SACRED BIOGRAPHY

by Henry Hunter

Hunter's biographical work spanning the lives of biblical figures from Adam through Abraham and beyond, presenting the stories of Scripture's great characters as sacred history with moral and spiritual lessons for readers.

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Chapter 1

001. Introduction

Introduction

Rom 15:4. For whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Various methods have been employed, at different periods and by different persons, to convey useful knowledge to mankind. The knowledge most useful and most important to man, is that of morals and religion. These sciences not only afford the most pleasant and elevating subjects of meditation, but evidently possess a very powerful influence over human happiness, both in the life which now is, and in that which is to come. The principles of morality and religion have, by some, been delivered in short, plain, and significant sentences; and have been left to produce their effect, by their own weight and evidence. Public teachers have, at other times, taken pains to explain and enforce these principles; have demonstrated their reasonableness and utility; and have exhibited the criminality, the danger, and the misery, of neglecting or transgressing them. The charms and graces of poetry have been employed to set off the native, modest beauties of truth and virtue, and allegory has spread her veil over them, in order to stimulate our ardor in the pursuit, and to heighten our pleasure in the discovery. The penetration of genius, the enchantment of eloquence, and the creative energy of fancy, have successively lent their aid to those gentle guides of human life, those condescending ministers to human comfort. The historic page, that faithful and true witness, has been unfolded. Ages and generations elapsed and gone, have been made to pass in review; and the lessons of religion and virtue have been forcibly inculcated, by a fair and impartial disclosure of the effects, which the observance or neglect of them have produced on the affairs of men. And the pencil of history has enriched the canvass, not only with men in groups, but selecting distinguished individuals, delineating them in their just proportions, and enlivening them with the colors of our nature, has exhibited a collection of striking portraits, for our entertainment and instruction. In contemplating these we seem to expatiate in a vast gallery of family pictures, and take delight in observing and comparing the various features of the extensive kindred, as they resemble or differ from each other; and through the physiognomy piercing into the heart, we find them, though dead, yet speaking and pleasing companions. The holy Scriptures posses an acknowledged superiority over all other writings, in all the different kinds of literary compositions which is called Biography, or a delineation of the fortunes, character and conduct of particular persons: and that, whether, from proper sources of information, they record that lives and actions of others.

These Lectures, undertaken at your request, and humbly submitted to your candid and patient attention; and, permit me to add, intended for you religious instruction and improvement, will, through the help of God, present you with a course of Sacred Biography, that is, the more particular and detached history of the lives of those eminent and distinguished personages whom Providence raised up, and whom the Holy Spirit has in the Scriptures of truth represented, either as patterns for us to imitate, or as objects of disesteem and aversion. We shall endeavor to

compare together those which possess more obvious and striking marks of resemblance or of dissimilitude; and they shall be brought, one after another, into comparison with that pure and perfect example of all excellence, which was exhibited by Him, who is “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.”

Happy will your Lecturer esteem himself, if he shall in any measure attain what he ardently desires, the power of blending profit with delight, for your use: the power with which the lively oracles of God furnish him, that of rendering the errors and the vices, as well as the wisdom and the virtue of others, beneficial unto you. In order to justify the design, for we presume not to answer for the execution, we shall endeavor to shew the propriety and usefulness of this mode of instruction in general, and the peculiar advantages which the sacred writers enjoy, in thus communicating useful knowledge; and which we of course possess, in the diligent and attentive perusal of their writings: and this shall serve as an Introductory Lecture to the Course.

We begin with attempting to shew the propriety and usefulness of conveying instruction, by means of the historical representation of the character and conduct of individuals, as opposed to the object of general history.

Now the professed purpose of all history is, without fear or favor, without partiality or prejudice, to represent men and things as they really are--that goodness may receive its just tribute of praise, and vice meet its deserved censure and condemnation. It is evident, that this end is most easily and most certainly attained, when our attention is confined to one particular object, or to a few at most. This may be judged of by the feeling operations of the mind, in the contemplation of other objects.

When, from the summit of some lofty mountain, we survey the wide extended landscape; though highly delighted, we feel ourselves bewildered, and overwhelmed, by the profusion and variety of beauties which nature spreads around us. But when we enter into the detail of nature: when we attend the footsteps of a friend through some favored beautiful spot, which the eye and the mind can take in at once; feeling ourselves at ease, with undivided, undistracted attention we contemplate the while we examine and arrange the parts; the imagination is indeed less expanded, but the heart is more gratified; our pleasure is less violent and tumultuous, but is more intense, more complete, and continues much longer; what is lost in respect of sublimity, is gained in perspicuity, force, and duration.

Take another instance:– The starry heavens present a prospect equally agreeable to every eye. The delights of a calm, serene evening, are as much relished by the simple and unlettered, as by the philosopher. But who will compare the vague admiration of the child of the clown with the scientific joy of the astronomer, who can reduce into order, what to the untutored eye is involved in confusion; who can trace the path of each little star: and, from their past appearances, can calculate, to an instant of time, their future oppositions and conjunctions?

Once more--It is highly gratifying to find ourselves in the midst of a public assembly of agreeable people of both sexes, and to partake of the general cheerfulness and benevolence. But what are the cheerfulness and benevolence of a public assembly, compared to the endearments of friendship and the meltings of love? To enjoy these, we must retire from the crowd, and have recourse to the individual. In like manner, whatever satisfaction, which we would not be thought by

any means to depreciate; yet the history of particular persons, if executed with fidelity and skill, while it exercises the judgment less severely, so it fixes down the attention more closely, and makes its way more directly and more forcibly to the heart. To those who are acquainted with this kind of writing, much need not be said. Evince the superior excellency of the sacred penman. Biographers merely human, necessarily lie under many disadvantages, and are liable to many mistakes. The lapse of time is necessarily thickening the veil which is spread over remote persons and events. The materials of history lie buried, confounded, dispersed, among the ruins of antiquity; and cannot be easily distinguished and separated, even by the eye of discernment, and the hand of honesty, from the rubbish of fiction. And as they are not always furnished by truth and nature, so neither are they always selected with judgment, nor employed with taste and discretion.

Men, who only see the outside, must of necessity infer the principles of human actions from the actions themselves. And yet no rule of judgment is more erroneous: for experience assures us, that many, perhaps the greater part of our actions, are not the result of design, and are not founded on principle, but are produced by the concourse of incidents which we could not foresee, and proceed from passions kindled at the moment.

Besides, every man sits down to write, whether of ages past, or of the present, of characters near or remote, with a bias upon his mind, and this he naturally endeavors to communicate to his reader. All men have their favorite periods, causes, characters; which, of course, they strive, at any rate, to embellish, to support, to recommend. They are equally subject to antipathies on the other hand, under the influence of which, they as naturally strive to depress, to expose, and to censure what they dislike. And as men write and speak, so they read and hear, under the influence of prejudice and passion. Where the historian’s opinions coincide with our own, we cheerfully allow him to be in the right; when they differ, without hesitation we pronounce him to be mistaken.

Most of the writers of profane ancient history are chargeable with an absurdity, which greatly discredits the facts they relate, and reduces their works almost to the level of fable. They attempt too much; they must needs account for every thing; they conjecture when light fails them; and because it is probable or certain that eminent men employed eloquence on important public occasions, their historians at the distance of many centuries, without record, or written document of any kind whatever, have, from the ample store of a fertile imagination, furnished posterity with the elaborate harangues of generals, statesmen and kings. These, it is acknowledged, are among the most ingenious, beautiful and interesting of the traces of antiquity which they have transmitted to us: what man of taste could bear to think of stripping these elegant performances of one of their chief excellencies? But truth is always injured, by every the slightest connection with fable. The moment I begin to read one the animated speeches of a hero or a senator, which were never composed, delivered, or written, till the historian arose, I feel myself instantly transported from the real theatre of human life, into a fairy region; I am agreeably amused, nay, delighted; but the sacred impress of truth is rendered fainter and feebler to my mind; and when I lay down the book, it is not the fire and address of the speaker, but the skill and ingenuity of the writer that I admire. Modern history, more correct and faithful than ancient, has fallen, however, into an absurdity not much less censurable. I mean that fanciful delineation of character, with which the account of certain periods, and the live of distinguished personages, commonly conclude; in which we often find a bold hypothesis hazarded for the sake of a point; and a strong feature added to, or taken

away from a character, merely to help the author for round his period.

Finally, a great part of profane history is altogether uninteresting to the bulk of mankind. The events recorded are removed to a vast distance, and have entirely spent their force. The actors exhibited are either too lofty to admit of our approach, with any interest or satisfaction to ourselves; too brutal to be considered without disgust, or too low to be worthy of our regard. The very scenes of action are become inaccessible or unknown; are altered, obliterated, or disregarded. Where Alexander conquered, and how Caesar fell, are to us mere nothings. But on opening the sacred volume, all these obstructions in the way of knowledge, of truth, of pleasure, and of improvement, instantly disappear. Length of duration can oppose no cloud to that intelligence, with which “a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years.” The human heart is there unfolded to our view, by Him “who what is in man,” and “whose eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the food.” The men and the events therein represented are universally and perpetually interesting, for they are blended with “the things which accompany salvation,” and affect our everlasting peace. There, the writers, whether they speak of themselves or of other men, are continually under the direction of the Spirit of all truth and wisdom. These venerable men, though subject to like passions with others, there speak not of themselves, but from God; “for 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.”[*]2Pe 1:21 And “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 perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”[*]2Ti 3:16-17

Having premised these things, we will proceed next Lord’s day, if God permit, to the execution of our plan; and shall begin, as the order both of nature and of Scripture prescribe, with the history of Adam, the venerable father and founder of the human race.

Men, Brethren, and Fathers, we are about to study the lives of other men; but it concerns us much more to look well to our own. Our forefathers were; we are. The curtain has dropped, and has hid ages and generations past from our eyes. Our little scene is going on; and must likewise speedily close. We are not indeed, perhaps, furnishing materials for history. When we die, obscurity will probably spread the veil of oblivion over us. But let it be ever remembered by all, that every man’s life is of importance to himself, to his family, to his friends, to his country, and in the sight of God. They are by no means the best men, who have made most noise in the world; neither are those actions most deserving of praise, which have obtained the greatest share of fame. Scenes of violence and blood; the workings of ambition, pride and revenge, compose the annals of men. But piety and purity, temperance and humility, which are little noticed and soon forgotten of the world, are held in everlasting remembrance before God. And happy had it been for many of those, whose names and deeds have been transmitted to us with renown, it they had never been born.

One corruption subdued, is a victory infinitely more desirable, and more truly honourable, than a triumph gained amidst the confused noise of ten thousand warriors, and as many garments rolled on blood; for “he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.”[*]Pro 16:32 Remember, my friends, that to be a child of God is far more honorable than to be descended from kings; and that a Christian is a much higher character than a hero. And let this consideration influence all that you undertake, all that you do. Act as it the eyes of Cato were always upon you, was the precept given, and the motive urged, to the Roman youth,

in order to excel in virtue. The eyes of God are in truth continually upon you. Live then as it is spoken, and every thought as it arises, is recorded is the book of God's remembrance, and must come into judgment, "keep thy heart with all diligence," set a watch in the door of thy lips, "and whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God."

We are about to review ages past, and to converse with men long since dead. And the period is fast approaching, which time itself shall be swallowed up: when Adam and his youngest son shall be contemporaries, when the mystery of providence shall be cleared up, the mystery of grace finished, and the ways of God fully vindicated to men. In the humble and solemn expectation of that great event, knowing and believing the Scriptures, and the power of God, let us study to live a life of faith and holiness upon the Son of God; "redeeming the time, because the days are evil," and "working out our own salvation with fear and trembling." And may the God of our fathers be our God and the God of our offspring, and conduct us through the dangerous and difficult paths of human life, and through the valley of the shadow of death, to his own "presence, where there is fullness of joy, and to his right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore." Amen.

Chapter 2

002. Adam to Abraham: Volume I

Adam to Abraham

Volume I

003. Adam Lived

Adam Lived Gen 5:5. And all the days that Adam lived, were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died.

If to trace the origin of particular nations; if to mark, and to account for, the rise and progress of empire, the revolutions of states, the discovery of new worlds, be an interesting, pleasant, and useful exercise of the human mind; how amusing, interesting, and instructive must it be, to trace human nature itself up to its source! Placed beneath the throne of God, it is pleasing to observe how the heavens and the earth took their beginning; and by what means this globe was at first peopled, and continues to be filled with men. If there be a natural, and not illaudable propensity, in individuals, to dive into the pedigree of their families; and in nations, to fix that of their princes, heroes and legislators; is it possible to want curiosity, or to miss entertainment, when the history of the venerable Father of all Men is presented to our attention--that of Adam, to whom we feel ourselves closely allied by condition and by blood, however unconnected we may seem to be with most of the collateral branches of the family: of whose nature we all partake; by whose conduct we are all affected, and in the consequences of whose actions we are all to this day involved? In pursuing this important inquiry, we have God himself for our guide, and we plunge into the dark regions of the remotest antiquity, lighted by that gracious Spirit, to whom all nature stands confessed, and with whom the whole extent of time is a single point, and unchanging now.

God having framed and fitted up this vast fabric, this magnificent palace, the earth, worthy of the inhabitant whom he designed to occupy it, and worthy of himself; having formed, arranged, and fructified the various and innumerable vegetable and animal tribes; having created, suspended, and balanced the greater and lesser lights, and settled the economy of the whole host of heaven; at length, with all the solemnity and majesty of Deity, as with the maturity of deliberation, as with a peculiar effort of divine power and skill, he designs and produces Adam, the first of men. When the earth is to be fashioned, and the ocean to be poured into its appointed bed; when the firmament is to be expanded, and suns to be lighted up, God says, Let them be, and they are created. But when Man is to be made, the creating Power seems to make a solemn pause, retires within himself, looks for a model by which to frame this exquisite piece of workmanship, and finds it in himself. “And 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. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them.”[*]Gen 1:26-27

Thus then was brought into existence, the father and founder of the human race. And O, how fair must that form have been, which the fingers of God framed, without the intervention of a second cause? How capacious that soul which the breath of God immediately inspired! But glorious and perfect as he is, Adam, upon his very first reflection, feels himself a dependant and a limited being. No sooner has his eye ascended to God who made him, than it returns to the earth from whence he was taken; and the very first excursion of reason informs him that he is at the disposal of

another, and restrained by law. He receives a whole globe, over which he is permitted an unlimited sovereignty: but one tree is reserved, as a token of his subjection. Every plant in paradise offers itself to gratify his sense, every animal does homage at his feet; but the sight of one kind of fruit in the midst of the garden continually reminds him, that he himself is dependant upon, and accountable to God; and while six parts of time are allowed for his own employments and delights, the seventh is set apart, sacred to his Maker.

Behold him then taking possession of his fair inheritance, of his vast empire, in all the majesty of unclouded reason, all the beauty of perfect innocence; possessed of every bodily, of every mental endowment. His numerous vassals of the brute creation present themselves before him; at one glance he discovers their nature and qualities, and gives them suitable names. But, while he is to be responsible: “The Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden, to keep it;” and he, for whom God and nature had produced all things in a luxuriant abundance, had nevertheless employment assigned him; he is placed in the garden to dress it. And can any of his degenerate sons then dream of independent property; or reckon want of employment to be and honorable distinction?

Behold him accepting his charge with submission and gratitude; entering on his employment with alacrity and joy; surveying his ample portion with complacency and delight. The prosecution of his pleasant task unfolds to him still new wonders of divine power and skill. The flower, and the shrub, and the tree, disclose their virtues, uses, and ends, to his observing eye. Every beast of the field spontaneously ministers to his pleasure or his advantage; all the host of heaven stands revealed to his capacious soul; and God himself, the great Lord of all, delights in him, and converses with him as a father and a friend. But yet he is alone; and therefore, even in paradise, but half blessed. The exulting heart of man pants for communication of satisfaction, and the rich profusion of Eden is but half relished and enjoyed, because there is no partaker with him. Being corporeal and earthly, he is unfit for the society of pure spirits; being rational and divine, he is above the society of the most sagacious of the subject tribes. “For Adam,” in the wide extended creation “there was not found an help meet for him.” But no sooner is the want felt, than it is supplied. God, who does nothing imperfectly, at length makes the happiness of paradise complete, and fills up the measure of Adam’s joy. “And the Lord 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 had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.”[*]Gen 2:21-22

What an important era in the life of Adam! What a new display of the Creator’s power, and skill, and goodness! How must the spirit of devotion be heightened, now that man could join in social worship! What additional satisfaction in contemplating the frame, order, and course of nature, now that he possessed the most exalted of human joys, that of conveying knowledge to a beloved object! Now that he can instruct Eve in the wonders of creation, and unfold to her their Maker’s nature, perfections, and will! What a new flavor have the fruits which grow in the garden of God acquired, now that they are gathered by the hand of conjugal affection, and recommended to the taste by the smile of complacency and love!--Ah! why were not joys like these permanent as they were pure? Was bliss like this bestowed but to be blasted? And must Adam’s chief felicity issue in his ruin?

We are reluctantly brought forward to that awful revolution, which at length took place in Adam's condition and character. Of the duration of his innocence and happiness we have no account. His history now becomes blended with that of the wicked and malignant spirit, who had "left his first estate" of holiness and felicity: and who, having artfully seduced our first parents from their innocence, exposed them to the wrath of God, procured their expulsion from paradise, rendered them a prey to fear, shame and remorse, and subjected them to pain, disease and death. The circumstances of the case, according to the Scripture account of it, were these. The devil observed the serpent to be an animal of peculiar sagacity and penetration, and fixes on him as a fit instrument of seduction. Fearing a repulse from the superior firmness and discernment of the man, he watches for, and find's the unhappy moment, when the woman, being separated from her husband, opposed to his wiles inferior powers of reason and intelligence, with greater softness and pliancy. He addresses himself to a principle in her nature, the immoderate indulgence of which he has proved fatal to so many thousands of her daughters, curiosity; curiosity, the investigator of truth, the mother of invention; curiosity, the prompter to rashness, the parent of danger, the guide to ruin. Having first gained her attention, he excites her to doubt and to reason in the face of a positive command; rouses in her a spirit of pride and ambition; and at length persuades her to make the fatal experiment. She eats of the prohibited tree, and, by transgression, acquires the knowledge of evil, whereas she had hitherto known only good. By what arguments Adam was prevailed upon to become a partner of her guilt, we are not informed. From the apology he made for his conduct, it is to by inferred that female insinuation and address misled him from the law of his God. And thus were both ruined by the operation of principles in themselves good and useful; but carried to excess, unchecked by reason, unawed by religion. Eve perished by a curious and ambitious desire after a condition for which God and nature had not designed her, a desire to be "as God, to know good and evil;" Adam fell by compliance to his wife, carried to unmanly weakness and compliance, yielding to his subject, bidding defiance to his sovereign. And what words can express, what heart can conceive the bitter change! All his posterity have experienced the melancholy transition from health to sickness, from ease to pain: very many have passed from affluence to indigence, from glory to shame, and not a few have exchanged empire itself for banishment or a dungeon. But more than the accumulated weight of all these at once, falls on the devoted head of our guilty first father. The eyes, which before met the approach of God with rapture, now are clouded with sorrow, tremble with fear, or strain with remorse and horror, at the voice of the Almighty. That tongue, which was once tuned only to the accent and the language of love, has in a moment learned to reproach and upbraid. The heart which glowed at the promise and the prospect of a fair, numerous, and happy progeny, now sinks in dejection at the dismal apprehension of that guilt and woe, in which his folly had plunged all his hapless children. Where innocence sat enthroned, there fell despair broods over her own stinging reflections, and tormenting fears. Above, the awful throne of an offended God; beneath, a fathomless gulf, kindled by the breath of Jehovah as a stream of brimstone; within, a troubled conscience, like the raging sea, incapable of taking rest. "The glory is departed: the gold is become dim, and the most fine gold changed." And now too a revolution in outward circumstances takes place, corresponding to that which had passed on his internal constitution and character. Adam must no longer possess that paradise of which he had rendered himself unworthy. Justice drives out from Eden the man, who had cast himself out from the favor of God. A wall reaching up to heaven, and immoveable as the decree of the Eternal, prevents the possibility of return. The flaming sword of the cherubim

bars all access to the tree of life. His labor, formerly his delight, must henceforward be accompanied with pain. The subject tribes throw off their allegiance, and either shun, or threaten their Lord. The elements change their influence, and his fair domain becomes a vast solitude. The sole partner of his former joys, now becomes the cause and the companion of his guilt, becomes also the companion of his woe. Mutual reflections and reproaches embitter and increase their common misery; and stern death stares them in the face. But will God contend forever, will he be always wroth? Then “the spirit should fail before him, and the souls which he had made.” Behold a dawn of hope arises, and the promise of the Most High saves from despair. The moment man becomes, and feels himself, a miserable offender, that moment is the gospel preached unto him; as the woman was first in the transgression, so from her the prospect of salvation arises; and it is declared that the “old serpent, who is the devil and Satan,” who had in deceiving her, destroyed her posterity, should by one who was peculiarly her posterity, be destroyed and slain. Thus they leave Eden, supported and cheered with the expectation of triumph over their bitter enemy, and of being restored at length to the favor of their offended God. To keep alive this hope, as well as to afford present relief from shame, at this period, it would appear, sacrifice was instituted. The same victim shed its blood, the type of atonement: and furnished its skin to clothe the naked, thereby presented the emblem of a perfect righteousness, to cover and shelter the naked soul. And thus early, distinctly and unequivocally was Christianity taught to mankind. In process of time, however, Adam has the felicity of becoming a father; and enjoys the satisfaction of seeing the blessing pronounced upon him in his better state, notwithstanding his apostasy, taking effect. Eve becomes the joyful mother, perhaps at one birth, of two sons, and the earth begins to be replenished. Behold the first parents of mankind exulting in affections unknown, unfelt before; exulting in this fresh proof that God had not forgotten to be gracious. Behold the nuptial tie strengthened and confirmed; the voice of upbraiding and reproach turned to the language of congratuation, complacency, and love.

Adam observes, with growing delight, his sons increasing in stature and wisdom. Stung with keen reflection upon the happiness which he had vilely thrown away, and the misery which he had entailed upon his hapless children, how would he exert himself to repair that loss! How forcibly inculcate, by his own fatal example, the obligations of God’s holy law! With what gratitude lead them to the promised atonement! With what heartfelt delight infuse knowledge into their opening minds!

Man is destined to labor from the beginning; and, for his punishment, guilty man must labor with the sweat of his brow. But all the punishments of Heaven in reality, and in the issue, are blessings. It is the privilege and the happiness of Adam and all his sons to be employed, though to weariness and fatigue. Accordingly the heirs and possessors of the whole globe, as soon as they arrive at man’s estate, betake themselves to the humble and necessary occupations of that simple state of human nature. “Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain was a tiller of the ground.” But Adam, we find, has taught his sons to blend religion with their secular employments; nay, to make their very employments the monitors and the means of religious worship. “In process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel he also brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof; and the Lord had respect to Abel, and to his offering; but unto Cain and his offering; he had not respect.”[*]Gen 4:4-5 And O, how early did the different passions and affections of the human mind discover themselves! Abel brings with his

offering an humble, pious, and believing spirit. Cain approaches the altar of God with a proud, selfish, murderous heart. And melancholy it is to observe, the first quarrel in the world, the first human blood that was shed, were occasioned by religion, which is designed of God to be, and is in itself, the dearest bond of union among men. An event now took place in Adam's family by which every former grief must have been renewed and embittered; and to his inexpressible mortification he finds himself a root of bitterness, of which all his branches must and do partake. Cain, incensed at the preference given to his brother's offering, burning with envy and resentment, watches his opportunity, and finding himself alone with him in the field, puts Abel to death. Thus man becomes the executioner of the dreadful sentence of the divine law, upon man--brother upon brother. What must have been the emotions of Adam's soul when these sad news were brought him! To lose a son, a pious promising son: almost an only one; prematurely, unexpectedly, by the hand of his own brother! The one dead! the other worse than dead; a wretch unworthy to live! How would his own transgression again stare him in the face! How would he again accuse himself as the author of his own wretchedness, and the propagator of woe on woe to his posterity! The empire of Satan over this miserable world would now seem confirmed; and the purpose of the divine grace would be apparently defeated. But God yet takes pity on fallen, guilty man, being mindful of his promise; and Seth is given to supply the loss of Abel--Seth, in whose line the promise runs, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ should come. And thus the divine interpositions always seasonably and suitably meet our necessities and wants.

Adam's own forfeited life is prolonged to many generations, and he lives to see his posterity increased to a great multitude, inventing and cultivating the arts, which support, adorn, or comfort life. But the time approaches, at last, that he must die. Mercy flew as on the wings of a dove to his relief; justice walks with slow and steady steps to his punishment. By himself, sin had entered into the world, and death must inevitably follow, and pass, upon him and upon all men. He had seen the ghastly appearance of death, in the person of his murdered son; he must now drink the bitter cup for himself: "And the days that Adam lived, were nine hundred and thirty years, and he, died." This is the end of all men, and the living should lay it to his heart. And thus at length decayed the fabric which God himself had reared; thus "the dust returned to the earth as it was, and the spirit to God who gave it." And thus must conclude the history of every life, though protracted to a thousand years, whether adorned with virtues, or sullied with vice, whether passed with noise on the great theater, or obscurely spent in the shade. To this complexion the wise and the beautiful, the brave and the good, as well as the simple and the homely, the timid and the vicious, must come at last. "Here the rich and the poor meet together; here the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." The next Lecture, if God permit, will attempt to exhibit to you, the comparison and contrast of the first and second Adam: in the former of whom all died; and by the latter, an elect world is made alive, and "raised up together and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

Let us endeavor to improve what has been said; by learning habitually to acknowledge, adore, and serve the great Author and preserver of our being, who has lavished so much goodness upon us, who adorned our nature with his own glorious image, pitied us in our low and lost estate, and has laid help for us on one who is mighty to save: and who, by the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel, is aiming at making us partakers of a divine nature, and delivering us horn that bondage of corruption, to which we are sunk by reason of sin.

Let its learn, secondly, from the sad example of the first transgression, to rest contented with that state and condition which Providence has assigned us in life; to use only lawful means for bettering it; to make the known will of God the only rule of conduct; never to reason and tamper with temptation; but to repel or flee from it at once: and to shun those as our worst enemies, who, on any occasion or pretence, would attempt to make us think lightly of the law of God.

Let me take occasion, thirdly, from that institution which God designed for the completion of human happiness in a state of innocence, and for the mutual assistance and comfort of the sexes, in their fallen condition, to censure and condemn that spirit and practice of celibacy, which is one of the crying vices of our own age and country, and which is equally inimical to religion, to good morals, to public spirit, and human comfort. He who says, or lives as if he thought, that it is “good for man to be alone,” gives the lie to his Maker; sins against the constitution of his nature, dishonors his parents; defrauds another of one of the justest rights of humanity, and in a case too where it is impossible so much as to complain; and exposes himself to commit offences against society which are not to be mentioned in this place. In truth, celibacy is a vile compound of avarice and selfishness, which would fain pass upon the world for prudence and self denial; and the state of our own country at present, in this respect, looks as if a single state, as in Roman Catholic countries, were established by a law, but that the laity, not the clergy, were bound by it. But, alas! I am only furnishing matter for a little conversation. There must be more virtue, religion and good sense among the young men of the age, before this crying evil be remedied.

Finally, let us take the conclusion of the book of God, and the bright prospect, which it discloses to our view, to support and cherish us under the melancholy scene exhibited to us in the beginning of it. “According to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” “And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold I make all things new.”[*]Rev 21:5 “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal proceeding out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse; but the throne of God, and of the Lamb, shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him. And they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun: for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign forever.”[*]Rev 22:1-5 “I beheld, and lo, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders, and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces and worshipped God; saying, Amen: blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might be unto our God forever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? And whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb, which is in the midst of the

throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."[*]Rev 7:9-17

Thus the mercy of God, and the blood of the Lamb, remove the guilt, and rectify the disorders of sin. Thus guilty, fallen man is recovered and restored. Thus the evils recorded in the first pages of the Bible are remedied and done away in that bright revelation of a world to come, which is opened to us in the close of it. Thus is Adam, and his renewed offspring, conducted from terrestrial paradise, where the tree of knowledge of good and evil grew up among the trees of life, to the paradise of God, where no mixture of evil intrudes itself, where none but the trees of life find a place. And thus the several parts of divine revelation explain, illustrate, strengthen, and confirm each other; and the whole taken together exhibiting throughout one great leading object, carrying on one great design, and accomplishing, at length, the one original purpose of the ETERNAL, is gloriously perfect.

Chapter 4

004. Adam and Christ Compared

Adam and Christ Compared 1Co 15:45. And so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. The frame of nature, the ways of Providence, and the work of redemption, mutually illuminate, explain and support each other. The invisible things of God are clearly understood by the things which are made: the world is evidently upheld and governed by him who made it at first. And the suspension of the laws of nature, and the special interpositions of Divine Providence, constitute the proof, that the gospel dispensation is from Him who has the universe under his control, to continue or to change its appearance at his pleasure; who has all hearts in his hand, and consequently, all events at his disposal. When we attempt to contemplate the providence of God, we immediately find it to be a system infinitely too vast for human capacity to take in, too complex for our penetration to unfold, too deep and mysterious for our understanding to fathom. All that we can do is to consider the detached parts of this majestic whole, as they present themselves to our senses, or to our reason; as they are transmitted to us in the history and experience of others; or as they are discovered to us by a revelation from heaven. Without the Bible, it were utterly impossible to give a tolerable account, much less one completely satisfactory, of the origin of the world, or of the appearances of nature; of the events which are past and are recorded, or those which are every day presenting themselves to our observation. But when reason vouchsafes to kindle her feeble lamp with fire from the altar of God, and to supply it continually with fresh oil from the sacred stores, what was formerly dark becomes clear: what before seemed intricate and perplexed, is found to be in perfect order and harmony; and the dim and scattered fragments become both legible and intelligible.

Nay, farther, the different parts of Scripture itself, taken separately and without connection, may seem to have less force, beauty, and importance; but when brought together, like the magnet and the steel, they immediately attract each other and unite; like the scattered bones in the valley, bone coming together to his bone, there starts, up a perfect man, nay, an exceeding great army. Type meeting the thing typified, prediction squaring with event promise tallying exactly with accomplishment, Scripture acquires a solidity which bids defiance to all created force: becomes, in its own energetic language, as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces.” The persons exhibited, the events recorded, the scenes described, the institutions ordained in one age and state of the world which were the shadows of good things to come, are not only instructive and interesting in themselves; but acquire a weight and importance which they possessed not before, when viewed in their relation to Him, to whom all the prophets give witness, and whose person, character, and work, are the fulfilling of all that was written of old time. The history of Adam ministers both pleasure and instruction to us as men: but Christians feel a peculiar interest in the perusal of it, by considering Adam “as the figure of him who was to come.”

Having, in the last Lecture, attempted a delineation of the life of the first man, according as it is transmitted to us in the holy Scriptures, we proceed, in prosecution of our plan, to institute in a few particulars, a comparison between Adam and Christ; between the federal head and representative of the human race, and the covenant head and representative of the church. But first, let us

observe wherein the first man differs from, and wherein he resembles all other men, who have descended from him by ordinary generation.

First--In the manner of his production. Other men arrive at their maturity, such as it is, by slow and insensible degrees; they make a progress through infancy, childhood, and youth, to man's estate; Adam was created perfect at once; the moment he began to exist, he existed in all the dignity and strength of reason and intelligence. All other men are conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity; he came from the hands of his Creator, holy and blameless, the son of God. The mental powers of the wisest and most intelligent of mankind, his sons, are narrow and contracted; we know but a few things, and them imperfectly: the whole world of nature was an open volume to his understanding. Since the fall, men are born into the world with the seeds of decay and dissolution in the constitution and frame of their nature; but Adam was created incorruptible, immortal. The property and power of the greatest of his posterity is cramped and confined; limited by mountains, rivers and seas; liable to be encroached upon, disputed, invaded, taken away but the dominion of the first man was uncontrolled, his authority indisputable, his property universal; the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea, all, all were put under his feet. But Adam, fallen and lost, is just what all his hapless children are; like them a slave to divers lusts and passions; like them liable to disease and death; like them a prey to sorrow, fear and remorse; like them a child of wrath, an heir of hell; and like them, to be recovered, restored, re–established, only by the mercy of God, and through the atoning blood of a Savior: and how that Savior was typified or held forth to the world, by the person, character, and relative connections of Adam, is to be the subject of the remaining part of this discourse.

Adam, perhaps, was not himself aware, that he was in this respect fulfilling the designs of Providence. We know that many others exhibited striking types of the promised Savior, in their persons, offices and actions, without being conscious that such Honorable distinction was conferred upon them; and Moses, the inspired author of the history of the first man, no where hints, that he considered Adam, or that Adam considered himself in this light. But to us the matter is put beyond a doubt, by one who wrote also under the inspiration of God, the great apostle of the Gentiles, who informs us, that this first man, into whose nostrils God breathed the breath of life, and who thereby became a living soul, was "the type or figure of him that was to come:"[*]Rom 5:14 and in many other places, in his epistles, shows us wherein the resemblance consists. Following him therefore, and the other sacred writers of the New Testament, as our guides, we observe.

First, that Adam typified Christ, as being in a peculiar sense the Son of God. The evangelist Luke, in tracing the natural pedigree of our Saviour, ascends step by step from son to father, till he comes to the first progenitor of all, "who was," says he, "the Son of God:" that is, his immediate offspring, deriving his existence without any interposition, from the great source of being. And what saith the Scripture concerning the Messiah? "I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee,"[*]Psa 2:7 and "when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world," he saith, "And let all the angels of God worship him."[*]Heb 1:6 As the manner in which Adam was produced, was new and unexampled, so the conception and birth of Christ were "a new thing in the earth:" the former created of dust from the ground, the latter formed by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of a virgin. But Adam, the son of God, though made in the likeness of his Creator, expressed that divine image only externally, as the coin exhibits the

image and impress of the sovereign: whereas Christ the Son of God displayed “the brightness of his Father’s glory,” and bore “the express image of his person.” Adam the son of God was produced in time, on the sixth day of the creation, after all the other works of God were finished: but Christ, the Son of God, the eternal wisdom of the everlasting Father, thus speaks of himself. “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth: when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world: when he prepared the heavens I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: when he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: when he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, and rejoicing always before him: rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men.”[*]Pro 8:22-31

Secondly--The constitution of Adam’s nature prefigured the person of Christ. In Adam, an immaterial immortal spirit was united to a material earthly body, to constitute one perfect, living man; in Christ, the human nature was united to the divine, to constitute one perfect life–giving Savior. The one a mystery of nature, the other a mystery of grace. The one, though incomprehensible, yet certainly known by every man to be true; the other though incomprehensible, yet by every Christian believed to be true.

Thirdly--The paternal relation which Adam bears to all the human race, beautifully represents to us Jesus the Son of God, as the spiritual father of all them that believe. The first man, Adam, says the text, was made a living soul,” that is, the source of a natural life, to them who had it not before; the last Adam was made “a quickening spirit,” that is, the giver and restorer of a spiritual and divine life, to those who, having lost it, were “dead in trespasses and sins.” The water in the conduit will rise to the level of its fountain, but can never mount higher. Thus Adam can communicate only what he was, and what he had himself; being therefore of the earth, earthly, he could only propagate an earthly existence; but the second man, being the Lord from heaven, can, and does, make his spiritual offspring “partakers of a divine nature.” As every man, upon coming into the world of nature, the instant he draws the breath of life, bears the image of the first man whom God created; so from Jesus Christ, progenitor of them who believe, all who are regenerated, or born into the world of grace, derive their spiritual existence, and bear the image of him, from whom the whole family of heaven and earth is named. But Adam is the remote, not the immediate father of our flesh: whereas Christ is the immediate source of spiritual light and life to all those “who are born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”[*]John 1:13

Fourthly,– Adam and Christ bear a striking resemblance in respect of dominion and sovereignty. When God had created man, “he blessed him, and said unto him, Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” “Thou hast made him,” says the Psalmist, “a little lower than the angels; and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things under his feet. All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.”[*]Psa 8:5-9 And Christ

the Lord, even in the days of his flesh, while he yet dwelt among men not only possessed but exercised an unlimited authority over the whole world of nature, over things visible, and things invisible. The prince of the power of the air fled at his command: the boisterous elements heard and obeyed his word: disease, and death, and the grave fulfilled his pleasure. How much more justly, after his resurrection from the dead, when “declared the Son of God with power, could he say of himself,” all power is given unto me, in heaven and in earth?” and the Apostle also, concerning him, “God 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.”[*]Php 2:9-11We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor. “And he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet.” The sovereignty of Adam, however, was derived, dependent, limited, and might be forfeited: and his history, and our own experience feelingly assure us, “that, being in honor he continued not;” that the crown is fallen from his head, and the scepter dropt from his hand. His derived authority was withdrawn by him who bestowed it; his dependent power was checked and curbed, because he had abused it; his limited empire was reduced to nothing, because he presumed to affect equality with his Creator; and having received dominion under a condition, failing in the condition, he forfeits his throne. But the sovereignty of Christ is inherent, independent, unlimited, and everlasting. “Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom;” and the Son himself saith, “I lay down my life, that I might take it again. I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.” “And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me is greater than all: and none is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.”[*]John 10:28-30

Again, the sacred and pure matrimonial union established in paradise between Adam and Eve, was intended to prefigure the mysterious union, the pure and reciprocal affection of Christ and his church: in which also we follow the Apostle of the Gentiles in his epistle to the Ephesians,[*]Eph 5:23 “for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it, with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish. We are members of his body; of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause, shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

Finally--The whole tenor of Scripture teaches us to consider Adam, the first of men, as the covenant head and representative of all his posterity, according to the order and course of nature; and Jesus Christ the Lord, as the federal head and representative of all his redeemed, according to the election of grace. “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.” “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” And “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."[*]Rom 5:17-19 But whatever admits of comparison, by bearing resemblance, must likewise admit of contrast, on account of dissimilitude: for what so like, as to be undistinguishable? What two persons are so much the same, as not to exhibit, to the least discerning eye, characteristical marks of difference? And indeed, the very particulars wherein the first and second Adam coincide, evince the infinite superiority, of the one above the other, as well as those circumstances which could not possibly be in common between them.

Adam was assaulted of the wicked one, by a slight temptation; yielded; and fell: Christ was tempted of the devil, by repeated, vigorous, and well-conducted attacks; resisted to the last; and overcame. Adam in paradise, became guilty, and miserable, and liable to death: Christ passed through a corrupted world, lived in the midst of a sinful and adulterous generation, but preserved unspotted innocence; "he did no sin, neither was guile found in his lips." Adam by one offence became guilty of the whole law, poured contempt upon it, and transmitted his crime, together with the punishment of it, to all mankind: Christ, by a complete obedience, "magnified the law, and made it honorable," approved himself unto God, and conveys the merit of his obedience and sufferings to all them that believe, for their justification and acceptance. Adam, aspiring to a condition superior to that in which his Maker placed him, not only failed to obtain what he aimed at, but also lost what he had; desiring to be as God, to know good and evil, he acquired indeed the fatal knowledge of evil, but lost the knowledge of good which he already possessed; and sinking himself, drags down a devoted world with him: whereas Christ, for the voluntary abasement of himself, is exalted to "the right hand of the Majesty on high," for the suffering of death, is crowned with glory and honor," and "lifted up on the cross, draws all men unto him." The moment we exist, in virtue of our relation to the first Adam, we die for an offence we could not commit; so, we no sooner become united to the second Adam through faith in his blood, than we become partakers of a spiritual and divine nature, and heirs of everlasting life, in virtue of a righteousness not our own. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." In Adam, we are condemned for one sin: in Christ we are justified from many offences. The history of Adam represents to us a garden with one tree of life amidst many that were good for food, and near to one that was pregnant with death: the Revelation of Jesus Christ exhibits to us a paradise, all whose trees are of one sort; whose fruit is life-giving, whose very leaves are salutary; trees of life which know no decay, never disappoint the gatherer's hope, never feel the approach of winter.

Genesis presents to our trembling, astonished sight, "cherubims and a flaming sword, which turn every way to keep the way of the tree of life." The Apocalypse discloses to our delighted eyes, angels ministering to them who are the heirs of salvation; and our ravished ears hear these glad accents bursting from amidst the excellent glory, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." "Let him that is athirst, come: and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Chapter 5

005. Cain and Abel

Cain and Abel

Heb 11:4. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts, and by it he, being dead, yet speaketh. A stateof innocence was apparently of short duration. The history of it contains but a very few particulars. To plunge the human race into guilt and ruin was the work only of a moment: but to restore mankind to life and happiness, employed depth of design to contrive; length of time to mature and unfold; and irresistible force to execute. The history of the world is, in truth, the history of redemption. For all the dealings of Divine Providence with men, directly or by implication immediately or remotely, point out and announce a Savior. To our first parents, immediately upon the fall, a promise was given, in general, indeed, but not in obscure terms, of deliverance and recovery, by one who should be in a peculiar and proper sense, “the seed of the woman.” And it is far from being unreasonable to suppose that the skins employed to cover the shame of our guilty first parents, were taken from victims slain by divine appointment; who by the shedding of their blood were to typify the great atonement, styled in Scripture “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” But admitting this to be merely a fanciful conjecture, we have the authority of God himself to affirm, that the immediate descendants of Adam offered such sacrifices, and looked in faith and hope to such propitiation: “For by faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness, that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts, and by it he, being dead, yet speaketh.” The history, character, and conduct of these two brothers, from the materials furnished us in Scripture, are to be the subject of this Lecture.

Adam, with the partner of his guilt and of his future fortunes, being expelled from Eden, and tumbled from all his native honors, enters on the possession of a globe, which was cursed for his sake. He feels that he is fallen from a spiritual and divine life, from righteousness and innocence; that he has become liable to death; nay, by the very act of disobedience, that he really died to goodness and happiness. But the sentence itself which condemns him, gives him full assurance, that his natural life, though forfeited, was to be reprieved; that he should live to labor; to eat his bread with the sweat of his brow; and not only so, but that he should be the means of communicating that natural life to others; for that Eve should become a mother, though the pain and sorrow of conception and child-bearing were to be greatly multiplied. In process of time she accordingly brings forth a son; and pain and sorrow are no more remembered, for joy that a man-child is born into the world. What she thought and felt upon this occasion, we learn from what she said, and from the name she gave her new-born son. With a heart overflowing with gratitude, she looks up to God, who had not only spared and prolonged her life, but made her the joyful mother of a living child; and who in multiplying her sorrow, had much more abundantly multiplied her comfort. Ease that succeeds anguish is doubly relished and enjoyed. Kindness from one whom we have offended, falls with a weight pleasingly oppressive upon the mind. Some interpreters, and not without reason, suppose, that she considered the son given her, as the promised seed, who should bruise the head of the serpent; and they read her self-gratulatory

exclamation thus, “I have gotten the man from the Lord.” And how soothing to the maternal heart must have been the hope of deliverance and relief for herself, and triumph over her bitter enemy, by means of the son of her own bowels! How fondly does she dream of repairing the ruin which her frailty had brought upon her husband and family, by this “first-born of many brethren!” The name she gives him signifies “possessed,” or a “possession.” She flatters herself that she has now got something she can call her own; and even the loss of paradise seems compensated by a dearer inheritance. If there be a portion more tenderly cherished, or more highly prized than another, it is that of which David speaks,[*]Psa 127:3-5 “Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is His reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed; but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.” But O, blind to futurity, with how many sorrows was this “possession,” so exultingly triumphed in, about to pierce the fond maternal breast! How unlike are the forebodings and wishes of parental tenderness and partiality, to the destinations of Providence, and the discoveries which time brings to light! “And she again bare his brother Abel.” The word denotes vanity, or a breath of air. Was this name given him through the unreasonable prejudice and unjust preference of a partial mother? Or was it an unintentional prediction of the brevity of his life, and of the lamentable manner of his death? But the materials of which life is composed, are not so much its days, and months, and years, as works of piety, and mercy, and justice, or their opposites. He dies in full maturity, who has lived to God and eternity, at whatever period, and in whatever manner he is cut off. That life is short, though extended to a thousand years, which is disfigured with vice, devoted to the pursuits of time merely, and at the close of which the unhappy man is found unreconciled to God.

Behold this pair of brothers, then, growing in wisdom and in stature; gladdening their parents’ hearts. They arrive at the age of reason, of vigor, of activity; they feel the law of God and nature upon them. Though the heirs of empire, they must labor for their subsistence--”Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.”[*]Gen 4:2 The earth will no longer spontaneously yield her increase. The clods must be turned up, and the seed must be cast into the furrow, through the care, foresight, and industry of man, else in vain will the heavens shed their influence; and in vain will the blessing of the Most High be expected. That cattle may furnish either the fleece for clothing, or milk for food, they must be protected from inclement seasons, and ravenous beasts; they must be conducted to proper pasture, and provided with water from the brook. And this is the origin of the first employments which occupied our elder brethren in a state of nature. And here it is observable, that the different dispositions of the brothers may be traced in the occupations which they followed. Pious and contemplative, Abel tends his flock; his profession affords more retirement, and more leisure; for meditation; and the very nature of his charge forms him to vigilance, to providence, and to sympathy. His prosperity and success seem to flow immediately, and only, from the hand of God. Cain, more worldly, and selfish, betakes himself to husbandry; a work of greater industry and art; the necessary implements of which suppose the prior invention of sundry branches of manufacture; and in whose operations, and their effects, art blending with nature, would claim at least her full proportion of merit and importance. But it is not the occupation which has merit or demerit; the man who exercises it, is the object of censure or of praise. It is not the husbandry of Cain, but wicked Cain the husbandman that we blame; it is not the shepherd’s life, but good Abel the shepherd that we esteem. “And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel he also

brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof; and the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering:"[*]Gen 4:3-4 What is any condition, any employment, unconnected with, unsupported, unadorned by religion! How wretched a creature is the mere citizen of this world, whose views, pursuits, and enjoyments, all terminate in time! The man who sees not his comforts and his successes as coming from the hand of God; and whose heart rises not in gratitude to the Giver of all good, is a stranger to the choicest ingredient in the cup of prosperity. But can God, the great God, stand in need of such things as these? "Is not every beast of the forest his, and the cattle upon a thousand hills?" Yes, verily; religion was not instituted for the sake of God, but of man: for man cannot be profitable to his Maker, as he that is wise, and good, and pious, may be unto himself. Religion is pressed upon us by the very law of our nature; and it is absolutely necessary to human happiness.

Cain observes the fruits of the earth arrive at their maturity. He knows that all his care and skill, without the interposition of Heaven could not have produced a single grain of corn. He had observed the seed which he cast into the ground, dying, in order to be quickened; he saw from putrefaction a fresh stem springing up, and bearing thirty, sixty, an hundred fold; and a power more than human conducting this wonderful progress. Of the first and best, therefore, he brings an offering unto the Lord; not to enrich his Maker, but to do honor to himself. Abel's flocks and herds likewise, through the blessing of the Almighty, increase and multiply; he adores the hand that makes his wealth; and presents the firstlings of his flock to the Lord. But, alas! his offering, in order to be accepted, must bleed and die. The innocent lamb which he had tended with so much care, had fed from his hand, had carried in his bosom, must by his hand be slain, must find no compassion from the tender shepherd's heart, when piety demands him--must be consumed to ashes before his eyes. "And the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering. But unto Cain, and to his offering, he had not respect." What made the difference? Not the nature and quality of the things offered, but the disposition of the offerers. Our text illustrates and explains the passage in Genesis, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." Cain came before God as a righteous man; Abel as a sinner. Cain brought an offering of acknowledgment; Abel a propitiatory sacrifice. Cain's gift bespeaks a grateful heart: Abel's a contrite spirit. Cain eyes the goodness of God; Abel his mercy and long-suffering. Cain says, "Lord, I thank thee for all thy benefits toward me;" Abel, "Lord I am unworthy of the least of thy favors." Cain rejoices in the world as a goodly portion; Abel, by faith, discerns and expects a better inheritance. Cain approaches, trusting in an imperfect righteousness of his own, and departs un justified; Abel draws nigh, depending on the perfect righteousness of a Mediator, and goes away righteous in the sight of God. In what manner the divine approbation and displeasure were expressed, we are not informed; whether by a celestial fire seizing and consuming the one offering and leaving the other untouched; or by a voice from heaven, declaratory of the mind of God. But we are assured that it was sufficiently notified to the parties themselves. On Abel, undoubtedly, it had the effect which a sense of the favor of God will always produce upon a good mind, a mind which esteems the loving kindness of the Most High more than life; sweet complacency and composure of spirit, "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." On Cain it produces a very different effect; he was very wroth, "and his countenance fell." Men are often angry when they ought to be grieved; and remorse for their own unworthiness frequently becomes resentment against their innocent neighbors; and not seldom it changes into sullenness, insolence, and rebellion against God himself. Observe the goodness and condescension of God; he vouchsafes to reason with, to warn,

and to admonish this peevish, petulant man; and gives encouragement to a better temper and behavior. “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?” He promises to support him in his right of primogeniture, unworthy as he was--”To thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him;” but at the same time he points out the danger of persevering in impiety, and of prosecuting his resentments--”If thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.” But the soul, of which envy, malice and revenge have taken possession, is lost to the better feelings of human nature; is deaf to remonstrance, and insensible of kindness The innocent are simple and unsuspicious; intending no evil, they fear none. Cain, it would appear from the letter of the narration, and the scene where the action is laid, decoyed his brother into solitude, under the mask of familiarity and friendship; “he talked with him,” they were in the field. What a horrid aggravation of his guilt! A deed of violence! Murder! a good man’s, a brother’s murder! Deliberately resolved on, craftily conducted, remorselessly executed! Was man’s first disobedience a slight evil, which introduced such desperate wickedness into the world; which transformed man into the most savage of beasts! “He rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.” Now was death for the first time seen; and seen in his ghastliest form! Death before the time! The death of piety and goodness! Death inflicted by violence, and preceded by pain! Death embittered to the sufferer by reflecting on the hand from which it came; the hand of a brother, the hand which should have supported and protected him, which should have barred the door against the murderer, not borne the fatal instrument itself! At length the feeble eyes close in peace; and the pain of bleeding wounds, and the pangs of fraternal cruelty are felt no more. “The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit unto God who gave it.” The spirit returns to God, to see his unclouded face, formerly seen through the medium of natural objects, and of religious services; to understand, and to enjoy the great mystery of the atonement, hitherto known only in a figure. Happy Abel, thus early delivered from the sins and sorrows of a vain world! And thus death, at whatever season, in whatever form, and from whatever quarter it comes, is always unspeakably great gain to a good man.

Such was the life, and such the untimely end of “righteous Abel;” for so our blessed Lord styles him, who fell a martyr to religion. The remainder of Cain’s history; the short view given us of the character of his descendants, together with the birth of Seth, given and appointed of God to preserve the sacred line, to propagate the holy seed, in place of Abel, whom Cain slew; will, with the permission of God, furnish matter for another Lecture. Let us conclude the present, by setting up the character of Abel as an object of esteem and a pattern for imitation.

Faith in God, and in a Savior to come; and the righteousness which is of God by faith, are the leading and striking features of this portrait; and by these, “being dead, he yet speaketh;” or if you choose to adopt the marginal reading, “is yet spoken of.” It is a desirable thing to enjoy a good name while we live, and to be remembered with kindness after we are dead. But reputation is the gift of others: it is often gained without merit, and lost without a crime. Whereas true goodness is a real unalienable possession; it cleaves to us in death; it accompanies us to the world of spirits; it instructs the world while we live; it speaks from the grave; it shines in the presence of God in heaven. Here, my friends, it is lawful and honorable to aspire. Permit others to get before you in wealth or in fame; grudge not to your neighbor the superiority in wit, or strength, or beauty; but yield to none in piety, in purity, in faith, in charity; aim at the highest honors of the Christian name; be humble, and be every thing.

Salvation, men and brethren, has, from the beginning, flowed in one and the same channel. There was not one gospel to the antediluvian, and another to the postdiluvian world; one method of redemption to the Jews, and another to the Gentiles; but “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” Abel, Abraham, Moses, David, Simeon, Paul, and all who have been, or shall be saved, lived and died in the faith of Christ. “Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”[*]Acts 4:12 This therefore is the great commandment of God to us in these days of meridian light and glory, namely, “that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another.” Was Abel a type of Christ, as well as a believer in him! The Scripture indeed saith it not expressly; but surely, without straining, we may discern some striking marks of resemblance. What saith Moses? “Abel was a keeper of sheep.” What saith Christ? “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” What did Abel? “He through faith brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof, an offering unto the Lord.” What did Christ? “Through the eternal Spirit he offered himself without spot to God.” Were Abel’s days cut short by the hand of violence? So “Messiah the Prince, was cut off, but not for himself.” Was Abel hated of, and slain by his brother? Christ “was despised and rejected” of his own, and died by the treachery of a familiar friend in whom he trusted, and by the cruelty of those who were his brethren according to the flesh. Did the blood of Abel cry to God from the ground, for vengeance on the head of him who shed it? O, with what oppressive weight has the blood of Jesus fallen, and how heavily does it still lie on the heads of them, and of their children, who with wicked hands crucified and slew him! Could the blood of Abel atone for his sin? No: but the blood of Christ cleanseth him, and every believer, from all sin. Yet Abel died as a righteous man, Christ as a sinner. Abel, a guilty creature, was justified and accepted through an imputed righteousness; Christ, who was holy, harmless, undefiled and separated from sinners,” was condemned and suffered, because “The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Abel suffered death once for all; the body of Christ was “offered once for all,” and by that one sacrifice, “he hath forever perfected them that are sanctified.” But we pursue the similitude and the contrast no farther. May God bless what has been said. Amen. And to his holy name be praise.

006. Cain

Cain

1Jn 3:11-12. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

It is a pleasant task to attend the footsteps of the wise and good, through the thorny maze of human life: to draw nigh with the devout, to the altar of God: to learn patience of the meek, compassion of the merciful, and kindness of the generous: to love and admire them in life, and to regret them in death. But ah! how painful to trace the progress, and to mark the appearances of "the carnal mind, which is enmity against God," and hatred to man from the first conception of an ill design, to the final execution of a deed of horror. Lust, having conceived, bringeth forth sin, and sin when finished, bringeth forth death." Nevertheless, it is highly important, that even objects of detestation should be placed before the eyes of men; that sin should be viewed in her native loathsomeness and deformity, to excite, if possible, aversion and disgust. To direct men in the journey of life, it is necessary to erect beacons, the admonition of hidden dangers and death; as well as to set up indexes, to point out the right path. The two first men who were born into the world, are designed of providence to answer this valuable purpose, to those who should come after them. Abel, though dead, continues to instruct men in the excellency, amiableness, and importance of true religion; Cain stands to all generations, a fearful example of ungovernable passion, hurrying a man on to blood, and plunging him into despair. Having considered the former as a pattern far imitation, we are now to consider the history of the latter, as affording all useful and seasonable warning to look to ourselves, "lest we also be hardened, through the deceitfulness of sin."

Cain has now accomplished his bloody purpose. His envied, hated rival is now removed out of sight: the virtues of his brother no longer reproach him: Abel stands no more in the way, to intercept the rays of the favor of God, or of man. Is he not now then at rest? No eye saw him commit the murder. And if it were known, who shall call him to account? No eye saw him! Yes, the eye of Cain saw him: yes, the eye of God saw him: hence the whole earth becomes all eye to behold him, all tongue to accuse him. Who shall call him to account? That shall Cain; his own conscience shall avenge the murder: that shall the hand of every man, fly whither he will; for every man is concerned to destroy him, who makes light of the life of another that shall God, from whom he cannot fly. Revenge, like "a devilish engine," recoils on him that employs it; or like the flame of Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace, catches hold of, and destroys the ministers of vengeance, not the objects of it. The mournful tidings must soon reach the ears of the afflicted parents. What were now thy feelings, Eve, when he, who was expected to be a Savior, turns out a destroyer? Which is the heavier affliction, a son prematurely and violently cut off; or a son living to present an object of horror and detestation to their eyes? A pious child dead, is beyond all controversy, a possession infinitely preferable to a profligate alive. Alas! what shall they do? To overlook the murder, is to

become partakers in the guilt of it; to punish the murderer, as justice demands, is to render themselves childless. Ah! how do the difficulties and distresses of their fallen estate increase upon guilty men every day! The cause, which was too hard for Adam to determine, God takes into his own hand. “And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother?”[*]Gen 4:9 Offences committed in secret, and offenders, whose power and station bid defiance to earthly tribunals, fall properly under the immediate cognizance of heaven. Behold the throne is set, and the judgment opened. How meek and gentle is God with this murderer! He would draw confession from his mouth, not as a snare, but as an indication of contrition. The end which God has in view, in making inquiry after blood, is, not the conviction and punishment; but the conviction, pardon, and recovery of the criminal. What a question. “Where is thy brother?” put by God himself to the wretch whose hands were yet reeking with his blood? What heart, hardened through sin, dictated the reply, “I know not, am I my brother’s keeper?” Is this the eldest hope of the first human pair? Is he not rather the first born of that accursed being, who is a liar and a murderer from the beginning? “I know not.” Falsehood must be called in to cover that wickedness which we are ashamed or afraid to avow. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” How dreadful is the progress of vice! How crime leads on to crime! Envy begets malice; malice inspires revenge; revenge hurries on to blood; bloodguiltiness seeks shelter under untruth, and untruth attempts to support itself by insolence, assurance, and pride: and haughtiness of spirit is but one step from destruction. Ah, little do men know, when they indulge one evil thought, or venture on one unwarrantable action, what the issue is to be! They vainly flatter themselves it is in their power to stop when they please. But passion, like a fiery unmanageable steed in the hands of an unskilful rider, by one inconsiderate stroke of the spur, may be excited to such a pitch of fury, as no skill can tame, no force restrain; but both horse and rider are hurried together down the precipice, and perish in their rage. The milder, and more indirect admonitions and reproofs of God’s word and providence being misunderstood, slighted or defied, justice is concerned and necessity requires, to speak in plainer language, and to bring the charge directly home: and that severity is most awful, which was preceded by gentleness, patience, and long suffering. God at length awakes to vengeance; “and he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.”[*]Gen 4:10 And mark how every creature arms itself in the cause of God. The dead earth is represented as acquiring sensibility, and refusing to cover blood: the silent ground becomes vocal, and loudly accuses the criminal; the stones of the field are at war with him who has made God his foe: nay, the earth is made not only the accuser, but the punisher of the guilty; for this new transgression it falls under a heavier curse. Adam for his offence, was doomed to eat bread with the sweat of his brow; was doomed to labor, yet to labor in hope of increase; but Cain shall spend his strength for nought and in vain. The ground shall present greater rigidity to the hand of cultivation: shall cast out the seed thrown into it, or consume and destroy it; or at best produce a lean and scanty crop. Cain and the earth are to be mutually cursed to each other. It seems to tremble under, and shrink from the feet of a murderer; it refuses henceforth to yield unto him her strength, and considers him as a monstrous misshapen birth, of which she is ashamed, and which she wishes to destroy. He considers it as an unnatural mother, whom no pains can molify, no submission reconcile. “A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.” When the mind is changed, every thing changes with it: when a man is at discord with himself, he is eternally from home. The spacious world, Cain’s hereditary domain, is become a vast solitude: of a home is turned into a place of exile. The person whom all men shun is everywhere a stranger; he who is smitten of his own

conscience, is continually surrounded with enemies. The same principle which engages men in criminal enterprises, in the hope of impunity, throws them into despair, upon the denunciation of punishment. As they formerly expected much higher satisfaction from the execution of their wicked purposes, than the most successful villainy ever could bestow; so now their own guilty minds outrun the awards of justice itself; and the awakened conscience does ample vengeance upon the offender at length, amply vindicates the cause both of God and man. This is strikingly exemplified in the case of Cain. His recent boldness and insolence are a strong contrast to his present dejection and terror. He now sinks under the apprehension of intolerable chastisements, and forebodes greater evils than his sentence denounced. His banishment he considers as far from being the greatest of the calamities of his condition; he feels himself excluded, hidden from the gracious presence of God; and deserted of his Maker, liable to fall by the hand of every assailant. But God remembers mercy in the midst of anger; and the life which he himself was graciously pleased to spare, no one else must, on any pretence whatever, presume to take away. He only who can bestow life, has a right to dispose of it.

