exact distribution of rewards and punishments in the present state, an allotment of temporal good and evil to men, according to their desert; but, although such a dispensation is plausible in theory, and it may be imagined that it could be easily realized, when we enter into detail we shall find, that it is attended with insuperable difficulties. According to this plan, it would be necessary that good men should enjoy uninterrupted prosperity, and consequently, that all the troubles and uncasinesses which arise from a thousand causes, should be warded off; that no disease should overtake them; that no trial should befall them, in their persons, or their families, or their friends; that their lawful schemes should always succeed, or that they should be prevented from thinking of schemes with which Providence would not concur; in short, that all nature should minister to them, and no part of it should ever interfere with their designs, or give them any disturbance. It would be necessary, on the other hand, that a process exactly the reverse should take place with respect to the wicked; that all precautions for the preservation of their health should be unavailing; that all the exertions of their industry should prove abortive; that every thing which they touched should be a sting, and every thing which they tasted should be bitter. I need not say that this plan would require a complete change of the laws of nature, or such frequent alterations of them, that they would no longer serve as a guide to human conduct.

An equal dispensation, which some men demand, could not take place but under a totally different system, and if now introduced, would involve all things in inextricable confusion. It will appear possible only to the most thoughtless of mankind. If the head of a family were an irreligious man, this scheme would require that he should be immediately punished; but observe, that he could not be punished alone. Whether his substance was wasted by a series of calamities, or he was cut off from the land of the living, his children would suffer by the loss of their natural guardian, or of the means of their subsistence; and the equality of the dispensation would be instantly destroyed. The same thing would happen if the children were wicked and the parent were pious; for every stroke which lighted upon them would fall upon him, and the innocent would be involved in the same condemnation with the guilty. Such is the intermixture of mankind, by a variety of relations, that the separate treatment of each individual according to his desert, is at present impossible. This is assigned by our Lord as the reason why bad men are permitted to mingle with the good, and to hold their place in society, contrary to what it might seem to us perfect justice demands:—“Wilt thou,” said the servants to their master, when they had discovered tares among the wheat, “wilt thou, that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.”†

Let it not be supposed, that, when we speak of Divine Providence, we mean by it a perfect moral administration. We see only its commencement, and must wait for its full development at the proper season. Its subjects are at present in a state of trial: by which I mean, that they are placed in circumstances which present them with opportunities of doing good or evil, and although they may be treated in part according to their conduct, yet the full retribution will not take place till their course is finished. We have seen that here

* Ps. lxxiii. 12, 16—20.

† Matt. xiii. 28—30.

are wise and necessary reasons why it is delayed. Hence the appearances of injustice, which have distressed good men, and furnished the bad with an argument against Providence, ought to give us no disturbance. Amidst the darkness which surrounds us, we see enough to convince us that there is a Supreme Governor, and that he loves righteousness and hates iniquity; and we are assured, that ere long his judgment will be openly revealed. There is sufficient evidence that Heaven is on the side of virtue, notwithstanding its trials, and against vice, notwithstanding its occasional success; and we are authorized to believe that virtue will ultimately triumph, and that vice will be expelled from the kingdom of God. "He cometh to judge the earth: He shall judge the world in righteousness, and the people with his truth."*

LECTURE XLIV.

ON THE FALL OF MAN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

Fallibility of Adam in his State of Innocence—His subjection to the Law of God—Command respecting the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—Penalty attached to it—Adam's Temptation, and Breach of the Command—Immediate consequences to our First Parents.

WE have seen that, having finished all his other works upon earth, God made man to be the lord of the inferior creatures.† His body was formed of the dust of the ground, and was animated by an intelligent and immortal spirit. It has appeared that, besides the gift of reason, by which he was distinguished from the other inhabitants of the earth, he was endowed with original righteousness, which properly constituted the image of God with which he was adorned, and fitted him for fulfilling the end of his creation, by glorifying the Author of his being. The happiness which he enjoyed was suitable to his compound nature, which derived pure pleasure from the external objects with which he was surrounded, and still higher satisfaction from conscious rectitude, and a sense of the Divine favour. Placed in the fairest spot of the earth, where his eye, his ear, and all his senses were delighted, he held high communion with his Maker, and while he poured out his soul in adoration and thanksgiving, rejoiced in the communications of his love.

But this happy state was not of long continuance. We have no reason to think, that man sinned on the day of his creation; but we have as little reason to believe, that he retained his innocence for years. "The gold soon became dim: the fine gold was speedily changed." There was only a short interval, when the favourite of heaven incurred its displeasure, and the beauty of holiness in which he was arrayed, was succeeded by the most revolting deformity. Into this melancholy and disastrous event we are now to inquire; and while we are speaking of the sin of the first man and its lamentable consequences, let us remember, how deeply interesting the subject is to ourselves, who are his descendants, and derive from him not only our nature, but all the guilt and pollution which are now associated with it.

Although man was perfectly holy, yet he was fallible, as every creature necessarily is. I do not say that every creature must actually fall; but that the nature of a created being is such, that a change from good to evil, from virtue to vice, and consequently, from happiness to misery, is by no means impossible. This does not imply any imperfection in the work of God. Immorta-

* Ps. xevi. 13.

† Lecture XL

bility is an attribute of his own nature, which cannot be communicated. He could indeed afford such assistance to his intelligent creatures that no temptation should overcome them, and give perpetual stability to their habits of holiness; but still it would be true, that considered in themselves they were subject to change. Mutability is inseparable from the idea of a created free agent. Freedom of will implies the power of choice; that is, it implies, that of two objects presented to him, a person may choose the one or the other. If he can choose the one, but cannot choose the other; if he is restrained by the law of his nature from acting, except in one particular way; he is not free, in the sense in which the term is commonly used. He is a creature totally different from men and angels, because he does not possess that liberty with which they are endowed. We have no reason to think, that this liberty will cease even in a state of perfection, with which it is not more inconsistent than it was with the innocence of paradise; for, although the will of the saints will be invariably determined to good, the determination will not be the effect of physical force, by which choice is taken away; but of the clear convictions of their minds, and the purity of their whole nature. They will still be as free as ever, because they will be what they are with their own full consent. If they cannot sin, the reason is, that they will not. From these observations, it appears, that although the fall of man did not necessarily result from his original constitution, yet it was the consequence of it. His will being free, he might refuse good and choose evil.

If it should be asked, Why did God bestow upon man a power, by the abuse of which his own authority might be insulted, and the happiness of the universe might be impaired? it may be remarked, that this is the amount of the question, Why did God make a creature capable of being the subject of law, and of obtaining a reward? Had man not possessed liberty of choice, he could not have yielded moral obedience. He might have been so constructed, as to go through the forms of duty, as the index of a clock points out successively the hours on the dial-plate; but there would have been no virtue in his movements; and he would have glorified God only as he is glorified by fire and hail, snow and vapour, and stormy winds, which fulfil his word. As the heavens and the earth exhibited innumerable examples of this kind of obedience, this conformity to his will in which intelligence had no share, it was necessary to the perfection of his work, that a creature should be raised up, who, knowing his Maker, and approving of his will, might execute his commands from design, and under the influence of gratitude and love. It was necessary to complete the scene, that a being should be introduced, to exemplify the moral as well as the physical dependence of the creature upon its Maker, and to honour him not only as the First Cause, but as the righteous Governor of his works. It is evident that this design could be accomplished only by means of a creature endowed with intelligence and choice.

But why, it may be asked again, did not God guard against the fatal consequences of liberty, by fortifying the mind of man against temptation, in the same manner as the saints, according to the doctrine of Calvinists, are preserved by his secret power from total and final apostasy? What is this but to ask, why he has permitted sin? a question which may be proposed with a view to perplex, but not in the hope of a satisfactory answer, as it has baffled the ingenuity of the wise and learned, in all ages of the world. If any person should think, that it was inconsistent with the goodness of God not to afford such assistance to man as should secure him against danger, he must proceed a step farther, and maintain that it was inconsistent with his goodness, to invest man with a power, the abuse of which might involve him in misery. It would follow, that it was unworthy of God to make such a creature as man; and that he, whom we have been accustomed to consider as the hea-

and crown of this lower world, was the only part of it which impeached the wisdom and benevolence of its Author. To inquiries of this nature we are not competent; and as an attempt to explore the counsels of the Almighty which he has not revealed, is manifestly impious, so, it is calculated to have an unhappy influence on our minds, and to lead us on from presumption to infidelity and atheism. It is certain, that God endowed man with freedom of will; it is certain that in the exercise of this freedom, man lost his innocence and happiness; it is certain that God was holy and righteous in this, as in all his other dispensations. Here let us rest, and patiently wait, till in another state our doubts shall be solved.

Man having been created a free agent, was the proper subject of command, and accordingly was placed under the law of his Creator, the knowledge of which was immediately infused into his mind. This law was virtually the same with that which was afterwards engraven upon two tables of stone, and is in every age the standard of duty. To all the precepts of the law, he was bound to yield obedience; and as we have already seen, he was furnished with sufficient powers for complying with the will of his Maker. It pleased God, however, to sum up his obedience in one point; without loosening the obligation of the other precepts, to fix his attention upon one positive injunction, that the strength and steadiness of his moral principles might be tried, and it might be ascertained, whether he was influenced by pure regard to his naked authority. The fact is thus related by Moses: "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die."*

It has been said, that it was unworthy of God to interpose his authority in a matter so trifling, and that it is incredible that he would have exposed our first parent to the hazard of ruining himself and his posterity by eating an apple. Whether, according to the celebrated maxim, ridicule be the test of truth or not, the state of mind which it implies, is not the most favourable for the calm investigation of it; and it is certain that, by a little artifice, the gravest subject may be exhibited in a ludicrous light. It will not be denied, that God had a right to prohibit the use of the tree of knowledge, as he was the sole proprietor of all the trees in the garden. It is manifest, that the prohibition did not proceed from malevolence, or an intention to impair the happiness of man; because, with this single reservation, he was at liberty to appropriate the rich variety of fruit with which paradise was stored. It is certain that, situated as he was, no command could be easier, as it properly implied no sacrifice, no painful privation, but simple abstinence from one out of many things; for who would deem it a hardship, while he was sitting at a table covered with all kinds of delicate and substantial food, to be told, that there was one and only one which he was forbidden to taste? It is farther evident, that no reason could be assigned, why Adam should not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge, but the divine prohibition. The fruit was as good for food as that of any other tree, and as pleasant to the eye; and there was nothing sacred in it, which would have been profaned by human touch. Hence you will perceive that, if God had an intention to make trial of the dispositions of his newly formed subject, he could not have chosen a more proper method; as it indicated nothing like a harsh or tyrannical exercise of authority, and was admirably fitted to ascertain whether his simple command would be to him instead of all other reasons for obedience. It is not a proper trial of reverence for a superior, when the action which he prescribes is recommended by other considerations. It is when it stands upon the sole foundation of his authority; when, having no intrinsic goodness, it becomes good only by his

* Gen. ii. 16, 17.

positive injunction; when the sole inducement to perform it is his command; it is in these circumstances, that it is known whether we duly feel and recognise our moral dependence upon him. The morality of an action does not depend upon its abstract nature, but upon its relation to the law of God. Men seem often to judge of actions, as they judge of material substances, by their bulk. What is great in itself or in its consequences, they will admit to be a sin; but what appears little, they pronounce to be a slight fault, or no fault at all. Had Adam, it has been remarked, been possessed of preternatural power, and wantonly and wickedly exerted it in blasting the beauty of paradise, and turning it into a scene of desolation, they would have granted that he was guilty of a great and daring offence, for which a curse was justly pronounced upon him. But they can see no harm in so trifling a matter as the eating of a little fruit. Nothing however is more fallacious than such reasoning; the essence of sin is the transgression of a law; and whether that law forbids you to commit murder, or to move your finger, it is equally transgressed when you violate the precept. Whatever the act of disobedience is, it is rebellion against the law-giver; it is a renunciation of his authority; it dissolves that moral dependence upon him, which is founded on the nature of things, and is necessary to maintain the order and happiness of the universe. The injunction therefore to abstain from the tree of knowledge, was a proper trial of the obedience of our first parent; and the violation of it deserved the dreadful punishment which was denounced and executed. He was put to the test, whether the will of God was sacred in his eyes; and he was punished because he gave the preference to his own.

The command, not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, was accompanied with a penalty, to be inflicted in case of transgression; "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Into the extent of this penalty, I shall afterwards inquire; and at present shall only observe, that while he was obviously threatened with the loss of the present life by the separation of his soul from his body, he was farther exposed to the deprivation of the divine favour, and the everlasting misery consequent upon it. Although a promise was not expressly made, yet it was implied in the threatening. If death would be the punishment of transgression, life would be the reward of obedience; the continuance not only of his animal life without end, but of all the happiness which he enjoyed in fellowship with his Maker, with such augmentations as his Maker might be pleased to confer in the exercise of his bounty, and in adaptation to the progressive and expanding faculties of his mind. In this transaction, there are all the constituents of a covenant. There were two parties, God and man; there was a condition prescribed, which man, as he was in duty bound, engaged to perform; there was a penalty, which would be incurred in case of failure; and there was a reward, to which he would be entitled by the fulfilment of the terms. It is worthy of attention, that although, through the sin of man, the consequences of this transaction have been fatal, considered in itself it was a proof of the goodness of God. Its immediate aim was to insure the happiness of our whole race, in a compendious way, by suspending it upon the obedience of our common progenitor, to whom the condition prescribed was perfectly easy, and no inducement was wanting to excite him to fulfil it. Besides, it put it in his power to acquire a right to immortal felicity, to which he could have possessed no claim, on the ground of the value or the extent of his services. Whatever obedience he was able to perform, he owed it to God, from whom he had received all his powers, physical and moral. Merit on the part of a creature, towards the Author of his being, and of all his privileges and blessings, is impossible; the idea of it is manifestly absurd. But, in consequence of the promise of God, that, if our first parent should obey his command, he would reward him, an opportunity

was furnished of establishing a claim upon his faithfulness, for his own felicity and that of his descendants. This convention between God and man, is sometimes called the Covenant of Life, because life or happiness was the subject of the promise; and more frequently the Covenant of Works, because works or obedience was the condition of it. Of this covenant, the tree of life, which also grew in the garden, may be considered as a seal. It probably received its name, not because there was some mysterious virtue in its fruit to render the body immortal; but because, if Adam had obeyed the voice of his Maker, he would have been allowed to eat of it, as a pledge or earnest of the eternal life to which he had now obtained a right. I take this opportunity of stating, with respect to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that it was probably so called, because, as is often said, man should eventually know good and evil by its means; good by the loss of it, and evil by painful experience: or rather because, if he abstained from violating it, he should know good, or continue to enjoy it; but otherwise, he should actually feel the evil of the threatening.

But, although the law given to man was easy, it was soon broken. The event is related by Moses: "Now the serpent was more subtile than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know, that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat."* Some consider this passage as an allegorical representation of the origin of moral evil. It is unnecessary to inquire how they explain it, as they have nothing to guide them but their own fancies; and some give one account of it, and others another. There seems to be no reason for deviating from the literal sense, (which is favoured by other passages of Scripture), notwithstanding some difficulties which occur in the narrative. The chief difficulty consists in what is said of the serpent. There is no doubt that the animal known by that name, was employed in the temptation of our first parents; but it may seem incredible that it should have uttered articulate sounds, as it was destitute of reason, and the gift of speech is known to be the peculiar attribute of man. The only solution of the difficulty is to suppose, that the invisible agent in the temptation, of whom we shall immediately speak, was permitted to cause such vibrations of the air, by means of the organs of the serpent, or in its mouth, as made the woman hear the words already recited. The serpent had no knowledge of what was spoken, and attached no meaning to the words which it uttered; they were properly the words of the superior being, who used it as his instrument. No man should say that the thing was impossible, unless he can prove that it was impossible for a superior being, with divine permission, so to move the air, that it should convey such sounds to the ear as he pleased; and every doubt should be superseded by the authority of Moses.

I have referred to an invisible agent, because it is certain that the serpent itself could not have spoken and reasoned; and the Scripture signifies, that the fall of our first parents was owing to the solicitations of a spiritual being. It calls the Devil, the old serpent,† in allusion to this transaction; and because, by his deceitful arts, he brought death into the world, it says, "He was a mur-

* Gen. iii. 1—6.

† Rev. xii. 9.

derer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth.”* The author of the temptation was that spirit, who is the leader and prince of the apostate angels. Limited as is our information respecting that order of creatures, we know that some of them rebelled against God; that for their sin, they were cast down into hell; but that, although reserved in chains to the judgment of the great day, they are not constantly confined to their prison, but are permitted to visit the earth. This liberty had been granted to their chief soon after the creation; and he employed it in carrying on his hostile designs against God, upon whom he wished to avenge himself for the punishment which he had justly inflicted upon him. While this was his principal motive, we may conceive him also to have been actuated by envy towards man, who enjoyed the favour of his Maker; and whose happiness in paradise was an image of the heavenly bliss from which he had himself been excluded. If he should succeed in seducing man from his allegiance, he would involve him in the same misery with himself; an event which would be gratifying to the malignity of his nature; and, at the same time, he would defeat the purpose of his Creator, whom he hated, and the obscuration of whose glory would be his highest triumph. Thus impelled by the darkest and fiercest principles of his nature, he was impatient to accomplish his design; and soon after our first parents had begun to taste the sweets of existence, he attempted, with too much success, to ensnare them.

The prohibition respecting the tree of knowledge, furnished the occasion of the temptation; and its name supplied him with an argument to enforce it. He boldly affirmed, that the eating of its fruit, instead of subjecting them to death, as they feared, would exalt them in the scale of intelligence; and that they should become as gods, or beings of a superior order, knowing good and evil. Remark the consummate art of the deceiver. Had he addressed himself to the animal part of their nature; had he held out the allurements of sensual pleasure; had he appealed only to the beauty and delicious taste of the fruit, his proposal would have been immediately rejected. Still untainted with sin, they were not to be drawn aside from the path of rectitude, by those low and paltry gratifications, which exert so powerful an influence upon their degraded children. He adapted the temptation to the nobler part of their nature; and held out the specious but deceitful promise of such an augmentation of wisdom, as should elevate them above their present condition, and render them worthy to associate with the inhabitants of the celestial regions.

It is difficult to conceive how they could be imposed upon by the words of the serpent, between which and the words of God there was an express contradiction. We may be apt to think that were a person of the highest reputation, or even an angel from heaven, to affirm, that any thing which God had told us was not true, we would not give credit to him. How then is it possible, that they, who were so much superior to us in intellectual and moral endowments, should be persuaded that their Creator had deceived them? The question is an important one, and it is not easy to return a satisfactory answer to it. It is no light task to explain by what process sin found access into a holy soul.

Man was endowed, not only with the knowledge of his duty and a fixed inclination to it, but also with various appetites, affections, and desires, which were constituent principles of his nature. These having been given to him by his Maker, were innocent in themselves, and might be innocently gratified; and as long as they were subject to his superior principles, and regulated by them, he was perfect according to the state in which he was placed. But, although it was the office of the moral principle to superintend and direct them, their excitement might anticipate its interference, and be suddenly caused by the presence of the proper objects; whatever seemed good was naturally fitted

* John viii. 44.

to awaken desire, and whatever seemed evil, naturally to awaken aversion. It follows, that, if conscience was hindered by any means from doing its duty, if an appetite or a desire was permitted for a moment to exist without the proper check, the harmony of the soul would be immediately disturbed; and the desire or appetite having acquired new strength, would press forward to its gratification without waiting for the approbation of conscience. Let us apply these observations to the case before us. In man in a state of innocence, the desire of knowledge must have existed, because, being a finite creature, he was capable of endless improvement in wisdom: all that was necessary was, that the gratification of this desire should be sought only by such means as his Creator might approve. In this state of mind, the prospect of acquiring knowledge would naturally excite the desire; and at this critical moment, the exercise of virtue consisted in subjecting it to moral restraint. To permit the desire to continue, without due consideration of the means, was a fault; and besides, gave it time to gather such force as might impel to immediate indulgence. In this way, we may account for the sin of our first parents. The affirmation of the serpent, that the eating of the forbidden fruit would be followed by a great increase of knowledge, awakened their desire; while they were reflecting upon his words, the moral principle was thrown off its guard; the desire became urgent, and fixed their attention solely upon its object; which at length so fascinated them, that they lost all power of resistance, and yielded to the temptation. The desire perverted their judgment, as it still does in the case of their descendants, who come to believe according to their wishes, and call evil good, and good evil.

From this account, it appears that our first parents were guilty of sin in their hearts, before they committed it with their hands; and that the eating of the forbidden fruit was only the outward expression of the vitiated state of their minds. The desire of knowledge by unlawful means, being indulged, disordered their whole moral constitution; and they had already rebelled against God, before they openly violated his law. "Lust," or desire, "when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."*

Although this account of the origin of moral evil should not be deemed satisfactory, it is certain that our first parents did break the commandment of God. That the fault was entirely their own, and that God was in no sense the Author of their sin, will appear from the following observations, which are chiefly a repetition of what has been formerly stated.

First, God created man perfectly holy, with no defect, no weakness, no tendency to sin. Every power was conferred upon him which was necessary to enable him to maintain the rank, and to perform the duty assigned to him.

Secondly, God set before him the fittest motives to secure his obedience. He promised as its reward, eternal happiness to himself and his offspring; he denounced death as the penalty of sin. The trial which he prescribed to him, was perfectly easy. The restraint imposed upon him, could hardly be considered as any restraint at all, surrounded as he was with the choice and abundant productions of paradise.

Thirdly, God did not withdraw, in the moment of danger, the ability with which he had furnished man for his duty. His holiness was unimpaired; his faculties were continued in their full vigour; no means were employed to darken his understanding, and to seduce his affections, except by the tempter. God was still present with him, to afford him assistance, if it was needed, and he should ask it; he did not abandon him till he actually sinned.

If we attend to these observations, we shall perceive that the fall of man was entirely owing to himself. That God could have so strengthened him

* James i. 15.

that he should have been invincible, is certain; but, as he had already imparted to him sufficient strength, there is not the slightest ground for thinking, that he was bound to give him more. Had Adam exerted the power which he possessed, he would have stood. God had done all for him, which either justice or goodness required him to do; the failure was wholly on his part. His fall was the consequence, not of want of ability, but of an adventitious state of mind, which hindered him from exerting it.

I shall not take up your time with an attempt to shew, that by this single act, man transgressed all the precepts of the law, but shall leave this exercise of ingenuity to those who can find entertainment in it, and think that it will serve some valuable purpose. I would remind you, however, of the words of the Apostle James, that he who "offends in one point, is guilty of all." His meaning is, not that he is guilty of a formal breach of every commandment, but that he virtually subverts the whole law, by rebelling against the authority upon which it is founded. The words are obviously applicable to the first sin. It was the revolt of man from his Creator. It was an explicit declaration, that he would no longer be subject to him, that his own will was his law, and that instead of submitting to divine guidance and control, he would walk according to the sight of his eyes, and the desires of his heart. It was an avowed insurrection against the supremacy of God, and an attempt to establish a separate and independent dominion upon earth; to wrest the sceptre from the hands of the Almighty, and commit it to the erring reason and wayward passions of his creatures. Trifling, therefore, as the act may seem to the thoughtless and profane, it implied all the guilt of the most daring impiety, and merited the dreadful punishment which ensued.

The immediate consequences of the fall, in relation to our first parents, are detailed in the narrative of Moses. First, "their eyes were opened, and they knew that they were naked."* The fact, that their bodies were without covering, they knew before; and the opening of their eyes, and their knowing that they were naked, must mean something different. The result of eating the forbidden fruit was not the acquisition of supernatural wisdom, as they fondly hoped; but a discovery that they had reduced themselves to a wretched and unprotected condition, being divested of original righteousness, and exposed to the wrath of their Maker. Hence they covered themselves with fig-leaves, and hid themselves among the trees of the garden, that he might not find them out. That Moses does not mean bodily nakedness, may be inferred from the words of Adam, who says not, 'I was ashamed,' but "I was afraid, because I was naked." The nakedness which gave rise to fear, must have been the nakedness of the soul. Our first parents were conscious of guilt, and wished to avoid a meeting with their Judge.—Secondly, they were summoned into his presence, and the sentence was pronounced upon them, by which they were subjected to all the miseries of life, and finally to death: "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."†—Lastly, they were expelled from paradise, a place too sacred and delightful to be the abode of the guilty; and sent into the wide world, now cursed for their sake, in which toil and trouble awaited them: "And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever; Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man: and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden, cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."‡

God seemed to threaten Adam with immediate death as the punishment of sin: "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die."§ As he did

* Gen. iii. 7.

† Ib. iii. 19.

‡ Ib. iii. 22—24.

§ Ib. ii. 17

not die on that day, we must conclude, either that the execution was delayed in the exercise of Divine patience, or that the apparent was not the real meaning of the sentence. It may import, that as soon as he transgressed, he should become mortal; and in this sense he did immediately die. He was dead in law; the seeds of mortality were sown in his constitution; a change took place in his body preparatory to its ultimate dissolution. It was now subject to internal disorders, and external injuries; it was exposed to the wasting influence of the elements; it was doomed to decline in vigour and activity, to feel the infirmities of old age, and at last to sink into the grave. At the same time, his mind was disturbed with fear hitherto unknown; and the awful prospect of the termination of his earthly career aggravated the other evils which he suffered, and embittered his remaining pleasures. He lost all hope of the happiness, which would have been the reward of his obedience, and would have consisted in the enjoyment of endless life and felicity. His right to it depended upon his fulfilling the terms of the covenant; and as he failed to fulfil them, he had no claim to the promise. That noble prize, which would have blessed him and his posterity through the ages of eternity, was for ever forfeited. He fell under the curse; and being unable to extricate himself from its power, he was still less capable of regaining, by his utmost exertions, the immense reward which, having been once rejected, would not be offered again. He was ejected from paradise, that he might not, with presumptuous hand, pluck the fruit of the tree of life, the symbol and seal of immortality. In the day of his transgression, he underwent spiritual death. His sin shed its baneful influence over his soul, and, in a moment, turned its beauty into deformity. Such was the constitution under which he was placed, and such was the nature of things, that the image of God must either be preserved entire, or be totally lost. The moment that the principle of rebellion was admitted, the principle of obedience was expelled; as soon as he began to love earthly things, the love of God was extinguished. When the tie was broken which connected him with his Maker, from whom those influences proceeded, which inspired and sustained his moral excellence, his holy dispositions withered and died, like the verdure of a tree plucked up by the roots. Nothing remained but his natural faculties, weakened and corrupted; a darkened understanding, a wayward will, sensual appetites, and irregular affections. The change was sudden, but it was complete. Human nature was essentially the same, but it was divested of its brightest ornaments. All its glory was gone, and it was now poor, miserable, and disgusting; an object from which he, who had lately pronounced it to be good, turned away his eyes with abhorrence.

Such were the effects of the fall of our first parents, but they did not terminate upon them. Adam, as we shall see in our next lecture, was the federal head of the human race; and as his obedience would have ensured the happiness of all his descendants, so his transgression involved them all in guilt and perdition. The fountain being polluted, the stream which flows from it is impure; the tree being corrupt, the fruit which it bears is also corrupt. It is owing to his sin that death has ever since been making havoc of mankind, and sweeping one generation after another into the grave; it is owing to his sin that holiness has been banished from the earth, and crimes and miseries have been multiplied from age to age; it is owing to his sin that myriads of beings, capable of immortal felicity and endless improvement, have been lost, and are doomed to spend an interminable existence in sorrow and despair: "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."*—Some of the topics which have now been slightly sketched, will be resumed and illustrated at greater length in the subsequent lectures.

* Rom. v. 12.

LECTURE XLV.

ON THE FALL OF MAN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

Covenant of Works—Definition of a Covenant—Scriptural Evidence of the Covenant between God and our First Parent—The Parties to it, God and Adam—Adam as the Federal Head of the Human Race—The Condition of the Covenant, Obedience—Its extent.

IN the preceding Lecture, I made some observations upon the test of obedience which was prescribed to our first parent, when he was forbidden to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; from which it appeared, that the transaction between him and his Maker was of a federal nature. But the subject holds such an important place in religion, and in systems of Theology, that it must not be slightly passed over, and I purpose, therefore, to devote this lecture to a more ample illustration of it.

A covenant is often defined to be an agreement between two parties upon certain terms, and comprehends a promise made by the one to the other, accompanied with a condition which the other accepts, and upon the performance of which he becomes entitled to the promise. Some add a penalty, if either of the parties be fallible; but it is not essential, and may be omitted, as it is in those covenants between man and man, in which the only consequence of a failure on the part of the person, who had engaged to perform a particular service, is, that he loses the stipulated reward; but this cannot properly be denominated a penalty. In the case before us, however, a penalty was subjoined; because, man being under the highest obligations to obey the will of his Creator, justice would not permit him, in the event of transgression, to escape with impunity.

The Covenant of Works has been defined to be, a convention between God and man concerning the method of obtaining eternal happiness, accompanied with a threatening of death in the case of disobedience; or the covenant which God made with Adam as the representative of his posterity, and in which he promised eternal life upon the condition of obedience, not only to the moral law written on his heart, but to the positive precept respecting the tree of knowledge. It is called the Covenant of Nature, because it was entered into with man while he was in his natural state, which was a state of innocence. It is called the Covenant of Life, because life was promised; but improperly, I apprehend, since this designation does not express its peculiar character, and points out no distinction between it and the Covenant of Grace, the same blessing being promised in both. It is more commonly called the Covenant of Works, and this denomination is evidently appropriate; shewing us at once what is its nature, and in what respect it differs from the other covenant, which bestows its reward not upon him who works, but upon him who believes.

It has been objected, that there is no mention of a covenant of works either in Genesis, or in any other passage of Scripture. Whether this be strictly true, we shall afterwards see; but in the meantime, we observe that, although the words should not be used, yet, if the thing intended by them is virtually taught, there is no good reason against a phrase, by which it is conveniently and intelligibly expressed. It is necessary for clearness and expedition, to adopt compendious modes of speech which are understood by all parties. We read the Scriptures, not merely to learn the words, but to collect the sense; and when we clothe it in a different dress, if it is faithfully represented, although the words are human, the sentiment is divine. It is objected, that

the transaction with Adam could not be federal; because, in a covenant, it is required that both parties should be free and independent, having power to give, or to withhold their consent; but that Adam, being a creature, had no choice, and was bound to acquiesce in the will of his Creator. Hence it has been thought, that it ought to be considered rather as a law than as a covenant. It is acknowledged that the qualification mentioned is necessary in a human covenant, or that the parties should be *sui juris*, and stipulate with perfect liberty; and that a condition imposed upon a person against his will would not be obligatory in law. But, although Adam was not at liberty to accept or reject as he might please, yet he freely gave his consent, as we may presume from the state of his mind, which recognized no law but the command of his Maker; and he came under a voluntary engagement to yield obedience to the precept enjoined, and to obey for the specific purpose of obtaining the reward, and avoiding the penalty. The transaction was federal on the part of God, as he proposed a condition, sanctioned with a promise and a threatening; and on the part of Adam, as he pledged himself to fulfil the condition.

I formerly stated, that in this transaction there are found all the parts of a covenant. There were two parties, God and Adam. We shall afterwards have an opportunity to shew, in what light both should be considered. There was a condition, consisting in obedience to the positive precept, which God was pleased to issue for the trial of man's fidelity. There was a threatening, although there have been different opinions respecting its import, or in what extent the term death, should be understood. There was a promise, not distinctly expressed, but implied in the threatening; for, if death was to be the consequence of sin, it clearly follows, that life was to be the reward of obedience. We cannot suppose, that a Being who delights in the happiness of his creatures would have placed man in such disadvantageous circumstances, that, while his transgression of the law would subject him to the greatest evil, no positive benefit would result from the most exact performance of his duty. He loves righteousness as much as he hates iniquity; and although there can be no merit in the best exercise of those faculties which are his free gifts, and are sustained by the continual care of his Providence, yet it would not have been consistent with his infinite goodness to have required man to serve him for nought. I may add, that our Saviour seems to refer to the original promise, when he says, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments;"* intimating that there was a reward, according to the divine constitution, as well as a penalty. It is supposed also, in the reasonings concerning the impossibility of justification by works in consequence of human guilt and depravity, that it is owing to his inability to fulfil the terms, that man cannot obtain eternal happiness by the law.

From these observations it appears, that we are warranted to maintain, that there was a federal transaction between God and our first parent, and that, from its nature, it is fitly designated the covenant of works. We may even allege, for the use of such language, the authority of Scripture. In Hosea vi. 7, we read, "But they like men have transgressed the covenant; there have they dealt treacherously against me." On consulting the original, we find this to be the literal version, "they, *כאדם* like Adam, have transgressed the covenant." The same Hebrew phrase occurs in Job xxxi. 33. "If I covered my transgression, *כאדם* like Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom;" and in Psalm lxxxii. 6, 7, "I have said ye are Gods, and all of you children of the Most High; but ye shall die like men," *כאדם* like Adam. The comparison in these two last is natural and impressive. The descendants of the first man imitate him in attempting to deny or palliate their sin; and the mortality to which he was subjected has descended to them as their inheritance: the most exalted

* Matt. xix. 17.

station furnishes no exception: the monarch dies like him, as well as the beggar. The resemblance is equally striking in the first passage, and there appears no reason against considering it as referring to the conduct of Adam, in violating his fidelity to his Maker. This is called the "transgression of the covenant," which obviously teaches, that a covenant was made with him. Although the term is not used, the thing is intended by the Apostle, when he makes mention of the law of works, and the law of faith. The former is the law, which promised life upon the condition of works; and what is this but a covenant? as the latter is the covenant of grace revealed in the Gospel, which freely promises it to believers. But the word is supposed to occur in that well known passage of the Epistle to the Galatians, where it is said, "These are the two covenants."* The meaning, however, is so doubtful, that the propriety of founding an argument upon it is questionable. The law from Sinai had some appearance of being a republication of the covenant of works, preparatory to the ceremonial institution, which prefigured the great atonement for sin; but to suppose, as some have done, that the Israelites in their national capacity are under that covenant, would exclude them from being the church, which can subsist only under a dispensation of the covenant of grace. When the Apostle says, that the law from Sinai "gendered to bondage," he may speak of it according to the ideas of the carnal Jews, who looked upon it as a covenant of works, by obedience to which they were to obtain righteousness and life; or he may refer to the terrors with which it was accompanied, to the minuteness and multiplicity of its precepts, which there was every moment a danger of transgressing, and to its partial revelation of grace, the way into the holiest of all being not yet made manifest. In this uncertainty, we cannot safely appeal to this passage as a decisive authority for calling the transaction with our first parent, a covenant. There would be still greater impropriety in quoting the Epistle to the Hebrews,† in which mention is made of two covenants, the old and the new. It would betray great ignorance, indeed, to suppose the one to be the covenant of works, and the other, the covenant of grace. The term, covenant, is used in a variety of senses, and in the present case signifies a dispensation of religion. The old covenant is the dispensation of Moses, the dispensation of types and figures; the new covenant is the dispensation of the Gospel. "The law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."‡

In every covenant, there must be parties, and here we have two, God and Adam. God prescribed the condition, and connected with it a promise and a threatening, and Adam, with due submission and thankfulness, consented.

God must be considered, in the first place, as the Creator and Sovereign Lord, possessed of a right to require the service of his creature, in whatever way and form his wisdom might determine. His authority was unlimited; unlimited, I mean in respect of Adam, who was at the absolute disposal of the Author of his being, and had no independent rights which his Maker was bound to respect. God could do any thing to him personally, and with a view to his posterity, which was consistent with his own perfections. He is a law to himself, that is, he is uncontrolled by any external cause, and acts according to his own will; but his will is not arbitrary; it is always in harmony with all the attributes of his nature. What he required from Adam was due to him, in consequence of the relation of the creature to the Creator; for it is evident, that he who is endowed with intellectual and moral powers by another, is under the strongest obligation to employ them according to the pleasure of the giver. The particular mode in which obedience was enjoined, is not liable to objection, as we formerly shewed. If it appeared to Divine wisdom to be a proper test, it is enough; and it is also manifest to us, that it was well

* Gal. iv. 24.

† Heb. viii.

‡ John i. 17.

adapted to answer the design. It made obedience hinge upon the authority of God alone, independently of any perception of fitness in the command itself; and this is its true foundation. The duty prescribed presented no formidable difficulty, but was remarkable for its easiness, and it was attended with no particular temptation to transgress. No person who considers the circumstances, can for a moment imagine that, in proposing this trial, there was a tyrannical exercise of authority, or any design unfriendly to the interests of men. God did what he had a right to do; but he imposed no burden which Adam was unable to bear.

In the second place, We must consider God as willing to communicate happiness to man. This appears from the nature of the transaction. A trial was made of his obedience; but the ultimate design, in subordination to the Divine glory, was his establishment in a state of innocence and enjoyment. God could have made him happy without entering into covenant with him; but, by adopting this plan, it was put in his power to secure his happiness, by acquiring a right to it; a right founded upon stipulation, or upon the promise. There is not a greater mistake than to imagine, that the actions of creatures are intrinsically meritorious. They are not profitable to God; they are not gratuitous; they were previously due, are performed by power which God has freely bestowed, and consequently, give no claim to a reward. The highest creature, after ages of affectionate and universal obedience, has not laid his Creator under any obligation. If no covenant had been made, although Adam had gone through a long course of obedience without a single failure, he would have had no title to a recompence, and no injustice would have been done to him if he had been annihilated. I do not say, if he had been subjected to sufferings; because, according to our ideas of equity, punishment should be inflicted upon the guilty alone; but merit being impossible, and no promise having been given, it would not have been unjust to have reduced him to a state of nonentity. It is, therefore, a proof of the goodness of God, that, by making a covenant with our first parent, he gave him an opportunity to secure a blessed and immortal life, and to secure it to his posterity as well as to himself. It is no objection, that the issue has been different, unless it can be shewn, that the failure of the plan was owing to its inadaptation to the nature and circumstances of man. But there is no ground for such a charge. The condition was easy; Adam was possessed of intellectual and moral powers, in full vigour and activity, and had the most powerful motive to obedience in the consideration, that the everlasting well-being of himself and all his descendants, depended upon his conduct.

Candour requires me to add, that we are not competent fully to assign the reasons of this dispensation. After the most mature consideration of the subject, it appears mysterious that God should have placed our first parent in such circumstances, that while he might insure, he might forfeit, his own happiness and that of millions of beings who were to spring from his loins. We cannot tell why he adopted this plan with us and not with the angels, each of whom was left to stand or fall for himself. We know that the result has been another dispensation, by which the highest glory has redounded to God, and a part of the human race will be redeemed from sin and suffering; but we cannot venture to affirm, that the first covenant was intended to pave the way for the second, without being liable to be charged with believing, that God did not design the happiness of man by the first covenant, and, consequently, that there was no goodness in making it; and that, in opposition to a law which he has prescribed to us, he did evil that good might come. Instead of speculating upon such high matters, and pretending to explain them by reasoning which does not satisfy the mind, we should endeavour to repress our doubts, and calm our murmurings, by the reflection that such was the will of God,

and his will is right. "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"*

I have been unavoidably led to anticipate some things, which properly belong to the next branch of the subject, under which we are to speak of man as the other party in the covenant, and to inquire in what light he should be viewed.

First, He must be considered as a subject of the Divine government, having no right to appoint his own service, and no choice respecting the mode of being made happy, and bound to acquiesce in the will of his Maker. The proposal of terms, demanded his unhesitating acceptance. This was his duty; he was free from constraint, but not from moral obligation. In this sense the covenant may be called a law, because it was accompanied with authority which could not be declined without open rebellion.

In the second place, We must consider him as not only bound to give his consent, but as willing, in consequence of the rectitude of his nature, and from this rectitude, possessed of the requisite ability for the fulfilment of the condition. He did not enter into the covenant by compulsion, but with perfect freedom, because, whatever seemed right to his Creator, seemed right also to him; and he entertained no doubt, that as the constitution was agreeable to justice, so it was calculated to advance the interests of himself and his posterity. He accepted the terms with joy, and was thankful to God, who dealt with him, not as an absolute Sovereign, but as a Benefactor and a Friend. That he was a proper person to be a party in this transaction, will, I presume, be readily acknowledged. None of his posterity would have been better qualified. He did not, indeed, enjoy the advantage of experience; but the want of it was more than compensated by the perfect knowledge of his duty, and the perfect harmony which subsisted between his will and affections, and the dictates of conscience. There was no ignorance or infirmity exposing him to the hazard of being misled or overcome, but his mind was full of light, and his heart of love.

But the character in which he ought to be chiefly considered, is that of a representative, or federal head, of those who were to spring from his loins. His being a federal head, is very different from his being a natural head. He was the natural head of the human race, as the first man, from whom all other men were to proceed, according to the law of generation; but this relation is not the ground on which his actions were imputable to his posterity. I am disposed to think that the reasonings of some Theologians on this subject are inaccurate, while they account for the present state of human nature upon the simple principle of transmission; maintaining, that as a tree propagates its kind, or produces a tree like itself, so Adam conveyed his own dispositions to his offspring. This is to account for a moral phenomenon by a physical law. Difficulties meet us in the doctrine of representation; but if it be admitted to be true, then imputation is seen to be consonant to justice. It is impossible, I think, to reconcile with justice the idea, that all men are involved in sin merely because their first father happened to be a sinner, just as children frequently exhibit the features of their parents. We cannot conceive that, in this case, any demerit could attach to his descendants, or that they could be punished except by arbitrary will. It appears more agreeable to reason to conceive that, if Adam had been only our natural head, he would have communicated the same nature to us which he received from his Creator, whatever might have befallen himself; because, on this supposition, we should have had no concern in his sin, any more than we are chargeable with the sins of our immediate parents. In the natural world, a corrupt tree may bring forth corrupt fruit, the scion may have all the bad qualities of the parent stock; but

* Rom. xi. 33.

in the moral world, individuals are originally independent, and stand or fall with one another only in consequence of some new constitution, which has given them a legal and moral identity. We say, therefore, that Adam was not only the natural, but the federal, head of his children.

Here we encounter opposition. That Adam was the federal head of his posterity, is denied by Pelagians and Socinians, who maintain that he acted for himself alone, and that the effects of his fall terminated upon himself. Arminians admit that the whole human race is injured by the first sin, but at the same time controvert the proposition, that Adam was their proper representative. All are expelled from paradise as well as Adam and Eve; women bring forth children with pain; men earn their bread by the sweat of their brows, and all are subjected to death. But death is not properly a punishment, for it cannot be that the innocent should be punished for the sin of another: it is a natural necessity of dying, derived from Adam, on whom this penalty was denounced. He could not procreate children, in respect of their condition, happier than himself. They are unavoidably exposed to the same evils, as a father who was once rich, and has been deprived of his property for his crimes, begets children who are poor, but who, if he had not sinned, would have inherited his wealth; not that the children suffer the punishment of their fathers, but experience the operation of a law of nature, according to which a person cannot transmit to others, good things which he does not himself possess. These are their views, as stated by Limborch,* who further maintains, that Adam can be considered as the representative of his posterity, only in the same sense in which this may be affirmed of any head of a family, any progenitor of a race; and expressly denies that a covenant was made with him in our name.

Here the objections against considering Adam simply as our natural head, which were formerly mentioned, ought to be recollected. These men are willing to admit that, in consequence of the fall of our first parent, we are subjected to many temporal evils, and even that men are born less pure than he was, and with a certain inclination to sin; but they see an insuperable difficulty in the idea that he was the representative of his descendants, for how could he be such without their consent? It may be truly said that they strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel; for surely it is less repugnant to reason and justice, that we should suffer through Adam, because we were legally connected with him, and he acted in our name, than that we should suffer solely because we derive our being from him by generation, although we had no concern in his sin. In the one case, although we may not fully understand the principle on which he was constituted our representative, we perceive a legal ground on which guilt is imputed to us; but in the other, we cannot discover any just cause that any share of the fatal effects of his transgression should fall to our lot. It strengthens the argument, that, according to Arminians, not our physical but our moral state is deteriorated, for we are born less pure; which, if it has any meaning, must signify that we are at least in some degree polluted; and we have a natural inclination to sin, which, in spite of all evasions, must be itself sinful. In plain language, we have become depraved and miserable, without any good reason; our present state is not our crime, but our misfortune. They exclaim against our doctrine, as making God the author of sin, but the odious consequence flows more directly from their own. To pretend that, although death and other temporal evils have come upon us through the sin of Adam, yet these are not to be regarded as a punishment, is neither more nor less than to say,—‘They must not be called a punishment, because this would not agree with our system. If we should concede that they are a punishment, we should be compelled to admit that the sin of the

* Limborchii Theol. Christ. lib. iii. cap. 3.

first man is imputed to his posterity, and that he was their federal head. We deny, therefore, that the labours and sorrows of the present life, the loss of such joys as are left to us at its close, and the dreadful agonies and terrors with which death is often attended, have the nature of a penalty.' In the same manner, a man may call black white, and bitter sweet, because it will serve his purpose; but he would be the veriest simpleton who should believe him. If our antagonists will change the meaning of words, they cannot alter the nature of things. Pain and death are evils, and when inflicted by the hand of a just God, must be punishments; for although the innocent may be harassed and destroyed by the arbitrary exercise of human power, none but the guilty suffer under His administration.

These observations will assist us in establishing the point under consideration. That Adam was the federal head of his posterity, we may confidently infer from the fact, that the effects of his sin extend to all his offspring without exception. It has been said, indeed, that in the record of the transaction, no mention is made of his posterity, and the words of the threatening are addressed exclusively to him. But there is little force in this objection. If we attend to the history of our first parents in paradise, we shall find, that several things were said to them, in which, although there is no explicit reference to their posterity, they are evidently comprehended. When God said, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth,"* no person supposes that the command, or rather the promise in the form of an injunction, was restricted to Adam and Eve, it being acknowledged on all hands, that it respected their descendants, and that the propagation of the human species ever since is the consequence of it. The words, "Behold I have given you the herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree on the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed, to you it shall be for meat,"† were not spoken to them alone, but were a gift of the productions of the soil to their successors in all ages. To come more closely to the subject, the threatening, "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die,"‡ was addressed in the first instance to Adam alone, but certainly was not intended to be limited to him, as is evident from its execution upon his children. Hence the sentence pronounced upon Adam, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,"§ must be viewed as a sentence upon all who, in virtue of it, suffer death and dissolution in the grave. Again, no person will say, that the curse respected the original transgressor alone, although there is not a hint that it would light upon others. Every man who looks upon our fields, and observes the labour which is necessary to cultivate them; every man who toils from morning to night in order to procure subsistence for himself and his family, will be compelled by painful experience to acknowledge, that the denunciation retains its force in this distant age of the world. "Cursed is the ground for thy sake, in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.—In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground."||

These observations may fully satisfy us, that it is not a valid objection against the representative character of Adam, that he was addressed as an individual, and no direct notice is taken of his descendants. The extension of the effects of his fall to those who have sprung from him, in the long succession of almost six thousand years, is a proof which cannot be fairly resisted, that he did not fall alone. Upon any other hypothesis, we cannot make sense of such declarations as the following, and we have seen how contrary to sound reason and Scripture are the attempts to explain them away. "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners."¶ "By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation."** "By one man sin entered into the

* Gen. i. 28.

† Ib. 29.

‡ Ib. ii. 17.

§ Ib. iii. 19

|| Gen. iii. 17, 19.

¶ Rom. v. 19.

** Ib. 18.

world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all **have** sinned.”* “In Adam all died.”† When mention is made of the first and second Adam, and the one is called the figure of the other, there must be a resemblance between them; and in what does it consist? In every respect but one, they are dissimilar. “The first man was of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven.”‡ The first man entailed guilt and death as the fatal inheritance of his children; the Second Man communicates righteousness and life. The contrast is stated at considerable length by Paul, in the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. But the first Adam was a figure of the second, if he was a public person, a federal head. On this supposition we perceive the resemblance; but it fails if there was no covenant with our great progenitor, and the words of Scripture convey a false idea. Jesus Christ, who was the Surety of sinners, might be with propriety called the Second Adam, if the first Adam was the representative of his seed; but if there is no legal relation between him and them, the appellation is not founded on truth.

I have endeavoured to prove the fact, but I do not pretend fully to explain it. President Edwards, in his book on Original Sin, which is an admirable work, and one of the ablest and most triumphant refutations of error which is to be found in our language, in answering the objection, that to deal with Adam and his posterity as one, was to act contrarily to truth, because they were not one but distinct, enters into a long dissertation upon the subject of identity. He shows that the identity of creatures is not an absolute, independent identity, like that of the Creator, who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever, but a dependent identity founded on an arbitrary constitution. It is owing to this constitution, that an old tree is the same with the seedling which sprung from the soil some hundred years before, and that the human body, which undergoes innumerable changes, is the same in old age and in infancy. To the same cause we must attribute the identity of all created beings, for they do not exist now, because they existed the last moment, as if nature went on in its course mechanically, or by its intrinsic power; but their preservation is equivalent to a continued creation. In the same way we explain the identity of the soul, and its uninterrupted consciousness: it being impossible to assign any satisfactory reason, why a man is conscious that he is the being that he was forty years ago, but the divine constitution. The conclusion which he draws from these premises is, that the objection, which maintains that to consider Adam and his posterity as one was contrary to truth, is built upon a false hypothesis; because it is a divine constitution, which makes truth in all matters of identity. But, with the leave of this great man, the cases are not analogous. In the case of created beings in general, identity is their continued existence; but in the case before us, it is the conjunction of separate beings by a legal union, which affects their moral state and final destiny. It is evidently a different thing to prolong the existence of a creature, and give it a consciousness of being the same at successive periods, from the connecting of many individuals together, so as to identify their actions and interests. The one is a physical, and the other a moral union, and therefore the one does not serve in any degree to illustrate the other. The difficulty remains as it was. The question is not about the power, but about the justice of God, not what he could do, but what it was consistent with his character to do; and the result of this metaphysical inquiry into identity is to prove, what we understood as well before, that the oneness of Adam and his posterity was founded on the will of God. What we wish to know is, how this constitution can be reconciled with his righteousness and goodness; but it throws no light upon this subject to inform us, that the power which established identity in natural

* Rom. v. 12.

† 1 Cor. xv. 22.

‡ Ib. 47.

things, so associated Adam and his seed that they were to stand or to fall together. When we are asking, whether it was right in God to do so, we cannot be satisfied by being told that he was able to do it. It is undoubtedly enough that God has willed any thing, because it is certain, that he never wills what is unwise or unjust ; but when our reasonings end in this point, we have unquestionably failed, if we set out with a professed design to solve the objections of infidelity, and to settle the wavering judgment on the basis of conviction.

The condition of the covenant was obedience to the law under which man was placed, and it is called the condition, because his right to the enjoyment of life was suspended upon it. The only precept mentioned in the narrative of Moses, is that which relates to the tree of knowledge. If he abstained from its fruit he should live, if he tasted it he should die. But if we consider, that the positive precept was given merely to make trial of Adam, we shall be convinced that his obedience was not limited to it, or, in other words, that it was not the only duty enjoined upon him. The moral law was not suspended, and this new precept substituted in its room, so that, in all other respects, he was for a time at liberty to do what he pleased. That law is immutable in its obligations, being founded on the nature and relations of God and man ; and it is impossible, therefore, that a creature should, by any dispensation, be exempted from its authority for a single moment. It was written upon the heart of man at his creation, and remained there under this new arrangement, in characters as distinct and impressive as ever. But the precept concerning the tree of knowledge was properly the condition, because it was by it that man's respect to the authority which had enacted the whole law was to be tried. I shall not repeat what was formerly said concerning its fitness to answer the design. Adam was considered as a subject of the Divine government, and as a holy creature capable of performing any duty which his Maker should be pleased to enjoin. He possessed in full vigour the principle of obedience, and would not feel any duty to be burdensome, and still less one so easy in performance.

It has been asked, Would the covenant have been broken by the transgression of any other precept of the law ? We must answer in the affirmative, if the design of the positive precept was, to make trial of the obedience of Adam, for he would have been equally unworthy of happiness, and deserving of punishment, if he had renounced the authority of God in any other instance. The alienation of his heart from God would have been the same. The positive precept was not more sacred than the other precepts of the law. There is no sufficient ground for a positive affirmation ; but it is possible, that this was the only precept in respect of which Adam was in danger of failing. As it was the proposed test of his obedience, it might be that here only he was left to himself. It is easy to conceive the Divine power to have guarded him against transgressing in any other matter. There is no absurdity in supposing that, while he was vulnerable in this point, he was defended every where else, against the assaults of the enemy ; and that in this manner it was secured, that the precept relative to the tree of knowledge should prove, what it seems to have been intended to be, the only test of his allegiance to his Creator. This was the only particular about which there might arise a contest of his will with the will of God. I merely throw out this hint for consideration ; but, if there is any truth in it, we get rid of the curious but useless inquiry, What would have been the consequence, if Adam had religiously abstained from the forbidden fruit, but had committed some other transgression ?

In some systems, the condition of the covenant is said to have been perfect. personal, and perpetual obedience ; but this statement is far from being accurate. I do not deny, that it required perfect obedience in the sense already explained. The whole law was concentrated in a single positive precept,

which put to the proof the principle upon which all obedience depends, profound submission to the authority of the Lawgiver; but if perfect is here used to signify universal in extent, as well as pure in motive, the obedience prescribed in the covenant was only perfect constructively. Adam had not to go through a course of all the duties, but to evince that he was ready to perform them as opportunity should occur, by attending to this particular duty. I grant also, that the obedience was personal, or, in other words, was to be performed by himself; but as no doubt ever did, or ever could, arise in any mind upon this point, it was altogether unnecessary to mention it. This is a truism; we cannot controvert it, but we deem it unworthy of notice, because it does not convey one particle of information. No person ever dreamed that Adam might have employed a substitute, or that he might have performed one part, and committed what remained to another. It is superfluous to say, that the condition was personal obedience. I deny also that it was perpetual obedience. The period of probation was not to be commensurate with his existence, nor indefinitely extended; there was a time fixed when the trial would end, and the reward would be conferred. To say that the obedience was to be perpetual, is contrary to the nature of a covenant. for in every transaction of this kind it is implied, that, when the stipulated service is finished, the promise will be fulfilled. But, when the term perpetual comes to be explained, we find that it does not signify perpetual, but temporary, and is employed to teach us that Adam was to continue to obey till the trial was ended. But why is a word used, which suggests an idea contrary to truth, and different from what the speaker or writer intended? Why should that be called perpetual, which would have probably terminated in a few days or weeks? Besides, if the meaning is, that man was bound to obey during the term prescribed, this notion is implied in the word perfect, for that obedience only is perfect which is sustained as long as the obligation to perform it lasts. Here then, we have an instance of repetition, under the name of distinction.

I have dwelt longer upon this account of the condition of the covenant than was perhaps necessary, because it is frequently met with, and may be adopted without examination. The words perfect, personal, and perpetual, have been sounded in our ears from our infancy, and we may repeat them without stopping to inquire, whether they have been selected with judgment, and give a true representation of the case.

Obedience was previously due by our first parent to his Maker, upon whom he was physically and morally dependent. It is implied in the just conception of a creature, that, as he holds life and all his faculties from his Creator, he is bound to live for him alone; and that, after having done all that is possible with his powers and in his circumstances, he is an unprofitable servant. His Creator has gained nothing by his services, and consequently owes him no recompence. Hence it appears that, in the actions of a perfect human being, there could be no intrinsic merit; that no claim could be founded on the real value of the actions; that there was no proportion between their worth and a reward, which it behoved justice to recognise. They therefore greatly err, who maintain, that the obedience of Adam would on its own account have entitled him to happiness. The merit of condignity, as it has been called, exists only in the dreams of Papists, and men like them, who forget that God cannot become a debtor to his creatures, but in consequence of his free and gracious engagement. But there may be such a thing as pactional or conventional merit, that is, merit arising not from the natural worth of the actions of creatures, but from a voluntary stipulation, by which God, independent and all-sufficient, has agreed to consider their obedience as a reason why he should bestow new benefits upon them. This was the only merit of which Adam was capable. God put it in his power to acquire a conventional right to life.

If he had performed the condition, he might have claimed it, not with the boldness which one man may use in demanding the fulfilment of a bargain, by another, because he has law and justice on his side, but with an humble sense that in himself he deserved nothing, yet with full confidence in the Divine faithfulness and goodness. There would have been no ground for self-gratulation or exultation; but there would have been ground for admiring and praising the liberality of his Maker, who had bestowed an immense reward for services which he might have exacted without making any return; and here we should remember and apply the words of the Apostle, "If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God."* In his presence, they who never sinned, as well as they who have been redeemed by grace, must cast down their crowns, and acknowledge that they have nothing but what they have received.

The obedience of Adam would have been considered as virtually the obedience of his posterity, for he would have performed it, not in a private, but in a public capacity. I do not mean, that God would have viewed his posterity as having actually obeyed, any more than that, when he justifies believers in Christ, he views them as having personally fulfilled the righteousness of the law. But what had been done by the common representative of the human race, would have been reckoned or imputed to them; so that, by the same act, their happiness and his would have been secured. If God had said to him, "Live, for thou hast faithfully obeyed my command," he would have said at the same time, "All thy descendants shall live." They would have come into existence pure and happy, and would have continued in this state without danger, or the possibility of a change. But, let it not be supposed, that they would have been released from an obligation to personal obedience. Adam himself would not have been released from it. All men would have been bound to fulfil the will of God throughout their whole duration; but obedience would not have been the condition on which their hopes were suspended. It would have been the willing and affectionate recognition of his authority, and an expression of their gratitude for his infinite goodness, in giving them existence, and making it blessed.

LECTURE XLVI.

ON THE FALL OF MAN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Penalty of the Covenant of Works, Death, Temporal, Spiritual, and Eternal—Promise of the Covenant—Seals of the Covenant.

HAVING considered the parties in the covenant, and the condition, I should proceed to the promise, which is next in the natural order, and is the only part remaining to complete a federal transaction. A penalty, I formerly remarked, is not essential, as covenants may be conceived, and are sometimes made, the violation of which terminates simply in their abrogation; but in the present case, it arose from the nature of things, it being impossible that, if man transgressed the law of his Creator, and a law which he had come under a voluntary obligation to obey, he should be permitted to escape with impunity. As the promise is not mentioned in the original transaction, and is in-

* Rom. iv. 2.

ferred from the penalty, it will be proper to begin with the latter: "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die."

The literal sense of this denunciation is so obvious, that one should have thought it impossible that there could be any dispute about it; but the perverseness of man has endeavoured to perplex every principle of religion, and has controverted, not only points which are obscure and mysterious, but the plainest declarations. If words can have a definite meaning, these import that the death of the body was to be the penalty of transgression; but this has been denied. Pelagius, who rejected the doctrine of original sin, and held that the fall of Adam affected himself alone, found it necessary to reconcile the prevalence of death among his descendants with his system; and hence he maintained, that even to Adam, death was not a punishment, but a natural effect resulting from his constitution. In other words, he was mortal from the beginning. He is represented by his contemporaries as having said, that Adam would have died, whether he had sinned or had not sinned, and that he died by a necessity of nature. Socinians, who have introduced almost every heresy into their creed, have adopted this opinion of Pelagius; "All die by Adam," says the founder of the sect, "because he was mortal; and for this reason, those who are born of him must also be mortal. The first man was taken from the earth, and was therefore earthy. This happened before the fall, and, therefore, before the fall his body was, by its own nature, liable to dissolution. Before he sinned, he had a body corruptible, vile, and infirm." Human impudence cannot well go farther than, in this bold and undisguised manner, to contradict the express declaration of Scripture. When a person ventures to deny what is self-evident, we are at a loss how to proceed; whether to reply to him, or to treat him with silent contempt. It may be sufficient, in the present case, to repeat the words of God to Adam, without quoting other passages in confirmation of their meaning: "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Can any thing be plainer, than that, if he did not eat, he should not die? Can we suppose, that God threatened as a consequence of transgression, what would take place in the course of nature? that Adam was deterred from disobedience, by the annunciation of an event which would befall him, although he performed his duty? If men will make themselves ridiculous, by venting opinions stamped with folly and absurdity, let them beware of exposing their Maker to contempt.