Ye over curious inquirers, who must needs be informed of every thing, what does it concern you to know, by what mark God distinguished Cain, to prevent his being killed by any one who might take upon himself to be the avenger of blood? Speculation and conjecture, which with some pass for illustration and knowledge, are not the objects of these exercises; but whatever assists faith, whatever supports a sound morality, whatever conveys real information, inspires a taste for goodness, represses inordinate and sinful desire; whatever teaches gratitude and love to God, and good will to men, that we would carefully observe, and earnestly inculcate. As it is no part of our intention to wander into the regions of speculation, under a pretence of elucidating the sacred history, it is still less so, to enter the lists of controversy. Your Lecturer has, no doubt, his opinions and prejudices, like other men: his prejudices, however, he is confident to say, are on the side of truth, and virtue, and religion: his opinions, he has no inclination dogmatically to propose; he neither wishes to make a secret of them, nor expects any one, much less the world, implicitly to adopt them. He is conscious of a desire to do good; not over anxious about fame; happy in the affection of many friends, and unconscious of having given cause to any good man to be his enemy. Forgive a digression, suggested by the occasion, not rambled into through design; proceeding not from the desire a man has to speak of himself, but from a wish, by doing it once for all, to cut off all future occasion of speaking, in or of the first person. We return to the history.

“It shall come to pass,” says guilty, trembling Cain, “that every one that findeth me shall slay me.” This is one of the many passages of Scripture, which the enemies of religion have laid hold of, and held forth as contradictory to other parts of revelation, in the view of invalidating and destroying the whole. Here, they allege, Moses is inconsistent with himself; in deriving the whole human race from the common root of Adam, and at the same time supposing the world so populous at the time of Abel’s murder, as to excite in Cain a well grounded apprehension of the public resentment and punishment of his crimes. Either, say they, there were other men and women created at the same time with, or before Adam and Eve; or else Cain’s fears were groundless and absurd. A learned and ingenious critic has taken the trouble to refute this objection, by instituting a calculation founded on obvious probabilities at least, by which it appears, that at the time of Abel’s murder the world was sufficiently peopled, on the Mosaic supposition, that all mankind descended from Adam, to render the public justice an object of well grounded apprehension to guilty Cain. We pretend not

to assert that the calculation of a modern author is a demonstration of a fact so remote: if it be probable, it is sufficient for our purpose, that of doing away one of the cavils of infidelity. The birth of Seth is fixed, by the history, in the one hundred and thirtieth year of Adam: it is therefore reasonable to place the death of Abel two years earlier, or near it; that is, in the one hundred and twenty-eighth year of the world. “Now though we should suppose,” says the calculator,[*]Dissert Chronol. Geogr. Critiq sur la Bible. 1 me. Disser. Journal de Paris, Jan. 1712, tom. li p. 6. “that Adam and Eve had no other sons in the year of the world one hundred and twenty-eight but Cain and Abel, it must be allowed that they had daughters, who might early marry with those two sons. I require no more than the descendants of these two, to make a very considerable number of men upon the earth, in the said year one hundred and twenty-eight. For supposing them to have been married in the nineteenth year of the world, they might easily have had each of them eight children in the twenty-fifth year. In twenty-five years more, the fiftieth of the world, their descendants in a direct line, would be sixty-four persons. In the seventy-fifth year, at the same rate, they would amount to five hundred and twelve. In the one-hundredth year, to four thousand and ninety-six: and in the one hundred and twenty-fifth year, to thirty two thousand seven hundred and sixty-eight.” Now, if to this calculation we add, the high degree of probability that Adam had many more sons, besides those mentioned in the record; that families were generally more numerous than the supposition states; that simple manners, rural employments, temperature of climate, and largeness of room, are circumstances inconceivably more favorable to population, than modern facts and European customs give us any idea of, we shall have no reason to think it strange, that Cain, under the pressure of conscious guilt, and harrowed with fear, which always both multiplies and magnifies objects far beyond their real number and size, should be alarmed and intimidated at the numbers of mankind, who, he supposed, were ready, and were concerned to execute vengeance upon him. “He went out,” the history informs us, “from the presence of the Lord.” Some interpreters have, from this expression, concluded, that even after the fall, God continued to reside among men, in some sacred spot adjoining to Eden, and in some sensible tokens of his gracious presence: that thither gifts and sacrifices were brought, and were there offered up; and that from thence, Cain, for his heinous transgression, was banished and excluded from the society and privileges of the faithful. Whatever be in this, we know for certain that wicked men naturally shun God, and drive him as far from their thoughts as they can: and in the phrase of Scripture, God is said to “hide his face” from wicked men, “to turn his back” upon them, “to give them up,” to denote his displeasure with them. “And he dwelt,” it is added, “in the land of Nod.” It is the same word which is rendered in the twelfth and fourteenth verses, a vagabond. Why our translators, in the two former verses give the meaning, or import of the word, and in the sixteenth verse, the letters of it merely, is not easily comprehensible. Let it be translated throughout, the sense is perfectly clear, and all ground of idle inquiry taken away. In the twelfth verse, God denounces his punishment, Thou shalt not die, but be Nod, a vagabond in the earth. In the fourteenth verse, Cain recognizes the justice of his sentence, and bewails it; “I shall be Nod, a vagabond in the earth.” And in the sixteenth, Moses gives us the history of its being put in execution, “he went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod,” a vagabond flying from place to place, skulking in corners, shunning the haunts of men, pursued incessantly by the remorseful pangs, and tormenting apprehensions of an ill conscience. Though you remove all external danger, yet “the wicked is as the troubled sea, which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt:” he is “majormissabib,” a terror to himself. To live in perpetual fear, to live at discord with a man’s self, is

not to live at all. The posterity of Cain are represented, in Scripture, as the first to build a city. The mutual fears and wants of men drive them into society; put them upon raising bulwarks, devising restraints, cultivating the arts which afford the means of defence against attacks from without, or which amuse and divert within. The invention of music, and of manufactures in brass and iron, are, accordingly, likewise ascribed to his descendants. When men are got together in great multitudes, as their different talents will naturally whet each other to the invention of new arts of life, and the cultivation of science; so their various passions, mingling with, and acting upon one another, will necessarily produce unheard-of disorders and irregularities. Hence, in Enoch the city of Cain, and in Lamech, the sixth from Cain, we first read of that invasion of the rights of mankind, polygamy, or the marrying more wives than one. In a great city as there will be many who omit doing their duty altogether, so there will be some, who will take upon them to do more than duty prescribes. The unvarying nearness, or equality which Providence has preserved from the creation of the world, of male and female births, is full demonstration, independent of all statute law, that the Governor of the world means every man to have his own wife, and every woman her own husband; that to neglect his intention in this matter, is an attempt to counteract his providence; and that to outrun it is an effort, equally vain, presumptuous, wicked, and absurd, to mend his work.

How long Cain lived, and when, or where, and in what manner he died, we have no information. And little satisfaction can it yield, to attend the footsteps of a wicked and unhappy man, through a life of guilt and remorse, to a latter end of horror. Better for him he had never been born, than to have lived a sorrow to her that bare him, detested and shunned of all men, “a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth,” a burthen and a terror to himself. Better for him his name had never been mentioned among posterity, than to have it transmitted to latest generations, stained with a brother’s blood. But it is of high importance to know, that God, in his good time, supplied the place of righteous Abel, preserved alive the holy seed, and secured a succession, which should at length terminate in that “promised seed,” who was “to bruise the serpent’s head,” who was “to destroy the works of the devil.” “And Adam knew his wife again: and she bare a son, and called his name Seth; for God, said she, hath appointed me another seed, instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.” This wicked man’s history is a loud admonition to all to watch over their spirits; and carefully to guard against the first emotions of envy, anger, hatred, contempt, malice, or revenge. And the words of Jesus Christ confirm and enforce the solemn warning, “I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say unto his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”[*]Mat 5:22-24

Hold thy bloody band, son, daughter of murderous Cain! Why should a brother, a sister fall by it! That furious look is a dagger; that unkind word has made the blood, the heart’s blood to follow it. Daughter of murderous Cain! A female hand armed with a sword, lifted up to slay, dipped in blood! No, she wields a more deadly weapon, she brandishes an envenomed tongue: poison more fatal than that of asps is under her lips; it is not the body that suffers, when that unruly member moves; it is the spirit, it is the spirit that bleeds: the man dies, and sees not who it was that hurt him; he perishes in the best part of himself, his good name is blasted; and what has he left worth possessing? The sight of a little material blood makes her faint: a dead corpse terrifies and shocks

her but she can calmly, and with delight, sit down to that horrid human sacrifice, a murdered, mangled reputation! But the history, also, in its connection, inspires holy joy and confidence in God, by representing the constant, seasonable, and suitable interpositions of his providence, according to the various exigencies of mankind. Devils and wicked men are continually aiming at defacing his image, at marring his work; but they cannot prevail. The purposes of the divine wisdom and mercy are not to be defeated by the united efforts of earth and hell. Abel dies, but Seth starts up in his room. Jesus expires on the cross, but “through death destroys him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. Surely, O Lord, the wrath of man shall praise thee, and the remainder of wrath thou shalt restrain.”

007. Enoch

Enoch Gen 5:24 And Enoch walked with God, and he was not; for God took him. The regular and uniform dominion of the laws of nature, or the occasional suspension and alteration of them, are equally a proof of the being and providence of God. Whether the sun, with uninterrupted speed, continues to perform his daily and annual course; or whether he “stands still in Gibeon” or “goes back on the dial of Ahaz;” the interposition of the Most High is equally apparent, and equally to be adored. And why may not He, who has “appointed unto all men, once to die,” in order to make his power known, and his goodness felt, exhibit here and there an illustrious exemption from the power of the grave, and thereby vindicate his sovereign rights as the great arbiter and disposer of life and death. To fallen Adam it was denounced. “Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return;” by one man “sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:” But, behold, the mortal sentence is remitted in favor of Enoch, the seventh from Adam; behold the order of nature is altered, the decree of Heaven is dispensed with; he is “translated without tasting of death.” When an event so entirely out of course, takes place, it is natural, and not unprofitable, to inquire into the causes of it; for when the issue is singular and uncommon we justly conclude that the circumstances which led to it, were likewise singular and uncommon. The Holy Scriptures afford us, but sparingly, materials for a life which concluded so very differently from that of other men; but what they have furnished, is striking and instructive. The venerable father of the human race had now himself paid the debt of nature. The curse of the broken law had been seen and felt in the unnatural and premature death of Abel; and was at length inflicted, in the departure of Adam, at the mature age of nine hundred and thirty years. The events which had hitherto taken place from the fall, were so many successive demonstrations of the justice of God; under the weight of which, men were, one after another, sinking into the grave. All that mercy had as yet done, was to grant a reprieve of forfeited life: and death, though delayed to the thousandth year, is still bitterness in the end. We may reasonably suppose the faithful themselves to have been overwhelmed at the sight of so many vials of wrath, poured out from time to time on their guilty race: and that they were incapable of discovering the promises of favor and triumph, of life and immortality through the obscure veil of that promise, “the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent.” The sacrifice of Abel indeed discovered a faith in God, which raised the spirit above the fear and the stroke of death; and good men like him, would be led in their dying moments, with holy confidence and joy, to commit their departing souls to God, as unto a faithful Creator; but the body evidently returned to its dust, suffered corruption, and was dissolved. Religion accordingly furnished, as yet, but imperfectly, one of the most powerful motives which it proposes to bring men unto God, as “the rewarder of all that diligently seek him.” But at length he vouchsafes to unveil the invisible world; and shows it to be possible “for flesh and blood to inherit the kingdom of God.” Within fifty-seven years from the time that Adam was laid in the dust, Enoch, without undergoing that change, passes immediately into the presence and paradise of God. And thus there was placed before the eyes of the church, and of the world, in that early period, an anticipated view and example of the final victory which the Messiah was at last to obtain over death, and all the other enemies of man’s salvation.

Enoch, however illustrious and distinguished in his latter end, as well as by the superior sanctity of his life, came into the world in the usual manner, and fulfilled the duties of the ordinary relations of human life, while he continued in it. One great branch of holy walking with God, is useful walking among men. Having, to the proper period, lived in the obedience and subjection of a son, he in due time becomes the master of a family and a father; for Methuselah was born to him in the sixty-fifth year of his age, a period earlier than that at which any of the patriarchs, according to the record, became a parent, except his grandfather Mahalaleel. It is not the religion of God, which withdraws or excludes men from society; and teaches disrespect to the secular destinations of providence, or the relative obligations and connections of life. No, it is the religion of Satan, which would represent as impure, what God declares pure, and permits to all, enjoins upon all; it is “a seducing spirit, and a doctrine of devils,” which forbids to marry, “which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them who believe and know the truth.” What, is a wretched solitary monk in his cell holier than Enoch, the father of a numerous family, who pleased God, so as to be rewarded with exemption from death, and with immediate admission into the kingdom of heaven? He who lives unconnected, wilfully contracts his sphere of being useful, and of doing good; he wickedly hides his talent in the ground; he robs God, his country, and his kindred, of services which they have a just right to expect from him.

Again, this holy man deserves our notice, as one of the great ancestors of the human race; as a link in the mighty chain of providence, which was gradually bringing on that eventful period, that fullness of time, when “the first-born among many brethren,” last in order of succession, but first in dignity, should come for our salvation. Enoch was born in the year of the world six hundred and twenty-two. Adam died fifty-seven years before his translation. Of consequence they were contemporaries, or lived together, for no less a period than three hundred and eight years. Adam’s whole stock of natural and divine knowledge might accordingly have been, and most probably was, communicated, by word of mouth, to Enoch, in so long a course of years: and much did he profit by a communication so important. And this, by the way, instructs us in one final cause of the longevity of the patriarchs in the antediluvian world. As there was then no written word, no transferable record of divine truth, all religious knowledge must have been greatly marred and impaired, if not entirely lost, in the rapid lapse of generations, reduced to the present short standard of half a century. But God graciously lengthened out life then to many centuries; whereby the father was enabled to instruct his posterity of the seventh or eighth generation, in the things which he himself had received immediately from the fountain of all truth and knowledge. Thus are the dispensations of Providence suited to the necessities of mankind; thus can God remedy every inconveniency, and make up every defect, in a way peculiar to himself. But to proceed,

Enoch was an illustrious person not only in the church but among the heathen--Eusebius, the famous ecclesiastical historian, who flourished and wrote in the fourth century of the Christian era, quotes Eupolemus, a heathen author of credit, as affirming that the Babylonians consider Enoch as the author of their astrology; and allege, that he is the same who is called Atlas by the Greeks, who, from his profound skill in natural objects, and particularly from his discoveries in astronomy, was hyperbolically said to sustain the heavens on his shoulders. The expression, “Enoch walked with God,” is, in conformity to this opinion, interpreted of his close and intense application to the study of nature, and of the great additions to the public stock of acquired knowledge, which he made, in consequence of it. That this may warrantably be supposed to constitute one branch of

“walking with God” we are not disposed to deny. The study of nature is honorable, pleasing, and improving, and “the invisible things of God” may be clearly traced in “the things that are made.” But had Enoch been merely a great naturalist, a sagacious astronomer, or a profound soothsayer, he had not been transmitted to future generations by a distinction so honorable and so uncommon; nor had his history merited so much of your attention as has already been bestowed upon it. Whether he, was an adept in the science of nature or not, we know, upon the best authority, that he was a great “prophet;” for Jude the servant of Jesus Christ, in his general epistle, quotes him in that quality, in these words: “Enoch also 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 their ungodly deeds, which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches, which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”[*]Jude 1:14-15 Now it is no business of mine to inquire in what record Jude found this prophecy of Enoch; it is sufficient for my purpose that an Apostle of the Lord delivers it as such. Our purpose, is not to answer the objections, and refute the cavils of unbelievers, but, humbly to attempt to illustrate, enforce, and apply Scripture truth, to those who receive the Bible as the word of God; as the guide of their faith, the source of their hope, and the rule of their life. From the prophecy itself, it is of importance to observe how, early, still how powerfully the doctrine, of a judgment to come was taught to the world. How clearly do those men discern, whose eyes are opened by the Spirit of the living God! How vast and how profound must that intelligence be, which can communicate, even to man, the foreknowledge of events the most remote; which revealed to Enoch, in the very infancy of the world, the awful day of its dissolution! In this holy man it is apparent, that the grace of God’s Spirit accompanied his gifts; the spirit of prophecy blended with the spirit of “faith, and love, and of a sound mind.” Not like Balaam, who saw in prophetic vision the star of Jacob arising, but in unbelief shut his eyes against its light; who envisioined things to come by the inspiration of the living God; but sottishly yielded homage to them who are no gods; who lived a prophet, but died an idolater; not like Caiaphas, who, following the impulse of his own passions, and governed by the prejudice of a blinded mind, uttered a truth which he was not aware of; stumbled on a prediction which he was unknowingly, undesignedly, helping to fulfill. But Enoch, impressed with the solemn truth which he, preached to others, daily improved by it himself. How apt are men to err in this respect! They earnestly covet the gifts, which are dispensed but to a few, and are not always sanctified to the possessor; while they are careless about the graces which God is ever ready to bestow upon all, and which always accompany salvation. Let me possess, O God, an humble and a charitable spirit, though with the simplicity of a child, rather than “speak with the tongue of men or of angels,” and be destitute of it. This leads us to the interesting, important, and instructive part of Enoch’s history, namely, his moral and religious character, expressed in these few but comprehensive words “Enoch was allied with God.” Everything else is transitory and fading. Youthful vigor and beauty are but the short-lived flowers of the spring, which die as soon as they are born; the honorable distinctions of this world are bubbles of empty air, which burst in a moment, and disappear for ever; scientific researches and discoveries, are only the amusement of children, who know but in part, and see as “in a glass darkly;” but holy walking with God is the honorable employment of a man; it is a permanent and perennial source of satisfaction: it is a the essence of life; the cure of pain; the conqueror of death; the gate of immortality; it is heaven upon earth. And wherein does it consist? “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” No. Walking with God must therefore commence in reconciliation to God: and Scripture knows, acknowledges,

teaches no other way of reconciliation but one. And the sacred commentator on the passage and character under review, lays down this great leading principle of religion, as the foundation of Enoch's holy conversion, and of the honors which he of consequence attained--"By faith Enoch was translated, that he should not see death, and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."[*]Heb 11:5-6 Now, in every age of the world, faith has but one and the same object. From Abel down to the youngest of the prophets, and from the fisherman who left his nets, and his worldly all to follow Jesus, to the end of time, the being, the nature, and the will of God have been, and can be, savingly known, and the mercy of God savingly embraced, only through a Mediator. On this foundation, what a superstructure of holiness may be raised! What gratitude, love, submission, and obedience to God! What complacency and delight in him! What kindness, compassion, forbearance, beneficence, and charity towards men! What gentleness, meekness, purity, peace; to adorn, to compose, to tranquilize, to bless the man himself! What constancy, perseverance, uniformity, increase in goodness! What venerability as a patriarch! What dignity as a sovereign! What sanctity as a priest! What responsibility as a husband, a father, a master! What utility as a pattern and example! And such an one was Enoch; thus he lived and walked with God; and thus escaped death, that end of all men: "He was not, for God took him." This is the last memorable particular of his history. About the import of the words we can be at no loss, after the apostle has explained them, by his being "translated that he should not see death." With the manner of that translation we have nothing to do, as Scripture is silent. If God intended it to be a public admonition or encouragement to the men of that generation, we may rest assured he gave full and satisfactory evidence concerning it. That he meant it to afford universal and everlasting instruction to mankind, it is impossible to doubt, from his giving it so honorable and so distinguished a place in his word. And what is the instruction which it administers to the world? Simply this, that a life of faith and holiness is but one remove from glory: that heaven descended to earth, will quickly raise men from earth to heaven: that death either averted, or overcome and destroyed, will at length open a passage to perfect union with God and enjoyment of him. Why should I detain you, to relate the dreams of visionaries, and the fables of imposters, respecting the manner in which God disposed of Enoch after his assumption? There is no edification, and indeed but a little amusement, in the bold fictions of a Mahomet, or the wild conjectures of a Jewish Rabbin. We acknowledge no other paradise, or habitation of the blessed, but that represented in Scripture, as the place where God gives the brightest evidences of his gracious presence, and communicates his glory in fill splendor. That, to which Jesus on the cross promised to conduct the penitent thief. That which Paul calls the third heaven: and which in other places of the Bible is denominated heaven, simply, and by way of excellency. Thither was Enoch taken; thither also did Elijah, two thousand one hundred and twenty-one years afterwards, mount on a chariot of fire, and the wings of a whirlwind; and finally, thither at length, in placid majesty, ascended the Captain of our salvation, "leading captivity captive."

Thus, in each of the three great periods of the church, was exhibited an instance of a man taken up into heaven, body and spirit, as a support and encouragement to the hope of believers, of attaining the same felicity. Enoch before the law was given; Elijah under the legal economy; and Jesus Christ, the Savior of men, under the evangelical dispensation. And God, in conducting these events, has gradually disclosed life and immortality, from the dawning of the morning light, to the

full glory of meridian splendor. It was a soothing and an animating spectacle for the faithful of the first world to see a good man vanish away, and after living his period on earth, in piety, purity, and peace, lodged, not in a tomb, but in the bosom of God. It was yet a stronger presumption of immorality, to those who lived in the second period to see the heavens opened for the reception of one of their prophets; and celestial ministers in flaming fire, not of anger, but of love, sent to conduct him to the place of the blessed. But it is a demonstration to Christians, and indeed the earnest and pledge of their inheritance, to see the great Author and Finisher of their faith, gradually and majestically rising through those vast regions which separate earth and heaven; and to hear the church triumphant summoning the gates of the palace of glory to be opened, to receive the King of Glory, on his coming to prepare mansions of bliss for their reception, when the days of their probation are ended. “Such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens”

Enoch, Elijah, and Christ, in certain views, can be compared only with each other; but in all things, he must have the pre-eminence. They prophesied through the power and virtue of the spirit given unto them; he is the giver of that spirit to them, and to all the prophets. As mere men, they must have had their infirmities, and the infirmities of one of them are upon record: but he knew infirmity only by a fellow feeling with the miserable, and he is the atonement for their sins. By the power and mercy of God, they were taken up into heaven; by his own power he ascended on high; they as servants, he as the eternal son of God. In them, we have a repeated instance of bodies glorified without suffering death; he “was dead, and is alive again,” and carried to heaven a body which had been laid in the tomb. In them we have an object of admiration and astonishment; in him, a pattern for imitation, a Savior in whom to trust, a ground of hope whereon to rest. Faith exempted them from death; and faith shall at length redeem all the followers of the Lamb from the power of the grave. Enoch and Elijah ascended as solitary individuals; Christ as the first-fruits of them that sleep: and “lifted up,” is drawing an elect world unto him. They were admitted to regions unknown, and among society untried: he only returned to the place from whence he came.

We conclude the history of Enoch with this obvious, but we trust, not useless reflection--That those lives which deserve most to be had in remembrance, are most easily recorded, and consist of fewest articles. The history of an Enoch is comprised in three words, while the exploits of an Alexander, a Caesar, or any other of the scourges end destroyers of mankind, swell to many volumes. But what comparison is there between the bubble reputation, bestowed by historians, poets, or orators, on the worthless and the wicked; and the solid, sterling praise, conferred on the wise and good, by the Spirit of God, by whom actions are weighed, and who will at last “bring every secret thing into judgment?” And woe be unto them, who love the praise of men more than the praise of God.

Into what a little measure shrinks the whole history of mankind previous to the flood; though a period of no less than one thousand six hundred and fifty-six years! To that great revolution of the world we are now brought; and the following Lecture, if God permit, will contain the first part of the history of Noah; in whose person, the old and new worlds, through the vast chasm of the deluge, were connected together; and who is exhibited in Scripture as a type of Him, in whose person heaven and earth are united, and by whom all things are to be made new. May God bless what has been spoken. Amen.

008. Noah--A Man to Comfort

Noah--A Man to Comfort

Gen 5:28-29. And Lamech lived an hundred eighty and two years, and began a son: and he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord had cursed. The fortunes and characters of men are various as their faces. What diversity has appeared in the lives, and in the latter end, of those persons whose history has already passed under our review, in the course of these Exercises! Adam experienced a change more bitter than death. Abel perished by the hand of his brother. The murderer becomes a terror to himself, lives an exile, and dies unnoticed. Enoch is gloriously exempted from the stroke of death, and carried directly to heaven. Noah survives the whole human race, his own family excepted; lives to behold a world destroyed, a world restored.

We are now arrived at that memorable revolution, of which there exists so many striking marks on the external appearance of the globe; of which there are such frequent and distinct intimations in the traditional monuments and records of all the learned nations of antiquity; and of which it has pleased God to give such an ample and circumstantial detail in Scripture.

Concerning Noah, great expectations were formed, from the moment of his birth. The world was arrived at an uncommon pitch of corruption and degeneracy. The natural evils which flesh is heir to, were prodigiously increased by irreligion and vice; so that the earth groaned, as it were, under the curse of God, and the violence and impiety of men. Lamech, the father of Noah, with the fondness and partiality of parental affection, flatters himself that his new-born son would prove a comfort to himself, and a blessing to mankind; and, most probably directed by the spirit of prophesy, bestows upon him a name significant of his future character and conduct; of the station which he was to fill, and the purpose which he was to serve, in the destination of Providence. He had the satisfaction of living to see his expectations realized; and his eyes closed in peace, fit a good old age, five years before that great calamity which overwhelmed the human race--the deluge.

Scripture accounts for the universal depravity of that awful period, in these words; “And it came to pass when inert began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.”[*]Gen 6:1-2 These expressions the most respectable and judicious interpreters explain as descriptive of unhallowed and imprudent intermarriages between the posterity of pious Seth, here called the “sons of God;” and the female descendants of wicked Cain, denominated “the daughters of men.” Attracted by external and transitory charms, they form alliances inconsistent with wisdom and disallowed of Heaven. The invention of the line arts being in the family of Cain, it is not absurd to suppose, that these were called in aid to personal beauty; and that the allurements of music and dress in particular, were employed by the daughters of Jubal “the father of all such as handle the harp and organ,” and of Tubal-Cain, “the instructor of every artificer in brass and iron,” to support the impression already made by their fair looks. What

ensued! That which will always happen to piety unwisely and unequally yoking itself with irreligion and profanity; the evil principle being much more powerful to pervert the good, than the good to reform the evil. Giants are said to have been the issue of those unfortunate marriages; literally, perhaps, men of huge stature, like the sons of Anak: in latter times: certainly, men of lofty, aspiring, haughty minds: the heirs to the pride, vanity, and presumption of their mothers, more than to the decency, wisdom, and piety, of their male ancestors. That corruption must have been general indeed, which comprehended all, save Noah and his household; and it must have been very grievous, to constrain the Spirit of God to employ language so strong and expressive as this, on the occasion: “And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart And the Lord said, I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth, both man and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth the that I have made them”[*]Gen 6:6-7 When the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint, dissolution and destruction cannot be at a great distance. “But Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations: and Noah walked with God.” How honorable for Noah to stand thus single, thus distinguished! Goodness supported and kept in countenance by the mode, and by multitudes, is amiable and praiseworthy; but goodness single and alone; goodness stemming the torrent, resisting the contagion of example, despising the universal sneer, braving universal opposition, such goodness is superior to all praise: and such was the goodness of Noah. He distinguished himself in the midst of an adulterous and sinful generation, by his piety, righteousness, and zeal; and God, who suffers none to lose at his hand, distinguishes him by special marks of his favor. “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.”[*]Gen 6:8 Of no character does Scripture speak more highly than that of Noah’s; “he was just a man, and perfect in his generations, and walked with God.” In general calamities it must needs happen that the innocent suffer with the guilty. But in some cases, Providence is pleased specially to interpose for the deliverance of good men. Rather than one worthy family should perish in the deluge a whole world of transgressors is respited, till the means of safety for that family are provided. Is a sinful city or nation spared? We may rest assured there are some valuable, pious persons among them. According to the idea suggested by our blessed Lord, the righteous are “the salt of the earth,” that which seasons the whole mass, and preserves it from putrefaction mud corruption. The apostle Peter styles Noah “a preacher of righteousness.” He was not carried away by the prevailing profligacy of his day. He preached by a holy descent from the prevailing maxims and practices of the times. He preached by an open and bold remonstrance against the general dissoluteness and impiety. And he preached at length by his works; by the construction and fitting up of the ark for the preservation of himself and family, and for saving alive a breed of the various sorts of fowls and animals.

It is with pleasure we once more refer you to the sacred expositor of the antediluvian history: “by faith,” says he, “Noah being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark, to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.”[*]Heb 11:7 Here a crowd of ideas rush upon us at once. Behold the great God in the midst of judgment remembering mercy. He will not destroy the righteous with the wicked. But God will not vouchsafe to perform that immediately by a miracle, which may be effected by the blessing of his providence upon human foresight, industry, and diligence. He who was pleased to save Enoch, by translating him to heaven without tasting death, thought fit to preserve Noah by means of an ark of his own building. The design and contrivance is God’s; the execution is man’s. He who could have transported Noah to a different sphere, and have lodged

him there in safety, till the waters of the flood had abated, kept him alive and in safety, rolling in the ark, upon the face of the mighty waters. He, who in the morning of the sixth day, by the almighty fiat, created at first the whole animal world, and though lost, could have in a moment replaced it, by the word of his power, thought proper to preserve alive the race of animals, by providing a place of refuge, and by a special instinct of his providence, warning them of their approaching danger and conducting there to shelter.

Behold, dreadful to think! the patience of God at last exhausted: and the decree goes forth. “The earth also was corrupt before God: and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and behold it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold I will destroy them with the earth.”[*]Gen 6:11-13 God has warned, threatened, borne with men in vain, and Noah has preached to them in vain. The day of the Lord is come, and who shall be able to stand? And who hath seen, heard of, or is able to conceive a calamity so dreadful? “The end of all flesh is come. I will destroy them with the earth.” Immediately upon the fall, universal nature underwent a change. The mild influences of the heavens were changed or withheld; the earth refused to yield her increase to the hand of the cultivator, but the full extent and awful import of the curse was never felt till now. By the deluge, the whole face of nature was to be altered; the solid globe dissolved and disjointed; its parts torn asunder from each other: its fertility diminished; that it might present to all future generations, a magnificent palace, but in ruins: the mere skeleton of ancient splendor.

Some ingenious men have supposed, that at this period, the position and motion of our earth, with respect to the sun, were changed: that till then it was so situated in relation to the heavenly bodies, as to possess an equal and universal temperature of air! that hitherto a perpetual spring went hand in hand with an abundant autumn: but that then it was placed in the slanting and oblique situation, which occasions diversity of climates and seasons which exposes one part to the burning and direct rays of the sun: binds another up in perpetual chains of darkness and ice; gives birth to volcanoes, earthquakes, tempests, hurricanes, and all that tribe of natural evils which afflict the wretched children of men. The effects, undoubtedly, must have been wonderful, as the event itself is altogether preternatural. I have no intention of going at present into a discussion of the question, whether the extent of the flood was universally over all the earth; nor into a philosophical investigation of the means employed in producing a phenomenon so singular. Taking the Bible account of the matter in its literal import, we will rather make such reflections upon it as may, by the blessing of God promote the interests of faith and of holiness in our hearts and lives.

Behold then, the venerable sage, at the admonition of Heaven, undertaking his great work. The foundation is laid: the fabric advances; and every stroke of the axe or hammer summons a thoughtless and a guilty world to repentance: but “they will not hear, they will not lay it to heart.” I see the good man, maligned, derided, insulted. In their gayety of heart, they scornfully style the ark, Noah’s folly. The work is finished, but they continue to sing, dance, and play; and many, it is probable, have an active hand in the construction of that machine, to which they scorn to resort for shelter from the impending danger. Noah is not to be diverted from his purpose. Neither the immensity of the undertaking, nor the length of time which it required, nor the opposition which he meets with from an unbelieving generation, discourage him in the prosecution of a design, planned by infinite wisdom, and recommended by divine mercy.

How the whole tribe of commentators have gone into the opinion, that the space of one hundred and twenty years were employed in building the ark, is strange and unaccountable. It appears not on the face of the history: it is irreconcilable to reason and experience: as without a miracle, the parts first constructed must have failed and decayed before the latter parts were finished: and it expressly contradicts the chronological detail of the facts, as delivered to us in Scripture. For Noah was five hundred years old at the birth of his eldest son. When the order for building the ark was given, all his three sons were married, as we learn from the following passage: “But with thee will I establish my covenant: and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons’ wives with thee.”[*]Gen 6:18 The youngest therefore, may reasonably be supposed to have seen his fiftieth year; and the flood came upon the earth in the six hundredth year of Noah’s life; there is left, then, a period considerably less than fifty years, for the execution of the work; and it most probably occupied a much shorter space than even that.

Some minute inquirers have taken the trouble to calculate the solid contents, and thence to estimate the burthen of this wonderful vessel. A cubit is the distance in a full grown man, from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger; for the conveniency of calculation, it has been fixed at a foot and a half of common measure. Upon this supposition, the ark contained one million, seven hundred and eighty-one thousand, three hundred and forty-six cubical feet; which, according to the usual allowance of forty-two feet to a ton, or two thousand pounds weight, makes the whole burthen to be forty-two thousand four hundred and thirteen tons; which is considerably more than the burthen of forty ships of one thousand tons each. Such was the vast, unwieldy fabric, entrusted, without mast, sail, rudder, or compass, to the mercy of the waves; and which contained the saved remnant of the human race, and of the animal creation, with all necessary accommodation and provision for the space of more than a year.

Behold the four-footed and the feathered tribes, each according to his kind, by a peculiar instinct of Heaven, flocking to Noah, for protection from the threatening tempest, as formerly to Adam, to receive their names. The beasts take warning and hide themselves, but men, more stupid than the brutes, sin on, till they are destroyed. Every thing announced a storm gathering. Noah preaches to the last hour; admonishes, entreats, threatens, and invites. What means that preternatural gathering together of the brute creation to one place? How come they in a moment to change their nature; to seek what before they shunned; to forget all animosity towards each other? Whence is it that “the wolf dwells with the lamb, the leopard lies down with the kid, and the young lion and the fatling together?” What so brutish and incorrigible as men given up to their own lusts! At length all is safely housed, from the dove to the raven, and God shuts in Noah with his charge. When lo! the face of heaven is covered with blackness. Nature shudders at the frown of an angry God--the windows of heaven are opened; the rain descends with great strength, speed, and haste, the barriers that confined the ocean to its appointed bed are removed, and the waters from beneath start up to meet the waters running down from above, and join their streams to avenge a holy and righteous God of his adversaries. The gradual increase of the calamity is a dreadful aggravation of its horror. Thick clouds first gave the alarm. Rain uncommonly heavy, and of longer than ordinary continuance, increases the growing surprise and consternation. The voice of mirth is heard no more, and “all the daughters of music are brought low.” By degrees the river, swelling over their banks, and seas forgetting their shores, render the plains and the valleys no places of safety. But the lofty mountains will afford a refuge frown the growing plague. Thither, in trembling hope, the

wretches fly. The authored tempest will surely spend itself, and serenity return. Ah, vain hope! The swelling surge gains continually upon them; all is become sea; the foundations of the hills are shaken by the tide; it advances upon them. As their last resource they climb the trees which cover the mountain tops, and cling to them in despair. Their neighbors and friends sink in the golf before their eyes! their ears are filled with the shrieks of them that perish. All is amazement and woe. At length they are all overtaken and overwhelmed. To have lengthened their miserable existence so long by vain efforts, is only to have lengthened out anguish. To fill up the measure of their misery, they perish with the bitter remorse of having despised and rejected the means of escape, when they had them in their power; like the rich man in hell, whose torment was grievously augmented, by the sight of Lazarus afar off in the bosom of Abraham.

Compare with these, the feelings of Noah and his little family within the ark. They enjoy a refuge of God's providing. They have full assurance of the divine protection. Ample provision for the evil day is made. O what gratitude to their Almighty Friend! O what fervent love among themselves! O what holy composure and rest in God! O what awful reflections on the justice and severity of the great Jehovah! O what sweet and satisfying meditations on his mercy! The sequel of Noah's history, and the comparison between him and Adam, and between him and Christ, will, if God permit, be the subject of the next Lecture. We cannot conclude the present without reflecting. On the danger and mischief which arises from forming graceless connections. It administers a solemn and suitable admonition to the male part of my audience, who have not already contracted alliances for life, to consider a principle of religion, and a taste for devotion, as among the leading qualities to be sought after in the female character, and the only sure foundation of honorable and lasting friendship; as the basis of, and the prompter to every domestic duty.

It administers a just, and, I am sorry to add, a seasonable reproof, to that spirit of avarice and selfishness, together with that criminal love of pleasure, which too much characterize the young men of the present day, and to which the higher considerations of piety, modesty and accomplishments really useful and ornamental, are daily sacrificed.

It instructs my female hearers, too, in the knowledge of what constitutes their real worth and excellence. "Favor is deceitful and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord she shall be praised."[*]Pro 31:30 General declaimers against the female sex have got excellent topics for their spleen, in the seduction of the first man by Eve, and the corruption of the old world by the daughters of Cain. I would make a kinder use of these sad events by considering them as instances of the great power which women have over men; and hence earnestly call upon Christian women, to cultivate with care and diligence the graces of that character, and to employ their influence, according to their different relations and opportunities, to diffuse a taste for what is decent, pious, and praiseworthy; and they may rest assured that their friends of the other sex will at least study to appear, what they would have them to be. The example of Noah is a loud call to aim at singular goodness. The multitude of offenders lessens neither the criminality, nor the danger of any one. Let none then think of "following a multitude to do evil." Community in vice may seem to diminish the guilt of sin, but community in suffering, is a bitter aggravation of it. Dare to stand, though alone, in the cause of God and truth; knowing that wicked men themselves revere that goodness which they do not love, and secretly approve the virtue which they will not cultivate. Remember who hath said, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also

deny before my Father which is in heaven."

You have heard of the destruction of the old world by water; your eyes shall behold that which now is, destroyed by fire. The preservation of Noah, by means which God appointed, is a striking type of the method of salvation from sin, death, and hell, by Jesus Christ. The present day of merciful visitation, is the precious season of resorting to that stronghold and place of defense; and to you the call is once more given, "look to me and be saved;" "come to me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Chapter 9

009. Noah--Remembered by God

Noah--Remembered by God

Gen 8:1. And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters assuaged. The word and the providence of God are the only infallible interpreters of His nature. The existence, and the order of the visible creation, evince the being of one Eternal Cause of all things, infinite in wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, mercy, and truth. But the harmony, the extent and limits of the divine attributes and perfections, are to be discovered only by observing what comes to pass; and by reading and understanding what God has been pleased to commit to writing, for our instruction. The light of nature is sufficient, for example, to instruct us, that God is righteous; and experience assures us, that He is merciful; but without the help of revelation, and the history of providence, we could not, we durst not say, where justice should stop, and when the tide of mercy would begin to flow. And is it not pleasant and encouraging to reflect upon the authority of both Scripture and experience, that justice, the awful and formidable perfection of the most high God, has its bounds; whereas goodness and tender mercy swell over all limits possessing a height and depth, a length and breadth, which surpass knowledge? Justice, is the river confined within its banks, and terminating its course in the sea; mercy, the unconfined, immeasurable ocean, in surveying the vast extent of which, the eye fails, and thought itself is lost. It is, moreover, delightful to consider, that the very judgments of Heaven, however dreadful in their nature and effects, are, upon the whole, and in the end, unspeakable blessings. The wrath of man, and judgments of which men are the authors, like the uncontrolled rage of devouring flames, spare nothing; they consume root and branch together. But divine justice, like the refiner’s fire, lays hold only of the dross, and bestows on the remaining ore greater purity and value. The history of the deluge among many other instances which ought be adduced, is a plain and a striking illustration of these observations. The last Lecture exhibited the fearful triumph of divine justice. We beheld heaven from above, the earth and ocean from beneath, uniting their forces in their Maker’s cause; “the windows of heaven opened,” the “fountains of the great deep broken up,” blending their waters, to overwhelm a world of ungodly men. What a prospect did this globe then present to the surrounding spheres; Involved in gross darkness for forty days together: and when the light returns, no dry land appears, for even “all the high hills which were under the whole Heaven were covered:” And O, tremendous object of divine vengeance! “All flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beasts, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth and every man. All, in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died. And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were within in the ark.”[*]Gen 7:21-24 “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” At length the tempest of wrath spends itself. At length, after a night so dark, so dreary, and so long, the morning light begins to dawn. Nothing but water is to be seen, except yonder little bark floating on the mighty surge, which threatens every moment to swallow it up, or

to dash it impetuously on some rocky mountain's top. It contains the sad remainder of the human race; the hope of all future generation. It is preserved, not by the power of him who constructed, but of Him who designed it, and who directed it to be built. It is guided, not by the skill of the mariner, but steered by the hand of Providence. That a vessel of such construction, should preserve its upright position for so long a time, in such a wild uproar of nature, must be ascribed to a perpetual supernatural interposition. The ark has proved the protection and preservation of Noah; but is it not his prison also? How gladly do we submit to a temporary inconveniency for the sake of a great and lasting good! But the inconveniencies, to which we submit in fulfilling the designs of Providence, shall not be prolonged beyond their needful period, nor increased beyond our strength. What an amiable view of the mercy and condescension of God is presented to us at this period of Noah's history! "O Lord, thou preservest man and beast!" And "doth God take care for oxen?" "God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark and God made a wind to pass over the earth and the waters assuaged." He who makes sphere to balance on sphere, in the great system of nature can make one element check, and control the rage of another, in the subordinate economy of our little globe. Wind stops the progress, and diminishes the fury of water at God's command. The dominion of any one element prevailing too long must soon prove fatal to the whole; but their powers blending with, opposing, balancing each other, produce that wonderful and delightful harmony, on which the being and the happiness of mankind depend. "The waters prevailed one hundred and fifty days, and after the end of them, they were abated."

According to the best chronological calculations, the different eras or stages of this great event, adapted to our reckoning of time, are thus fixed. A few days after the death of Methuselah, the son of Enoch who was born two hundred and forty-three years before Adam died, and in whose person, of course, the creation of the world and the flood seemed almost to meet; I say, a few days after Methuselah's death, God commanded Noah, on the tenth day of the second month, answering to the thirtieth of November, in the year of the world one thousand six hundred and fifty-six, and before Christ two thousand three hundred and forty-eight, to prepare that week for going into the ark, and to receive all the living creatures which came thither by direction of Providence, in the course of seven days. On the seventeenth day of the second month, or the seventh of December, in the six hundredth year of Noah's life, the Deluge began, after the Lord had shut him in with all his family. The rain from heaven, and the flux from the ocean, continued without intermission forty days and forty nights, till the waters prevailed fifteen cubits above the highest mountains; and then stayed on the seventeenth of January. It continued flood one hundred and fifty days, including the forty days from its commencement to its full height that is, to the seventeenth clay of the seventh month, or the sixth of May, when the flood abated, and the ark rested upon one of the mountains of Ararat or Armenia. On the first day of the tenth month, or July nineteenth, the waters still continuing to decrease, the tops of the neighboring mountains became visible from the ark. At the end of forty days from thence, on the eleventh day of the eleventh month, or the twenty-eighth of August, Noah opened the window of the ark, and sent forth the raven, which never returned to him. After expecting her for seven days in vain, on the third of September, he sent forth the dove, which returned to him the same day, having found no rest for the sole of her foot, through the continuance of the waters. After seven days more, on the tenth of September, he again sends forth the dove, which returned in the evening, with an olive leaf in her mouth, a proof that the waters had decreased below the height of that plant. After waiting yet

seven days more, Noah again sends forth the dove, on September seventeenth, which returned not again to him, a proof that “the ground was dry,” and that this bird could now find food to sustain life, out of the ark. On the first day of the first month, answering to October the twenty-third, in the year of the world one thousand six hundred and fifty-seven, when Noah entered into the six-hundred and first year of his age, on this first day of the new world, he removed the covering of the ark, and beheld that the ground was And finally, on the twenty-seventh of the second month of the new year, or December the eighteenth, at God’s command, who had sent him in, Noah came out of the ark, and all who were with him, in perfect safety; after they had been confined therein the space of one year and eleven days. And now that he is liberated from so long confinement, what are his first sentiments; what is the first use he makes of restored liberty? It is neither a day of business, nor of pleasure, for himself, but of piety and gratitude towards God. A portion of the animals, hitherto cherished and protected with so much care and tenderness; and preserved in the general wreck of nature, must yield their lives, and pour out their blood by their patron’s hand, at God’s altar. Was not this a direct acknowledgment, that his own life was forfeited with those of the rest of mankind; but spared by an act of distinguishing grace? The stock of living creatures was awfully reduced by the deluge; and this consideration, with, a worldly and selfish mind, might have been pleaded as an excuse for delaying sacrifice till victims were multiplied by length of time. But when works of piety, charity, or mercy, are to be performed, a gracious spirit considers the urgency of the call, rather than the largeness of means. What is saved from God and the wretched, from religion and humanity, will never make any one rich. What is bestowed on works of piety and mercy, is properly laid out at more than common interest. Did Noah’s six couple of beasts, and of birds, increase more slowly, that the seventh was devoted in sacrifice to his Maker and Preserver? I suppose not. In this, if in any sense, what the wise man says, is true, “there is that scattereth and yet aboundeth; there is that withholdeth: more, than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty.” O how acceptable to God are the sacrifices of an humble, grateful, faithful heart! The ground that was cursed for the offence of one, and deluged for the offences of many, by the faith and piety of one is delivered from the curse, and forever secured from the danger of a second flood: “And the Lord smelled a sweet savor; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every living thing, as I have done.”[*]Gen 8:21

Having satisfied the demands, and received the consolations of religion, Noah and his sons are dismissed of God to their secular employments, to the possession and cultivation of their spacious inheritance. All the grants which had been given to the first man, and all the blessings pronounced upon him are renewed to Noah and his family. The whole animal creation is afresh subjected to their power and authority. And now, for the first time, we read of the flesh of animals being permitted unto man for food. But in the very same breath, the use of blood is forbidden to mankind. Was it intended to admonish men to be tender of the lives of the brute creation; and not to take away, wantonly and unnecessarily, what they are unable to restore? Was it to teach men not to use as common food, what was, from the beginning, the symbol of atonement? Is it that the thing prohibited is unfit and unwholesome for aliment? Was it, by placing a fence round that which constitutes the life of a beast to guard, with the greater sanctity of the life of man? The interdiction undoubtedly has a meaning, for none of the precepts of God are merely arbitrary. Wherever he interposes by a special mandate, there we may rest assured, some end of piety, of purity, or of mercy, is to be accomplished by it.

God never communicates his grace by halves. He is but half preserved, who has escaped one great calamity, if he must afterwards live in perpetual fear. Noah's family has outlived the deluge: but every dark cloud is a memorial of that grievous plague, and a threatening of its return. Every watery cloud, therefore, with the sun with its opposition to it, shall be an assurance, written in the most distinct characters, to them and all generations of men following, that "the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh." The bow in the clouds existed no doubt before this; the natural cause al ways and uniformly must produce the same effect; but it has now a use and a meaning unknown before. It formerly manifested in its most beautiful colors, stupendous size, and exact shape and form, the God of nature; now it has become witness for the God of grace. It was always an object beautiful to behold; but O, how much greater its excellence and importance, as the token of God's covenant! When natural appearances lead to saving acquaintance with nature's God, then they are truly valuable and useful.

We are now come to the last memorable event of Noah's life; which, though far less honorable for him than the which preceded, the sacred historian has nevertheless recorded, with the same exactness and fidelity, which he has employed in transmitting the rest of his history. Noah, though advanced to a late period in life, and assured that henceforth the duration of human life was to be greatly abridged, engages with alacrity in the labors of husbandry. That God who thought fit to save him from the flood, by an ark of his own building, will not preserve him alive, but by fruits of his own raising. He who could reap the clusters of the vine, must first plant, shelter, prop, and prune the vine. But behold the juice of the grape in a new state: possessing a quality unheard of before. Eaten from the tree, or dried in the sun, it is simple and like the grain from the stack of corn; pressed out and fermented, it acquires a fiery force, it warms the blood, it mounts to the brain, it leads reason captive, it overpowers every faculty, it triumphs over its lord. How often have arts been invented, which have proved fatal to the inventors? Every poison, it is said, contains, or is produced contiguous to, its antidote. Such is the care, such the goodness of God to men. But alas! must it not also be observed, that our very food and cordials contain a poison, through the ignorance or excess of man. Was Noah unacquainted with this intoxicating quality of wine, and overtaken through inexperience? Or did the faithful monitor of the old world and the father of the new, deliberately sacrifice decency and understanding to thus insinuating foe? In either case, who can help deploring his shameful, his degraded condition; and the consequences which flowed from it! We pity the dishonored father; but we detest the unnatural son who could make sport of his parent's shame. He who intoxicates himself does ill; but he who in cool blood, can take an indecent, or an injurious advantage of the intoxication of another, does worse. The modesty and dutifulness of two of Noah's sons, exhibit a lovely and instructive example to youth; their ingenuous shame, their eagerness to conceal the infirmity of their father. They deserve to be blessed with numerous and thriving families, who have practiced duty and obedience to their parents. This accordingly is the blessing entailed upon Shem and Japheth, and Ham's disrespectful an indecent behavior towards his father, is in like manner punished in the entail of a lasting and heavy curse upon his offspring. Of all the precepts of the law, the fifth most obviously, directly, and certainly, requites the breach or the observance of itself. Noah awakes from his wine, and meets the reproof of his intemperance, in the knowledge of what his sons had done unto him, when he was not himself. And what reproof so keen and severe to an ingenuous mind like his, as the reflection, that he had made himself an object of scorn and derision to one part of his own family, and of sorrow and pity to the other. At length the period arrives that Noah must die; and he

who had seen the world in three different states, as it came from the hands of the Creator, unless as it was affected by the fall--covered over with the waters of a flood--and restored again through the mercy of Heaven, at last sinks into the grave, and ceases to have any farther interest in the world. He survives that great destruction, the deluge, three hundred and fifty years; lives to instruct a new race of men in the knowledge, the love, and the worship of the true God; lives to see his progeny increased and multiplied, and spreading on every side; lives to exhibit to a short-lived race of mortals an example of patriarchal dignity and longevity; and dies at the age of nine hundred and fifty years; short of the life of Methuselah only by nineteen. From that period, the life of man began gradually to decrease, till it shrunk into its present little measure. Whether life be long or short, “death certainly is the end of all men, and the living should lay it to his heart.”

Noah and Adam may be compared and contrasted in various respects. Adam the father of the first world; Noah of the second. Adam, by one willful transgression, involved all mankind in ruin; Noah, by many repeated efforts, in vain endeavored to save mankind from impending destruction. The unbelief and disobedience of Adam affected all; the faith of Noah preserved a remnant. The grant of the whole globe was conferred on these two alone, of all mankind. For the crime of the one, the earth was cursed; through the sacrifice of the other, the curse was withdrawn. In both, their own ill behavior, and the punishment of their children. Upon the guilty son of Adam, God pronounces sentence, and executes judgment in person: the injured father himself, in the case of Noah, is made the minister of wrath to denounce the vengeance of God upon his own guilty son.

Adam and Noah were both distinguished types of Christ; and from this they derive their chief dignity and importance. Some interpreters, who wish to find out an evangelical meaning to even the minutest circumstance in the sacred records of the Old Testament, have alleged, that the import of the names of the antediluvian patriarchs, taken in their order, contain a prophesy of the Messiah: with which I shall present you, rather as discovering an honest zeal for the prevalency of gospel ideas, than as containing a solid and satisfactory argument, in support of gospel truth. Blessed be God, our most holy faith is built on a broader, surer, and more immoveable foundation than the uncertain and arbitrary interpretation of a few Hebrew names. But the speculation is at least innocent, and may perhaps have afforded some degree of consolation to the pious minds which have adopted it. The explanation of the names alluded to, is this. Adam, man: Seth, placed: Enos, in misery: Cainan, lamentable: Mahalaleel, the blessed God: Jared, shall come: Enoch, teaching: Methuselah, that death shall send: Lamach, to the smitten, or miserable: Noah, consolation--But we are fully warranted, by many clear, indubitable, and explicit applications of Scripture, “to preach the unsearchable riches of the gospel of Christ,” from the history of Noah. Shall I encroach upon your patience, and proceed to it now? or implore your candor for an attentive hearing to it, extended to its proper length, and displayed in its minuter circumstances, in a future lecture? I must trespass no longer upon the former; but rather trust to the latter. And the more, that I cannot but wish both preacher and hearers might bring freshness of spirits, patience of attention, and thirst of improvement, to a subject of first-rate importance in the scale of divine truth. And now may He who, by an ark of Gopher-wood, saved Noah and his household from the deluge of water, deliver us, by the grace of his Son Christ Jesus, from that more dreadful deluge of fire, which Scripture assures us shall come upon the “world of the ungodly.” “Flee now to your strong hold, ye prisoners of hope--behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.”--To the God of mercy, through the Son of his love, be ascribed immortal praise--Amen.

Chapter 10

010. Noah and Christ Compared

Noah and Christ Compared

Isa 54:7-10. For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee, for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me; For as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should not more go over the earth: so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee. As the lesser streams fall into, and are mixed with the greater; and as all the rivers empty themselves, and are lost in the ocean; so the whole course of events, from the creation of the world, in their separate currents and in their general and combined tide, flows towards one grand era, styled in Scripture, the fullness of time; and terminates in one event, of infinitely greater moment than all the rest, the “manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh.” The patriarchal dignity, prophetic foreknowledge and penetration, the sanctity of the priesthood, and the regal majesty, all point out, all move towards, all center, and settle in Him, who is “the everlasting Father,” “the Prophet who should arise,” “the Apostle and High Priest of our profession,” the “Prince of the kings of the earth.”

We are struck with a pleasing awe when we converse with the venerable men who lived before the flood. Adam, the first of men; Enoch, who walked with God; Noah, the preserver and restorer of the human race. But in tracing the history of their lives, a still small voice continually whispers us in the ear, saying, A greater than Adam, a greater than Enoch, a greater than Noah is here: a voice from heaven proclaims, sinners, attend; “Behold my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him.” Some, with more zeal and honesty, than wisdom and truth, have labored to discover and to establish a resemblance between our blessed Lord and those who were types of him, in every the minutest circumstance of their lives, and in every expression they employ to describe their private and personal feelings and situations. This has been carried so far as to strain and stretch the penitential language of David, in the fifty-first psalm, respecting the matter of Uriah, into expressions suitable to the character and condition of the Messiah, in certain supposed circumstances. Guarding ourselves against every thing like a forced construction and application of Scripture; without hunting after fanciful resemblances, which tend to weaken and impair the truth, instead of strengthening and supporting it, we will endeavor carefully to point out and improve those which actually exist; namely, such as the Spirit of God directs us to form, by pointing them out to us in the written word; or such as by fair analogy, that is, from known and admitted facts, or from obvious and incontrovertible reasonings, we are warranted to form for ourselves.

Happily, the History of Noah is one of those, in the use and application of which, Scripture has lent us much assistance. The very name of that patriarch was not given him without a meaning and design, which extended much farther than to his person, and the day in which he lived. “This

same," said his pious father, "shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed."[*]Gen 5:29Noah signifies comfort, rest, peace. And when God is bringing his first begotten into the world, this is his proclamation by the month of his prophet, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."[*]Isa 40:1-2 And that we may be at no loss to what period, and to what person these expressions are to be applied, it immediately follows, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."[*]Isa 40:3-5 Was Noah an expected deliverer from the curse pronounced upon the ground for man's disobedience? Alas! The curse continued nevertheless; nay, the very blessings of life become accursed to every impenitent transgressor: but Christ "is our peace, who has redeemed us from the curse," not of the ground, but of the law, "being made a curse for us;" and under whose dominion, when finally established, "there shall be no more curse."

"Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord;" and of Christ he saith, "Behold my servant whom I upheld, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth." "Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations:" and of whom speaks the prophet, when he saith, "he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth?" and the Apostle, "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" and again, "such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." Noah was a preacher of righteousness; and the spirit of prophesy puts these words into the mouth of the Messiah himself, "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart, I declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy loving kindness, and thy truth, from the great congregation."[*]Psa 40:8-10 Noah preached, and preached in vain, to a corrupted, hardened generation, ripe for the destruction of a flood; Jesus, with similar mortification and regret, preached to an impenitent, incorrigible nation, devoted to destruction by means of a Roman army. "Noah walked with God:" Christ, says of himself, "I and my Father are one;" and "my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." But Noah, though righteous, could not by that righteousness, save the men of his generation from the judgments of God: his faith and holiness availed himself, and those who with him feared, believed, and prepared; but could not save another: and there is a supposed state of corruption so great, and a day of vengeance so awful that though those three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in the land, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness: but the righteousness of the blessed Redeemer is of such infinite value and perfection, as to deliver, from spiritual and eternal death, an innumerable multitude of transgressors. But the most memorable incident in the history of Noah's life, was the "building of the ark for the saving of his house." Every circumstance relating to which, exhibited a figure of him who was to come. And first, they exactly coincide in respect of the design or contrivance. The plan of the ark was formed in the eternal mind, long before it was communicated to Noah; thus believers are "chosen of God in Christ before the foundation of the world." To human apprehension at first sight, and to human understanding enlightened by experience, and the astonishing improvements made in naval architecture, a vessel of such construction would be far

from appearing the likeliest means of preservation from a calamity like the deluge. Not a seaman or ship-builder in Britain, but would pronounce it a clumsy piece of work, would affirm it could not possibly live at sea, and predict its foundering in the deep, even without the attack of a storm. Thus “the cross was to the Jews, a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness; but to them who believe, Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” We read of no other methods of safety being thought of, or attempted, by the thoughtless men of the antediluvian world. When the evil overtook them, they would naturally flee to such wretched refuge as despair pointed out; but whatever other means of salvation, in the great and terrible day of the Lord, human imagination may have devised, the Scripture saith expressly, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved:”[*]Acts 4:12 and unavailing, in that day, will be the desponding invocations of impenitent sinners, to “the rocks to fall upon them, and to the hills to cover them from the presence of God, and the wrath of the Lamb.” As the ark was a type of the Messiah, being both designs of infinite wisdom; so do they also coincide in the end or purpose to which they were destined, the salvation of those who fled, and who flee thither for refuge. “Noah prepared an ark for the saving of his house;” and “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life:”[*]John 3:16 and “after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”[*]1Co 1:21 Both of them fully and perfectly answer the end of their institution. The ark was at once a place of shelter from the storm; contained all necessary accommodation and provision; furnished opportunity and means of the most delightful communion and fellowship; and constituted the dearest bond of union and love. Who does not see in this, that wonderful person of whom prophesy thus speaks, “A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest: as river of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.”[*]Isa 32:2 In whom “it has pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell;” of whom “the whole family in heaven and earth is named;” who thus declares in his own person, “those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost,” who enjoins them to “love one another,” and prays for them, that “they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.” The attractive influence of the gospel, and its blessed tendency to tame and subdue the high thoughts and savage dispositions of thehuman heart, were beautifully prefigured by the instinctive call of Providence to the brute creation to seek shelter in the ark, and by the placability and gentleness of their dispositions towards each other while they continued in it. The words of Isaiah are literally a history of the deluge, and they contain a prediction equally beautiful and striking, of the peaceableness and concord of Christ’s kingdom; “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of an asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”[*]Isa 6:6-9 Under the influence of Christ’s spirit, the fierce and the proud, the cruel and the resentful, the envious and the passionate, “put on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering;” and learn to “forbear one another, to forgive one another.”

Again; the figure shifting from the ark, to him who built and constructed it, according to the pattern given him of God, Noah himself becomes the type and Jesus the person typified. The plan or design of the ark was of God; the execution was Noah's; in like manner, the plan of redemption, which was formed of old, even from everlasting, God was at length manifested in the flesh to execute, and in it he labored and persevered, till bowing his head, "it is finished." What shall we say? The very waters of the flood have a figurative prospect of gospel times and gospel ideas. The deluge was a purifier of the old world, corrupted and defiled by sin; and "a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water;" the antitype of which remarkable event, we are informed by the apostle Peter, is our salvation by baptism; "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us, (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."[*]1Pe 3:21 When we behold the same element destructive to one and salutary to another, are we not led to think of that doctrine which is "unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved and in them that perish? to the one it is a savor of death unto death, and to the other, a savor of life unto life;" and of that other under which the Baptist represents the power and coming of the Son of God? "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."[*]Mat 3:12 The wind or spirit which passed over the earth, and assuaged the waters, points out to us not obscurely, the power of that Divine Spirit, who in the beginning "moved upon the face of the deep," and reduced chaos into order and beauty; and who, through the whole course of Providence "sitteth upon the flood;" even "the Lord on high, who is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea." Is it not sweetly figurative of that dawn of hope, that proclamation of mercy, before which the tide of wrath begins to ebb and to subside? The figure of the dove declares its own meaning and import. In the natural purity and innocence of that sweet bird; in her going and returning; in the expressive speed of the first excursion; in the expressive symbol she bore in her mouth at her second return, the olive-leaf; in the clear and explicit information conveyed by her not returning again the third time, it is impossible not to observe a prefiguration of the purity and innocence of the Holy Jesus, the Mediator between God and man. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, and publisheth salvation!" "Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of the birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land." As the state of the world was gradually unfolded to Noah by the different appearances and conduct of his dove; so was the plan of redemption by Jesus Christ gradually disclosed to the world, in types, in allegories, and by predictions, till the morning light at length became perfect day, and "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 unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds."[*]Hebrew 1:1-2 As the ark, after the tossings and tempest of the flood, rested safely on the top of Mount Ararat; so Christ, having suffered all things that were appointed, "entered into his glory," and established the faith of them that believe in him upon "a rock, against which the gates of hell never shall prevail." The ark afforded protection to those only who fled for shelter under its roof, and whom God shut up within it. It was not merely the sight of that wonderful fabric, nor the knowledge and approbation of the plan, nor an active hand in the rearing of it, nor an external adherence to it, when the evil day came, that afforded safety to the miserable. Our Lord himself furnishes us with the application of these important circumstances. "Not every one that saith unto

me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity."[*]Mat 7:21-23 And impressed with an awful sense of it, Paul says of himself, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly: so fight I, not as one that beateth the air; but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast away."[*]1Co 9:26-27

Farther: when we see Noah at the altar of God, offering the sacrifices of thanksgiving, presenting a victim of every clean bird, and beast, and God smelling a savor of rest; ceasing from his anger, remitting the curse, and establishing a new covenant upon better promises, we "behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world." Christ, the altar that is erected, the priest who officiates, and the victim which is offered up. We behold provision made for the remission of transgression committed under the second covenant, for which there was no remedy under the first. The passage on which this discourse is built, is a full and particular illustration of this. The whole chapter refers to the bringing in of the Gentile nations to the standard of the Messiah. "For thy Maker is thine husband [the Lord of Hosts is his name] and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the Lord has called thee as a woman forsaken, and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou was refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, not rebuke thee. For 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."[*]Isa 54:5-10 Expressions beautifully figurative of the strength, beauty, and duration of the Christian church, and of the immoveable foundation on which the Christian faith is built.

Finally, the rainbow, the token of God's covenant of peace with the earth, produced, in the course of nature, by the rays of the sun falling on a cloud impregnated with rain; without straining for a similitude, exhibits mercy rejoicing over judgment; the rays of the sun of righteousness reflected from and dispersing the clouds of divine wrath and human guilt. It represents the dispensations of the Most High towards men, as distinguished from those spiritual beings who never sinned, and those who never shall be saved. In hell, the gloom is not for a single instant dispelled by one beam of light, nor despair relieved by one ray of hope. The serenity of heaven is never obscured by one frown from the face of God. But our world is the theater, on which are displayed, "mercy and truth meeting together, righteousness and peace kissing each other;" "truth springing out of the earth, and righteousness looking down from heaven." The bow in the cloud is the reverse of that described by the Psalmist: "He hath bent his bow and made it ready, he hath also prepared for him the instruments of death: he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors."[*]Psa 7:12-13 No, it is a bow unbent, armed with no deadly weapon, and its dangerous, threatening side averted from us, and turned towards heaven. The bow is never to be seen but when one side of the heaven is clear, and the sun above the horizon; unless it be by the sober, silver rays of the moon's mild, reflected

light. Thus every thing useful and pleasing in nature, every thing satisfying and consolatory in providence, in order to be perceived and enjoyed, must be irradiated, explained, and applied, by the eternal Wisdom, the Word of God, “the true Light which enlighteneth every man who cometh into the world;” and thus many of the objects which we are incapable of contemplating, by the direct and immediate illumination of the glorious “Father of Lights,” are tempered to our perception form other orbs. “No man hath seen God at any time. The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father he hath declared him.”

Thus have we endeavored to point out those particulars in the person, character, and life of Noah, which seem more obviously typical of Christ the Lord; but I cannot conclude the parallel, without directing your thoughts to one article of resemblance more. The old world having undergone the purgation of a flood, was delivered in its renewed state to Noah and his natural posterity for a possession: and from the world that is, when purified by fire, “We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.” “He that sitteth upon the throne saith, Behold I make all things new! for the former things are passed away.” And he that is before the throne saith, “In my father’s house are many mansions! if it were not so I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.” “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.” “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.”

Let me now exhort you in the words of Christ, “Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they testify of Him, who is Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end;” and as you read and meditate, the light will break in upon yon, and the Savior of the world will stand confessed in every page, in every line; so that we may say one to another, in the words of Andrew to Simon his brother, “We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.” And when you see all that is venerable in respect of antiquity, all that is sacred in office, all that is dignified in royalty, bringing their glory and honor to him, lay yourselves at his feet, and say, “he is our Lord and we will worship him;” for “surely this is the Son of God.” And here closes the first great period of the world. There next ensues a very considerable space of time, fruitful indeed in names, but barren in events. Providence has thought fit to draw a veil over it for this obvious reason, that however amusing or instructive the detail of that period might be to us, as citizens of this world, having no special relation to the history of redemption, it cannot be very deeply interesting to us as Christians. And the design of the Bible is not so much to convey to us natural and political knowledge, as the knowledge of “the only true God, and of Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent, whom to know is life eternal.” The sacred historian accordingly hastens on to the times of Abraham, when the promises and predictions of the Messiah become more clear and express, and that Savior was explicitly announced, “in whom all the families of the earth” should at length be blessed. When we have marked the progress of the dawn, and observed the first rays of this rising sun, through the medium of type, figure, and prediction; when we have considered the tokens of approaching glory in the east; let us look up together, and behold the splendor of the full-blown day; let us contemplate the glory spread around us, by “the sun shining in his strength.” The scattered glimmerings of light--a terrestrial paradise, the first promise of deliverance by the seed of the woman, Abel’s sacrifice, Enoch’s translation, Noah’s ark, and all that followed during

so many ages, were at length collected and lost in that one great luminary, which is the light of the Christian world. But alas! “this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light; neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.”[*]John 3:19-20 Let us endeavor to approve ourselves, “children of the light, and of the day,” and observe and follow Him, who thus speaks concerning himself, “I am the light of the world; he that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

011. Abram--Get Out!

Abram--Get Out!

Genesis 7 :l. Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee.

It would yield neither amusement nor instruction, to lay before you in detail, the genealogical succession office sons of Noah, from the flood to the calling of Abram--Scripture presents us with a very general view of that period. It shows us mankind engaged in pursuits common to men in every age. It exhibits the usual and natural operations, and the effects of pride, and ambition, and avarice: plans of empire formed; imperial cities founded; now discoveries made, and settlements established. For a considerable time the recent horrors of the deluge must have laid first hold of the minds of men as the awful monuments of it were every where before their eyes. This would naturally, for a while, confine them to the mountainous regions of Armenia, where the ark first rested. But as their fears diminished, and their numbers increased, we find them, allured by the beauty and fertility of the plains, which were washed by the Tygres and the Euphrates, descending gradually from the heights, and spreading along the vast and fruitful valleys of Shinar or Chaldea. And he who had seen the whole human race cut off for their wickedness, his own family consisting of eight persons excepted, lived to see the descendants of that family almost as numerous and as profligate as the generation of men which had been destroyed by the flood. He had the mortification, in particular, of seeing his posterity engaged in an enterprise equally absurd, vain, and impious; that of building "a city and a tower whose top should reach unto heaven," to transmit their names with renown to posterity, to be the great seat of empire, and thereby the means of preserving them in one grand system of political union, and of securing them from discord and dispersion. The sacred volume informs us, that the very means which they had vainly devised to keep themselves together, in the wisdom of God, separated and scattered them. But the history of that event falls not within the design of these exercises. Leaving Nimrod and his vain-glorious companions to erect the monument of their own folly, and to feel the consequences of their impiety, let us attend the sacred historian in tracing, not the rise and progress of empire, but the formation, the unfolding, and the execution of the plan of redemption. Dropping the mighty founders of Nineveh and Babylon in that oblivion wherein Providence has plunged them never to emerge, let us accompany the father of the faithful from Ur of the Chaldees to the place of his destination, and observe the increasing splendor of the day of grace, and adore the wisdom, truth, and faithfulness of Him who promised, and who "hath done as he had said."

It may be proper to observe, in the entrance of the history of this great patriarch, that one life, that of Noah, almost connects Adam with Abram: For Noah was born only one hundred and twenty-six years after the death of Adam, and lived till within two years of Abram's birth. In one sense, therefore, the father and founder of the Jewish nation is very little more than the third from the first man. So readily, immediately, and uninterruptedly, might the knowledge of important truth, particularly the promises of salvation, be communicated through so long a tract of time. It is farther

observable, that as from Adam to Noah there are ten generations, so likewise from Noah to Abram there are ten generations; but the latter succeeded each other much faster than the former. The first ten occupy a period of one thousand six hundred and fifty-six years; the last is shrunk down to three hundred and fifty-seven. We are henceforward, therefore, to be conversant with lives reduced nearer to our own standard. While extreme longevity was necessary to carry on the designs of Providence, men lived to the age of many centuries. When God saw it was meet to substitute a written and permanent revelation, in the place of oral tradition from father to son, the life of man was shortened. The history of Abram's life commences at a period of it, long before which that of most men is concluded; namely, at the seventy-fifth year of his age. It is never either too early or late to serve and follow God. But the folly and presumption of youth is but too apt to defer matters of the greatest moment to the last hour; and this fatal waste of the seed time of life, is the sure foundation of dishonor, remorse, and despair, in old age. But though our patriarch had arrived at a period of life so advanced, before the sacred historian introduces him upon the stage, the obscurity which lies upon his earlier years is amply compensated by the rich, instructive, and entertaining materials, furnished from the divine stores, for the history of the latter part of his life.

There is something singularly affecting, in the idea of an old man giving up the scenes of his youthful days; scenes endeared to the mind by the fond recollection of past joys; foregoing his kindred and friends; and becoming an exile and a wanderer, at a period when nature seeks repose, and when the heart cleaves to those objects to which it has been long accustomed. But that man goes on cheerfully, who knows he is following God; he can never remove far from home, who has "made the Most High his habitation;" he who falls asleep in the bosom of a father, knows that he shall awake in perfect peace and safety. Accordingly, "Abram, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went."[*]Heb 11:8

Abram being held forth in Scripture as the pattern of a cheerful, prompt, and active faith in God, as we proceed, we shall mark the appearances and the effects of that faith in the successive trials to which it was exposed. The very first act of his obedience to the will of Heaven, proves the existence and the prevalency of this powerful principle. When called to leave his country and his father's house, "he went out, not knowing," not caring, "whither he went." What could have induced him to make such a surrender, but a sense of his duty to God, an entire acquiescence in the wisdom and goodness of Providence, and a full assurance that his Heavenly Father both could and would indemnify him, for every sacrifice which he was called to make! A sacrifice similar to this every real Christian virtually offers up, when he renounces the pomp and pleasure of this vain world, to the hope of an "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Ur of the Chaldees was become a land of idolatry. Abram's nearest relations had lost the knowledge, and deviated from the true worship of the God of their fathers. To have continued there, would have been to prefer a situation dangerous to religion and virtue. Why may we not suppose the call given him to depart, to be the impulse of an honest and enlightened mind, stirred at the sight of so many idols, and the impure rites of their worshippers; and prompted to flee, at whatever expense, from scenes of so much impiety and pollution. When men are to receive immediately their indemnification or equivalent, the merit of a surrender is small; but it requires the faith and trust of an Abram, to take a general promise of God as full security. But his faith had to struggle, in the very setting out, with difficulties seemingly insurmountable. The promises made to him were not

only conveyed in very general terms, and the accomplishment removed to a great distance, but natural impossibilities also barred the way. What a slender prospect must a man entertain of a numerous offspring, when both nature and religion prevent the possibility of his having children? The Spirit of God therefore bestows a just tribute of praise on this part of his conduct, he “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness,” because that “against hope, he believed in hope.” But when we come to examine the promise more particularly, we shall find that it contained every thing which can rouse and fire a noble and generous mind: personal honor and felicity; “I will bless thee, and make thy name great:” a numerous and a thriving progeny, who to latest ages should acknowledge him as their founder, and glory in their relation to him; “I will make of thee a great nation, and thou shalt be a blessing:” universal benefit accruing to the human race from him; “in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” Behold then the illustrious exile turning his back on home, attended only by his aged parent sinking into the grave under the weight of years and infirmity; his beloved Sarai; and Lot his nephew, who, it would seem, was determined to share the fortunes of his pious uncle, and with him to sacrifice every worldly consideration to religion. With Providence for their protector and guide, and the word of God for their encouragement and consolation, they set out in confidence, and arrive at their destined habitation in safety. But God, who had provided for Abram a country, would nevertheless have him carry away from Chaldea, all his honestly acquired property; for true faith makes light of none of God’s benefits; and worldly prosperity, honorably acquired, moderately and thankfully enjoyed, is an undoubted mark of God’s favor. Being arrived in Canaan, God appears to Abram again, and informs him that this was the land which he had in view for him; and renews the declaration, “Unto thy seed will I give this land.” In these words, two things are remarkable. First, a farther delay of the accomplishment of the promise, I will give; and secondly, a transferring of the gift of it, from Abram himself, to his seed. Each of these alone had been sufficient to have cooled an ordinary ardor, to have discouraged an ordinary spirit. But the good man discovers no symptom of dissatisfaction or disappointment, at either the delay or the change of destination; he does not so much as inquire when or how that promised offspring of his was to arise. It is sufficient for him, that he is following the call of Heaven, and that he is blessed with the divine presence through his pilgrimage: with him, even “hope deferred maketh” not “the heart sick;” he finds he is not even now come to his rest, yet repines not. But though he finds no house nor city for himself to dwell in, he finds both leisure and inclination to erect an altar unto God; “and there builded he an altar unto the Lord who had appeared unto him.”[*]Gen 12:7 He who has set up his rest in the Almighty, is every where and always at home; and a truly gracious spirit will never omit a work of piety and mercy, under a pretence of wanting means or opportunity.

Why should we inquire, in what manner God appeared unto Abram; or how much wiser should we be for knowing it? Has not the great, the Almighty God, resistless power over our bodies and our minds? And can he not make every element, every creature, a vehicle of his will to us? Behold the patriarch removing from place to place; “sojourning in the land of promise as in a strange land,” traveling from Sichem to the plain of Moreh; from Bethel to Hai; probably through fear of the idolatrous Canaanites; who, we are told, then occupied the land--But though he sojourn, as the wayfaring man, but for a night, the altar is constituted, and the victim is offered up.[*]Gen 12:8 And Abram’s altar is not built in the spirit wherein many a sacred edifice has been since reared, and many a pious volume purchased, for show, not for use--having built an altar to Jehovah, “he called upon the name of Jehovah.” But a wandering life through Canaan is not the worst of his condition.

His faith is put to a new and severe trial; he is driven out of that land by famine. The country so pompously promised, as a portion to his seed, when increased to the number of the sand upon the sea-shore, refuses subsistence sufficient to his family in its present diminutive state? What then? Let nature or providence raise what obstacles they may, faith removes or surmounts them. He sits not down suddenly with the peevish prophet, saying, “I do well to be angry,” but employs sagacity and diligence to discover, and to obtain, the means of relief. He retires to Egypt, which the scarcity had not reached, or which it had afflicted in an inferior degree. Self-preservation is the first law of our nature; “and he that provideth not for his own, especially those of his own house, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” But where alas, shall we find the faith that never staggered through unbelief; the confidence in Heaven that never failed? On his entrance into Egypt, Abram is seized with an unaccountable fit of distrust altogether unbecoming his character, and equally injurious to God, to Sarai, and to the king of Egypt. He is afraid of trusting the honor of his wife, during a temporary residence in a strange country, to that God at whose command he had given up his native country and his all. He injures the friend and companion of his youth, in supposing her capable of being allured by the splendor and flattery of Egypt, to forget her duty to her husband. He affronts a prince whom he knew not, by suspecting him of a base and criminal design against the peace and honor of a stranger, driven into his dominions for relief from famine. He has recourse to the crooked path of cunning and falsehood, when the direct road of fairness and truth would have served his turn much better. Over caution, is brother to great rashness. He who wants to show himself over wise, soon proves himself to be a fool. The very means which Abram has devised for preserving Sarai’s chastity, exposed her to danger. As his sister, she might be lawfully addressed by any one; as his wife, she was considered as sacred to himself; for the rights of wedlock were held in reverence, even by idolatrous Egyptians. What must have been his feelings when the imposture was detected? How keen his remorse, to see Pharaoh and his innocent household plagued for his fault? The conscious shame of having acted wrong, and of thereby having brought mischief upon another, is, perhaps, the severest punishment an ingenuous mind can suffer. The next remarkable event of Abram’s life is infinitely more honorable for him, and which therefore we pursue with much greater satisfaction. Being safely brought back again to Canaan, he resorts to his former residence between Bethel and Hai, and “pitches his tent by the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first.” And there again he renews his communion with Heaven; for one failing breaks not off the intercourse between God and a good man. Enjoying here a temporary repose, his worldly substance increases fast upon him: for “the blessing of the Lord it maketh rich.” But every earthly good thing brings its inconvenience along with it. His brother’s son has cast in his lot with Abram, and is cherished by him with singular tenderness and affection: when, behold, the increase of riches becomes an increase of vexation. Though the masters are disposed to peace, the servants cannot agree. “A strife arose between the herdsmen of Abram’s cattle and the herdsmen of Lot’s cattle:” and what augmented the folly of such a contention, it is remarked, that “the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land:” so that their quarrel among themselves rendered them more vulnerable by the common enemy. For once that riches promote friendship, they ten times engender strife; by setting on fire, envy, or jealousy, or pride, or some such destructive passion. The behavior of Abram on this occasion, merits particular notice and commendation. “And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen: for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me; if thou wilt take the left

hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."[*]Gen 13:8-9 An hundred sermons preached, or an hundred volumes written, in favor of a peaceable, gentle, yielding, generous, manly spirit, were far short of the plain and persuasive lesson taught us by this conduct of the patriarch. But it merits a larger place in the history of his life, than is now left for it, in what remains of your time. We willingly, therefore, reserve it, to be drawn out into greater length, and to be pressed more particularly, as an useful and striking example to believers.

Christian, you call yourself a son of faithful Abram: let me see that you are actuated by his spirit. What sacrifice, I beseech you, are you making; what sacrifice have you made, to conscience, to duty, to your Christian profession? What worldly interest have you given up? What lust have you mortified? What exercise of humility, of self-denial, of self-government, are you engaged in? Faith in God, and submission to his will, were the leading principles of Abram's life: What are yours? Deal faithfully with God, and with yourselves; and know, that to be a lover of the pleasures, riches, or honors of a present world, to the neglect of religion and its joys, is to prefer Ur of the Chaldees, with its impurity, impiety, and idolatry, to the love and worship of the living and true God. Was the faith of Abram always uniform, his obedience perfect, his conduct irreproachable? No. Then it is not always to be imitated, nor at all to be depended upon. But there is a pattern of faith and obedience, which all may propose as an example, and upon which all may rest as a ground of acceptance with God. When such an one as Abram falters in his duty, "let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall:" let none "be high-minded, but fear;" let us account no danger small, no foe contemptible, no deviation from the path of rectitude a light thing. Let us watch most diligently on our weakest side: and let us learn from the patience, forbearance, and tender mercy of God, when, "a brother is overtaken in a fault," to "restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." Had Abram an altar for God, before he had an habitation for himself? Learn from him, O, young man, how to begin the world, as you wish to thrive and prosper in it. The house in which no altar is erected to God, wants both a foundation and a covering. The family which wants the word and the worship of God, is not yet begun to be furnished. Make room for your Maker and he will settle you in a large place. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all things shall be added to you." Did Abram rule his own spirit, did he meekly recede from his just right, did he gently yield to an inferior, for the sake of peace? Blush, O man, to think of thy pride and selfishness; of thy positiveness in opinion, thy devotedness to interest, thy insolence in the day of power, thy contempt of the opinions, thy indifference to the feelings and the happiness of others. Look to Abram, and learn to be a conqueror. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Look to your Father in heaven, who "is kind to the evil and unthankful:" for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." And thus "be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

Finally; Was the word made to Abram, sure? Has his name become renowned, did his progeny increase, were his seed planted in the promised land, and in him are all the families of the earth blessed? Then learn to honor God by reposing confidence in him, assured that, "though heaven and earth pass away, his word shall not pass away." The next Lecture will carry on the History of Abram "the friend of God," and exhibit the gradually opening discovery of the scheme of redemption by Jesus Christ. The blessing of the Almighty we implore on what is past, and his assistance and blessing on what is to come, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

012. Abram--Man of Peace

Abram--Man of Peace

Gen 13:8. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen: for we be brethren. The history of Abram alone, occupies a larger space in the sacred volume than that of the whole human race from the creation down to his day--Hitherto we have had rather sketches of character, than an exact delineation of the human heart; we have had hints, respecting remote important events rather than an exact and connected narrative of facts. But the inspired penman has gone into the detail of Abram's life, from his being called of God to leave Ur of the Chaldees, to the day of his death; a detail including the space of one hundred years. Moses marks with precision the succession of events which befell him; unfolds his character on a variety of trying and interesting occasions; and discloses the operations of a good mind through the course of a long life, adorned with many virtues and excellencies, yet not exempted from blemish and imperfection.

What renders the Scripture history in general, and that of our patriarch in particular, useful and instructive, is, the exhibition of private life therein presented to us, and the lessons of wisdom and virtue thereby taught to ordinary men. The intrigues of a court, the operations of a campaign, the consequences of a battle, the schemes of a statesman, the prowess of a hero, and the like, represented skillfully, and adorned with the charms of eloquence, may amuse or dazzle the reader. But the actors being altogether out of our level, and the scenes entirely out of the line of our experience, though pleasure may, no great advantage can, result from acquaintance with them. To perform splendid actions, and to exhibit heroic virtue, is given but to a few; and opportunities of this kind but seldom occur in the course of one life. Whereas occasions to practice generosity, justice, mercy, and moderation; to speak truth and show kindness: to melt with pity, and glow with affection; to forbear and to forgive, are administered to us every step we move through the world, and recur more frequently upon us, than even the means of gratifying the common appetites of hunger and thirst. When, therefore, we behold men of like passions with ourselves, placed in situations exactly similar to our own, practicing virtues within our reach, and discovering a temper and disposition which, if we please to cultivate, we may easily attain: then, if we read not with profit as well as delight, it must be because we want not the power, but the inclination, to improve.

Abram has left his kindred and father's house at God's command. Multitudes do the same thing every day, impelled by ambition, by avarice, by curiosity, by a wandering, restless disposition. Happy is he, who, in removing, does not leave his religion behind him; and who, in the midst of the employments, or the delights of a new situation or place of residence, is not tempted to forget or to forsake the God of his native home, and of his early years. Alas, how often does this very metropolis prove the grave of virtuous sentiments, of religious principles, and a regular education! Though Abram be but a pilgrim in Canaan, yet he thrives and prospers there. As the pious soul seeks and finds means of intercourse with Heaven in every condition and state of life, so God, who

suffers none to lose by fidelity and attachment to him, can render the most untoward, unsettled, and dangerous condition, productive of real happiness: “if a man’s ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.” But never do we find wealth flowing in, and increasing upon a man, without some corresponding peril or inconvenience. Either the mind is corrupted by it, or the possessor is exposed to be hated, envied, and plundered. The peace of Abram’s family had like to have been disturbed, by a quarrel arising out of its prosperity; but it was preserved by the good man’s wisdom, moderation, and condescension. The officious zeal of pragmatical servants has well nigh embroiled their peaceable and kindly affectioned masters. “And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram’s cattle and the herdmen of Lot’s cattle; and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land.” How can any one think of security and peace in this world, when the rashness, malice, folly, or pride of a domestic, may set a man at variance with his chief friends? Indeed we are vulnerable in exact proportion to the extent of our possessions.

How great is Abram’s mind, how amiable his conduct upon this occasion! “And Abram said unto Lot, let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee! Separate thyself; I pray thee, from me; if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.”[*]Gen 13:8-9 Abram was the elder man; he was to Lot in the room of a father. Him had God distinguished by special marks of his favor, and by the promises of future greatness and pre-eminence. If the one must give way to the other, who would not instantly pronounce, that undoubtedly Lot ought to yield. Might not the call and destination of God have been warrantably pleaded as a reason why Abram should have the first choice? Abram no doubt, both might and could have asserted the preference; and he proves that he well deserved it, by giving it up. What person in this assembly but stands reproved or admonished by the example of the patriarch’s humility, moderation, and affability? It is indeed a perfect contrast to that tenaciousness of their opinions, that punctilious adherence to the east iota of their rights, that inflexibility of self-love and self-conceit, that perpetual assumption or demand of preference and superiority, which mark the conduct of most men. Were it necessary to enforce the example of Abram by the precepts of the gospel; the whole spirit of Christianity, a multitude of particular injunctions, and above all, the temper and conduct of the great pattern of all that is amiable and excellent, might be adduced, to expose and condemn, if not to cure, that selfish spirit, equally inconsistent with good sense and with religion, which exacts a perpetual sacrifice from others, without discerning the propriety or necessity of making the slightest sacrifice to others in return. Permit me to recite a few passages on the subject. “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another. Be of the same mind one towards another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.”[*]Rom 12:3-5;Rom 12:10;Rom 12:16;Rom 12:18 “Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves.”[*]Php 2:3 “We then that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For

even Christ pleased not himself; but as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee, fell on me. Now the God of patience and consolation, grant you to be like-minded one towards another, according to Jesus Christ."[*]Rom 15:1-3;Rom 15:5 Thus have we precept upon precept, pattern upon pattern, on a subject as plain as the light at noon-day, and which is presenting itself to us almost every hour we live. But alas! it is not preaching that can confer the temper of an Abram; and that can induce men to forego the claims which pride and self-conceit are incessantly urging them to advance.

Behold then Abram and his nephew at length constrained to separate. Nature, affection, religion, affliction, had all conspired to unite them; but a flow of worldly success dissolves their union; and the old adage is exemplified in them, "relations sometimes agree best at a distance from one another." The power of choosing was given to Lot, and he exercised it accordingly; "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan: and Lot journeyed east; and they separated themselves the one from the other."[*]Gen 13:10-11 How wisely this choice was made, we shall have occasion to remark in the sequel of the history. So good a man, and a relation so kind as Abram, must sensibly have felt this separation from his nearest kinsman. But whatever blank was made in his happiness by the failing of this creature comfort, he has the consolation of reflecting, that it was not brought upon him through his own fault; and it is speedily and abundantly compensated by the visions of the Almighty; by the promises of Him that is faithful and true, and by the presence and affection of that Friend, who sticketh closer than a brother. "And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward. For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the hand, in the length of it, and in the breadth of it: for I will give it unto thee."[*]Gen 13:14-17 There is something delightfully soothing to the human heart in the idea of property--one's own home, his own field, his own flock. If any thing can add to the satisfaction of this king of possession, it is the having acquired it honorably, and the capacity of enjoying it with cheerfulness, wisdom, and moderation. Dishonest gain can never bestow contentment, and seldom descends to a remote heir. But the gratification of honest prosperity and success is capable of being still unspeakably heightened and sweetened; namely, by the heart-composing, spirit-elevating consideration, that the blessing enjoyed is the gift of God, is the pledge of paternal love, and the earnest of eternal felicity. In such happy circumstances did our patriarch inhabit the plains of Mamre; blessed in the present, more blessed in the prospects of futurity; blessed in the fullness of this world, more blessed in the favor of God, which is better than life; blessed in the promise of a numerous and prosperous offspring, infinitely more blessed in the promise of that holy seed in whom "all the families of the earth are blessed." When we find the good man abiding in tents, a pilgrim and a stranger in Canaan, do we not perceive it written in legible characters, "arise ye and depart, for this is not your rest?" Hear we not the voice of God, saying plainly, "seek ye another country, that is an heavenly one?" But even the life of a pilgrim, and of a shepherd, is not secure; neither does any worldly condition admit of a certain or long repose. Let a man be ever so peaceably inclined, how easily may he be involved in the feuds of contentious neighbors? This was the case with Abram. In the fourteenth chapter of this sacred book, we have the history of a

powerful confederacy of four kings against five; founded no doubt, as all such confederacies are, in a lust of power or wealth; or directed by a spirit of cruelty and revenge. It issues in a bloody conflict in the vale of Siddim. Sodom, where Lot had chosen to dwell, becomes a prey to the conqueror, and he himself is made a prisoner, and his goods are plundered. These facts are related by Moses, and become interesting to us, merely from their connection with the history of Abram. What, but for this, are Chedorlaomer, Amraphel, and Arioch, to the men of this day, but mere names? Lot must now have grievously felt the consequences of his imprudent choice of a place of residence, had it not been for the friendship and valor of his venerable uncle; who, roused by the intelligence of his nephew's distress and danger, flies instantly to his relief. Behold the good old man exchanging his shepherd's crook for the warrior's spear, and rushing with all the ardor and impetuosity of youth on the insulting victor. Which shall we most admire in this important and interesting transaction, the strength and eagerness of his natural affection; his honest indignation at violence and oppression; the skill with which he planned his enterprise; or the vigor, boldness, and intrepidity with which he executed it; the moderation with which he exercised his victory; his disinterestedness in declining any share of the fruits of it for himself; or his justice and good faith in attending to, and supporting the just right of his allies? All, all together, constitute an unequivocal and a brilliant proof, of a mind truly noble and dignified: and his conduct on this occasion suggests a crowd of reflections both pleasing and useful.

Remember, Christians, it is the same man, who for the sake of peace with a brother gave up his just claim to a junior and inferior; that was not afraid in the cause of the injured and oppressed, to attack a numerous host, headed by princes, and flushed with victory. With whom then does true magnanimity reside? Surely with the humble and condescending. The man who has subdued his own spirit is invincible. Behold in this the nature, and the foundation, of true courage. It is not to make light of life; it is not "to rush like the horse into battle;" it is not to talk high swelling words of vanity: It is to fear God; it is to be calm and composed in danger; it is to possess hope beyond the grave; it is to be superior to the pride, and incapable of the insulting triumph of success. Behold how the kindred graces and virtues delight to reside in unity and harmony, in the bosom of a good man! Neither good nor bad qualities are to be found solitary in the breast of any one. Is a man pious? Then he is humble. Is he humble? Then meek and condescending. Is he condescending? Then bold, then just, then generous, then merciful. Is he a child of God, a disciple of Jesus? Then he is all that is amiable. Behold in Abram, a soul superior to the love of riches, and consequently greater than a king; "And the king of Sodom said unto, Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself. And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up my hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldst say, I have made Abram rich."[*]Gen 14:21-23 That integrity is incorruptible which considers life and happiness as consisting not in "the abundance of the things which a man possesseth:" which prizes an honest, though humble independence, above the honors and treasures which princes have to bestow.

Abram, on this occasion, is found in connection with a most extraordinary person, who bursts upon us like the sun from behind a thick cloud unveil his splendor for a moment, and then hides himself again in the shades of night: "Melchizedec, king of Salem, and priest of the most high God;" whose appearance, history, and character, we could have hardly comprehended, had not a brighter day since arisen, and an inspired apostle unfolded the meaning of what one inspired prophet acted,

and another has recorded. The history of Melchizedec, short as it is, with the apostolic comment upon it, will easily furnish materials for a Lecture by itself, and shall not now therefore be anticipated. The story of Abram himself shall for the present stand still, to be resumed and prosecuted in its order: it being now high time to look forward, and to bring that patriarch, with those who went before him, to the feet of Jesus--his “offspring;” yet his “root:” later than him by almost two thousand years; yet before him “of old, even from everlasting;” receiving existence from him in the order of nature, and by the tenor of the covenant; yet bestowing existence upon him, as the eternal Word, “by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made that is made.”

Abram may be first compared to Adam, being both the fathers of many nations, and especially constituted of God for that end. With both, the covenant of God was established, which included and involved their posterity, though the children were not as yet born: for with God, that is effected, which is purposed to be done; and his promises are gifts already bestowed. Adam’s transgression transmitted evils innumerable to his offspring; Abram’s faith entailed blessings unspeakable upon his family for many generations. Both of them typified Christ in their day; and both “saw his day afar off:” Abram may be compared with the princes and great men of the age in which he lived. And in true dignity of mind, in elevation of spirit, in generosity of sentiment, in propriety of behavior, he will be found superior to most, and inferior to none. We see kings receiving obligations from him; while he nobly shows himself above receiving an obligation from any one. And Abram is a type of every real Christian giving up the world as a portion, at God’s command, and sacrificing the dearest delights of nature to the demands of duty; living as a stranger upon earth, and looking for “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” But the great venerability of Abram’s character arises from his relation to Jesus Christ whom he shadows forth in a great variety of respects. Abram was called and constituted of God, to be the natural head of a great an powerful nation; Jesus, “the first-born among many brethren,” to be the spiritual father of the whole vast family of believers. The covenant of God with Abram carne in aid to the insufficiency of the first covenant; which had become weak, and ineffectual to salvation, through the corruption of human nature; and it prefigured a covenant still more sure and immoveable than itself, “established upon better promises,” even the sending of “the Son of God, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin; to condemn sin in the flesh.” The prompt obedience of Abram to the call of Heaven, leads us directly to Him, who says of himself, “my meat is to do the will of him who sent me;” and the language of whose whole life, spirit, sufferings, and death is, “Father, not my will, but thine be done.” Abram’s appearing on the stage, and entering on the discharge of the duties of his public character, in the full maturity of his age, suggests to us, the Savior of the world entering upon, and discharging his public ministry, in the full vigor of life, and flower of his age. When I behold Abram sojourning in the land of promise as in a strange country, I think of him, who “came to his own and his own received him not:” and meditate on “the Son of Man, who had not where to lay his head.” Abram, chased into Egypt by famine, reminds me of Jesus flying into Egypt from the wrath of a jealous and incensed king. Who can read of Abram discomfiting confederate princes, without bethinking himself straight of the triumphs of a Redeemer over “principalities and powers, and the ruler of the darkness of this world;” Satan, sin, and death “into the lake of fire?” When we behold Lot brought back from captivity by the kindness and intrepidity of his affectionate kinsman, can we refrain from turning our eyes to our compassionate elder Brother, who “through death has destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and delivered them who through fear

of death were subject to bondage;" and who has restored his younger brethren to "the glorious liberty of the sons of God?" Abram nobly refuses to be made rich by the bounty of the king of Sodom; thus when the Jews would have taken Christ and made him a king, he withdrew himself: and when the prince of the power of the air presented him with the prospect of the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and proffered all to him on condition of his doing homage for them, he rejected the offer with disdain, "get thee behind me, Satan." The amiable qualities of Abram's mind bear a lively resemblance to the spirit that dwelt in our divine Master. But in Abram it was a spirit imparted, in Jesus a spirit inherent; it was bestowed on the former in measure, on the latter it was poured out without measure: in the patriarch it was mingled with dross, alloyed by a mixture of human imperfection; in the Savior it was unmixed, unalloyed, for "he did no sin, neither was guile found in his lips." But the time would fail to enumerate the marks of resemblance. Many others will occur to the careful and attentive reader of Abram's history; these shall for the present suffice from this place. The farther continuation of it shall be suspended, and give way, according to the order of the narration, and to give these exercises all the advantage of variety which their nature will admit, to the singular history of Melchisedec; which, God willing, shall be the subject of the ensuing Lecture, and to which permit me to implore your patient and candid attention. Earnestly praying that the blessing of the Most High may crown what has been spoken, we ascribe praise to His name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

013. Melchisedec

Melchisedec Gen 14:18. And Melchisedec, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.

Psa 110:4. The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec.

Heb 6:20. Jesus, made an high priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec. The eagerness and avidity with which men pry into abstruse and difficult subjects, can be exceeded only by their coldness and indifference to obvious and important truth. The religious controversies which have engaged so much attention, occupied so much time, and furnished employment for so many rare talents; which have whetted the tempers and too often the swords of men against each other, are, in general, on points of doctrine too deep and mysterious ever to be fathomed by human understanding, too lofty to be scanned without boldness and presumption, or too trifling to merit regard. Revealed religion, like every thing that is of God, must necessarily present many difficulties to a creature so limited as man. But instead of being rejected on that account, it is the more to be prized and reverenced; as having this evidence, among many others, of coming from Him, whose nature, whose works, and whose ways, none “can find out unto perfection.” Curiosity, guided by humility, and aiming at useful discovery, is a laudable and useful principle. But curiosity impelled by self-conceit, and resting in mere speculation, is generally rash and presumptuous, often trifling, impertinent, and contemptible. In every branch of knowledge, those truths are the most valuable which are the plainest, and which present themselves in the greatest abundance: just as nature produces in the greatest profusion those commodities which are most useful and necessary to man. The subject of this night’s Lecture, is one of those which have afforded ample employment to critics and commentators. Were our object amusement only, it were easy to entertain you for months to come, with the ingenious, the fanciful, the absurd, and nonsensical expositions which have been given of the person and history of Melchisedec. But as we aim at usefulness, and acknowledge no guide in sacred things but the holy Scripture, Moses shall be our only authority and guide in tracing this remarkable story; David and Paul our only interpreters, in the application and use of it.

Abram, with a little band of three hundred and eighteen persons of his own household, and a few friends, has pursued, overtaken, surprised, and discomfited four confederated kings, with their victorious army; and recovered Lot, his brother’s son, into liberty. Returning from this honorable, bold, and successful enterprise, he is met by a prince of a very different character from those whom he had conquered, and those whom he had delivered. They were sons of violence, sons of blood; his name was Melchisedec, and Melchisalem--king of righteousness, king of peace. It is extremely probable, that these epithets were titles conferred upon this great and good man, as being descriptive of his person and character; and might be designed of Providence as a memorial to all princes of what they ought to be; lovers, preservers, and promoters of justice, maintainers and conservators of peace.

It is pleasing to find ourselves mistaken in our calculations of the numbers of good men, and in our estimates of the state of religion in the world. For these calculations and estimates through ignorance and contractedness of spirit, are generally, if not always, erroneous, by being short of the truth. Who did not conclude, when Abram was called to leave his idolatrous country, that the knowledge and the worship of the true God were entirely confined to his family? When lo! a king and priest of the most high God, of whom we never heard, of whose existence we had formed no opinion before, breaks forth upon us, all at once; and teaches us this most elevating, this most encouraging truth, that the number of the redeemed is much greater, and the state of religion much more prosperous, than the partial views, and the systematic spirit of even good men, will permit them to believe. Thus, in latter times, a prophet of no less dignity than Elijah, from apparent circumstances, made a most erroneous computation of the number of the faithful in his day. “The children of Israel,” saith he, “have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.”[*]1Ki 19:14 But what saith the answer of God to him! “I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.”[*]1Ki 19:18 And when the ransomed of the Lord shall at length return together to Zion, they shall be “a great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues.” And what heart but must exult in the prospect of the grace of God being more widely diffused than we apprehended, and extended to regions unknown, and multitudes unthought of by us?

Though but little be told us of this extraordinary person, that little is both pleasing and instructive. In him; we find united two offices of high dignity and respectability--royalty and the priesthood; the majesty of the one united to the sanctity of the other; Melchisedec, “king of Salem,” was also “the priest of the most high God.” How truly honorable is high station, when supported by the beauty and dignity of holiness, and adorned with unaffected goodness! Is the state of a king either dishonored or diminished by attendance at the altar of God? No; it is religion that sweetens, and embellishes, and ennobles every condition: it is religion, forming an intimate and a permanent relation between a man and his God, “that raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dung-hill, and setteth him with princes;” and which exalteth earthly princes to heavenly thrones. Examples are rare in history of these two characters being united. The kingdoms and the priesthood of this world, fall to the lot of but a selected few; they hardly blend in one and the same person, seldom meet to crown the same head. But in the new creation of God, in “the kingdom prepared for the heirs of glory from the foundation of the world,” the high lot of Melchisedec is the lot of every child of God. All are “kings and priests unto God, even the Father.” And the Apostle Peter, addressing, not the princes and potentates of the earth, but “strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,” thus writes, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him, who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”[*]1Pe 2:9 Is this king of righteousness and peace venerable in his priestly robes, attending, in the order of his course, upon the most high God? Is he less amiable and respectable in administering to the necessities of his fellow men? A prince is never more kingly, than when he is practicing the virtues of humanity, hospitality, and compassion. And the praise of these too belongs to Melchisedec, for “he brought forth bread and wine,” to refresh the patriarch and his little army, after the labor and fatigue of their rapid march and violent conflict. The great God is infinitely above the need of our services. How then can we honor him most, and serve him best? By copying his example; by doing good; by

communicating to the comfort of others what he has kindly bestowed upon us. What object does this world present, once to be compared with a human being replete with benevolence, habitually studying to glorify his Creator, by alleviating the distresses, and promoting the happiness of his creatures? This is the true luster of riches, this is the glory of greatness, this the splendor of power, this the majesty of kings.

Kindred spirits are easily and powerfully attracted to each other; and religion forms the strongest and tenderest bond of union among men. Abram and Melchisedec meet like men long acquainted. The patriarch nobly disdains to accept the spoils proffered to him by the king of Sodom; but joyfully, and with gratitude, embraces the friendship and kindness of the king of Salem. The gifts of a bad man yield a very mixed satisfaction to an honest mind, but it is pleasing to the soul to receive benefits from the wise and good. An interchange of kind offices is the life of friendship in worthy minds. In our commerce with Heaven, benefits flow continually from God to us; continually receiving, we have nothing to send back but the effusions of a thankful heart, and the humble desires of needy dependants; but friendship among men subsists only among equals, and depends on kindnesses mutually given and received. Melchisedec “brings forth bread and wine” to Abram; Abram gives him “tithes of all.” So early existed in the world that mode of supporting the ministers of religion. A great prince like Melchisedec needed not to minister in holy things for hire, but he would, by his example, teach mankind, what God, by a special constitution, established under the law, and afterwards delivered to the world in a general proposition, that “he who serves at the altar should live by the altar.” But how poor in comparison, is the gift which the patriarch brings to the priest of God, to that which he receives from him. Abram’s is an offering of acknowledgment and respect merely, by which the receiver was neither benefited nor enriched, but Melchisedec’s return to him was a real benefit; he “blessed him and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth.”[*]Gen 14:19 Abram was already blessed, in growing, worldly prosperity, blessed in recent victory over his enemies, blessed in the deliverance he had wrought for his beloved nephew, blessed in possessing the respect and esteem of princes: but blessings like these have fallen to the lot of bad men, and are in themselves unsatisfactory: Melchisedec pronounces a blessing which crowns all the rest, and gives value to them all. “The blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow therewith;” Abram is “blessed of the most high God,” with the prospect, though distant, of the Messiah’s day, who should spring from himself, according to the flesh, and in whom “all the families of the earth should be blessed.” Abram beheld in the very person who pronounced the benediction upon him, “the figure of him who was to come,” that “king who should reign in righteousness;” “he saw it, and was glad.” What selfish, solitary joy is once to be named with the pure benevolent delight, which glowed in the patriarch’s breast, every time the promise was brought to his ear, and the Savior, his own Savior, the Savior of the world, was placed before his eye? “And blessed be the most high God,” continues he, “which hath delivered thine enemies into thine hand.”[*]Gen 14:20 The blessing which cometh down from heaven, ascends, together with its fruit, to heaven again; as the precious drops which fall down to water the earth, rise upward in gales of fragrance, from the fruits and flowers which they produce, and perfume the air. “Mercy is twice blessed, it blesseth him that gives and him that takes.” But behold, while Melchisedec yet blesseth Abram, he is out of our sight, and is no more to be found. He burst forth upon us like the sun from behind a thick cloud; disappeared again as quickly; and is to be discerned only in that track of glory which he has left behind him. Blessed type of him, who “led out his disciples as far as to Bethany, and he lift up his

hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven:"[*]Luk 24:50-51 And who, "while they beheld, was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight."[*]Acts 1:9

Thus all the men of ages past have made their escape from us, and we behold them no more: and thus we ourselves are one by one disappearing from among men. Adam, and the great majority, died. Enoch, and one more were translated without tasting death. The latter end of Melchisedec is concealed from us. But, from his extraordinary character, we are led to imagine it could not be in the ordinary course of humanity. In so many various ways can God remove and dispose of his creatures; and thus, through various passages, we enter into the world of spirits: and "mortality is swallowed up of life."--What other of the kings of the earth is to be compared with Melchisedec? Is he not rather raised up of Providence, to reproach and to condemn the potentates of this world; the rule of whose government, too often, is not righteousness and law, but humor and caprice; and the end of it, not to bless mankind, but to gratify some passion of their own; who, instead of preserving the nations in peace, themselves the sons of peace, have incessantly, from the beginning to this unhappy day, involved the wretched human race in scenes of war, and violence, and blood? To which of the earthly thrones shall we look for the union of the sanctity of the priesthood with the majesty of the sovereign? Alas! kings are "set in slippery places."--Their education, their station, their employments, their connections; all, all unhappily encroach upon the offices of religion; tend to weaken its impressions, and to shut out its consolations--But there is a Prince, betwixt whom and this king of Salem, the resemblance is so striking, that he who runs may trace it. Not a few have given in to the opinion, that the wonderful personage represented in this history, under the united character of priest and king, was none other than the Son of God himself, assuming a temporary human form, to exhibit in that dark age of the world, an anticipated view of the person, which he was, in the fullness of time, to assume, of the character of which he was to sustain, and of the offices which he was to execute. The expressions which describe Melchisedec, it is alleged, are not applicable to any creature: and as, from several other passages in the books of Moses, it is probable, if not certain, that the Redeemer of the world manifested himself in the patriarchal ages, at sundry times, and on divers occasions, under the character of the angel of the Lord; it is apprehended, that this appearance to Abram might be of the same nature; in order to furnish the father of believers with a clearer and more distinct idea of the person of the Redeemer, according to the words of Christ himself, "your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad."[*]John 8:56

I see no danger that can result, either to faith or morality, from admitting this supposition. And it must be admitted, that there are circumstances, both in the history and in the apostolical application of it, which sufficiently warrant such an interpretation. If there is not an actual identity of persons in Melchisedec and the Messiah, the analogy at least is so obvious, that we have but to bring Moses and Paul together, in order to discover its exactness, and to feel its force. The likeness is presented to us in Scripture, not as some others, in scanty and obscure hints, or in some leading features and lineaments only; but the portraits are drawn as it were, at full length, by the masterly hands of a prophet and an apostle, and placed side by side for our inspection. In this part of our undertaking, therefore, nothing more is necessary than to transcribe from the page of inspiration.

Scripture is singularly expressive, both in what it speaks of Melchisedec, and in what it conceals; and in both these respects we may in some measure understand the meaning of what David, in spirit, says of the Messiah, “thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec.” And first, To whom can the names of king of righteousness, king of peace, be applied with such strict propriety, as to him whom God hath “anointed over his holy hill of Sion.” who reigns in justice and in love: who, righteous himself, has wrought out for all his happy subjects a justifying righteousness by the merit of his blood, and continues to work out in all, a sanctifying righteousness by the grace and power of his Spirit? But peace and righteousness are not mere external designations of Messiah, our prince; names without a meaning, titles without merit, like many of those which are worn by the potentates of this world, Catholic, Most Christian, Faithful, Imperial, Defender of the Faith! Appellations calculated to excite pity or derision. No: his titles are of the essence of his nature; the display of them, is the object of his mission, and the consummation of his plan. “His name shall be called the Prince of peace.” “Of the increase of his government, and peace, there shall be no end.”[*]Isa 9:6-7 “In Christ Jesus, we, who sometime were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us:” “He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to them that were nigh.”[*]Eph 2:13-14;Eph 2:17 “The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.”[*]Isa 53:5 His gospel is prophesied of, as God’s “covenant of peace,” and “the counsel of peace.” At his birth, the melodious anthem of “peace on earth, and good will toward men,”[*]Luk 2:14 ascended from the tongues of ten thousand angels, up to the eternal throne: and when he left the world, this bequest, more precious than the mantle of Elijah, fell from him, and remained behind him to bless mankind, “peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you:”[*]John 14:27 peace with God, peace of conscience, peace with all men; for “being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”[*]Rom 5:1 And “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”[*]Rom 14:17 Acquaintance with God, through him, produces inward tranquility. “Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee.”[*]Job 22:21 And “if God be for us, who can be against us?” “The peace of God passeth all understanding.” The world can neither give it nor take it away. And when his gospel shall have produced its full effect, and his kingdom is finally established; “the work of righteousness shall be peace;” “and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance for ever.”[*]Isa 32:17 But it were endless to enumerate the passages of Scripture, which represent Jesus Christ the Savior, as the author, the purchaser, the giver, the operator of peace, and “the Lord our righteousness.”They are his nature, his name; the burthen of his preaching, of his prayers: they are the fruit of his sufferings and death, the object of his intercession, the operation of his Spirit: they are the seeds of glory in his redeemed upon earth; and the perfection of glory in him and in them, when the triumph of his grace shall be completed in heaven. As the names and titles ascribed to Melchisedec, apply in full force, and in their utmost extent to our blessed Savior, so the several actions in which we find him engaged, have their exact counterpart in what Jesus did, in the exercise of his public ministry. They are these three--“he brought forth bread and wine,” to refresh Abram and his weary host; he “blessed Abram;” and he received of him “tithes of all” the spoils. In the first of these we are led to contemplate the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ when he exerted, more than once, his almighty power, in miraculously multiplying bread to refresh and sustain the fainting multitudes, who resorted to hear him: and when he instituted, by taking, blessing, and distributing bread and wine, that memorial of his death,

which has been in every age, and shall continue to the end of the world, the food of the hungry soul, and a cordial to the faint; the token of a salvation already wrought out and purchased; and the foretaste of a salvation “ready to be revealed;” the communion of imperfect saints, in the church militant, and the eternal bond of union among the spirits of just men made perfect, in the church triumphant.

Again, Melchisedec blessed Abram. In this action of the king of Salem, we behold Jesus, “who went about doing good,” and scattered blessings wheresoever he went. “He took little children into his arms and blessed them.” He pronounced a blessing, which still rests on “the poor in spirit,” “the meek,” “the merciful,” “the pure in heart,” “the peace-makers,” and those “who hunger and thirst after righteousness.”[*]Mat 5:3;Mat 5:10 He blessed the bread before he brake it, and gave it to his disciples: when he ascended up on high, blessings upon blessings flowed from his lips; and in virtue of his intercession at the right hand of the Father, “every good gift, and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights.”[*]Jas 1:17 If the world has any comfort; if the soul has any hope; if there be any communication between heaven and earth; if there be “good will towards men;” “if there be any consolation in Christ; if any comfort of love; if any fellowship of spirit; if any bowels and mercies;”[*]Php 2:1 if there be any joy purer, and more perfect than another, “the blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow therewith;” it is of him, whom “God having raised up,” even “his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities”[*]Acts 3:26 But the grand accomplishment of the type is reserved for that day, when, together with faithful Abraham, all “the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads;”[*]Isa 35:10 when “the Son of man, coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory,” shall thus welcome his redeemed to the regions of eternal day, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”[*]Mat 25:34 The last of Melchisedec actions that stands upon record, is his receiving the tithe of the spoils from Abram. On which subject I think it best to give you the Apostle’s commentary in his own words. “Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law; that is, of their brethren, though they came out of the loins of Abraham; but he whose descent is not counted from them, received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction, the less is blessed of the better. And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. And as I may so say, Levi also, who received tithes, paid tithes in Abraham; for he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him.”[*]Heb 7:4-10 From which he justly infers, that “perfection” could not be “by the Levitical priesthood,” that “there was need” of “another priest, after the order of Melchisedec, and not after the order of Aaron;” who should be “made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life;” and that “seeing the law made nothing perfect,” but “the bringing in of a better hope did,” “by so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament:” and “this man because he continueth ever hath an unchangeable priesthood.” Through him, therefore, let us offer “the calves of our lips,” and “present” our “bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service:” for “we are not our own, we are bought with a price; therefore, let us glorify God in our body, and in our spirit, which are God’s.” As the names and employments, so the united offices and dignity of Melchisedec, met in all their luster in the person of the Son of God; “King of Salem,” and “Priest of the most high God.” In

“derision” of the vain attempts of the heathen, and of the impious confederacy of the kings and rulers of the earth, “against the LORD, and against his Anointed,” God declares, “I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.”[*]Psa 2:6 He came not indeed in worldly pomp, but in lowliness and meekness, yet the powers and potentates of the earth were made subject and subservient to him. “Wise men from the east” were conducted by a star to Jerusalem, and thence to Bethlehem of Judah, to do homage to him at his birth; and poured “their treasures, gold, frankincense, and myrrh,” at his feet. Augustus issued “a decree that all the world should be taxed.” What was his motive, what his end? We cannot tell; but we know the end which God had in view by it namely, to bring into more public notoriety, the several circumstances of Christ’s nativity, and to transmit them to the latest posterity, in all their splendor and importance. Thus the haughty master of imperial Rome was constrained of Providence, to render unknown, unintended, involuntary homage to yonder babe in the stable of Bethlehem.” “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.”[*]Acts 4:27-28 Is he not then “the blessed and only Potentate; the King of kings, and Lord of lords? Now especially, exalted as he is, to the right hand of the Majesty on high. 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.”[*]Col 1:16-17 And, into the kingdom of his glory, when finished, “the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor.” Then shall angels and men join in this grand celestial chorus, “the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”[*]Rev 6:15 But while his exalted rank as a sovereign removes us to an awful distance, his milder character as “the Apostle and High Priest of our profession,” allures us back to his presence, and dissipates our terrors. He is “a merciful and a faithful High Priest,”an “High Priest, touched with the feeling of our infirmities:” “a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens,” through whom we have encouragement to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”[*]Heb 4:16 He has by “one offering perfected forever them that are sanctified,” and who, having “washed us from our sins in his own blood,” shall at length make us “kings and priests unto God and his Father. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever.”[*]Rev 1:6 The circumstances relating to Melchisedec, which are concealed, no less than those which are revealed to us, lead directly to similar circumstances in the person and character of our Lord. “Without father, without mother, without descent; having neither beginning of days nor end of life;” no predecessor; no successor; no limited time of service; no derived title; a dignity not passing from hand to hand, but permanent, inherent, immutable.” Such was the type. What is its antitype? “Who shall declare his generation?” “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”[*]John 1:1 “Verily, verily I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am.”[*]John 8:58 “And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.”[*]John 1:14 “Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.”[*]1Ti 3:16 “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last; I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, amen.”[*]Rev 1:14;Rev 1:18 “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world! “Slain from the foundation of the world!” The altar which consecrateth “the gift,” the priest that presents the sacrifice; the “second temple” which eclipses the glory of the “first.” All, and in all. Every thing

pointed to him; all ended in him, and all are infinitely exceeded by him.