Arminians admit, that temporal death was, in a certain sense, the consequence of sin; when Adam fell, he was laid under the necessity of dying. They hold, however, that his body was naturally frail and mortal; but that he would have continued to live, if he had obeyed his Creator. They choose to say, that we were laid under the necessity of dying, to intimate that he was not made mortal by sin, having been so from the beginning; but that after he sinned, death, which he would have escaped, if he had acted a dutiful part, was unavoidable. Upon this hypothesis, death cannot be strictly called a penalty, or new evil which owed its existence to sin, for Adam was naturally subject to it; but it assumed the form of a penalty, by being denounced as what would certainly take place, in case of disobedience. In a word, this is a proper commentary upon the threatening. 'Thou art mortal by thy original constitution. I will prolong thy life, if thou retain thy integrity; but if thou transgress, the law of thy nature will be permitted to operate, and thou shalt return to the dust from whence thou wast taken.' It is sufficient to say, that for this opinion there is not the slightest foundation in Scripture; that it is contrary to the natural import of the threatening, which suggests, that the evil denounced was a thing to which man was not previously liable; and that it differs from the sentiments which have been entertained by christians in general, and by the Jews, if we may judge from the words of one of their ancient

books: "God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of his own eternity. Nevertheless, through envy of the devil, came death into the world."*

Dr. Taylor of Norwich, (who is an oracle among Divines of a certain description,) has taken the liberty not only to wrest the Scriptures, but most manfully to contradict himself, so that his sentiments on this subject are a mass of confusion. He tells us, that "the sentence of death, of a general mortality, was pronounced upon mankind, in consequence of Adam's first transgression;" that they are "made subject to death, by the judicial act of God;"† and yet he maintains that, in Scripture, "nothing is said to be imputed, reckoned, or accounted to any person for righteousness or condemnation, but the proper act or deed of that person."‡ He affirms and denies: tells us that we are adjudged to death for the sin of Adam, and tells us again, that we could not be adjudged to it, but for our personal sin. The truth is, that he did not believe original sin, but was led into this labyrinth by his insidious design to retain the phraseology of Scripture, while he explained away the meaning. That he did not consider death as the penalty of sin, is evident from his maintaining that it is a great benefit, and is intended to be such, as it increases the vanity of earthly things, and tends to excite sober reflection, to induce us to be moderate in gratifying the appetites of the body, and to mortify pride and ambition. Thus, by his magic touch, the curse is changed into a blessing; and certainly, if, as Dr. Taylor believed, we are not born guilty and polluted, it is necessary to account for the strange fact, that we are apparently treated as criminals; and, since it is not very easy to do so in a satisfactory manner, to put on a bold face, and say, that it is quite a mistake to suppose that death is an evil, for it is designed solely for our good. It has been very properly asked, if this be the case, how does it come to pass that infants die, who can derive none of the alleged advantages from their mortality? It is rather a puzzling question, which we shall leave the admirers of this Theologian to answer as they best can.

I have already taken notice of the opinion, that death befalls the posterity of Adam, as a natural inheritance, or that their mortality is not properly the punishment of his sin, but the consequence of his mortality; and I shall not repeat the observations formerly made.

Temporal death is the dissolution of the union which subsists between the body and the soul. When the soul forsakes the body, the breath goes out; the circulation of the blood ceases, with all the vital functions, and it becomes as inactive and insensible, as any piece of unorganized matter. Putrefaction commences, and in process of time, its firmest parts, even the bones, are reduced to their original elements.

He who appoints the end, provides the means by which it will be accomplished. Death is not, in ordinary cases, the sudden rupture of the tie which binds together the two constituent parts of our nature. It is effected by a variety of causes, which, in a longer or shorter time, and with greater or less violence, impair the strength, and derange the contexture of the body, so that it ceases to be a fit habitation for the soul. As these causes are not accidental but operate under the direction of Providence, which has fixed the manner and time of our death, as well as our death itself, they must be considered as included in the original sentence. Nothing, indeed, was mentioned in the threatening but death; but when God explained the import of the term, in his address to our first parents after the fall, he denounced sorrow, and toil, and a long train of outward troubles, to be closed by their return to the dust. The afflictions to which adults are subject may be viewed as the punishment of their personal transgressions, and are thus represented in the Scriptures; but

* Wisd. ii. 23, 24.

† Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin, Part i.

‡ Ibid. p. 3.

the diseases and sufferings of infants cannot be accounted for in this way, as they are not capable of actual sin, and they must be the effect of their connexion with Adam. The body is affected by the elements; by vicissitudes of cold and heat; by the air which it breathes; by the rain and dew of heaven; by exhalations from the earth and the waters, which cause sickness, pain, debility, and decay. It is injured and worn out by the toil which is necessary to procure a subsistence; for the earth, cursed for our sake, spontaneously brings forth briers and thorns, but demands severe and patient labour as the price of its valuable fruits. The accidents which prove fatal to life could not be easily enumerated; the diseases of various names, which assail us by day and by night, form a long and melancholy list; and the dreadful visitations of earthquake, famine, and pestilence, which lay waste cities and provinces, are means by which the Almighty avenges the violation of his law. We may add to these evils, the anxiety, the fear, the disappointment, the regret, the foreboding apprehensions, which haunt the mind, and, in consequence of the intimate connexion between the soul and body, make the latter pine away, and sink into an untimely grave. When death entered into the world, these evils accompanied it. They are not distinct penalties, but ramifications of the one penalty incurred by the breach of the covenant. Man is dying from the moment of his birth; and as many of the human race are cut off almost as soon as they see the light, so it is but a sickly life which is allotted to those whose time is prolonged; a life always precarious, and which, being attended with pain and infirmity, reminds them that it will not last long, and that they are hastening to the house appointed for all living.

That temporal death is a penal evil, will be manifest from an attentive consideration of its nature. The death of a man is not like that of a vegetable, which, not having consciousness, does not enjoy existence; nor like that of the lower animals, which, although sentient beings, having little recollection of the past, and no knowledge of the future, feel neither regret nor fear, and suffer merely the pain which terminates their life. Death is to us the loss of a possession which we highly value, and eagerly wish to retain, and the surrender of which is often attended with acute mental distress. Let us think of the situation of our first parent, and endeavour to enter into his ideas and feelings, and we shall perceive how dreadful an evil it is. He had received from the hand of his Creator, along with existence, so many blessings that nothing was wanting to his happiness; and looking forward, he was gladdened by the prospect of endless ages of felicity, when suddenly his hopes vanished, and there opened to his view a short and troubled course, which would terminate in the abode of darkness and corruption. He must have trembled while the sentence was sounding in his ears, and for a time have been overwhelmed with despair. To his posterity, life does not present the same attractions; but, fallen as is the value of the gift, it is still highly prized. "All that a man hath will he give for his life." To preserve it, is our constant care; we submit to incessant labour, in order to procure the means of supporting it; we summon others to assist us in repairing the injuries which it has sustained, and guarding it against danger; the very thought of dissolution alarms us, and is admitted into the mind with reluctance, and sometimes we turn pale, and shudder at its name. We recoil from suffering; but what would not a man undergo, rather than part with his life? We confess, then, that death is an evil; our feelings bear testimony to the truth, that it is a punishment of an awful kind. To be arrested in the midst of our career; to be separated for ever from those whom we love; to close our eyes for the last time upon the light of the sun; to give up our joys and hopes with our parting sigh; this is the doom of man that is born of a woman; this is the sad inheritance which our great progenitor has bequeathed to us. Every circumstance bespeaks the wrath of God

against the work of his hands. He destroys it as if it were loathsome in his sight. This is not the chastisement of a Father, but the vengeance of a Judge.

In this light we cannot but view temporal death, when considered simply as the extinction of the present life. But if we take into the account its consequences; if we reflect that the soul is not extinguished when the body dies, and after its separation is disposed of in some other state of being; and that he who goes out of this world under the curse, can have no reasonable expectation that his condition will be improved in the next; temporal death will be found a much more formidable evil than it appears to our senses. When a criminal has endured a capital punishment, he is beyond the operation of human laws, but the authority of the Divine law is commensurate with our being; and if the death of the body has not atoned for transgression, omniscient and omnipresent justice will still proceed against its victims.

“In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” The Hebrew expression is, “In dying thou shalt die.” There is no peculiar emphasis in it, as some have imagined, but it is a common idiom of the language, which conveys nothing more than the English phrase, “thou shalt die.” It seems to denounce the immediate execution of the threatening; but, as Adam was permitted to live after the fall, it is probable that, although this would be the meaning in our language, it denoted in Hebrew merely the certainty of the event. We may say, that in that day he became dead in law, as a criminal is after sentence has been pronounced upon him; that he then became mortal, his constitution being changed, and the seed sown in it which would ripen into death. It is frequently added, that he died spiritually; and whether this is the proper import of the word or not, it is a truth which I shall proceed to illustrate.

Spiritual death consists in the loss of the favour and image of God, or is the moral change by which Adam was deprived of the holy principles with which he was endowed, and became incapable of loving and serving his Creator. There can be no doubt that such death was the effect of the fall, and it may therefore be included in the threatening.

Pelagius and his followers were of a different opinion. As he denied that the sin of Adam affected any but himself, so he seems to have thought that the injury which he sustained by it was slight, and that he retained his original power of doing good if he chose to exert it. Arminians may not speak in the same unqualified terms, but they do not admit that the effect of the fall was a total loss of what we call original righteousness. Even in his primitive state, man was not adorned, according to them, with the image of God, in the sense at least in which we understand it; for it chiefly consisted in his dominion over the other creatures, although it is granted that, at the same time, he was possessed of a considerable share of knowledge, and there was no disorder among his faculties. But, although his state was rendered worse, his nature was not thoroughly vitiated. He fell from a state of innocence and integrity, and his appetite was now more inclined to evil than before; but he did not fall into a state of moral impotence, or lose entirely his power to do good. It is inconceivable that one sinful act should have had the effect to cause a complete change of his dispositions. If you object, that spiritual death was comprehended in the punishment of Adam, they will grant that this is sometimes the meaning of death in the Scriptures; but they deny that it is to be so understood in the original threatening, which inferred nothing but a return to the dust. But, granting spiritual death to be included, they maintain that it ought not to be considered as implying the total loss of spiritual power. The metaphor ought not to be pressed too far; it is enough that there is some analogy between the state of the soul, and the state of the body after it has ceased to live; and if men do not perform good works, they may be said to be dead,

without any inquiry whether they possess a power to perform them or not Dr Taylor says in his observations on the first three chapters of Genesis, "The threatening to man in case of transgression was, that he should surely die. Death was to be the consequence of his disobedience. Death is the losing of life. Death is opposed to life, and must be understood according to the nature of that life to which it is opposed. Now, the death here threatened can, with any certainty, be opposed only to the life God gave Adam when he created him. Any thing besides this must be pure conjecture without solid foundation."*

But, peremptory as the conclusion is, it is neither self-evident, nor can it be easily proved. If the death threatened was opposed to the life which Adam enjoyed, it must signify, not only the simple termination of his temporal existence, but the forfeiture of all the privileges attending it, among which the favour and image of God will be admitted to hold the principal place. Although it was only one sin which was committed, yet it dissolved the moral union between man and his Maker; and we cannot conceive him to have retained the moral excellence of his nature after this separation, any more than a branch retains life after it has been cut off from the tree, or a limb from the body. The history, concise as it is, gives indication of an unhappy change. Our first parents trembled at the voice of God, endeavoured to conceal themselves from him, and came into his presence with reluctance; thus betraying consciousness of guilt and alienation of heart. Perhaps there is force in the remark which has been made upon the difference of the language respecting Adam himself and his son. Adam was created in the image of God, but he begat a son in his own image. His own soul was pure at first, like Him who made it; but the soul of Seth was tainted with the impurity of his fallen parent. A state of sin is frequently represented under the image of death: "Let the dead bury their dead."† "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."‡ "She who liveth in pleasure, is dead while she liveth."§ It is still more to our purpose, that the natural state of all mankind is expressed by the same metaphor, the state, I mean, in which they are prior to conversion: "You hath he quickened, which were dead in trespasses and sins."|| This is the state, not only of the Gentiles, but of the Jews, as the context shews; and as no reason can be given for its universality but original sin, and as this was the effect of man's apostasy from God, it may be justly considered as included in the threatening of death; a term which is used in the sacred writings with great latitude of meaning.

The soul of Adam, which was the subject of this death, retained its natural powers. He did not lose all knowledge, nor become incapable of volition, nor did the operations of conscience entirely cease. He was still an intelligent, and, in a certain sense, a moral agent; but his internal frame was deranged, and he could neither think nor will, neither love nor hate, in conformity to the law of righteousness. When the body dies, it becomes as inactive and unfeeling as a piece of unorganized matter. The effect is not the same in the case of spiritual death, because vitality is essential to the soul, but its operations are all unholy; and consequently, it no more fulfils the purpose of its being than the dead body, which retains the organs of sense, but perceives nothing, and the instruments of motion, but is still as a stone. Such was the effect of sin upon Adam and his descendants. It could not dissolve our relation to God as our Creator, nor exempt us from his authority; but it forfeited his favour, and suspended the intercourse, by which only the moral excellence with which he had adorned the soul could be preserved. The Divine Spirit, the Author of holiness under all dispensations, the Soul, if I may speak so, of the soul

* Scrip. Doctrine of Original Sin, p. i.

† Matt. viii. 22.

‡ Rev. iii. 1.

§ 1 Tim. v. 6.

|| Eph. ii. 1.

withdrew, and left guilty man not merely *in puris naturalibus*, as the School men say, but in the debasement and wretchedness which he had entailed upon himself by his voluntary act. The soul was the habitation of the Spirit; but he abandoned it in just displeasure at the profanation which it had undergone.

“That he hath withdrawn himself, and left this his temple desolate,” says Mr Howe, “we have many plain and sad proofs before us. The stately ruins are visible to every eye, that bear in their front, yet extant, this doleful inscription, Here God once dwelt. Enough appears of the admirable frame and structure of the soul of man, to shew the Divine presence did once reside in it; more than enough of vicious deformity to proclaim, he is now retired and gone. The lamps are extinct; the altar overturned. The light and love are now vanished, which did the one shine with so heavenly brightness, and the other burn with so pious fervour. The golden candlestick is displaced, and thrown away as a useless thing, to make room for the throne of the Prince of darkness. The sacred incense, which sent rolling up in clouds its rich perfumes, is exchanged for a poisonous hellish vapour, and here is, instead of a sweet savour, a stench. The comely order of this house is turned all into confusion; “the beauties of holiness” into noisome impurities.—The noble powers which were designed and dedicated to divine contemplation and delight, are alienated to the service of the most despicable idols, and employed unto vilest intuitions and embraces; to behold and admire lying vanities, to indulge and cherish lust and wickedness. What have not the enemies done wickedly in the sanctuary? How have they broken down the carved works thereof, and that too with axes and hammers!—Look upon the fragments of that curious sculpture which once adorned the palace of the great King; the relics of common notions, the lively prints of some undefaced truths, the fair ideas of things, the yet legible precepts that relate to practice. Behold! with what accuracy the broken pieces show these to have been engraven by the finger of God, and how they now lie torn and scattered, one in this dark corner, another in that, buried in heaps of dirt and rubbish. There is not now a system or entire table of coherent truths to be found, or a frame of holiness, but some shivered parcels.—You come, amidst all this confusion, as into the ruined palace of some great prince, in which you see, here the fragments of a noble pillar, there the shattered pieces of some curious imagery, and all lying neglected and useless. He that invites you to take a view of the soul of man, gives you but such another prospect, and doth but say to you, Behold the desolation, all things rude and waste. So that, should there be any pretence to the Divine presence, it might be said, If God be here, why is it thus? The faded glory, the darkness, the disorder, the impurity, the decayed state, in all respects, of this temple, too plainly shew the great Inhabitant is gone.”*

In the last place, Eternal death was included in the penalty of the first covenant. This is denied, and it is maintained that nothing was threatened but the separation of the soul from the body, which would be the result of a train of previous miseries. This is evident, it is said, from the explanation of the sentence which God gave after the transgression of Adam, assigning it as his punishment that he should return to the dust, and making no mention of spiritual death, and the torments of hell, but solely of toil, and sorrow, and pain. It is certain, however, that the term, death, is often used in a figurative sense, to express the moral state of the soul, as we have already proved by several passages: and it is not less certain, that it signifies also the miserable state of the whole man in the world to come. This is acknowledged by those who will not admit that it bears this meaning in the present case: and, indeed, it is impossible for any person who has perused the Scriptures with attention, to be of a different opinion. When our Lord says, “He that believeth in me shall

* Howe's Living Temple, Part ii. chap. iv.

never die ;” “ This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die ;” * he evidently refers not to temporal, but to eternal death. In the same sense, dying and death must be understood in many other passages. The words of Paul are worthy of particular attention : “ The wages of sin is death ; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” † It is so manifest that here, death signifies something more than the separation of the soul from the body, that we shall scarcely meet with contradiction. The death is commensurate with the life ; the gift of God is opposed to the loss which we have sustained by disobedience. Let it be observed, that death is the wages of sin, the recompence which it merits. Eternal death, therefore, must have been included in the punishment of Adam, for God would surely award to him what was his due. As he would not punish him more, so he would not punish him less, than his iniquity deserved, because he is strictly just. It is therefore absurd to suppose, that only temporal death was threatened ; it is to suppose that the first sin was too slight to be treated with greater severity ; and if so, it will follow that for no other sin the offender can be adjudged to final perdition. Eternal death is called the second death, to intimate, I presume, that it is connected with the first, and that the one succeeds the other, in execution of the same sentence. An argument may be drawn from the contrast which is stated between Adam and Christ, in the fifth chapter of the Romans. The condemnation which has come upon us by the former, is opposed to the justification which we obtain by the latter. But justification is a deliverance from eternal death, and implies not only the remission of sin, but a title to heavenly blessedness ; whence it is called the “ justification of life.” ‡ The death threatened in the law, and the life promised in the gospel, are contraries, but from the one we may form a judgment of the other. If the life which we derive from the Second Adam is eternal, such must be the death entailed upon us by the first.

Eternal death is not the annihilation of man, but supposes him to be in a state of sensibility, because it is a positive punishment. It is, if I may speak so, a living death, “ These shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” § It is indeed called everlasting destruction, but it is the destruction of happiness, not of the persons who are capable of enjoying it. It will be inflicted upon the whole man ; and hence our Lord admonishes us to fear him “ who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” || The soul will be punished by means of the body, and will also undergo sufferings peculiar to itself. Separated from the Source of good, it will be tossed with incessant restlessness, and feel the torment of desires which it is impossible to satisfy. It will be agonized by a sense of the Divine displeasure, by the upbraidings of conscience, and by the terrors of despair. From this state of dereliction and absolute wretchedness there is no relief, no prospect of escape. Hope, which comes to all in this life, never comes to those who have failed in the trial. No new opportunity will be given to correct the fatal error. Such, according to the covenant, was the doom of the first transgressor ; and not of himself alone, but of his posterity who were connected with him as their federal, as well as their natural head. And our ruin would have been complete and irreparable, if God had not, in his infinite mercy, made a new covenant with us, in another Man who is the Lord from heaven, that as in Adam all died, so in Christ might all be made alive.

The final loss of a being destined to live for ever, and capable of perpetual improvement and felicity, is an awful thought. It is totally different from the wreck of a globe, for, when matter is deranged and scattered, there is no suffering ; every dreadful idea is associated with it. It is more awful to think of the ruin of a whole order of beings, and still more so, to reflect that it is the

* John xi. 26. vi. 50. † Rom. vi. 23. ‡ Rom. v. 18. § Rev. xxi. 8. || Matt. x. 28

effect of one sin, of the fault of one individual, in whose fall millions are involved. He who can contemplate this catastrophe without solemn impressions, is destitute of moral sensibility; and he who does not feel himself overpowered and embarrassed, has a mind peculiarly constituted. If he sees no difficulty, or imagines that he can solve every difficulty, he is blind and self-conceited. No part of the Divine dispensations is more mysterious, and calls more loudly for humble submission of mind. In comparison of it, some other points at which reason startles are plain. After having used every endeavour to satisfy ourselves, we shall find it wise and necessary to repress our inquiries and doubts by such questions as these, "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid."*

I proceed to consider the promise of the covenant, which is not explicitly mentioned, but may be deduced from the threatening; upon the principle that, although we cannot appeal to justice for a reward, because no creature can merit any thing from the Creator, we may infer from the Divine benevolence, that obedience would have procured the good opposed to the evil which has been incurred by disobedience. But Socinians tell us, that God promised nothing to man, neither temporal nor eternal life, and that all promises relating to spiritual and heavenly blessings, are peculiar to the new covenant. Arminians, as their sentiments are stated by Limborch,† believe, that man would not have died, if he had not sinned; and further, that it is credible, that when his obedience was sufficiently ascertained, God would have translated him to heaven; but that no promise of this kind was made, and the benefit would have been bestowed out of mere favour. It is strange to think how perversely these men act, and how they turn all things upside down. While they labour to prove that, under the new covenant, eternal life is to a certain extent obtained by works, they are as anxious to persuade us that, under the old covenant, it was owing solely to grace. They know neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm, and are blind leaders of the blind.

It is granted, then, by some of our opponents, that if Adam had not sinned, he could not have died; obedience would have ensured the perpetual enjoyment of life. We do not say that he would have strictly deserved this recompence; but as his Maker gave him reason to hope for it, by denouncing death only as the punishment of disobedience, it would have been due to him according to the terms of the convention. All his descendants would have been immortal as himself; and as paradise could not have contained them, nor the world itself, it is probable that they would have been removed to another state in their order, where they would have led a life more refined, and more like that of the angels.

It is certain that he would have retained the image of God, in which, as we formerly proved, he was created. There was a possibility of losing it during the course of his trial; but when that was finished, there would have been no farther risk. His holy dispositions would have not only been strengthened by the trial, and have grown into habits, but they would have been confirmed by the power of God, as the angels are, who were once in a state of probation, and fallible as experience proved, but are now established in purity and blessedness. Some men object to the idea of Divine influence certainly determining the will, as inconsistent with its freedom; but their notions are absurd, because it follows from their principles, that no creature can ever arrive at an immutable state, and that the saints and angels may change, and experience a reverse in their circumstances, unless they are converted into machines. The same power which has rendered their holiness permanent, would have secured

* Rom. ix. 20, and 14.

† Theol. Christ. lib. iii. cap. 2.

Adam and his posterity from liableness to sin. The life of purity and peace and communion with his Creator, which he enjoyed before his trial, would have been continued to him for ever. There would have been no darkness in his understanding, no disorder in his affections, no sorrow, no fear, no regret for the past, no anxiety about the future. The soul would have enjoyed perpetual sunshine, the body would have never suffered infirmity and decay, and nature around him would have bloomed with unfading beauty. He would have eaten the fruit of the tree of life, and been immortal. In a word, the great promise of the first covenant was eternal life, as it is of the second. This is evident from those passages of Scripture in which the terms of the first covenant are repeated. "The man that doeth those things shall live by them." "What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."* This is not a new promise, for God has never entered into any new stipulation to reward man, on the ground of his obedience; it is the promise which was made from the beginning, and shews us what Adam was taught to expect, if he should obey the law of his Maker.

It remains to speak of the seals of the covenant. A seal has been defined to be the visible sign of invisible grace, and may be more generally described as an institution of which it is the design, to signify the blessings promised in the covenant, and to give an assurance of them to those by whom its terms have been fulfilled. Seals are posterior, in the order of nature, to the making of the covenant; and although, from the first, they may serve as motives and encouragements, the use of them is conceded to none but those who have obtained an actual claim to the promise. Some have maintained that there were four seals or sacraments of the covenant of works, paradise, the Sabbath, the tree of knowledge, and the tree of life; but the common opinion is, that only the two latter sustained this character. I hope to convince you, that neither of these statements is correct.

Paradise has been pronounced to be a seal of the covenant. It was a garden of delights, adorned by the hand of God, and was a fit emblem of a still more glorious habitation, where Adam should contemplate the unveiled glory of his Creator, and be made supremely happy in the immediate fruition of his love. It is acknowledged that heaven is called paradise more than once in the New Testament; but it does not follow that the earthly paradise was originally a type of it. It is more reasonable to think, that the one has been made the image of the other since the fall, to intimate that, by redemption, we are put in possession of all the felicity which man enjoyed in his primitive state. "A greater Man has restored us, and regained the blissful seat," from which we were expelled. It is, I think, a conclusive argument against paradise being a seal, that Adam was placed in it immediately after his creation, and dwelt in it during the time of his trial. But this is contrary to the nature and design of a seal, which is not administered till the terms of the covenant be fulfilled. No man will say that a person may be baptised and admitted to the Holy Supper before he has believed; it is acknowledged that faith must precede. It is equally preposterous to suppose that, if paradise was an emblem and a pledge of the abode of man in a higher world, he was allowed to enter it, while it was yet uncertain whether he would perform the obedience, on which his title to the promise was suspended.

The Sabbath has been represented as another seal of the covenant. To Adam, it has been said, it was a symbol that when he had finished his labour upon earth, he should be translated into a place far more lovely than paradise, and should enjoy a rest much more delightful. When at certain seasons he suspended his daily employments, and gave himself wholly to the service of

* Rom. x. 5. Matt. xix. 16, 17.

his Maker, was not this an earnest and a prelibation of the time when, freed from all care of this animal life, he should hold immediate communion with God, mingling with the choirs of angels, and engaging in their exercises? The same objection may be urged against this seal as against the former, that the use of it was permitted to Adam, and enjoined upon him, before his trial commenced. The first Sabbath immediately followed the day of his creation. It is a conjecture destitute of all probability that he fell on that day. The narrative of Moses contradicts it, according to which the Sabbath was past before the covenant was made; and a review of the events of the sixth day will convince us, that there was neither time nor opportunity for the temptation. Adam thus spent one Sabbath, and for ought we know, many Sabbaths in paradise. He repeatedly enjoyed this sacred rest during his probation, which could not, for the reason alleged, be a seal of the covenant. Can we suppose, that God would confirm a promise to him to which he had not yet established his claim, and all interest in which he afterwards forfeited?

By Divines in this country, these two seals are generally discarded. But many of them assign this place to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, if possible, I think, with still greater impropriety. We need not spend time in inquiring into the reason of its name. It may have been so called, because God would by its means put man to the proof, whether he would retain the moral goodness with which he had endowed him, or would become evil by the abuse of his liberty. Thus, he is said to have tried Hezekiah, that he might know what was in his heart.* It may have been so called, because, by abstaining from its fruit, Adam would come to the possession of the highest good, but, by eating it, would involve himself in the greatest evil. It is only in this last view that it can be considered as a seal, being thus significant of the consequences of obedience and disobedience; but it is worthy of observation, that, contrary to the design of other seals, it confirmed the threatening as much as the promise. Except in this case, seals are always understood to be appended to the promise; and the common relation of the tree of knowledge to both the promise and the threatening, may justly make us doubt whether it was really such. To assign this use to it is to confound two things, which, in all other covenants, are perfectly distinct, the condition and the seal. Here the same thing serves both purposes. That which tried man's obedience is made the seal of the reward of his obedience. But, while the trial was going on, it could seal nothing to him, because it was uncertain what would be the issue; and if the trial had ended happily, it does not appear that the tree of knowledge would have been of any further service. It is much more simple and rational to consider it merely as the subject of the condition of the covenant, and not to invest it with two contradictory characters; and besides, it should be remembered, that the only ground for supposing it to be a seal, is a particular interpretation of its name, which is matter of conjecture, and for which another may be substituted with equal probability.

Lastly, The tree of life has been considered as a seal of the covenant, and in this opinion I concur. I believe it was a seal, and the only one which God was pleased to appoint. I reason in the first place from its name. It was called the tree of life, to signify, I apprehend, that it was a symbol of the life promised to obedience. This interpretation is justified by the figurative use of the name, in reference to the happiness of the world to come. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."† We know that this paradise is heaven, in which there is literally no tree of this or any other description; and therefore, as it denotes eternal life in this application, we are authorised to conclude, that it was a symbolical representation of it in the earthly paradise. The idea that

* 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

† Rev. ii. 7

it is called the tree of life, because it possessed a virtue to render the body immortal, is absurd, and much resembles a Jewish or Mahometan fable. Can any one tell what he means, by ascribing such virtue to it? Has he studied in the school of the alchemists, who amused themselves and the world so long, with the hope of discovering the elixir of life? Is it conceivable that immortality could be imparted by the physical process of swallowing and digesting a material substance? I reason, in the second place, from the words of God: "Behold the man is become as one of us; to know good and evil: And now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever,"* *he must be expelled from the garden*; for these, or words to this purpose, must be supplied to complete the sense, the passage being elliptical. The words have been supposed to have been spoken in irony, and certainly God might have treated with derision man's impious attempt to rise to an equality with him; or they are merely a statement of what was his design, or what was his hope in which he had miserably failed. But, whatever is the import of the words, "Behold the man is become as one of us to know good and evil," the meaning of those which follow is easily perceived. Adam, whose understanding was darkened, as his affections were corrupted by sin, might entertain the notion which has been embraced by some of his posterity, that the fruit of the tree of life would make him immortal, and in this foolish expectation might stretch out his rash hand and seize it. To prevent this act, he was driven out of the garden. This was done, not merely that he might not delude himself with this false hope, but that he might not profanely appropriate what did not belong to him.—There was no reason why a precaution should be used against his eating the fruit of this more than of any other tree, if it had not been a seal; but if it stood in this relation to the covenant, Adam had no right to it, and it was fitting that he should be forcibly hindered from taking the symbol of eternal life, both for the glory of God, whose sacred institution was not to be profaned, and that he might be made sensible of the full extent of his misery. The pledge of eternal life was denied him, that he might feel how dreadful was the loss which he had incurred by transgression.

From these arguments it will appear, that we are authorised to regard the tree of life as the seal of the covenant. I trust that you are also satisfied, that the other seals which have been mentioned are imaginary. This illustration has extended much farther than I had anticipated, but I have still some observations to make upon the covenant and its consequences.

LECTURE XLVII.

ON THE FALL OF MAN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

Covenant of Works, continued—How far it still subsists—Effects of Adam's breach of it upon his Posterity—The imputation of his Guilt, and Original Sin—Proofs of these Doctrines, from Scripture and Experience.

AFTER the account which has been given of the covenant of works, it remains to inquire whether it still subsists, or has been disannulled by the violation of its terms. I apprehend that the ideas of some on this subject are inaccurate, or at least that they use language which is not consistent with truth. I do not mean those who, from ignorance of the true design of redemption,

* Gen. iii. 22.

imagine that God has made a new covenant of works with us, which, on account of its mitigated terms, they are pleased to call a covenant of grace, but Divines sound in the faith, who firmly maintain that our own works are in no sense the cause of our salvation, but yet speak as if the first covenant still continued, offering eternal life upon condition of obedience, and object to the idea of its being antiquated or abrogated.

I observe, in the first place, That the law of the covenant, as we may justly call the moral law, of subjection to which the command respecting the tree of knowledge was a test—that the law retains all its authority. Man might renounce his allegiance to God, but he could not withdraw from his dominion, which is founded in the nature of things, and undergoes no alteration, whatever changes may take place in the circumstances of his subjects. A rebel does not cease to owe obedience to his lawful prince, or it would follow, that he was punishable only for his revolt, but not for the crimes which he might subsequently commit. It has been said, that God could not claim obedience from man, because he was no longer in covenant with him; of which objection this is the import, that Adam was not bound to obey his Creator but by voluntary consent, or was not bound to obey him without the stipulation of a reward. It is hardly possible to conceive an opinion more clearly stamped with the characters of folly and impiety. As for the assertion, that God could not justly require obedience from man after he had become incapable of performing it, it will deserve attention, only when it is proved, that his sin was not voluntary, and that it was not himself, but his Maker, that put him in a state of moral inability.

I observe, in the second place, That the penalty of the covenant is in force against all who are under it. It began immediately to be executed upon Adam, who lost the image and favour of God, became subject to pain and sorrow, and was liable to death: and it has been executed upon the successive generations of his posterity. God did not revoke the penalty, or substitute a milder punishment, when he introduced the new dispensation; he only provided the means by which man might be delivered from the original sanction. There was now a possibility of escaping the consequences of sin, if they would cordially accept the proffered salvation; but, in the mean time, they remained in a state of condemnation, the heirs of all the misery which their first parents had entailed upon them. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them,”* is the sentence pronounced upon the descendants of Adam.

I observe in the third place, That the covenant itself is abolished, by which I mean that, although it still demands obedience to its precepts, and executes its penalty upon transgressors, it does not promise life to the obedient. There is now no federal transaction between God and man, according to which he engages to give life to the keepers of the law. It is indeed often said, that, if men could fulfil the demands of the law, they would be entitled to happiness; but this is a mistake. The constitution upon which alone man’s title could be founded was disannulled, and has not been re-established. That it was disannulled will be perfectly evident, if you reflect upon the nature of a covenant. It is an agreement between two parties upon certain terms. If the terms are not fulfilled, the agreement is dissolved, and the penalty, if one was proposed, takes effect. The promisee cannot come forward at some future time, and say to the promiser, I will now do what was prescribed. The latter is no longer bound by his promise, may reject the offered service, because the season when he wanted it is gone by, and has a right to exact the penalty. In consequence of the sin of Adam, the agreement which his Creator had made with him came to an end. He had violated the condition, lost all claim to the promise, and

* Gal. iii. 10.

fallen under the penalty. There was no clause in the covenant providing him with an opportunity to retrieve his fault, and still holding out the hope of the reward after he had failed. His eternal interests were suspended upon one trial, and if it terminated fatally, his doom was fixed for ever. You will observe that, if what has been now said is true in respect of Adam, it is true also in respect of his posterity, who were identified with him, and placed in the same circumstances by the covenant. It cannot be, therefore, that a promise of life is still made to them upon condition of obedience, for no such promise was made to him after the fall. His hope was founded upon a new promise, a promise of mercy through the seed of the woman, and God gives no other hope to his posterity. Let it not be imagined, that there is a proposal of two ways of obtaining happiness in the world to come, the one by the works of the law, and the other by faith. Men may dream of the former, but they only dream, for, besides the utter impossibility of the thing, God has never come under a new obligation to reward their obedience. The covenant of works is superseded by the covenant of grace, and the promise of life belongs to that covenant alone. It is an error, therefore, to represent men in a natural state, as under the covenant of works, when it is meant that they are required to perform perfect obedience as the condition of life. Perfect obedience is demanded from them, but not as the condition of life; for never since the fall did God promise life upon such terms. The first covenant, as a covenant, no longer exists. Nothing remains of it but the precept and the penalty; the promise is cancelled.

It may be alleged that this doctrine is not in accordance with Scripture, in some passages of which the original tenor of the covenant is expressed. “The man that doeth those things shall live by them.”* “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.”† But does any person seriously think, that this is a re-enactment of the covenant? Did God intend to teach the Israelites, or our Saviour the young man who was inquiring the way to heaven, that future happiness was still promised to human obedience? No; the design in both cases was to convince the self-righteous of the impracticable nature of the task which they had undertaken; to shew them that there was an insurmountable obstacle to the attainment of their hopes; to remind them that, according to their own plan, there was required an obedience too pure and extensive to be performed by such power as man possesses in his fallen state. Such passages do not import that there is still a constitution by which obedience and life are connected, but proceeding according to men’s own notions of the matter, they demonstrate the folly of their expectations, from the unconquerable difficulty of the enterprise.

Let us now inquire what are the consequences of the first sin to the posterity of Adam. If it were true, as Pelagians maintain, that he was not the representative of his children, and that God dealt with him as an individual, it would also be true that none was affected by his sin but himself; but if a covenant was made with him, the consequences are necessarily the same to him and his descendants. It follows from the nature of a federal transaction, that the interests of both were identified, so that the evil which he incurred is transmitted to them as their inheritance. There is no possibility of getting rid of this conclusion, but by refuting the arguments produced to prove that the transaction with Adam was of a federal nature.

We say, then, in the first place, That by his sin his posterity became liable to the punishment denounced against himself. They became guilty through his guilt, which is imputed to them, or placed to their account, so that they are treated as if they had personally broken the covenant. I do not see in what other sense we can understand the words of the Apostle, “By one man’s dis-

* Rom. x. 5.

† Matt. xix. 17.

obedience many were made" or constituted "sinners."* It is not satisfactory to say, that they are treated as sinners although they are not really such, because the question naturally follows, How can they be justly treated as sinners, if they are not guilty? and the question is unanswerable. "The judgment was by one," or by one offence, "to condemnation."† We have, in these words, an act of judgment ascribed to God, who always judges according to truth; the ground upon which it proceeded, the one offence, the deed of one man; and the sentence expressed in the term, condemnation. Now, as it appears from the context that the subjects of this sentence are men universally, it was plainly the doctrine of Paul, that all men are punished according to Divine justice for the transgression of Adam. There is no mention of their personal sins, with whatever demerit they are attended, but of one sin committed before they were born, by him whose children they are. He expresses the same mournful truth by saying again, "Through the offence of one many are dead."‡ And here we must recur again to a fact, which formerly engaged our attention, the prevalence of temporal death. That man was mortal in his primitive state, is so gross a falsehood, that it scarcely deserves a serious refutation. We have seen the absurdity of pretending that death is sent as a favour, and that, although our death is the consequence of the sin of Adam, it is not to be considered as properly a punishment. These are all contrivances by which some men, who have previously adopted a system, endeavour to make the Scripture give countenance to it, and do not scruple, when they are pushed, openly to give it the lie. It is the doctrine of Paul, that death has come upon us by the sin of Adam, not accidentally or naturally, but by the operation of law: "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned;" § *ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἡμαρτον*. The expression, *ἐφ' ᾧ*, has been explained in two different ways. If we render it "in whom," as some critics contend, the Apostle teaches, that as death came by the sin of Adam, so all other men die because they sinned in him. If we translate it, "*because* all have sinned," then the Apostle affirms that all die, because all are sinners. But this cannot be true, if the imputation of Adam's guilt be denied, for thousands of the human race die in infancy, before they are capable of committing actual sin. The Apostle brings infants under our notice in a following verse: "Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression."|| Some understand by these, adults who, during the interval between Adam and Moses, could not sin as Adam did, because they were not subject to a law which forbade sin under the penalty of death; and, therefore, they admit that they must have died for his sin. But was there ever a time when men were without law to God, or his law did not denounce death upon transgressors? No, this was the penalty of sin under all dispensations. It is more consonant to Scripture and common sense, to understand by those "who had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression," infants, of whom this description is very properly given, because they could not be guilty of actual sin. Yet, they died as well as adults; and how can we account for the fact but upon the supposition that, some how or other, they were sinners in the sight of God? They are among the "all men" upon whom death has passed, and it must be true that they, as well as adults, have sinned. The death of infants is utterly inexplicable, but upon the principle of original sin. As they die in the common course of events, so they have been involved in those terrible judgments which are monuments of the power and wrath of the Almighty. The children of Sodom and Gomorrah perished with their wicked fathers and mothers; and this indiscriminate destruction took place after Abraham had said to the Most High, "That be far from thee, to slay the righteous

* Rom. v. 19.

† Ib. 16.

‡ Ib. 15.

§ Ib. 12.

|| Ib. 14.

with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee; shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"* and the Lord had assured him that he would make a distinction. Here was a case in which evil was not to fall promiscuously upon a people, but they alone were to suffer, who were found worthy of punishment; yet here children were destroyed with their parents. Let it not be said that they could not escape, when the fire fell from heaven upon their habitations. Besides that there are no limits to the power of God, he could have saved them as he saved Lot and his family, by the ministry of angels; yet the angels did not carry away a single infant, but left them all behind. It is therefore certain that they were not righteous, and that, although free from the enormous crimes of the adults, they were chargeable with some sin, and what could that be but the sin of our nature? It may be said that God could compensate the sufferings of those innocents in the world to come. This is nothing to the purpose, as the same thing might have been said of Lot, and any other righteous person who happened to be in the city. On this principle there was no better reason for delivering him than for delivering them. But God had declared that he would not slay the righteous with the wicked; he did slay the children, and the inference is plain, that the children were guilty.

I shall appeal to another passage, in proof of the imputation of guilt to the posterity of Adam, and their obnoxiousness to punishment. Speaking of the children of disobedience in whom the evil spirit works, the apostle adds, "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."† It is observable, that, while he addresses in the first instance the Ephesians, who were Gentiles, he afterwards includes himself and his compatriots the Jews in this account, shewing that he is describing the moral state of the whole human race. It is an assertion contrary to evidence, that he is speaking of the Gentiles alone: for why did he change the person, if the subject of discourse was the same? Would it not be absurd in a man who was talking to an assembly of the poor or the diseased about their case, suddenly to change his style, and include himself in the number, while he was rich and in good health? It is vain, therefore, to pretend that the words, "and were by nature children of wrath," are referrible only to the Gentiles. Whatever they signify, they are descriptive of the natural state of all unconverted men. It has been contended that the phrase, "by nature," simply means, really or truly, and that men are really children of wrath, in consequence of their wicked practices. In this manner, the argument for original sin from this passage is evaded. Undoubtedly this is not the obvious sense of the expression, the sense suggested by the use of it on other occasions, and arising from the understood import of the term, nature. What any thing is by nature, it is by its original constitution. This quality is coeval with it. We oppose what is natural to what is acquired. If, then, the apostle meant that the Ephesians and others were children of wrath by practice, had incurred the anger of God by their personal sins, it must be acknowledged that he did not adopt the most luminous mode of conveying his meaning. The word "nature" was unhappily chosen, being calculated, as no explanation of it is subjoined, to give a false idea of the moral condition of men; and, accordingly, it has led to the conclusion, that they are objects of the Divine disapprobation when they come into the world. It is alleged, however, that this interpretation of the word is not without the authority of the apostle himself; and a passage is produced, in which it is said that nature unquestionably signifies practice or custom: "Doth not even nature itself—*αὐτὴ ἡ φύσις*—teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?"‡

* Gen. xviii. 25.

† Eph. ii. 3.

‡ 1 Cor. xi. 14

What else can *φύσις* here signify but custom? Although, however, *φύσις* should mean custom in one solitary instance, this would not be a good reason for so explaining it in other instances, where the connexion did not necessarily require it. It is not sound criticism to say, A word occurs once in an unusual sense, and therefore we may give it the same sense when it occurs again. But there is no cause for departing from the common acceptation in the passage before us. "The emphasis used, *αὐτὴ ἡ φύσις, nature itself*, shews," says Mr Edwards, "that the apostle does not mean custom, but nature in the proper sense. It is true it was long custom that made having the head covered a token of subjection, and a feminine habit or appearance, as it is custom that makes any outward action or word a sign or signification of any thing; but nature itself, nature in its proper sense, teaches that it is a shame for a man to appear with the established signs of the female sex. Nature itself shews it to be a shame for a father to bow down or kneel to his own child or servant, because bowing down is, by custom, an established token of subjection and submission."* To express his idea more clearly and concisely, as custom had made long hair a part of a woman's dress, nature itself taught that it was a shame for a man to wear it, because, by doing so, he confounded the visible distinction between the sexes. The result of this discussion is, that nature is to be understood literally, when we are said to be "by nature children of wrath," and the meaning is, that we are born in a state of condemnation.

Thus I have proved the first proposition, that in consequence of the sin of Adam, his posterity are obnoxious to the penalty.

I observe, in the second place, That in consequence of his sin, they come into the world in a state of depravity. Pelagius and his followers maintained that, notwithstanding what had happened to Adam, the power of free will remains entire, and that, independently of Divine grace, man is capable of beginning, carrying on, and consummating good works; that God gives us the ability, but that we can exert it without farther assistance. Socinus treated the idea of innate depravity as a fable and a dream. The sin of Adam was so far from corrupting his posterity, that it did not destroy the image of God in himself, and it remains entire in all other men. Arminians admit that we are born less pure than Adam was, and that we have a greater inclination to sin, which is apt to be excited even by a light occasion; but as far as this inclination, or concupiscence as it is called, is from nature, and not contracted by vicious custom, it is not properly sin. It is merely the natural appetite or desire of having what is agreeable, and avoiding what is disagreeable; which, as long as the will does not consent to it, is not sinful, but furnishes matter for the exercise of virtue. Virtue is discovered by conquering the desire of the flesh; but there would be no place for it, if the flesh spontaneously desired nothing but what reason approved. Papists hold the same opinion concerning concupiscence, because, finding that it remains in all men, they are under the necessity of denying that it is sin, to uphold the doctrine of their Church, that original sin is completely taken away in baptism. And thus both combine to set aside the argument for original sin, founded on this tendency, this proneness to evil, which is one of the strongest proofs that our nature is tainted. Yet it is of this proneness to evil, this inflammability of our nature which every spark is in danger of kindling, that Paul speaks in the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans: "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known desire, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of desire" or "concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead."† Here he expressly calls concupiscence sin, and represents it as flowing from a sinful principle in the heart; but it seems that, before his conversion, he was as blind

* Edwards on Original Sin, Part ii. Chap. 3. § 3.

† Rom. vii. 7, 8

as Arminians and Papists, and never suspected it to be sin, till he became better acquainted with the law, and found the desire to be so importunate and imperious, that the more it was forbidden, it was the more violent in its operation.

The doctrine of our Church is thus stated in the Confession of Faith: "By this sin," of our first parents, "they fell from their original righteousness, and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation."* Again, in the chapter on free will, it says, "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto."†

A difficulty meets us at the outset. If, as we say, the soul of man is depraved from the commencement, what shall we say? Does God create it sinful? Does he infuse depraved principles at its first formation? Then he must be the author of sin? or is it pure when it comes from his hands? and is it contaminated by its connexion with the body? Then we may ask, How can there be moral contagion in a piece of matter? or how can the union of a spirit to it, cause the pollution of that spirit? These are questions which cannot be answered. They are curious, but not useful. They may perplex us; but a solution of them is not necessary to the proof of the doctrine, which rests upon arguments supplied by both Scripture and experience.

Let us begin with Scripture. Our first proof shall be taken from an early period of the history of mankind. It is said before the flood, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."‡ Lest we should think that the description is applicable only to the corrupt generation which then lived, and may be regarded as a singular one, since the Divine patience would no longer bear it, God said again after the flood, "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth;"§ intimating that, notwithstanding this awful testimony against sin, it would still abound in the world; for it was like a stream which, having suffered a temporary check from some external cause, will continue to flow, because it has a permanent source. The word rendered imagination, signifies a figment, or formation; and, in its present use, denotes a device or contrivance of the mind. "The imagination of man's heart" is expressive of the operation of his faculties, intellectual and moral. All his thoughts, all his desires, all his purposes are evil, expressly or by implication; because the subject of them is avowedly sinful, or because they do not proceed from a holy principle, and are not directed to a proper end. The words are pleonastic, since to say, that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is evil," was sufficient; but, as if with a design to exclude the possibility of evasion, and to exhibit the truth in the most emphatic manner, it is added, that they are "only evil," evil without any mixture of good, and they are evil "continually," or all the day. It is not occasionally that the human soul is thus under the influence of depravity; but this is its habitual state. It seems impossible to construct a sentence, which should more distinctly express its total corruption. Now, there must be some cause of this constant and universal effect; and the sacred historian refers it to our nature itself, when he affirms that the imagination of man's heart is evil "from his youth." The word translated "youth," is not only used to denote the period of life commonly so called, but comprehends infancy also, and, in the present case must be thus

* Conf. c. vi. § 2, and 3.

† Ib. c. ix. § 3.

‡ Gen. vi. 5.

§ Gen. viii. 21

understood; for we cannot account for it, that man should be sinful from his youth, unless the seeds of evil exist in his constitution, unless he be sinful from the commencement of his being. Such a description would not have been given, if we came into the world perfectly pure, or with merely a tendency to evil, which might be checked in innumerable cases by education, and a variety of circumstances. The tree must be corrupted to the core, which produced corrupt fruit at first, and continues to produce it as long as it stands. There is not a saving clause in this description, not a word introduced in favour of human nature; but it is portrayed as an unmixed mass of corruption.

Let us next attend to the words of David in the fifty-first Psalm, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."* The occasion of composing it, was his conduct in the matter of Uriah, which, when the time of reflection came, appeared to him in the most odious light, and gave rise to deep contrition, humble confession, and earnest prayer. But it was not this sin alone by which he was affected. The sins of his past life presented themselves to his mind in a long train, and accompanied with great aggravations; and tracing them back, step by step, he arrived at the source from which they had all proceeded, the original depravity of his nature. In this sense only can the words quoted be understood. To suppose him to refer to some sin of his parents, is absurd; for if they had been guilty of some sin, in relation to him, the mention of it would have been out of place on this occasion, when he was not confessing their guilt but his own. When a penitent betakes himself to the mercy of God, he is thinking of his own transgressions, and anxious to obtain pardon for himself; he certainly will not go out of his way, to enumerate the faults of others, and least of all, in the form of crimination. Why should David have recalled, at this time, the sin of his mother? Was it the cause of his sin? or would it serve to alleviate it? No; he had sinned from his own choice, and he was willing to bear all the blame. Besides, we know of no sin of his parents, which he could have in his eye. He was not born in fornication, but in lawful wedlock; his mother was not an adulteress, but a virtuous woman. She and Jesse were both sinners, as all men are; but no particular criminality attached to them, on account of the birth of their son. It is equally absurd to suppose him to mean, that he was born with a constitution which inclined him to licentiousness. What had this to do with his mother? If he inherited it from her, does he not throw an unseemly reflection upon her character, such as we should hardly expect from the most worthless of mankind? If he merely intended to plead his natural constitution as an alleviation of his crime, we may ask, Is it the character of a penitent, to endeavour to exculpate himself? Could he allege, as an apology, his physical temperament, without virtually insinuating, that it was owing more to God than to himself, that he had committed the sin to which it inclined him? Yet to this wretched shift have some had recourse, in order to evade the evidence from this passage, for original sin. The testimony is decisive. David was "shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin." Sin was an element of his being; the embryo in the womb was tainted. His nature was depraved before he saw the light. Men might have called him an innocent; but, in the eyes of God, he was polluted. How could he be corrupted, before he was capable of acting and thinking, but by the transmission of moral defilement from Adam, his federal head?

The next passage is taken from the conversation of our Lord with Nicodemus: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh."† This word "flesh" occurs in different senses. Sometimes it signifies men, who are so called, because they live in fleshly bodies: "All flesh is grass." "The end of all flesh is come:" "Except these days were shortened, no flesh should be saved."‡

* Psalm li. 5.

† John iii. 6.

‡ Isa. xl. 6. Gen. vi. 13. Matt. xxiv 22

THE FALL OF MAN

It also signifies the corrupt principle in man, or his nature as depraved: “In my flesh dwelleth no good thing.” “If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.” “The flesh lusteth against the spirit.” “They who are in the flesh, cannot please God.”* It is used in both senses, in the passage which we are considering: and this is not the only instance of the occurrence of the same word, with two different meanings attached to it, in the same sentence: “Let the dead bury their dead;”† that is, let the spiritually dead bury those who are literally dead, as is evident from the occasion on which the words were spoken. In the first place, the flesh signifies man. Our Lord is speaking of two births, of which he ascribes the first to the flesh, and the second to the Spirit. The Spirit is the Author of the second, as he affirms in the preceding verse, and man is the instrument of the first. Natural and supernatural generation are referred to their respective causes. There can therefore be no doubt, that, in the first place, the flesh signifies man: There can be as little doubt, that, in the second place, it signifies moral corruption; for it is opposed to spirit, or that which the operation of the Spirit produces, and this is holiness. To imagine the meaning to be that man begets man, would represent our Lord as uttering with solemnity a saying unworthy of him, since it conveys no information, and destroys the contrast between the two parts of the verse. The Spirit generates something totally different from that which the flesh generates. But the subjects of regeneration are sanctified; the subjects of natural birth must therefore have pollution conveyed to them from their parents. I do not see that any other sense can be reasonably put upon the words: and if this interpretation is just, we have the testimony of Him who knew what was in man, in opposition to those who maintain that we are pure at our birth, or that our nature is so slightly tainted, that it retains much of its original goodness. For, let it be observed, that flesh, when metaphorically applied, denotes moral evil alone, moral evil without mixture. “Those who are in the flesh,” in whom it is the reigning principle, “cannot please God.” There is nothing about them of which he approves. When it is represented as remaining in the saints, it still sustains the character of unmingled evil. Hence Paul says, that “in his flesh,” the corrupt part of him, “there dwelt no good thing,”‡ and declares that “the flesh lusts against the spirit,” contends against the renewed part of our nature; “and these are contrary, the one to the other.”§ At his natural birth, man, according to our Saviour, is flesh, wholly a polluted thing; it is only at his supernatural birth that he becomes spirit, or is inspired with the principles of holiness.

I might argue from the words of Job, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.”|| He is speaking of the frailty and misery of man, who is born of a woman, and is of few days, and full of trouble; and he assigns the cause. He is afflicted and mortal, not merely because he is guilty of many personal sins, but because he is come out of an unclean thing. He is the descendant of a polluted race; he inherited corruption from his parents, who were the channel in which it was conveyed to him, from the original source of impurity.

A general argument may be founded on the doctrine of Scripture respecting the necessity of regeneration. We must be born again; we must “put off the old man, and put on the new;”¶ we are “saved by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour.”** All this is unintelligible, if the nature of man is not wholly depraved. Hence those who deny original sin, or entertain superficial views of it, are much in the same condition with Nicodemus, when the subject was first proposed to him, and ask, How can this be? Regeneration,

* Rom. vii. 18. Ib. viii. 13. Gal. v. 17. Rom. viii. 8. † Matt. viii. 22.

‡ Gal. v. 17.

|| Job xiv. 4.

¶ Col. iii. 9, 10.

‡ Rom. vii. 18.

** Tit. iii. 5, 6

the name of which they are compelled to admit, dwindles into baptism, or a profession of christianity, or a reformation of life. They cannot understand it to mean a radical change of disposition, because, upon their principles, such a change is not necessary. If man is pure when he comes into the world, religion cannot make him better; and if he has some unruly appetites, but possesses nobler principles to control them, he needs no assistance, or only such assistance as is afforded by the external teaching of the word, and the dispensations of Providence. But no person, who takes the Bible as his instructor, can believe that nothing more is wanted. A change is there described, which human power cannot effect, and which is the work of the Spirit of God; a change so great and so complete, that it is fitly compared to a second birth, a creation out of nothing, a resurrection from the dead. Regeneration does not consist in repairing our injured moral system, but in making it anew. It is pre-supposed that we have lost original righteousness, are thoroughly depraved, and wholly disqualified for serving and glorifying God. The Scriptural doctrine of regeneration is inseparably connected with the doctrine of original sin. Both stand or fall together.

A proof of original sin may be deduced from the early appearances of depravity in children. The young of the lion and the tiger may be comparatively harmless, and submit to be handled, because they have not yet acquired their natural strength, and their dispositions are not fully unfolded; but even then, they will give indications of the ferocity by which their species is distinguished. It is not long till infants begin to shew, by their fruit, that they are shoots from a bitter root. "I sinned," says Augustine, "in my infancy; and although I do not remember what I then did, I learn it from the conduct of others at the same age. I discovered dispositions which would be blamed in me now, and which, when we grow up, we are at pains to eradicate. I sought with tears, what it would have been improper to give me; I was indignant at my superiors, and my parents, because they would not comply with my wishes, and attempted to avenge myself by striking them. I have seen a child that could not speak, full of envy, and turn pale with anger at another that was suckled along with it."* We may add to these instances, the deceit and falsehood which are found in children, and illustrate the saying of the Psalmist: "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies."† We are apt to look upon these things with a smile of indulgence, and to ascribe them to ignorance, or the absence of reason, rather than to depravity. But, if they are in themselves at variance with the Divine law, to which man's nature was at first exactly conformed, a change must have taken place in his moral frame, or there would have been no disorder in it at any period of his life, no movement which was not in unison with the standard. Can we conceive any thing similar in the infant Redeemer; any signs of impatience, jealousy, and anger, even a passing emotion to disturb the calm of his mind? Let us think of Him, and learn what human nature would have been from the first moment of life, if it had retained its primitive innocence.

The last proof which I shall produce of original sin is, the universal depravity of mankind, for which it is impossible to account in a satisfactory manner, unless we admit the depravity of their nature. If it is allowed, on all hands, that a tree is known by its fruit, and a man's disposition by his words and actions, this rule ought, in fairness, to be applied to the whole race; and, finding them all corrupt in practice, we are bound to conclude that they are corrupt in heart. Besides the evidence afforded by our personal experience, and by history which supplies its defects, the testimony of Scripture, from which there is no appeal, is decisive.

* August. Confess. Lib. I. cap. vii.

† Psalm lviii. 3.

In the first part of the Epistle to the Romans, Paul discusses the subject and proves, by an induction of particulars, that Jews and Gentiles were both under sin. The Gentiles had all fallen into idolatry; and not liking to retain God in their knowledge, were given up to a reprobate mind, and vile affections, in consequence of which they sunk into the lowest state of moral degradation. No kind of sin can be conceived which was not practised among them; and their wisest men did not escape the contagion. There was not one of them whose character would bear investigation. Common readers are imposed upon by the extravagant praises bestowed upon certain individuals, but Paul has pronounced a sentence of reprobation upon their most renowned philosophers; and from what we know of them, it is not too much to say, that their virtue, which is admired when dead, if it were alive and displayed before our eyes, would excite our abhorrence.

The depravity of the Gentiles may not excite surprise, because their religion, instead of restraining it, furnished a stimulus to the most abominable vices, in the example of their profligate gods. Were the Jews better than they? They had a law published by God himself, and enforced by promises and threatenings; and prophets were sent to enjoin obedience, and to reprove their transgressions. Yet the history of the Jews is a continued narrative of rebellion against the authority of heaven. In the wilderness they provoked the Holy One of Israel; they revolted from his worship in their own land: blessed or chastised, they were still the same, a refractory and ungrateful people. Every person knows how low was the state of religion and morality among them at the time of our Saviour's appearance.

A review of the history of the world in various nations and ages would confirm the doctrine of Scripture concerning the entrance of sin and the depravity of our species; and Christendom, with all its advantages, would furnish as ample proof as the other regions of the earth. Sin, although there subjected to some restraints, appears with great power, and in many an odious form, and men every where exhibit the same general character. There is no way of accounting for this state of things, but upon the hypothesis, that man is in a fallen state, and has lost the image of his Maker. Accidental differences among men, such as the colour of the skin, and the formation of the features, may be explained by local and occasional causes; but the shape of the body, the organs of sense with which it is furnished, the contrivances for receiving and digesting food, and the other operations by which life is sustained, and which are found to prevail throughout the varieties of the species, we consider as effects of a general and permanent law. If we reason in the same manner concerning universal depravity, we must come to the conclusion, that there is something radically wrong in human nature, some inherent principle which gives rise to this uniformity, for which external and adventitious circumstances are not sufficient to account. As, in physical science, we discover the properties of matter in general, and the distinguishing properties of particular substances by experiment, so the moral quality of human nature is ascertained by our own observations, and that of others transmitted to us in authentic channels. Whence is it that depravity exists in all the individuals of a particular age, and has existed in all past generations?

Some endeavour to explain this fact by the influence of bad example, by which they must mean, that men, although capable of virtue, and born with good dispositions, are led astray by seeing others walking in the paths of vice. Now, in order to be consistent, as they cannot deny that depravity is very general, they must admit that bad example is general. The cause must be commensurate with the effect. If it were only here and there that bad example is exhibited, it would be only here and there that corruption would be diffused. It follows, therefore, that there has been bad example in all ages and

nations, in all provinces, cities, villages, and families. Hence it appears, that this is a preposterous attempt to account for a thing by itself. We ask, How it comes to pass that men are so generally corrupt? and our opponents answer It is because their conduct is generally wicked. But this is the very fact about which we are inquiring. We say to them, Explain it to us, and they refuse us to the fact itself. If human nature is not depraved, what is the cause that men, every where and at all times, exhibit bad example? If they are not wicked in heart, why are they wicked in practice? But further, if human nature is not depraved, why is bad example so readily imitated? What gives it such extensive influence? Common sense would dictate, that there must be a tendency to evil, since it is so generally followed. What always takes place, must be owing to a permanent cause. Surely if men came into the world without sin, they would be more likely to imitate good than bad example; and if they had only a slight inclination to it, the goodness of the example would, in many cases, prove a check to that inclination, and the result would be an extensive prevalence of virtuous practice. This attempt to account for the corruption of mankind, independently of the corruption of their nature, is extremely foolish. The general imitation of bad example demonstrates an innate propensity to evil; and this is the point for which we are contending.

Others would account for the depravity of mankind by the abuse of free-will, by which they mean the power which man possesses of choosing and refusing, by his own sovereign determination, independently of motives. It has been justly observed, that such free-will is of all causes the most uncertain. It cannot be known beforehand how it will decide; and it is utterly inconceivable that a cause so unsteady and capricious should produce a uniform effect. There is a manifest absurdity, therefore, in this attempt to account for the depravity of men in all ages and nations. You might as well account for the regular return of day and night by the motion of a weathercock. We may ask, Whence have men, in all ages, abused their free-will? Why, if they are masters of their own volitions, have they always chosen in one way? How is it, if their wills are equally free to good and evil, that they have not determined in favour of good? If we found that, in every trial, one of the scales of a balance descended, we should conclude that it was heavier than the other; and can we draw any other conclusion respecting the will, on observing how regularly it decides in favour of evil? It has chosen evil among Jews, Gentiles, Mahometans, and Christians: it chooses it in Europe, Africa, Asia, and America. This is not the work of chance; it is the result of a previous bias. The will is inclined to evil, and therefore human nature is depraved.

Nothing is more unmeaning than the declamations of some men concerning human nature, because they are contrary to experience. If, when they tell us of its virtuous dispositions, they mean any thing more than the authority which conscience retains to a certain extent, the instincts and affections which we possess in common with the lower animals, a sense of honour which is pride disguised under a decent name, the civilities of life, and the performance of certain duties which are enjoined by the laws of society and are enforced by a regard to interest; if the virtuous dispositions which they ascribe to human nature signify any thing purer and more excellent, they affirm what is false, and what they must know to be false, if they are not mere dreamers wrapt up in the contemplation of the theories of the closet, and ignorant of the realities of life. What a disgusting spectacle does the history of mankind present! It is the history of war, oppression and blood; of profaneness and intemperance, avarice and selfishness, falsehood and fraud. There is scarcely a page of the annals of the world which does not furnish proof of the doctrine which we have endeavoured to establish. The institutions of civil society bear a testimony to it; for what renders necessary so many definitions of personal rights,

and so many securities of person and property, but the vicious dispositions of mankind, which prompt them incessantly to encroach upon others, and to promote their own interests by artifice and violence? What embitters the relations of life, but wayward tempers and ungovernable passions? And what makes individuals unhappy, but insatiable desires, fretfulness, impatience, discontent, remorse for the past, and fearful forebodings of the future? Every appearance bespeaks a fallen race; and upon a review of the crimes and miseries which abound in the world, we are led to the conclusion, that "all flesh have corrupted their ways." "Lo! this only have I found, that God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions."*

The doctrine of original sin places human nature in a very degraded light; but this is no argument against its truth. The question is, not what we should wish it to be, but what it actually is. It could serve no purpose to represent it as pure, if it is corrupted; possessed of power to do the will of God, if it is dead in trespasses and sins. Let us remember, that this description of human nature is applicable to ourselves. Each of us was born a sinner, and a son of perdition. What reason have we to be thankful that God has remembered us in our lost estate, and sent his Son to redeem us from it! Through him man rises from the ruins of the fall, and in a better world shall enjoy happiness which will fear no forfeiture, and know no end.