Rejoice, Christians, in this “more sure word of prophesy;” and “take heed unto it, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day star arise in your hearts.”[*]2Pe 1:19 Revere the unfathomable depths of the eternal mind. “Secret things belong to God; but things which are revealed, belong to us, and to our children.” Turn all your inquiries to some good account; remembering that the “end of the commandment is charity,” is to inspire veneration and love to God, and good will to men. Seek not to be “wise above what is written:” and “be not wise in your own conceit.” In reverence adore an incomprehensible Jehovah, who, by no search is to be “found out unto perfection.” Rejoice in hope of that day, when all mysteries shall be unveiled, and the wisdom, the love, and the goodness of God shall shine conspicuously in every creature and every event; when the honors of a Melchisedec shall be communicated to all and to every one of the myriads of Christ’s redeemed. When, such as is the head, shall all the members be, “kings and priests unto God.” And let us, “by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality.” Amen.

Chapter 14

014. Abram--Offering and Covenant

Abram--Offering and Covenant

Gen 15:17-18. And it came to pass, that when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold, a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram.

There is something awfully pleasant, in tracing the manners and customs of ancient times, and of distant nations; particularly in the celebration of their religious ceremonies. Religion in every age and nation, has been the foundation of good faith, and of mutual confidence among men. The most solemn conventions, and the most explicit declarations have been considered as imperfect, till the oath of God was interposed, and until the other august sanctions of divine worship ratified and confirmed the transaction. It cannot but be a high gratification to every lover of the holy Scriptures, to find in the Bible the origin and the model of all the significant religious rites of latter ages and of remoter nations; to find in Moses, the pattern of usages described by a Homer and a Titus Livius, as in general practice among the two most respectable and enlightened nations of antiquity, the Greeks and Romans.

Making of covenants is one of the most frequent and customary transactions in the history of mankind. Controversies and quarrels of every sort issued at length in a covenant between the contending parties. The solemn compacts which have taken place between God and man, are known by the same name; and have been confirmed by similar forms and ceremonies. The word translated to make a covenant, in all the three learned languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin: that is, according to the uniform application of it in the Old Testament, and the constant phraseology of the most approved Greek and Roman authors, signifies to cut, to separate, by cutting asunder, to strike down. The word translated covenant, in the original Hebrew, according as we derive it from one or two words of similar form and sound, signifies either a purifier, that is, a purifying victim; and the phrase, to make a covenant will import, to kill, strike, cut off, a purifying victim; or it may signify a grant of favor, a deed of gift freely bestowed and solemnly ratified by the most high God. And according to this derivation it imports, that the party with whom it is made, is put into a new and happier state."[*]Taylor'sHebrew Concordance, p. 232. Between man and man, it denotes a new arrangement of certain concerns common to both, whereby they are put upon a clearer and surer foundation than they were before. Now the order, and form of Abram's sacrifice described in the ninth and tenth verses of this chapter, is a full illustration of the meaning of the words, "And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle dove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another; but the birds divided he not." And in the text, "the Lord made a covenant," i.e. he cut asunder or divided a purifying victim. Abram, according to God's command, took an heifer, a she-goat and a ram, each of three years old, slew them; divided each into equal parts; placed the separated limbs opposite to each other, leaving a passage between; passed between the parts himself, according to the custom of the

sacrifice; and when the sun was down, that the appearance might be more visible and striking, the Shechinah, or visible token of God's presence, passed also between the divided limbs of the victims, as "a smoking furnace and a burning lamp;" the final ratification of this new treaty between God and Abram. By this covenant God graciously became bound to give Abram a son of his own loins, who should become the father of a great nation, and the progenitor, after the flesh, of the great Savior and deliverer of the human race; and Abram on his part bound himself to a firm reliance upon all God's promises, and a cheerful obedience to all his commands. Such were the awful solemnities of this important transaction. What mysteries were contained in these sacred rites, we pretend not to unfold. They were evidently of divine institution, for God honored them with his presence, approbation, and acceptance. They apparently had been long in use before this period; for Abram, without any particular instruction, prepares and performs the sacrifice; and they certainly continued long in the church of God after this; for we find the practice as far down as the times of Jeremiah, that is about the period of the dissolution of the Jewish monarchy. The passage in this prophet to which we refer, describes so minutely these ancient religious customs, and so strikingly illustrates and supports the history of Abram's covenant and sacrifice, that I trust you will forgive my quoting it at full length. "This is the word that came unto Jeremiah from the Lord, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them. That every man should let his manservant, and every man his maid-servant, being an Hebrew, or an Hebrewess, go free, that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a Jew his brother. Now when all the princes, and all the people which had entered into the covenant, heard that every one should let his man-servant, and every one his maid-servant go free, that none should serve themselves of them any more, then they obeyed, and let them go. But afterwards, they turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids. Therefore the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, I made a covenant with your fathers, in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondmen, saying, At the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother, an Hebrew which hath been sold unto thee; and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee: but your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear. And ye were now turned, and had done right in my sight, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbor, and ye had made a covenant before me in the house which is called by my name. But ye turned and polluted my name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom he had set at liberty at their pleasure, to return, and brought them into subjection, to be under you for servants and for handmaids. Therefore, thus saith the Lord, Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbor: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the Lord, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine, and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof, the princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land which passed between the parts of the calf; I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life; and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth."[*]Jer 34:8-20 Now the expressions here employed, of "polluting God's name, transgressing his covenant, and not

performing it," and the threatened punishment of this violation, "their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth," explain to us, in some measure, the meaning of those solemn ceremonies with which covenants were executed. And here surely it is not unlawful to employ the lights which are thrown upon this subject, by the practice of the Gentile nations, and the writings of those who are styled profane authors. From them we learn, that on such occasions the custom was, that the contracting party or parties, having passed between the divided limbs of the sacrifice, and expressed their full assent to the stipulated terms of the agreement or covenant, in solemn words, which were pronounced with an audible voice, imprecated upon themselves a bitter curse, if they ever should violate it. "As I strike down this heifer, or ram, so may God strike me with death, if I transgress my word and oath." "As the limbs of this animal are divided asunder, so may my body be torn in pieces, if I prove perfidious." Permit me to present one instance of many, from the two illustrious nations alluded to. The Greeks and the Trojans, according to Homer, having agreed to determine the great quarrel between them, by the issue of a single combat between the two rivals, Menelaus and Paris, the terms being solemnly adjusted and consented to on both sides, the ratification of the covenant is thus described, Iliad, lib. III. 338.[*]It may perhaps be amusing to the reader, to compare the simplicity of a literal prose translation, with the poetical elegance and spirit of the English Homer. The passage follows:

"On either side a sacred herald stands,

The wine they mix, and on each monarch's hands

Pour the full urn; then draws the Grecian lord

His cutlass sheath'd beside his pond'rous sword;

From the sign'd victims crops the curling hair,

The heralds part it, and the princes share;

Then loudly thus before the attentive bands,

He calls the gods, and spreads his lifted hands:

"'O first and greatest Pow'r! whom all obey,

Who high on Ida's holy mountain sway,

Eternal Jove! and you bright orb that roll

From east to west, and view from pole to pole,

Thou, mother earth! and all ye living floods!

Infernal furies and Tartarean gods,

Who rule the dead, and horrid woes prepare

For perjur'd kings, and all who falsely swear!

Hear and be witness. If----.'

"With that the chief the tender victims slew,

And in the dust their bleeding bodies threw!

The vital spirit issued at the wound,

And left the members quiv'ring on the ground.

From the same urn they drink the mingled wine,

And all libations to the powr's divine;

While thus their pray'rs united mount the sky;

'Hear mighty Jove! and hear, ye gods on high!

And may their blood, who first the league confound,

Shed like this wine, distain the thirsty ground:

May all their comforts serve promiscuous lust,

And all their race be scatter'd as the dust!'"

Pope's Iliad, III. 376

"The Grecian prince drew the sacred knife, cut off a lock of wool from each of the heads of the devoted lambs, which being distributed among the princes of the contending parties, he thus, with hands lifted up and in a loud voice, prayed; 'O Father Jove, most glorious, most mighty: O sun, who seest and hearest every thing: ye rivers, thou earth, and ye powers who in the regions below punish the false and perjured, be ye witnesses, and preserve this covenant unviolated.' Then, having repeated the words of the covenant in the audience of all, he cleft asunder the heads of the consecrated lambs, placed their palpitating limbs opposite to each other on the ground, poured sacred wine upon them, and again prayed, or rather imprecated: 'O Jupiter Almighty, most glorious, and ye other immortals! Whoever shall first transgress his solemn oath, may his brains and those of his children, flow upon the ground like this wine, and let his wife be divided from him and given to another.' Thus when it was agreed to settle the contest for empire between Rome and Alba by the combat of three youths, brothers, on either side; after the interposition of ceremonies similar to those which have been described, the Roman priest who presided, addressed a prayer to Heaven to this effect: 'Hear, Father Jupiter, hear prince of Alba, and ye whole Alban nation. Whatever has been read from that waxen tablet, from first to last, according to the plain meaning of the words, without any reservation whatever, the Roman people engages to stand to, and will not be the first to violate. If with a fraudulent intention, and by an act of the state, they shall first transgress, that very day, O Jupiter, strike the Roman people as I to-day shall strike this hog, and so much the more heavily, as you are more mighty and more powerful than me.' And having thus spoken, with a sharp flint, he dashed out the brains of the animal."

Thus in the three most distinguished nations that ever existed, we find the origin of their greatness, in similar ceremonies; empire founded in religion, and good faith secured by the sanction of solemn sacred rites. And is it not pleasing to find the living and true God, as in respect of majesty and dignity, so in priority of time, taking the lead in all that is great and venerable among men? We find Moses, the prince of sacred writers, describing a religious sacrifice performed by Abram one

thousand nine hundred and thirteen years before Christ, which the prince of heathen poets so exactly describes as the practice of his own country upwards of one thousand years later; and which the great Roman historian relates as in use among his countrymen, in the time of Tullus Hostilius, the third king of Rome, before Christ about six hundred and sixty-eight years. The circumstances of this interesting transaction have led me much farther than I intended; I now return to take up the thread of the narration. Abram having returned from the slaughter of the kings; having achieved the deliverance of Lot his brother's son from captivity; having paid tithes to Melchizedec, the type and representative of the great High Priest over the household of God, perhaps the Son of God himself, thus early exhibited in human nature to the world; having received the blessing from him, and bidden him farewell, retires again to the quietness and privacy of domestic life, humbly confiding in the divine protection, and patiently waiting the accomplishment of the promises. The man who habitually seeks God, is readily and happily found of him. "After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."[*]Gen 15:1 The din of war, and the congratuations of victory, these transitory and perturbed occupations and comforts being over, intercourse with Heaven recommences and improves: the still small voice of divine favor is again heard--"Fear not, I am thy shield." Abram was become the dread of one confederacy of princes, and the envy of another; both of them situations full of danger; but his security is the protection of the Almighty. He scorned to be made rich by the generosity of the king of Sodom; and his magnanimity and disinterestedness are recompensed by the bounty of the great Lord of all; "I am thy exceeding great reward." Why should we curiously inquire after the nature of the heavenly vision, and ask in what manner the word of the Lord came unto him? Know we not the secret, the inexplicable, the irresistible power which God possesses, and exercises over the bodies and over the minds of men? Know we not what it is to blush for our follies, though no eye beholds us, to tremble under the threatenings of a guilty conscience, though no avenger be pursuing; and to enjoy serenity and peace, in the midst of confusion and tempest? Whence is this, but from the word of the Lord within us, constraining or encouraging us to hear? This renewed declaration of the divine favor, draws from Abram a dutiful yet pathetic expostulation, on the condition of his family and affairs; in which the impatience and fretfulness of the man, mingle with the submission and resignation of the believer. He was grown rich and respected; he had been victorious over his enemies, and become a blessing to his friends; but he is sinking into the vale of years, and his great possessions are ready to descend to a stranger, Eliezer of Damascus, the steward of his household. Is it any wonder to see a proud, unmortified Haman dissatisfied, though basking in the sunshine of royal favor, because one Mordecai sits in the king's gate, when a pious Abram feels uneasy in the enjoyment of all this world could bestow, because one thing was withheld? Alas, what condition of humanity is exempted, for any length of time together, from sorrow and vexation of spirit? How much of the affliction of the remainder of Abram's life, arose from the possession of that blessing, which he now coveted so earnestly! But surely we should do but slender justice to the holy man, in supposing that the sentiments which he expressed upon this occasion were merely the effect of a natural desire of having children of his own body, to whom his large possessions might descend. The man who rejoiced in the prospect of the Savior's day; the man who was ready at God's command to offer up Isaac in sacrifice; the man who had given up every thing nature holds dear, when duty called him to it; and who took the simple promise of God as a full indemnification; such a man must, in charity, be presumed to entertain the most liberal and

disinterested views, in thus ardently desiring a son. We hear of no disapprobation expressed against his ardor and impatience; on the contrary, it procures from God a more distinct and decisive promise of the speedy accomplishment of his wishes--“And behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.”[*]Gen 15:4 The time, though not the manner of the vision is fully conveyed to us; it was early in the morning while it was yet dark, for “he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them. And he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.”[*]Gen 15:5 Scripture allusions to natural objects, are adapted to the ordinary conceptions of mankind. The sun is represented as rising, and setting, and moving round the earth; and the stars are represented as innumerable, because this is apparently the case, and justified by the ideas and language of all nations, though the fact be philosophically otherwise. Surely the truth of God, in his promise to Abram, is little affected by the astronomical arrangement of the heavenly bodies, which latter ages have devised, and whereby the number of those glorious luminaries is determined to a greater degree of accuracy. What the promise means to give the good man full assurance of, is, that his posterity should be both numerous and illustrious beyond all conception. And, if I may be permitted to hazard a conjecture, and to anticipate an observation on this subject, the error of David, many ages afterwards, in insisting on having the people numbered in his reign, which was one of the most prosperous periods of the Israelitish history, consisted in his attempting to determine what God would have left undetermined. It being an object of much greater importance to a wise and good prince, to see his subjects thriving, numerous, and happy, than to know the exact number over which he reigns; just as it is much more delightful and beneficial to a man, to contemplate the beautiful seeming irregularity of the starry heavens, to lose ourselves, as it were, in their glory and immensity, and to enjoy their benign influences, than to fix with the utmost exactness and precision, their number, motions, and distances. Accordingly, we find, that in the days of Solomon the son of David, when Jewish splendor and populousness were at their zenith, no attempt was made to discover the number of the people; but in conformity to the obvious intention of God, in the passage now under review, that matter was for ever left in a state of glorious uncertainty.

Abram’s doubts are now entirely removed; “he believed in the Lord; and counted it to him for righteousness.”[*]Gen 15:6 As God rewards the faithful, not by halves, not sparingly, nor grudgingly; so all true believers, like faithful Abram, honor God by an entire and unlimited confidence; and believe not only in hope but against hope. The patriarch thus indulged and encouraged, presumes still farther on the divine goodness, to entreat some present token of the truth and certainty of the promises made to him. “And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?”[*]Gen 15:8 Both from what goes before and follows, we must conclude, that this was not a request of diffidence, but of desire and love. We neither desire nor exact from our friends formal obligations to show us kindness: this would imply a doubt of their attachment; but we dearly love to bear about us the tokens of their affection. In like manner Abram asked for a sign, not that he suspected any thing, but because he loved much. It was taken, as it was meant; and friendship was strengthened by the request and the grant of it. The covenant which ensued, and the ceremonies by which it was ratified, have already been considered. But some farther circumstances here recorded well deserve our notice. The order for the sacrifice was given early in the morning. The former part of the day was employed in preparing it; and we may suppose all things ready by noon. Abram has done what was incumbent upon him; but the great God is not

limited to seasons or forms; Abram must therefore wait and watch--wait till God condescends to appear--watch, that his sacrifice be not plundered or polluted. At length, about the going down of the sun, the approach of deity is felt. “And when the sun was going down a deep sleep fell upon Abram: and lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.”[*]Gen 15:12 How insupportable must be the visitations of God’s anger! (I tremble while I speak) if the visions of his mercy and love are so awful and tremendous! While he was in this ecstasy, the principal events that should affect his family for the space of four hundred years, are revealed to him; and the issue is to be, at the end of that period, the quiet and certain possession of the very land which he then inhabited; even from the Nile to the Euphrates. But we trespass on your patience too long.

Let us, in conclusion, raise our thoughts to a new covenant, established on better promises; to a sacrifice whose “blood cleanseth from all sin;” “to a new and living way consecrated into the holiest of all, through the veil, the Redeemer’s flesh.” Let us look to that body which was broken upon the cross, the atonement for transgression; “to that inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away;” “to that kingdom which cannot be moved,” that government and peace of “which there shall be no end;” to that “great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, which stand before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palms in their hands;” to that day, when “they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.” Is every discovery of God a mixture of light and darkness, “a furnace that smoketh, a lamp that burneth,” “a pillar of cloud, a pillar of fire?” Let us rejoice, and walk, and live in that light; let us revere, adore, and preserve an humble distance from that darkness. Are the visits of God’s wrath intolerable to the wicked; and the approaches of his gracious presence awful even to the good? Let us, then, think of drawing nigh to him, only through the son of his love, in whom he is ever well pleased. Is the covenant on God’s part “ordered in all things and sure?” Are all “the promises” in Christ “yea and amen?” Is the “glory” they propose and ensure, “yet to be revealed?” “Be not faithless but believing;” “cast all your care upon him, for he careth for you.” “Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known.” “He who cometh, will come and will not tarry.” “The grace of our Lord Jesus be with your spirits.” Amen.

Chapter 15

015. Abram--The Man of Patience

Abram--The Man of Patience Isa 28:16. He that believeth shall not make haste. The ways of Providence and the workings of the human mind do not always keep pace one with another. In the pursuit of their ends, men are at one time careless and indolent, at another, over eager and hasty; but God is ever advancing towards his, with a steady, progressive, majestic pace. When we get sight of a favorite object, we grasp at it through possibility and impossibility; we hurry on to possession, too little scrupulous about the means. To God all things are possible; and “he is the rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity; just and right is he.” Men ignorantly and weakly judge of their Maker by themselves, and foolishly attempt to regulate the divine procedure by their own preconceived opinions of it: “Behold I thought,” said Naaman the Syrian, “he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper;” but God had said, “Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thou shalt be clean.” It is rare to find a faith which steadily, cheerfully, and constantly walks hand in hand with the purpose and promise of Heaven. We either “stagger at the promise, through unbelief,” or impatiently strive to bring forward the accomplishment by indirect methods. When we look into history, how unlike do events appear from the form into which they were previously shaped by the fond expectations of the persons concerned! The Jews, in the person of Messiah, looked for a prince who should revive the faded splendor of David’s throne; but the Messiah whom God raised up, established a kingdom “of righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” The disciples are dreaming of sitting at their Master’s right and left hand, when “the kingdom should be restored to Israel;” he is sending them forth to “suffer shame for his name.” The sentiment of the prophet which I have now read, as the foundation of another Lecture on the history of Abram, is just and striking. “He that believeth shall not make haste.” Faith neither lags behind, nor strives to outrun the word of God. “Thus saith the Lord,” is its rule and measure; it endures, waits, proceeds, acts, refrains, as “seeing him who is invisible.” But in the most composed, firmest, and faithfullest of believers, we find the frailties and infirmities of the man frequently predominant; and a slighter temptation sometimes prevailing, after more severe and difficult trials have been withstood and overcome. Nothing can exceed the solemnity with which God ratified his covenant with Abram, as recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Genesis. Under the sanction of the most awful forms and ceremonies, a son is promised, the future father of a numerous offspring; and an inheritance is allotted to that chosen seed, by him who has all things in heaven and in earth at his disposal. Abram takes the word of God as a full security; believes and rejoices. He had now dwelt ten years in Canaan: and notwithstanding his advanced period of life, we find him discovering nothing like eagerness or impatience; he “believed” and therefore did “not make haste.” But though he was not the first to devise an undue and intemperate method of arriving at the accomplishment of the promise, we find him ready enough to adopt one of this nature when it was suggested to him.

It was now put beyond a doubt that Abram should become a father, but it has not yet been declared explicitly that Sarai shall be a mother. With the anxiety natural to women in her

circumstances, however, we may suppose her to hope till she could hope no longer. At length, her feelings as a wife gave way to her concern about her husband's glory and happiness; and she consents to Abram's having children by another, rather than that he should not have children at all. Projects formed and executed in haste, are generally repented of at leisure; and when we fly in the face either of nature or of religion, we shall speedily and infallibly find both the one and the other much too powerful for us. Sarai's was a lot to be envied by most women; beautiful and beloved even to old age; mistress of an ample fortune, and a numerous train of domestics: the wife of a prince, and, what is much more, of an amiable and excellent man. But the glory and joy of all these flattering circumstances were marred and diminished by one perverse accident, "she bare Abram no children." Not blindly and capriciously, but in wisdom and in righteousness, the great God apportions to the sons of men good and evil in this life; that none may be exalted above measure, and that none may sink into dejection and despair. During Abram's sojourn in Egypt, Pharaoh, smitten with Sarai's beauty, had made his court to her, on the presumption of her being a single woman, by the usual modes of attention, and presents numerous and costly, suitable to his rank and the manners of the times: "sheep, oxen, he-asses, men-servants, maid-servants, she-asses, and camels." Of the female servants probably bestowed upon that occasion, one is now brought particularly into view, and occupies a conspicuous place henceforward in this history. The deception attempted by Abram, in making his wife pass for a sister, is very little to his credit; and his accepting presents from Pharaoh, circumstanced as he was, and knowing what he did, was far from being an honorable proceeding; indeed, no good could be expected to come of it; and though God did not, at the time, reproach him for his conduct by a verbal reproof, he is now preparing, by his righteous providence, to make him feel that he had acted wrong. Thus, the monuments of our faults become the instruments of our punishment. Sarai proposes to her husband to assume this Egyptian handmaid, Hagar, as a secondary, or inferior wife: in hope of building up a family by her, and thus of making the promise to take effect. Unnatural as this may appear, it is far from being without a parallel. The truth is, it is very natural, and very common, to try to get rid of a present pressure, though with the hazard of subjecting ourselves to a heavier burthen. Every thing was wrong here. A shameful distrust of God; an attempt to introduce a foreign and perhaps an idolatrous mother into the family of Abram: a most unwise and inconsiderate tampering with her husband's affection; a foundation laid of probable, if not of certain domestic jealousies and quarrels; evil done in vain expectation that good may come of it. Abram complies with the suggestion of his wife, and Hagar conceives. It requires not the gift of prophecy to foresee the consequence. Hagar becomes vain and insolent, and Sarai is thoroughly mortified. The handmaid now considers herself as her mistress's equal, if not her superior; she views Abram's vast possessions, and vaster prospects, as entailed on her posterity. Little and wicked minds are soon elevated, and as easily depressed. The whole of Sarai's behavior, is that of a peevish, unreasonable, disappointed woman. The wise scheme was of her own contriving; and now that she feels the effect of her impetuosity and rashness, she turns the edge of her resentment against her innocent husband; "And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee I have given my maid into thy bosom, and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the Lord judge between me and thee."[*]Gen 16:5 How weak, wicked, and absurd is all this! Had the good man formed a deliberate design of injuring and insulting her, she could not have employed harsher language: and yet whatever evil has been committed, was her own devising. But the language of passion is ever contradictory and inconsistent. "My wrong be upon thee." Why should it? "My folly

recoils upon myself," would have been the language of truth and justice. She dares not, even in her rage, accuse Abram of incontinency, but reluctantly discerns and acknowledges her own rashness: "I have given my maid into thy bosom, and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes." The tide of anger says not, it is enough, knows not where to stop: "The Lord judge between me and thee." Who would not conclude, from an appeal so solemn, that she has the better cause? And yet, she is appealing to God in a case where she was clearly, consciously in the wrong. I like not hasty references to Heaven. A truly serious spirit will reflect twice before it interposes the name of God on any occasion, and shudder at the thought of employing it upon a false or frivolous one; an angry spirit sticks at nothing. For this reason, I will sooner believe a plain, unprofessing man, on his simple word, than ten thousand common swearers, under the sanction of as many oaths.

See into what disorder one ill-advised measure has thrown a happy, well-regulated family. Abram's ill-judged compliance with the precipitate advice of his wife, has embroiled him in contention with herself; it constrains him to connive at her cruel treatment of an unhappy woman, who is at least to be pitied as much as blamed; and renders the prospect of the promised seed a heavy affliction instead of a blessing. Sarai is betrayed by the eagerness of her spirit, first into an absurdity: then into unkindness and undutifulness towards her lord; then into profanity and impiety towards God; then by an easy transition, into barbarity towards a wretched slave, who was entirely at her mercy, who had been brought, without any high degree of criminality, into a condition which claims compassion and attention from all; brought into it by herself too: and this to the endangering, for ought she knew, of all the hopes of her husband's family, and the greater interests of the human race. Hagar, hapless wretch! an object of commiseration throughout; led, perhaps reluctantly, to her master's bed, elevated to a transient gleam of hope, exulting in the prosperity of a moment, hurried instantly back, by all the severities which jealousy can inflict, into the horrors of slavery, and driven from visionary prospects of bliss, into scenes of real distress; ready to perish with the innocent unborn fruit of her womb, in the wilderness, by famine, or the jaws of some ravenous beast! for "when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face." In what deep and accumulated woe, I say, may one inconsiderate step involve the children of men! And if good and well-intentioned people suffer thus severely from one act of rashness and imprudence, who but must tremble to think of the fearful consequence of deliberate wickedness? A thousand volumes written against polygamy, could not lead to a clearer, fuller conclusion against that practice, than the story under review.

Mark now, how seasonably and suitably God interposes to rectify all this disorder. When we have wearied ourselves with our own devices, and snared ourselves in the works of our own hands, Providence takes up the case, subdues it to its own wise and gracious purposes, and turns evil into good. Hagar flies from the face of her unkind mistress, but happily for her, she cannot flee from God. The interest which Abram now has in her, gives her an interest in the peculiar care and protection of the Almighty. This is the first time we read in Scripture of the appearance of an angel; and it was to reprove, exhort, and succor an helpless afflicted woman: and thus is mercy ever more ready to come at the call of misery, than justice to pursue the footsteps of guilt. From the whole tenor of the history, we are led to conclude, that this heavenly vision was the untreated angel, God in the form, and performing the office of a "ministering spirit;" for this angel assumes the names and attributes of God, speaks of Hagar's present condition, and future prospects, with

the knowledge peculiar to Deity; and describes the extraordinary future greatness of the male child, with which she was pregnant, as his own work. The event demonstrates whose the prediction was: and Hagar evidently considered the person who spake with her in this light; for she ascribes to him the incommunicable name Jehovah, and adores him as the omniscient, omnipresent God." And the angel of the Lord said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude. And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Behold thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction. And 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. And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me."[*]Gen 16:10-13 A great number of striking circumstances press upon us in the careful perusal of these words. Does God condescend to exercise all this care and tenderness about a person so obscure, helpless, and unbefriended as Hagar; then who is beneath his notice, or unimportant in his sight? Are the secondary and subordinate designs of his providence of such extensive and permanent consequence to the world? Then, of what infinite and eternal weight, is his first, great leading object! If an Ishmael be introduced into the world with so much pomp and solemnity, what must the birth of an Isaac be? And what must it be, when God bringeth his own first-begotten upon the scene, whom all the angels are commanded to worship? How astonishingly awful is that foreknowledge, which discovered, before he was born, Ishmael's character; and that power which predetermined and affected the character and state of his posterity to the latest ages, while as yet their progenitor was in his mother's womb? How are all the designs of the Most High, in the course of his adorable providence, and the execution of them, rendered subservient to one glorious purpose, which rises superior to, and absorbs all the rest the plan of salvation by a Redeemer! How wisely are the children both of the bond-woman and of the free, reminded of the lowness and helplessness of their original! "A Syrian ready to perish was my father," says the one; "an Egyptian bondmaid ready to perish was my mother," says the other.

What a happy circumstance it was for Hagar to have lived so long in Abram's house! Liberty in Egypt had not proved a blessing so great, as slavery in Canaan. To be exalted to the dignity of a mother to princes. To be introduced to the knowledge of the living and true God! How different are the appearances of Providence, considered at the moment, and viewed through the medium of reflection and experience! Under the impulse of sorrow or of joy, we cry out, "all these things are against me," or "it is good for me to be here;" but when the account comes to be arranged, after the transport is over, we find ourselves necessitated to transfer many articles to the opposite pages, and to state that as favorable, which once we called adverse; and that a misfortune which once we accounted a blessing. The history informs us of Hagar's flight but leaves us to draw our own conclusion respecting her return. Indeed, we may now suppose all parties to have been brought little to themselves. The solitude and dangers of the wilderness, and the apparition of the angel, awful, though in mercy, have of course, greatly diminished in Hagar's mind the rigor of her mistress's treatment, and she is glad to return to her former habitation. The sudden disappearing of her maid; just apprehension of the evil which might have befallen a desperate woman in her delicate situation; time, serious reflection, an remorse for her cruel and unjust behavior must surely have humbled the spirit and mollified the heart of Sarai, and disposed her to receive the returning fugitive, if not with marks of external complaisance, at least with secret and silent satisfaction. And Abram, always wise, and gentle, and good, would now necessarily rejoice in the

restored peace of his family; in this fresh demonstration of the divine tenderness towards himself and all who belonged to him; in the farther enlargement and extent of the blessing promised; and in the prospect of the final and full accomplishment of all that the Lord had spoken.

According to the word of the angel, Hagar in due time bears a son to Abram, in the eighty-sixth year of his age, and the eleventh after his departure from Ur of the Chaldees. To preserve forever the memory of the divine interposition, the name given to the child by the angel in the wilderness, is put upon him by his pious father, to whom, no doubt, Hagar had carefully related the whole transaction, Ishmael, “God shall hear,” because God heard, pitied, and relieved her affliction. And such was the origin of the father and founder of the Arabian nation; a people, who, in their character and manners, through every period of their history, evince from what root they sprung, and verify the prediction concerning their progenitor, “he will be a wild man, his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him.” And history illustrates the expression of the angel, “and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.” For whereas the slavery and subjection of all other nations make a considerable part of their history, that of the Arabs is entirely composed of a relation of their conquests, or their independence. They are at present, and have continued through the remotest ages, during the various and successive victorious expeditions of Greeks, Romans, and Tartars, a separate, a free, an independent, and an invincible nation; a mighty band of illustrious robbers, united among themselves, and formidable to all the world; inhabiting a vast country of one thousand three hundred miles in length, and one thousand two hundred in breadth--one region of which, from the purity and salubrity of its air, and the fertility of its soil, is deservedly denominated the happy; it produces the finest fruits, spices, and perfumes in the world, and is remarkable for breeding the most beautiful and useful animals of their of kind, horses, camels, and dromedaries.

We hasten to conclude this Lecture, by adding to the reflections already made, this farther one, that we are not to judge of the greatness and importance of the designs of Providence, by any worldly marks of distinction and pre-eminence. The posterity of Ishmael was much earlier, and has been much longer established, and existed in a much higher degree of national dignity and consequence, than the posterity of Isaac. But in the line of Isaac, not that of Ishmael, run the promises of life and salvation. To Isaac and not to his elder brother, pertained “the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises,” and of him “as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God, blessed forever.” The things which are highly esteemed among men, are often of no price in the sight of Him, who “hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, weak things to confound the mighty, base things of the world, and things which are despised, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things which are, that no flesh should glory in his presence.” With Ishmael we have nothing to do, nor with his posterity; they are to us only a wild man and a wild people, inhabiting such a region of the globe. But in Isaac and the fortunes of his family we are deeply interested indeed, as the apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians, clearly evinceth: and his words shall be the evangelical illustration of the subject. “Abram had two sons; the one by a bond maid, the other by a free woman, but he who was of the bond woman was born after the flesh; but he of the free woman was by promise; which things are an allegory,” (that is, one thing is expressed, and another hinted at or signified,) “for these are the two covenants: the one from the Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Hagar; for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to,” or is in the

same rank with, “Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, rejoice, thou barren, that bearest not: break forth and cry, thou that travailest not, for the desolate hath more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise: but as then, he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless, what saith the Scripture? Cast out the bond woman and her son; for the son of the bond woman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman. So then, brethren, we are children not of the bond woman, but of the free.”[*]Gal 4:22-31

Behold the two prime branches of Abram’s family from their birth down to this day, separated, supported, distinguished from the rest of mankind, and from each other, a standing proof of the power and providence of God, and a demonstration of the authenticity of that revelation which we acknowledge as divine, and on which we will build all our faith and hope. “Behold, the counsel of the Lord shall stand forever, and the purpose of his heart to a thousand generations.” God grant us wisdom to understand and do his will, to the glory of his great name, and our own eternal salvation. Amen.

016. Abram--Man of Hospitality

Abram--Man of Hospitality Heb 13:2. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. When men are disappointed in their expectations, it is natural for them to become negligent about the performance of their duties. Irritated or grieved at one thing, they grow careless in every thing; and because another has failed in affection or respect to us, we suffer ourselves to behave unkindly and disrespectfully to others. The effect which mortification, disappointment, or injuries, have upon truly good minds, is, however, the reverse of this; the vexation or distress they themselves have endured, is the strongest of incentives to prevent, as far as they are able, similar occasion of affliction to their brethren of mankind.

Men stand continually in need of each other, and therefore every man is bound to give his countenance, to show kindness, and to grant support to every man. We cannot move a single step through the world, without being brought into connection with strangers, and of course, without having opportunities afforded us of doing or receiving some instance of hospitality. To be careless or unkind in this respect, then, is to be at once unwise, inhuman, and unjust. Christianity has taken into its service every valuable and worthy principle of our nature, and calls the whole catalogue of human virtues its own. As we are continually reminded, in the course of providence, of our being pilgrims and strangers upon earth, so we are strictly and repeatedly enjoined by the laws of the gospel, to be attentive and kind to strangers. “Be given to hospitality,” says Paul. “Use hospitality one to another without grudgings,” says Peter; and in the words I have read, the Apostle recommends the same duty of humanity, “be not forgetful to entertain strangers,” which he enforces by a motive which every heart must feel. “for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” It is of this motive, and of the history to which it refers, that we are now to discourse.

After a delay of ten years, the promise of a son is made good to Abram. But as he consulted not God in the means of obtaining that blessing, so God consults not his views and expectations in the character and destination of the son given to him. For it is one thing to be blessed and to prosper in the gifts of Providence, and another to be blessed in the course of the promise, and according to the tenor of the covenant. The seed which the Most High sware that he would raise up, was to prove an universal benefit to mankind; but the son whom Hagar bear, was to be “a wild man; whose hand should be against every man, and every man’s hand against him:” Abram therefore is apparently as far as ever from his favorite object; and as a farther trial of his faith, perhaps to punish him for deviating from the strict line of his duty, though with an honest intention, thirteen years more are permitted to elapse, and yet no symptom of the expected mercy appears. At that period, while the improbability, in the course of nature, was daily increasing, Abram is again visited with the visions of the Almighty. Our attendance upon God must be constant and assiduous, and it is equally our interest and our duty to wait upon him; but if he makes himself known to us at all, at whatever season, in whatever manner, it is infinite grace and condescension. Jehovah’s appointed time is now at length come to enter on the performance of his own work in his own way. The very first word that proceeds from his lips removes every difficulty, though natural obstacles might seem increased: “I am the Almighty God,”[*]Gen 17:1 or God all-sufficient; fear therefore no failure

of the covenant on my part, for what truth hath spoken, that shall omnipotence bring to pass; and see that there be no unfaithfulness on thine, “walk before me, and be thou perfect.” The former declarations concerning a numerous offspring are renewed, and an alteration is made in the patriarch’s name, importing his relation to a multitude of princes and nations who should spring from him. To the eye of nature the title is premature; but faith considers that as done which is promised. Observe Abraham’s posture while God talks with him; “he fell on his face.”[*]Gen 17:7 The presence of the Almighty is the loudest call to humility, and the more any one knows of God, the more he must fear before him. Behold Abraham fallen to the ground, and angels covering their faces with their wings, and tremble thou, O man, before him! But the trial of Abraham’s faith and obedience is not yet over. God has appeared, not to fulfill the promises under the first covenant, but to enter into a second: and, instead of receiving the long expected son, he is commanded to perform an unpleasant and painful operation upon his own body, and upon all the males of his family. To qualify, however, the bitterness of this prescription, the promise becomes more express, and brings the darling object closer to the eye; it is now declared that Sarai, whose name too was changed, as a witness and token of the event, should bear a son, and that next year should at length crown all his wishes, and evince the truth and faithfulness of God. Abraham acquiesces with gratitude and joy. He had believed and trusted God, when the event was more obscure and remote, and now that it is more distinctly seen, and brought to the very eve of accomplishment, his heart exults with purer and more sensible delight. This the Scripture expresses, by saying, he fell on his face and laughed; a circumstance which Providence instantly lays hold of, and perpetuates to every future generation the memory of Abraham’s faith on this occasion--the son that should be born, shall by his name, Isaac, he shall laugh, express that emotion which his pious, believing father felt, when the will of God was revealed to him. Abraham laughed in faith, and is rewarded every time he beholds his son, or hears his name pronounced, by the approbation of God and his own conscience: Sarah afterwards laughed in incredulity, and was as often reproved for her unbelief.

We hear not Abraham inquiring into the reasons or meaning of God’s covenant of circumcision; and we will imitate his pious reserve and submission. It was sufficient to him, and be it so to us, that thus God would have it to be. That the great Jehovah should have distinguished the descendants of that family from all the families of the earth, by this token, and continue to the present hour thus to distinguish them, after almost every other badge of difference is obliterated and lost; that the posterity of Abraham should persevere in this practice, through a period so extended, and that no other nation should ever have adopted it as an established rite of their religion, is one of those apparently unimportant circumstances which are ready to escape the hasty eye, but which, in connection with other proofs, established the truth and certainty of the Scripture revelation, and the constant interposition of Divine Providence in the affairs of men beyond the power of contradiction. Behold then the rite of circumcision is performed; and Abraham sits down in the patient expectation of the appointed hour of merciful visitation.

One day, while he was enjoying the coolness of the shade at his tent door, in the heat of the day, three men, under the appearance of travelers, presented themselves to his view. These were three angels, say some of the Jewish Rabbi’s, and without hesitation, they furnish us with their names too, Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael. A few of the Christian fathers, on the other hand, contend that here was a visible representation of the most holy Trinity, exhibited to Abraham as

three, addressed and acknowledged by him as one. That something more than created excellence was there, cannot be doubted, after a careful perusal of what Moses has related upon this occasion. But whether the mystery of the Trinity was thus, and then, revealed to the church in the covenant head of it, we presume not to affirm. It is apparent that the patriarch did not, during the former part of the interview, comprehend the nature and quality of his guests, as he neither performs the worship due to the most holy God, nor preserves that awful distance, which even the presence of an angel must inspire; and the Apostle, alluding to him in the text, says, he "entertained angels unawares," that is, not knowing he did so. The scene that follows is a beautiful picture of ancient manners, and wonderfully coincides with the customs of the other nations of remote antiquity, as transmitted to us by their historians and poets, particularly Homer, that careful observer and masterly painter of nature and human life.

Abraham immediately starts from his seat with all the agility of youth, at the sight of the strangers; and with all that glow of affection which is natural to a good man, who had himself known the heart of a stranger, he tenders them every accommodation and refreshment which his simple habitation could afford. Sweetness of temper, easiness of behavior, and kindness of disposition, are peculiarly engaging in old people, because these qualities do not so frequently adorn life's decline. The invitation hospitably given is cheerfully accepted.

True kindness, which is true politeness, attends to the little wishes and wants of those whom we entertain. Water to wash the feet of the weary traveler is a refreshment, though not so necessary as a morsel of bread to comfort his heart, yet, in a sultry climate especially, not less grateful. We remember slight attentions after we have forgotten great benefits. The proud man makes a feast to gratify himself; the hospitable man, to rivet the bonds of friendship, or cherish the soul of the stranger. What a delightful simplicity runs through the whole story The fare, "cakes of fine meal, baked upon the hearth" by the hands of Sarah herself; a "calf from the herd," of Abraham's own choosing; butter and milk, the produce of their own pasture; their canopy, the spreading branches of an old tree; their attendants, the man who had in former days put kings and their armies to flight; the subject of their conversation, Abraham's family affairs. Contrast with this the madness of a modern fashionable entertainment; the profusion of far-fetched luxury, the emulation of wealth and pride, the ingenuity employed in contriving and administering incentives to excess, the gibberish of compliment, the restraints of ceremony, the tinsel of false wit, the noise of mirth without joy, to the expulsion of truth and nature; a costly and painful collection, where nothing is wanting, but the very things which constitute a feast, plenty of wholesome fare, unaffected friendship, moderation, good humor, and good sense. When we are doing our duty, we are in the way of procuring for ourselves gratification; and if there be a virtue which is its own reward, hospitality is that virtue. Abraham now enjoys it to the full. But little does he think what a repast his divine guest is providing for him in return. Sarah, according to the manners of the times, had remained invisible, confining herself to her own separate tent. The angel now inquires concerning her, on purpose to introduce a conversation respecting the object of this visit; and assuming his proper character of Jehovah, subjoins a direct promise, that within the course of a year from that day, Abraham should have a son by her. Sarah, whom curiosity had drawn towards the door of the tent to listen, overhears this conversation, and not knowing the promise or the power of God, treats it as a thing impossible, and laughs, not in joy but in derision. She is observed, detected, and reproved of Him who is at once faithful, good, and merciful; holy, just, and severe. But why is Abraham called to answer for

the infirmity of his wife? Was it to render the reproof more pointed to Sarah? As, indeed, what can be so galling to an ingenuous mind, as to hear an innocent person called in question for our fault? The criminal now stands discovered, she is dragged from her lurking place, and stands abashed and confounded, to make her defence. Ah how dangerous it is, to have deviated once from the path of rectitude! How one false step leads to another, and another, and another, till conviction and shame close the scene. The first wrong step here was the indulgence of an idle curiosity, a dangerous if not a sinful principle. People who listen, generally hope or fear to hear something about themselves, and it seldom happens that they are entirely gratified with what they hear. The next error was her secret disbelief of a promise so frequently and so solemnly repeated: this is followed by the weakness of thinking to escape the notice of one who beheld her though unseen, and could read her heart, though her person was not in view; and finally, deliberate falsehood attempts to conceal her preceding faults.

God neither overlooks nor forgets the errors of those, towards whom he has thoughts of love; and happily the purposes of his grace are not to be defeated by the forwardness and folly of men. Sarah, in spite of her incredulity, shall become the joyful mother of a son, and that son shall be the source of blessings innumerable, unspeakable to mankind. God in his holiness hath sworn it, and "is any thing too hard for the Lord?" The business of this important visit being settled, the strangers rise to depart, and look as if they would go towards Sodom; and Abraham, not satisfied with having performed one instance of hospitality, follows it up to the last with kindness and attention, "he went with them to bring them on the way." Two of the three, it would seem, now disappeared, and Abraham is left alone with the third, and from the conversation that ensues, we have no room left to doubt that he was the Son of God, come down to execute the vengeance of Heaven upon the sinful cities of the plain. "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, and see whether they have clone altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know. And the men turned their faces from thence, and toward Sodom but Abraham stood yet before the Lord."[*]Gen 18:17-22 The same person descends to bless Abraham, and to destroy Sodom: thus the same gospel is "a savor of life unto life, and of death unto death, in them that believe, and in them that perish;" and thus shall the same divine person be revealed in the end of the world, in "flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel," and to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe."[*]2Th 1:8;2Th 1:10

Abraham having obtained mercy himself, becomes an intercessor for his sinful neighbors. The judgments of God are very awful to a serious mind; fools only make a mock at sin, and its fearful consequences. But the whole scene is too interesting and instructive to be brought forward in the close of a Lecture, especially as it is necessary, before dismissing you, to make some reflections of a practical tendency from what has been spoken.

You see, my friends, of what moment the salvation of a lost world is in the sight of God. At how many times, in how many different manners, did God speak of this subject unto the fathers? How many embassies of angels; how many appearances of the mighty Angel of the covenant himself?

As if the great God had been carrying on no design from the beginning, but one, a design of love to guilty, fallen men: that one, which of all others guilty, fallen men treat with the greatest slight and contempt. What! shall that purpose and plan which occupied the eternal mind from everlasting ; to mature and execute which the world was created; which has been declared to man by so many signs in heaven above, and on earth beneath, by the tongues of so many prophets, by so many oracles; to announce which angels and archangels have descended from their thrones; and to accomplish which, God was made manifest in the flesh, tabernacles among men, and proclaimed the great salvation-shall it be announced, unfolded, executed in vain? And will thoughtless, inconsiderate creatures, continue to treat it as a thing of naught? O when shall we cordially enter into the views of God our Maker and Redeemer, and earnestly pursue the same object with him, the salvation of ourselves and others!

God is not sensibly present with us as he was with Abraham, but he is as really so, as if the eye beheld him, and as if we conversed with him face to face. O, man, God is in thy heart and conscience: God is in this place; in this book: and he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The visions of the Almighty to Abraham are visits of mercy to you. How easily could he draw aside the veil which conceals him from your eyes, and where we see nothing but empty space, discover to us a marshaled host of “chariots and horsemen of fire.” But he is to be now discerned only by the eye of faith, and we must be satisfied to “see in a glass darkly.” The awful period approaches when the veil shall drop, and we ourselves, disembodied spirits, shall see and feel, and converse with the Father of spirits. Let, “thou God seest me,” O man! be the leading, commanding idea of thy life, in the city and in the field, in society and in solitude, by night and by day, and when you come to die, you will find you have not far to go; to be “absent from the body” is to be “present with the Lord.” Is it so pleasant and improving to contemplate the detached fragments of the plan of Providence and redemption, which is all we can attain in this state? What will it be in yonder world of bliss, to be endowed with a capacity of comprehending the whole vast design, and to have the harmony, connection, and dependence of the several parts revealed to us by Him who is both the author and finisher of it. Eagerly hungering after the fruit of this tree of life, “which grows in the midst of the paradise of God,” this tree of knowledge of good but not of evil, let us be humbly and modestly, but carefully and constantly searching the Scriptures, in which alone the way of eternal life is declared, and that life is in the Son of God. And may God give us understanding in all things; and to his name be praise--Amen.

017. Abraham--Man of Faith

Abraham--Man of Faith

Jas 2:23. And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the friend of God. Of all the temporal blessings which God in his exuberant goodness hath bestowed upon mankind, one of the greatest, if not the chief, is a sincere and virtuous friend. Into the composition of this character enter all the amiable and excellent qualities which our nature possesses; and in a commerce of virtuous friendship, we find the exertion of the noblest principles, and a display of the worthiest actions. The person who is approved and esteemed of wise and good men, must himself be wise and good. To what a pitch of dignity then is the patriarch Abraham raised? Venerable in possessing the esteem of men; infinitely more venerable, as distinguished by the approbation and friendship of God. Volumes written in his praise, and containing a particular enumeration of his virtues, could not say more than the few words of the Apostle which have now been read. All that is necessary, in order to explain them, is to have recourse to his history, to mark his character, to observe his conduct; and on the other hand to trace the dispensations of the Divine Providence towards him, and to attend to the manner in which it pleased God to treat him, in order to learn how this sacred friendship was constituted and in what it consisted. And on the part of Abraham, we shall find cheerful and prompt obedience, unbounded trust and confidence, profound reverence and fervent love; on the part of God, the most winning condescension, the tenderest affection, the most unshaken constancy. One essential quality of true friendship entered particularly into is this, namely, communication of purpose and design. Abraham indeed could have no view or intention but what lay open to the eye of God, as soon as formed within his own breast; but the designs of the Most High could be known to him only as they were revealed.

We are presented with a very remarkable instance of such gracious communication, in the close of that interview, the commencement of which has already passed under review. God having confirmed the faith of Abraham, and reproved the infidelity of Sarah respecting the promised seed, unfolds a farther design he had in this solemn visit to our world. He has come to execute judgment as well as to show mercy; for “our God is a consuming fire.” But the hands of Omnipotence are as it were bound up, till Abraham the friend of God is made acquainted with what is meditating. “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?” As afterwards he said to Lot, when he wished to hasten his flight from the midst of destruction, “Escape thither, for I cannot do any thing until then be come thither.” The character given of Abraham well deserves the attention of every father, of every master. “For I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.”[*]Gen 18:19 The secret divulged under this sacred seal, is God’s determination speedily and signally to destroy Sodom, and the neighboring cities whose profligacy was arrived to such a height, as suffered not justice to rest. Whatever thoughtless men may think of sin, it can be no light thing which reaches the eternal throne, calls forth the terrors of Almighty Power, and brings down the Most High from heaven to earth.

Abraham, justly alarmed at this intimation, with the sympathy and tenderness natural to a good mind, takes upon him to intercede in behalf of his unhappy neighbors, now placed on the very brink of ruin. A truly gracious spirit is never harsh and unmerciful. The vilest criminal, when delivered up to the punishment he justly merits, excites compassion in the feeling and humane. The persons who themselves most need forgiveness, are generally the most unrelenting, and make lightest of the judgments of God upon others.

Lot, allured by the beauty and fertility of the plain of Sodom, had chosen to fix his residence there, when he parted from his uncle, and is now ready to pay dearly for the imprudence of that choice. When we view an object but in one light, that which strikes us first, and flatters us most, and when we make choice of it for a few more obvious and attractive qualities, we are laying up for ourselves sorrow and remorse in the day when experience has opened our eyes to the discovery of circumstances unheeded or over looked before. In Abraham's place an ordinary mind would have enjoyed, at least, a temporary triumph, when Sodom was threatened; the triumph of sagacity and ease, over rashness, imprudence, and danger. But far different concerns occupy Abraham's breast; concern about the interests of God's glory, and about precious souls ready to perish. The whole intercessory scene is affecting in a very high degree, and needs no commentary to illustrate its force and beauty. I shall simply read it. "And Abraham drew near and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou also destroy, and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous 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 said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes, Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous; wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there: and he said, I will not do it for forty's sake. And he said unto him, Oh, let not the Lord be angry and I will speak; Peradventure there shall be thirty found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold, now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. And he said, Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake."[*]Gen 18:23-32

It was thus that God, and Abraham the friend of God, lived and conversed together; it was thus this sacred friendship was mutually expressed. The fearful catastrophe that presently ensued, falls not within the design of the present Lecture, which is to trace the history and character of the patriarch Abraham. The next time he is brought into our view, we behold him at an awful distance contemplating that destruction which he could not by entreaty and intercession avert. Dreadful change! That beautiful plain which had allured the eyes of Lot, in one eventful day converted into a vast smoking furnace. Cities and their inhabitants swallowed up in a deluge of fire. "The Lord reigneth, let the people tremble."

Abraham had lived sixteen years in the plain of Mamre; but now, whether by the particular direction of Heaven, or prompted by a natural desire to withdraw from a neighborhood rendered unwholesome and unpleasant by the change which had passed upon it, and which incessantly

presented such a tremendous monument of divine wrath to his eyes, he removes to the south-west corner of Canaan, between Kadesh and Shur, near the wilderness, and sojourned in the kingdom of Gerar, the country of the Philistines, and which afterwards was by lot assigned to the tribe of Judah. And here again, Abraham, through fear and suspicion, is induced to employ the same deceit which he had practiced in Egypt, respecting his relation to Sarah, and thereby runs into the very danger which he meant to avoid. His conduct on this account is undoubtedly very reprehensible. He was to blame for judging so dishonorably of mankind, as to think ill of a people whom he knew not--“Surely the fear of God is not in this place: and they will slay me for my wife’s sake.”[*]Gen 20:11 Surely the fear of God was not before his own eyes, when he had recourse to a subterfuge so mean, to preserve the honor of his wife, and his own life. He was to blame for employing artifice a second time, after God had extricated him so mercifully from his first error. Had not God said, “I am thy shield?” and yet be fears where no fear was. Had not God said, “walk before me, and be thou perfect?” and yet he yields to a slight temptation. The very apology which he makes for his conduct, when the truth was brought to light, discovers a mind not perfectly satisfied with itself. “And yet indeed she is my sister: she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.”[*]Gen 20:12 O, how lovely, how majestic is simple truth! It seeks no retirement, stands in need of no defence, is ever consistent with itself, ever inspires with courage him who practices it. Falsehood strips the mind of its conscious dignity, keeps a man perpetually in fear, puts invention continually on the rack to prevent the means of detection. But the weakness of man shall not make the purpose of God of none effect. Sarah, now pregnant of the promised seed, is miraculously protected of Heaven, and the truth of God in Abimelech’s dream exposes Abraham’s waking deception. “Surely, O Lord, the wrath of man shall praise thee.”

Abimelech, by the various uncommon circumstances which had affected his family and kingdom, from the time that Abraham had come into it, being fully persuaded that he was a favorite of Heaven, endeavors by presents and courtesy to attach him closely to himself, and prevails with him to accept a habitation in his country. There, it was so determined of Providence, Sarah, was delivered of the long expected son of promise. Time creeps or flies to us, according to our hopes or our fears, our sorrows, or our joys; but with God, there is no quickness or slowness of progression, no distance of place or time. Our eagerness and impatience cannot accelerate, our reluctance or aversion cannot retard his purpose a single instant of time. The joy of such an event is rather to be imagined than described. The birth of a child is always matter of unutterable satisfaction to the mother at least; what then must have been the solid, the heart-felt joy of Abraham and Sarah, on the birth of a son, the heir of great possessions, the father and founder of a mighty nation, the progenitor, according to the flesh, of the Savior of the world; given by promise, and raised up by a miracle!

Sarah herself, it would appear, performed the maternal office of suckling this precious child; neither her high rank, nor abundant affluence, nor advanced period of life, are pleaded to exempt her from this task of nature. According to the custom of the times, Abraham made a great entertainment on the day that Isaac was weaned, when probably he was solemnly recognized as Abraham’s heir, and by some public act invested with his rights as such, This would naturally excite the envy and displeasure of Ishmael, and produced that insolent or contemptuous, behavior, which our translation renders by the word “mocking,” and by which Sarah was so much

incensed, that she insisted on the immediate banishment of Hagar and her son. No created joy is either pure and unmixed, or of long continuance. Sarah's comfort is marred by the brutality and insolence of Ishmael to her son, and not improbably by the fear she entertained of one so much advanced in stature, and strength above Isaac, and of such a wild untoward disposition. Abraham's peace is destroyed, and his life embittered by the necessity he is under of driving from his house his own child and the unhappy mother. Whether the good man were criminal or not, in the assumption of Hagar as his concubine, sure I am, first and last, he smarts severely for it. And Isaac, the covenant head and representative of the church, begins at an early period of life indeed, to suffer persecution from the jealousy and malignity of the serpent's issue. Thus, every state and condition of human life, God sets one thing against another, that we may still and ever be brought to the recollection, that "this is not our rest." We are more surprised at the slender provision with which Hagar and Ishmael are dismissed, than at the dismission itself. That the patriarch, for the sake of peace at home, should consent to part with the bond woman and her son, is very conceivable; but that they should be turned adrift into the wide world, without protection, without attendant, without provision, except so much bread and water as the wretched mother could carry upon her own shoulders; these are circumstances, which, on the usual principles of human conduct, appear altogether strange and unaccountable. But in God, the fatherless and the friendless ever find mercy. Lost in the wilderness, outcast from society, disowned and rejected, ready to perish with hunger and thirst, they meet with attention from Him who feeds the ravens, and without whom a sparrow falleth not to the ground.

We may well suppose that Ishmael's expulsion from his father's house and fortunes, and the way of life into which it forced him, would greatly increase his natural ferocity of temper, and contribute to form and fix that character which was given of him by the angel before he was born, "he shall 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." God brings his predictions to pass, not always, nor generally, by miraculous interposition, but by the operation and concurrence of natural causes. "He became an archer," lived by declaring war on the beasts of the field, and gradually brought himself to bear, and even to prefer that way of living, which had at first been obtruded upon him by the strong hand of necessity. So happily is our nature framed, that use at length reconciles the mind to what was in prospect insupportable, and, at first, galling and distressful. Hagar, in resentment probably of the treatment she had met with, in order to widen the breach, and to bar the way to reconciliation, forms a marriage for her son with a woman of her own country: from which we may conclude that they went back headlong into idolatry. The vexation arising from this domestic dissension has scarcely subsided, when Abraham finds himself embroiled with his host and protector, the king of Gerar. The servants of Abimelech take violent possession of a well of water which the servants of Abraham had digged, and the quarrel is taken up by the principals themselves. Such is human nature: such is human life. From the beginning to this day, miserable mortals have been contending and striving, and shedding each other's blood about a well of water, or some such ground of dissension. The whole world is a possession too small for ambition and avarice, and selfishness considers that as taken from us which another enjoys. Happily, moderation and good sense prevented this offence from coming to an open rupture. When men are disposed to peace, punctilio is easily overlooked; but where there is a disposition to quarrel, it is easy to magnify the most petty neglect into an affront, and to make an unmeaning look the occasion of a breach. The convention between Abraham and Abimelech is ratified in the most

solemn manner, by the making, that is., the cutting or dividing of a covenant, according to the form observed on a much more important occasion, and which has been described in a former Lecture: namely, The ratification of the covenant between God and Abraham. But why should covenants, promises, oaths, be necessary in the commerce of human life! Alas! because men are false, treacherous, and perfidious. The awful manners and customs of times that are past, only serve to convince us, that in every age the corruption of man has been so great upon the earth, that ordinary obligations will not bind; that without the sanctions of religion, the sense of honor, regard to the rights of mankind, and the supposed rectitude of human nature, are feeble and inefficacious. No other argument is necessary to prove that our nature is depraved, and that religion is necessary to man, than the necessity to which men have been reduced, in every age and nation, to secure and preserve the interests of truth and justice, by explicit compacts, and solemn appeals to the Deity: by making “an oath for confirmation an end of all strife.” Abraham dreads Abimelech as not having the fear of God before his eyes. Abimelech stands in awe of Abraham as under the special protection of Heaven: they agree in one thing, in revering the sanctity of a solemn oath; which being interposed, they both sit down secure and happy; Abimelech rests satisfied that Abraham will do nothing to disturb his family or government, or injure his person; Abraham, that Abimelech will not encroach on the rights of private property, or invade those of conscience. This transaction seems to have brought our patriarch to a resting place. He is not himself to be a potentate in the earth, but a great prince courts his alliance, and forms a league with him. The possession of Canaan is postponed, but Isaac is born. The son of the bond woman is banished, but the son of the free woman lives in his house, grows, and prospers, and increases in stature, and in favor with God and man. We see the good man now in the serenity of a vigorous, placid old age, enjoying all that this world can bestow on a virtuous mind, united to a wholesome constitution; unimpaired by intemperance or disease, failing only by the gradual imperceptible decays of nature; capable of enjoying life to the last. I behold the venerable man planting his oaks in Beersheba, solacing himself with the thought, that though his head was soon to be laid low, his Isaac would in due time repose under their shade. How contemptible is the spirit which considers self only in all that it does! How I honor the man who lives to the end of life; nay, strives to prolong existence, and succeeds in the attempt, by engaging in pursuits through which posterity is to be benefited! We will now leave him in this happy tranquility of life; and may his trees quickly rise to shelter his aged head from the sultry heat of the noon-tide sun; and be his Isaac a comfort greater than ever parent knew; and let the tide of benevolence from his honest heart, roll back to its source, increased with overflowing fullness from the ocean of everlasting love. But the grove which he planted was not merely an amusement for old age, or an embellishment of his habitation, it was dedicated to God, and destined as a seat of devotion; there “he called on the name of the Lord.”