LECTURE XLVIII.

ON THE COVENANT OF GRACE.

Origin of Redemption in the Covenant of Grace—Meaning of the term, Covenant—Transacted between the Father and the Son—The Father viewed as a Party to the Covenant—The Son as a Party—His character of Representative, Surety, and Mediator—Remarks on a distinction between the Covenant of Redemption and the Covenant of Grace.

HAVING illustrated the fall of man and its fatal consequences, in some preceding Lectures, I proceed to speak of his Redemption. It is universally acknowledged, that God might have left our guilty race to perish in their sins. He was certainly not bound in justice to interfere on their behalf; but as the righteous Governor of the world, he might have proceeded to uphold the authority of his law, by executing its penalty upon the disobedient, and to give an awful example of vengeance to the intelligent inhabitants of the various provinces of his empire. His goodness did not require that he should rescene his rebellious subjects from the misery which they had brought upon themselves, because he had already given an ample display of it in their creation, and it was still exhibited in the happiness diffused through all the regions of innocence. His glory does not depend upon the manifestation of any particular attribute, but upon the manifestation of them all on proper occasions, and in full harmony. He is glorified when he bestows blessings upon the righteous, and is equally glorified when he inflicts punishment upon the wicked. The event shews that his glory is greater in the salvation, than it would have been in the destruction, of men; but it ought to be considered, that his glory means nothing but the manifestation of his character to his creatures, and that, as there was no necessity for such a manifestation, and it could not contribute in

* Eccl. vii. 29.

any degree to his felicity, it was perfectly voluntary, and might have been withheld. The only necessity which can be admitted, is that, if he shew himself at all to his creatures, the discovery shall correspond to the greatness and excellence of his nature. He might not have created a single being to contemplate and admire his perfections; and when those who were admitted to the wonderful spectacle were guilty of dishonouring him, he might have farther revealed himself only in wrath, pouring out the vials of his indignation upon the polluted spot which they inhabited, and turning it into a scene of desolation. What would the loss of our world have been to Him in whose eyes it is as nothing, yea, less than nothing and vanity? It follows from these observations, the truth of which cannot be disputed, that the plan which he has devised for the restoration of fallen men to purity and happiness, originated in his sovereign grace.

In speaking of the work of redemption, we must ascend to its source, and begin with the consideration of that eternal agreement between the Persons of the Godhead, on which the whole dispensation of mercy to mankind is founded. It is usually called a covenant, and, on account of its origin, and of the manner in which its benefits are communicated, it is denominated the Covenant of Grace. But, in using this term, we must not give loose reins to our fancy, and invest a divine transaction with the forms and technicalities of a human bargain. This, I fear, has been sometimes done,—with the best intentions, I have no doubt, but with an unhappy effect, as it brings down a subject which should always be reflected upon with reverence and admiration, to a level with the every-day affairs of miserable mortals, and is calculated to make us forget its sublimity in the minuteness and familiarity of the detail.

The Hebrew word *ברית*, and the Greek word *διαθήκη*, which are translated covenant, are used in different senses. *ברית*, in several places, evidently signifies an appointment or constitution, as, for example, when God speaks of “his covenant with day and night,” when the idea of an agreement or stipulation cannot for a moment be admitted. It evidently bears the meaning of an appointment or ordinance, unless we choose rather to call it a promise, when God says to Noah, “I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood, neither shall there be any more a flood to destroy the earth.” We must understand it as signifying a promise, when God is said to have made a covenant with Abraham, saying, “Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance.” In the Christian Scriptures, the word *διαθήκη* occurs in all the following senses,—a promise, a command, a religious constitution or dispensation, a covenant, and perhaps in one instance or two, a testament. Our translators, I think, have confined themselves to the two latter words, using sometimes the one and sometimes the other, I might almost say arbitrarily, but without doubt injudiciously. We read, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, of the mediator of a testament, and the surety of a testament, although every person must see that the word, covenant, should have been preferred, because we know well what the mediator or surety of a covenant is, while it is impossible to conceive in what sense these terms can be applied to a testament. I have made these remarks, to shew that it is not from the simple occurrence of the Hebrew or the Greek words, that we are to infer a federal transaction between God and man, or between any other parties, but from the circumstances of the case, which alone can determine in what sense the terms are employed. We may meet with them where no covenant is implied, and we may find a covenant to have been made, where neither of them is used to express it. I would farther observe, that we should beware of falling into the mistake of some superficial readers of the Scriptures, who have occasionally misinterpreted passages in which the word occurs, by explaining it of the covenant of works, or the covenant of

grace, when something different is intended. I should wander from the subject of the lecture, were I to examine the various places in which it occurs. I shall take notice only of one passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which speaks of a first covenant that was not faultless, and of a second which succeeded it.* If any man read this passage with attention, he will perceive that neither the covenant of works, nor the covenant of grace properly so called, is intended, but that these covenants are the two great dispensations of religion, of which the one was established by the ministry of Moses, and the other by the ministry of Christ. Perhaps it would have accorded better with the design of the Apostle, to have translated the original word by *dispensation*; but it is certain, that the first covenant was the Jewish economy, and the second is the Christian.

There are various considerations, from which we may infer the existence of the covenant of grace, or of that agreement relative to the salvation of sinners, into which God entered with his Son before the foundation of the world. The character of a Surety, which is given to our Saviour in Scripture, points him out as the representative of others, and as having come under an engagement to fulfil certain terms in their name, and for their benefit. The title of the Second Adam, and the comparison, or rather the contrast, which is drawn between him and the first man, implies, that he resembled the latter, in being a federal head, by whose conduct others are affected. The frequent declarations, that he came into the world to do the will of his Father, import, that the Father had proposed a certain design to him, and that he had undertaken to accomplish it; and this conclusion is confirmed by the important circumstance, that promises are made to him of a glorious reward. The transaction is clearly expressed in the following words: When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin," or rather, "if his soul shall make a propitiatory sacrifice, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand;"† for here we have a condition and a promise. Indeed, the whole scheme of redemption involves the idea of a covenant; while one Divine Person prescribes certain services to the other, the other performs them; and the result is, not only his own personal exaltation, but the eternal happiness of millions whose cause he had espoused. That this transaction was anterior to the beginning of time, is evident from the assertion of an Apostle, that "eternal life was promised before the foundation of the world;" for as a promise always supposes some person to whom it is made, and the human race had then no existence, it must have been made to Christ as the representative of his people. May we not apply to this occasion the following words? "I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, ere ever the earth was.—Then I was by him, as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth; and my delights were with the sons of men."‡ In the opinion of many, this covenant is expressly mentioned in the eighty-ninth Psalm: "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant. Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations."§ There is no doubt that the primary reference is to the covenant of royalty, in which the kingdom was promised to David and his descendants; but there can be no question that a greater than David is here, namely, his illustrious Son, who is sometimes called after his name, and in whom the promise has been fulfilled; for God has given to him, according to the words of the angel who appeared to his mother, "the throne of his father David, and of his kingdom there shall be no end;"|| By reading the psalm, you will be convinced that the language is too sublime, and the things foretold are too great, to admit of being

* Heb. viii. 7.

§ Ver. 3, and 4.

† Isa. liii. 10.

|| Luke i. 32, 33.

‡ Prov. viii. 23, 30, 31.

limited to any earthly monarch, or race of monarchs, however extensive their dominions, and however glorious their achievements. It is the antitype of David, the elect of God, as he is styled by Isaiah, the object of his peculiar choice and dearest love, with whom this covenant was made, by which "mercy is built up for ever, and the divine faithfulness is established in the very heavens."

It may be objected, that a covenant could not have been made between the Father and the Son from eternity, when our Lord had not assumed our nature; because the transaction supposes not only two distinct persons, but two distinct wills, and we are assured that they are, in essence, numerically one. But the objection will have no weight with any one who believes the doctrine of the Trinity. It is possible, indeed, to propose questions which he cannot answer, and to start difficulties which he cannot solve; but it is worthy of attention, that the reasoning of his antagonists is not founded upon their knowledge, but upon their ignorance. They do not know, that the thing to which they object is impossible; they merely are unable to conceive its possibility, and hence draw the hasty conclusion, that it could not take place. If we admit that there are distinct persons in the Godhead, we must also admit, that the attributes of a person belong to each, namely, understanding and will. How this is consistent with the most perfect unity of the Divine essence, we may be unable to explain; but the testimony of Scripture is a sufficient foundation of faith. The Father has a will, and the Son has a will; for, on the contrary supposition, they would be in every respect the same; and the union of these two wills, with respect to the salvation of men, and the means of its accomplishment, is that covenant which is the subject of our present inquiry.

As, in every covenant, there are parties who come under mutual engagements, it is necessary to speak of the Father and the Son under this designation; and, in doing so, we can hardly avoid ideas and expressions which bear too close an analogy to the thoughts and proceedings of men; but let us not adopt them from choice, and, as I have formerly remarked, degrade the subject, by a too familiar illustration. A Divine transaction we cannot understand, except by referring to a human transaction to which it bears some resemblance; but we should exclude every thing low, every thing which is allied to human infirmity. When two men enter into a covenant, one of them makes a proposal to the other, who immediately, or after deliberation, accedes to it. We must not think, however, that, in the present case, the proposal preceded the consent in the order of time, or that it was the proposal of the one party, which turned the attention of the other to the subject, and gained his concurrence. Who does not see the impropriety of such an imagination, as the parties were Divine persons, to whom we cannot ascribe a succession of thoughts, without virtually denying the infinity and immutability of their knowledge, and whom we cannot conceive to consult together after the manner of men, without imputing to them limited views, and a gradual accumulation of ideas? Who does not see, that a single and harmonious act of the Persons of the Trinity, was sufficient to form and to ratify all those purposes which are executed in time? If there be any expressions in Scripture, which seem to favour rather a successive process than a simultaneous decision, they are used in condescension to us, who can judge of things which we have not seen, only by things which we do see; and they ought to be explained in the same way with all those passages which represent God as actuated by human feelings and passions. As the design of this covenant was to reconcile opposite interests, the interests of heaven and of earth, on each side there was a party; the Father acting for the honour of the Godhead, and the Son for the salvation of men.

The Father must not be considered as acting simply in his personal character; but as the Son was the federal head of his people, whom he undertook to redeem so the Father is to be viewed as representing all the Persons of

the Trinity. This is not a refined speculation, or a mere subtlety, but a truth which it is necessary to know, that our ideas of the subject may be correct. Whether he be considered as demanding satisfaction for sin, or promising eternal happiness, a little attention will shew us, that he sustained a representative character. Sin was as offensive to the other Persons as to him, and their honour was equally engaged to demand its punishment; so that their concurrence was indispensably necessary in any expedient for averting the penalty from the criminals themselves. One Person, if I may speak so, could not have adopted it, without the consent of the others. The promise of eternal life, although made by the Father, is not exclusively his, but is expressive of the goodness of the whole Godhead; for that life will consist in the immediate and perpetual enjoyment of the favour and love of all its Persons. Hence, we find the Apostle John praying for grace and peace to the churches of Asia, not only “from him which is, and which was, and which is to come,” * or the Father; but from the Holy Ghost, called, on account of the variety and fullness of his gifts, “the seven Spirits which are before his throne,” “and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful Witness, and the first-begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth.” The design of the covenant was, to vindicate the rights, and to manifest the glory, not of the Father alone, but of that nature which is common to him, and the Son, and the Spirit. By him indeed, the terms were proposed, and the promises were made; but the terms were the result of the united counsels of the Trinity, and their united love was the source from which the blessings flow. We should beware of understanding those passages of Scripture, which ascribe our redemption to the love of the Father, as if we were indebted for it to him alone, while they are solely intended to point out the part which he sustains in this wonderful economy. Redemption originated in the love of the Godhead; but the office of appointing the Saviour, and prescribing the services to be performed, devolved upon the Father as being the first in the order of subsistence.

Without insisting further on this topic, I shall proceed to specify some particular characters, in which the Father acted when he made a covenant with his Son.

First, He acted as a God of infinite love. I anticipated what might be said on this point, in the introduction to this lecture. God first loved men, and then proceeded to provide a Saviour for them, and to settle the plan, by which the design of his mission should be accomplished. Their fall and their subsequent misery were clearly foreseen. He saw them to be without excuse, without help, and without hope; and at this moment, his eye pitied them, and his arm brought them salvation. It is, therefore, to love that we must ascribe the making of the covenant, for, as their character presented no motive, so it has appeared that he could not be influenced by any other consideration than his own benevolence. They are miserable, it is true, and he is merciful; but although full of compassion, he is impelled by no necessity to exercise it, as manifest from the case of fallen angels, whose doom is as lamentable as that of men, but against whom the door of hope is for ever shut. The making of the covenant was the effect of pure goodness, and is represented as “grace given us in Christ, before the world began.”

Secondly, He acted as a sovereign God, exercising his goodness according to his own pleasure, giving grace to some, and withholding it from others. His sovereignty was displayed in the fact to which we have already referred, the provision of the means of redemption for men, while fallen angels were left in a state of condemnation. Hence, the Redeemer was not appointed to enter into an alliance with the angelical nature, but to become bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. The reason why creatures of an inferior

order were preferred to those who so much excelled them in the spirituality of their essence, and the extent of their faculties, can be found only in that uncontrolled will which directs all things in time and eternity. His sovereignty appears also in the limiting of the benefits of the covenant to a portion of the human race; for, while the first Adam represented all his natural descendants, the second Adam was the representative only of his spiritual seed, by whom are meant those who were to be born again by his grace. Among the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, there is a "remnant according to the election of grace," * and these "were chosen in him before the foundation of the world." † "He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and hath compassion on whom he will have compassion." ‡

Thirdly, He acted as a holy and righteous God. While he purposed to display the exceeding riches of his grace, he also purposed to glorify his purity and justice. It was impossible that he could devise or approve of any plan for the salvation of sinners, which could reflect dishonour upon any perfection of his nature. But his truth, and justice, and holiness, would have been dishonoured, because what was due to them would have been entirely overlooked, if man had been restored to happiness, while the law which he had violated was not fulfilled, and no satisfaction was made for his offences. Against such a result, effectual precaution was taken by the selection of the Son of God, to intervene between him and sinners, and by the proposal to him of the only terms upon which they could be restored to favour. He was substituted in the room of the guilty, and undertook in their room to answer every claim; he was constituted a federal head, whose actions should have a legal respect to those whom he represented, and be held by the Supreme Lawgiver as a full equivalent for all that they were bound to do and to suffer. The duty imposed upon him was to assume the nature of man, in which alone the terms of a covenant made for the salvation of men could be fulfilled; and after he had assumed it, to yield obedience to the precepts of the law, and to endure the execution of its penalty. In the proposal of these terms, the inflexible moral rectitude of the Divine nature was demonstrated. At the moment when love was in full operation, its other attributes were held so sacred, that not a step was taken without securing their rights. God was willing to pardon, but he would not cancel the guilt of the sinner, unless an atonement were offered for it. He would be just in justifying the ungodly; he would make "mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other." Hence you perceive that the covenant could not have been made with men themselves; for to them the fulfilment of the terms would have been impossible. It could be made only with a Divine Person, who, joining himself to our nature, could bear almighty wrath, and magnify the law by perfect obedience.

The other party in the covenant of grace was the Son, who sustained a public character, and was the representative of his people. The second covenant, as we have said, could not have been made with men, because they were under a sentence of condemnation for the violation of the first. No other creature, however dignified and richly endowed with moral excellencies, was qualified to enter into a federal transaction with God, in behalf of the guilty, because the terms were too high to be fulfilled even by the ability of an archangel. The universe was not then in existence; but that eye which sees the future as well as the present, did not behold in any of its provinces a single being, who was worthy to stand forth as an intercessor for our fallen race; and if a Divine person had not appeared to undertake the arduous task, our condition would have been as hopeless as that of the apostate angels, for whom no remedial scheme has been devised. But the Father appointed his

* Rom. xi. 5

† Eph. i. 4.

‡ Rom. ix. 15.

own Son, as one who was both able and willing to befriend us ; and the office which was assigned to him he most readily accepted. “Lo, I come : in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God ; yea, thy law is within my heart.”* These words are expressive of his cheerful compliance with the terms of the covenant, and they are recorded in the volume of the divine decree, concerning the salvation of men, or of the scriptures, which are a faithful transcript of it. Animated with zeal for the glory of his Father, and with ineffable love to perishing sinners, he “rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth ;” that is, it gave the highest pleasure to his benevolent heart to assume the character of our Redeemer, although he was fully apprised of the humiliation and sufferings to which it would be necessary to submit, in order to accomplish his design.

In consequence of his consent to the terms of the covenant, he was constituted the head or representative of his people. He became a public person, who acted in the name of others. Some may think that, as men had not yet fallen, it would be more accurate to say, that it was then agreed that he should become their representative, as soon as their circumstances should require his interposition ; but, if we believe that the covenant was made from eternity, and that they were chosen in him before the foundation of the world, there seems to be a necessity for admitting that he was invested with this character prior to the commencement of time. A new relation was formed between him and the guilty, in virtue of which he was made answerable for their guilt, and came under an obligation to perform the obedience which they owed to the law, that his righteousness might be imputed to them, as if they had obeyed and suffered in their own persons. That this doctrine has a foundation in Scripture is evident from the comparison, formerly referred to, which Paul institutes between Christ and Adam, whom we acknowledge to have sustained a federal relation to his children. “But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead ; much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift : for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one ; much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one Jesus Christ. Therefore, as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation ; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners ; so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”† I have quoted this long passage, in order to show you how the Apostle runs a parallel between Adam and Christ, with a design to teach us at once in what respect they agree, and also in what they disagree. The disagreement consists in the difference of the effects resulting from their respective agency, the one having been the cause of guilt and depravity, and death ; the other, of righteousness and life. The agreement consists in their public character, and the representation of Christ is as clearly stated as that of the first man. In both cases the language is similar, and implies, not an accidental, but an instituted connexion between them and others, in consequence of which others are affected by what they have respectively done. By the one came condemnation, by the other justification ; by the one we are made sinners, and by the other righteous. If Adam had not been our federal head, we should not have suffered by his first transgression more than by his subsequent sins, or by those of our nearer progenitors ; and we may reason in the same manner, that, if Christ had not been our federal head, we should have been no more benefited by his obedience than by that of any of the saints

* Ps. xl. 7, 8.

† Rom. v. 15—19.

Its merit would have terminated in himself, and its influence upon us would have been merely that of example.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Christ is called the surety of the covenant.* A surety is a person who gives security for another, that he will perform something which the other is bound to do; that is, in case of failure, will perform it for him. The title, as given to our Saviour, implies that he came under an obligation to fulfil the condition of the covenant for his people. He undertook, as we shall afterwards see, to yield the obedience which they owed to the law, and to make satisfaction to Divine justice for their sins. Some, however, have taken a different view of the matter. Christ, they say, is surety for God to man, or has pledged himself that, to those who enter into covenant with God, the promises shall be performed. It is true, that "all the promises in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God;"† or, in other words, that he has ratified them in this sense, that his blood having been shed as the price of the blessings which they contain, the performance of them ought to be confidently expected by believers. But the performance depends solely upon the justice and faithfulness of God. A surety is admitted, when a doubt or suspicion is entertained of the person for whom he is bound, and his credit is brought forward to supply what is wanting in the other. Keeping this idea of a surety in mind, we shall perceive, to say the least, a manifest impropriety in calling Christ a surety for God; for it implies that the simple promise of God is not worthy of trust, and could not be depended upon till it was confirmed by the pledged truth of another. But the Scriptures represent the word of God as the sole ground of faith. We must believe, because he is true and faithful, and will not deceive us. His word is the highest possible security; it stands in need of no confirmation; and if he has been pleased to sanction it with his oath, it is not because an oath was necessary to render it worthy of credit, but in condescension to human infirmity. "God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."‡ The promise is as immutable as the oath; and the latter was added, not to render the former more sure in itself, but to remove our unreasonable suspicions. How could any person be a surety for God? Is his sincerity more fully ascertained? Has his faithfulness been more clearly established? I know not what some men mean, nor am I sure that they understand themselves, when they say that Christ was surety for God.

There are others who, granting that he was surety only for man, explain his suretiship in a manner not consonant to Scripture. He was surety, they say, that men would perform the obedience which God requires from them in the covenant of grace. In some instances, this mistake is founded upon another respecting the nature of the covenant, as being an agreement entered into between God and men themselves, in which spiritual blessings are promised upon certain conditions. I shall afterwards consider this opinion; and, in the mean time, I observe, that the notion of Christ's being surety for our obedience, receives no countenance from Scripture. He has, indeed, obtained for his people that grace by which they are enabled to obey; but the actual communication of it belongs to the Father, who has engaged in the covenant to bestow it. The obedience of believers is secured, not by any pledge which Christ has given in their name, but by the following promise of the Father: "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 an

* Heb. vii. 22.

† 2 Cor. i. 20.

‡ Heb. vi. 17, 18.

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.”*

A surety for a bankrupt—for this is the only comparison which the present case will admit—is one who engages to satisfy his creditors, by paying his debts. Hence, when Jesus Christ is called the Surety of the new covenant, the meaning evidently is, that he undertook to discharge the debt which sinners owed to the law and justice of God, the debt of obedience, and the debt of suffering.

Our Saviour is farther called the Mediator of the covenant; a title which imports that he interposes between God and men with a view to reconcile them. “There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”† For this office he is qualified by the constitution of his person. Possessed of the Divine nature from eternity, he agreed to assume the human, that he might be allied to both parties; and he knew how to establish a perfect harmony between the glory of God and the salvation of his guilty creatures. There are so many observations to be made upon the necessity of the Mediatorial office, the qualification of our Saviour for it, and its effects, that they would detain us too long from entering upon the other parts of the subject. I shall therefore reserve them for another occasion.

The covenant by which men are saved is one, and was made with Christ before the foundation of the world. Many Theologians, however, are of opinion, that there are two covenants connected with the salvation of men, which they call the covenant of redemption, and the covenant of grace, and distinguish them in the following manner. The covenant of redemption was made from eternity; but the covenant of grace is made in time: The parties in the former are God and his Son, the parties in the latter are God and sinners: The covenant of redemption is the agreement between the Divine Persons, which we have already explained, and the condition of it is the righteousness of Christ; the covenant of grace is the agreement which God makes with sinners in the Gospel, promising to them spiritual and eternal blessings upon the condition of faith. There is no reason to exclaim against this statement as fraught with dangerous error; nor should we give way to that weak zeal, which is startled at modes of expression different from our own, and hastily concludes, that they are meant to convey a difference of meaning. If we examine it with candour, we shall find that, in substance, it accords with our own views of the subject. I acknowledge, that there does not appear to be any ground in Scripture for the notion of two covenants. The blood of Christ is called “the blood of the covenant,” not “of the covenants,” as we may presume it would have been called, if it had been the condition of the covenant of redemption, and the foundation of the covenant of grace. The truth is, that what those Divines call the covenant of grace, is merely the administration of what they call the covenant of redemption, for the purpose of communicating its blessings to those for whom they were intended; and cannot be properly considered as a covenant, because it is not suspended upon a proper condition, as we shall presently see. At the same time it is right to remark, that it is frequently spoken of as a covenant, and is said to be made with men themselves. “I will make with you an everlasting covenant.”‡ “This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord.”§ “He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure.”|| I may add, that the Confession of Faith, which we receive as a standard of doctrine, although we sometimes beg leave to dissent from some of its expressions, gives the same view of the covenant of grace: “Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by the covenant of

* Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

§ Heb. viii. 10.

† 1 Tim. ii. 5.

|| 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

‡ Isa. lv. 3.

works, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; whereby he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.”* Still I am persuaded that the doctrine taught in our church, which has been adopted also by many others, is more accurate, that the covenant by which we are saved is one, whether you call it, the covenant of redemption, or the covenant of grace, for neither the one name nor the other is found in the Scripture; and that what some call the covenant of grace, is nothing but the dispensation by which the benefits that Christ purchased by his obedience and death are imparted to believers.

The use of the term *condition*, in reference to the covenant of grace, may also be considered as objectionable, because it commonly means something which when done by one party, gives a right to what was promised by the other. To call faith, therefore, the condition of the covenant, may seem to imply, that there is merit in faith, which entitles us to salvation. This, however, is far from being the meaning of those whose sentiments we are at present considering. The term is used by them in a lower sense, and simply signifies something which goes before another, and without which the other cannot be obtained. They do not assign merit to faith, but simply precedence. According to them, faith is the condition of the covenant, because the promise of salvation will be performed to none but believers. They hold as well as we, that it is only the means of obtaining an interest in the salvation offered in the Gospel; and that it is itself an effect of grace, being wrought in the heart by the Spirit of regeneration. If they err, then, it is not in sentiment, but in language; and we should be cautious in affirming that they err even here, lest the censure should recoil upon persons of whom we are accustomed to speak with great veneration, and to whom some are disposed to look up as almost infallible oracles, the framers of those public standards which we have adopted; for they did not hesitate to make use of the obnoxious term. “The grace of God,” they say in the Larger Catechism, “is manifested in the second covenant, in that he freely provideth and offereth to sinners a Mediator, and life and salvation by him; and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him, promiseth and giveth his Holy Spirit to all his elect, to work in them that faith, with all other saving graces.”† As, however, the word, condition, has been often employed in an unscriptural sense, and is apt to suggest false ideas to the ignorant and unwary, it is more prudent to lay it aside.

I remark by the way, that the vehemence with which some in our church have opposed the use of the term, while they might have known that nothing improper was meant by it, is altogether unjustifiable. It arose either from ignorance that the term is found in our standards, or from dishonest zeal, which condemns in an antagonist what it tolerates in a friend. And here we may remark the improper conduct of most churches in reference to their standards. Having once adopted them, they regard them as the laws of the Medes and Persians, which must never be altered. As if their infallibility were ascertained, they are never subjected to revision; whereas they should be frequently revised, that such changes may be made in sentiment and language as are suggested by more correct views of the Scriptures. Then we should have avoided the awkwardness of having standards to which we assent without reserve or qualification, but in which there are expressions that we cannot use without incurring the suspicion of error. I know only of one exception from this practice, so unbecoming Protestants and daily students of the Scriptures.‡

* West. Conf. c. vii. § 3.

† Quest. 32.

‡ It is believed that the exception here alluded to, was that of the Protestant Church of France, which revised its standards at every period of two years.

We cannot exercise the same indulgence towards every view which has been given by Theologians of the covenant of grace, for, by some, it has been grossly misrepresented, so that nothing remains but the name. According to them, the design of the death of Christ was to make God reconcilable to sinners, and to procure a new covenant with them, in which pardon and eternal life are promised on the condition of faith, repentance, and obedience. If sometimes they call faith alone the condition of the covenant, we must beware of being imposed upon by the sound of a word, to which they have affixed a peculiar meaning favourable to their own system; for it does not signify, as in the language of other divines, reliance upon Jesus Christ alone for salvation, but such a belief of the truth as leads to obedience, and derives all its value and efficacy from its effects. Having erected this fanciful structure, they give it the name of the new covenant, the gospel covenant, or the covenant of grace, because they pretend God has manifested his grace in it by proposing easier terms. In the first covenant, he exacted perfect obedience; but now he requires only sincere obedience, in consideration of the infirmity of man, who, being enfeebled by sin, and surrounded with temptations, is incapable of complying with the strict demands of the original law. The remedy, in this case, is repentance for defects and transgressions; and, through the mediation of Christ, God accepts of our upright endeavours to serve him. But, whatever name may be given to this imaginary transaction, it is truly and formally a covenant of works, the nature of which consists in suspending the reward upon certain performances, whether they be many or few, difficult or easy. That is a covenant of works, which makes works of any kind the condition of the promise. The words of the Apostle are express, and expose the vanity and criminality of this attempt to join together two things, which are, and ever will be opposed to each other: "If it be by grace, then is it no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more of grace; otherwise work is no more work."* There are only two laws by which men can hope to be saved, the law of works, and the law of faith; of which the former says, "Do this, and thou shalt live;" but this is the language of the latter, "To him that worketh not, but believeth in him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."† The scheme which we are now considering, is a clumsy and audacious attempt to blend together two methods of salvation which are essentially different. It supposes, besides, what is absolutely impossible, that God may relax the strictness of his law, and require less from men than he once did, because they are become unable to give more. But how could God demand less, if he be the same holy and righteous being that he was in the beginning? The inability of men to yield perfect obedience, is not owing to him but to themselves, and consists in unwillingness, in aversion of heart. It does not consequently deprive him of his rights, nor would it be worthy of his character to lower the standard because his subjects are dissatisfied with it, and by doing so, to give his sanction to their unjustifiable revolt. Are they not commanded "to love him with all their heart, and soul, and mind, and strength? and to love their neighbour as themselves? And is not this the whole of the law; the utmost that was ever required? "Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."‡ I add, that, although it were granted that faith, repentance, and sincere obedience are now accepted instead of perfect righteousness, the covenant, of which these were the condition, would not deserve to be called the covenant of grace on account of the easiness of its terms. None will deem them easy but the man who is ignorant of himself, and of the total corruption of human nature. To us, in whose flesh there dwells no good thing, they are as impossible as perfect obe-

* Rom. xi. 6.

† Ib. iv. 5.

‡ 1. iii. :

dience. The person who is reduced to the last stage of weakness by a mortal disease, is as incapable of raising a weight of ten pounds, as a weight of a hundred. I conclude, therefore, that this view of the covenant of grace is erroneous, has no foundation in Scripture, is contrary to the moral attributes of God, fosters pride, overthrows the gospel of Christ, and is calculated to deceive sinners, with the vain hope of obtaining salvation by their own efforts, while the terms which it proposes are not more within the compass of their ability than the strictest and most extensive demands.

LECTURE XLIX.

ON THE COVENANT OF GRACE.

Condition of the Covenant—Preliminary Remarks on the Engagement to perform it into which the Son entered—The Condition included, First, Perfect Obedience to the Precepts of the Law; Secondly, Satisfactory Sufferings for the Sins of his People—Promises of the Covenant considered as they respected Christ himself and as they respected the Elect—View of the Blessings promised to the Elect.

A COVENANT is an agreement between two parties who come under mutual engagements. Something is to be done by one of the parties, in consequence of which the other party binds himself to do another thing in return. When a master, for example, enters into an agreement or covenant with a servant, he prescribes certain duties to be performed by the servant, and promises to recompense him with suitable wages. By consenting to the compact, the servant becomes bound to perform the stipulated work, and the master is bound to bestow the reward when the term of labour is finished. In a covenant therefore, there are two parts, a condition with a promise; and sometimes a penalty is added to be executed in case of failure. The two former are found in the covenant of grace; and I now proceed to consider them in their order.

The condition of a covenant is that work or service which gives the performer a right to the promised reward. In order to learn what was the condition of the covenant of grace, let us remember that Jesus Christ, by becoming the surety of his people, took upon himself those terms which it would have been necessary for them to fulfil, in order to obtain the favor of God, and a title to happiness. What these were, will appear, if we consider the original obligation under which man was placed by his Creator, and the situation into which he had brought himself by disobedience. The first covenant enjoined perfect obedience to the Divine law as the condition of life; and the will of the Maker of the covenant was signified to Adam, in the prohibition to taste the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As the prohibition was not founded on the nature of things, but on the sovereign will of God, it was a clear intimation to our first parent, that his hope of continued and augmented felicity was suspended upon his unreserved submission to the authority of his Creator. He was to obey him in every thing, and to ask no reason but his command; he was to live for him alone, and to consecrate all his powers to his service. Such was the original condition of the covenant; But something more is now demanded, in consequence of the melancholy change which has taken place in the circumstances of man. As he was a fallible creature, a penalty was added in the beginning to enforce the precept, and to vindicate the honour of the Lawgiver, if the covenant was violated. To this penalty, Adam became obnoxious as soon as he had sinned; and his descendants are under the sentence of death, which was first pronounced upon him.

Hence we perceive what must have been, and actually was, the condition of the covenant of grace. For what was requisite that fallen man might enjoy peace with his offended Maker, and regain the happiness which he had lost by transgression? Although the first covenant had been broken, its claims subsisted in full force. It still demanded that perfect obedience which man had failed to yield, and in consequence of this failure, farther demanded that its penalty or curse should be executed upon the guilty. As man could not himself satisfy these claims, they devolved upon his surety, and that too, without any abatement; for, to suppose them to have been relaxed, on account of the dignity of the person, and his intimate relation to the Father, is to suppose God to have been less holy and just in the covenant of grace, than in the covenant of works. You see, then, that the fulfilment of the terms of the one covenant, was the express condition of the other. All that was required from sinners was required from their Saviour. The second covenant could not be established but by an exact compliance with the requisitions of the first. And the demands of the first covenant were enlarged by the breach of it; for, from man in a state of innocence, it required only obedience to its precepts; but from guilty man, and from Christ his representative, it required not only obedience but suffering.

Before I proceed to explain, more distinctly, the condition of the covenant, there are some remarks to be made upon the engagement into which our Saviour entered to perform it. The engagement was perfectly voluntary on his part; there existed no prior obligation, nor was there any authority by which he could be compelled to it. As a divine person, he was subject to no law, and acknowledged no superior; for, although we call the Father the first Person of the Trinity, we do not assign to him any pre-eminence of dignity and power, but merely state the order of subsistence. To suppose the Son to be inferior to him, would be inconsistent with the belief, that the same individual essence, and consequently the same perfections, belong equally to both. He "thought it not robbery to be equal with God."* Supreme dominion is necessarily attached to true and proper Divinity. The Son is "King of kings, and Lord of lords." With this supreme authority which we attribute to him, the engagement into which he entered to perform the condition of the covenant, was not incompatible. It was an act of his will, concurring with his Father in the scheme of redemption, and consenting to execute the part of the work which was allotted to him; but it did not imply a present subjection to the authority of his Father, or the immediate assumption of an inferior station. It was merely a purpose thus expressed, to assume that station at the proper period; a promise to descend to the earth in the fulness of time, and to appear in the form of a servant. By this promise of obedience, to be afterwards performed in the nature of man, the Son, as God, no more subjected himself to the Father, than the Father subjected himself to the Son, by promising to give him a right to demand the stipulated reward. I would not, however, be understood to insinuate, that he was not, from eternity, constituted our Surety, and that he only assumed his character at a posterior date. If grace was given to us in Christ before the world began, and the elect were then chosen in him to salvation, there seems to be a necessity for admitting, that a relation was then formed between him and his people; but it could not immediately have all the effect which it afterwards had, when he was manifested in the flesh. But it gave him a present interest in them; it was the foundation of that gracious economy which commenced after the fall, and which he carried on by his Spirit, and by the external ministry of angels and prophets; and it was the ground on which God pardoned sinners, and bestowed spiritual blessings upon them, prior to the incarnation and death of his Son.

* Phil. ii. 6.

I shall afterwards take an opportunity to speak of Christ as Mediator, and of the mysterious constitution of his person. It is certain that he is Mediator in both natures, the divine and the human; and hence it may seem to follow, that in both he is subject to the Father; and the difficulty remains, how one Divine Person could be subject to another. The proper solution of it, I think, is to consider the subjection, so far as the divine nature was concerned, as merely economical; and, being voluntary on the part of the Son, submitted to only for a time, and to promote a particular design, it manifestly does not imply any degradation. He did not surrender his Divinity, or any of his perfections, or any of his rights, but solely consented to sustain, for a season, a subordinate office, for the glory of the Godhead, and the salvation of a perishing world. Retaining his original glory, he was pleased to draw a veil over it in the eyes of men; to empty himself, according to the strong language of Scripture, and take upon him the form of a servant. The case would be similar, as far, at least, as human can resemble Divine things, if the son of a king, who was associated with him in the throne, should condescend, for reasons of state, to receive and execute the orders of his father. His title to supreme authority would be unimpaired, and, in fact, he would actually retain it undiminished, although he had waived the exercise of it for a time. The subjection of the human nature to the Father, was real, like that of any other creature to the Creator. It was different, indeed, from any other creature, in this respect, that the second person of the Trinity had united it to himself; but, in consequence of this union, there was no communication of properties from the one nature to the other, so that the human was deified, and raised above the authority of law. Although subsisting in the same hypostasis with the divine nature of the Son, it continued perfectly distinct, and was consequently under the same moral obligation, which binds the highest as well as the lowest creature to obey the will of the Author of its being. We may therefore say, that Christ as Mediator was subject to his Father, using the word, subject, in such a sense as is not inconsistent with his Supreme Divinity, and always remembering, that his subjection in the divine nature was voluntary and temporary, but in the human nature is necessary and perpetual. The necessity of maintaining the subjection of his whole person as sustaining the mediatorial character to the Father is obvious, because the acts of his human nature alone would not have accomplished the redemption of his people. A higher agency was requisite to fulfil the terms of the covenant. The Son of God must be made under the law, and the Lord of glory must be crucified.

I now proceed to speak more particularly of the condition of the covenant, which our Surety fulfilled. In many theological books, we are taught that it comprehended the three following things, holiness of nature, righteousness of life, and satisfaction for sin by sufferings and death. To answer these demands, our Redeemer assumed human nature without a stain, gave perfect obedience to the precepts of the law, and shed his blood as an atonement for sin. I am disposed to call in question the accuracy of this statement. To the second and third particular I have no objection, and believe that they were truly the terms of the covenant; but I do not see that the first was any part of the condition. My reason for dissenting in this instance from the common opinion, is that, besides satisfaction to divine justice, which is now required in consequence of sin, no other thing can be conceived to be the condition of the covenant of grace, which was not the condition of the covenant of works. Now, holiness of nature was not part of that condition, because man already was possessed of it when the covenant was made, and all therefore that could be required of him was, that he should act agreeably to the principles and dispositions with which his Maker had endowed him. A condition bears reference to the future, and implies something to be done. No man enters into a

covenant with another, on the ground of what he at present is, but on the ground of what he promises to be or to do. God did not promise eternal life to Adam, because he had a holy nature, but in the event of his obeying the command which he had given him respecting the tree of knowledge. The only condition prescribed to him was obedience, and it is the only condition, therefore, which could be prescribed to his Surety. It is true indeed that man, having lost the holiness of his nature, is bound to account for it; but this is done, not by substituting the holiness of the human nature of Christ as a compensation for the want of it, but by his atonement on the cross for all sin original and actual: and being indispensably necessary to communion with God and the enjoyment of heaven, it is restored to the elect by the operation of his Spirit. The holiness of his human nature, I consider rather as a qualification for the work which he was appointed to perform, than as any part of the work itself. It was necessary that it should be a holy thing, not only because an impure nature would not have been admitted into personal union with the divine, but because it would not have been acceptable to God, or capable of performing a single action of which he would approve. Its holiness was an indispensable pre-requisite, according to his own saying. "First make the tree good, and then the fruit will be good." The Father therefore engaged to provide it, and actually gave it to him at the appointed time. "Wherefore, when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me."* These are the words of our Saviour, and they imply, that the human nature was given to him by his Father that he might have something to offer, namely, the immaculate oblation of his body and soul. We believe that all that our Saviour did and suffered in the character of our Surety was meritorious of salvation. But there is no merit in the simple possession of a gift, however excellent in itself; and merit arises from the proper use of the gift, from the use of it according to the will of the giver and for the purposes which he had in view in bestowing it. The holiness of the human nature of Christ was a gift of his Father, by which he was qualified for his work, and in receiving it, considered as a man, he was passive. There was therefore no place for merit, although his unspotted purity was in the highest degree pleasing in the eyes of his Father. His merit consisted in the use of the gift, in retaining his holy nature amidst all the temptations of Satan and the world, and in exerting its faculties in the service of his Father. It could not therefore be a part of the condition of the covenant, which consisted in active duties, in doing something which God had enjoined, and to which he had promised a reward. For these reasons, I reject the first particular which is usually mentioned as included in the condition of the covenant, and shall confine your attention to the second and the third.

First, The Father required from our Surety perfect obedience to the precepts of the law. Such obedience was demanded from man under the first covenant; and as the obligation of the moral law is not founded on occasional circumstances, but on the nature and relation of God and his creatures, the same obedience must have been required in the second. There was no possibility that man could obtain happiness unless this obedience was performed by himself, or by another whom the Lawgiver should admit to act in his name. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments," † is the answer which the law returns to the sinner, who asks what he shall do to inherit that life. It is evident that the same obedience was required from our Saviour, when acting as our federal head. As he is said to have been made under the law, when he was made of a woman, so we hear him expressing, in the view of his future incarnation, his intention to fulfil it: "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart."‡ He knew and loved the law,

* Heb. x. 5.

† Matt. xix. 17

‡ Ps. xl. 8.

and he came into the world to honour it by submission to its authority. He was always ready to recognise his obligation to obedience. By receiving baptism from the hands of his forerunner, he solemnly and publicly dedicated himself to the service of his Father; and his whole conduct was a commentary upon his own declaration: "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."* Accordingly he diffused on all around him the light of holiness, as well as of heavenly doctrine. In every relation and condition of life, in his conduct towards friends and enemies, in peace and in trouble, before the eyes of the public and in retirement with his own followers, he exhibited a perfect example of it. He glorified God, he loved man, he went about doing good. As he boldly challenged his enemies to convict him of sin, so he reckoned with the utmost confidence upon the approbation of his Father. "He that sent me, is with me; the Father hath not left me alone, for I do always those things that please him."†

It may be objected, that the obedience of Christ, however perfect, could not be available for us since he owed it for himself, because as man he was subject to the same moral law, which is obligatory upon all mankind. Its merit, therefore, could not be imputed to others, but must have terminated upon himself. Different answers may be returned to this objection. It may be said in the first place, that, although it was performed in the human nature, it was the obedience of our Mediator in his whole person, and consequently, that he did not owe it for himself, because, being the Son of God, he was not subject to the law. It may be alleged indeed, that as Mediator he was subject to the Father in the sense already explained; but it should be considered that, this subjection being voluntary, the obedience which resulted from it was not necessary for himself, and could therefore be accepted in behalf of those for whose benefit it was intended. It may be said again, that even his human nature owed no obedience for itself, in order to its admission into heaven, but in virtue of its union to his Divine person, was immediately entitled to all the glory and felicity of which it was capable. Whatever obedience, therefore, he performed upon earth and in a state of humiliation and trial, was not upon his own account; and hence, according to justice, the benefit of it might be transferred to his people. It may be said once more, that, although the human nature of Christ was necessarily subject to the law of God as the eternal rule of righteousness to all intelligent creatures, yet it was from choice that it became subject to the law in that particular form, in which it was binding upon men. To them it bore the form of a covenant; but this form was incidental and temporary, and would have ceased as soon as the condition was fulfilled. "The obligation of the law under this consideration," says Dr. Owen, "ceaseth when we come to the enjoyment of the reward. It obligeth us no more formally by its command, Do this and live, when the life promised is enjoyed. In this sense, the Lord Christ was not made subject to the law for himself, nor did yield obedience unto it for himself. For he was not obliged unto it by virtue of his created condition. Upon the first instant of the union of his natures, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, he might, notwithstanding the law that he was made subject unto, have been stated in glory. For he that was the object of all divine worship, needed not any new obedience to procure for him a state of blessedness. And had he naturally, merely by virtue of his being a creature, been subject to the law in this sense, he must have been so eternally, which he is not. For those things which depend solely upon the natures of God and the creature, are eternal and immutable. Wherefore, as the law in this sense was given unto us, not absolutely, but with respect unto a future state and reward; so

* John ix. 4, 5.

† Ib. viii. 29.

the Lord Christ did voluntarily subject himself unto it for us, and his obedience thereunto was for us, and not for himself." * I may subjoin to these answers to the objection, that it cannot be consistently advanced by those who acknowledge the representation of Adam, and believe that, although he was subject to the law on his own account, and bound to obey its precepts for himself, yet, if he had fulfilled the terms of the covenant, his descendants would have been entitled to the promised reward on the ground of his obedience. If his obedience could have been considered as virtually the obedience of his posterity, there is evidently no reason why the obedience of Christ should not have been accepted on the behalf of his people, and have entitled them to the reward promised in the covenant of grace, even although it were true that he was himself personally bound to perform it. The will of God was sufficient to establish a relation between the acts of the representative and the represented, in the one case as well as in the other.

In the second place, I proceed to observe, That the Father required from our Surety satisfaction for the sins of his people. When a covenant is broken, the promise made by the other party is no longer binding, and the penalty, if there be one, is inflicted. Hence man, having failed to perform the stipulated obedience, became subject to the curse; and the justice of God demanded the execution of it. There were only two ways in which he could escape his righteous doom; either by an act of mercy on the part of his Judge remitting the punishment, or by the substitution of another person, who should bear it in his room. To the first method were opposed the purity and rectitude of the Divine nature, which holds sin in abhorrence, and will not permit it to pass with impunity. The second was therefore adopted. Let it be here observed that, while the claim of the law to a full compensation for the wrong which it had sustained was established, there was in the present case a relaxation of its severity, by the admission of a substitute. It is evident that its original sanction required the punishment of the transgressors. "In the day thou eatest thereof," the law said to Adam, "thou shalt surely die,† and not another for thee;" and on this ground he and all his descendants might have been called upon to answer, each for himself. The law itself does not know a substitute, and would not admit one. It was owing, therefore, to a gracious dispensation of the Lawgiver that Jesus Christ was constituted the Surety of sinners. The sovereign will adopted this expedient as the only one by which our ruined race could be restored, and the glory of all his perfections could be displayed in our salvation. As the execution of the penalty upon the actual transgressors, would have involved them in total and irretrievable perdition, a substitute was appointed who was able to bear it. "All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all."‡ The satisfaction of Christ was an eminent part of the condition of the covenant, and is mentioned as such in several places of Scripture: "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin," or rather, "when his soul shall offer a sin-offering, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand."§ The condition enjoined is, that he should be an expiatory sacrifice; and the promise is, that he should be rewarded with immortal life, and the redemption of his spiritual seed. "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."|| He who was perfectly immaulate could be made sin only by imputation; which does not imply that he was polluted with sin, or accounted an actual transgressor, but merely that he was made answerable for the sins of those whom he had undertaken to represent. "Christ hath redeemed us from the

* Owen on Justification, chap. xii.

† Isa. liii. 6.

§ Ib. 10.

† Gen. ii. 17.

|| 2 Cor. v. 21

curse of the law, being made a curse for us.”* The curse is the sentence dooming the transgressor to punishment; and Christ was made a curse, by being subjected to that sentence, in consequence of his voluntary assumption of the office of a Surety.

How, it may be asked, could the sufferings of Christ be satisfactory for the offences of others? We acknowledge in this case a relaxation of the law; but does it not defeat the ends of justice? It is not, perhaps, sufficient to say, that he was legally one with them; for, although this is true, and was necessary to his suffering in their room, he was in reality a totally different person, and his sufferings were not literally theirs. If the ends of justice had required that the transgressors of the law should undergo the penalty in their own persons, it is plain that Christ would have died in vain, because substitution could not have been admitted. But, if it was only required that compensation should be made to the law for the injury which it had sustained, the sufferings of Christ might be available for us, as we see in the case of a debtor whose creditor is fully satisfied by the payment of the surety, although the debtor himself should be forever insolvent. The death of Christ, in consequence of his superior dignity, established, still more than the death of the guilty would have done, the authority of the law, and fully demonstrated that its precepts are just as well as holy: that its penalty is not a vain threatening, but that between sin and punishment there is an inseparable connexion; that God is righteous, and shall not be disobeyed with impunity. This is all that would have been accomplished by the execution of the penalty upon sinners themselves and all that was necessary to uphold the moral government of God. There was a mixture of grace in this dispensation; but it did not set aside, or in any degree impair the rights of the law.

But how, it may be asked again, could the sufferings of Jesus Christ satisfy for the sins of “a great multitude which no man can number, out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues?” The common answer is, that the transcendent value of his sufferings was the consequence of the dignity of his nature; and it seems to be sufficient. His sufferings were limited in degree, because the nature in which he endured them was finite; but their merit was infinite, because the suffering nature was united to the Son of God. An idea, however, seems to prevail, that his sufferings were the same in degree with those to which his people were liable; that he suffered not only in their room, but that *quantum* of pain and sorrow which, if he had not interposed, they should have suffered in their own persons through eternity; and so far has this notion been carried by some, that they have maintained that his sufferings would have been greater or less, if there had been one more, or one fewer to be redeemed. According to this system, the value of his sufferings arose, not from the dignity of his person, but from his power. The use of his Divine person in this case, was not to enhance the merit of his sufferings, but to strengthen him to bear them. If this is true, it was not necessary that he should have taken human nature into personal union with himself; it was only necessary that he should have sustained it; and this he could have done although it had subsisted by itself. That the sufferings of the man Christ Jesus were greater than those which a mere mortal could have borne, will be readily granted: but, although it does not become us to set limits to Omnipotence, yet we cannot conceive him, I think, considered simply as a man, to have sustained the whole load of Divine vengeance, which would have overwhelmed countless myriads of men through an everlasting duration. By its union to himself, his human nature did not become infinite in power; it was not even endowed with the properties of an angel, but continued the same *essentially* with human nature in all other men. Nor is the supposition

* Gal. iii. 13.

which we are considering, at all necessary ; for as, in virtue of the union, the sufferings of his human nature were the sufferings of the Son of God, they acquired an incalculable intensity of value, and were equivalent to the sufferings of all his people, as his obedience was equivalent to the obedience which they were bound individually to perform. The will of God determined their degree, and the dignity of his person imparted a worth to them above all price. This view of the subject does not occur, I believe, in some of our Theological systems, and in our popular books ; but I persuade myself that it is just, and is preferable to the loose declamatory expressions which we often hear with respect to the greatness of his sufferings.

I have now shown you what was the condition of the covenant of grace. It included the obedience of our Surety to the precepts of the law, and his satisfactory sufferings. These constitute his *righteousness*, by which we are justified ; a term of frequent occurrence in the Scriptures, which signifies his perfect conformity to the law, in all its demands.

I now proceed to speak of the promises of the covenant. They are distinguished into two classes ; the one including the promises which immediately respected Christ himself ; and the other, the promises which respect his elect.

In relation to Christ himself, God promised to furnish him with all necessary preparation for the arduous work which he had undertaken to perform. The promise of a human nature in which he might fulfil the law, is referred to in the following words, which were formerly quoted : “ Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me ; ”* and it was performed when the power of the Highest overshadowed the blessed virgin, and the holy thing which was born of her was called the Son of God. The promise of the holy and supernatural endowments by which that nature would be fitted for the discharge of its duty, is thus expressed by the prophet Isaiah : “ The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord ; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord.”† In the writings of the same prophet, our Saviour himself describes, in figurative language, his preparation for his office by the power of his Father : — “ The Lord hath called me from the womb ; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword ; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft ; in his quiver hath he hid me ; and said unto me, “ Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”‡ These promises were performed by the abundant communication, the communication not by measure, of the Holy Ghost in his graces and gifts, of which there was a visible sign at his baptism, when the Spirit descended like a dove, and rested upon him.

Again, the Father promised to support him in his work. It was a work attended with such difficulties, that created power, although unimpaired by sin, would have been totally inadequate to it ; and it was to be performed in human nature, which had failed in an easier undertaking, even when possessed of untainted innocence, and of faculties in all their freshness and vigour. Our Saviour was encouraged by the assurance of the Divine presence and assistance : “ Behold my Servant whom I uphold ; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth : I have put my Spirit upon him, and he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.—He shall not fail, nor be discouraged, till he has set judgment in the earth ; and the isles shall wait for his law.—I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, and for

* Heb. x. 5.

† Isa. xi. 2, 3.

‡ Ib. xlix. 1, 3.

a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house.”* Accordingly we find him firmly depending upon these promises on the most trying occasions. The Lord God will help me, therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.”† In the spirit of unshaken faith, when his enemies were conspiring against him, and his few friends were about to forsake him, he said to his disciples, “Behold the hour cometh when ye shall be scattered, every one to his place, and shall leave me alone; but I am not alone, for the Father is with me.”‡

It is evident that these promises were not suspended upon the condition of the covenant, like those which will be afterwards mentioned, and may therefore be considered as belonging to the covenant only in this sense, that it was solely with a view to it that they were made. From their nature, some of them anticipated all obedience upon the part of our Surety, and instead of being the reward of his services, were intended to assist and encourage him in performing them. The only stipulation implied in them, was that, if Christ should undertake the work of our salvation, his Father would provide him with the means of accomplishing it; and they are properly expressive of the share which he would take in the execution of the plan that he had devised in concert with his Son.

Once more, The Father promised to confer a glorious reward upon his Son, and this promise manifestly depended upon the performance of the condition. Under this head, we may consider, first, that, when his work was finished, he should be invested with honour and power: “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” “I will make him my first-born, higher than the kings of the earth.” “He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.”§ These promises were performed after his resurrection from the dead, when God gave “him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue should confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”|| We may consider, in the second place, the promises which respected the salvation of his people; for this is an eminent part of his reward, as it was with a design to accomplish their salvation that he suffered and died: “He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.”¶ Such would be the happy result of his propitiatory sacrifice. Having triumphed over death, he should behold a numerous offspring arising in all ages to call him blessed, and rejoicing in the invaluable benefits which he had purchased for them with his blood: “Ask of me, and I will give thee the Heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.”**

I proceed to speak of the promises which immediately respect the elect. I begin with observing, that they were made in the first instance to Christ, with whom alone God transacted in the covenant of grace. In every case which admits of a representative, the other party addresses himself to him, either in proposing the terms, or in stipulating the reward. Hence it is plain, that the promises were made to our Surety; and it is farther evident from the consideration, that the persons, in whose favour they were to be performed, had then no actual existence, as the transaction took place before the foundation of the world: “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.”† If eternal life was promised before the creation, it follows that it was promised to Christ, who was then constituted the federal head

* Isa. xlii. 1, 4, 6, 7.

† Ib. l. 7.

‡ John xvi. 32.

§ Ps. cx. 1. Ib. lxxxix. 27. Ib. lxxii. 8.

|| Phil. ii. 9—11

¶ Isa. liii. 10.

** Ps. ii. 8.

†† Tit. i. 2.

of his people. It was promised to him, not simply as a Divine person, but as sustaining a public character, and standing in an intimate relation to those whom he was appointed to redeem; and therefore, the promise may be considered as virtually made to them, on whom the blessing will be bestowed at the stated season, and in the proper order.

Eternal life comprehends all the blessings of the covenant of grace. The Scriptures make mention of it as the great end of the incarnation and sufferings of Christ: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but should have everlasting life."* It is emphatically represented as *the* promise, to denote not merely its pre-eminence, but its comprehensiveness: "This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life."† By reflecting upon the subject, you will perceive that all the blessings of grace and glory are included in it. The enjoyment of it is not confined to the future state; it commences in this world, when the believer not only obtains a title to immortal happiness, but is illuminated, and sanctified, and comforted by the Spirit of grace, and it will be perfected in the world to come. "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."‡

It will be proper to take a distinct view of the blessings promised to the elect; and not to multiply particulars, I shall content myself with the following summary.

First, The Father promised to regenerate the elect. When the covenant was made with Christ in their name, they were considered as persons dead in trespasses and sins, alienated from the life of God, unwilling to return to him, and incapable of faith, by which alone an interest in the righteousness of the Surety is obtained. In this state they are when the gospel is preached to them, and its grace is first displayed by infusing into their souls a principle of spiritual life: "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws in their mind, and write them in their hearts."§ In consequence of this promise, the Holy Ghost enters into them, and, by his almighty power, effects that change which we call regeneration, and which is the commencement of a new life of holiness and peace. It appears from their state prior to this change, that the performance of the promise precedes all qualification, and all dispositions preparatory to the reception of the grace which it communicates.

Secondly, The Father promised to forgive their sins. This blessing consists in the repeal of the sentence, which was pronounced upon them as transgressors of the law, and annuls the obligation to suffer the penalty, so that they are as safe as if they had not offended. It, therefore, holds a distinguished place among the blessings of the covenant; "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." It was procured by the atonement of Christ, which satisfied the demands of justice, and is enjoyed by those on whom his blood is sprinkled, or who obtain by faith an interest in his propitiatory sacrifice. It is a comprehensive blessing, which has a retrospective and a prospective influence; for not only is the guilt of their past and present offences cancelled, but they are secured against the imputation of the guilt of such sins as they may afterwards commit: "There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."||

Thirdly The Father promised to sanctify the elect. This blessing is virtu-

* John iii. 16.

† 1 John ii. 26.

‡ Ib. v. 11—13.

§ Jer. xxxi. 33. Heb. viii. 10.

|| Rom. viii. 1.

ally comprehended in the promise of regeneration, which we have already considered; for "the writing of the law upon their hearts" signifies, at least, the communication of the first principles of holiness. The seed thus sown by the hand of God, he waters and cherishes, that it may bring forth fruit in abundance: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you."* When Paul prayed that the Thessalonians might be "sanctified wholly," and that their "whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,"† he rested his hope of an answer upon the faithfulness of God in the performance of his promises: "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."‡ Holiness is an essential ingredient in the eternal life, which is the great blessing of the covenant, and it is necessary to prepare us for the pure enjoyment of the heavenly state.

Fourthly, The Father promised to preserve the elect in a state of grace, from which they would fall if they were left to themselves: "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me."§ This promise consists of two parts. First, God engages not to forsake them, for his affection is not mutable and transitory, like that of men, but he rests in his love. Hence he says in another place, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."|| Secondly, he puts his fear in their hearts, that they may not forsake him. Their faith may be feeble, but it shall not utterly fail; their holiness may lose its lustre, but it shall not be extinguished; sin may occasionally prevail against them, but it shall not recover the dominion. There is a spark under the ashes, which the breath of heaven will kindle into a flame; there is a living principle which, protected from danger, and cherished by secret communications from heaven, will acquire full vigour and activity in a better world. "The water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water, springing up to everlasting life."¶

Lastly, The Father promised to glorify the elect. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."** This promise includes many particulars; a happy death, a blessed resurrection, a public justification at the tribunal of Christ, admission into heaven, and the fruition of unbounded and never-ending felicity. When the promise is performed to all whom Christ has redeemed, the design of the covenant will be fully accomplished; and the Mediator having delivered up the kingdom to the Father, or brought to a close the administration over which he presides, "God will be all in all."††

There are several other points relative to the covenant, upon which your time will not permit me to enter at present, and I shall therefore reserve them for another Lecture.

* Ezek. xxxvi. 25.

† Isa. liv. 10.

‡ 1 Thess. v. 23.

¶ John iv. 14.

§ Ib. 24.

** Isa. xxxv. 10

§ Jer. xxxii. 40.

†† 1 Cor. xv. 28.

LECTURE L.

ON THE COVENANT OF GRACE.

Farther Observations on the Promises of the Covenant—The Covenant of Grace admitted of no Penalty—The Administration or Dispensation of it committed to Christ—View of it as a Testament—Dispensation of the Covenant before and subsequent to the coming of Christ.

HAVING pointed out, in the preceding Lecture, some of the promises which were made to Jesus Christ, as the Representative and Surety of his people, I proceed to make a few general observations upon them.

The first observation is, That they originated in the love of God. They are varied expressions of it; diversified aspects which it bears towards man, considered as guilty, polluted, and miserable; and the ultimate design of them is his restoration to purity and happiness. In them, God is manifested to be love. They are the overflowings of his heart towards his fallen offspring, and awaken a more impressive sense of his infinite benevolence, when we view them in connexion with the wonderful expedient which has been adopted that his goodness might have access to us, all the promised blessings being conveyed by the substitution and sufferings of his Son. “How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light shall we see light.” *

The second observation is, That the promises bear a relation to Christ, not only because they were made primarily to him, but because the performance of them was suspended upon his fulfilling the condition of the covenant. A question has been agitated among Theologians, whether, as they express it, the promises were founded on the offices of Christ; that is, in more intelligible language, whether it was owing to his mediation that the promises were made? This may be considered as one of those subtle questions which have been brought forward to exercise ingenuity, and furnish a subject of debate, without being of much practical utility. In the usual manner, Divines have arranged themselves on opposite sides, some affirming and others denying. By those who are accounted orthodox, it has been judged agreeable to truth to maintain, that they were not founded on the offices of Christ, but were perfectly free and voluntary on the part of God, proceeding from his infinite goodness. This is undoubtedly true; but one thing is certain, that when they were made to Christ, he was considered as the representative of his people, who was to fulfil the righteousness of the law in their name, and that not one of them would have been made, if he had not condescended to assume this character. It is also certain that all the blessings contained in the promises were purchased with his blood, which was the price of our salvation. For all the blessings of grace and glory we are indebted to his mediation. Hence God is said “to bless us with all spiritual blessings in Christ,”† or for his sake. As the life which was promised in the first covenant, would have come to us through the obedience of Adam, so the eternal life promised in the second covenant is the gift of God, through the obedience of his Son.

The third observation is, That the promises of the new covenant are free. In explaining this particular, it is necessary to attend to the distinction of absolute and conditional. By an absolute promise, is meant a promise which will

* Ps. xxxvi. 7—9.