We bid him adieu then at this pleasant resting place of life, rejoicing in the past, and calmly waiting the hour of dismission from all his trials and sorrows. But I dread this treacherous tranquility. Bodes it not an approaching storm? The event will show. I shall not anticipate, but hasten to conclude this Lecture, with inviting you to a participation in that divine friendship which Abraham enjoyed, and from which none are excluded; for “the secret of the Lord is with all them that fear him, and he showeth to them his holy covenant.” What is the birth of an Isaac compared to the manifestation of God in the flesh? “To us a Son is born, to us a Savior is given,” and “in him all the families of the earth are blessed.” Let the history of Abraham teach us how vain it is to expect unmixed happiness in a world of vanity; and to dread the approach of calamity when we possess

uncommon ease. Let us adore and admire the wonder-working hand of God, which unseen directs, controls, subdues all creatures, and all events, to its own purposes. Let us trust in the Lord and do good, and love, and speak, and practice truth. When we seethe father of the faithful failing and faltering, let none be high-minded but fear, and “let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” Did Providence take Ishmael the outcast, the wild man under its protection? Let poor and virtuous parents take encouragement to cast the care of their helpless offspring on the Father of the fatherless and the Judge of the widow. Did one hasty ill-advised step involve the patriarch in such acute and lasting distress? Ponder, then, O man, the paths of thy feet, and beware of doing evil, in expectation that good may come of it. By casting your eyes upon the sacred page, you will see what is to form the subject of the next discourse. It is a topic well known, and which has been frequently handled, but it is one of those that will ever please and ever instruct. May God bless what has been spoken. Amen.

018. Abraham--Offering of Isaac

Abraham--Offering of Isaac

Heb 11:17-19. By faith Abraham when he was tried offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called; accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead: from whence also he received him in a figure. The parts of history which please and instruct us most, are those which exhibit to us illustrious persons in trying situations, holding fast their integrity, conducting themselves with wisdom, and overcoming great difficulty by patience and fortitude, and trust in God. The passages of our own lives which we recollect with the greatest satisfaction, and which we find ourselves most disposed to relate to others, are those which, while they passed, were involved in the greatest danger and distress. The memory of past joys is generally insipid and disgusting, but the recollection of the perils which we have escaped, the obstacles which we have surmounted, the miseries which we have endured and overcome, is in truth the chief ingredient in the happiness of our more tranquil days, and the consolation which a life of fatigue, exertion, and calamity, provides for the inactivity, feebleness, and retirement of old age. No man thinks of calling to his own remembrance, or of describing to another, the festivity of an entertainment, a month after it is over; but the horrors of a battle or a shipwreck, are thought and talked of with delight, as long as we are capable of thinking or speaking. What a feast was Abraham preparing for his remaining years by the sacrifice he tendered upon Mount Moriah! What a subject of useful meditation, what an example of praiseworthy conduct, has he furnished to mankind to the end of the world! This is one of the peculiar happy portions of history which at once awaken and interest our feelings; fire the imagination; seize, restrain, exercise, improve the understanding, and powerfully tend to affect and influence the conduct. As a scene in private life, we contemplate it again and again, with new and increasing admiration and delight; as entering into, and connected with the great, the divine plan of Providence and redemption, we regard it with religious veneration.

Most men, during the bustling period of human life, amuse themselves with prospects of retreat and tranquility in its close. And so most probably did Abraham. He had arrived, through much tribulation, at that period when nature wishes for, and expects to find repose. All that a wise and good man could reasonably propose to himself, he had, through the blessing of Heaven, happily attained. Religion crowned his multiplied temporal comforts, and opened the celestial paradise to his view. Isaac, the joy of his joy, the essence of all his other felicities, is born, has grown up, is become amiable, and wise, and good. His eyes have seen the salvation of God, and he is ready to depart in peace whenever the summons comes. But ah, how vain to think of rest till the scene be closed indeed, and death have sealed the weary eyes forever! All the trials which Abraham had hitherto endured, are merely superficial wounds, compared to the keen stroke of that two-edged sword which now pierced him, even “to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow.” To suffer banishment from his country and friends at the age of seventy-five years; to be driven by famine from the land of promise into a distant country; to have the companion of his

youth, and the affectionate partner of all his fortunes, repeatedly forced from him; to have his domestic quiet disturbed, and his life embittered by female jealousy and resentment; to be reduced to the necessity of expelling his elder son from his house, with the slender provision of a little bread and water: these, taken either separately or in connection, and compared with the usual afflictions to which man is exposed, present us, it must be allowed, with a lot of great severity and hardship, but they are lost in the severity of the greater woe yet behind. For “it came to pass after these things,” in addition to all foregoing evils, and apparently to the defeating of the great designs planned by God himself, and in part executed, “that God tried Abraham” in this manner: “Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.”

We mean not to go into the unnecessary criticism which has been employed with perhaps a good intention, to vindicate the divine conduct on this occasion. Surely the infinitely wise God is equal to his own defence. He has transmitted to us this part of his procedure without rendering a reason, without making an apology; and it is presumption, not piety, which shows on every occasion, an eagerness to reason in his behalf. Is it not sufficient at present to say, that men are very incompetent judges of the divine conduct; that a view of the detached parts cannot enable us to form a just and adequate conception of the whole; and that without knowing the ultimate end and design, we must of necessity have a very imperfect idea of the means and instruments employed?

It were easy to declaim on the horrid idea of demanding a human sacrifice, and of employing the hand of a father in a service so unnatural; on the mischief which might arise from an example so dreadful! on the manifest contradiction between this mandate and other laws, both general and special; and perhaps it were as easy to refute all such declamation, and to prove it nugatory and absurd. But let any man, learned or unlearned, read the story throughout, and if he is not both pleased and instructed, he must either be stupid or fastidious in a very high degree. In what manner the command of Heaven was communicated to Abraham, we are not informed. It was unquestionably conveyed with so much clearness and certainty, as left him no possibility of doubting from whom it came. And it again leads us to reflect on the irresistible power which God possesses and exercises over our bodies and minds, whereby he can communicate himself to us in a thousand ways, of which we are able to form no conception, and against which we should in vain attempt to arm ourselves. It appears to have been in the night season: probably, when, as on a former occasion, “God had caused a deep sleep, and a horror of great darkness to fall upon him.”

What a knell to the fond paternal heart! Every word in the oracle seems calculated to awaken some painful feeling, and to increase the difficulty of compliance. A person of humanity like Abraham might naturally be supposed to revolt from the idea of a human sacrifice, had the meanest slave of his household been demanded, and had the choice of a victim been left to himself. What then must have been the emotions of his soul from the moment its darling object was mentioned by the voice of God, till the mandate was completed. “Take now thy son;” this must have at once produced eagerness of attention in a mind ever awake and alive to the welfare and prosperity of Isaac. The tender manner in which God is pleased to describe that favorite child, would undoubtedly excite the most pleasing hope of some new mark of the divine regard to him; “take now thy son, thy only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest,”--and invest him with all the honors of the promise, put him in possession of his destined inheritance? Ah, no! Turn him out a wanderer

after his brother Ishmael, with a loaf of bread, and a bottle of water for his portion? That had been severe; but more dreadful still, “and offer him for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.”

Abraham hesitates not, argues not. He who before staggered not at the promise, staggers not now at the precept through unbelief. As a proof of his being in earnest, he rises immediately, while it was yet early; he makes all needful preparation for this heavy journey and costly sacrifice, with the utmost serenity and cheerfulness; he communicates to no one the order given him, lest the wickedness of others might have shaken his own firmness, or interrupted his progress. Having saddled his ass, for it was in this simple style that the great men of the East, in these better days of the world, used to travel; having summoned two of his young men to attend and assist in the preparation, having called Isaac, and cleft the wood for the burnt offering, they proceed together from Beersheba for the land of Moriah.

Josephus represents Isaac at this time as in his twenty-fifth year, and describes him, with much appearance of truth, as a young man of singular accomplishments, both of body and of mind. The trial was, without doubt, greatly increased to Abraham by the delay, and the distance of the place of sacrifice. Had the oracle demanded an instant offering, the immediate impression of the heavenly vision would account for the suddenness and dispatch of the execution. But leisure is afforded for the reflection; parental affection has time to strengthen itself; the powerful pleadings of nature must in their turn be heard; the oppression of grief, of fatigue, of old age; the sight, the society, the conversation of Isaac, combine their operation to make him relent, and return. But though nature knows faith, such as Abraham’s knows not what it is to relent. With steady steps, and unshaken resolution, he advances to the fatal spot, now first distinguished by the choice of God, for the scene of this wonderful sacrifice; distinguished in the sequel, as the seat of empire and of religion among Abraham’s chosen race; and finally, distinguished most of all by a sacrifice in finitely more valuable and important, and of which this of Isaac was but a shadow. Being arrived at the foot of the mountain, which was pointed out by some sensible token, the servants are left behind, and Abraham, armed with the fire and the knife, and Isaac bearing the wood destined to consume the victim, ascend together. And now, had his faith been capable of failing, could his purpose have changed, the question which Isaac in the simplicity of his heart, proposed, must have triumphed over his resolution, and decreed the victory to flesh and blood, “And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and his said, Here am I, my son: and he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the Lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.”[*]Gen 22:7-8 The heart that feels not this is lost to sensibility. Every endeavor to illustrate or enforce it, were idle as an attempt to perfume the rose, to paint the tulip into richer tints, or to burnish the sun into a brighter luster. At length with weary steps they arrive at the place which God had told him of. The mighty secret, which had hitherto labored in the anxious paternal breast, must at last be disclosed, and “the lamb for the burnt offering” must be produced. It is not the sacrifice of a bullock or a sheep, which are able to make no resistance; nor of a child unconscious of its situation; but of a man, whose consent must be obtained; and who, either by entreaty, by argument, be speed, or by force, might have delivered himself. The Jewish historian presents us with the dialogue which passed between the father and son on this occasion, striking and pathetic indeed, but far inferior to the beautiful simplicity of Moses. Having built an altar,

having laid the wood in order upon it, and made all other necessary preparation, the unhappy father is thus represents as communicating to the devoted victim the will of the Most High: “O my son, begged of God in a thousand prayers, and at length unexpectedly obtained; ever since you were born, with what tenderness and solicitude have I brought you up! Proposing to myself no higher felicity than to see you become a man, and to leave you the heir of my possessions. But the God who bestowed you upon me, demands you again. Prepare then to yield the sacrifice with alacrity. I give you up to Him. Who at all seasons, and in all situations, has pursued us with loving kindness and tender mercy. You came into the world under the necessity of dying; and the manner of your death is to be singular and illustrious, presented in sacrifice by your own father to the great Father of all: who, we may presume, considers it as unfit and unbecoming, that you should depart out of this life by disease, in war, or by any other of the usual calamities to which human nature is subject: but who waits to receive your spirit, as it leaves the body, amidst the prayer and vows of your affectionate parent, that he may place it in perfect blessedness with himself. There, you shall still be the consolation and support of my old age, not indeed by your presence and conversation, but bequeathing me, when you depart, the presence and the blessing of the Almighty.” Isaac, the worthy offspring of such a father, cheerfully complies, and piously answers--“I should be unworthy of life, were I capable of showing reluctance to obey the will of my father and my God. It were enough for me that my earthly parent alone called me to the altar, how much more when my heavenly Father redemands his own.”

He accordingly submits to be bound, and to be laid as a victim upon the wood. And now behold a sight from which nature shrinks back, and stands confounded;--a father lifting up his only son, his is already made the sacrifice; for with God, intentions are acts; and he receives his Isaac a second time form the hand that gave him at first. The voice of God is again heard. It is ever welcome to the ear of faith: welcome when it announces heavy tidings, welcome when it demands an Isaac; and O, how welcome when it brings glad tidings of great joy; when it says, “Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.[*]Gen 22:12

Abraham prophesied without being conscious of it, when he said, “My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering:” for lo, behind “him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering instead of his son.”[*]Gen 22:13We know but in part, and we prophesy in part, but God sees the end from the beginning; he is the rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he.”[*]Deu 32:4 With what different feelings does the patriarch descend from the mountain! His Isaac lives, and yet his sacrifice is offered. He came to yield his dearest earthly delight at the call of God, and he goes away enriched with new blessings and fresh promises. Who ever sacrificed to God and was a loser? “Who ever hardened himself against God and prospered?”

It is impossible that any one can be so inattentive as not to observe, through the whole of this wonderful history, the mystery of redemption shadowed forth? Is the divine conduct, in this trial of Abraham, dark and inexplicable to human reason? Angels desire to look into the plan of gospel salvation, and are unable to comprehend it. Was Abraham ready at God’s command to offer up his only son for a burnt offering?”

God himself so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."[*]John 3:16 God had pity upon an afflicted, earthly father, and a devoted child, and sent his angel to deliver him: but God "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all."[*]Rom 8:32 Isaac was ready to be slain, Jesus was actually put to death. Isaac cheerfully submitted to the will of Heaven, and offered his throat to the sacrificing knife; and of Jesus it is written in the sacred volume, "Lo, I come, I delight to do thy will, O God, thy law is within my heart;"[*]Psa 60:6;Psa 60:8 "he gave himself for us, a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savor unto God."

Isaac having first typified the Savior, passes into a type of the elect sinner, bound and stretched upon the altar, in trembling apprehension of the fatal blow. He is reprieved by a voice from heaven; and thus, when there was no eye to pity, nor hand to save our sinful devoted race, a voice is heard from the most excellent glory, "deliver from going down to the pit, I have found out a ransom." "I have laid help on one who is mighty to save." Behold the ram caught in the thicket, conducted and detained of Providence, and substituted as a sacrifice in the room of Isaac, and think of him of whom it is written, "he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."[*]Isa 53:5-6 From the tendered sacrifice of Isaac arose new prospects and new promises to his family; from the death of Christ sprung up the hope of "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that faded not away," to all them that believe. The substituted sacrifice was of God's appointment, providing an acceptance, both in the figurative and the real history, and by both we are instructed, that when men have the wisdom to submit to, and follow God their Maker, they may safely commit the issue of all to him. To view the history of Abraham in detached parts, is to involve ourselves in difficulty and distress--to read patiently to the end, is the road to light, and peace, and joy. The prejudiced Jew, and the self-conceited Greek, look at the cross and pronounce it foolishness, or fall over it as a stumbling block; but to them that believe, who wait the issue, who look to the end, "Jesus Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God." Presumptuous men will take upon them to judge of a plan which is not yet executed, and will apply to the narrow and erroneous scale of their own reason and understanding, the infinite and eternal designs of the only wise God. When the fabric of creation was completed, God pronounced all to be very good, and then "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy;" when the plan of redemption is executed, then, and not till then, let men or angels presume to judge of the fitness or un fitness of it. Determine nothing before the time. The Lord, and the day of the Lord, is at hand. In meditating on this history, may it not be asked--Who among you is with Abraham sacrificing, I do not say, his lawful joys, but his sinful lusts? Who among you is rising up early, and, with a resolute hand, slaying his sloth, his pride, his avarice, his lust, his malignity, before the altar of God? Who among you is rising betimes to "offer unto God thanksgiving:" to contemplate the glories of nature; to adore and admire the wonders of Providence; to look into the mystery of redemption, and to meditate with new and increasing delight on that love of Christ which passeth knowledge? The little good which we do, we wish to be seen of all men; not like Abraham, who would have his devotion neither witnessed nor interrupted by any one. But glory pursues true goodness, notwithstanding its own modesty and humility. Why should I suffer myself to be teased and vexed with the cavils of an unbeliever? Let him start ten thousand objections, if he will, to the frame of nature, the conduct of Providence, or the method of salvation. I will thus

simply reply; Do you comprehend the whole! Are you of the privy council of heaven? Can you account for any thing you behold! Do you know to what all these things tend, and in what they are to issue?

Rest, Christians, in general, obvious, useful, practical truth; and know that devotedness to God is the essence of religion, and the sum of human happiness. Look forward to that day when light shall arise out of obscurity, when all mysteries shall be unveiled; when the faculties of the human mind shall be strengthened and increased, and the objects contemplated shall be brought nearer the eye, placed in a fairer point of view, and irradiated with a fuller glory; when God shall in the most complete and satisfactory manner vindicate his ways to men. The next Lecture will conclude the History of Abraham, and the proposed course for this season. If to your former attendance and kind attention, you will indulge me with one audience more, it will increase the affectionate regard of a grateful heart, and afford an opportunity of expressing that gratitude at greater length. May God bless all the means of knowledge, of piety, and of improvement. Amen.

019. Abraham--Seeker of Heaven

Abraham--Seeker of Heaven

Heb 11:13-16. These all died in faith, not having received the promises; but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned but now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city.

What is the amount of human life? Vanity and vexation of spirit. All our wanderings tend towards the grave. The anxieties and solicitude, the hopes and fears, the disappointments and successes which alternately occupy and agitate the mind, at length come to one issue, and all-conquering death settles the account. The time is at length come that Sarah must pay the debt of nature. That beauty which conjugal affection doted on, and which princes coveted, becomes deformed with wrinkles; the cold hand of death chills the fond maternal heart, and even the delight of an Isaac is enjoyed no more. The Jewish Rabbins, fruitful in legends, affirm, that grief for the sacrifice of Isaac shortened her life. For that the devil, who had exulted in the prospect of seeing Isaac perish by the knife of his father, to revenge himself for the disappointment which he felt upon his deliverance by the angel, conveyed intelligence to Sarah that the sacrifice was actually performed; which news speedily proved fatal to her. As if the oppressive weight of one hundred and twenty-seven years did not sufficiently account for the death of a frail woman, without the necessity of a preternatural interposition.

Affecting change! The eyes of Abraham himself cannot now endure to look upon her, whom once he shuddered to think that the eyes of another should behold with too much desire; and he is now as eager to bury her out of his sight, as be formerly was to retain the possession of her wholly to himself. Let the beautiful and the vain, the gay, the admired, and the flattered, think of this and be humbled. The latter end of her life, however, is better than the beginning. Tormented with the unaccomplished desire of having children, subjected to all the hardships of a pilgrimage state, and stung with the keen pangs of jealousy, almost up to her ninetieth year, life at length subsides into a delightful calm of thirty-seven years more, cheered and cherished by the unabated affection of her beloved lord, and blessed with the progress and accomplishments of the son of her womb, Isaac, the favorite of God and man. But she must finally make one remove more; not to that country from which she came out, but to that land “from whose bourne no traveler returns.” A partaker as of the fortunes, so of the faith of Abraham, she sees the promises afar off, is persuaded of them and embraces them; desires and looks for another country, that is, an heavenly.

God had promised to Abraham and his seed the possession of Canaan, and lo, it commences in the purchase, at their full value, of a little field and a cave, for a burying place. He had been threatened with a severe stroke in the demanded sacrifice of Isaac, he is made to feel one in the loss of Sarah. The mellowed friendship of so many years, and union cemented at last by so dear a

pledge, could not be dissolved without pain. Abraham is sensible of his loss, and bewails it. His religion is not of that sort which values itself on doing violence to nature; he knows nothing of that vain philosophy which affects to deny what it feels: neither has an old age of one hundred and thirty-seven years extinguished in the heart those tender emotions, which the deprivation of an object, once fair, and ever dear, naturally excites. He who does not weep on such an occasion as this, is something more or less than a man. But to persevere in bewailing the dead, to the neglect of our duty to the living, is both folly and impiety. Abraham's sorrow encroaches upon none of the valuable principles of a good mind. His whole conduct in the purchase of the field of Ephron the Hittite, and the cave of Machpelah, exhibits a soul replete with the most amiable and respectable virtues. Tender and affectionate, he is desirous of honoring in death the remains of what he prized in life. Noble-minded, generous, and independent, he refuses to show respect to the memory of Sarah with that which cost him nothing. Civil and polite, he repays the courtesy of his neighbors with affability and condescension. Scrupulously just and honest, he will give nothing less than the full price, and in full tale, weight, and purity, for what was frankly tendered him as a gift. The dialogue of the twenty-third chapter is a masterly picture of the beautiful simplicity of ancient manners, and exhibits a strife of unaffected kindness, good-nature, and civility, which at once pleases and instructs. Let me beseech you to peruse it carefully when opportunity offers. Would to God such contentions were more frequent in the world. The purchase is made, the price is paid, possession is made sure, and then was Sarah buried. And thus, first, Abraham became seized of the land of promise. So differently does Providence shape events from our preconception of them.

It is worthy of observation, that this is the first money transaction which we read of in the world. Till then, and long after, both among the posterity of Abraham and other nations, wealth was estimated by the number and quality of cattle; and cattle were the principal instruments of commerce--Thus we read in many places of Homer, of a coat of mail worth an hundred oxen; a caldron worth twenty sheep; a cup or goblet worth twelve lambs; and the like. The words belonging to commerce or exchange of commodities, in the Greek language, are mostly derived from the names of certain animals, by means of which that exchange was originally carried on. Thus the word itself which signifies to truck or commute one kind of goods for another, is derived from that which signifies a lamb;[*]Arnusthai-arnos the verb which is translated to sell, comes from the noun, which translated signifies a colt or young horse.[*]Poolein-poolos the Greek word, which in our language is to buy, comes from that which signifies an ass:[*]Ooneisthaionos the term that denotes rent or revenue, and that which signifies a sheep, are of kindred composition and import.[*]Probmasis-Probaton A criminal, according to the magnitude of his guilt, was condemned to pay a fine of four, twelve, or an hundred oxen.[*]Timeema tessaraboion, doodekaboion, ekatomboion. A wealthyperson is called a man of many lambs.[*]Poluarnos Two rival brothers are represented in Hesiod, as fighting with each other about the sheep of their father; that is, contending who should be his heir. But even so early as the time of Abraham, we find silver employed as a more commodious mean of traffic; and the concurrence of all civilized and commercial nations to this day, in employing the precious metals for this purpose, is a proof how early men learned the wisdom of this world; and discovers to us, how readily they invent, how accurately they reason, and how prudently they act, in matters that are conducive to their temporal interest and advantage. But to return-- By the death of Sarah, the care and anxiety about the dear object of their common affection becomes naturally much increased to the surviving parent. Isaac was now arrived at man's estate, and it is fit that the heir of the promise should be established in a

family of his own. For how are the promises of God brought into effect, but by the intervention of the means which nature and Providence have appointed! Abraham, with the solicitude of a good father, is desirous of matching his son, rather prudently and piously, than nobly or wealthy. In these days of simplicity and nature, the partner for life was sought after, not for the largeness of her possessions; but gold, and silver, and jewels, were employed to court beauty and virtue to their proper sphere of importance and usefulness in life. Abraham judges it unwise to marry his son into a Hittite family, because they had deviated from the worship of the true God. He could esteem their hospitality, kindness, and civility, as they deserved, without falling in love with their religion. And he who cannot make this distinction must either be unfaithful to God or unfriendly to man. Affecting view of the corruption and degeneracy of human nature! that Isaac, the son of faithful Abraham, should be deemed in greater danger of being perverted by an idolatrous wife, than that a woman of Canaan should be converted to the worship of the living and true God, by a believing husband.

Isaac, it would appear, devoted to retirement and contemplation, little attached himself to the concerns of this life; the management of his affairs and his settlement in the world, he leaves to the wisdom of his father, and the fidelity of an ancient domestic. The journey of that servant into Mesopotamia, and the success of it, belong more properly to the history of Isaac. As far as Abraham is concerned in it, we behold a holy man acknowledging God in all his ways, and making the ordinary concerns of life a religious service: and we see God, in return, directing every step to a happy issue.

Having seen his beloved son settled entirely to his satisfaction, he enters again himself into the honorable state of marriage, and is blessed in it by a progeny of six sons and ten grandchildren born in his life time. In order to prevent strife after his death, as far as human sagacity and foresight could do it, and knowing that property is the great source of contention among men, he settles his worldly affairs, bequeathing the great bulk of his fortune to Isaac, the son of his first and principal wife; following in this the destination of Providence, and fulfilling the condition of the covenant under which Rebekah was induced to become Isaac’s wife. He makes a suitable provision for the younger branches of his family, and sends them, by dint of his paternal authority, into a distant part of the country, where he yet lived, that the quiet and peaceable temper of Isaac might not be exposed to disturbance and trouble, from the neighborhood of ambitious, violent, or avaricious brothers, after his death. That fatal period at length overtakes him also, and he comes to the grave, “like as a shock of corn cometh in his season,” in a good old age, “an old man, and full of years,” at the age of one hundred three score and fifteen. A life shorter by far than any we have hitherto studied, but much fuller of incidents and events. A life checkered with uncommon trials, and blessings as extraordinary. A life distinguished by the most brilliant virtues which adorn human nature, but not wholly exempted from its frailties and infirmities. Abraham purchased a grave for Sarah. Alas! he was only providing a habitation for himself! How short, how unimportant the distance between the funeral rites which we prepare, and those which are prepared for us! But can this be all that God intended to bestow upon our patriarch by promises so lofty, conveyed in language so solemn? Was it for this he was called to leave his country and his father’s house? Did vision upon vision, covenant upon covenant, promise upon promise, conduct only to a little cave in Hebron? Was the favor of the Almighty, the all bountiful Jehovah, expressed to the man whom he dignified by the title of his friend, only by such things as are the common gifts of his providence to

all, and which are often bestowed on the vilest and most worthless of mankind? If the grave were to terminate the existence of man, such questions would be indeed of difficult solution. But the difficulty of them scatters and disperses before one word of God, spoken three hundred and thirty years after the patriarch's death, even to Moses at the bush in Horeb. I am the God of Abraham. His relation to God was as entire three centuries after his body was consumed in dust in Machpelah, as when he was entertaining angels in Mamre, or sacrificing upon Mount Moriah. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." To Him, and for Him, and with Him, now live the faithful of all past ages; and precious is their very dust in his sight. Judge nothing then before the time, till the day come which shall unfold the purpose of Heaven, which shall clear up the mystery of Providence, and fully vindicate the ways of God to man.

It appears that some intercourse between Ishmael and his father's family had been kept up; for we find him apprized of Abraham's death, and assisting at his funeral. He must be a wild man indeed, not to have been tamed, at least into a temporary sorrow, by such an event, and melted into forgetfulness of all past resentments, by the death of a father. Providence wisely produces this good effect, by the common calamities wherewith families are visited; they tend to reconcile the alienated, they extinguish bitterness and strife, they rekindle the dying embers of filial duty and brotherly love. Isaac and Ishmael, men of different natures, of opposite interests, rivals from the womb, forget all animosity, and mingle tears over a father's tomb.

It remains, in conformity to our plan, that we point out in a few particulars, the resemblance betwixt Abraham and Christ, that we may see wherein the former typified the latter.

Abraham, at God's command, leaving his country, and his father's house, points to us obviously, Jesus, at the fullness of time, leaving heaven's glory and the bosom of the Father, and coming into our world and living a pilgrim and a stranger in it. Abraham, in a land which was his own by the gift and promise of God, nevertheless obtained no fixed residence in it, but wandered about from place to place; Jesus, in a world which he made and upholds, which is his by the most undeniable title, was without a place where to lay his head. Abraham was called the friend of God, and to him God communicated his purposes of mercy and of judgment; Jesus, the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, and knows intimately the mind of the Lord, he hath declared him. With Abraham God established the political covenants which secured to him and his family the possession of Canaan, and all the temporal and spiritual blessings of a transitory and preparatory economy; Jesus is the Mediator of a better covenant, established upon better promises; even the covenant of redemption, whereby the kingdom of heaven, and eternal life, are made sure to all his spiritual seed; for thus it is written of him, I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, thy seed will I establish forever, and build up thy throne to all generations;" and "according to his abundant mercy he hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." In Abraham we venerate the natural head of a great family, raised up, multiplied, preserved and distinguished by the hand of Providence to this day. Of Christ, "the whole family of heaven," and all the families of the earth "are named," "and he is before all things and by him all things consist." Abraham stands forth the typical representative, father, and pattern of believers; Christ is "the head of the body, the church," the real source of a spiritual and divine life to all them who believe.

Abraham's intercession in behalf of Sodom, and Christ's lamentation over Jerusalem, are a beautiful and striking counterpart to each other. The sacrifices which Abraham and Christ respectively offered up unto God, wonderfully illustrate and explain one another. But in the midst of so many marks of resemblance, who does not by a glance discern as many characters of dissimilitude; and an infinite superiority claimed by Him who "in all things must have the pre-eminence?" Who shall declare his generation, who saith of himself' "before Abraham was, I am?" Abraham was a man of like passions with us, and even the father of the faithful stumbled and fell; Jesus was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." and the prince of this world himself, when he came, found nothing in him. Abraham was ready to offer up Isaac: Christ actually offered himself "a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savor unto God." The faith of Abraham could not redeem him from death; the power of Christ triumphed over the grave. The first covenants, being of a temporary nature, having fulfilled their design, are passed away. The New Testament in the blood of Christ being for everlasting, continues in full force, and shall last while sun and moon endure, nay, when "all these things shall be dissolved." Being arrived at one of the great epochs in the history of the world, we shall just for a moment look back, and mark the link which connected this period with the flood, and even with the antediluvian world; giving you only names and dates for the sake of brevity. Shem the second son of Noah, and father of Arphaxad and of all the children of Heber, to whom the family jewel, that is, the promise of the Messiah, was committed, who saw two of the great calamities of the world and outlived them, the deluge, and the confusion of languages, and who lived no doubt to see and rejoice in Abraham and Isaac as the heirs of the promise; Shem, I say, is the great link of these two eras of the world. For, he lived before the flood ninety-eight years, and after it five hundred and two; of consequence he died only twenty-five years before Abraham. His life accordingly may be calculated thus, with regard to the great persons and events with which he was connected. Before the flood, he lived ninety-eight years. After the birth of his own son Arphaxad, five hundred. After the death of Arphaxad, sixty-one. After the death of Noah, one hundred and fifty-two. After the confusion of tongues, three hundred and forty-eight. After the death of Sarah, thirteen. Before the birth of Jacob, ten. Before the birth of Moses, two hundred and seventy-five. When Abraham was one hundred and fifty years old, Isaac fifty, and before the descent into Egypt, one hundred and forty. The chronology of Abraham's life, according to the Scripture account, stands thus. He died in the one hundred and seventy-fifth year of his age, and of the world, two thousand one hundred and eighty-three. Before the birth of Christ, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-one. After he discomfited and slew Chedorlaomer, and the other kings, ninety-one. After the intended sacrifice of Isaac, fifty. After the death of Sarah, thirty-eight. After his marriage with Keturah, thirty-five. After the death of Shem, twenty-five. Before the descent into Egypt, one hundred and fifteen. When Isaac was seventy-five years old; Esau and Jacob, fifteen; Ishmael, eighty-nine, and Heber his great grandfather, from whom the name of Hebrew comes, four hundred and sixty. "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise," and when he gave up the ghost, was buried in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, by his sons Isaac and Ishmael. And thus, my dear friends, we have, through the help of God, finished the first part of the plan of these Lectures. And the season of interruption and separation being now come, permit me, with a heart overflowing with affection and gratitude, to return you my sincere thanks for your regular attendance and patient attention. You were invited hither with much humility and diffidence; you have come hither with much alacrity and steadiness,

and you must not depart hence, without bearing along with you the grateful acknowledgments of the Lecturer. He has the consolation of believing, that as neither he, nor his undertaking, are the creatures of party, or of human system, nor aim at any interests but those of virtue, good sense, and religion; so they have been encouraged by wise and good men of various sects and denominations. He humbly hopes he has interfered with the happiness, fame, or usefulness of no good man whatever. If he has led any one to read the Bible more carefully, to trace the connection betwixt the Old and New Testament characters, institutions, and events more accurately; to trace the ways of Providence more closely; or to feel the powers of a world to come sensibly, verily he has his reward. But he affects not fastidiously to undervalue some considerations of inferior importance; he dwells with secret delight on the disinterested attachment and generous services of his private friends; his heart glows at the public marks of regard he has received; and the temporal emolument arising from his labors, he receives with much thankfulness to you, and to that kind Providence, which is pleased to smile upon another effort to rear up a numerous family. May the kindness you have shown the preacher, return a thousand fold upon your own heads. The God of love be with you all. Amen.

Chapter 20

020. Isaac to Moses: Volume II

Isaac to Moses

Volume II

021. The Patriarchs Live

The Patriarchs Live

Zec 1:5-6. Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? And they returned and said, Like as the Lord of Hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.

Reflections upon the shortness of human life, and the uncertainty of sublunary enjoyments, naturally present themselves, in the various changes which we daily observe, and daily feel. But alas, our reflections are too superficial and transitory, to produce habitual superiority to the world, uniform submission to the will of God, and efficacious impressions of eternity. Wasting and decaying every hour, we form and prosecute schemes of futurity, as if “our strength were the strength of stones, and our bones brass.” Reasoning and reflecting as men, we live and act as children; and pursue the bauble of the moment, as if it were “the pearl of great price.” When the drama of human life is ended, and the curtain drops, lo, it has shrunk to a measure so small, and contains events of so little importance, that it is difficult to render a reason why man should have existed at all; and we are constrained to cry out with the Psalmist, “Verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity; surely every man walketh in a vain show; surely they are disquieted in vain.”[*]Psa 34:6-7 But my text greatly relieves this apparent insignificancy of our fleeting existence in this world, by conveying to us this important idea, that the Divine Providence is carrying on its great and wise designs, by feeble, short-lived and even worthless instruments. And the date of our latter end is wisely and mercifully hid from our eyes; and every man is taught to consider himself, his life, his actions, as of importance, that we may exert ourselves to the last, and “do with our might whatsoever our hands findeth to do.” Though our fathers are no more, and the prophets do not live for ever, yet the words and statutes which God commanded his servants the prophets, “took hold of our fathers, and they returned and said, Like as the Lord of Hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.” This leads us, in a direct road, to make a just estimate of the lives and actions of other men; and to consider seriously how we ought to order our own conversation, how we ought to spend our own days and years. In the preceding course of these Lectures we endeavored, beginning at Adam, and ending with Abraham, historically to delineate, and practically to improve, the lives of those venerable men, by whom the world was first peopled, instructed, and governed: and who, in their persons, by their actions, or the events which befell them, successively typified, or foretold to their contemporaries, the great Savior and Deliverer of the human race, during a period of more than two thousand years. By entering into the spirit of the prophet Zechariah, in the words now read, we shall be enabled to review that period with profit and delight. And this review shall serve to introduce the history of the other lives, which the sacred volume in succession, presents to our observation, and has sketched for our information and improvement. In Adam, we behold at once our natural first father, and our federal head: from whom, as men, our existence is derived, and by whose conduct our character has been deeply affected, and our state in some respects

determined. “Our father Adam, where is he?” he fulfilled his day, he accomplished the purposes of the eternal mind, he then fell asleep, and is now seen no more. But, however remote the date of his formation, and of his death; however distant from us the region in which he lived, however apparently unconnected with us in interest, in fame, or fortune, we are, we know, we feel ourselves deeply involved in what he was, in what he did. In Adam we all died; we all forfeited a natural, and lost a spiritual and divine life and, in Adam, we received the promises which have since been fulfilled, and to him first were opened prospects, which the course of Providence has realized, even the restoration of our fallen nature, by one “greater man,” who has regained for us seats more blissful than those from which by transgression he fell; namely, the “seed of the woman, who has bruised the serpent’s head.” Our first father, where is he? Lost indeed to us, but not to God. All traces of him, excepting those only which perpetuate the memory of his guilt and its woeful consequences, are effaced and forgotten; but his station before God remains unchanged, his importance undiminished. Dead to us, he lives to Him, with whom “a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years.” Can we meditate upon the first man who was created upon the earth, without rising in our thoughts to Him who created him out of the dust of the ground, and” breathed into his nostrils the breath of life? And who has of one blood formed all nations of men to inhabit upon the face of the whole earth.” Can we think of our father after the flesh; and not connect with him the idea of our Father who is in heaven? Is not the painful recollection of him in whom all died, happily relieved and done away by reflecting on the glorious second Adam, in whom an elect world is made alive? And O, how is the loss of an earthly paradise compensated by the promise of “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness;” that paradise of God, in the midst of which grows the tree of life, always blossoming, always bearing fruit, and exempted from the dangerous neighborhood of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Our brother Abel, where is he? Cut off in the bloom of life; fallen, fallen by the hand of a brother; but immortal by his faith and piety, qualities not liable to the stroke of death. “By faith he offered to God” an excellent and an acceptable sacrifice. In presenting the firstlings of his flock, he had a respect to the great Lamb of atonement, and thereby, “being dead, he yet speaketh.” Prematurely taken away, but not for a crime; “a victim to malice and envy, he typified Messiah, the Prince, cut off, but not for himself,” crucified and slain in the prime of life, by the impious hands of his nearest kindred. And, living under the influence of the same principle, we too shall become immortal, shall “endure as seeing him, who is invisible, and present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service.”[*]Rom 12:1 In the life, and more particularly in the exit of the patriarch Enoch, life and immortality were more clearly brought to light. Hitherto, men had terminated their earthly course by descending into the grave and seeing corruption. But, when we come to inquire concerning Enoch, “where is he?” The Scriptures reply, “By faith Enoch was translated, that he should not see death; and was not found; because God had translated him: for before his translation, he had this testimony that he pleased God.”[*]Heb 11:5 “He was not, for God took him.” Our thoughts here settle, not on the gloomy mansions of the dead, “the house appointed for all living,” but on the regions of eternal day, irradiated with the glory, and beautified with the presence of God. We rise in faith and hope to that bright world from which Christ descended, and to which, having finished his work, and achieved his victory, he afterwards reascended, leading captivity captive. And all who are partakers of the same precious faith, contemplate with joy that same mansion of everlasting rest, “prepared for them from the foundation of the world,” and “ready to be revealed in the last time,” when the body shall be

redeemed from the power of the grave, and the Savior, lifted up on high, shall, draw all men unto him." In Enoch, "walking with God," and passing immediately, soul and body, from earth to heaven, the world that then was, saw, in a figure, Him that was to come, whose meat and drink it was to do the will of his heavenly Father, and who has opened a passage, through the very gates of death, into the heavenly world, and that not for himself only, but for all who believe on his name, and who love his appearing. Enoch, our father, where is he? There, O my soul! there, O my Christian friend, where, through the grace that is in Christ Jesus, we have everlasting consolation, in the good hope of arriving also. O death, where is thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory! Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through Jesus Christ our Lord."[*]1Co 15:55;1Co 15:57

Advancing to the times of Noah, we behold the world first deluged with an over flowing flood of sin, and then with an inundation of waters. The measure of human iniquity full, and the vials of divine wrath filled in order to punish it, up to the brim, and poured out upon an impious generation, to its utter extinction and ruin. Nevertheless, a remnant is saved, and mercy rejoices in the midst of judgment. Animated by the same principle which inspired his venerable ancestors that principle which gave value to Abel's sacrifice, which strengthened Enoch to walk with God, and through which he was translated without tasting of death, Noah "prepared an ark for the saving of his house." The history and method of redemption, by the Lord Jesus Christ, are so clearly prefigured in every part of this wonderful event that he who runs may read them. Noah, "just man, and perfect in his generations;" Noah, who "walked with God," and was "preacher of righteousness;" Noah, who "warned of God of things not seen as yet and moved with fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his house," is evidently in all these characters and actions, a type of the Holy and Just One, whom the world despised and rejected; a type of "the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, and hath declared him" unto men; a type of the great "teacher sent from God," to warn a guilty devoted race to flee from the wrath to come, and to conduct them to a place of safety: a type of him, who, chosen of God, and moved by pity and affection, prepared a present refuge, and an everlasting habitation, for perishing sinners. Of Noah, his pious prophetic father, when he imposed his name, exultingly exclaimed, "This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord bath cursed:"[*]Gen 5:29 and, in the blessed Redeemer of mankind, all his pious, believing children, enjoy the prospect of a period, and a world, wherein "there shall be no more curse;" and on whom the eternal Father by the tongue of an angel, imposed the name of Jesus, because he should "save his people from their sins." Noah, our father, where is he? where is the man who was Enoch's contemporary, who conversed with the sages of the old world, who saw the globe one vast ocean, whom all the waters of a deluge could not drown, who received a grant of the whole renewed earth for an inheritance? All these successive changes led but to the grave, and we see him no more. "All the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years, and he died." Let the possessor of a continent think of this, and check his pride. Let florid, vigorous youth, think of three score years and ten. Let him who is rearing a mansion of one thousand feet by five hundred, meditate on one of six by two, and learn to die. The ark which Noah prepared for the saving of his house, where is it? It fulfilled its destination, it escaped the wreck of worlds, it preserved, and rendered up, its precious deposit, then fell into decay. It exists but in description, it has no form but what fancy has bestowed upon it in a picture, or upon a coin. But its fame, its use, its end, its antitype, are immortal. That magnificent vessel, not the contrivance of man, but the appointment of God; constructed according to the pattern, formed and prescribed by infinite wisdom; preserved in the wild uproar of conflicting elements, by the

almighty power of God;--resting at length on solid ground, and unloading its precious treasure without the loss of a single life--are so many successive, distinct, pleasing, and instructive views of the plan formed, followed, and, in due time, perfected, of man's deliverance from sin, and death, and hell, by the Lord Jesus Christ; who thus speaks of his redeemed, and of himself, in his last solemn address to his Heavenly Father, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me, I have kept, and none of them is lost;"[*]John 17:12 and in another place, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all: and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."[*]John 10:28-29 The emblems of the raven, the dove, the rainbow, the altar, the sacrifice, and others which enter into the history of this patriarch, are beautiful and significant illustrations of the same interesting, all-important subject. And the whole taken together, satisfyingly demonstrate, that if "death reigned from Adam to Noah," and the "offence abounded," yet "grace did much more abound;" and that out of the ruins of human apostasy, guilt and misery, the hand of Heaven was gradually rearing that glorious fabric of salvation, which, when completed, an enraptured universe shall contemplate with astonishment and delight. "This is the day which the Lord hath made: this is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes." The sight of the world restored, renewed, and blessed to Noah, the second father of the human race, leads us forward, borne on the wings of promise, to the still more magnificent prospect of the "restitution of all things;" to the day when he who sitteth upon the throne shall say, "Behold I make all things new;" when, according to his word, a new, more splendid, and more durable system of the universe shall arise under the plastic hand of the great Author and Finisher of the Christian faith, from the wreck of worlds consumed by fire; when Jesus shall bring all his ransomed ones to Zion, with "songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; when sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Sailing down the current of sacred history, the plains of Mesopotamia and Ur of the Chaldees appear in sight; and we behold an illustrious exile and his family, on their way from their country, kindred, and father's house, like the first pair expelled from Eden, ----All the world before them, where to choose

Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.

We behold Abram, at God's command, going out, "not knowing whither he went;" Abram, the respected father of all them that believe, raised up of Providence, in the same important view, to carry on the same grand design. In the declarations which were made to him, we behold the plan of redemption assuming a clearer and more distinct form; unfolding its nature, and arranging its several parts. The glorious person who was promised to Adam, immediately upon the fall, under the more obscure description of the "seed of the woman," who should "bruise the head of the serpent," was now announced to the world, as the "seed of Abram," in whom "all the families of the earth should be blessed." And henceforward we have prediction upon prediction, ordinance upon ordinance, promise upon promise, event upon event, leading to, rising above, improving, enlarging upon one another, like the light of the ascending sun, gradually increasing from the early dawn to the perfect day. We observe types, shadows, ceremonies, sacrifices, disappearing by little and little; patriarchs, priests, prophets, lawgivers, and kings, retiring one after another, and giving place to "the Lord, our Judge, our Lawgiver, our King, to save us:" as the twinkling fires of the night hide their diminished heads, and the vapors disperse before the glorious orb of day.

But, Abraham our father, whither is he also gone? Even the faith which surrendered an Isaac at God's command, and which has forever preserved his name from death, could not rescue his body from the power of the grave. It sleeps and is dissolved in the cave which was purchased from Ephron the Hittite. He had not a principle of life in himself, nor the power of communicating it, to either his natural or spiritual posterity. But the "words and the statutes, which God commanded him and his other servants the prophets, took hold of them," and continue to lay hold of us. In the midst of all this mortality and change, one thing is immutable and eternal, the word, the purpose, the decree of the Most High. "Heaven and earth may pass away, but it shall not pass away." Our father Abraham, where is he? Behold him in yonder world of bliss, with "Lazarus in his bosom," resting from all his own troubles; and cherishing the poor, the outcast, the afflicted, the tormented; enjoying "the end of his faith, the salvation of his soul," and waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of his body; "beholding him face to face, whom once he beheld afar off, and as in a glass darkly." Who is this that breaks in upon us at once in meridian glory? What bright day dazzles the wondering eye, preceded by no dawn, succeeded by no evening? It is Melchizedec, that "king of righteousness and peace," that priest of the most high God, whose generation none can declare, whose nature and person none is able to describe. Is he but as one of the prophets, or is he the Lord of the prophets himself, pronouncing the blessing which he alone can confer; celebrating in an early age, that eucharist, which should be the memorial of his office and glorious achievement, till time expire? In him, whatever he were, a type, or the son of God revealed; a shadow, or the substance; in him we behold the great leading object of Providence disclosed to our view; that priesthood which is unchangeable, that kingdom which shall never be destroyed, that Prince of peace, who has reconciled guilty men unto God, that righteousness through which we have access with humble confidence to the throne of grace. "Abraham rejoiced to see that day." It strengthened him to wait patiently for the promised seed; it cheered his wanderings from place to place; it fortified his heart to the sacrifice of his Isaac; it laid his hoary head with hope in the dust.

Having from this eminence surveyed the ground through which we have traveled; a delightful landscape, terminating in the distant hills of Eden, and watered by the fair river of Promise, meandering through its whole vast extent--we look forward, in hope and desire, to the happy plains where Isaac pitched his tent, and Jacob fed his flocks; to the nations which Joseph saved by his wisdom, and ruled by his power. And, in our intended progress, Eternal Spirit of Wisdom! vouchsafe thou to be our instructor and our guide: point out to us the objects which deserve our notice: enlighten thou our eyes, guard our hearts, direct the paths of our feet. What we know not, that do thou teach us, what we do know, help us wisely to improve. Following thee, "the crooked shall become straight before us, and the rough places plain. The sun shall not smite us by day, nor the moon by night. We shall go from strength to strength," after them who "inherit the promises, till every one of us also, in Zion, appeareth before God." Have you ground of pride and joy, my friends, in the acknowledgment or recollection of your forefathers? Were they wise and good; blessed in themselves, and a blessing to the world? Take care that ye degenerate not from their virtues, that ye dishonor not their name, that ye swerve not from "the good old way" of piety, in which they trode. Is there in the line of your ancestry, any circumstance humiliating and painful? Efface it, annihilate it, sink it, in a new existence, derived from a celestial stock. Change the tainted, corrupted current of an earthly pedigree, for the adopted honors, the gratuitous inheritance, the ennobled spirit of your Heavenly Father's love. Strive to be the first of your race;

and leave to your heirs a possession infinitely better than the demesnes of princes, even the savor of a good name, a pattern worthy of imitation, the remembrance of qualities which are not subject to the stroke of death.

You see, Christians, what is the leading, the commanding object, in the eye of eternal Providence. The salvation of a lost world by Jesus Christ. Adopt the same object, cleave unto it, keep it continually in view. All things else are vain and worthless; for they are passing quickly away. Our interest in, our hold of the world is diminishing every hour. Our consequence, as candidates for immortal bliss, as the heirs of glory, is rising in proportion. When we cease from importance, as the citizens of this world, our real importance begins to be felt and understood. I recommend not sullen distance from your fellow-creatures, nor peevish discontent. Live in the world, associate with mankind, enjoy your portion which God allotteth you. But “use the world so as not to abuse it;” and while you are cumbered about many things, never forget that one thing is needful; and make choice of that “good part which shall not be taken away from you.”

While we speak and hear, we change; and the hand of the executing angel hastens to number us with the dead. We are going to join the venerable men whose memory we revere, whose faith we profess to follow, whose virtues we are bound to copy. Yet a little while, and time shall be no more; and we shall be contemporary with our fathers who, have preceded, and with our children who are to follow us, until the dissolution of this system. We look back to Adam, the father of us all, and we look forward to his youngest son. We look up, and “see heaven opened, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.” We look around and behold “the nations of men that are saved” bending before the throne. We hear the Savior’s voice, “Here am I, and the children thou hast given me.” We hear the word of the Eternal Father proclaiming aloud; and the myriads of an assembled universe, angels and men, joyfully echo it back, “All is good, yea, very good.” Amen. Hallelujah!

Chapter 22

022. Isaac--Blessed by God

Isaac--Blessed by God And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac: And Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi.--Gen 25:11.

Those scenes in human life which make the greatest figure in history, are far from being the most beneficial to mankind; neither were the persons, whose names have been transmitted to us with the most renown, and whose actions have dazzled posterity with their luster, either the happiest in themselves, or the greatest blessings to the age in which they lived. To make one man a hero, how many garments must have been dyed in blood? And what are the acclamations of a triumph, but the miserable echo of the cries of the wounded, and the groans of the dying?

We are this night to trace the history of a man of peace: the history of one, who was not indeed exempted from his share of the ills which flesh is heir to, but whose afflictions, being private and domestic, were patiently borne by himself, and disturbed not the repose of others; the history of one, who, by the example of his piety and virtues, did more to instruct and to bless mankind, than all the conquerors which ever existed, from Nimrod of Assyria, down to Frederic of Prussia. The life of Isaac, for seventy-five years of it, is blended with that of his illustrious father. For though, upon the face of the narration, the birth of Esau and Jacob does not appear till considerably after the death of Abraham, yet, by comparing dates, we find that the lads must have been fifteen years old when their grandfather died. And we may justly consider it as no slight trial of the faith both of the father and son, that Isaac the heir of the promise, should live twenty years childless, from his marriage with Rebekah. But their patience of hope, their importunity of prayer, and their confidence of faith, are at length rewarded by two sons at once.

I mean not to recapitulate the extraordinary circumstances of Isaac’s conception and birth, as they have already been considered in the history of Abraham. We shall only take up those particulars of his story which are more personal and peculiar; in which Isaac himself was either an agent or a sufferer. And, we find him at an early period indeed, feeling distress and suffering persecution. The day he was weaned, how was the festivity of that joyful occasion embittered to his childish, innocent heart, by the cruel taunts and mockings of his brother Ishmael! It is remarkable that almost all, at least the severest trials which this patriarch endured, arose from his nearest and dearest relations. Hated and scorned from the womb, by his brother; devoted in sacrifice of his father; called early to mourn the loss of his affectionate mother; afflicted for twenty years with the barrenness of his only and beloved wife; vexed from their very conception, with the strife of his jealous sons, struggling for superiority; mortified and grieved to the heart, with the inconsiderate, unwise, idolatrous marriages of his favorite Esau; practiced upon, and deceived in old age and blindness by the address and cunning of his wife, and younger son; involved in quarrel upon quarrel with his powerful neighbors, through the rashness and contentiousness of his servants: never faulty, yet throughout unfortunate. Indeed a man’s liableness to distress and disappointment is in exact proportion to the number and quality of the good things which he possesses. Do we enjoy peculiar delights? We are on the brink of danger. At the partiality of Sarah to such a son as

Isaac, we need not be at all surprised. It is pleasant to observe, however, that this partiality neither corrupted his understanding nor his heart. Neither the indulgence which he met with, nor the prospects to which he was born and brought up, seem to have rendered him, on any occasion, insolent or assuming. And maternal fondness met with its dearest, best reward, in filial duty and tenderness. Sarah lived respected, and died lamented, by her only and beloved son. In reviewing the sacrifice of Isaac, that I may not encroach on your time, I shall only make this remark--that this memorable transaction was not less a proof of the faith of Isaac, than of Abraham himself. As the obedience of the father was prompt and cheerful, so was that of the son. If the resignation of Abraham merits praise, the submission of Isaac claims no less; for his consent must undoubtedly have been obtained. In both it was “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, and a reasonable service;” and the blessing pronounced from heaven on that occasion, applied to both, equally and in the same manner. The next important event of Isaac’s life, upon the sacred record, is his marriage. Swallowed up of sorrow for the loss of his mother, or absorbed in devout meditation, he leaves all concern about his future fortunes, and establishment in the world, to the care and wisdom of his father. And he thereby reproves the forwardness and self-sufficiency of our young men, who presume to think for themselves in every thing before they have learned to think at all; who attempt the works of men with the knowledge and the strength of children. In the various particulars of this transaction, we have a beautiful and interesting picture of the simplicity of ancient manners and customs. Is it not a custom rather ancient and obsolete, to see all parties piously acknowledging God, upon such an occasion as this? Is it not rather uncommon to see a prudent father, anxious to match his only son with virtue and religion, not with rank and affluence, to the endangering of his moral and religious principles! With us, the most valuable accomplishments, whether bodily or mental, go for nothing, unless set off with gold; but Rebekah, without a dowry, was with jewels and gold courted to the arms of Isaac. Has the female heart alone in all ages been the same; perpetually accessible to the allurements of finery, presents, and praise! Where shall we now look for servants such as Abraham’s, at once affectionate to his master, faithful to his trust, and filled with reverence to his God. This part of the history is an excellent commentary upon that injunction of the wise man, “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”[*]Pro 3:6 Abraham’s servant has hardly finished his address to heaven, when lo, Providence which works unseen, unknown, unobserved by us, has brought the subject of his prayer already to his eye. And in what place, in what employment is the destined bride of Isaac found! Indolently reclined under a canopy of state, or issuing forth to breathe the evening air, accompanied by a numerous and splendid retinue of domestics! No, my fair hearers, look at Rebekah, beautiful, and young, and high born, bearing her pitcher on her shoulder to the well, to draw the evening’s water for the family--and learn, that the humble, yet useful employments of domestic life, are a virtuous woman’s most honorable station; that whether in virginity, wedlock, or widowhood, God and nature have destined you to occupations, not perhaps highly honorable in the eyes of unfeeling wealth, or giddy dissipation, but highly consequential to the happiness of others, and therefore essential to your own. Look yet again to Rebekah, and learn affability, and kindness, and condescension--learn at once to perform your duty, and to promote your interest. It suits the early bloom of life, it suits your sex, it is congenial to your natural propensities, to be gentle, to be courteous; and, believe me, it is equally conducive to your honor and advantage. The obliging deportment of Rebekah to the servant, paved the way to her advancement to the rank of his mistress. And can you think the dignity of Isaac’s future wife in the smallest degree impaired,

by her civilities to his servants, or by her humanity to the poor dumb brutes which followed him! Believe me, an insolent, unfeeling, uncomplying young woman, is an odious, contemptible, unnatural--a monstrous thing. Look at Rebekah yet once more, my beloved daughters, and learn openness, frankness, sincerity. Was she deficient in virgin modesty, that most attractive of all female graces, if, when asked, “wilt thou go with this man!” she ingenuously replied, “I will go.” No; but the honest simplicity of nature was not then corrupted and disguised by modes of behavior, the beggarly refinement of modern education. Then, what the heart and conscience dared to avow, the cheek blushed not at hearing, the tongue scrupled not to utter. I cannot yet cease to speak of that sweet, that amiable creature. Mark again, I beseech you, as she approaches her destined lord, how female delicacy, how maiden diffidence and reserve, resume their empire! “She alighted off the camel, she took a veil and covered herself.” And where, and how was Isaac found of his fair spouse! He had gone out “to meditate, or to pray in the field at the even-tide.” This is the leading, prevailing lineament in the good man’s character: a heart turned to devotion, an eye continually directed to wards heaven. Meditation and prayer are the proper improvement of all mercies past, and the best preparative for mercies yet expected; a cordial balm for the woes which we already endure, and an infallible antidote to the poison of those evils which we have yet to fear. What is not to be hoped for, from an union built on such a foundation? The fear and love of God on both sides; calmness, wisdom, fidelity, and affluence on the part of the husband; humility, decency, meekness, frankness, and discretion on the part of the wife; a mutual desire of pleasing, and of being pleased. “Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.”[*]Gen 24:67 So wisely and so graciously hath God provided a suitable relief from every human calamity. And thus Providence prepares us, in one form of the school of relative duty, for a higher and a higher still, till we have filled every station with some degree of comfort and of credit. The transition from a dutiful and affectionate son, to a kind and indulgent husband, is natural and easy. And here, my young friends, you are furnished with a plain, but important rule, for forming the great choice of life. Is an undutiful child likely to make a good husband or wife? Have I reason to expect that one who has violated the first law of nature, of morality, of religion, will fall at once, and without preparation, into the more complicated and more difficult duties of the conjugal state? But what lot of humanity is free from anxiety, free from disappointment, free from pain! The heir of Abraham’s wealth; but what signifies Abraham’s wealth! The heir of the promise goes childless. Who is so foolish as to look for perfect happiness in a world of vanity, in a valley of tears? Those to whom the blessing of children is denied, are fretful and discontented; and those on whom it is bestowed, are in terror, anxiety, and vexation every hour. Happily, I hear of Rebekah’s suggesting no dangerous, no unwarrantable expedient as a remedy for this sore evil; and holy Isaac thinks of seeking relief there only, where he was accustomed to seek, and to find the cure of all his ills. “Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the Lord was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said unto her, two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels: and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the other.”[*]Gen 25:21-23 He asked a child, and his prayer is answered by the gift of two sons. And thus Providence, often slower than our wishes and desires, frequently compensates that delay by greatly outdoing our requests and expectations. But to again how care and sorrow arise out of our greatest comforts! The children

are hardly conceived when their strife begins; and Isaac has as much reason to entreat the Lord, that his wife might be spared in the pangs of an unnatural labor, as he formerly had, that she might be delivered from the infelicity of barrenness. Indeed, “who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow!” But this we know, “that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”[*]Rom 8:28 The strife which thus began in the womb, becomes visible at the birth, and continues through life: nay, is transmitted to posterity. The remark of the fanciful and ingenious bishop Hall on the passage, is to this purpose. “Before Rebekah conceived she was at ease: so before spiritual regeneration, all is peace in the soul: but no sooner is the new man formed in us, but the flesh conflicts with the spirit. There is no grace where there is no unquietness. Esau alone would not have striven; for nature will ever agree with itself. Never any Rebekah conceived only an Esau, or was so happy as to conceive none but a Jacob: she must be the mother of both, that she may have both joy and exercise. This strife began early: every true Israelite begins his war with his being. How many actions which we know not of, are not without presage and signification. In this contest, Esau got the right of nature, Jacob of grace: yet that there might be some pretence of equality, lest Esau should outrun his brother into the world, Jacob holds him fast by the heel, so his hand was born before the other’s foot. But because Esau was some minutes the elder, that the younger might have better claim to that which God had promised, he buys that which he could not win. If either by strife, or purchase, or suit, we can attain spiritual blessings, we are happy. Had Jacob come out first, he had not known how much he was indebted to God for his advancement.” Thus far the bishop. And thus, at the age of threescore years, and after twenty years from his marriage with Rebekah, Isaac became the happy father of two hopeful sons. And here, the expiration of your time obliges me to interrupt this story. But I must not conclude the Lecture till I have, in a very few short hints, endeavored to show you the analogy of Isaac the son of Abraham, and Jesus Christ the son of God.