† Eph. i. 3.

be performed without respect to any qualification possessed, or any work done by the person to whom it is made. The performance of it depends exclusively upon the faithfulness of the promiser. In this sense, some of the promises are absolute; and I may quote as an example the first promise, formerly mentioned, which stands at the head of all the rest, in the list given by an Apostle, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts."* It is evident that nothing in the sinner, prior to regeneration, can be a reason for imparting to him a principle of spiritual life; for while he is in the flesh, or a state of natural depravity, he cannot please God. To grace he is indebted for the communication of the Spirit, and not to the earnestness of his prayers, and his diligence in the use of the means. I request you to observe, that on this subject there is a want of correctness in the language which is frequently employed. There is a way of talking of absolute promises, as addressed to sinners in the Gospel, which, although it recommends itself to the inattentive, by seeming to exalt the grace of God, is not agreeable to truth. As an absolute promise must without fail be performed, it would follow, that, if the promise of regeneration, which is suspended upon no condition, was made to sinners without distinction, they should all, at one time or another, be brought into a state of salvation. The conclusion is unavoidable; but as none of us would choose to acquiesce in it, we must reject the premises, and hold that this absolute promise is not addressed to sinners in general, but to the elect alone, or rather, is a sort of promissory prediction of what God purposes to do in reference to those who were redeemed by his Son. If there are any other absolute promises—and in this class may be reckoned the promises of the unchangeable love of God to his people, and of the constant inhabitation of the Holy Ghost in their souls—they are made to persons who are in covenant with God by faith. No absolute promise can be made to a sinner, simply considered as such. Other promises suppose some qualification of the person to whom they are made, or some work to be done by him before these are performed. Such promises some call conditional; but if condition is understood to mean that which gives a just title to the promise, we must say, that all the promises of the covenant of grace are unconditional, there being no such thing as merit of any kind, even in the saints. If, however, the term merely signifies something which precedes the enjoyment of particular blessings, it must be acknowledged that many of them are conditional, although the use of this term ought to be avoided. The remission of sins is not promised to every man, but solely to him who believes; nor eternal life to persons of every description, but to those alone who are pure in heart, and persevere to the end. Yet even those promises are free; because, if faith and holiness are previously required, these qualifications are the subject of other promises, which absolutely depend upon the faithfulness of God. They are resolvable into the promise of regeneration, which we have seen is absolute, with respect to the elect. God, therefore, when he demands certain qualifications in men, as necessary to the performance of particular promises, must be considered merely as settling the order in which the blessings of salvation shall be communicated. The enjoyment of some must precede the enjoyment of others. "Whom he did predestinate, them he also calls; and whom he calls, them he also justifies; and whom he justifies, them he also glorifies."† In short, however dear it cost our blessed Saviour to accomplish our salvation, upon us it is bestowed "without money and without price." The whole building is of mercy; the hand of God is displayed in its commencement and its completion; and here, as in the second temple of the Jews, "the head-stone thereof shall be brought forth with shoutings, Grace, grace unto it."‡

* Heb. viii. 10.

† Rom. viii. 30.

‡ Zech. iv. 7.

When I stated the parts of which a covenant consists, I remarked that a penalty is frequently added, to be inflicted if one of the parties shall fail. Thus, when the covenant of works was made with our progenitor, and abstinence from the fruit of the tree of knowledge was enjoined as the condition God said to him, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." There was no penalty in the covenant of grace, because Jesus Christ, our Representative could not fail; and his indefectibility arose from the mysterious constitution of his person. He was a man, but not a mere man, for he was at the same time the Son of God. As all creatures are capable of change—and the highest have changed, as we know from the conduct of those angels who kept not their first estate—in a covenant made with a mere creature, however pre-eminent in nature and endowments, a penalty is introduced with propriety. But our blessed Saviour being immutable in his Divine person, and the human nature being established in a state of holiness by its union to him, a penalty could have no place in a federal transaction in which he was concerned. Let it not be imagined that this statement is contradicted by the fact that sufferings were inflicted upon Christ. In these, I acknowledge, a penalty was executed; but it was the penalty of the covenant of works, to which he submitted as an essential part of the condition of the covenant of grace. If it were the condition of a covenant which one man made with another, that the latter should engage in laborious services, or expose himself to danger, or endure pain, it would be absurd to call his cost and trouble a penalty; which is totally distinct from the condition, and can have no place till the covenant is violated. Christ suffered penal evil; it was not, however, inflicted for any failure on his part, but submitted to as the means of establishing the covenant, and obtaining for his people the promised reward.

As there was no penalty in relation to the Surety, so there is none in relation to his people, for this obvious reason, that he fulfilled the covenant for them, and completely established their right to the promises. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."* It is acknowledged that there are threatenings addressed to those who have entered into the covenant by faith, to deter them from disobedience, and that these are executed when they transgress. "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes."† These visitations may indeed be called penalties or punishments, but usually receive the milder character of chastisements, because they are inflicted by the hand of God, not as an avenging Judge, but as a merciful Father; and are not intended for the destruction, but for the good of the sufferer. They are not penalties, in the common acceptation of the term, for a penalty is the evil of pain, to which a person is subjected for a crime, and is designed to satisfy the law by a just retribution. But it is not satisfaction to justice which is the object of the afflictions of believers: the intention of them is, both to testify that sin is displeasing to God, and to lead them to repentance and amendment. Severity is mingled with love: "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."‡ Their afflictions may, therefore, be considered in the light of blessings, and as connected with the promises of the covenant, because they are subservient to their sanctification and final happiness. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."§

Having given you a view, at considerable length, of the covenant of grace, I now proceed to speak of what has been called the administration of it, but might be more correctly called the dispensation of grace, which is founded upon it.

* Rom. viii. 1.

† Ps. lxxxix. 30—32.

‡ Heb. xii. 6.

§ 2 Cor. iv. 17.

I begin by observing, That the blessings of the covenant are committed to our Saviour, that he may distribute them according to his own will, and the will of his Father, which in this as in every other matter perfectly harmonize. This honour has been conferred upon him, that the blessings which were purchased with the infinitely valuable price of his blood should be at his disposal, and that sinners should be reminded of their unspeakable obligations to him, by receiving every good thing immediately from his hands. This constitution is agreeable to our notions of fitness and justice; for the fulfilment of the condition of the covenant gave him a right to the promises, and put him in full possession of their inestimable treasures. Accordingly, after his resurrection he told his disciples, that “all power was given to him in heaven and in earth;” * evidently meaning, that it was given to him in consequence of his sufferings and death. Long before, the holy Psalmist, looking forward in the Spirit of prophecy, had said, “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.” † His words are explained by those of Peter to the Jews, who were filled with astonishment at the miracle of Pentecost: “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.” ‡ Three things are observable in these words; that the gift of the Holy Ghost to our Saviour was the performance of a promise made to him by his Father; that the promise was performed after his ascension; and that the Spirit was given to him, that he might pour him out upon men like the rain which falls upon our fields. Our Lord himself has assured us, that he has received “power over all flesh” from his Father, “that he may give eternal life” § to his peculiar people; and in the following words he teaches us, that upon this donation is founded the dispensation of grace, which was established by his authority, and will be carried on to the end of the world. “All things are delivered unto me of my Father.” || Hence follow the gracious invitations and promises of the Gospel: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” ¶ This important truth is more distinctly expressed in the following passage. “Wherefore he saith, When he ascended upon high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of the body in love.” **

In explaining the administration of the covenant of grace, it is remarked by Theological writers, that, in relation to men, it assumes the form of a testament, or a deed by which a person bequeathes his property to his heirs, to be enjoyed by them after his decease; or that its blessings are conveyed to us in a testamentary form. By some of them, much importance is attached to this view of the subject, and they illustrate it at great length, and with a minuteness of detail, tracing the metaphor and similitude in this, as in other instan-

* Matt. xxviii. 18.

† Ps. lxxviii. 18.

‡ Acts ii. 32, 33.

§ John xvii. 2.

|| Matt. xi. 27.

¶ Matt. xi. 28.

** Eph. iv. 8, 11—16.

ces, to every point of resemblance which a lively fancy can suggest. Accordingly, they tell us of the testator, the legacies, the legatees, and the executor. The testator is Christ himself; the legacies are the blessings of salvation; the legatees are sinners; and the executor is also Christ, who differs in this respect from a human testator, that, although he died to confirm his testament, he rose again, and is now alive to carry it into effect. Particulars of this kind may arrest the attention of the multitude, and obtain their approbation and applause; but they exhibit a Divine dispensation too much in the shape of a human transaction, and tend to degrade it by the association of low and familiar ideas. One reason that some Divines enlarge upon this view of the covenant is, that, in their opinion, it is calculated to exhibit, to the greatest advantage, the freeness of its administration; for a testament, they say, is a deed of grace, without conditions properly so called. But this is a mistake; for, although men do commonly make a free conveyance of their property in their latter will to their heirs, they sometimes burden it with conditions, upon the performance of which the enjoyment of the property depends. It is not, therefore, from the testamentary form of the covenant, that the freeness of its administration can be justly inferred, but from other circumstances unconnected with this view of the subject. It does not therefore follow, that those who do not approve of this view are enemies to the doctrine of grace, although some of them may have been so, because that doctrine may be more successfully maintained upon different grounds. With respect to the assertion, that the legatees of this testament were sinners in general, I question whether it is perfectly accurate. A legatee of an unconditional testament has an undoubted right to the property bequeathed to him, and nothing but injustice can prevent him from enjoying it. His right is complete by his nomination in the testament; it is not necessary that he should come forward and claim the inheritance; it is the business of the executor to put him in possession of it. Were all men the legatees in the testament of Christ, all men would be entitled to salvation, and without any effort on their part to attain it, would infallibly be saved. But those who call them the legatees, mean nothing more than that by this deed salvation is offered to them, and will be bestowed upon all who accept of it; and at the same time they call this an unconditional testament. Their ideas are confused and contradictory; for if none shall obtain the inheritance but those who claim it by faith, it is evident that, in a qualified sense the testament is conditional, and that, in strict language, the only legatees are believers. If these observations are just, it will follow, that the view of the testament which is given in some systems and treatises on the covenant of grace, is incorrect. The following statement of a late writer is, in my opinion, more agreeable to truth. "As the promissory part of the covenant respecting the elect was, by the dying Redeemer, turned into a testament, it necessarily follows that the legatees can be none other than those to whom the promises were originally made by the Father; the promissory part of the covenant regulating the testamentary. To whomsoever the promises were made in Christ, to them, and to them alone, are the promises made by him (in the gospel,) otherwise his promises would be more extensive as to their objects than his Father's are; that is to say, he would promise eternal life to them to whom the Father never did; a doctrine not to be readily admitted, as neither agreeing with his delegated authority, nor with his fidelity in promising. For, if eternal life be bequeathed to all, how is it bestowed on so few?"

"The covenant of grace," says our Confession of Faith, "is frequently set forth in Scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the Testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed."* We have already seen, that, by the

* Conf. c. vii. § 4.

covenant of grace, the Confession means a transaction between God and men themselves, in which "he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation through Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him that they may be saved."* The word testament does often occur in our translation, and it has been remarked that the original term διαθήκη signifies both a testament and a covenant. Its primary meaning is "testament;" but in Scripture it frequently occurs in the sense of συνθήκη. You have seen that, by our translators, it is sometimes rendered "testament" improperly, and that "covenant" should have been preferred, as when Christ is called the Mediator and the Surety of a testament; characters to which no distinct idea can be affixed. I believe that there are many other passages in which "covenant" should have been substituted for "testament;" and I am not sure that there is more than one passage in which the latter word should be used, namely in the two following verses of the ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead; otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth."† Attempts have been made to shew, that even here the word "covenant" should be used; but as they seem to be forced and unnatural, I abide by the common translation, and admit that, in this instance, the Apostle, taking advantage of the double meaning of διαθήκη, alludes to it in the sense of a testament. But he alludes to it, I apprehend, not to lead us into a train of speculation upon the new covenant as converted into a testament, and into all the details of such a transaction, but merely to illustrate the subject which he was discussing, the necessity and the effect of the death of Christ. The idea of a testament was suggested by the mention of the eternal inheritance in the preceding verse. As an inheritance is conveyed from one person to another by a testament, this designation may be given to the covenant of grace, because it conveys to us the inheritance of eternal life, and conveys it in virtue of the death of the Surety. It was with the covenant of grace as it is with a testament. As the death of the testator is necessary to render a testament valid, so the death of Christ was necessary to ratify the covenant, and to make its promises sure to his spiritual seed. It is the necessity of the death of Christ which the Apostle intended to establish, and the notion of a testament is incidentally introduced solely for the purpose of illustrating the point. Salvation comes to us through his death, as an inheritance comes to the legatees through the death of a testator. I do not positively affirm that this is the only passage in which διαθήκη should be rendered a testament; but I am persuaded that the propriety of this translation is more apparent here than in any other place; and, although I will not presume, in opposition to a formidable array of Theologians, to discard this view of the covenant of grace, yet I cannot help thinking that it rests upon a slender foundation, that undue importance has been attached to it, and that it has been dwelt upon with unnecessary prolixity.

In speaking of the administration of the covenant of grace, we must consider it as carried on under two distinct economies, of which the one preceded, and the other is subsequent to the coming of Christ in the flesh.

That there was a dispensation of grace prior to the coming of Christ, is evident to every person who reads the Scriptures of the Old Testament. It commenced immediately after the fall, when the first intimation of mercy was made, and continued till the death of our Saviour, when it was formally abolished. That it was virtually the same with the present dispensation, and differed from it only in form, may be proved by a variety of considerations. The exhibition of the seed of the woman as the ground of hope to the guilty, was the preaching of the gospel to our parents in paradise; and the same object was pointed out to the patriarch in subsequent revelations, and to the Jews by

* Conf. c. vii. § 3.

† Verses 16, 17.

their typical institutions and the voice of the prophets. Hence the mission of Jesus Christ is represented as the fulfilment of the ancient predictions “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up a 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.”* The Apostle Paul affirms that the gospel which he was employed in preaching, had been published long before to Abraham, and that those who believed it, were admitted to a participation of the same privileges with the patriarch: “The Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith, are blessed with faithful Abraham.”† The covenant established with him was, virtually the same covenant, which is still established with believers; for it contained the great promise, in which all other blessings are involved, that God would be a God to him, and to his seed after him; and it is called by an Apostle, “the covenant which was confirmed before of God in Christ.”‡ that is, the covenant of grace. The unity of the two dispensations, notwithstanding their apparent discrepance, is manifestly implied in the following words: “God who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son.”§ The substance of the revelation is the same, although the persons by whom it was communicated were different.

I request your particular attention to the two following passages, from which it appears, that the dispensation under which the ancient church lived, was connected with the covenant of grace, being founded on the atonement of Christ, by which the covenant was ratified. “Him,” says Paul, “God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.”|| Remark the expression, “the remission” or passing by “of sins that are past.” These, it is acknowledged, are the sins which were committed in the ages prior to the manifestation of Christ. God passed them by, or remitted them in the exercise of his forbearance; he was gracious to the guilty persons, and received them into favour, although no expiatory sacrifice of sufficient value had yet been offered for them. How was it consistent with his justice to do so? This difficulty is removed by the mission of the promised Redeemer, who has made an atonement of infinite value, the virtue of which reaches back to the beginning of time, and forward to the end of it. In exercising mercy towards those who lived before his coming, God had a respect to this atonement, and he acted towards them like a creditor, who lets his debtor go free, although payment has not yet been made by his surety, because he has full confidence in him, that he will fulfil his engagement. The other passage is in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and in quoting it, I shall correct our translation by substituting covenant for testament, which in our version is twice employed improperly. “And for this cause he is the Mediator of the new covenant, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.”¶ The transgressions which were under the first covenant, were the sins of the peculiar people of God under the covenant of Sinai, the sacrifices offered for which could deliver them only from the temporal penalties of the law; yet many of them obtained the full pardon of their sins, so that God did not enter into judgment with them, either in this life or in the next, on the ground of the great sacrifice which was to be offered in the fulness of time. Christ was the Mediator of the new covenant for the redemption of those sins

* Luke i. 68—70.

§ Heb. i. 1.

† Gal. iii. 8, 9.

‡ Rom. iii. 25.

§ Ib. 17.

¶ Heb. ix. 15.

or assumed this character that he might expiate them, and actually did so by the shedding of his blood. Hence it appears that those, who lived under the law of Moses, were saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as those who live under the gospel.

Our Lord may be considered as sustaining the office, and performing the duties of a Mediator before his incarnation. It is not a vain opinion of the Jews, that it was the second Person of the Trinity, who gave the promise of mercy to our first parents in paradise, appeared to the patriarchs, published the law from Sinai, conducted the church in the wilderness, and managed its affairs during the ages which followed. It is certain, that a Divine Person did often appear under the ancient economy, and as there is no reason to think that it was the Father, whom no man has seen, we conclude that it was the Son, who assumed the form of that nature in which he was after to sojourn upon earth. He was the Angel of God's presence, and the Angel of the covenant, concerning whom these three particulars are worthy of attention; that he was a Divine Person, for the name of God was in him, and the power of pardoning or not pardoning sin belonged to him; that he acted in an official capacity, for he was an angel or messenger; and that his office was connected with the gracious dispensation which was then established, for he was the Messenger of the covenant. As far as that dispensation was carried on by revelation of the Divine will, we are expressly assured, that it was under his direction and superintendence. It was the Spirit of the Messiah, Peter says, "who testified beforehand" in the prophets, "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."*

The administration of the covenant, during this period, was carried on, as we have seen, by personal appearances of the Son of God, by the ministry of the prophets, by the miraculous and sanctifying operations of the Holy Ghost, and by the various institutions which God gave to the church. Sacrifices were offered soon after the fall; and as they could not be suggested by reason, nothing seeming to be more unnatural than to propitiate the Deity by the blood of the lower animals; and as, if they had been a human invention, they would not have been acceptable to God, we must believe, that they were appointed by himself, to prefigure the oblation of our Saviour, and to direct the faith and hope of mankind to him, for deliverance from the curse. The sacrifices of the Jews were enjoined, and every thing respecting them was regulated by Divine command. It is an error to consider the ceremonial law merely as intended to guard them against idolatry; and still farther from the truth, to imagine that several of its rites were borrowed from heathen usages; an opinion which is derogatory to its honour, and besides, is incapable of proof, the practices of the Egyptians, in which the resemblance is traced, being known to us only by Greek authors, who, living a thousand years after the death of Moses, were as ignorant of the state of matters in his age, as we are. The legal institutions, says an Apostle, "were shadows of things to come, but the body is of Christ."† His meaning obviously is, that such a representation was given by them of Christ, his office, his sacrifice, and its effects, as is given of a man by the projection of his shadow; a representation which shews the outline, or general form, but does not exhibit his features. The information communicated to the people of God, was obscure and imperfect; but still there was a revelation which sufficed "for the time then present," as it enabled them, through faith in the promised Redeemer, to obtain eternal salvation. Some degree of light was thrown upon the figures of the law by the prophecies, which became clearer and clearer, as the time drew nearer for his manifestation in the flesh.

"The Old Testament," says the seventh article of the Church of England,

* 1 Pet. i. 11.

† Col. ii. 17.

“is not contrary to the New; for both in the Old and New Testament, everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man. Therefore they are not to be heard, which feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises.” Although there is no express mention of eternal life in the law of Moses, yet it was implied, as our Saviour has shown, in the declaration, that God was the God of the patriarchs; and, we are assured by an Apostle, that “they desired a better country, that is, a heavenly.”* This hope was retained by their descendants, who also looked for an inheritance beyond the grave, of which Canaan was a type. Although the law was much enforced by temporal rewards and penalties, these were not, and could not be, its only sanction, since God was related to the Israelites as well as to us, as their moral Governor and Judge; and, if there was a dispensation of grace, it must have held out the same blessings to be enjoyed, and the same consummation to be expected, which are exhibited in the promises of the gospel. Accordingly, it is certain that, as believers under the ancient economy were justified by faith, and were favoured with the presence and consolations of the Holy Ghost, so they looked for perfect and eternal salvation in another state of existence. “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”†

The administration of the covenant, since the coming of Christ, is a subject so well understood, that it may be passed over with a few observations. The gospel makes known to us the eternal counsel between the Father and the Son, displays the riches and freeness of Divine grace, offers salvation to all who hear it, and comforts believers by its promises of present and future blessings. All the other ordinances are channels by which the benefits which Christ purchased are communicated. In particular, baptism and the Lord’s supper sustain a peculiar character, being sacraments or seals; that is, sacred institutions of Divine appointment, in which, by sensible signs, Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.” The design of them is to declare, that the persons to whom they are administered, are in covenant with God, have a right to its blessings, and shall obtain the everlasting inheritance; that so their faith and hope may be confirmed, and they may be excited to perform that obedience which God requires from those whom he has admitted into his friendship.

The present dispensation is distinguished from the past by the superior clearness of its manifestations. What was formerly exhibited under the veil of types, is now openly revealed. “The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.” All the information is given which is suitable to our present condition, and which our minds are at present capable of receiving; and, in consequence of the difference between the twilight of the law and the bright day of the gospel, the people of God far excel their predecessors in the measure of their knowledge: so that the Baptist himself, who enjoyed greater advantages than the prophets, is surpassed by the meanest member of the Church, who is illuminated by the Spirit. Again, it is distinguished from the former dispensation by the more abundant influences of the Spirit. An Evangelist having remarked that Jesus spoke of the Spirit, which they who believed in him should receive, adds, “For the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified;”‡ not meaning that he had not been given at all; but that he had not yet been given in that fulness of his influences, which was enjoyed when our Lord ascended to heaven, and the Christian dispensation commenced. God promised in the latter days, or in the days of the Messiah, “to pour out his Spirit upon all flesh,” and the gospel is called the “ministration of the Spirit.” Hence, as there is now

* Heb. xi. 16.

† Ps lxxiii. 24, 26.

‡ John vii. 39.

greater light, there is also greater liberty. The people of God, in ancient times, being under tutors or governors, to use the words of Paul,* though sons, differed not from servants; but now they are sons freed from every restraint, and in full possession of their privileges. The different states of mind arising from the two dispensations, are pointed out in the following words: "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."† Lastly, the present dispensation is distinguished from the past by its extent; the one having been confined to the nation of Israel, at least after the formal separation from other nations, at the time of the Exodus, but the other embracing as its object the whole human race. Hitherto it has not been universal; but its limitation has not arisen from its nature, as was the case with respect to the Jewish economy, nor from any express prohibition, but from the inactivity of Christians, and from the secret arrangements of Providence, which fixes the times and the seasons for accomplishing its own designs. "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," was the command of Christ to his Apostles; and ere long, God will have respect to his covenant, the covenant which he made with his Son, and "will give to him the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession."

The great design of the administration of the covenant of grace, is to impart its benefits to those for whom they were intended. It is accomplished by the preaching of the gospel, in which salvation is offered to sinners; and by the power of the Spirit, who works faith in the hearts of those who were chosen in Christ to eternal life. It is only by faith that we can obtain an interest in the covenant; agreeably to the solemn declaration, "He that believeth shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned."‡ As the descendants of Adam came under the obligation of the covenant made with him, by successively entering upon existence; so men become connected with the covenant which was made with Christ, by being born into the world of grace.

It concerns every person, therefore, to inquire, whether "God has made with him an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure." It is an inquiry intimately connected with his eternal welfare, for by this covenant alone salvation can be enjoyed. How shall this important point be ascertained?

First, He who has entered into covenant with God, is a convinced and awakened man; for, although its benefits are offered to all, none but those who feel their need, will accept of them. Peace with God, which the covenant has established, will be prized and sought by those alone, who, conscious of guilt, dread his displeasure and vengeance. By the secure and careless world, the proposal of reconciliation is disregarded. Conviction of sin, by the application of the law to the conscience, is the first step in the process, by which men are excited to take hold of God's covenant, that they may make peace with him. Secondly, He who has entered into this covenant, "has fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before him."§ This is a description by an Apostle, of those who have an interest in the promises, and in the strong consolation which flows from them. They have fled from the wrath of God, which pursued them according to the tenor of the first covenant, to the Mediator of the second, whose blood speaks better things than the blood of Abel. In the next place, He who has entered into this covenant, has founded his hope of salvation upon the righteousness of Christ, by which it was fulfilled. If this was the condition of the covenant, he alone who consents to it, can have any right to the promises; those who go about to establish their own righteousness, in vain expect to enjoy its blessings, and are guilty of an impious attempt to disannul the eternal agreement between the Father and the Son

* Gal. iv. 2.

† Rom. viii. 15.

‡ Mark xvi. 16.

§ Heb. vi. 18.

This is the tendency of the doctrine of the merit of good works, in the mild est form in which it can be proposed. Allow that they are performed by the assistance of grace, and that nothing is required but sincere obedience, still it is a new condition, totally different from the original one. The admission of any thing, however qualified, even of faith itself, as the ground of our acceptance, is subversive of the covenant of grace. The notions of some men may be confused, and their expressions inaccurate, while the exercises of their hearts are humble and evangelical; they may seem to trust in their own righteousness, while before God they renounce it as utterly insufficient; but, if there is any man who distinctly and deliberately depends upon it, as he betrays the spirit, so he is under the authority of the old covenant, which ministers condemnation and death. "As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse." * Lastly, He who is in covenant with God, is a holy person; for this, we have seen, is its first promise: "I will put my laws in their minds, and in their hearts will I write them." It found him a sinner, but it has made him a saint. Its design, to re-unite men to God in the bonds of friendship, could not be accomplished without the sanctification of our nature; between which, in its unregenerated state, and a Being of infinite purity, there is a mutual repugnance, and communion is impossible. The promises of the covenant not only furnish motives to obedience, but hold out that aid by which the people of God are enabled to perform it. And it is the character of believers, that they do not rely upon their own powers, and attempt to serve God in their own strength, but depend upon his grace, which works in them both to will and to do; and that they ascribe to him all the praise of their success.

To the man who perceives in himself those evidences of his interest in the covenant, we may say, 'Hail, thou that art highly favoured of the Lord, the Lord is with thee. Thy sins are pardoned, and thy immortal welfare is secured; happy art thou, and it shall be well with thee. "The lines are fallen to thee in pleasant places; yea, thou hast a goodly inheritance; for God is the portion of thy cup." † Tossed and afflicted thou mayest be in this sinful world, but thou shalt not perish, for the covenant is sure and everlasting. The price of thy redemption is paid. Eternal life is thine by right, and, ere long, it shall be thine in possession. The power which created all things, and upholds them, will protect thee from dangers; and the truth, which is more stable than the everlasting mountains, is pledged to realize thy hopes. "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness, that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me." ‡

LECTURE LI.

ON THE MEDIATORIAL OFFICE OF CHRIST.

A Mediator between God and Man necessary—General Observations on the Office of Mediator—Christ's Qualifications for the Office—Reconciliation to God, the effect of Mediation—In what nature Christ is Mediator—He is not Mediator for Angels—Commencement and Duration of his Office.

THERE was not a Mediator in the first covenant, because man being in a state of innocence was acceptable to his Creator, and having a pure conscience was not disturbed by those terrors which haunt his guilty descendants, and make them recoil from intercourse with the Just and Holy One; yet, it was

* Gal. iii. 10.

† Ps. xvi. 6.

‡ Ps. lxxxix. 34—36.

condescension on the part of God, to enter into a federal transaction with his own creature to whom he owed nothing, and whose obedience he might have demanded, without stipulating any reward; and by making a covenant with him, he lessened, as it were, the natural distance between them, and put a veil upon his glory, the full splendour of which, even a spotless being could not have been able to endure.

Since the introduction of sin, the necessity of a Mediator has been generally felt and acknowledged. It was a consciousness of their own meanness, and unworthiness to approach the Supreme Being, the Lord of heaven and earth, which first gave rise to the idolatry of the Gentiles. Conceiving the celestial bodies to be animated, dazzled by their splendour, and believing that they had nearer access to the Deity, and greater influence with him than the inhabitants of this inferior region of the universe, they paid religious homage to them, in the hope that through their patronage, they should be recommended to the notice of the Father of all. In process of time, they imagined an order of invisible beings, to whom the office was assigned of carrying the prayers of men to the Gods, and bringing commands and blessings from the Gods to men. "God," says Plato, "does not mingle in familiar intercourse with mortals, but all intercourse and conversation with him are maintained by means of demons," as those fancied beings were called. They conjoined with them those persons who had been distinguished upon earth by their virtues and illustrious achievements, and were exalted to the rank of demi-gods after their death.

Moses was the mediator of the covenant which God made with the Israelites at Sinai, and hence the law is said to have been given "by the hand of a mediator."* The interposition of a third person between that people and the Lawgiver was soon found to be necessary. The appearance of JEHOVAH amidst blackness, darkness, and tempest, filled the whole camp with alarm, and his voice issuing from the midst of devouring fire, so terrified them, that they said to Moses, "Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die."† How could they but tremble, in whose ears his holy law was proclaimed, and whose consciences told them that they had often transgressed it! The mediation of Moses consisted in his acting as an *internunciatus*, or messenger, between God and the Israelites. God did not speak again to them with an audible voice; Moses published his commands; and as he spoke for God to the people, so he spoke for the people to God, presenting to him their promises and vows, and requests.

Jesus Christ is the Mediator of a better covenant, and the office as sustained by him, is to be understood in a higher and more perfect sense. He is not merely a prophet, who has spoken to us in the name of God, and an intercessor who recommends our petitions to him, but, by the sacrifice of himself, he has removed the obstacles which prevented our friendly correspondence; and while by his death he reconciled God to the guilty, by the influence of his grace upon their hearts, he reconciles the guilty to God.

A Mediator is one who intervenes between two parties at variance, and makes peace. The original word is *μεσιτης*, which signifies, *ὁ μεταξὺ δυοιν*, *qui medius inter duo stat, vel est*. Unitarians, consistently with their principles, understand it to mean simply a messenger, a person sent by God to declare his will and his promises. But, although it does not admit of a higher sense in its application to Moses, it signifies much more when Christ is designated by it, as will appear, I trust, from what will be said in this lecture, and from the subsequent illustration of his priestly office. The word Mediator does not occur in the Old Testament, except in the translation of the Seventy, who render these words in Job, "Neither is there any days-man (an old word for *umpire*) between us, that might lay his hand upon both,"‡ in the following

* Gal. iii. 19.

† Exod. xx. 19.

‡ Job ix. 33.

manner, εἰθε ἢν ὁ μεσιτὴς ἡμῶν, καὶ ἐλθῇ καὶ διακρίνῃ ἀνὰ μέσον ἀμφοτέρων, "I wish that we had a mediator attentively hearing and judging between both." The Hebrew מוֹכִיחַ, is a *judge* or *arbiter*, employed in settling a dispute, and deciding who has the right side of the question. The passage refers rather to an umpire than a mediator.