They were both raised up for one and the same purpose; even to manifest the mercy and love of God to fallen men; the one as the bright and morning-star to usher in the day, the other as the meridian sun, “traveling in the greatness of his strength.” Isaac, the natural root and progenitor of Christ: Christ, the spiritual author, root and head of Isaac. Isaac was the son of much expectation, the subject of many prophecies. The set time of his birth was determined and foretold by almighty Power, by unerring Wisdom, long before it happened; thus the birth of Christ, the desire of all nations, was announced to the world by a cloud of witnesses, not years, but ages, centuries, many centuries before the time. The time, the place, all the circumstances attending it, were written as with a sun-beam, so as to render mistake impossible. Both Isaac and Christ were conceived out of the usual course of nature, that the finger of God might be seen and acknowledged in both events; Isaac of a mother beyond the natural possibility of having children, Jesus of an immaculate virgin. Isaac was early hated and persecuted of his brother, the son of his own father; and the persecution of Jesus from the sinful world he came to save, began at his birth, continued through the whole of his life, and issued in a shameful, painful, and accursed death. “He came to his own and his own received him not. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” But what was seen in the mountain of the Lord, forms the closest resemblance, and affords the sublimest instruction. In the sacrifice on Mount Moriah, we behold the father and son like-minded in presenting it cheerfully at the command of God. Abraham withheld not his son, his only son, and Isaac voluntarily surrendered himself, as a lamb, for a burnt

offering. And on Mount Calvary what do we behold! “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”[*]John 3:16 “God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, and how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”[*]Rom 8:32 And Jesus gave himself for us, “a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savor unto God.” He “loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood.” Here also the Father and Son like-minded, and in the same view, and for the same end, the redemption of an elect world. “O the height and depth, the length and breadth, of the love of God: it passeth knowledge!” The private personal character of Isaac, a man of calmness, contemplation, and peace; the dutiful son of his affectionate mother; the respectful observer of his father’s will, might, without doing violence to the subject, be brought into comparison with the pure and perfect character of his antitype, whose spirit nothing could discompose, whose nights were spent in prayer, and his days in doing good; “whose meat and drink it was to do the will of his Heavenly Father, and to finish his work,” and whose dying breath uttered the accents of filial affection, and provided a son, a protector, and a home, for his desolate, afflicted mother. O the glorious excellency of that character, which exhibited the example of every personal, every relative virtue which comprised the essence of all that is amiable in every other character, and left all created goodness at an infinite distance behind! Look to Isaac and be instructed. Look to Jesus and “grow in grace,” and go on towards perfection, and “press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” The next Lecture, with the divine permission, will contain the remaining part of the life of Isaac, from the death of his father to his own. May God communicate saving knowledge to us all, by every mean of instruction: and to his name be praise in Christ. Amen.

023. Isaac--A Man of Worship

Isaac--A Man of Worship

Gen 26:23-25. And he went up from thence to Beer-sheba. And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father; fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed, for my servant Abraham s sake. And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.

It is a pleasing and an instructive view of the Divine Providence, to consider one and the same great design as carried on to maturity, in periods and by persons the most remote from each other, without communication of intelligence, without concurrence or exertion among themselves; to behold the great God molding, guiding, subduing the various passions, purposes, and private interests of men to his own sovereign will; to behold the building of God rising in beauty, advancing towards perfection, by the hands of feeble workmen, who comprehend not the thousandth part of the plan which they assist in executing, and who, instead of cooperating, frequently seem to counteract one another. One digs his hour in the quarry; another lifts up his axe, and strikes a stroke or two in the forest; a third applies the square and the compass to the stone which his neighbor had polished. But their labors, their views, their abilities, however different, all promote the same end; and though they and their endeavors be frail and perishing, the work in which the Almighty employs them is progressive, is permanent, is immortal.--Here a shepherd, there a king; here a little child, there a sage; here a legislator, there a conqueror; here a deluge, there a conflagration, fulfills the design of high Heaven; and the glorious fabric of redemption rises and rises, though patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles sink, one after another, into the dust. Man often begins to build, but is unable to finish, because he had not counted the cost; but God "seeth the end from the beginning." He can never want an instrument, who has heaven, earth, and hell at his disposal. "Surely, O Lord, the wrath of man shall praise thee," Satan is thy chained slave, and "ten thousand times ten thousand mighty angels minister unto thee." How then can thy aim be defeated? How can thy counsels fail? The personal characters of the three leading patriarchs of the house of Israel, differ exceedingly in many respects, and their manner of life differs as much, while their ruling principle is the same. The faith of Abraham, ardent and intrepid, was ever ready to encounter the most threatening dangers, to undertake the most difficult employments, and to render the most painful and costly sacrifices at God's command. The faith of Isaac, placid and contemplative, sought the happiness of communion with God in calmness and solitude, and satisfied itself with the secret, untumultuous delight of beholding his family built up, and the promises of God advancing to their accomplishment. The faith of Jacob, active and persevering, wrought upon and excited by the peculiarities of his ever-varying condition, supported a life of much bustle and industry, and surmounted disappointments and afflictions the most mortifying and oppressive. For it is the office of this divine principle, not to alter, to suppress, or eradicate the natural tempers and dispositions of men, but to guide, impel, or control them, in conformity to their proper destination.

Abraham, sensible of the ungovernable, encroaching spirit of Ishmael, of the numerous and pressing claims of his younger children, and of the gentle, yielding, unresisting nature of Isaac, had, with the prudent foresight of a good parent, made such a disposition of his temporal affairs in his life time, as was most likely to prevent contention and mischief after his death. Ishmael had been dismissed many years before, had already become the head of many numerous and powerful tribes, “twelve princes according to their nations,”[*]Gen 24:13-16 and from habit, inclination, and necessity, had contracted a fondness for a roving, erratic course of life. He had been brought into a transient connection with his brother Isaac, by an event which softens the most rugged and obdurate dispositions, the death of their common father; and their resentments, for a time at least, perhaps forever, are buried in the tomb of him to whom they owed their birth. But difference of interest, affection, and pursuit speedily separates them again. Ishmael betakes himself to his favorite occupations in the desert, and Isaac abides quietly in his tent, and tending his flocks, by the well Lahai-roi. The sons of Abraham by Keturah had been more recently removed, with a suitable provision, into a distant part of the country.[*]Gen 25:6 So that upon his father’s demise, Isaac found himself in the quiet possession of by far the greatest part of his immense wealth, but excluded from the society of those whom his own sweetness of temper and sense of duty, and the proximity of blood, would have led him to cultivate and cherish. And thus riches, the object of universal desire and pursuit, create more and greater wants than those which they are able to remove. By exciting envy, jealousy, and suspicion, they separate those whom nature has joined; friendship is sacrificed to convenience; and, to enjoy in security what Providence has given him, the unhappy possessor is constrained to become an alien to his own brother. We cannot refrain from bestowing, in this place, a posthumous praise upon Abraham, who, uninfected by the tenacity of old age and selfishness, cheerfully surrendered, while he yet lived, a considerable part of his property, in order to insure the future peace of his family, and wisely left his principal heir a poorer man, that he might leave him happier and more secure. How unlike those sordid wretches, who will scatter nothing till death breaks into the hoard; and who care not what strife and wretchedness overtake those who come after them, in the very distribution of their property, provided they can keep it all to themselves, were it but for one day longer!

Isaac had hitherto trusted every thing to the wisdom and affection of his kind father, and to the care of an indulgent Providence, even so far as to the choice of his partner for life. But his father being now removed by death, and his own children growing up fast upon him, he is under the necessity of arising and exerting himself. For the blessing of Providence is to be asked and expected, only when men are found in the way of their duty, and wisely employing lawful and appointed means of prospering. We accordingly find him, with the prudent sagacity of a good husband, father, and master, directing the removal of his family from place to place, as occasion frequently required; forming alliances with his powerful neighbors, for their mutual security; and presiding in the offices of religion, his favorite employment. And though Providence has deprived him of the counsel and protection of an earthly parent, he finds, in his happy experience, that the man whom God continues to protect and bless, has lost nothing. “Father and mother have forsaken him, but the Lord has graciously taken him up,” “hedged him round on every side,” and put the fear and dread of him into all the neighboring nations, who, though they envied, durst not hurt him. The distresses which embittered the remainder of Isaac’s life, were chiefly internal and domestic; and, alas! had their source in his own infirmity, namely, a fond partiality in favor of his elder son; the mischief of which was increased and kept alive, by a partiality, equally decided,

which Rebekah had conceived in favor of Jacob. “Isaac loved Esau because he did eat of his venison; but Rebekah loved Jacob.”[*]Gen 25:28 Most of the evils of a man’s lot may be easily traced up to some weakness in which he has indulged himself, some error into which he has fallen, some opportunity he has let slip, or some crime which he has committed. Of all the infirmities to which our nature is subject, none is more common, none is more unreasonable, unwise, and unjust, none more easily guarded against, none more fatal in its consequences to ourselves and others, than that of making a difference between one child and another. It destroys the favorite, and discourages those who are postponed and slighted; it sows the seeds of jealousy and malice, which frequently produce strife, and end in violence and blood. It sets the father against the mother, and the mother against the father; the sister against the brother, and the brother against the sister. It disturbed the repose of Isaac’s family, and had well nigh brought down Jacob’s hoary head with sorrow to the grave. Parents ought to examine, and to watch over themselves carefully on this head. If they are unable to suppress the feeling, the expression of it, at least, is in their power; and policy, if not justice, demands of them an equitable distribution of their affection, their countenance, and their goods. For, if there be a folly which, more certainly than another, punishes itself, it is this ill-judged and wicked distinction between equals. One is ashamed to think of the reason which is assigned for Isaac’s preference of his elder to his younger son, “Isaac loved Esau because he did eat of his venison.” The original language expresses it still more forcibly, “because his venison was in his mouth.” By what groveling and unworthy motives are wise and good men often actuated! And what a mortifying view of human nature is it, to see the laws of prudence, and justice, and piety, vilely controlled and counteracted by the lowest and grossest of our appetites! It was not long before the effect of parental partialities appeared. A competition for precedency, and the rights of primogeniture, engaged the attention of the two brothers, and whetted their spirits against each other, from their earliest years. The pretensions of each were supported respectively by the parents according to favor, to the disregard of every maxim of good sense, and of the destination and direction of the Divine Providence.--Who it was that prevailed in this contention, and by what means, will be seen in the sequel.

While the family of the patriarch was thus torn with internal dissension, Providence was pleased to visit him with a grievous external calamity. “There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham.”[*]Gen 26:1 This, for a while represses animosity. Distress, common to all, teaches them to love one another; and instead of a struggle for presidency, the weightier concern, “Where shall we find bread?” now occupies their thoughts. This dispensation was probably intended as a reproof and correction to all parties. The parents were admonished of the folly of aiding and increasing the unavoidable ills of life, by willfully sowing discord among brethren. Esau, ready again to perish with want, is stung with remorse to think, that in one hasty impatient moment of hunger, he had sold, for the transient gratification of low appetite, what no penitence could undo, no money repurchase. And Jacob, feeling himself the cravings of hunger, was Chastised for taking an unkind advantage of his brother’s necessity; and, ready in his turn to perish, might be constrained to adopt the words of starving Esau, “behold, I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this birth right do to me.”[*]Gen 25:32 For, although God serves himself of the weaknesses and vices of men, he approves them not, nor will suffer them to pass unpunished.

Isaac, warned of God, removes not into Egypt, the land which had afforded his father shelter and subsistence in a similar storm, and which has often proved an asylum to the church; but retires to Gerar, one of the cities of Palestine, situated between Kadesh and Shur.[*]Gen 20:1 Abimelech was the prince who at that time reigned over the Philistines. The same person, according to Josephus, with whom Abraham had formed a connection so friendly,[*]Gen 20:14-15 and with whom, for that reason, Heaven now directed Isaac to sojourn, till the famine should be relieved. This conjecture of the Jewish historian, though not insupportable, from a physical impediment seems highly improbable; if we consider that seventy-five years have elapsed since Abraham resided at Gerar: and history furnishes few, if any examples, of reigns of so long continuance. It is more probable that Abimelech was then the general appellative name of the princes of that part of Palestine, as Pharaoh was that of the kings of Egypt. When we behold the patriarchs thus removing from place to place, a feeble, unwarlike, encumbered band, through nations fierce, envious, and violent, their safety is to be accounted for only from the restraining power of God over the hearts of men. The dreadful judgment of Sodom, where Lot dwelt; the blindness which punished the attempt to violate his guests, and the more tremendous destruction which avenged just heaven of their ungodly deeds, might operate powerfully, so far as these events were known and their memory was preserved, to overawe the neighboring nations, and to procure for Lot's family and kindred, the attention and respect which fear, if not love, inspires. And, as a proof of his supremacy, that God, "in whose hand the heart of the king is, and who can turn it which way soever he will," has frequently constrained the enemies of his church and people to be their friends and protectors. This repeated visitation of Canaan by famine, was a repeated trial of the patriarch's faith. The promise of a land, so frequently unable to sustain its inhabitants, could have little value in the eye of a worldly mind. But faith in God discerns the principal worth and importance of temporal blessings, in their being connected with, and representing spiritual objects; and examines events, not by their agreement with preconceived opinions, and extravagant expectations, but by their moral effects and consequences. A region uniformly and unfailingly plenteous, might betray its possessor into the belief that its fertility flowed solely from natural causes, and God might be forgotten and neglected. A year of scarcity is calculated to teach man his dependence, and to force him to implore "the blessing which maketh rich, and causeth the earth to yield its increase."

While he sojourned among the Philistines, Isaac falls into the same infirmity which dishonored his father in Egypt. Misled, by suspicion unworthy of an honest man, and tear unworthy of the friend of God, he violates sacred truth, and sins against his own conscience: for when interrogated concerning Rebekah, "he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife, lest, said he, the men of this place should kill me for Rebekah: because she was fair to look upon."[*]Gen 26:7 The criminality of this mistrust is greatly aggravated by the clearness and fullness of the heavenly vision, whereby he had been admonished to bend his course to the court of Abimelech. "And the Lord appeared unto him and said, Go not down into Egypt. Dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee: for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father. And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries: and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws."[*]Gen 26:2-5 Slight temptations frequently prevail, after trials more formidable have been successfully

resisted and overcome. The wise, therefore, will reckon no danger small, no foe contemptible, no condition perfectly secure. The faithful will learn to speak truth, to do good, to trust in the Lord, and fear nothing.

Virtue is not hereditary in families, it descends but in rarer instances; whereas frailty, alas! descends from every father to every son. Virtue is the water in the particular pool; vice the torrent in the river, which sweeps every thing before it. The moderation, honor, and good sense of Abimelech, are the severest imaginable reproof of the disingenuousness of the prophet,[*]Gen 26:9-11 and happily prevented the mischief, which Isaac, seeking by improper means to shun, had well nigh occasioned.

Under the protection and friendship of this prince, he has now obtained a settlement in the land; and by the blessing of Heaven upon his honest industry, he prospers and increases in the midst of difficulties. “Isaac sowed in the land, and received in the same year an hundred fold: and the Lord blessed him. And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew, until he became very great. For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants.”[*]Gen 26:12-14 But we are by no means to imagine, that worldly success is ever proportioned to promising means and favorable opportunities. “The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.” Some men’s sails seem to gather every breath of the wind: they get forward in spite of every obstacle. Others feel the tempest continually blowing in their faces. All things are against them, and though they set out with the fairest, most flattering prospects, unaccountably thwarted and disappointed, they “wax poor, and fall into decay.” Let not prosperity, then, be deemed an infallible proof of wisdom, or worth, or of divine favor. Neither let want of success be always derived from folly, or vice, or the curse of Heaven; for in this mixed, imperfect, probationary state, “time and chance happen to all men,” neither can a man tell “what is good for him all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow.”

Every temporal advantage has a corresponding infelicity. Isaac grew rich and great, but “the Philistines envied him.” And, “who can stand before envy!” That dark, malignant passion, prompted his surly, jealous foes to cut off one source of his wealth, “for all the wells which his father’s servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth.”[*]Gen 26:15 This was, in effect, to destroy the flocks and the herds. For without water, the cattle upon a thousand hills” are a poor, perishing commodity. Envy considers that as gained to itself which is lost to another: and not only delights in destruction, from which it hopes to draw advantage, but enjoys the mischief which it works merely for mischief’s sake. Envy will even submit to hurt itself a little, to have the malicious satisfaction of hurting another much. Abimelech himself; more liberal-minded than meaner men, grows at length weary of his guest, feels hurt at his growing prosperity, envies his greatness, and dismisses him with cold civility. “And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us: for thou art much mightier than we.”[*]Gen 26:16 Grandeur admits not of friendship; and friendship disdains to dwell with profligacy. Of all the men in a nation, the king is most certainly excluded from this blessing; and surely, his lot contains nothing to be once compared with it, or which can supply its want.

Isaac prudently gives way. He withdraws the hated object from before the eyes of envy, and leaving the city, pitches his tent in the valley of Gerar. Apprehending, he had a hereditary right to the wells of water which were his father’s, and which the Philistines had maliciously obstructed, he

digs again for them in the valley. And from respect to the memory of Abraham, as well as to keep alive the remembrance of the gracious interpositions of the Divine Providence in his behalf, he revives the ancient names by which the wells were distinguished. Particularly the name Beersheba, or, the well of the oath, is preserved, the memorial of the covenant ratified upwards of seventy years before, between the king of the Philistines and Abraham; and which was known by that name for many ages afterwards, as one of the extreme boundaries of the holy land. But the unrelenting jealousy of the Philistines pursues him from the city into the field. No sooner has he by industry procured for his family that important necessary of life, water, than the herdmen of Gerar, endeavored by violence to possess themselves of it. Isaac, fond of peace, chooses rather to recede from his just right, than to support it by force; and still retires, seeking relief in patience and industry. He finds himself still pursued by the pride and selfishness of his neighbors; but at length conquers by yielding. A victory the most certain, the most honorable, sand the most satisfactory. And the tranquility and ease of Rehoboth,[*]Room amply compensate the troubles and vexation of Esek[*]Contention and Sitnah.[*]Hatred Finally, to prevent as far as in him lay, every ground of quarrel, he fixes his residence at a still greater distance from Abimelech. “He went up from thence to Beer-sheba;” where feeling himself at home, after so many removals, he at once pitches his tent for repose, and builds an altar for religion; and the hatred and violence of man is lost and forgotten in communion with God. The expression, “he called upon the name of the Lord,” seems to import, that when his altar was built, it was consecrated to the service of God, with certain extraordinary solemnities; such as sacrifice, and public thanksgiving, at which the whole family assisted, and in which the holy man himself, the priest as well as the prince of his family, joyfully presided. His piety was speedily acknowledged and crowned with the approbation and smiles of his Heavenly Father. For, “the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father, fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and will multiply thy seed, for my servant Abraham’s sake.”[*]Gen 26:24 His meek and placid deportment, to, either with his increasing power and wealth, and the favor of Heaven so unequivocally declared, have rendered the patriarch so dignified and respectable in the eyes of the world, that the prince, who from an unworthy motive had been induced to treat him with unkindness, and to dismiss him from his capital, now feels himself impelled to court his friendship, and to secure it by a solemn compact. Abimelech considers it as no diminution of his dignity, to leave home, attended with the most honorable of his council, and the supreme in command over his armies, in order to visit the shepherd in his tent. The expostulation[*]Gen 26:27 of Isaac is simple and natural, and his conduct[*]Gen 26:30 exhibits a mind free from gall, free from resentment. The reply of Abimelech discloses the true motive of this visit. And we are not surprised to find, that fear has at least as large a share in it as love.[*]Gen 26:28-29 The worst of men find it to be their interest to live on good terms with the wise and pious: and good men cleave to each other from affection. The covenant being amicably renewed, and the oath of God interposed, and, “an oath for confirmation is an end of all strife,” the king of Gerar and his retinue return in peace, and leave Isaac to the retirement which he loved, and to that intercourse with Heaven, which he prized infinitely above the friendship of earthly potentates. And now, a delightful calm of eighteen years ensued, of which no traces remain to inform or instruct men, but which from the well known character of this patriarch, we may well suppose were spent in such a manner, as to be had in everlasting remembrance before God. At this period, his domestic tranquility was again cruelly disturbed, and, by his favorite son; who, in the fortieth year of his own life, that is, the hundredth of his father’s,

introduced two idolatrous wives at once, into the holy family. This was two great evils in one. It was being unequally yoked with infidelity; and carrying on a practice which has ever been and ever will be fatal to domestic peace. The daughter of a Hittite would naturally be disposed to interrupt the religious harmony which prevailed in Isaac's habitation, and two wives at once would, as certainly, be disposed to annoy each other, and to embroil the whole family in their quarrels. Isaac was well acquainted with the solicitude of his pious father on his own account, in the important article, marriage; and was conscious of a similar anxiety respecting the settlement of his sons. We may easily conceive, then, how he felt at this accumulated irregularity and imprudence of Esau. He was wounded there, where as a man, a father, and a servant of the true God, he was most vulnerable. To be neglected, unacknowledged in a matter of the highest moment to his comfort, by that son whom he had cherished with the fondest affection, and on whom he rested his fondest hopes; how mortifying to a father! But besides the holy descent was in danger of being marred by an impure heathenish mixture; and the minds of his grandchildren likely to be perverted from the knowledge and worship of the God of their fathers. Such is the ungracious return which parents often meet with, for all that profusion of tenderness and affection which they lavish upon their offspring; such their reward, for all their wearisome days, and sleepless nights. The ingrates dispose of their affections, their persons, their prospects, their all, in a hasty fit of passion; as if the father who brought them up with so much toil and trouble, as if the mother who bore them had no concern in the matter. The ungrateful, disorderly conduct of their elder son, and no wonder, was "a grief of mind to Isaac and to Rebekah."

Whether it was from the vexation occasioned by this event, from disease, from accident, or some natural weakness in the organs of sight, we are not informed, but we find Isaac, in the one hundred and thirty-fifth year of his life,--in a state of total blindness; and he was probably visited with the loss of that precious sense at a much earlier period. But forty-five years, at least, of his earthly pilgrimage were passed in this dark and comfortless state. All men wish to live to old age; but when they have attained their wish, they are apt to repine at the infirmities and the discomforts which are necessarily incident to it. They would be old; but they would not be blind, and palsied, and feeble. They would be old; but they would not be neglected, wearied of, and forsaken. They would be old; but they would not be practiced upon and deceived. But, old age certainly brings on all these, and many more inconveniences; and vain it is to dream of the benefit, without the care. We read but of one, that is Moses himself, whose "eye at the age of one hundred and twenty, was not dim, nor his natural force abated." This dark period of Isaac's life, containing many interesting and instructive particulars, will furnish matter for a separate discourse. In reviewing the past, we are under the necessity of again admonishing parents on that momentous article.--Impartiality in the distribution of their attention, their tenderness, and their property, among their children. The trifling circumstances of name, of personal likeness, of beauty and deformity, and the like, over which parents had little power, and the children none at all; and which in themselves have neither merit nor demerit, and are the objects of neither just praise nor blame, have been known to establish distinctions in families, which destroyed their peace and accelerated their ruin. Children unborn have often felt the dire effects of a silly nickname, imposed on a progenitor whom they knew not, and whose relation to them was thereby rendered a curse. Men are often deemed unfortunate, both by themselves and others, where they deserve to be reckoned unwise. They themselves do the mischief, and then wonder how it came about. They spoil their children, and then complain that they are so perverse. I know how difficult it is to bring up youth; how difficult to

bear an even hand between child and child, to counteract the bias of favor and affection, to conceal and disguise the strong emotions of the heart. But it is only the more necessary to be prudent, to be vigilant, to walk circumspectly," and, to ask "wisdom of God."

Chapter 24

024. Isaac--The Blessing of His Sons

Isaac--The Blessing of His Sons

Gen 27:1-5. And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son. And he said unto him, Behold, here am I. And he said, Behold, now I am old, I know not the day of my death. Now, therefore, take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison; and make me savory meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die. And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son: and Esau went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it.

There is a generous principle in human nature, which commonly disposes us to take part with the weakest. We feel an honest indignation at seeing weakness oppressed by might, honesty over-reached by cunning, and unsuspecting goodness played upon by selfishness and knavery. God himself feels the insults offered to the destitute and the helpless; declares himself “the judge of the widow, the protector of the fatherless, the shield of the stranger.” He aims his thunder at the head of him who putteth a “stumbling-block in the way of the blind and planteth a snare for the innocent.” And though, in the sovereignty of his power, and the depths of his wisdom, he is sometimes pleased to employ the vices of men to execute his purposes of goodness and mercy, he loves and approves only “whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report.”[*]Php 4:8 and the persons who love and practice them.

It is not the least profitable part of the study of both providence and Scripture, to trace the conduct of a righteous God in punishing the offender, though he has subdued the offence into a servant of his own will; chastening his children by a rod of their own preparing; tumbling the wicked into the pit which themselves have digged, and bringing backsliders again to himself, by making them to eat the bitter fruit of their own doings. Happy it is for the children of men, if their deviations from the path of rectitude meet their correction in a temporal punishment. But woe to that man, whom justice permits to thrive in his iniquity, and to grow hardened through impunity; whose retribution is deferred, till repentance can produce no change. Chastise me, O Father, as severely as thou wilt. Let me not fall asleep under my transgression, and thy hot displeasure.--Dispose as thou wilt of my body, my estate, my worldly comfort; but let my soul live before thee. Let me see my sin, and purge me thoroughly from it.

We are now to attempt the illustration of these reflections, from history. The life of Isaac may be divided into three periods. The first, containing seventy-five years, from his birth to the death of Abraham; during which, being under parental government, and of a meek, unaspiring disposition, his history is blended with, and included in that of his father. The second, commencing at his father’s death, and ending in his one hundred and thirty-seventh year: when it pleased God to visit him with extreme weakness, or total loss of eye-sight. This contains the space of sixty-two years, which may be termed his active period. To it succeeds a heavy period of forty-three years, up to

the day of his death. During which we see a poor, dark old man, at the disposal of others, moving in a narrow sphere; “knowledge” and comfort “at one entrance, quite shut out.” We behold a man, who, when “he was young, girded himself, and walked whither he would; but now become old, stretching forth his hands, and another girding him, and carrying him whither he would not.” This portion of his history, accordingly, is blended with, and swallowed up in that of his two sons. At the beginning of this period, we find Isaac sensible of his growing infirmities, feeling the approach of death, though ignorant of the day of it, and anxious to convey the double portion, the patriarchal benediction and the covenant promise, according to the bent of his natural affection, to his elder and more beloved son. He calls him with accents of paternal tenderness, and proposes to him the mingled gratification of pursuing his own favorite amusement, of ministering to his fond father’s pleasure, and of securing to himself the great object of his ambition and desire, the blessing, with all its valuable effects.

Behold of what importance it is, that our propensities be originally good, seeing indulgence and habit interweave them with our very constitution, till they become a second nature, and age confirms, instead of eradicating them. We find, the two great infirmities of Isaac’s character predominant to the last, a disposition to gratify his palate with a particular kind of food, and partiality to his son Esau. Time has not yet blunted the edge of appetite; and the eye of the mind, dim as the bodily organ, overlooks the undutifulness which had pierced a father’s heart, by unhallowed, inauspicious marriages with the Hittite; and Isaac discerns in his darling, those qualities only in which misguided affection bad dressed him out. Thus a strong and lively principle of grace may consist with much natural weakness.

Rebekah, equally attentive to the interest of her younger son, happened to overhear the charge which Isaac gave to Esau, and immediately, with the quickness of a female, determined, at all hazards, to carry a favorite point, she builds upon it a project of obtaining, by management and address, what she despaired of bringing about by the direct road of entreaty or persuasion. Unhappy it is for that family, the heads of which entertain opposite views, and pursue separate interests. One tent could not long contain two rival brothers, whose animosity was kept alive and encouraged by those whose wisdom and authority should have interposed to suppress it. It is affecting to think how little scrupulous even good people are, about the means of accomplishing what their hearts are set upon; how easily the understanding and the conscience become the dupe of the affections.--The apologists of Rebekah charitably ascribe her conduct on this occasion to motives of religion. She is supposed to be actuated throughout by zeal for supporting the destination of Heaven, “The elder shall serve the younger;” a destination which she observed her husband was eager to subvert. I am not disposed to refuse her, to a certain degree, the credit of so worthy a principle; for the piety of her spirit, on other occasions, is unquestionable. But I see too much of the woman, of the mother, of the spirit of this world, in her behavior, to believe that her motives were wholly pure and spiritual. Religion, true religion, never does evil that good may come.

Admitting that Isaac was to blame, for misunderstanding, forgetting or endeavoring to contradict the oracle which gave the preference to Jacob; surely, surely, it belonged to the wife of his youth to have employed other means to undeceive and admonish him. Was the deception which she practiced upon his helplessness and infirmity, the proof she exhibited of the love, honor, and obedience which she owed her lord? Was it consistent with genuine piety, to take the work of God

out of his hands? As if the wisdom of Jehovah needed the aid of human craft and invention. And, could a mother, not only herself deviate into the crooked paths of dissimulation and falsehood, and become a pattern of deceit, but wickedly attempt to decoy, persuade, constrain her own son, to violate sacred truth? “It is not, and it cannot come to good?”

Having planned her scheme, and over persuaded Jacob to assist in the execution of it, Rebekah loses not a moment; and Isaac’s favorite dish is ready to be served up, long before the uncertainty of hunting, and the dexterity of Esau could have procured it. Jacob, arrayed in goodly raiment of his elder brother, disguised to the sense of feeling, as much as art could disguise him, and furnished with the savory meat which his father loved, advances with trembling, doubtful steps to his apartment. In the conversation that ensued, which is most to be wondered at--the honest, unsuspecting simplicity of the father; or the shameless, undaunted effrontery of the son? But, in thinking of the one, our wonder is mingled with respect and esteem; the other excites resentment and abhorrence. It shows the danger of getting into a wrong train. One fraud must be followed up with another; one injury must support and justify another; and simple falsehood, by an easy progress, rises up to perjury. Who is not shocked, to hear the son of Isaac interposing the great and dreadful name of the “LORD God of his father,” not to confirm the truth, but to countenance and bear out a willful and deliberate lie! What earthly good is worth purchasing at such a price? Surely his tongue faltered when it pronounced those solemn, those awful words. The good old man’s suspicions were evidently alarmed, either by the tone of Jacob’s voice, or by the hesitating manner in which he spoke. And, apprehending he had an infallible method of detection, if a fallacy there were, he appeals from the testimony of his ears, to his feeling. But behold, craft is too deep for honesty. Rebekah and her son have not contrived their plot so ill, as to fail at this stage of the business; and Isaac is too good himself to imagine that others could be so wicked. He suffers himself, therefore, to be at length persuaded; and, refreshed with meat and drink, pronounces the blessing which he had promised. had he not been blinded, when he saw, with ill judged favor to Esau, and seduced by the flavor of his venison, he had not been exposed to this imposition, in his helpless state. Could Jacob have trusted in God, and waited to be conducted of Providence, he had arrived at his end no less certainly, and with much less dishonor. But “God is true, though every man be found a liar.”

It is worthy of observation, that though Isaac, by the spirit of prophesy which was in him, foresaw and foretold the future fortunes of his family; though he could clearly discern objects at the remotest distance, his natural discernment was so small, and even his prophetic knowledge so partial, that he could not distinguish the one branch of his family from the other; and, impelled by a will more powerful than his own, he involuntarily bestowed dominion and precedency where he least intended it. “For the prophesy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”[*]2Pe 1:21 Thus, Balaam afterwards prophesied, not what he would, but as the Spirit of God constrained him; and thus, Caiaphas predicted the death of Christ for the sins of the people; but “this spake he not of himself’; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation.”[*]John 6:51

Thus was Isaac deceived, in having Jacob imposed upon him for Esau. Nor was Rebekah less disappointed. For the blessing which she had surreptitiously obtained for her favorite, instead of producing the immediate benefits expected from it, plunged him into an ocean of distress, exiled him from his country and his father’s house, exposed him, in his turn, to imposition and insult; and,

but for the care of a superintending Providence, the success which he had earned by the sacrifice of a good conscience, must have defeated and destroyed itself. But “the counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.”[*]Psa 33:11 “His decree may no man reverse.” “The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God;” but the wisdom and righteousness of God, can easily bend the wrath of man to their purpose.

Jacob has hardly departed with his ill-gotten benediction, when Esau arrives in the triumph of success and hope; his heart overflowing with filial tenderness, and panting for the promised reward of his labors. The feelings of both the father and son, when the cheat was discovered, are more easily conceived than described: the shame of being over-reached, resentment against the impostor, the chagrin of disappointed hope, of disappointed ambition; bitter reflection on the folly and danger of resisting the high will of Heaven, and on the hard necessity of submitting to the irreversible decree. Nothing can exceed the tenderness of Esau’s expostulation, when he found the blessing was irrecoverably gone from him. The name of his brother; the occasion of its being given him; his conduct since he grew up; the repeated advantage he had taken, of his necessity at one time, of his absence at another, all rush upon his mind at once, and excite a tempest of passion which he is unable to govern. “And Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father; and Esau lift up his voice and wept.”[*]Gen 27:38 The ability and the good will of an earthly parent have their limits. He has but one, or at most a second blessing to bestow. What he gives to this child is so much taken away from that other. But the liberality, and the power of our heavenly Father, are unbounded. “In our Father’s house there are many mansions.” With him “there is bread enough and to spare.” Isaac discovers at length, that he has been fighting against God; and while he resents Jacob’s subtilty, and the unkindness of Rebekah, he acknowledges and submits to the high will of Heaven. The blessing which he had pronounced unwittingly, and which he finds to be irrevocable, he now deliberately and cheerfully confirms. And now, behold the little spark of discord between the brethren blown up into a flame, which threatens destruction to the whole family. And, dreadful to think, Esau looks forward, with desire to the death of his old, kind father, that he might prosecute revenge against his brother unto blood. Hitherto we have seen in Esau an object of compassion: we now view him with detestation; and we find the righteous judgment of God prosecuting this murderous disposition in his posterity to their utter ruin. “For thy violence against thy brother Jacob, shame shall cover thee, and then shalt be cut off for ever.”[*]Obadiah 1:10 “As I live, saith the Lord God, I will prepare thee unto blood, and blood shall pursue thee: since thou hast not hated blood, even blood shall pursue thee. Thus I will make Mount Seir most desolate, and cut off from it him that passeth out and him that returneth.”[*]Eze 35:6-7 “Thus saith the Lord, For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and kept his wrath for ever. But I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah.”[*]Amo 1:11-12 Rebekah too, now that “a sword pierces through her own soul,” ready “to lose both her children in one day.” too late discerns how imprudently she has acted, and is glad to purchase the safety of her favorite at the price of his banishment. So uneasily do those possessions sit upon us which we have acquired by improper means. The threatening words of his elder son, must have speedily reached the ears of the aged patriarch also. And he has the inexpressible mortification of learning that the ungrateful wretch whom he had cherished in his bosom, and to whom his fondness would have given every thing, was enjoying the prospect of his approaching death, because it would afford a safer opportunity of

practicing his meditated revenge. This indeed was the bitterness of death, to “feel how sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to have a thankless child. And, thus severely the unwise attachment of both the parents punished itself, by the effect which it produced. To prevent the dreadful mischief which hung over his hoary head, all his prospects concerning Esau, being now blighted by the heathenish alliances which he had formed, by his diabolical character, and by the rejection of Heaven, he gladly consents to the dismission of Jacob: and all his hopes, at length, settle on him whom he loved less. But, to part with the heir of the promise, at the age of one hundred and forty years, to send him away into a far country--was it not to part with him for ever? The fervor of his farewell benediction, pathetically expresses his despair of meeting him again, “God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people: and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave to Abraham.”[*]Gen 28:3-4 These are the last words, this the last action of Isaac’s life, upon record. But his latter end was at a greater distance than he or than Esau apprehended. He survived this event forty years. He lived to lose in communion with God, the disorder and dispersion of his family. He lived to shelter and to bless by his prayers, him whom the paternal roof could shelter and protect no longer. He lived to be refreshed with the good tidings of the success of the blessing, and the happy increase of Jacob’s family. He lived to “see him” again “in his touch,” and to embrace his grandchildren. This period of his life is a mere blank to posterity. But if we are ever admitted to read in “the book of God’s remembrance,” O how will these forty years of silence and oblivion arise and shine! At last, old and full of days, Isaac drops into the grave. “The days of Isaac were an hundred and fourscore years, and Isaac gave up the ghost and died, and was gathered unto his people.”[*]Gen 35:28-29 “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!” Time, and a better spirit and the death of a father, have happily extinguished resentment between the brothers. Esau thinks no more of slaying Jacob. They mingle tears, as did Isaac and Ishmael, over their parent’s tomb, and their angry passions sleep in the dust with him.

Thus lived and died Isaac, the son of Abraham, a man of contemplation, piety, and peace. A man of few and slight infirmities; of many and eminent virtues. A man, whom Providence tried with multiplied and severe afflictions; and whom faith strengthened to bear them with patience and fortitude. His story comes home to the breast and bosom of every man. His excellencies are such as all may, by due cultivation, acquire; his virtue such as all may imitate. His faults are those, to which even good men are liable, and which they are the more concerned to avoid, or to amend. To young men, we would hold him up as a pattern of filial tenderness and submission. Isaac possessed in an eminent degree, that most amiable quality of ingenuous youth, dutiful respect to the mother who bare him. He cherished her with pious attention while she lived, and sincerely lamented her in death; till duty called him to drop the grateful and affectionate son, in the loving and faithful husband. So long as Abraham lived, Isaac had no will but the will of his father. The master of a family may learn of him domestic piety and devotion, conjugal fidelity, prudent foresight, persevering industry. The selfish and contentious are reproved, by the example of his moderation, by his patience under unkindness and injustice, by his meek surrender of an undoubted right, for the sake of peace. Let the aged consider him well, and imitate his sweetness of temper, his resignation under affliction, his gentle requital of deception and insult, his superiority to the world, his composure in the prospect of dissolution, and the faith which triumphed over death and the grave. Let the affluent and the prosperous learn of him, to adorn high rank and

ample fortune, by humility and condescension; and the wretched, to endure distress with fortitude and resignation. Let his faults be forgotten, and his infirmities covered; or remembered only as a reproof and admonition to ourselves. And let us be followers together of him, and of all them who “through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

025. Jacob--Purchaser of the Birthright

Jacob--Purchaser of the Birthright

Gen 25:21-34. And the boys grew; and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field: and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison; but Rebekah loved Jacob. And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field and he was faint. And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage, for I am faint; therefore his name was called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do me? And Jacob said, Swear tome this day and he sware unto him: and sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils, and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way; thus Esau despised his birthright. The importance of personages, to whose acquaintance we are introduced in the sacred pages, is to be estimated, not by circumstances which catch and engage the superficial and the vain, and which constitute what is called greatness among men. No; “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 naught things that are.”--When great men are to be sought for, the mind that is governed by worldly ideas, rushes straight to the palaces of kings, or enters into the cabinet where statesmen assemble, or attends the footsteps of the warrior over the ensanguined field. But reason and religion conduct us in far different paths, and present us with far different objects. They discover to us, many a time, true greatness under the obscure roof of a cottage, or the spreading branches of a great tree. They exhibit dignity and consequence, affixed, not to the royal scepter, but to the shepherd’s crook; and feelingly teach us, that what is highly prized among men is of little estimation in the sight of God. The person on whose history we are now entering is the third in order and succession of the illustrious three, who are distinguished in Scripture as the covenant friends of God, and the ensamples of all them who in after ages should believe. “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Thus it is spoken of the men, whom the King of kings delighted to honor. And what is rank and title, among men, compared to this?

Jacob was, by the ordinance of heaven, destined to pre-eminence and superiority before he was born. And he who could have raised him to the rights of primogeniture, in the ordinary course of nature, was pleased, such is divine sovereignty, to bestow this advantage upon him, by the concurrence of various providential events. That men may adore, and submit to the God “who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will.” The struggle between the twin brothers began early, and lasted long. With more than ordinary reasons for loving each other, the ill-judged partialities, of parental affection, and the lust of precedency and power, inflame them to uncommon rancor and animosity. The strife, which was at first accidental, or instinctive, becomes at length willful and deliberate. And the name of Jacob imposed in the beginning, from the slight incident of his laying hold, with his hand, of his brother’s heel, comes in process of time to be a mark of his character, and a record of his conduct. Events unimportant, incidental, contingent in the eyes of men, are often matters of deep design, of mighty and lasting consequence with God.

The natural disposition of the two brothers early discovered itself. Esau betakes himself to the active and laborious sports of the field.--Jacob, formed for social and domestic life, abides at home in the tents, attending to family affairs, cultivating filial affections, and living in the exercise of filial duties. The Chaldee Paraphrast gives a translation of the words of Moses, rendered in our version, “dwelling in tents,” considerably different in sense, “He was a minister in the house of teaching,” understanding by the word tents or tabernacles, the place appointed for divine worship. The first action of Jacob’s life, which we find recorded by the sacred historian, is by no means calculated to give us a favorable impression of his heart. The young men were now in their twenty-fifth year. The elder entirely devoted to his favorite pursuit: the younger, ever on the watch to obtain that by art or industry which nature had taken from him. It happened on a certain day, that Jacob had employed himself in preparing a plain dish of pottage of lentils, for his own entertainment. And here, let not the fastidious critic, who measures every thing by modern manners and maxims, consider this as an employment beneath the dignity of Isaac’s son. It is, in truth, one of a multitude of instances, of the beautiful simplicity of ancient customs. The greatest heroes, and proudest princes, whom Homer has exhibited, are frequently found engaged in similar occupations. Esau, returning from the field, and having been either unsuccessful in hunting, or being too impatient to delay the gratification of his appetite till his venison was prepared, entreats his brother to give him a share of the provision which he had made for himself. Jacob, taking advantage of his hunger and eagerness, proposes, as an equivalent for his pottage, no less a price than the favorite object of all his ambition and desire, the birthright. Unconscious or regardless of its value, and in a haste to satisfy the cravings of the moment, he inconsiderately parts with that which nature had given him in vain, and which a father’s fondness strove to secure for him; but which a conduct so “profane” and precipitate proved him altogether unworthy of possessing.

But, was the conduct of Jacob pure and praise-worthy in this transaction? It cannot be affirmed. Providence had indeed ordained him to the blessing which he so ardently coveted; but Providence neither appoints nor approves of crooked and indirect paths to the ends which it has proposed. Weak and erring men may perhaps not be displeased, to have part of their work taken off from their hands; but if we presume to take the whole or any part of the work of God upon ourselves, it is both with sin and with danger. “His counsel indeed shall stand,” but the offender shall pay the price of his rashness. It is a dreadful thing to get into a course and habit of acting amiss. When once we have got a favorite object in view, how every thing is made to bend to it! The birthright, the birthright was the darling object of Jacob’s fondest wishes; and, as if the decree and the prediction of heaven had not been security sufficient for the attainment of it, he seeks to confirm it to himself by a deed of sale with his brother, and the interposition of a solemn oath; and finally, is eager to have the bargain ratified by the solemn benediction of his father’s prophetic lips. “He that believeth shall not make haste.” But alas! I see in Jacob an earnestness to obtain his end, that borders on diffidence and suspicion; and indeed, whom or what can that man trust, who has not confidence in his Maker? The vile scene of imposition and fraud practiced upon his blind and aged parent, as forming an essential article of Jacob’s history, rises again to view. I like his taking advantage of his father’s blindness still less than his attempt to carry a favorite point by taking advantage of his brother’s hunger and impetuosity. The latter was but the skill and address of an open adversary; the former was the cunning and deceit of a crafty and undutiful child. Observe how cautiously, and fearfully, and slowly, the footsteps of the deceitful must proceed. The moment that the conscience swerves from truth and rectitude, the man becomes jealous, and anxious, and

timid. But integrity advances with firmness and intrepidity. “And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver, and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing.”[*]Gen 27:11-12

But, what could make Rebekah and her favorite son so anxious to attain this superiority? What was there in the birthright, to make it thus fondly coveted, and unremittingly pursued? The answer to these questions will at least plead some excuse for their zeal, if not wholly do away the guilt of their falsehood. First--The gift of prophesy was known to reside in the patriarch Isaac; and the parental benediction, in certain circumstances, was considered as having the force of a prediction. Secondly--Preeminency and power over the rest of the family in patriarchal times, were affixed to priority concerning birth; thus God speaks to Cain concerning Abel, “thus thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.” Thirdly--A double portion of the paternal inheritance appertained to the first-born. And this perhaps explains the meaning of Elisha’s request at the rapture of Elijah, “Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me:” not as if he meant to ask, or expect, twice so much as Elijah had, but the share of an elder brother. Fourthly--The honor of priesthood resided then and for many years after, in the first born, and was justly considered as the first of privileges. Finally--The promise of the Messiah, “the first born among many brethren,” was entailed upon the eldest son: and this was justly understood to confer a dignity and luster infinitely superior to all temporal blessings. The guilt of Esau consisted in undervaluing and despising an advantage so distinguished.--The offence of Jacob’s fraud is greatly extenuated, if not wholly extinguished, in the nobility and worth of the prize for which he contended. Behold him, then, retiring from the presence of his deluded father, who had prescience sufficient to discern, at the distance of ages, the future fortunes of his family, without sagacity capable of discerning the imposture, which was, at that very instant, practicing upon his credulity and want of sight. Behold Jacob retired, in possession indeed of the blessing, but haunted with the terrors which eternally pursue the man, who is conscious to himself, that he has acted wrong. He has gained the birthright, but he has lost a brother. He has by subtilty stolen away the prophetic benediction, but be has raised up against himself an implacable foe. The possession of nothing yields that satisfaction which we promised ourselves in it beforehand; and conscience will not permit us to enjoy peaceably that which we have acquired unworthily. His father’s blessing announced every kind and degree of prosperity, “the dew of heaven, the fatness of the earth, the servitude of nations and people, lordship over his brethren.” But he is instantly constrained to become an exile and a wanderer from his father’s house. And when he himself comes to make the estimate of his awn life, in the close of it--what is the amount? “Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.” His elder brother is declared his inferior, but he has by much the stronger arm of the two. And, while he is practicing deceit upon his nearest relations in Canaan, Providence is silently preparing the means of requiting him in Padan-aram, in the person of one already a near relation, and about to be much more closely allied to him, Laban the Syrian, a man much more cunning and selfish, and much less scrupulous than himself. As this is a character which the inspired painter has delineated with peculiar felicity and skill, it may now be necessary to look back for a few moments, and to observe the first opening of Laban’s spirit and temper, as they appear on the face of the sacred drama.

Abraham’s servant being arrived in Mesopotamia, in search of a wife for Isaac, his young master, providentially conducted, lights on Rebekah, the sister of this Laban, by the well of water. Having

briefly unfolded his commission, and made her a present suitable to his master's rank and affluence, she runs home to acquaint her relations of the adventure. Laban, instantly, attracted by the sight of the gold, and by the account he had heard, of the state in which Abraham's servant traveled, very prudently concludes, that such a connection might be improved to very great advantage. Hence that profusion of civility and kindness to an entire stranger, "Come m, thou blessed of the Lord, wherefore standest thou without? For I have prepared the house, and room for the camels."[*]Gen 24:31 Did we not afterwards discover him to be groveling, greedy, and mercenary, this might have passed for the language of kindness and hospitality. But, when the whole is taken in connection, we see a man from first to last invariably attached to his own interest, employing his very daughters as mere instruments of commerce, and prizing nothing, but in proportion as it ministered to his own advantage. Of all the passions of our nature, there is none so steady, uniform, and consistent as this is. Avarice never tires by exercise, never loses sight of its object: it gathers strength by gratification, grows vigorous by old age, and inflames the heart, when the vital fluid can hardly force a passage through it. What a feast for such a spirit, the concluding scene of the marriage treaty for Rebekah! "The servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah: he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things."[*]Gen 24:53 Such was the man, with whom Jacob was now destined to spend a very considerable part of his life; and whose treatment of him, in the eyes of the severest judge, may pass as a sufficient punishment for the little fallacies which he had practiced in his father's house.

Behold then, in the covenant head and representative of the holy family, "a Syrian ready to perish," leaving the paternal roof without an attendant, without a guide, without a companion; more forlorn than his grandfather Abraham himself. For the bitterness of his exile was alleviated by the company and conversation of his beloved Sarah; whereas, the affliction of Jacob's banishment was grievously increased, by the consciousness that he bad brought it upon himself; and from the bitter necessity of enduring its wearisome days and nights by himself alone. What could have supported a man in such circumstances? A man, who was attached to domestic life; a plain man "abiding in tents;" a man who had fondly flattered himself with the hope of power and tranquility; who had dreamed of superiority over his brother, but had not attained unto it? I can think of but one thing, that could have rendered his lot supportable, as it then stood. Jacob, after all, was a good man.--His conduct was not indeed pure and perfect, but his heart was right with God. He had once and again been mistaken in the means which he had employed, but he had all along aimed at the noblest and most important end: and, from the chagrin and disappointment which ever attended the plans of his own devising, he had always a sure and a satisfying refuge, in the wisdom and mercy of God. In truth, he had not attained the knowledge of true practical, vital religion, in the house of even his father Isaac, in Lahai-roi: but he learns it in silence and in solitude, in the plains of Luz. It is a good thing for a young man to feel his own weight, "to bear the yoke in his youth." At case, and in a multitude, we forget God--in retirement and danger, we learn and feel our dependence, and call to remembrance a long-forgotten God. This is also a proper stage for resting on our way. We cannot lead our traveler from home, till we have found for him a place where to lodge. We cannot bear to see him from under the protection of the parental wing, till we are secure that he has got another protector and friend, that "friend who sticketh closer than a brother."

Conformity to the plan we have proposed, and regard to the analogy of Scripture, would now lead us to exhibit the patriarch Jacob, as a type of the Messiah, to whom patriarchs and “prophets all give witness,” and who was specially prefigured by the son of Isaac. But, his story is not yet sufficiently advanced, to afford a foundation broad and solid enough to support a comparison, such as a more extended view of the subject will furnish, and such as might more rationally conduce to the ends of edification. We deem it of more importance, at this period, to submit to your consideration a. few general observations, respecting typical representation, and the proper use to be made of it.

First; In order to constitute a proper type, it is by no means necessary, that the person who answers this important purpose should possess perfect moral qualities. Were this requisite, who ever was worthy to represent the Son of God, the holy Jesus, “who did no sin, neither was guile found in his lips?” But as “the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity,” though the law gives no countenance to error or infirmity; so Providence, at sundry times and in divers manners,” raised up men to prefigure to their contemporaries an in, maculate Savior, who were themselves “compassed with infirmity, of like passions with others,” and whose faults are but the more conspicuous, from the honorable station, and employment to which they were called. It will follow,

Secondly; That the comparison is not to be stated and pursued through every particular incident of the life, and every feature of the personal character of the person who is the type. Men of very different characters, and in very different situations, typified the Savior of the world. To suppose every article of their history, condition, and char ratter to be typical and prophetic, would therefore, in many instances, involve absurdity and contradiction. Samson, David, and many others who might be mentioned, were eminent types of Christ; but then, the resemblance holds only in certain great leading circumstances: the miraculous conception, for example, the Nazaritic sanctity, the invincible strength, the solitary, victorious achievements, the triumphant death of the former: the divine appointment and elevation, the royal dignity, the providential success of the latter, the subduing all the church’s enemies; these and the like, are the typical circumstances. But to pursue the resemblance throughout, to make every action of Samson’s or of David’s life typical of something correspondent in the Messiah, would lead far beyond absurdity; it would issue in impiety and blasphemy.

Thirdly; Scripture by direct application, or by fair, unrestrained analogy, ought therefore to lead, to regulate, and to correct all our inquiries of this sort. We shall else be in danger of rearing a baseless, flimsy structure in the clouds, which can afford neither shelter nor rest. When pleasant amusement alone is the object, invention and fancy may be allowed their full exertion. But when we aim at religious instruction, we must be contented to take the Spirit of God for our guide. And here too, men ought to be jealous and watchful over their own spirits; lest, in endeavoring to establish a favorite system, and to justify or support preconceived opinions, they give to their own wild imaginations the solidity and weight of divine truth, and, departing from the simplicity of the gospel, presume to stamp the poor trash of their own brain with the sacred impress of God. It has often, and with too much, justice, been lamented, that many apply to the Bible for a justification of the opinions which they have already formed, and which they are determined, at all risks, to maintain, and not to receive the information which they need, and to rectify the prejudices under which they labor.

Finally; To determine the nature and propriety of typical representation it is of importance to inquire, Whether or not the resemblance which we mean to pursue, has a tendency to promote some moral, practical, pious purpose? Does it inspire reverence, wonder, gratitude, love to God; dependence upon, and trust in him? Does it engage us to study, to search, to love the Scriptures? Does it impress on the heart a sense of our own weakness, ignorance, and guilt; and, of the deference, respect, and good will which we owe to others! Or, is it made a ministering servant to vanity and self-conceit? Leads it our attention from practice to speculation, to theory from real life? Does it place the essentials of religion in modes of opinion and forms of worship; and, neglecting the heart, content itself with playing about and tickling the imagination? The answer to these questions will decide the point. By its fruit, the tree is known. Should all, or any of these remarks seem to bear hard on any of the comparisons which we have endeavored to establish, we are disposed cheerfully to relinquish the most favorite analogy, rather than seem, in the slightest degree, to misrepresent, disguise, or pervert the truth. We mean not to wrest Scripture to our purpose: but would make our purpose with reverence bend to that sacred authority. We would not with sacrilegious hands force out of the Bible, by violence and art, a scanty and unnatural crop; but by diligent cultivation and assiduous care, draw from it a plenteous harvest of what the soil naturally produces. And, we now return from this digression, to pursue the history of Jacob.

026. Jacob--Trip to Syria

Jacob--Trip to Syria

Gen 28:5;Gen 28:10. And Isaac sent away Jacob, and he went to Padan-aram, unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother. And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went towards Haran. At what stage, or in what condition of human life, can a man say, Now my heart is at rest, now my wishes are accomplished, now my happiness is complete? By what unaccountable, untoward circumstances is the comfort of the worthiest, best ordered, most prosperous families, oft times marred and destroyed! Not through vice only do we suffer, but up to some piece of imprudence, or inadvertency; up to some trifling infirmity in our nature, or some petty fault in our conduct, our greatest calamities may easily be traced. One man has made his fortune, as it is called, but he has impaired his health in the acquisition of it, or made shipwreck of a good conscience. Another inherits a fine estate; but goes childless. There, we behold a numerous and promising family of children; but the wretched parents have hardly bread to give them: and here, both progeny and plenty; but hatred, and jealousy, and strife, banish tranquility and ease. The heart of this child is corrupted through indulgence; the spirit of that one is broken by severity.

Isaac is wealthy, but his eyes are dim that he cannot see. God has given him two sons at once, but they are the torment of his life. He is fondly partial to Esau; and Esau does every thing in his power to mortify and disoblige his kind and indulgent father. He is unwittingly drawn in to bless Jacob; and, the very next breath, feels himself constrained to pronounce sentence of dismission and banishment upon him. "The whole ordering of the lot is of the Lord," but "men themselves cast it into the lap." Providence only brings that out, which, with our own hands, we first put in.

Jacob has by skill and address pushed himself into the birthright, and by subtilty insinuated himself into the blessing. And how do they sit upon him? Very uneasily indeed. His father's house is no longer a home for him. Grasping at more than his right, he loses what he already had. Eagerly hastening to preferment, without waiting for Providence, he puts himself just so much farther back. And, seeking rule and preeminence in his father's family, he finds servitude and severity in the house of a stranger. If men will carve for themselves, they must not charge the consequences of their rashness and presumption upon God.

Behold the pilgrim then, on his way, pensive and solitary; without so much as a favorite, faithful dog, to accompany and to cheer his wanderings. His whole inheritance, the staff in his hand. Now, for the first time, he knows the heart of a stranger. Now he feels the bitter change from affluence to want, from society to solitude, from security and protection to anxiety and danger. More forlorn than Adam when expelled from paradise, than Abraham when exiled from his father's house, he has no gentle mate to participate and to soothe his anxieties and cares. The Scripture assigns no reason, why Isaac's heir, and Rebekah's favorite son, the hope of a powerful and wealthy family, was dismissed with such slender provision, wholly unattended, and unprotected too, upon a journey, according to the best calculations, of about one hundred and fifty leagues, or four hundred

and fifty miles, through a country in many places desert and savage, and in others no less dangerous, from the hostile tribes which inhabited and ranged through it. But the reason, though not directly assigned, is plainly hinted at in the sixth verse of this chapter, which informs us, that Esau knew of this journey, as well as of the cause and intention of it. Jacob therefore may be supposed to have stolen away secretly, and without any retinue, and to have shunned the beaten and frequented path to Padan-Aram, in order to elude the vigilance and resentment of his brother, who, he had reason to apprehend, would pursue him to take away his life. And besides this, we may justly consider both the errand on which he was sent, to take a wife from an allied and pious family, to propagate a holy and chosen seed; and the homely, solitary style of his traveling, as a very illustrious instance of faith in God, and obedience to his will, and that not in Jacob himself only, but in his parents also, who could thus trust the sole prop of their family hopes, and of the promise, to dangers so great, and distresses so certain, with no security but what arose from the truth, mercy, and faithfulness of God. The uneasy reflections arising from solitude, and inspired by a gradual removal from the scenes of his youthful and happy days must have been greatly embittered to Jacob, by the consciousness of his leaving brought all this upon himself; by the keenness of disappointment, in the very moment when the spirits were wound up to their highest tone through success; and by total darkness and uncertainty with respect to his future fortunes. However, the cheerfulness of light, the pleasing change and variety of natural objects as he journeyed on, the ardor and confidence of youthful blood and spirits, carry him with confidence and joy through the day. But ah! what is to become of him now that the sun declines, and the shadows of the evening begin to lengthen! Overtaken at once by hunger and fatigue, and darkness and apprehension, where shall he seek shelter, how find repose! Happily, calamity strengthens that soul which it is unable to subdue. The mind, forced back upon itself, finds in itself resources which it knew not of before, and the man who has learned to seek relief in religion, knows where to fly in every time of need. The strong hand of necessity is upon our patriarch; submit he must, and therefore he submits with alacrity. And now behold the heir of Abraham and of Isaac, without a place where to lay his head; that head which maternal tenderness had taken pleasure to pillow so softly, and to watch so affectionately. “He lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set: and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep.”[*]Gen 28:11

------“Sweet are the uses of adversity;

Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,

Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.”

Jacob, removed from his earthly parents, is but the nearer to his heavenly Father; a stranger in the waste howling wilderness, he is at home with God. Cares perplex his waking thoughts, but angels in bands lull his perturbed breast to rest; they guard, and instruct, and bless his slumbering moments. Who does not pity Jacob, as the evening shades gather and close around his head?--Who does not envy his felicity when the morning light appears, and with it, the recollection of a night passed in communion with God? Jacob sleeps, but his heart wakes.--What had been most upon his mind through the day, continues to occupy and to impress his thoughts after his eyes are closed. Wonderful, awful, pleasing power of God! which in the city and in the field, at home and abroad, awake and asleep, moves, directs, governs our bodies and our spirits as it will.

What lofty heights is the mind of man capable of attaining! What wonders of nature and of grace is the great God capable of unfolding to it, when delivered from the grossness of this clay tabernacle, or when joined to a spiritual body; when we consider the astonishing flights it is even now capable of taking, when the duller senses are laid to rest, and their influence suspended!

Dreams are generally frivolous, meaningless, or absurd. But here is a dream worth repeating, worth recording; whether we attend to what was seen or what was said.--What was seen? “Behold a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.”[*]Gen 28:12 The circumstances of the dreamer, partly interpret the vision. Jacob’s holy desires, his faith and his prayers, had ascended, as on angel’s wings, up to the throne of God. Protection and favor, and comfort, descend from the eternal throne, as through the ministration of angels, on Jacob’s head. The top of the ladder reacheth unto heaven, but the Lord on high is above it. It standeth upon the earth, but the eye of Jehovah is at its foundation, and his almighty arm giveth it stability. The cherubim and the seraphim are not above his control and authority; a poor belighted pilgrim is not beneath his notice.

Thus, the great plan of the Divine Providence, upholding all things, observing all things, subduing all things to his will, was feelingly conveyed to Jacob’s mind, in this vision of the night. And in it, the world is instructed, that however great the distance between heaven and earth, however inaccessible that bright abode may be to flesh and blood, to celestial spirits it is but a few steps of a ladder; before an omnipresent God, intervening space is swallowed up and lost; and, condescending mercy! sovereign grace keeps that communication ever open, which the malice of hell and the apostasy of man had well nigh interrupted for ever. But I should have given you a very imperfect interpretation of this mysterious dream, did I stop short in it, as merely a symbolical representation of the plan of Providence. For in looking into another part of the sacred record, I find the same expressions and ideas applied to a subject of peculiar concernment to the Christian world. Christ, when entering on the discharge of his public ministry, having given Nathaniel a personal and convincing proof of his divine knowledge, adds,--“Thou shalt see greater things than these. Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”[*]John 1:51 Here then is the true mystery of the ladder which unites heaven and earth. The Son of Man first descending to assume our nature, to achieve in it the work of man’s redemption; and then having finished the work given him to do, ascending triumphantly in glorified humanity, up to heaven again. And, behold here too, “The Lord standing above.” The plan of salvation, as of Providence, is the design of him “who worketh all things after the counsel of his will.”--“Who in Christ Jesus hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence,” and who “in bringing many sons unto glory, bath made the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”[*]Heb 2:10 And who are they that ascend and descend along this mysterious scale? “He maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.”[*]Heb 1:7 “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them, who shall be heirs of salvation.”[*]Heb 1:14

If what by Jacob was seen in vision at Bethel be worthy our attention, no less memorable and important are the things which he heard. It was much to hear a repetition of the covenant of God with Abraham and Isaac, his fathers, ratified and confirmed to himself. It was much to hear the blessing lately pronounced over him by the prophetic lips of his earthly parent, conveyed to his ear by a voice infinitely more sacred. It was much to hear that the land which he then occupied with his

weary limbs, as a wayfaring man who continueth but for a night, should afterwards be given to him and to his seed for a possession. It was much to hear, from the mouth of God himself, the blessed assurance of protection through his journey, of success in his undertaking, and of a safe return to his native home. It was much to hear of a posterity, innumerable as the sand upon the sea shore, and spreading to the four winds of heaven. But the essence of all these promises, the joy of all this joy, was to hear the renewed, the reiterated promise of a seed descending from him, in whom “all the families of the earth should be blessed.” What could Jacob ask? What had God to bestow, more than this?

Here then the vision ends, and Jacob awakes. After the obvious, natural, and we trust, scriptural view, which we have attempted to give you of the subject, I shall not use your patience so ungratefully as to trespass upon it by going into a detail of the wild waking dreams of paraphrasts, and Rabbis, and pretended interpreters, on this pas sage of the sacred history. It is of more importance to attend to our patriarch, restored, with the morning light, to the perfect use of his rational faculties, and making use of the admonitions and consolations of the night season, as a help to piety, and a spur to duty through the day. There was something so singular, both in the subject and external circumstances of his dream, that he immediately concluded, and justly, that it was from heaven. And is it not strange, that he who felt no horror at the thought of laying himself down to sleep in a desert place, under the cloud of night, and alone, is filled with a holy dread when morning arose, at the thought of being surrounded with God. “And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God: and this is the gate of heaven.”[*]Gen 28:17 And, if the visits of the Almighty, as a father and a friend, be thus awful even to good men, what must be the visitation of his wrath to the ungodly and the sinner?

Jacob arises immediately, and erects a monument of such simple materials as the place afforded, to the memory of this heavenly vision, which he was desirous thus to impress for ever on his heart. The difference of the expression in the eleventh verse, “he took of the stones of the place, and put them for his pillows,” and in the eighteenth, “he took the stone that he had put for his pillow and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it,”[*]Gen 28:18 has given occasion to one of the Jewish Rabbis to attempt a reconciliation by a fiction of his own brain. Jacob, he says, having chosen out Just three stones over night, to support his head, found them all joined into one the next morning; which, he pretends to allege, was a signification of the strict and solid union which subsisted between God and Jacob. And some later interpreters, though aided by the superior light of the gospel dispensation, have been simple enough to adopt this fable, and to explain it, some, of the ineffable union of the three persons who are the object of our worship; others, of the conjunction of the soul, body, and deity in the person of Jesus Christ.

It appears that Jacob intended simply to record, in such characters as his situation afforded, that night’s important transaction. He sets up the stone, or stones, upon which his head had reposed when visited with the visions of the Almighty, in the form of a rustic pillar, and solemnly anoints, and thereby consecrates it, to the honor of God, by the name of Bethel, that is, “the house of God;” and over it, thus dedicated, he afresh and voluntarily enters into solemn covenant with God, obliging himself by a sacred vow, to acknowledge and worship none but him; committing himself with filial confidence to the protection of his gracious providence; trusting the time and manner of his return to the care of infinite wisdom; promising ever to consider this monumental pillar as an altar devoted to the service of God; and binding himself, by an explicit declaration, to devote to

pious uses the tenth part of whatever lie should through the divine blessing acquire. By the way, the oil wherewith he consecrated his pillar was undoubtedly part of the slender provision made for his journey; and apparently a little bread and oil was all he could possibly carry with him. But of that little he cheerfully spares a portion for the purposes of religion; for the possession of a truly pious soul is small indeed, if it bestow nothing when charity, mercy, or devotion give the call. With what alacrity does he now prosecute his journey! What a change in his condition produced in one short night! When “the heart is established by grace,” difficult things become easy; the valley is exalted, and the hill laid low; the crooked becomes straight, and the rough places plain. Nothing that the sacred historian deemed worth recording, occurred during the remainder of this pilgrimage. Jacob at length arrived “in the land of the people of the east.” And now, no doubt, he flatters himself that all his troubles and mortifications are at an end. His grandfather’s servant, Eleazar, had been happy enough to finish a marriage treaty for his master’s son in a few hours conversation; surely then the heir of the same family may be equally successful when making personal application for himself. Ah blind to futurity! Strange, unaccountable difference in the divine conduct towards different persons! Jacob must earn that by long fourteen years servitude, which Abraham’s servant was so successful as to accomplish in the pronouncing of almost as many words. But here we must make another pause, and leave the next sweet scene of Jacob’s life, and the sequel of it, to another Lecture. But we must no longer defer, the beginning at least of that parallel which is one object among others, if not the chief, in these exercises.

Jacob was destined of Providence to power and presidency before he was born. Jesus is declared the Son of God, and the heir of all things, by the angel who announced his miraculous conception and birth to his virgin mother. Jacob, the last in order of nature, but first in the election of grace, prefigures him, who, appearing in the end of the world, is nevertheless “the first-born among many brethren.” Jacob, hated and persecuted of his brother, is an obvious type of him who was to come, “despised and rejected of men;” crucified and slain by the impious and unnatural hands of those who were his bone and his flesh. Jacob, dismissed with blessings by his father from Beer-Sheba, points out to us Jesus leaving heaven’s glory, and the bosom of the Father, in compliance with the eternal decree, to become a wanderer in our world; “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” The object of Jacob’s journey and of Christ’s is one and the same. Jacob, to procure for himself a believing spouse, to become the fruitful mother of an elect offspring; Jesus, to purchase for himself, at the price of his own blood, “the church, which is his body, to espouse it to himself as a chaste bride,” united to him in everlasting bands of interest and affection. Jacob, deserted and solitary in the plain of Bethel, is a shadow of Christ forsaken of all in the wilderness of this world, yet not “alone, but his heavenly Father always with him.” The vision of the ladder has already spoken for itself. What then remains but to add, Jacob’s covenant, consecration, and vow, are so many different representations of Christ’s covenant of redemption: his unction by the Spirit to the execution of his high office; and not the tithe, but the whole of his vast and glorious acquisition rendered unto God even the Father: when the kingdom is finally delivered up to “him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, that God may be all in all.”

I add no more but my most fervent prayers to Almighty God--That by night and by day, alone and in society, when you sleep and when you wake, in prosperity and in adversity, you may be still with God: and that “the Almighty may be your refuge, the Most High your habitation,” and “underneath” and around you “the everlasting arms.” Amen.

027. Jacob--Love for Rachel

Jacob--Love for Rachel

Gen 29:20. And Jacob served seven years for Rachel: and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her. The great Author of our nature has wisely and wonderfully adapted the various objects which successively solicit our attention and engage our pursuit, to the different periods of our life, the different and successive affections of our heart, the different stations which we have to occupy, and the duties which we are bound to perform. Human life, in so far as nature predominates over it, does not consist of violent and sudden transitions, but of calm, gentle, imperceptible changes: like the gradual progress of the day, from the morning dawn to meridian splendor; and thence gradually back again, to the glimmering twilight of the evening, and the shades of night. We emerge not at once from infancy into manhood; we sink not in a moment from manhood into old age. We grow, and we decline, without perceiving any alteration. Betwixt the giddiness and inconsideration of childhood, and the serious cares and employments of mature age, there is a middle and an important stage of life, which connects the two. And there is a passion happily suited to it, which contains and unites the spirit of both; a passion which blends the vivacity and impetuosity of the boy with the gravity and thoughtfulness of the man: that noble, generous passion, which the great God has implanted in our nature, to attract, unite, and bless mankind; and which, therefore, the pen of inspiration has not disdained, in its own inimitable manner, to describe. It was this passion which speedily compensated to Jacob the loss of his father’s house, and the pains of a tedious journey; which sweetened and shortened seven long years of hard and mortifying servitude; but which, at the same time, anticipated both the cares and the delights of future life.

Jacob, cheered and supported by the recollection of his vision at Bethel, and animated with the hope of a happy meeting with his friends and relations at Padan-Aram, goes on his way rejoicing; and, guided, protected, and sustained by an indulgent Providence, he arrives in safety. It was that simple, innocent and happy age of the world, when the chief occupations and enjoyments of human nature were seen in the shepherd’s life; while, as yet, gold had not settled the price of every other production of the natural world, nor determined the importance of all intellectual endowments: while as yet, commerce had not opened her ten thousand channels of luxury, to enervate, corrupt, and destroy mankind. His conversation with the shepherds of Haran[*]Gen 24:1-8 must always afford exquisite delight to those, whose taste, undebauched by the frippery of modern manners, and the affectation of ceremony and compliment, can relish the honest simplicity of nature, and the genuine expression of unaffected, unsophisticated kindness and benevolence. From them he has the pleasure of hearing that his kinsman Laban lived in the neighborhood, and was in health; and that his daughter Rachel was every moment expected to come to the watering-place, with her father’s flock. While they are yet speaking, Rachel, beautiful as the opening spring, and innocent as the lambs she tended, draws nigh with her fleecy charge. With what admirable propriety and skill do the holy Scriptures represent the most distinguished, exalted, and amiable female characters, engaged in virtuous, humble, useful employments! Sarah, baking

cakes upon the hearth, for the entertainment of her husband's guest; Rebekah, drawing water for the daily use of her brother's family, and the refreshment of the weary traveler; and Rachel feeding her father's sheep. O that ye knew, my fair friends, wherein your true dignity, value, and importance consisted! They consist in being what God from the beginning intended you to be, "an help meet for man;" not the mere instrument of his pleasure, nor the silly idol of his adoration.

Jacob, with the ardor natural to a manly spirit, and the zeal of an affectionate relation, runs up to salute and assist his fair kinswoman. Little offices of civility are the natural expression of a good and honest heart; they often suggest the first sentiments of love, both to those who confer, and to those who receive them; and they keep love alive after it is kindled. The meeting of that day, and Jacob's natural, easy, officious gallantry, in relieving Rachel, on their very first encounter, of the heaviest part of her pastoral task, inspired, I doubt not, emotions very different from those which the mere force of blood produces; and were, I am sure, recollected by both, with inexpressible satisfaction, many a time afterward. And little do I know of the female heart, if it would not much rather be wooed with the attentions and assiduities of an agreeable man, than by the prudent and disgusting formalities of settlements, and deeds, and reversions. Rebekah was courted by proxy, with presents and promises; Rachel, by her destined husband in person, with the looks and the language, and the service of love. Betwixt the union of Isaac and Rebekah, that match of interest and prudence, no obstacle, except the trifling distance of place, interposed; but many difficulties occurred to retard, to prevent, and to mar the union of Jacob and Rachel, founded in esteem and prompted by affection. They become insensibly attached to each other. For love does not give the first warning of his approach to the parties themselves. But it did not long escape the penetrating selfish eye of the crafty father and uncle; who, from the moment he observes this growing passion in his nephew and daughter, casts about how best to convert it to his own advantage.

Jacob had frankly told him his whole situation, and laid open all his heart. He informed him, that he had indeed purchased the birthright, and obtained the prophetic blessing; but that through fear of his brother he had been constrained to flee from home, and to seek protection in Syria. This was, by no means, a situation likely to engage the attention and to procure the kindness of a worldly mind. An empty, nominal birthright, and a blessing which promised only distant wealth, were very slender possessions, in the eye of covetous Laban. He could not help comparing the splendid retinue of Eleazer, seeking a wife for his master's son, with the simple appearance of Jacob, come a courting to his family with only a staff in his hand; and he finds it greatly to the disadvantage of the latter. But it is the interest of avarice to put on at least the appearance of that justice which it secretly dreads and hates, if not of that generosity which it despises. Jacob had, unsolicited, and without a stipulation, hitherto rendered Laban his best services for nothing. Indeed he was thinking of but one thing in the world, and that was, how to render himself agreeable to his amiable cousin. When, therefore, Laban, who must clearly have foreseen the answer, under an affected regard to the interest of his relation, inquires into and proposes the condition of his future services, he without hesitation mentions a marriage with his younger daughter. And, having no marriage portion to give the father, as the custom of the times and of the country required, he offers, as an equivalent, seven years personal servitude and labor. What is loss of ease, loss of liberty, loss of life, to love? When I behold Jacob, at such a price, ready and happy to purchase the object of his affection, whether shall I pity or contemn the cold, timid, selfish hearts of the young men of the present generation, who persist in the neglect of nature's clearest, plainest law, from, I know not

what, pretended reasons of caution and wisdom, which would fain pass for virtue; but are in reality the offspring of pride and luxury, pusillanimity and self-love. The proposal is no sooner made than accepted. And Laban has the satisfaction of at once betrothing his daughter to wealthy Isaac's son and heir, and of securing for himself the present emolument of Jacob's labor, care and fidelity for seven good years. Thus, the rights of humanity, the laws of hospitality, and the ties of blood, are all made basely to yield weakly to the most sordid and detestable of all human passions. And behold the freeborn grandson of Abraham sinks into abject servitude, and, the worst of all servitude, subjection to a near relation.

But, as every blessing of life has its corresponding inconvenience, so every evil has its antidote. Jacob is contented and happy, while his pains and fatigue are alleviated by the conversation of his beloved Rachel; and, what is it to him, that the stern, discontented father frowns and chides, so long as the beautiful daughter receives him with complacency and smiles! He bears with patience and cheerfulness the ardor of the meridian sun, and the cold chilling damps of the evening, in the hope of that blest hour, when tender sympathy shall sooth his distresses, and every uneasiness shall be lulled to rest, in the bosom of love. In this sweet commerce, the years of slavery glide imperceptibly away: and what absence would have rendered insupportably long, the presence of the beloved object has shortened into the appearance of a few days. Such is the inconceivable charm of virtuous love. "Jacob served seven years for Rachel: and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her."[*]Gen 24:20

Jacob, having faithfully fulfilled his part of the covenant, now calls on Laban to fulfill what was incumbent upon him. The better to conceal the fraud which he was meditating, he feigns compliance: and, believing, Jacob is amused with all the usual apparatus of a marriage feast. In conformity to the custom of those eastern nations, the bride was conducted to the bed of her husband, with silence, in darkness, and covered from head to foot with a veil; circumstances, all of them favorable to the wicked, selfish plan, which Laban had formed, to detain his son-in-law longer in his service. Leah is accordingly substituted in room of her sister. And he who by subtilty and falsehood stole away the blessing intended for his brother, is punished for his deceit, by finding a Leah where he expected a Rachel. He who availed himself of an undue advantage to arrive at the right of the first-born, has undue advantage taken of him in having the first-born put in the place of the younger. He who could practice upon a father's blindness, though to obtain a laudable end, is in his turn practiced upon by a father, employing the cover of night to accomplish a very unwarrantable purpose. Laban was base, treacherous, and wicked; but Heaven is wise, and holy, and just. Let the man who dares to think of doing evil in the hope that good may come, look at Jacob, and tremble. The shame, vexation, and distress of such a disappointment, are more easily imagined than described. And, what are all the votaries of sinful pleasure preparing for themselves? Treasuring up shame and sorrow, when the delirium of passion is over, and the returning light of reason awakens them to reflection and remorse. They thought it "to be Rachel, but in the morning behold it was Leah." The next day, as may well be supposed, exhibited a scene of no pleasing kind: expostulation, upbraiding, and reproach. Laban, as avarice seldom chooses to avow its real motives, endeavors to justify his treachery and breach of faith, by a pretended regard for the laws and manners of his country, which permitted not the younger to be given in marriage before the first-born. An honest man would have given this information when the bargain was first proposed. It was an insult, not an indemnification, to produce it now. What will not this base

passion make a man do? To deceive the unsuspecting and unwary; to oppress the weak; to practice upon the stranger, are among its simpler and more customary operations. Behold it leading a father, to----by what name shall I call it?--prostitute his own daughter. If there be a crime blacker than another; if, Satan, there be a purpose thou wouldst accomplish, which modesty shudders to think of, which the hand trembles to perpetrate, from which the conscience in horror recoils; infuse into some dark heart the demon of covetousness, the love of money; place gain in one eye, prostitution and parricide in the other, and the work of hell is done.

Mark how easy and flexible the conscience of a miser is. Let interest blow the gale, from whatever quarter it be, and lo, with the rapidity of thought, the understanding and conscience of the covetous wretch are veered round with it! The man, who last night shuddered at the thought of violating a foolish and absurd fashion of the country is not ashamed, the very next morning, to propose polygamy and incest; and to make his own children the instruments of them. Whence this strange inconsistency? It was for his advantage to adhere to the custom of the country; and to dispense with the laws of God and nature. What does it concern him, that disorder and distress are introduced into his daughter's family, so long as it can anyhow redound to his private benefit? If another man have what may be called a weak side, avarice is quick-sighted as the eagle to discern it, and not more penetrating to discover than dexterous to convert it to its own emolument. Unfortunately, Jacob's infirmity was clear as the sun at noon. His unextinguished, unabated passion for Rachel was well known to her rapacious father; who had, with a joy which the worldly mind alone can feel, seen his flocks multiply, and his wealth increase, under Jacob's care. Unsatisfied and insatiable, he builds upon this well-known attachment the project of a farther continuation of Jacob's servitude, with all its accumulation of riches and consequence. The proposal which avarice made without a blush, love accepted with perhaps too much precipitation. We are not framing an apology for Jacob's conduct, but delivering the features of his character, and the lines of his history, from the sacred record. But this much we may venture to affirm, that Jacob, left to himself, and to the honest workings of a heart inspired by the love of an estimable object, would never have dreamed of a plurality of wives; much less of assuming the sister of his beloved Rachel, to be her rival in his affections. It does not appear, that the solemnization of Jacob's marriage with Rachel, was deferred till the expiration of the second term of seven years. Provided Laban got sufficient security for performance of the agreement, it was indifferent to him when the other got possession of the bride. It is probable, therefore, that he gave way immediately to Jacob's wishes; and the more so, that his business was likely to be executed with greater fidelity and zeal, by a servant and son gratified, indulged, and obliged, than by one soured by disappointment, dissatisfied and irritated by unkindness and deceit. Behold then Jacob, at length, at the summit of his hopes and desires. After much delay, through many difficulties, which have strengthened, not extinguished affection, Rachel is at last his wife. But alas, human life admits not of perfect bliss! The seeds of jealousy and strife are sown in Jacob's family. The wife who enjoyed the largest share of the husband's affection, is doomed to sterility; the less beloved, is blessed with children. Thus a wise and gracious Providence, by setting one thing against another, preserves the prosperous from pride and insolence, and the wretched from despair. Twenty years did Isaac and Rebekah live in wedlock without a child, though the inheritance and succession of all Abraham's wealth and prospects depended upon it; whereas the family of Jacob, a simple shepherd, earning his subsistence by the sweat of his brow, the servant of another man, is built up and increases apace. The good things of life seem, to the superficial and discontented, to be

unequally divided; but there is no balance so exact as that in which all conditions and all events are weighed. The great Governor of the world does not indeed conform himself, in the dispensations of his providence, to the misconceptions and prejudices of short-sighted, erring men; but he is affording ignorant, erring men, if they will but be attentive, perpetual cause to adore and admire his wisdom and justice, his mercy and faithfulness. Leah bears to Jacob, as fast as the course of nature permitted, four sons one after another; and, what is remarkable, not only is the hated wife first honored with being a mother, but with being the mother of the two tribes destined to the priesthood and to royal dignity; nay, the mother, remotely, of the chosen seed; a dignity after which every mother, since the first dawning of the promise, eagerly aspired. The fruitfulness of her sister violently excites Rachel's envy. The partiality of Jacob to her, and all his profusion of tenderness, avail her nothing. She is unable to suppress her chagrin and mortification; and, in the bitterness of her heart, forgets both the respect which she owed her husband, and the submission she ought to have paid to the will of God. "And she said unto Jacob, Give me children or else I die."[*]Gen 30:1 How odious, how pitiable are the sentiments, the looks and the language of passion, to the calm and dispassionate; nay, to the passionate man himself, when the fit is over, and passion has spent itself! "And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead; who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?"[*]Gen 30:2 What! and can the anger of Jacob be kindled against his Rachel, his first, his only love! to obtain whom he cheerfully served fourteen years! My fair hearers, presume not too far on the fondness of the men who love you. Be calm, be moderate, be unassuming, be reasonable, be submissive, and ye are every thing. Be arrogant, impetuous, self-sufficient, imperious, unreason able, and ye sink into nothing. I tremble to think of the dreadful length a woman will go to gratify her own spleen, and to mortify a rival. In truth, she ceases to be a female, where certain feminine points are to be carried; and the leading, distinguishing characteristics of the sex are lost and sunk in the feelings of the individual. What! the jealous, envious Rachel, who found her beloved husband had already one wife too many, to think of throwing another into his bosom! But her too happy sister and rival is to be mortified; and she cares not what pangs it costs her own heart. O, my gentle friends, you are yourselves the framers of your own fortunes. Be yourselves, and I will answer for my own sex. But quit the ground on which God and nature have placed you, and you are indeed to be pitied. If I might venture to hazard an opinion, not altogether unwarranted by the history, and which I am convinced by experience to be well founded you much oftener lose your object by over eagerness than by inattention. You may, now and then, succeed by address, or vehemence, or force; but you will succeed more certainly, and much more pleasantly with God and with man, by meekness, and gentleness, and submission.

Thus was Jacob most grievously wounded, there, where he was most vulnerable; most violently disturbed, there, where he promised himself perfect repose. Thus, our heaviest crosses arise out of our dearest comforts; and the pursuits of "vanity," issue in "vexation of spirit." Thus, all things conspire to give full assurance to the children of men, "that this is not their rest;" and invite them to seek: "another country, that is an heavenly, where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor pain," and "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

028. Jacob--Seeks Remuneration

Jacob--Seeks Remuneration

Gen 30:25-30. And it came to pass when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place and to my country. Give me my wives, and my children for whom I have served thee, and let me go: for thou knowest my service which I have done thee. And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favor in thy eyes, tarry, for I have learned by experience, that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake. And he said, appoint me thy wages, and I will give it. And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle was with me. For it was little which thou hadst before I came: and it is now increased unto a multitude; and the Lord hath blessed thee since my coming: and now when shall I provide for mine own house also?

There is no subject of contemplation more pleasing, more instructive, more composing to the mind, than the wisdom and goodness of the Divine Providence, in adapting and adjusting, with such consummate skill, the understanding, the dispositions, and the exertions of men, to their various and successive situations, relations, employments, and fortunes. What so feeble, so helpless, so necessitous as a new-born infant? But its proper aliment has accompanied it into the world. Its first cry has awakened ten thousand fond affections in one, who, at the hazard of her life, brought it forth, and at the hazard of her life, is ready to preserve it. What so giddy, rash, inconsiderate as youth? But the father is proportionably thoughtful, serious, and attentive. Man, of all animals, stands longest in need of support and protection; therefore natural affection in man is more intelligent and of greater duration than in any other creature. Instinct and reason unite their force, in aid of the lengthened infancy and childhood of the human race. Parents often, and unjustly, complain, that their care and tenderness meet not with reciprocal returns of attachment and affection from their children; not considering, that this current sets continually downward, and that the love which we bear to our offspring nature has intended they should repay, not to us, but to their offspring. Do our children grieve and vex us with their levity, and thoughtlessness, and folly. Let us have a little patience. By and by they shall become fathers and mothers; and then shall they be cured of what now gives us so much uneasiness; and then shall they be grieved, vexed, and mortified, in their turn. The anxieties which Jacob’s dissension with his brother occasioned to their fond parents are now thickening upon his own head. In the last period of his life, we saw the honest shepherd following his simple employment with cheerfulness and joy; drinking delicious draughts of love from the approving eyes of his amiable shepherdess; and beguiling the tedious months of servitude in converse with his Rachel, and with the prospect of that bright hour, which was to crown his hopes, and to reward all his toil. But those soft moments have passed away, and vanished like a dream; their flight was not perceived; their value is understood and prized after they are forever gone. The cares, and troubles, and apprehensions of a father now occupy his mind. Jealousy and strife disturb his repose. Why multiply elaborate arguments against the practice of polygamy. Look into the wretched disorder and discord of those families which have been built upon that unnatural system, and be assured it is not, it cannot be,

from Him, who loves the children of men, and all whose institutions aim at making them happy. The rival sisters, rather than not mortify each other, voluntarily mortify and degrade themselves, by raising their handmaids to a participation of their husband's bed. Envy and revenge, if they can but hurt an adversary, regard not the wounds which they inflict at home. Unhappy Jacob! my heart bleeds for him. His time, and labor, and strength, are at the disposal of a selfish, hard-hearted, insatiable father-in-law; his very person and affections are insolently settled, disposed of, and transferred at the pleasure of two jealous, wrangling sisters: while, behold a family rising and increasing upon him, without the power or means of making any provision for it. The mind of his beloved Rachel, whom he had earned at the hard price of fourteen years painful service, is soured and chagrined by the want of one blessing. The labors of the field through the day, are not relieved at night by the tenderness of sympathy and love, but embittered and aggravated by womanish altercation and strife. What could have supported him but religion?

Leah has, at various intervals, borne Jacob six sons and a daughter: and Rachel's grief and despair are at their height, when God, whose counsels move not, nor stand still in complaisance to our desires or caprices, thinks meet to remove her sorrow and reproach; and she becomes the joyful mother of a son. What ingenious pains the silly mothers take to perpetuate the memory of their jealous sentiments and contentions, in the names which they impose upon their children; impiously presuming to drag in Providence as a party to their quarrel; foolishly and wickedly transmitting their contemptible hatred and animosity to the disturbance and distress of their posterity; and madly sowing the seeds of a plague, which might one day break out and consume them! O how different the jealous spirit which at first dictated the names of the twelve heads of the tribes of Israel, from that prophetic spirit which foresaw and predicted their future characters and situations, as it breathed from the lips of their dying father; and, from the mind of God, who was employing female spleen and passion, to declare his own purposes and designs.

About the time of Joseph's birth, it would appear, the term of Jacob's servitude had expired. He now therefore naturally thinks of the home which he had left so long before, and of the obligations which he lay under, to exert himself in the maintenance and provision of his numerous family. He therefore modestly applies to Laban for his dismission. That greedy kinsman, well aware of the advantages which had accrued to him from Jacob's diligence, fidelity, and zeal, expresses much regret on hearing this proposal. But, it is not regret at the thought of parting with his daughters and grandchildren: it is not the tender concern of bidding a long farewell to a near relation and faithful servant. No, it is regret at losing an instrument of gain it is the sorrow of a man who loves only himself.

Hitherto, the profits of Jacob's industry had been wholly his uncle's. He had most ungenerously taken advantage of his nephew's passion for his daughter, to reduce him into a mere drudge for his own interest. From a sense of shame, as well as a regard to interest, he is at length constrained to Jacob's sharing the fruits of his own labor with him. Laban's craftiness had proved too hard for Jacob's candor and integrity; but the wisdom of Heaven, at last, proves more than a match for even the cunning of a Laban. Jacob, whether prompted from above, or instructed by natural sagacity, aided by experience, proposes as his hire, such a part of the flocks which he fed, as should be, in future, produced of a certain description, "the ring-straked, speckled, and spotted,"--which were so few in number, that they might rather be reckoned the sportings than the regular productions of nature. Laban acquiesces without hesitation in this proposal; wondering in

himself, I doubt not, that Jacob should be so simple as to make it. An entire separation is accordingly made, without delay, between the cattle of the description which had been stipulated, and the rest of the flock. They are removed to prevent all occasion of suspicion and complaint, to the distance of a three days' journey; and delivered into the custody of Laban's sons, men too like their father to throw any thing into Jacob's scale, either through good-will, neglect, or carelessness. Jacob continues to tend the remainder of the flocks, pure from all mixture, and they were by far the greatest part of the flock, for his father-in-law. The device which he employed, and which seems to have been suggested to him in a dream, is well known to all who read the Scriptures. It has been disputed, whether the success of it was in the ordinary course of natural cause and effect, or was entirely produced by a miraculous interposition in favor of our patriarch. Indeed, there seems in it a great deal of both the one and the other. That the female, in the moment of conception, should be more than usually susceptible of strong and extraordinary impressions, and capable of transmitting that impression to her young, so as clearly to mark and distinguish it, is too fully proved by experience to be denied. But this happens too seldom in the usual walk of nature, to permit us to suppose that the extraordinary increase of Jacob's cattle was in the mere current of thins, aided a little by human sagacity and skill. That one lamb, or kid, should be marked with "the streaks of the poplar, hazel, and chestnut rods," or, that one here and there through the flock should be thus distinguished, we can easily believe to happen without a miracle. But, that the great bulk of the young should bear this signature; that, as the impressing object was exhibited or withdrawn, the dams should conceive uniformly and correspondently, is, on no principle of nature or of art, to be ac counted for. The finger of God is therefore to be seen and acknowledged in it. Thus was the condition of Jacob speedily and wonderfully changed to the better: "And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maid-servants, and men-servants, and camels, and asses."[*]Gen 30:43 And thus, the world is instructed, that he who fears and follows God, will sooner or later find his reward. But it seems determined of Providence, that Jacob should never find a place of rest. Lately, he was poor and dependent, and thence anxious in his own mind, and liable to insult, and unkindness, and oppression from others. Now, he is rich and prosperous, and thence exposed to hatred and envy. And envy, like a plague or a torrent, sweeps every thing before it. We may easily conceive with what watchful jealousy Jacob's carriage and his charge were observed by such men as Laban and his sons. With what astonishment and indignation did they behold the best and most beautiful of the ewes and she-goats bringing forth nothing but "speckled and spotted!" Their rage and discontent are, for awhile, expressed by sullen looks and secret murmurs only. At length they become too violent to be suppressed, and break forth into open scurrility and abuse. The tongue of the gloomy father indeed says nothing--What can he say? But his averted looks, his glaring, dissatisfied, indignant eyes, fully declare the anguish that preys upon his heart. I confess I am malicious enough to enjoy it. I love to see the envious man goaded and stung by the lashes and snakes of his own dark, empoisoned conscience; because I love to see mankind happy. It gives me pleasure to see the generous rival of a sordid miser, surpassing him in wealth, eclipsing him in estimation and success: galling him by his prosperity and liberality.

Jacob, however, is unable to stand it. And, judging it better for all parties that they should separate, to save himself the distress of encountering the bitter words and sour looks of unkind relations, and to spare them the misery of witnessing his growing prosperity, he proposes to return to his aged, kind parents, from whom he was certain of meeting with a cordially affectionate

reception. The dialogue which passed between Jacob and his wives upon this occasion,[*]Gen 31:4-16 lets us deeper into the distresses and discomforts at his present condition; and exhibits the picture of a covetous man in still livelier, but therefore the more odious colors. From it we learn, that the sordid father, not contented with exacting of his son-in-law the rigorous performance of his hard bargain, according to the rules of strict justice, (and the justice of a miser is stern, unfeeling, and severe indeed) frequently had recourse to trick and chicane to over-reach and defraud him. No fidelity could please, no submission mollify, no attachment subdue, no tie of justice bind, no call of nature awaken his impenetrable, selfish heart. “Ye know that with all my power I have served your father. And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times, but God suffered him not to hurt me.”[*]Gen 31:6-7 “And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, Is there yet any portion of inheritance for us in our father’s house? Are we not counted of him strangers! For he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money.”[*]Gen 31:14-15 Whom do men commonly cherish and love with peculiar tenderness! Their daughters and grandchildren. For whom do men usually save, and gain, and lay up in store! For their daughters and grandchildren. But behold, here is a father who has sold his daughters for hire, who treats them as strangers to his blood, defrauds them of their undoubted right! Behold a grandfather taking pleasure, not in the innocent prattle, not in the dawning genius, not in the increasing stature of the young ones who descended from his own loins; not in smoothing for them the rugged path of life, not in extending and brightening their prospects, not in rearing and establishing their fortunes! but, in diverting the streams of their subsistence; but, in grasping to himself the hard-earned fruits of their father’s industry; but, in undermining, counteracting, destroying their interests and their hopes! How happy it is for the world, that this vile passion is neither immortal nor omnipotent God is, in spite of Laban, fulfilling to Jacob the covenant and promise which he entered into at Bethel. Jacob had stipulated but moderate things for himself, “bread to eat and raiment to put on,” whilst he was from home; and a peaceable and safe return to his father’s house: and lo, an indulgent Providence has far exceeded his expectations, and even his desires. But, if he be increased, he is also encumbered; if his stock be larger, so is also his care; have his comforts multiplied! he is but the more vulnerable. A retinue, consisting of two wives and as many concubines; twelve children, the eldest but thirteen years old, and the youngest under seven; of the servants necessary to a family so numerous; of a live stock so extensive, to be removed, and of the attendants absolutely needful for that purpose; a family such as this, was in a condition very unfavorable to the journey which they are about to undertake, especially, liable as they were to be pursued and overtaken by incensed Laban; or, intercepted and cut off by the way, by the equally incensed Esau. But, Jacob is following the direction of Heaven, and therefore proceeds with humble confidence. What a destroyer of human comfort is wealth, that universal object of pursuit! See, it has alienated the affections of one man from his own family; it has driven another to flee from that person as an enemy, whom he had once sought unto as a friend. In one shape or another, this evil affection, the love of riches, is, I am afraid, at the bottom of most of the ill we do, and of most of the ills which we suffer.

Jacob, having communicated his intention to his family, and obtained their hearty concurrence, takes advantage of Laban’s occupation in the business of his sheep-shearing, to steal away homeward. And he has the felicity of gaining three days’ journey, before the news of his flight have reached the uncle. But encumbered as he was, this is but a slight advantage, if a pursuit were attempted; and he must be indebted for his safety, after all, to the protection of that God whom he

was following, and not to his own wisdom, foresight, speed, or force.

Jacob, I dare say, was scrupulously careful to remove nothing but what was, by a clear and undoubted title, his own. He who had repeatedly and patiently submitted to imposition and oppression, for the sake of quietness, was not likely to provoke enmity, and justify vengeance, by robbery and plunder. But Rachel, in what view, and for what reason, it is not easy to determine, has “stolen away the images which were her father’s.” Many solutions have been attempted, of this strange and unaccountable piece of theft. Some of them I shall just mention, leaving you to form your own judgment of the matter. It is alleged by some Rabbis, that she carried off the Teraphim or idols, lest her father, by consulting them, should discover the route which Jacob had taken, and so pursue with the greater certainty of overtaking him. Some ascribe her conduct to piety and natural affection, as if she meant to make Laban sensible of the weakness of deities which would suffer themselves to be stolen away, without giving notice of such a design, and were incapable of making any resistance; thereby hoping to detach her father from the absurdity and impiety of idol worship. Others, less charitably disposed towards her, represent her as a true daughter of Laban, instigated by covetousness, to purloin the deities, for the value of the precious materials of which they were composed, or whereby they were ornamented. And Chrysostom, with almost equal severity, accounts for the robbery from her predilection in favor of idolatry.

Thus Jacob left his father-in-law: or, to use the marginal reading, which is sufficiently warranted by the Hebrew words, “stole away the heart of Laban the Syrian;” that is, either he acted with so much prudence and caution, that Laban suspected not, fathomed not his design; or, he stole away that which was dear to him as his heart and soul, his precious, precious wealth. The sequel abundantly justifies this latter interpretation. For Laban is no sooner informed of his son-in-law’s escape, than, without the shadow of a pretence to molest him on his way, or to force him back, makes after him with a powerful body of his friends, if not to plunder and murder him, at least, to oblige him to return. After seven days’ hasty marching, he overtakes him and his cumbersome train, in Mount Gilead; and he is ready to seize on his defenseless prey. But the God in whom Jacob trusted, plants around him a fence more impenetrable than the Adam and the rock. Laban’s gods could not hinder themselves from being stolen away by a simple woman, and packed up among other lumber, to be conveyed off: but Jacob’s God is watching and protecting him night and day; nay, watching his enemy too, to check and repress him. For, the vision of the Almighty, is not only with them that fear him, to direct and comfort them, but sometimes also with them that fear him not, to restrain, to threaten, and to terrify them.

God, in a dream by night, charges Laban, in a manner which he could not but understand, feel, and remember, charges him at his peril to offer Jacob any injury in word or deed: “for when a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemy to be at peace with him.” Thus warned, he comes up with his nephew next morning; and, like many, who, when they are galled by an ill conscience, endeavor to ease themselves of its reproaches, by transferring the blame from themselves to the persons whom they have wronged; he reproaches Jacob with a conduct, which, he well knew, had resulted entirely from his own harshness and severity, and upbraids him with unkind behavior to his daughters, fully convinced all the while, that they had no ground of complaint against any one, so much as against their own unnatural, unkind father, who had counted them as strangers: “for he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money.”

It is pleasant to hear a miserly wretch talk of the liberal and generous things which he intended to have done, after the call and occasion are over, and his generosity is in no danger of being brought to the test.--Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away from me! and didst not tell me that I might have sent thee away with mirth, and with songs, with tabret, and with harp? And hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters? Thou hast now done foolishly, in so doing."[*]Gen 31:27-28 But truth will appear through the closest disguise. With all this pompous parade of kindness and affection, he is weak enough to avow the violent purpose with which he had undertaken the pursuit, and, from his father-in-law's own lips, Jacob has the satisfaction to learn that he owed his safety to the kind interposition of a heavenly, not to the altered mind of an earthly parent.

But, figure to yourselves Jacob's surprise, when charged by Laban with having stolen his gods. If there was a thin g about Laban's house more odious and contemptible than another in his eyes, it was his Teraphim. He would justly have reckoned such an impure mixture among his goods as the corrupter and destroyer of the whole. His defence therefore is simple, yet forcible; because it is the language of genuine truth, and of conscious innocence and integrity. I like Jacob's speech throughout.[*]Gen 31:36-42 It is the language of a good and honest heart. Your time permits me not to make any commentary upon it. Indeed it needs none. Observe only, in general, how generous is the fear which he expresses, lest Laban should violently resume the wives whom he had given him. Some of them had been obtruded upon him by fraud, others by persuasion; but they are the mothers of his children, and therefore he cannot bear to think of parting with them, though he might have been permitted. How noble is the disdain and indignation which he, expresses, on being charged with the theft of Laban's gods! How manly the recapitulation of his past services and sufferings! How bold the defiance he bids to malice and resentment! But, it discovers too much of a great and generous spirit, to be passes: over thus slightly. I must therefore take the liberty to resume it, and to enlarge a little upon it--and now hasten to conclude, with this single idea, of the analogy which we never wish for a moment to lose sight of Jacob, leaving Canaan, solitary and poor, banished from his father's house, and degraded into slavery: and Jacob, returning, loaded with the spoils of churlish Laban, and blessed with a numerous, prosperous, and increasing family, without a violent stretch of thought, prefigures to us--Jesus, descending from heaven, and the original splendors of his nature; voluntarily depressing himself into the form of a servant, and meekly submitting, for a season, and to accomplish a great and important purpose, to the want of the smiles of his heavenly Father's countenance: and "the glory that followed"--his triumphant return to heaven, adorned with the spoils of death and hell, and attended by an innumerable train of spiritual sons and daughters, acquired in a strange land, adopted into the family of God, constituted the heirs of glory, and in due time to be exalted, together with their glorious Head, to heavenly thrones, May we, beloved, swell the triumph of that day, and find eternal rest from the toils and dangers of the way, in the bosom of our Father and our God. Amen.

029. Jacob--Fearing Esau

Jacob--Fearing Esau

Gen 32:9-11. And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto, me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant: for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. The man who is instructed to “acknowledge God in all his ways,” and he only, has found out the road that leads to true happiness. The cup of prosperity wants its choicest ingredient when the love of our heavenly Father, is not tasted in it. The bitterest potion, when mingled by his hand, we can drink with confidence and cheerfulness. It is pleasant to a man, to see his own sagacity and diligence crowned with success. But very imperfect is that pleasure unless he can look up and say with submission and gratitude, “the blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow therewith.” There is a virulence in the ills which we bring upon ourselves, or which flow from the unkindness and injustice of others, that corrodes the heart, and depresses the spirit. But calamity, the appointment of Heaven, calamity the discipline of a Father’s care and wisdom, brings its own relief along with it. The very poison, if administered by his hand, becomes its own antidote, and what threatened to kill, effects a cure.

It would greatly tend to improve our wisdom, to promote our piety, and increase our pleasure, to take frequent and particular reviews of our own life; and to observe the changes which have taken place in our circumstances from time to time, in connection with the means and instruments which Providence more clearly or more obscurely has employed, and through which our enterprises have succeeded or failed. Many, very many, have arrived at situations to which once in their lives they durst not have presumed to aspire. But their present elevation and prosperity want their brightest ornament and their firmest support if they be destitute of that spirit which good Jacob breathes in the words which I have read--that spirit which ascribes every acquisition, every blessing to the wonder-working hand of indulgent Heaven.

Few men have experienced greater varieties, greater reverses of condition than our patriarch. But we find him perpetually gathering strength from the hardships which he endured, supporting a life of uninterrupted, unutterable affliction with patience and fortitude, suffering and feeling as a man but enduring and overcoming as a saint, and at length closing the extended scene of woe, with the triumph of a believer exulting in the bright, unclouded prospects of immortality.

One general remark may be applied to his whole history. His deepest distresses sprung out of his choicest comforts; his most signal successes took their rise from his heaviest afflictions. The attainment of the birthright and the blessing drove him into banishment; the labor, watchfulness, and anxiety of a shepherd’s life conducted him to opulence and importance. The elevation which he too eagerly grasped at was the cause of his depression; the humiliation to which be voluntarily and patiently submitted became the foundation of his future greatness. The partial fondness of a

mother exposed him to the unnatural unkindness and severity of an uncle; the jealousy and envy of malevolent and selfish brothers-in-law forced him back to the calm delights of his father's house.

After twenty years' hard service under Laban, which that ungenerous kinsman repaid with harshness, injustice, and deceit, but which God was pleased bountifully to reward by a numerous and thriving progeny and large possessions, he sets out secretly, in order to shun the mortification which he daily endured, for the land of Canaan. He is hotly pursued, and with hostile dispositions, by his father-in-law, and overtaken, encumbered as he was, on the seventh day, in Mount Gilead. Providence once more interposes in his behalf, and protects him from Laban's fury.--Charged with undutifulness and disrespect, and accused of a robbery which he would rather have died than commit, he defends himself with the spirit of a man, with the dignity of conscious innocence, and the awful superiority of truth and virtue. Those who have a taste to relish the modest, manly, simple, pathetic eloquence of a good and honest heart, will, I am persuaded, find much pleasure in the perusal of Jacob's reply to Laban's accusation. "And Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban; and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What is my trespass? What is my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me? Whereas thou host searched all my stuff; what hast thou found of all thy household stuff? Set it here before my brethren, and thy brethren, that they may judge betwixt us both. This twenty years have I been with thee: thy ewes and thy she-goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. Thus I was, in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from mine eyes. Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle; and thou hast changed my wages ten times. Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction, and the labor of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight."[*]Gen 31:36-42 The power of truth is irresistible, and even Laban, though with an ill grace, is constrained to yield to it; and matters are at length amicably settled to their mutual satisfaction. To prevent as much as possible all future ground of fear and suspicion, a covenant of peace and good will is ratified between them, with all the solemnities of a sacrifice, an oath, a monumental pillar, and a feast of love. In the whole of which transaction, we cannot help remarking, that Laban, the party who had the wicked intention and the guilty conscience, is the first to propose, and the most eager to employ the awful formalities of compacts, and promises, and oaths. He knew that he himself needed to be thus bound, and therefore judges it necessary thus to bind the other. Laws are made for the violent and injurious, covenants for the false and perfidious. The light of an upright heart is its own law, the conscience of an honest man his own faithful witness, his own tremendous judge. What is the opinion of the world to conscious integrity? "The conscious mind is its own awful world." Guilt is timorous, jealous, and suspecting; innocence bold, believing, and generous. Laban employs the most words; Jacob has the purer and more righteous intention. Laban does justice, not from a regard to duty, but through fear of detection and punishment; Jacob speaks and practices truth because he loves it. The form of religion is employed by Laban to perfect the security which he wanted; Jacob scruples not to superadd the form, where he felt the force of the obligation. Laban swears, that he might hold the other fast; Jacob, because he fears an oath, and is willing at once to satisfy the other and to bind himself. Laban, an idolater, calls to witness the gods whom the ancestors of Abraham and Nahor served "beyond the flood;" Jacob, a worshipper of the living and true God, swears by "the fear of his father

Isaac," the God who has power to save and to destroy. The agreement being thus solemnly ratified, and the hour of separation at length come, they part with mutual satisfaction--Laban with the self-congratuation of having made a virtue of necessity; and Jacob, well pleased to have escaped so happily from a danger so threatening. Laban returns with his train to Haran, and we hear of him no more. And little does it signify what became of an old miserly knave, whose name had been better blotted out of every record, than transmitted to posterity with so many notes of infamy upon it. Jacob goes on his way rejoicing towards Canaan, beloved of God, and respected of men.

He has hardly bidden his father-in-law farewell, when we find the angels of God pressing forward to meet him."[*]Gen 32:1 The history of these superior beings, and of their commerce with mankind, is so brief, so obscure, and so figurative, as rather to excite curiosity than to gratify it. It serves rather to furnish matter for speculation, than to convey distinct, full, and exact information. By the angels of God, who are said to have met Jacob on this occasion, some understand merely human messengers, whether deputed from among his own attendants to examine the country through which he was to travel, or some friendly strangers directed that way of Providence, to warn him of the approach of his brother Esau. But we cannot materially err by taking the words of Moses in their literal acceptation, and according to the more obvious sense which they convey. "Wherefore should it be thought a thing incredible," that the same merciful God who condescended to visit Jacob's sleep at Bethel, with a vision of angels ascending and descending from Heaven to earth, to cheer and encourage his solitary progress to Haran, should vouchsafe to bless his waking thoughts at Mahanaim with a visit of these ministering spirits in a bodily form, to be the image and the assurance of the divine favor and protection in every hour of danger, in every time of need? What had that man to fear from the rage of an incensed brother, though that brother were followed by an armed host, around whom "the angels of the Lord encamped" in two hosts or bands.

Whether the history, in this passage, is to be understood literally or figuratively; whether these angels were human or supernatural beings; this, in either view, well deserves remark, that Jacob was not induced, in confidence of the vision, to neglect any duty of piety or of prudence. Piety dictates the address and recommendation of himself to the Goal of angels and of men, which we read in the opening of our discourse; and in this he chiefly rested his safety. And prudence made such a wise arrangement of his affairs, as might either gain a brother by kindness, melt him by submission, or oppose him with success. The religion which, aiming at things uncommon, miraculous, or preternatural, neglects or despises the plain track of reason and revelation, is dangerous, and to be suspected. It ministers too much to human vanity; it would establish a standard, vague, variable, and capricious as the wild imagination of man; and, making every one in matters of faith, a law unto himself, would depreciate time "sure word of prophesy," which yields a steady, uniform, and certain light, to illuminate a dark world. The disposition of his company, which Jacob made, in the view of meeting- his brother either as a friend or an enemy, discovers the deepest wisdom and penetration. Everything that might revive the memory of their ancient grudge is artfully suppressed. If there appear any ostentation of wealth, it is wealth devoted to the use and service of a brother. The message which was put into the mouths of the servants who conducted the droves of cattle, to be successively delivered to Esau, is wonderfully calculated to turn away the wrath of an angry man, "my lord Esau," "thy servant Jacob." And the present

judiciously intended to disarm and mollify him, is, with equal judgment, exhibited and tendered not, all at once, but slowly and gradually; in sensibly to steal upon his heart, and imperceptibly to lull all his resentments asleep. He appears voluntarily paying, a tribute of duty and affection as to his sovereign, not haughtily exacting submission and acknowledgment as from his vassal. Fear for his own life had driven him, twenty years ago, from the face of Esau, and now that his being is, as it were, multiplied in the persons of so many, dear to him as his own soul, his apprehension increases in proportion.

We cannot but observe, though we need not much wonder at, the partiality discovered in settling the order of this domestic procession. The beloved wife and her darling son are placed in the rear, farthest from danger, if danger there were, because first in the attention and respect of the fond husband and father. Unhappy Jacob! whether shall we pity or blame thee? In this management I see the dawnings of that unwise and unfortunate preference, which afterwards raised such a tempest in the family, and pierced through the paternal heart with so many sorrows. The thirty-second chapter of this sacred book concludes with the history of an event in Jacob's life, so very singular and mysterious, as to baffle interpretation, and defy criticism. I mean, his wrestling with a person unknown, in the form of a man, whom he afterwards describes as God, and against whom he prevailed in the contest. If this transaction is to be understood according to the letter of the narration, the Spirit of God has seen meet to withhold the knowledge of some particulars which are necessary to a clear and distinct comprehension of it; and the inquirer is stopped short, with the reply of the angel who wrestled, to Jacob's request, "Tell me I pray thee thy name;" "Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?[*]Gen 32:29 The figurative meaning, and the practical intention and application, are more obvious and it is this indeed with which we have chiefly to do. Jacob was that very morning to meet Esau, his brother, who was advancing toward him, at the head of four hundred men. Uncertain of his disposition and intentions, conscious of having given him much cause of offence, and apprised of the menacing and resentful language which he had formerly held concerning him, he shudders to think of the consequences of this formidable encounter. And, having first poured out his soul to God in such a dreadful emergency, and then adopted the measures for safety which wisdom and the necessity of his situation suggested, he again, it is natural to suppose, might have recourse to earnest prayer and supplication, and continue in it during a great part of the night and morning. This, in the forcible and figurative phrase of oriental language, might be expressed "by his wrestling" with God "to the dawning of the day;" and is at length prevailing so far as to obtain from God some sensible sign or token, to assure him he should be carried through this, as through his other dangers and distresses, undestroyed, unhurt. The sign given him was calculated at once to express approbation of his faith, fortitude, and perseverance; and to convince him of his inferiority and weakness. The unknown wrestler, though seemingly foiled in the combat, by a simple touch dislocates a joint in the hollow of Jacob's thigh, and thereby disables him from continuing the struggle. Might not the wisdom of God be employing such mystical representation and expression to instruct men in the nature of prayer, and to enforce the obligation of it? "To the end that we should pray always and not faint." Do we prevail in our applications at the throne of grace? It is because our heavenly Father is disposed to yield, and stands out only to heighten our exertions, and call forth our importunity. Have we power with God, and prevail?" Then "what is man who shall die, and the son of man who is a worm!" Did Jacob sink and fail in the very moment of victory! We are just what God makes or permits us to be.

Whatever were the real circumstances of this extraordinary scene, it procured Jacob a new and an honorable name, which obliterated to his posterity, if not altogether to himself; that less honorable appellation which commemorated a little, though significant incident attending his birth, and which recorded the infamy of his unfair dealings with his father and brother; Jacob, the supplanter, is transformed into Israel, a prince with God. The vision of the Almighty is scarcely at an end, when the interview with Esau takes place. And we are then fittest for every service, for every trial, when we have settled matters with Heaven. He who by a touch disjointed Jacob's thigh, could by a word have scattered Esau's host. But behold a greater miracle! By a simple act of his sovereign will, he has in a moment changed Esau's heart. They meet, they converse, they love, as brothers ought to do. And "O how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" We apprehend a strife of fierce and angry looks, of reproachful words, of violence and blood. But how joyful the disappointment! Behold a contention of kindness, a blessed contest of affection; the honest, heart-melting triumph of nature, the noble victory of goodness. Let the proud and the resentful peruse, with care, this inimitable scene of tenderness, painted in colors so bright and so touching by the pencil of inspiration,[*]Gen 33:4-15 and say, whether it be possible for any gratification of revenge, any depression of a hated rival, any triumph of violence and blood, to yield any thing that deserves the name of, joy, compared with the sweet satisfaction which must have filled the bosoms of this pair of brothers, burying animosity and discord in mutual endearments, and expressions of good will. Ah, why should so many wretched brothers as there are of us, pass through a world in which there is so much unavoidable misery, estranged from one another; or madly, wantonly, wickedly interrupt and disturb each other's passage, by bitterness and wrath! What wretched things are wealth, and pomp, and state ant power, which will not permit brothers to live together in love as they might, and as, but for one or other of these disturbers of human quiet, they would do!

Such scenes as that which now passed between Jacob and Esau ought to have been perpetual. But alas, it cannot be! Esau must return to his possession in Mount Seir that very day; and Jacob pursue his journey to Canaan. The paternal roof must no more cover their heads again at one time, nor the affectionate parents enjoy the supreme felicity of witnessing their reconciliation, and of strengthening it by their blessing and their prayers. Let the lower ranks of mankind rejoice, that a gracious Providence, in withholding from them affluence, and station, and distinction, has left them a blessing greater than all put together, friendship, and the means of exercising and enjoying it. Parents, as ye love your children, and wish to have them near yea, and to bless you with a sight of their health and prosperity, be moderate in your views and efforts concerning them. Prospects of ambition, or of avarice, will of necessity banish them from your sight, will separate them from each other, will scatter them upon the face of the earth.