The necessity of the mediation of Christ, arises from the existence of sin ; which being contrary to the nature and the will of God, renders those who have committed it obnoxious to his displeasure. As they had no means of appeasing his anger, the interposition of another person was requisite to atone for their guilt, and lay the foundation of peace. This is the great design of his office ; but it extends to all the acts, by which sinners are actually brought into a state of reconciliation, are fitted for holding communion with God, and are raised to perfection and immutable felicity in the world to come. It comprehends the particular offices which our Saviour is represented as sustaining, the prophetic, the sacerdotal, and the regal ; and it is by executing these that he completely performs the duties, and realizes the character of a Mediator. 'There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.'* These particular offices will be afterwards considered in their order. In the present lecture, I shall confine myself to some general observations. My purpose is to inquire what are the necessary qualifications of a mediator between God and man, and to shew that they are all found in Him, to whom this character exclusively belongs.

In the first place, a Mediator is necessarily a different person from either of the parties whom it is his design to reconcile ; he can neither be the party which is offended, nor the party which has given the offence. The party offended may forgive the offence ; but in this case a mediator is not wanted so far as he is concerned. The party offending may be sorry for his conduct and earnestly desire that peace may be made ; but he may have no access to the party offended, or the latter may reject his advances, because he does not deem the proffered satisfaction to be adequate. In this case, a third person must interpose to adjust the difference, by the proposal of terms in which both will acquiesce.

It will be said, How could Jesus Christ be a Mediator, since it is certain that he was not in a state of neutrality, but was the party offended, being one with the Father and the Spirit ? for, if we hold the common doctrine of the Trinity which teaches that all the Divine persons subsist in one undivided essence, we must believe, that they were all displeased at the sin of man, and that the penalty denounced upon him had the sanction of their common authority. It is acknowledged that, according to this view, he whom we call Mediator must be considered as Lawgiver and Judge, and that, instead of expecting him to interpose in our favour, we had every thing to fear from his vengeance. Have we not reason to believe that it was he who appeared in paradise after the fall, and pronounced the doom of the whole human race upon our guilty progenitors ? But let us remember, that the Scriptures introduce us to the knowledge of an economy or arrangement among the persons of the Godhead, by which different characters and offices are assigned to each, and new relations are sustained by them towards one another, and towards us. The law, for the violation of which we are condemned, is the law of the Father. He appears in the character of the Supreme Governor of heaven and earth. It is against him that the offence has been committed ; it is his justice which demands the punishment of the guilty ; and with him remains the power to extend mercy to them, and to prescribe the terms upon which it will be exercised. The Son having resigned, if I may speak so, those prerogatives to the Father, (resigned them, I mean, for this special purpose,)

* 1 Tim. ii. 5.

has assumed a different character. He does not pursue the claims of justice against sinners, but stands forth as their friend, to rescue them from their perilous situation, and to give such satisfaction as their offended Sovereign may demand. Thus, in this economy, he is distinguished from the Father, and is as closely related to us as the surety is to the person for whom he has become responsible. But, although between him and men an intimate connexion subsists, he is not one of them, considered as offenders; such union would have totally disqualified him for his office. A partaker of their nature, and even of its infirmities, he was perfectly free from that pollution with which it is stained in every other individual. "He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners,"—so separate that he could approach to God in their name, and was looked upon by the Holy One with entire approbation. This point will afterwards come under our notice.

In the second place, A mediator must be independent, and master of himself. He must possess full ability for the duties of his office, and a full right to exert that ability in whatever way the design of the office may require. If it be necessary, in order to effect a reconciliation, that he should give satisfaction by sufferings and death, it is evident that he must have absolute power over himself: because those who are subject to the authority of another, cannot dispose of themselves and their services without his consent. Hence we perceive that, in the present case, a mere creature could not have been mediator because something was required which a creature was not at liberty to give by his own spontaneous deed. Angels and men are the property of the Creator, which cannot be alienated without sacrilege. They must wait his command before they venture to engage in any enterprize not comprehended in the original law of their nature. In particular, it should be considered that the life of man is his gift, and is not to be thrown away or surrendered, whatever good might be anticipated from the sacrifice, without the permission of the Giver. And here we may remark, that the substitution of one life for another, could not be justly admitted by a human government, for this obvious reason, that what the substitute had no right to give away, his superiors could have no right to accept. That the offer was voluntary, would not alter the case, because mere willingness and moral power are two things totally different. As our life is not our own, so our faculties are instruments with which we are furnished for the service of our Maker; and the exertion of them for any purpose not commanded or permitted, is a waste or an abuse, for which we are reprehensible. We may not trifle with our happiness, although it may be thought, that if we choose to suffer we are unwise, but not criminal; for it flows from the Divine bounty, and as it should be thankfully received, so it should be carefully preserved, and only parted with when duty calls, and an act of self-denial is demanded for the glory of God. Into the office of Mediator between God and man, which required the sacrifice of ease and life itself, no mere creature, although otherwise qualified, (which, however, was impossible,) could have intruded without presumption. He had not the requisite power, the power to lay down his life, and the power to take it again. But this power belonged to Jesus Christ, who was indeed bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and, if he had possessed no higher nature, would not have been a fit person to mediate between heaven and earth; but, while the Scripture traces his human genealogy, and calls him the son of David, it is careful to inform us that he was also the Son of God. As a Divine person, he was not under the control of superior power, he was subject to no law, by which his activity was confined to a particular sphere; he might interfere wherever his wisdom and benevolence pointed the way. He could stoop from his dignity, and draw a veil over his glory. Having assumed our nature, he might employ it as the instrument of accomplishing any service which would promote the

designs of the Divine government, and the interests of the human race. He might present it as a pure oblation to his Father, and give his blood as the ransom of our souls.

In the third place, A mediator must be a person who has great influence over both parties; he must possess the means and the power to terminate their mutual aversion, and unite them in the bonds of peace. It is not the interference of any person which will effect a reconciliation; he must be one who can conduct the business with prudence, and adjust the difference to the satisfaction of both parties. In the present case, the negotiation could be successfully carried on only by one in whom both could confide, and who had such interest with both, that, to use language employed on such occasions among men, they would be disposed to attend to his proposals. The object of the interposition was to bring together, upon amicable terms, God and men, between whom sin had caused a mutual alienation; to remove displeasure on the one hand, and aversion on the other, and to restore an intercourse founded in love. The necessary qualification was found in Jesus Christ; "Him the Father heareth always;" to his requests he never fails to lend a favourable ear. What would he refuse to a Son, who is the brightness of his glory, and whom he always loved; to a Son, who has shed at the foot of his throne blood more precious, not only than that of bulls and goats, but than the blood of the noblest and the holiest of the human race; a Son, who has so faithfully and honourably finished the work assigned to him, notwithstanding the most formidable difficulties; a Son, who submitted to humiliation, and sorrow, and death, that he might exalt the character of his Father, and give the highest manifestation of his glory to the universe? There was not another in heaven or on earth who had such claims to be heard, when he came forward to intercede for the guilty. To the interest which upon these grounds he possesses with the offended Lawgiver, no limits can be assigned. Infinitely acceptable to Him, both as his own Son, and as our Advocate, he may ask what he will, and it shall be granted to him. God will not retain his anger against those whom one so high in favour has taken under his protection, and recommends to his approbation. His influence with the other party, whose consent is necessary to complete the reconciliation, is equally great. What power is he not able to exert upon them by means of his word, which casts down high thoughts and proud imaginations, and leads captive the willing mind? What can they refuse to a person of such dignity, who condescends to solicit them? How irresistible are the claims of his blood! How attractive is the display of his grace! If these motives should prove ineffectual to dispel their prejudices, and conquer their aversion, he has access to the springs of motion in the heart. He can send the Holy Spirit to persuade with gentle but irresistible efficacy; who, by a manifestation of wrath and of mercy, of the hopelessness of a contest with the Almighty, and the happiness flowing from his favour, leads them humbly to supplicate peace, and to accept the offered reconciliation with gratitude and joy.

In the fourth place, A mediator between God and man must be capable of suffering. The design of his office is to make reconciliation; and as God would not pardon sin without satisfaction to his justice, the design could not be accomplished unless the mediator would submit to the penalty; for only upon this condition would the offended Lawgiver receive them into favour. Had the redemption of man been merely an act of power, like the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, the Son of God might have effected it without assuming our nature, and descending to a state of humiliation. But it was a moral work, which was to be conducted in conformity to the principles of the Divine government, and to terminate in a full display of its rectitude and purity. We need not here discuss the question, whether God could have pardoned sin without an atonement. Although we should venture to affirm that

ne could—and surely it is a venture which ill becomes beings of such limited views—it would be sufficient to know that he would not, as appears from the event; for hence it follows, that the qualification which we are considering, was indispensably necessary to a mediator. The Scriptures, upon the one ground or the other, represent the death of Christ as essential to the plan of our redemption, and ascribe our reconciliation to it: “When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.”* It is an obvious corollary from these premises, that the Mediator must be a creature, for a creature alone can suffer; the Divine nature is impassible and immortal; its felicity is independent and immutable. But there is probably a great diversity of intelligent beings. We know of two orders, the human and angelical; and it may be asked, whether an individual of either might have assumed this office, or whether there was any reason why he should be exclusively a man? The answer is obvious. The Mediator must be a man, because, being a third person acting between two parties, with a view to reconcile them, he would not have been qualified for his undertaking if he had not possessed the nature of both. But there are two other reasons connected with the necessity of his sufferings. First, if he must undergo the penalty denounced upon the objects of his mission, an angel could not have been our substitute, because he might be annihilated, but could not die in the sense of the law; the death which the law threatened, being the separation of the soul from the body, while his nature is spiritual and uncompounded. Secondly, the expiation of sin must be made in the nature which sinned. The identity of nature seems to have been indispensable to the ends of justice. If a man dies for men, we see a case of righteous retribution; but nothing of this kind would have appeared if the burden of human guilt had been laid upon an angel. This doctrine is taught in the following words: “Forasmuch then as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”† The reason of the incarnation is assigned in the next verse: “For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham.”‡ The word rendered, by the aid of a supplement, “he took on him the nature,” is *ἐπιλαμβάνεται*, from a verb which signifies *to take hold of*, and *to help*: “Verily he did not help angels, but he helped the seed of Abraham,” and for this reason he took part of our flesh and blood, and not of the spiritual nature of angels.

In the fifth place, A mediator, the design of whose office is to reconcile God to the guilty, must himself be free from sin: “Such an high priest became us, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separated from sinners.”§ Would a man, who was himself a rebel, and whose presence would rouse the indignation of his prince, be a proper person to be employed in soliciting the pardon of his brethren in guilt? The perfect purity of the Mediator was necessary to the acceptance of his services. The law made men priests who had infirmity, and needed to offer first for their own sins, and then for the sins of the people; and the character of the ministers, as well as the nature of the sacrifices, rendered the service unavailing to the expiation of moral guilt. Again, the purity of the Mediator was necessary to the fulfilment of that part of his office, which consisted in giving us an example that we might walk worthily of the state of reconciliation; and that this example might answer its design, it must be absolutely perfect. It must be one which we may implicitly imitate, without doubt and without danger of going astray. Once more, the Mediator between God and man is a source of sanctification, according to the saying of the Evangelist: “Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.”|| But how could we derive this blessing from him, if he were not himself perfectly holy?

* Rom. v. 10. † Heb. ii. 14, 15. ‡ Ib. 16. § Ib. vii. 26. || John i. 16

How could we be enlightened by him, if he were not light? When the angel announced his birth to the virgin, he said, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore that holy thing, which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God."* This primitive purity he retained during the course of his life, conversing and familiarly associating with sinners, but not learning their ways. He died, indeed, as a criminal, but he died for sins not his own: he "suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."† Nay, he was not only free from actual transgression but he was incapable of sin; so fortified against temptation, that he could not be seduced. It was an eternal covenant which God intended to establish by his ministry; a covenant which should not be broken like the first. The first Adam was created in the image of his Maker, but his holiness was not an inalienable possession. Had the second Adam resembled him in mutability, the hopes of mankind might have been disappointed once more; and the remedy proving insufficient, the case would have been desperate. But he stood firm in the severest trial. No argument, however subtle, could perplex his reason; no solicitation, however powerful, could seduce his affections. Satan exhausted his arts in vain, and in vain did the world display its glories before him; neither promises nor threatenings, neither flattery nor reproach, could excite a wandering thought, or an irregular desire. The Mediator has, therefore, accomplished the design of his office. By his immaculate sacrifice, the covenant is confirmed, its promises are sure to his spiritual seed, and there is no condemnation to those who believe in him. "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God?"‡

In the last place, A mediator must be a person to whom men may have free access, that they may place confidence in him, and enter without fear into his communion. The design of his office would be defeated, if his character were repulsive, and his conduct were such as to keep them at a distance. They must be encouraged to throw themselves into his arms, to commit themselves to his protection and guidance, to entrust him with their most important concerns. It is by first gaining our confidence and persuading us to connect ourselves with him, that he brings us back to God from whom we have revolted: "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me."§ That he is one whom we may humbly approach, and in whom we may hope, is evident from these considerations. First, although, in one of his natures, he is exalted far above us, and above angels, who, in comparison with him, are less than nothing and vanity; yet on the other, he is nearly related to us, our kinsman and our brother. It is a human voice which gently says, "Fear not, I am he that liveth and was dead."|| Secondly, he has felt our infirmities, and suffered our affliction, and may we not expect more tender, and more active sympathy, than if he had merely a speculative knowledge of our miseries? John refers to the first consideration, when he says, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us;"¶ and Paul points out the second as a source of consolation in these words, "In that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted."*** Thirdly, we have express assurances that he bears a most tender affection to us. It would be nothing that he is a man like us, nothing, that he has experienced our sorrows, if we had not positive evidence that his love to us is real, constant, and

* Luke i. 35.

† 1 Pet. iii. 18.

‡ Heb. ix. 12—14.

§ John xiv. 6.

|| Rev. i. 17, 18.

¶ John i. 14.

*** Heb. ii. 18.

infinite ; for men are often hard-hearted to their brethren, and sometimes those who have tasted the evils of adversity appear not to have become more compassionate to others, but to have their feelings blunted and destroyed. But in Jesus Christ we find a heart which responds to the cry of distress, and a tongue which speaks a word in season to the weary. Love displayed in his life and in his death, and unchanged in his state of exaltation, invites sinners to approach, and assures them of a cordial reception : “ Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “ Lord, to whom shall we go ? thou hast the words of eternal life.”*

To the duties of his office, I have been led frequently to refer when explaining his qualifications. They will be particularly considered when we give an account of the several offices which are implied in the general one of Mediator. As Mediator, he is the representative of God to us, the image of the invisible God, the person in whom he is seen ; and the light of the glory of God shines in his face. In consequence of the darkness which sin had spread over the minds of men, and the alienation of heart which it had produced, the knowledge of God was in a great measure lost, but it is restored by the revelation of which he is the Author : “ No man hath seen God at any time ; the only-begotten Son, that is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”† He has not only brought to light those doctrines which reason is supposed able to discover, but he has made known things which eye had not seen, ear had not heard, neither had it entered into the mind of man to conceive, the mysteries of the Divine nature, and the eternal counsels concerning human redemption, which had been hidden from ages and generations. It is owing to the mediation of Christ, that such a discovery has been made of the Divine character as is adapted to the present circumstances of man ; which, instead of depressing, elevates him, instead of awakening fear, inspires hope and joy. We behold the Father in the face of the Son, and every feature is marked with benignity. The terrors of his majesty have passed away, and we conceive it possible that worms of the dust should hold communion with the Possessor of heaven and earth. The rays of the sun come to us through a cloud, which abates their dazzling splendour, and attempers them to the human eye. To the question of Solomon, “ Will God in very deed dwell with man upon the earth ?” we can answer, He will dwell with them ; he has sent his beloved Son to re-unite them to himself in the bonds of eternal friendship.

This leads me to remark, that the Mediator has established that peace between God and man which it was the object of his office to effect. For this purpose, it was necessary, as I formerly intimated, that the efficacy of his mediation should extend to both parties ; that he should reconcile God to men, and men to God. The reconciliation of God to us, by which I mean the appeasing of his anger, and the procuring of our pardon and acceptance, was accomplished by his sacrifice, which, by its intrinsic value, and the willingness with which it was offered, fully satisfied the demands of justice. The reconciliation of sinners to God, which consists in destroying their natural enmity against him, and inspiring love and confidence, is effected by the power of his grace. The consequence is, that God dwells in them, and they dwell in God. Peace on earth, and good will towards men, are the fruits of his mediation : “ This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord : I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts ; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord ; for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.”‡

* Matt. xi. 28. John vi. 68.

† John i. 16

‡ 1'eb. ii. 10-12.

From what has been now said, it appears that he is the medium through which intercourse is carried on between heaven and earth. Through him the love of God descends upon us, and through him our prayers, and thanksgiving, and all our holy services, ascend to God. He obtains for us all spiritual blessings. They are granted in consideration of his merit, and in answer to his request; and they are not dispensed immediately by the Father, but pass us through the hands of his Son. The fountain of Divine love has found a channel, in which it flows to refresh and gladden the souls of the guilty and unworthy. The heavens are opened; and peace, and righteousness, and salvation have come down to the habitations of mortals; "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them." In return, we present to him the sacrifices which he requires, of gratitude, praise, and obedience, accompanied with humble supplications for new communications of his goodness. Our services, being imperfect and mingled with sin, might be rejected; but the iniquities of our holy things were expiated by our merciful High Priest, and our oblations presented by him meet with a favourable reception, to which they are not entitled on their own account. His mediation is the basis of all acceptable religion; it gives us boldness to enter into the holiest of all. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

It appears that the duties of the mediatorial office are performed on earth and in heaven, as the High Priest of the Jews ministered both in the court where the altars of sacrifice stood, and in the holy of holies. If it be inquired in what precise nature Jesus Christ is Mediator, I would say, that he executes the office in both natures, the Divine and the human. The Scripture characterizes him as the man Christ Jesus; but that man was united to the second person of the Trinity. Considered as Mediator on the part of God, he discharges his duty, it has been said, by his Divinity; for it is as God that he sends the Holy Spirit, reigns over the church, reveals the mysteries which none could know but he who is in the bosom of the Father, and performs other acts which imply sovereign authority and infinite power. Considered as Mediator on the part of man, he discharges his duty by his humanity; for it was as man that he died, rose from the grave, and ascended to heaven; as man that he took possession of heavenly glory in our name, and interceded for us before the throne of his father. But, in thus referring his mediatorial acts to their respective classes, we ought to be careful to avoid the affectation of accuracy, and not to lose sight of the personal union of his natures, in consequence of which they are one principle of operation in the work of redemption. Since the incarnation, both natures act together according to their peculiar properties. They are not confounded so as to make one nature, but, while they remain distinct, the person is one. Some things could be done only by one of them, as for example, the human nature alone could suffer and die; but the other is always to be understood as concurring with it. In the death of the human nature, the Divine co-operated, by a voluntary surrender of it to crucifixion, and by communicating such value to its sufferings, that they were an adequate atonement. It is only in the Divine nature that he can hold and exercise the supreme authority over all things, with which he is invested for the salvation of the Church; for it is manifest, that the Lord of heaven and earth must possess infinite knowledge, and wisdom, and power; but his human nature shares in this glory. It is seated at the right hand of God, far above all principalities and powers; and it will be the visible Judge in the great day, when all nations shall be assembled to receive their final sentence: "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."* It is in

* Matt. xxv. 31.

the human nature that he has a fellow feeling of our infirmities, for it was as man that he suffered what we suffer; but his divine nature goes along with his human in pitying us, and is the source of the consolation by which we are supported.

The Scripture calls Jesus Christ the Mediator between God and man. Some have affirmed that he is also the Mediator of Angels, upon what authority they are best able to tell. The Bible does not say one word in their favour, and to dogmatize when it is silent, is surely to intrude into things not seen. All are agreed that he is not the Mediator of fallen angels, and an Apostle expressly assures us, that "he did not help them," and therefore did not assume their nature. Another informs us, that, "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down into hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;"* that is, he placed them in very different circumstances from those of men, who were condemned as well as they, but not by an irreversible sentence; whereas angels are consigned to a state of hopeless misery. He determined from the beginning to admit no negotiation on their behalf. The peace having been broken, was never to be restored. He has exhibited in their doom an awful example of severity, which will no doubt be productive of important consequences in the moral administration of the universe. The reason of this distinction between two classes of rebellious creatures we do not understand; but while we see justice taking its course upon the one, and grace extended to the other, with what intense feelings of gratitude should we extol and magnify Him, who so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son for its redemption! It is, then, of good angels that Christ is said to have been Mediator; and if you inquire in what way he could sustain this character in relation to beings, who, having never transgressed, had no need of his interposition? you will be told that he was not a Mediator of redemption to angels, but of preservation and confirmation. It was owing to him, that when others fell they stood, and by him such stability was given to the righteousness with which they were created, that they shall never lose it. If this doctrine be admitted, man will seem to have been hardly dealt with, who stood in as much need of such a Mediator as they, but not enjoying this benefit, yielded to temptation, and involved all his posterity in misery. The sovereignty of God may be deemed a sufficient answer to this difficulty; but if we proceed to ask, what occasion there could be for a Mediator between God and innocent beings whom he loved, and upon whom he was ready to bestow every necessary blessing without solicitation? whether the idea of a Mediator before any change had taken place in the original state of things, does not imply some imperfection in that state? and whether there is any thing in the constitution of our Saviour's person, and in the new covenant, which bears the most distant relation to angels? we shall not, I fear, receive a satisfactory answer. The truth is, that the opinion under review, is a mere conjecture, which does not receive the slightest countenance from Scripture; and when we go beyond the information which it gives, our speculations about angels are not more wise nor more worthy of attention, than the theories would be which in our idle hours we might form about the inhabitants of Saturn. The angels are said to be put in subjection to our exalted Redeemer; but this is very different from their being confirmed by him in holiness, and refers to a different period of their existence. They are said also,—if we understand them to be "the things in heaven,"—to be in him "gathered together in one," with the things on earth;† but the obvious and natural sense is, that they are united with the saints in one society, over which he presides. By him the enmity subsisting between angels and men was destroyed; for when men are reconciled to God, and renewed after his image, angels love them and minister

* 2 Peter ii. 4.

† Eph. i. 10.

to them, and will joyfully receive them into their everlasting habitations. There is no doubt that in consequence of the mediation of Christ the happiness of angels is augmented: the cause is not, that they were the objects of his mediation, or that as Mediator he did any thing with a direct view to their good, but that a new revelation was given of the Divine character and perfections which these holy beings contemplate with delight. Hence the joy which they expressed at our Saviour's birth: "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace, good will towards men." If there are any other holy beings in the universe, this effect is not peculiar to angels; for the glory of God in redemption will increase the felicity of all to whom it is made known.

There is a question which relates to the commencement of the Mediatorial office, and which it might be improper to pass without notice, because it gave rise to a great deal of speculation not long ago, in one of the bodies into which our Church was then divided. It so happened that I paid little attention to it at the time, and am not acquainted with the arguments which were advanced by the opposite parties; but the one contended that Christ did not become Mediator till his incarnation, and the other assigned an anterior date to his office. It is not a proof of the falsity of a doctrine, that it is held by persons many of whose other views are erroneous, because they who are often wrong may sometimes be right. It will not, however, serve to recommend the opinion that the mediation of Christ commenced at his birth, to know that it is a doctrine of the Church of Rome, which has been condemned by Protestant Divines. Roman Catholics maintain that Christ is Mediator only as man, and therefore consider him as not having entered upon his office till he assumed our nature.

It is of importance to settle the meaning of terms, because when they are left vague and indeterminate, both parties may dispute with great vehemence, and seem to hold the most opposite creeds, while in reality there is no difference of sentiment. If by the mediation of Christ we mean his acts of humiliation, obedience, and suffering, we must say, that he became Mediator at his incarnation, because it was only in human nature that he could perform those acts. But, if we mean by his mediation, the whole of his agency in behalf of sinners, we must go back to the fall, and even into eternity, when the covenant was made between the Father and the Son. I can conceive some men who pride themselves in what they call metaphysical reasoning, (which, however, is often the working of a dark and bewildered mind), to object that, as the Mediatorial office implies subordination, our Saviour could not sustain it while he remained, if I may so speak, in his pure Deity, unallied to an inferior nature. If there is any force in this argument, it will prove too much; for the legitimate inference from it is, that still he is Mediator only as man; a position contrary to the doctrine of our Church, and to the most obvious conclusions from Scripture.

Those who claim the character of orthodox, and particularly such of them as aim at systematic accuracy, and delight in nice distinctions, have sometimes need to be reminded of their own admonition to heretics, not to allow reason to intermeddle with matters of pure revelation. It is of no consequence what may be the result of our speculations upon the nature and fitness of things, our faith in every point ought to be determined by the oracles of God. Now, if we consult the Scriptures with simplicity of intention, resolved not to cavil but to learn, we shall discover not a few grounds for believing, that our Redeemer acted as Mediator prior to his coming in the flesh. We shall find him acting towards men in the name of God, and towards God in the name of men, as he has acted since his incarnation. It is a mediatorial act, the act of a prophet, to reveal the will of God; and who needs to be told that he was the author of revelation under the old as well as the new dispensation? The prophets were his ministers as well as the apostles; and accordingly the Spirit

who spoke in them is expressly called the "Spirit of Christ." * And it appears that he is called his Spirit, not merely because he testifies concerning him, but because he was sent by him.† Again, it is a mediatorial act, to exercise authority over the people of God, and to give laws for the regulation of their worship, and of their conduct towards God and man. It is the belief of Jews and Christians, that it was he, and not the Father, who promulgated the law to the Israelites in the wilderness, and as this opinion is consonant to his own declaration, that no man has at any time seen the Father, the Son being his representative to mankind, so it is confirmed by the proto-martyr Stephen, who, speaking of Moses, says, "This is he that was in the church in the wilderness, with the Angel that spoke to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers, who received the lively oracles to give unto us."‡ But we read of none who spoke to him at that time but God. "Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice."§ Who then could this angel who is called Jehovah be, but the angel who assumed the same character, when he appeared in the burning bush, the angel to whom the power belonged of pardoning or retaining sin, a power completely divine? This angel was God; but the title of angel or messenger implies, that he was acting in subordination to another, and destroys the argument that he could not be Mediator, till he had united himself to a created nature. And surely there is no difficulty in conceiving a person to be officially subordinate to another, although in essence and original dignity he is his equal. To intercede for man is another act of mediation, which our Saviour performs in the heavenly state. In the first chapter of Zechariah, we find these words: "Then the angel of the Lord answered and said, O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem, and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?"|| It is most reasonable to think, that this was not a created angel, but the angel who spoke to Moses in Sinai, the second Person of the Trinity, to whom the administration of grace for the salvation of the church has been committed in all ages, and who was the immediate author of the ancient dispensation. This conclusion is strengthened by the fact mentioned in the preceding verses, that the messengers whom the Lord sent "to walk to and fro through the earth," and who evidently signify the ministers of providence, are represented as giving an account to this angel of the execution of their commission. Surely they did not give the account to a creature, but to God in whose service they were engaged. I have only to add, that to deny that Christ was Mediator before his incarnation, leads to the denial of the existence of any covenant or transaction respecting our redemption till that period, because in that transaction he must have appeared as the friend and surety of man, and, according to the hypothesis, he could not become such till he had assumed a nature capable of subjection and obedience.

It may safely be inferred, I think, from these things, that the mediation virtually commenced before our Saviour was made flesh, and dwelt among us in a visible form. I admit that, till he descended to the earth, that constitution of person, which the office required, was wanting, and some of its most important duties could not be performed; but, to conclude that, therefore, he performed none of them, would be illogical, and contrary to the evidence produced. When he assumed the body which God had prepared for him, as he came to do the will of God, so he was in a condition to fulfil it in every particular, to obey, to suffer, and to die. At his baptism, he was formally invested with the office, or more accurately, he was publicly recognised as the Messiah; and he dedicated himself to the service of his Father, in the work of our salvation. The visible descent of the Spirit upon him, was a symbol of

* 1 Pet. i. 11.

§ Acts vii. 38.

† Lecture xxxiii. p. 156.

‡ Zech. i. 12

‡ Exod. xix. 19.

the ample qualifications with which his human nature was supplied, and a voice from heaven attested the Divine approbation: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

How long Jesus Christ will continue to discharge the duties of his office, is a question about which there is a diversity of sentiment. The common opinion is, that the office will be perpetual. It seems reasonable to believe that, as by him sinners are reconciled to God, and admitted into communion with him, he will be the medium of intercourse even in the heavenly state. With this idea those passages of Scripture are understood to accord, which represent him as a Priest for ever, as ever living to make intercession, and ascribe to him an eternal kingdom.* On the other hand it is contended, that the office may be conceived to cease when its design is fully accomplished; that our Saviour having been appointed Mediator to bring sinners to God, and to a state of perfection, there will be no cause that he should any longer sustain that character, when all the saints have been redeemed from the earth, and being not only justified, but free from the slightest taint of sin, will have no need of an intercessor, and may hold immediate intercourse with the Holy One. The Scripture appears to favour the idea of the termination of his office, by saying, that when the end comes he will deliver up the kingdom to the Father, and be subject to him, and that then God will be all in all.† Those who maintain the perpetuity of the mediation, besides being influenced by what they deem scriptural authority, are actuated by zeal for the honour of our Saviour, which seems to them to require that he should for ever retain an office which has reflected so much glory upon him, and without which the happiness of the righteous could not be secured. Those who adopt the opposite opinion do not consider it as derogating from his glory in any degree, and persuade themselves that nothing can give a more exalted idea of his mediatorial character than to believe, that he has so perfectly re-united God and his sinful creatures, that his farther interposition is unnecessary. The work will stand upon the solid basis which he has laid, will need no repair, nor the constant care of the Architect to prevent it from falling into ruins. It is formed of such durable materials, and compacted with such skill, that it will last for ever. I have given you a general account of this controversy, but reserve the discussion of it to another opportunity, when it will again occur.

The wisdom which is displayed in the mediation of Christ, is worthy of the highest admiration. Human wisdom would have been confounded by the question, Who shall repair the breach between heaven and earth? Who shall engage his heart to approach to God, in the name of the guilty? A creature was too mean, and too weak, to undertake the arduous enterprise, and a Divine Person was too great, and too remote from us, to appear upon our side. The mediation is the work of Him who is wonderful in counsel, and who proposes the noblest ends and the fittest means.

What glory does the mediation reflect upon our Redeemer! Standing between heaven and earth, he conducts a negotiation, on which depend the interests of both. He stands alone; his own arm brings salvation, and of the people there is none with him. The work which he is performing, surpasses every other in its nature and consequences. To him are committed the care of the Divine honour, and the happiness of the human race, and by him are all things made new; human nature is raised from the ruins of the fall, paradise is regained, and the everlasting triumph of righteousness and truth over error and sin, is secured.

* Heb. vi. 20, vii. 25. Luke i. 33, &c.

† 1 Cor. xv. 24-28.

Date Due

D 18 '47

15440

1281 21 1213



Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 01019 6576