Jacob, by slow movements, as the delicate condition of part of his retinue required, advances homewards in a south-west direction from the ford of Penuel, on the south bank of the Jabbok, towards Jordan; and arrived safe at the ford of Succoth. So called from the booths which he erected there, for a temporary repose to himself and family, in the plains of Jordan, about twelve or fifteen miles from Penuel; ten miles south of the sea of Galilee; and five south of the Jabbok, where it runs into Jordan: a city afterwards assigned by lot to the tribe of Gad. After resting at Succoth about a month, be proceeds to travel from Jordan west and by south about thirty-five miles, and arrives in peace and safety, according to the promise and covenant of the God of

Bethel, which was ratified more than twenty years before, at Shechem, the city of Hamor, the Hivite; of whom he bought a field, in the same place where Abraham first pitched his tent upon coming into Canaan. And there Jacob erected an altar, and dedicated it by the name of El-Elohe-Israel, God, the God of Israel. Now this event happened in the year of the world two thousand two hundred and sixty-six; before Christ, one thousand seven hundred and thirty-eight; after the flood, six hundred and ten; from the peregrination of Abraham, one hundred and eighty-three; before Jacob's descent into Egypt, thirty-two; before the going out of the children of Israel from Egypt, two hundred and forty-seven; and in the year of Jacob's life, ninety-eight; Isaac, his aged father, living then at Beer-sheba, one hundred and fifty-seven years old. And this naturally furnishes another resting place in the history of our patriarch. The next Lecture, if God permit, will resume the subject, and carry it forward to a conclusion. We detain you only for a moment or two, to suggest a few thoughts on the analogy of Jacob and Christ, from this portion of the Scripture history. How beautifully and how exactly does the account which Jacob gives of himself as a shepherd correspond to the character of the "good shepherd who giveth his life for the sheep!" "This twenty years have I been with thee thy ewes and thy she-goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. That which was torn of beasts, I brought not unto thee: I bare the loss of it. Of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night. Thus I was, in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from mine eyes."[*]Gen 31:38-40 "And he said unto him, my lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me : and if men should over-drive them one day, all the flock will die. Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant; and I will lead on softly, according as the cattle that goeth before me, and the children be able to endure; until I come unto my lord unto Seir."[*]Gen 32:13-14 "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."[*]Isa 11:11 Angels, thus ministering to the heir of the promise, at Bethel, at Mahanaim, lead our thoughts directly to the annunciation, the nativity, the temptation in the wilderness, the agony in the garden, the resurrection, the ascension, the second coming of our blessed Lord. The wrestling at Peniel, is a strong figurative description of the powerful and prevalent intercession of the Prince with God, Messiah himself, whose language is not "Father, I beseech thee," but "Father, I will." Jacob's safe and happy return to Canaan, and to his father's house, every enemy being subdued either by fear or by love, accompanied with two bands of sons and daughters, wherewith God had enriched him in the land where he was a stranger, and where he had been humbled, and oppressed,--prefigures, as has been suggested in a former discourse, the triumphant return of the great Captain of salvation to his father's house above, loaded with the spoils of principalities and powers: the power of hell vanquished by force, an elect world redeemed and rescued by love. "His right hand and his holy arm had gotten him the victory;" "he shall reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet," "sing praises to his name, sing praise." "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."[*]Psa 68:8 "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."[*]Rev 1:5-6 Amen.

030. Jacob--Protector of Benjamin

Jacob--Protector of Benjamin

Gen 42:36-38. And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children; Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me. And Reuben spake unto his father, saying, Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee: deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again. And he said, My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.

It is a pleasing and an useful employment to trace important events up to their sources; to mark the gradual progress of human affairs; to observe the same persons at different periods of their existence, and in different situations; to discover on what delicate hinges their fortunes have turned; and to contemplate the wisdom, power, and goodness of Divine Providence, in producing the greatest effects from the slightest and most unlikely causes. There is no greater error in conduct than to reckon certain actions relating to morals, trifling and insignificant. When revolutions in private families, and in empires, are pursued up to the springs from whence they flow, they are often found to commence in some little error, inadvertency, or folly, which, at the time, might have been despised or neglected. Just as mighty rivers begin their course in some paltry, obscure stream, which the peasant could dry up with the sole of his foot. The past is infinitely less perspicuous to the eye of human understanding, than the future is to divine intelligence. God “seeth the end from the beginning, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will fulfill all my pleasure.” The periods which make the most brilliant figure in the page of history, were periods of anxiety and trouble to the men and the nations who then figured on the scene. A life of many incidents is a life of much distress. When the writer has got a great deal to relate, the person whose life is recorded has had a great deal to suffer.

Much more is written of Jacob than of any other of the patriarchs. Alas! it is only saying that his miseries were much more numerous and severe. In a life shorter than his father’s by thirty-three years, calamity so crowded upon calamity, that it seems extended to the utmost stretch of even antediluvian longevity. What hour of his mature age is free from pain and sorrow? Not one! In what region does he find repose? No where. Canaan, Haran, Egypt, are to him almost equally inclement. As a son, a servant, an husband, a father; in youth, in manhood, in old age; he is unremittingly afflicted. And no sooner is one difficulty surmounted, one woe past, than another and a greater overtakes him. Formerly he had youthful blood and spirits to encounter and to endure the ills of life. Hope still cheered the heart, and scattered the cloud. But now, behold the hoary head sinking with sorrow to the grave; the spirit oppressed, overwhelmed, with a sea of trouble. Keen recollection summons up the ghosts of former afflictions, and past joys recur only to remind him that they are gone forever; and black despair obscures, excludes the prospect of good to come. What heart is not wrung, at hearing a poor old man closing the bitter recapitulation of his misfortunes, in the words I have read, “All, all these things are against me?”

Perhaps the life of no other man affords a like instance of accumulated distress. The mournful detail of this evening will present, collected within the compass of not many months, a series of the heaviest afflictions that ever man endured; and all springing up out of objects, in which the heart naturally seeks and expects to find delight. An only daughter dishonored--his eldest hope stained with incest--Simeon and Levi polluted with innocent blood--Judah joined in marriage to a woman of Canaan, and a father by his own daughter-in-law--Joseph torn in pieces by wild beasts--his beloved Rachel lost in childbirth--his venerable father removed from him in the course of nature--the miserable wreck and remains of his family ready perish with famine--Simeon a prisoner in Egypt,--and Benjamin, the only remaining pledge of his Rachel's love, demanded and forced to be given up. What sorrow was ever like this sorrow? "This is the man who hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath." And does all a partial mother's fondness; do all a father's blessings, wishes, and prayers; do all the promises and predictions of Heaven issue in this? "If in this life only there were hope," who so miserable as God's dearest children? Whose lot is so much to be deplored as that of the son of Isaac?

Jacob, after an absence of more than twenty years, has returned to the land of his nativity. A guardian Providence has protected and delivered him from his avowed enemies, from Laban, and from Esau: but the most dangerous enemies of his repose are still nearer to him, they "are those of his own house." He has purchased an estate, he has spread his tent, he has erected his altar; "his mountain stands strong," what can move him! From what slight beginnings, do great events arise! Dinah the daughter of Jacob, prompted by female vanity, curiosity, or some other motive equally deserving blame, ventures, unattended, beyond the verge of the paternal superintendence and protection, and falls into danger and shame. She went out, says the Scripture, "to see the daughters of the land." Josephus affirms, that she was attracted by the celebration of a great public festival, according to the manners of the country. Her youth, innocence, and inexperience inspire confidence; novelty awakens curiosity; beauty tempts, opportunity favors, and virtue is lost. From the first transgression, down to this day, female disgrace and ruin have begun in the gratification of an immoderate desire to see, and to know, some new thing; from an inclination to exhibit themselves, and to observe others. One daughter of Israel is much more likely to be corrupted by communication with many daughters of Canaan than they are to be improved by the conversation of that one. There is much wisdom, my fair friends, in keeping far, very far within your bounds. There is danger, great danger, in advancing to the utmost limit of liberty and virtue. For, the extreme boundary of virtue is also the extreme boundary of vice; and she who goes every length she lawfully may, is but half a step from going farther than she ought, or perhaps than she intended.

Desire is commonly extinguished by gratification; but it is also sometimes inflamed by it. And so it was with Shechem. The first disorder of his passion and its effects, are not more to his shame, than the reparation which he intended and attempted, is to his honor. Indeed, if we except the leading step in this transaction, the whole proceeding on the part of the young prince is noble and generous to a high degree; and loudly reproves and strikingly exposes the cool, the cruel, remorseless seducers of a Christian age, and of a civilized country. The unhappy father receives the news of his daughter's dishonor with silent sorrow. And how often does he wish in the sequel, that he had forever buried his grief in his own heart! Hamor readily adopts the views of his son, disdains not the alliance of a shepherd, courts Dinah, though humbled, with all the respect due to

a princess, and all the munificence becoming one who was himself a sovereign. Those who are fathers, who have daughters for whom they feel, or for whom they fear, will judge of Jacob's satisfaction at this proposal. To have the wound which had been made in the fond paternal heart, instantly closed up; the stain cast upon his name, wiped clean away; his darling child's peace and reputation restored; an honorable alliance formed with a wealthy, virtuous, and generous prince; a whole people proselyted from idols to the God of Israel. How many sources of exquisite satisfaction! Is the black cloud over Jacob's head going for once to descend in refreshing drops, is it going for once to burst, and disperse itself into calmness and serenity? Alas, alas! the tempest is only gathering thicker around him; and dreadful must the discharge of it be. I shudder as I proceed.

Simeon and Levi, two brothers having the same parents of Dinah, and who, on that account, think themselves peculiarly concerned in the vindication of their sister's honor, affect to receive Shechem's overtures with complacency.--They have no scruples but what arise from religion. Let these be removed, and the way is cleared at once. Deep, designing, dissembling villains! The ordinance of God is in their mouths, the malice of the devil lies brooding in their hearts. They recommend a sacrament, and they are preparing a sacrifice, a horrid human sacrifice, of many victims.

There is not a more singular fact in all history, than the ready compliance of the whole inhabitants of Shechem with the proposal of changing their religion, and of receiving, at so late a period in life, the painful sign of circumcision. Great must have been the authority which Hamer had over them, or great the affection which they bore him. Unhappy man! and he practiced a little deceit in stating the case to his people, but was himself much more grossly deceived. And I greatly question whether he had prevailed, had not the temptation of Jacob's cattle and other substance, been held out as a motive to obtain their consent. Comply however they did--and it proved fatal to them. For on the third day, the two sons of Jacob already mentioned attended probably by a band of their friends and servants, rushed upon them and put them all to the sword. "Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel; I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel."[*]Gen 44:7 We no where meet with an instance of more savage, indiscriminating barbarity. For the offence of one, a whole nation is mercilessly cut off; and rapine closes the scene of blood. For they plundered the city, and carried off the wretched women captive whose husbands they had murdered. Horrid, infernal passion! And how was Dinah's honor repaired by this! And these simple, easy, believing men, these harmless, unoffending women, what had they done? Daughters of Canaan, dearly have ye bought the favor of a visit from Jacob's daughter. Idle and unhallowed was the opening of the scene, and dreadful has the conclusion been. I should not have been surprised to hear of a confederacy among all the neighboring states, to exterminate such a band of robbers and murderers from the face of the earth. Jacob is justly alarmed with the apprehension of this, and, warned of God, removes from the neighborhood of Shechem to Bethel; a spot that brought to his recollection, calmer, happier days--when he was flying indeed from his country, without wealth, without a friend; but free also from the anxiety, vexation, and care, which an increased family and abounding wealth have brought upon him. How much better is it to go childless, than have children to be the grief and plague of a man's heart? Being arrived at Bethel, where he had been blessed with the visions of the Almighty on his way to Padan-Aram, he deems it a proper time and place to purge his family of every vestige of idolatry. It is no easy matter to live

in an idolatrous, or irreligious country, without losing a sense of religion, or acquiring a wrong one. This is one of the great evils which attend traveling into distant lands. Our young men who reside long abroad, whatever else they bring back to their native country, generally drop by the way the pious principles which were in stilled into them in their youth. Some very nearly related to Jacob, I am afraid, had a violent hankering after the gods beyond the flood. Why else did Rachel steal away the images which were her father's? However that may be, Jacob now disposes of them in a proper manner, and buries every shred that could minister to idolatry, under the oak that was by Shechem. The conduct of Jacob's sons had, of necessity, awakened a hostile spirit in the country against him, which, had it not been providentially restrained, must have proved fatal to him. But "the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob."[*]Gen 35:5

About this time, a breach was made in the family by the death of Deborah, Rebekah's nurse; the threatening and fore-runner of a much heavier stroke. For, just after they had left Bethel, as he was on his way finally to join his father with all his family, with a heart exulting, no doubt, in the prospect of presenting to his venerable parents the wives and children which God had given him; Rachel, his much-loved Rachel, is suddenly taken in labor by the way side, and dies, after bearing another son. Unhappy woman! She falls a victim to what she had coveted so earnestly. "Give me children else I die," in her haste, in the bitterness of her heart, she exclaimed. She obtains her wish, and it proves fatal to her. God, a righteous God, gives her children, and she dies. Resentment at her vehemence and impatience is lost in sorrow for her loss. The history does not expand itself here, but simply relates the fact. Some causes are injured, not assisted, by a multiplicity of words. The feelings of the patriarch on this occasion are rather to be conceived than described. Rachel early, constantly, tenderly loved; earned with long and severe servitude; endeared by knowledge and habit, and rendered more important and valuable by fruitfulness, could not be lost without pain. It was natural for the dying mother to think of perpetuating the memory of her mortal anguish, by giving the son whom she brought into life at the expense of her own, the name of Ben-oni, "the son of my sorrow." It was wise and pious in the surviving father, to preserve rather the memory of the benefit received, than of the loss sustained; and by the name of Benjamin, "the son of my right hand," to mark and record submission to, and trust in Providence, rather than seek to perpetuate his grief, by retaining the maternal appellation, which seemed to murmur at and to reflect upon the dispensations of the Almighty. Dying in childbirth, it was found necessary to bury her with greater expedition than the removal of the corpse to the cave of Machpelah permitted; though there the precious dust of Sarah and of Abraham reposed. And, as it is happily ordered by nature, Jacob amuses, soothes, and spends his grief, which might otherwise have oppressed and spent him, in erecting a monument to Rachel's memory. Thus, what the heart in the first paroxysms of its anguish intends as the means of rendering grief lasting or continual, gradually, imperceptibly, and most graciously extinguishes it altogether.

While this wound was still bleeding, the patriarch's heart is pierced through with another stroke, if not so acute, perhaps more overwhelming. Reuben, his eldest hope, raised and distinguished by Providence, placed in the foremost rank among many brethren, degrades and dishonors himself by the commission of a crime which modesty blushes to think of, and "such as is not so much as named among the Gentiles;" a crime which blended the guilt and shame of another with his own; which could not make the usual apologies of surprise, temptation, or passion for itself: But let us

hasten from it. We can sit and weep awhile upon the grave of Rachel; but from the incestuous couch of Reuben, imagination flies away with horror and disgust. What a dreadfully licentious, irregular, and disorderly family, is the family of pious Jacob! Each of his sons is worse and more wicked than another. Accursed Laban, I see thy infernal avarice at the bottom of all this disorder and wickedness! It was 'that which first introduced a multiplicity of wives into Jacob's bosom. It was that which created and kept up jarring interests in his family; and gave birth to those unhallowed, disgraceful, head-strong passions, which disturbed his peace, pierced his heart, and dishonored his name. An affliction more in the order of nature, and whose certain and gradual approach must have prepared the heart to meet it, at length overtakes him. After an absence of more than twenty years, he rejoins his aged father, now in his one hundred and sixty-third year, at Arbah, afterwards called Hebron, "the city where Abraham and Isaac sojourned." It does not appear whether Rebekah yet lived, or not. If she did, what must have been her feelings at embracing her long-lost, darling son; and at finding him so abundantly increased in children and in wealth? Pure and perfect is the delight of a grandmother, as she caresses the young ones of a beloved child, the heirs and representatives of the husband of her youth, the supporters of his name, prospects, and dignity. In presenting his family to his father, Jacob must have been agitated by various and mixed emotions. It was natural for the old man to inquire minutely into the events of his son's life, during the tedious years of their separation; into the character and qualities of his grandchildren; into the state of Jacob's worldly circumstances; much more, into the state of his mind as a believer, and the heir of the promise. The answer to these parental inquires must of necessity have awaked in the bosom of the wretched sufferer ten thousand melancholy and painful sensations; and torn open afresh those wounds which the lenient hand of time had begun to close up. The hardships endured in Padan-Aram; the severity, churlishness, and deceit of Laban, would rise again to view. And almost every child, as he presented them one by one to his sire, must have suggested some mortifying and distressful circumstance to wring his heart. Dinah, not in the bloom and dignity of virgin innocence, but humbled and dishonored, robbed of that which makes youth lovely, and age respected--Simeon and Levi, her brothers, polluted with innocent blood, and Reuben, his "first-born, his might, and the beginning of his strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power," stained with incest--Judah, his fourth son, who had begun to build up a family of his own, but it was by a Canaanitish woman,[*]Gen 38:2;Gen 38:18;Gen 38:24-26 whose progeny involved him in complicated guilt, and covered him with shame--Joseph and Benjamin, fair as the opening blossoms of the vernal rose, and precious as the purple fluid which visited his sad heart--But alas! the highly valued stock which had shot forth these two lovely branches, is prematurely cut down and withered. His beloved Rachel is no more; and he is deprived of even the poor consolation of reflecting, that her sacred dust slept in the same tomb with that of his venerable ancestors. But to have the privilege of pouring his sorrows into the bosom of a father, was the alleviation if not the cure of them. And he, who by meditation, and faith, and prayer, had overcome the world, and lived so long in heaven, was well qualified for administering the vivifying cordial to the fainting soul, to apply the sovereign balm to the aching heart of a son, who had been a still greater sufferer than himself. But the calamities of neither the father nor the son are as yet come to a period; and they have still to interchange sorrows for a loss more bitter and oppressive than any which they have yet endured. For, in little more than six years from their re-union; while Isaac, now one hundred and seventy years old, was patiently looking for his dismission from this scene of trouble, and preparing to enter the harbor of eternal rest he is

driven back upon the tempestuous ocean, and doomed to toil and grieve ten years more of a weary life, deploring an affliction which admitted of no consolation, and which at length brought his white head with sorrow to the grave. At this period it was, that Joseph, beautiful and young, Joseph, the delight of God and man, Joseph, the memorial of Rachel, the pride of Jacob, the prop of Isaac's old age, disappeared, and was heard of no more, till many years after his venerable grandsire slept in the dust.

Jacob, sinking himself into the dust, under the pressure of a burthen which nature was unable to sustain, is at length called to perform the last sad office of filial affection, and to lay his hand upon the already extinguished orbs of his honored father; willing, and longing, I am persuaded, to have descended with him into the grave. But not the least eventful part of his history is yet to come. It will henceforward be blended with that of Joseph, which now solicits our attention. O could we but bring to the study and display of it, a small portion of that native simplicity, that divine eloquence, that celestial energy, which glow and shine upon the page of inspiration! with what delight and success should we then speak, and with what pleasure and profit should ye then lend a listening ear! The story of Jacob, as it proceeds, teaches many useful lessons for the conduct of life; and opens many sources of religious instruction. Who would not rather be honest, unsuspecting, believing Jacob, than dark, designing, selfish Laban? And yet, who does not see the necessity of blending the wisdom of the serpent, with the harmlessness of the dove? We mourn to think on the prevalence of those fiery and ungovernable passions which separate, and scatter, and alienate those whom God and nature designed to live together, and to love one another; and which robs human life of many instances of felicity which might have been in it. Why should Isaac and Jacob have lived twenty years asunder, to their mutual discomfort and distress? The vile spirit of this evil world arose; the spirit of pride, emulation, ambition, avarice, fear, revenge, drove Jacob into a miserable exile; and left his father a forlorn, forsaken, anxious blind old man. Happy that poverty, which permits the parent and his child to cherish each other, till the cold hand of death chill the heart. Happy the obscurity which excludes envy; and forces not a man to be an enemy to his own brother!

We have seen in the patriarch, a man like ourselves, "bruised and put to grief;" the image of "one greater man," "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," whose woes commenced in the manger, and ceased not till they were lulled to rest in the tomb. "The Son of Man" who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." "The heir of all things" who emptied himself, and voluntarily assumed "the form of a servant." "And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their ear-rings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem."[*]Gen 35:4 "And Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and the changers of money, sitting. And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables: and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence, make not my Father's house an house of merchandise."[*]John 2:13-16 Jacob presented to his father a numerous and thriving offspring; but many of them children perverse and corrupted, their father's shame and sorrow. But when our spiritual Head shall present his redeemed to "his Father and our Father, to his God and our God," saying, "Here am I, and the children thou hast given me," the parental eye shall discern in them "neither spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing." Our Father in Heaven ever lives, "exalted that he may show mercy;"

our “Redeemer liveth,” “he is risen again, he is even at the right hand of God, he also maketh intercession for us.”

031. Jacob and Joseph--Coat of Colors

Jacob and Joseph--Coat of Colors

Gen 37:3-4. Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him. The history of mankind exhibits an unceasing contention between the folly and wickedness of man, and the wisdom and goodness of God. Men are continually striving to outdo, to mortify, and to hurt one another; but a gracious Providence, by opposing spirit to spirit, interest to interest, force to force, preserves the balance, and supports the fabric. His sovereign power and matchless skill, produce exquisite harmony from the confused, the contending, discordant tones of human passions. He controls and subdues a diversity, which threatened disorder, separation, and destruction, into a variety which pleases, which unites, which cements and preserves man kind. And a more consolatory, a more composing, a more satisfying view of the divine Providence we cannot indulge ourselves in, than this merciful superintendence which it condescends to take of the affairs of men, and of every thing that affects their virtue or their happiness. The disorders which prevail in the natural world, under the subduing hand of heaven, range themselves into order and peace. The convulsions which shake and disturb the moral world, directed, checked, and counterbalanced by a power much mightier than themselves, subside into tranquility, through the very agitation and violence they had acquired. “Surely, O Lord, the wrath of man shall praise thee, and the remainder of wrath thou shalt restrain.” When the tumult is over, and the noise ceases, religion rears up her head, and says, in the words of Joseph to his brethren, “but as for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.”[*]Gen 1:20

We are now come to a passage of the sacred history of uncommon beauty and importance. Whether we consider the simplicity and grace of the narration, the affecting circumstances of the story, the interesting and instructive views of the human heart which it unfolds, the many plain and useful lessons which it teaches; or the mighty consequences, both near and remote, which resulted to the family of Jacob, to the Egyptian monarchy, and to the human race, from incidents, at first insignificant and seemingly contemptible, but gradually swelling into magnitude, embracing circle after circle, extending from period to period, till at length all time and space are occupied by them.

Isaac was now as good as dead; calmly looking forward to his latter end; alive only to sentiments of piety and of pain. And Jacob was, through much difficulty and distress, at last settled in the land wherein his father was a stranger; increased in wealth, rich in children, rich in piety, but advanced in years, and loaded with affliction. Jacob’s family, the salt of the earth, was itself in a very putrid and corrupted state; and the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel were themselves very bad men. The unhappy father endeavors to soothe the anguish arising from the ill behavior of his grownup sons, by the pleasing prospects which the more amiable qualities of his younger children opened

to him. The sacred historian introduces to us the favorite character of Joseph with wonderful art and skill. From the very first moment we become interested in him. He is the long expected son of beauteous Rachel--his mother was dead--he had now attained his seventeenth year--and he was the darling object of his fathers affection. Jacob's affection, however, has not blinded him so far, as to bring up even his favorite in idleness. Little does that man consult either the credit or the comfort of his son, who breeds him to no useful employment: for indolence is the nurse of vice, the parent of shame, the source of misery. Unfortunately for him, however, Joseph is associated in employment with persons whose conversation was not likely to improve his morals, and whose dispositions toward him did not promise much to promote his happiness; "the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives;" who alas! seem to have inherited much more of the spirit of the bondwoman who was their mother, than the freeman who was their mother, than the freeman who was their father. What were the particulars of their ill conduct we are not told: but Joseph observed it, was grieved and offended, and reported it to his father.

Jacob is not wholly irresponsible in this. It was imprudent to trust a well-inclined young man, at that delicately dangerous season of life, far, or long out of his sight, and in such company. It was madness to add fuel to those resentments, which his ill-disguised partiality to this son of his old age had already kindled in the breasts of his other children. But his understanding seems quite blinded by love for the boy; and he proceeds from weakness to weakness. As if he had not raised up enemies enough to him, by countenancing in him the odious character of tale-bearer, he goes on to expose him to the hatred of all the family, by dressing up his darling in "a coat of many colors."

What a foundation of mischief was here laid! The brothers must have been much less inflammable than they were well known to be, not to have taken fire at this indiscreet, this ridiculous distinction. And Joseph himself must have possessed a mind much more firm and more enlightened than seventeen generally discovers, not to have felt at least some transient emotions of vanity, insolence, and self-sufficiency, in being thus favored above the rest. The father was therefore injurious to all, but most to himself. His house is now in flames, and he himself has fired the train. Parents, as ye love your repose, as you value your children, as you would have them dwell together in unity, as ye would not put a dagger into a brother's hand to shed a brother's blood, guard yourselves well against partial affections: or if unhappily you have conceived them, conceal it from every eye, let not the favorite see it, let not his rival suspect it. Let reason, let religion, let that very partiality itself teach you to be wise and just. Parents, as ye prize the understanding, the virtue, the true dignity of your children, let them never be taught to think that dress confers consequence, that finery implies worth, that the body deserves more attention than the mind. Let not even your daughters be led, through your silly vanity, to believe that any part of their excellence consists in the splendor of their appearance. But still inculcate upon then, that a mind stored with virtues, with modesty, meekness, gentleness, patience, humility, is both to God and man, a sight infinitely more pleasing than the most beautiful person adorned with jewels and lace, it these or any of these be wanting. Let then know early, and hear frequently, that cleanliness and decency are virtues which they ought to acquire and to practice: but that a curiously ornamented body is, to a discerning eye, nothing but the indication, and the wretched, tawdry covering of a naked soul.

I think I see the ill effect of Jacob's fondness on Joseph himself. What could have suggested those dreams of his own superiority, the recital of which was so offensive to his brothers, and which drew from his father himself check and reproof? Nothing but the petulancy of his waking thoughts buoyed up by confidence in paternal preference and favor. It will be said, that they were intimations from above, of his future greatness and eminence. It is readily admitted. But of what stuff does the foreknowledge and power of God frame prognostics and prediction? Sometimes, perhaps often, of the violent propensities and desires of men's minds. And many events seen to have been predicted, not because they are to come to pass, but they come to pass because they have been predicted. The dreams themselves are the natural working of a young mind, inflated by indulgence. The repetition of them, where they were sure to occasion disgust, marks a simplicity, an innocence, a boyish thoughtlessness and indiscretion, which it were cruel severely to censure, but which wisdom can by no means approve. And, the whole taken together, the prognostic with the realization, the cause with the effect, the prophesy with the contrast of the weakness of man, and the power of God; the meanness of the materials, and the magnificence of the fabric; the feebleness of the instrument, and the force of the hand which employed it.

Though Jacob was not altogether pleased with the spirit which these dreams and the rehearsal of them discovered, yet they had a very different effect upon him and upon his sons. They envied and hated him the more; he "observed the saying." Whether from a father's partial fondness, or instructed by that Spirit, who afterwards disclosed futurity to him, down to the gathering of the people to Shiloh, he considered the doubling of the vision, and it coinciding purport, as portending something great and good to his beloved child; and he sits down patiently to wait the issue. And we shall presently to wait the issue. And we shall presently find it was hastening towards its conclusion in a course much more rapid, and by means much more extraordinary than any which he could possibly apprehend. By this time the power of Jacob's family was grown so great, or the terror inspired by the cruel murder of the Shechemites was so far effaced, that his ten eldest sons adventure into the neighborhood of that city to feed their flocks. The distance from Beer-Sheba, where Jacob dwelt, being considerable ; their absence being extended to a length of time that created anxiety, and though their apprehensions might, a solicitous father's anxiety not being quite laid to rest, he thinks proper to send Joseph from Hebron, to inquire after their welfare, and to bring him word again. Unhappy father and son! little did they think the parting of that day was to be for such a length of duration. Blind that we are to futurity! We "cannot tell what a day may bring forth." The last meeting, the last parting; the last coming in and going out; the last time of speaking and of hearing; the last of every thing must soon over take us all. Joseph accordingly leaves his father's house, never, never to return to it more, and goes forth in quest of his brethren. Our tender affections are now strongly excited for the hapless youth. A lad of seventeen, who had never till now been froth beneath the protection of paternal care and tenderness; whose face "the wind of Heaven" had never hitherto "visited too roughly;" whose spirit mortification had never galled, whose heart affliction had never yet pierced; thrown at once into the wide world, missing his way in an unknown country, exposed to savage beasts, or more savage men; coming at length to the place of his destination, but disappointed of finding what he looked for there; and finally falling into the hands of butchers, where he expected brothers, If ever there were an object of compassion, it is now before us. I observe his young heart flutter with joy, when, after all his wanderings and anxieties, he descries his brothers, and their tents, and their flocks afar off I see the tear of tenderness rush to his eyes, while he delivers his father's greeting, and tells the tale of his youthful

sorrows and mistakes upon the road. I see his blooming countenance flushed with delight and satisfaction, at the thought of being again among friends, of having once more a protector. Ah cruel, cruel disappointment! They have been plotting his ruin, they have devoted him to death. He comes to them with words of peace, with kind and affectionate inquiries after their health and prosperity. They meet him with looks of aversion, with words of contempt and hatred, with thoughts of blood. The history of Jacob's family exhibits a shocking view of manners and of society at that period. They digest and execute a plan of murder, with as much coolness as we would an improvement in agriculture, or an adventure in trade. It is no wonder the poor Shechemites found no pity at their hands, when they are so lost to the feelings of nature, humanity, and filial duty, as to deliberate and determine, without ceremony or remorse, upon their own brother's death. The trifling incident of the dreams lies rankling in their bosoms. "Behold," say they, "this dreamer cometh." Well has our blessed Lord cautioned his disciples against the use of contemptuous expressions one to another. For however slight and insignificant a hard or ridiculous name at first sight may appear, it proceeds from an unkind heart, and partakes of the nature of murder.

It is no uncommon thing for men who have quite got over every scruple of conscience, and all sense of duty, still to retain some regard to decency; and to respect opinion and appearances after the heart is become perfectly callous. Though they can remorselessly resolve on shedding blood, they have not confidence enough to avow their violence and barbarity, but craft and falsehood must be called in, to cover their villany from the eye of the world. "Come, now, therefore, and let us slay him; and cast him into some pit, and we will say, some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams."[*]Gen 37:20 That there should have been one of the ten capable of conceiving and suggesting such a deed of horror, had been wonderful; but that only one of ten should rise up to intercede for the unhappy victim, exceeds all belief. We almost lose the remembrance of Reuben's filthiness, in his good-natured attempt to save his brother. If there were something of deceit in the proposal which he made to the rest for this purpose, it was on the side of virtue, and calls at least for pardon, if not for commendation.

Joseph was now .at hand. And O how different his reception from what he fondly expected! "They stripped Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colors that was on him. And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it."[*]Gen 37:23-24 With truth has the wise man said, "the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." The demons of envy and revenge have taken possession of their hearts. In vain he weeps, in vain he prays, in vain employs the tender names of father and brother, to win their pity. The coat, the odious coat, the badge of a partial father's fondness, steels their breasts. They strip it off with more of savage joy than ever the doting parent felt of satisfaction in seeing him put it on, or the hapless youth himself in wearing it. The horror of being cast alive into a pit to perish with hunger, is not to be conceived, much less expressed. What must it then have been to a heart like Joseph's, tremblingly alive to the keenest sensations of pain; acquainted, till then, only with gentleness and indulgence, and now dreadfully awakened to perceive the full extent of his misery? Instant death had been mercy to one in such a situation. As if they had done nothing, they sit down unconcernedly to eat bread. Savage monsters! Could the moderate cravings of their own appetite fail to remind them of the wretched state of their poor brother; fail to suggest the misery of perishing for want, and to awaken compassion in some gentle bosom? Yes; with his piercing shrieks yet sounding in their ears, with his piteous, supplicating looks yet before their eyes, they indulge the commonest, lowest cravings

of their own nature, and calmly consign him to a lingering death; the bitterness of which was every instant increased by the slowness of its approach. And now, behold the darling of Jacob on the very brink of despair; when Providence, wiser than they were cunning, and more powerful than they were wicked, interposes for his deliverance.

It was so ordered of Heaven, that a traveling company or caravan of Ishmaelitish merchants passed by, while they were at dinner, in the course of their traffic to Egypt. A thought occurred to Judah, whose heart now began somewhat to relent, that an opportunity offered of ridding themselves of their hated rival, without incurring the guilt of shedding his blood; namely, that of selling him for a slave to the Ishmaelites; who, he knew would carry him along with them into Egypt, sell him over again' for profit, and thereby for ever prevent the possibility of his return, to detect their villany, and renew his pretensions to superiority over them. No sooner was this proposal made than it was assented to. And they, who a little while before made nothing of taking away their brother's life, with less scruple and ceremony still, take upon them to rob him of his liberty; and, as if he had been a bullock, or a kid from the flock, sell him for twenty pieces of silver, into the hands of strangers. O the wonder-working hand of God! The circumstances which lately seemed to poor Joseph so untoward and unfavorable, were working together for the preservation of his life, and paving the way to glory. Had he not wandered in the field, his arrival had happened too early for the passing by of these merchants to save him. Had he found his brethren in Shechem, as he expected, instead of Dothan, he had been out of the track which his deliverers took. "Who can tell what is good or evil for a man," till the end come, and the mystery of Providence be unfolded? These, to the eye of man, are little accidental circumstances. But they are a part of a vast arrangement, made by Him "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will," to bring about a great purpose. There are wheels almost imperceptible in the great machine, which the untutored eye is apt wholly to overlook, but which are indeed as necessary to motion as the largest and most obvious.

Thus was the jewel of his father's heart vilely bartered away as a thing of little value. Behold Joseph in the hands of the descendants of him whose "hands were against every man, and every man's hands against him," and he is safer with wild Ishmaelites, than with bloody, unnatural brothers. From avarice, if not from pity or affection, they will treat him kindly, that they may dispose of him to advantage. So much better is a merciful, or even a mercenary stranger, than an envious and cruel brother. Reuben, it appears, was not present at this consultation, bargain, and delivery. He probably stole away, when the rest sat down to meat, that by a round-about path he might arrive at the pit where Joseph was hid, and assist him in effecting his escape, while the rest were otherwise employed. But he had made so large a circuit in order to avoid suspicion, that the sale was transacted before he came to the place, and his benevolent intention was thereby frustrated. He is the only one of the brothers who seems to have felt a single spark of pity for the unfortunate youth, or of concern for the distress of his aged parent. What then must his anguish have been, when he came to the pit, and found no Joseph there? From his worst fears however he is soon relieved, and, bad as it was, rejoices to hear that Joseph was only sold for a slave. By common consent it is agreed to conceal, if possible, the whole of this dark scene. They must meet their father again, and to him something must be said for the non-appearance of his amiable, his beloved son. I am not more shocked at their first purpose of blood, than at their artful device to cover it, and their awful steadiness and fidelity to each other, in guarding so well the dreadful

secret. It proves what deep, what determined, what thorough-paced villains they were. And from such men does the Jewish nation glory to have sprung! They stain the variegated coat, the cause of so much jealousy, with blood, which they intend shall pass with the wretched father for the blood of him that wore it; and they send it to Hebron as accidentally found in the field in that state, to carry its own doleful tidings with it.

I cannot accompany this fatal pledge to the place of its destination. Who can bear to witness the anguish of a miserable old man sinking under the weight of accumulated woe? All his former griefs admitted of consolation. They were more directly from the hand of God, they were in the course of nature, they might be cured or endured. But this stab was mortal; it defied medicine, it mocked at length of time. He himself has had the principal hand in this great evil; and I fear, I fear he suspects the truth, though he says it not. Beautiful, too much beloved, ill-starred Rachel! once I pitied, now I congratulate thee. A gracious Providence has in kindness taken thee away from the evil to come. The sight of Joseph's vesture dipped in blood, must have proved fatal to thee, hadst thou lived to that day. To have lived till now, must have been to endure pangs more frightful than the agonizing throes of childbirth, or the last dying struggles of dissolving nature.

We hasten from a scene which the heart is unable long to contemplate, to land Joseph safely in Egypt--where being arrived, he is transferred, like a bundle of spicery, from the Midianites to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, and captain of the guard. And here your time warns me to stop. And here, in the hands of that God who "delivered him from the paw of the lion and the bear," we deposit this precious trust, confident of its being restored, like all that we commit to God, increased in value, importance, and utility. If the subject be pleasing to you as it is to me, I shall hope to have the pleasure of resuming it with you next Lord's day.

Jesus, the well-beloved Son of God, came from his Father's house above, to bring to us, his brethren after the flesh, the gentle and affectionate commendations of his Father's love. Instead of welcome, he met with reproach and scorn. "He came to his own and his own received him not." "He was despised and rejected of men." "His familiar friend in whom he trusted, which did eat of his bread, lifted up his heel against him." Judas, one of his own house, sold him for thirty pieces of silver. He was stripped of his vesture, his raiment was stained with blood. "He looked and there was none to help." "He trode the wine-press alone." "He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." "He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."[*]Isa 58:7 "It became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in I bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."[*]Heb 2:10 Men "thought evil against him, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."[*]Gen 50:20 "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations."[*]Psa 32:11 To the attentive reader of the Scriptures, these, and many such applications as these, of the history of Joseph, to the person, the character, the office, and undertaking of the Messiah, will readily occur. To the careless and unbelieving, more has been said than they will understand, regard, or approve. We commend them to the mercy of God, and we implore a blessing on what has been spoken, for Christ's sake. Amen.

032. Joseph--Trusted by Potiphar

Joseph--Trusted by Potiphar

Gen 39:2-6. And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man, and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house and all that he had he put into his hand. And it came to pass, from the time that he made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake: and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field. And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand: and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat; and Joseph was a goodly person, and well-favored.

Unless "the heart be established by grace," in prosperity it will be elated above measure, and in adversity will be ready to sink under the weight of its woe. A principle of religion preserves the balance of the soul, and guards it equally from rising into insolence, or falling into dejection. It has been disputed whether prosperity or adversity be the severer trial of the two. In order to determine the question, it is necessary to know the character of the party who is tried. In some persons we meet with a stupidity, an insensibility of nature, on which change of circumstances makes no apparent impression. This endeavors to pass upon itself, and actually does pass upon superficial observers, for moderation in success, and patience in affliction. But the rock is not patient, because without murmuring it bears the incessant dashing of the raging sea; neither does the snail deserve the praise of humility, because it attempts not to fly. That moderation is estimable, which, awake to all the advantages of rank, and fortune, and success, offends not God by levity and ingratitude, nor man by haughtiness and pride. That patience merits admiration and praise, which feels, yet complains not; which sighs, yet submits.

It is very natural for men to flatter themselves that they could support prosperity with wisdom and propriety. But I believe experience will evince, that while success tends to relax, weaken, and extinguish the religious principle, calamity, by teaching us our own weakness and dependence, awakens, strengthens, and keeps it alive. The lot of most men alternately furnishes occasion for exercise in both ways. It is the office of genuine and solid piety, to instruct us "in whatever state we are, therewith to be content;" "to exercise men unto godliness, which is profitable unto all things, having the promise both of the life which now is, and of that which is to come." The amiable and illustrious person on whose history we entered in the last Lecture, and which we are now to continue, affords a shining and affecting example of a mind unsubdued by the deepest distress, and uncorrupted by the highest degree of elevation. His affliction commenced at an early period of life. It was, of its kind, peculiarly bitter and severe. It came from a quarter whence it was least to be apprehended; and the transition was instantaneous, from a tranquillity and indulgence which knew no bound, to anguish which no language can express, no imagination conceive. As he was to be an eminent type of Him, who, "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, not opening her mouth,"

Scripture represents Joseph submitting to the barbarous treatment of his brothers, as doomed to perish of hunger in an empty pit, and sold into slavery to the Ishmaelites, without arguing, without upbraiding, without repining. Were it possible to form a stronger idea of the hard heartedness of Jacob's sons than that which their cruelty to Joseph affords, it is to see them the calm witnesses of the anguish of their father's soul, without being moved by all his misery and tears to divulge the important secret, and to pour into the fond paternal heart the cordial balm, which even the knowledge of his son's being a slave in Egypt would have administered. As a dawn of hope would thence have arisen, that by some blessed revolution of events, the precious hour might perhaps at length arrive, which should restore him to his father again. What a dreadful thing it is to embark on a sea of vice! To return is difficult, if not impossible--to proceed is ruin.

Joseph, meanwhile, lives and prospers in a strange land. He has not lost all, he has lost nothing, who enjoys the divine presence and favor. The amiable youth is indeed from under the shadow of his fathers wing, but the protection of Heaven is not withdrawn; "the Almighty is his refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." A young man brought up like him, in fullness, liberty, indulgence, and ease, might have been supposed sullen and stubborn under a change of condition so sudden and so severe: or to have sunk into melancholy and despair. But with Joseph it was not so. With true magnanimity and spirit, he cheerfully accommodates his mind to his situation, and without murmur or reluctance, addresses himself to the discharge of his duty as a diligent and faithful servant. We have not power over our lot, to carve it out as we please; but the mind has power over itself: and happiness has its seat in the mind, not in external circumstances. The favorite son of Israel seems degraded and dishonored, even when raised to the first rank of servitude in Potiphar's house; but Joseph, pious, modest, wise, and faithful, is equally respectable whether as a son or as a servant.

Never did Potiphar make so fortunate a purchase. The blessing of God enters into his house, from the moment Joseph becomes a member of the family. In many various ways are servants curses or comforts to those with whom they dwell. Let a servant have a conscience, and you have a certain pledge of his fidelity. Divest him of that, and where is your security, that either your property or your person is safe in his hands? Joseph demeaned himself as a good servant; Potiphar as a wise and a kind master. In vain do we look for affection and attachment in our inferiors, if we treat them with insolence, unkindness, or neglect. The great and affluent are much more in the power of, much more dependent upon their meanest domestics, than they are willing to understand, or to acknowledge. And surely, it is much more prudent to secure their affection as humble friends, by condescension and good nature, than to provoke their resentment or revenge, by pride and severity.

Joseph has been faithful over a few things, he is made ruler over many things. "He made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand." His personal accomplishments keep pace with his mental endowments, "he was a goodly person and well favored." Beauty, like every other gift of nature, is good of itself, and therefore to be received with thankfulness. But alas, how often does it prove a snare to the possessor, and a temptation to others! This quality of Joseph's had like to have proved more fatal to him than even the envy of his brothers. This last threatened only his body, but that endangers the soul. The one sold him into bondage, the other would have plunged him into dishonor. His master's wife looked upon him with eyes of unhallowed affection, and attempts to make him a partaker of her impurity. To expatiate on the nature of this

temptation, would be as indecent as it is unnecessary. It is a fearful example of the dreadful length which the human mind is capable of going, when the restraints of shame are once broken through.

Some kinds of temptation are boldly to be encountered, and resolutely overcome.--There are others only to be conquered by flight, and disarmed by removing to a distance. Joseph dwells only on one circumstance, in order to settle and determine his conduct--the all-seeing eye of God, and the danger of offending him; “how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God.”[*]Gen 39:9 Pleasure, and interest, and passion, blind the eyes; but conscience with scrupulous attention, always and everywhere reveres an omnipresent Jehovah. The lower principles of our nature respect and are regulated by consequences. This great principle is moved only by a sense of right and wrong. Interest and desire are contented with inquiring, “is there no danger of being found out!” But conscience is only to be satisfied by ascertaining, “whether it be sin or duty.” The consequence to Joseph, was such as might be expected from the temper of a shameless woman, false, lascivious, and resentful. The demon of lust turned into those of rage and revenge, she accuses of an attempt to seduce her, the man, whom no consideration of pleasure, or of advantage, could for a moment seduce from the right path. This accusation, however false, being uncontradicted, is admitted as true; and Joseph, as the reward of faithfulness almost without example, is immured in close custody, to be dragged forth at a proper opportunity to severer punishment. And here again we have a fresh instance of the greatness of his mind. He chooses rather to incur his master’s groundless displeasure, and to sink under the weight of a false accusation, than to vindicate his own honor, by exposing the shame of a bad woman; and he leaves the clearing up of his character and the preservation of his life, to that God with whom he had entrusted still higher concerns, those of his immortal soul. And thus, the least-assuming, the shamefaced, feminine virtues, temperance, and chastity, and innocence, and self-government are found in company with the most manly, the heroic qualities, intrepidity, constancy and contempt of death. No place is frightful to a good man but the dungeon of an ill conscience. Free from that, Joseph is at large, though in prison. It is the favor or displeasure of God that makes this or the other spot comfortable or irksome. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty; but to the guilty, the whole world is a place of confinement. God, who delivered him out of the pit accompanies him also to the prison. And what heart so savage that goodness cannot mollify, what nature so obdurate that the power of the Almighty cannot reach! The profession of a jailer s unfriendly to benevolence; it is a character which implies sternness and severity. But whether this man were formed of gentler clay, or whether the meekness and modesty of Joseph had wrought even upon a rocky heart; or whether Providence specially interposed to further its own deep designs, so it is, we find our good young man in high favor with his keeper. Wherever we find Joseph,--in Potiphar’s house, in prison, or at court, we find a man faithful, and diligent, and trusty; and we find a man honored, esteemed, and confided in, by all with whom he has any connection. Let a man be inflexibly honest and true, and he will never have reason to accuse the world of want of confidence. But it is no wonder if the dishonest knave find men full of doubt and suspicion. As his master’s house before, so the prison now, prospers on Joseph’s account. The world is not always sensible of its obligation to the presence of good men. But Sodom was in a fearful state the moment righteous Lot went out of it; and when the people of God, “the salt of the earth,” are all removed from it, the end of the world cannot be at a great distance. By a strange concurrence of circumstances, which the Divine Providence alone could have brought together, Joseph has for his fellow prisoners two of the chief officers of the king of Egypt, who had fallen under their

master’s displeasure; and had been for some time in confinement, uncertain of their doom. The great God is whetting his instruments, making his arrangements, marshalling his forces, at very different times, and in very different places. The envy of Jacob’s sons, the lasciviousness of Potiphar’s wife, the disobedience of Pharaoh’s servants, the anger of the king himself,--all, all meet, strange to think! in one point, the elevation of Joseph to the right hand of the throne. Remove but one link, and the chain is broken asunder. Take away but a single stone, and the fabric falls to the ground. But “this work and counsel is of God, and therefore it cannot be overthrown.” “He willeth, and none can let it.”

It is not at all surprising, that he who had been preparing his work in places and in minds so remote from, so unlike to, and so unconnected with each other, should bring it to a conclusion by means somewhat uncommon and supernatural. It happened, that in one and the same night, the chief butler and the chief baker of Pharaoh dream each a dream, which laid fast hold or their minds and memory. And being men, like the rest of their country strongly tinctured with superstition, and at that time in circumstances which peculiarly disposed them to receive superstitious impressions, their spirits are considerably affected by the vision of the night; not doubting, that it portended the speedy approach of some great good or evil. Joseph attending them in the morning, in the course of his duty, observed the deep concern which was engraved on their countenances; and sympathy being always one of the native effusions of an honest heart, he kindly inquires into the cause of it. By the way, how pleasant is it to observe this excellent young person with so much cheerfulness and good nature performing the humble offices of a jailer’s servant? He was accustomed to be waited upon, to be ministered unto; but duty calls, and with alacrity he ministers to the necessity of others. But what do I see? An under jailer starting up all at once into an interpreter of dreams, possessing a sagacity that reaches into futurity, directed and taught by a Spirit whose piercing eye penetrates into eternity, and discerns all the wonders of the world unknown! Flow much wiser, how much more noble, how much more excellent, are they who live in communion with God than other men! For though they do not all attain the gift of prophesy, the gift of working miracles, the gift of speaking with tongues; yet they all are dignified by the spirit of prayer, the spirit of adoption, “the spirit of faith the spirit of love, and of a sound mind.”

Joseph, from the different complexion of their several dreams, and inspired no doubt by wisdom from above, predicts their approaching doom; the speedy restoration of the one to his former trust and dignity; a sudden and ignominious death to the other. Nothing but inspiration could have borne Joseph through a declaration so bold and decisive, and which was to be brought to the awful test of confirmation or disappointment in so short a space as three days. So confident is he of the certainty of his interpretation, that he founds all his hopes of enlargement upon it. And there is something inexpressibly tender and pathetic in his application to the chief butler to that effect, “but think on me when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house. For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews and here also have I done nothing, that they should put me into the dungeon.”[*]Gen 40:14-15 The event justified the prediction; and it is an awful and affecting illustration of the observation of the wise man, “the king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.”[*]Pro 21:1 A youth, a stranger, a prisoner, could have no power over the counsels of Pharaoh. But the power which controls all the potentates of the earth, and marshals the whole host of heaven is bringing his own word to pass,

and performing his own pleasure. The chief butler, we may suppose, readily promised Joseph his best services when he should be again restored to place and power; but like a true courtier, he thinks no more of his promise, nor of his fellow prisoner, after his own turn was served. So selfish, so thoughtless, so ungrateful is man! Had he been under no personal obligation to the young stranger, for his tender assiduities while in confinement, and for the agreeable and certain intelligence which he received from him of his approaching deliverance, common humanity, awakened by the simple tale of innocence and misery which he had told, ought to have prompted his immediate and most earnest exertions in his behalf. And yet he suffers two full years to linger away, without caring to reflect whether such a person existed or not. And when he thinks of him at last, it is not the generous recollection of kindness and attachment; but the selfish remembrance of courtly adulation, eager to gratify his prince, not to rescue talents, and innocence, and worth, from unmerited oppression. Pharaoh hanged him not for the offences which he had committed against his sovereign, but for his forgetfulness and ingratitude to Joseph, let him be hung up an object of detestation and contempt to all generations of mankind.

How very differently do God and men often judge of one and the same object! If there be in all Egypt a person more forlorn and inconsiderable than another, it is an Hebrew slave in a dungeon. But “God raiseth the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, that he may set him with princes.” Pharaoh himself now begins to act a part in this wonderful drama. For kings, in the hand of God, are only instruments of an higher order, and of more extensive operation. Kings are liable to hunger and thirst like other men; kings must sleep, and may be disturbed by dreams like other men--and thus it happened to the mighty sovereign of Egypt. With vision upon vision, in one night, was his rest troubled; the strange coincidence and mysterious import of which greatly perplex his waking thoughts. In a country teeming with gods, and overrun with superstition, no circumstance was overlooked which in any manner seemed to portend a future event. No wonder then that the prince, who has not always the best informed nor the firmest mind of any man within his dominions, should be rendered uneasy by a repetition of dreams, so singular in themselves, so similar to, and yet so unlike one another. It is not less wonderful, that in a country so prolific of magicians and soothsayers, not one should be found bold enough to affix a meaning, or guess at an interpretation. Was it that the true God confounded and silenced their vain imaginations? or that Pharaoh, dissatisfied with their idle conjectures, and prompted from above to make farther inquiry, rejected the usual modes of solution, that, heaven-directed, Joseph might emerge out of obscurity to save a great nation, to preserve his father’s house in famine, and to fulfill the prediction and promise made to Abraham, concerning the future fortunes of his posterity? The king’s vexation interests and affects the whole court. And then for the first time, the chief butler bethinks himself of his faults. and of his promise, and of his obligations to his fellow prisoner, and relates in the hearing of the king, the very extraordinary circumstances of his own imprisonment and enlargement; of his dream, the interpretation and the issue. He is of consequence led to mention the character and situation of the interpreter. This instantly effects for Joseph, what his friendship, had it been exerted, perhaps would not have produced--an immediate order to set the prisoner free, and to bring him without delay into the royal presence. When men can be subservient to the interest, the pleasure, or the ambition of princes, they are in the sure road to preferment; and a man is often more indebted for success to a fortunate incident than to a righteous cause. Joseph’s affairs are now in a train such as his warmest friends could wish; and again we see another saying of the wise man verified “Seest thou a man diligent in his business’. He shall stand before kings,

he shall not stand before mean men."[*]Pro 22:29

Pharaoh's expectations are not disappointed. He relates his dreams; and God, the author of the visions, and who had sent the interpreter and the explanation, by the mouth of Joseph unfolds its meaning and import. Pharaoh's dream had puzzled himself and all Egypt by its first aspect; but now that it is explained, flow easy, how simple, how applicable, how natural every thing appears! The greatest discoveries, after they are made, appear so obvious and so plain, that every one is ready to wonder he did not lilt upon it first; and this, instead of diminishing, greatly enhances the merit of the first discoverer. Upon the manifestation of the import of Pharaoh's redoubled vision, it is found, that God, who had given formerly to two of the servants an intimation of their approaching fate, was now giving to the sovereign a premonition of the visitations of his providence, to this great, populous, and wealthy empire. A previous notice of good renders it a double blessing; a warning of evil prepares us to meet it, and thereby diminishes its weight.

Joseph's interpretation carried conviction along with it; and Pharaoh immediately resolves to act upon it. There is a certain indescribable charm in true wisdom, in unaffected goodness, that forces approbation, and carries the heart captive at once. There is a native dignity in virtue, which, while it never assumes, nor pushes itself forward, is never timorous, embarrassed or awkward. Joseph possesses unaffected case and composure in the presence of Pharaoh and all the court; and the court on this occasion, we have reason to think, was a very splendid, public, and crowded one. So good a thing it is to have the heart established by the fear of God. It casts out every other fear. But the days of his depression are now ended, and every step he has trod through this valley of humiliation, is a progress made to the glory that follows. And here we break off, having conducted Joseph to the right hand of the throne; and beholding him ready to mount the second chariot, while admiring nations proclaim before him, "bow the knee." The next Lecture will exhibit the son of Jacob in all the splendor of high life; armed with all the authority of a minister of state, possessing a plenitude of power over the whole kingdom of Egypt.

Turn for a moment from Joseph, and behold a greater than him. "The prince of this world came, and found nothing in him." Temptation addressed to "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," had from his lips an instant repulse, "it is written, it is written." "In his humiliation his judgment was taken away;" he suffered as a malefactor, though "he did no sin, neither was guile found in his lips." He was condemned and put to death upon a false accusation. From the triumphant ignominy of the cross, he dispenses life and death to his fellow-sufferers; paradise to the one, everlasting shame to the other. "Who hath known the mind of the Lord, or, being his counselor, hath taught him?" "The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, lie hath declared him." "No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal him." "He made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, lie humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God hath also 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."[*]Php 2:7-11 "Fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory!"[*]Luk 24:25-26 "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne"[*]Rev

3:21 “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”[*]Rev 2:10

I conclude all in the words of the beloved disciple, who thus describes a more august vision than ever appeared to Pharaoh: “And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb, as it had been slain: having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beasts 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 honor, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I, saying, Blessing, honor, glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.”[*]Rev 5:6-14

033. Joseph--Ruler of Egypt

Joseph--Ruler of Egypt

Gen 41:38-44. And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: thou shall be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it on Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his need: and he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had: and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh; and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the laud of Egypt.

If it be pleasant to observe, in particular instances, the providence of God justifying its own procedure, by relieving and vindicating oppressed innocence, or by precipitating prosperous guilt from its lofty seat; what must be the satisfaction and delight of beholding the whole plan of Providence unfolded, every mystery to the divine conduct explained, and all the ways of God to men completely vindicated! A very considerable part of our present distress arises from hastiness and impatience of spirit. We are for rushing to the end at once; we will not afford our Maker and Ruler leisure to open his own designs, to illustrate his own meaning. We would have the work of Heaven performed in our way; we have settled the whole order of things in our own minds; and all is wrong that ignorance, fretfulness, and presumption are pleased to dislike. Cloudy, rainy weather is much less agreeable than serenity; yet it requires but a moment's reflection to be convinced that eternal sunshine would be the reverse of a blessing to mankind. Now the alternate succession of day and night, of fair weather and rain, have not greater beauty and utility in the world of nature, than the successive shades of adversity, and sunbeams of prosperity, which appear on the face of the moral world. Of this unceasing succession or mixture, the lot of individuals, the fortune of nations, the state of the globe, perhaps the system of the universe is composed. Nothing is permitted to continue too long: no being is suffered to go too far out of his station. The balance eternally depends from the hand of a Being possessed of infinite wisdom; and after a few slight vibrations, the scales speedily bring each other into equilibrium again. The swelling of a wave, the rolling of the ship, nay the finger of a child, may for a moment derange the compass; but after trembling an instant or two from point to point, immediately the needle resumes its steady, stated northern direction.

If there be in history a passage, which more than another encourages us patiently and submissively to wait for the end, to follow and submit to the conduct of Providence, it is the story of Joseph the son of Jacob. What man of humanity would have refused to lend his helping hand to rescue the innocent youth from the fury of his unnatural brothers, to pull him up out of the pit, and to restore him to his father again? Who would not gladly have sacrificed a part of his substance to

purchase his release from Egyptian servitude? What friend to truth and virtue but would have rejoiced to vindicate his character from the vile aspersions of his infamous mistress, and to save him from undeserved punishment? What heart, alive to the feelings of gratitude, but would have seconded the application of “the chief butler,” for his immediate enlargement ? But all this would have been precipitate, rash, and absurd. His fond father himself could not have conducted his favorite son to the honors which he attained, by a way so certain, so safe, and so honorable. Whether we regard Joseph himself, or the interests of his father’s family, or the welfare of Egypt, or the good of the human race, Providence, when we come to the issue, it is found, has secured, promoted, and succeeded them all, in its own wise and gracious method, infinitely better than they possibly could have been by all the sagacity and foresight of man. By the wonderful steps then which we have seen, behold Joseph exalted to the right hand of Pharaoh, made lord over all Egypt, the lives, the conduct, the liberties, the property of millions entrusted to his care, subjected to his authority. Behold him married to a princess, arrayed in vestures of fine linen, a gold chain about his neck, the royal signet in his hands, riding through the land in the second chariot, while admiring nations bow the knee before him. Behold the dream which boyish vanity, perhaps at first suggested, which fraternal jealousy so keenly reprobated, and so sternly avenged, which a father’s wisdom was constrained to check and reprove, and which incredulity, no doubt, would treat as the idle chimera of a disturbed imagination, is verified and brought to pass. When we observe so many of the important events of Joseph’s life turning upon the hinge of dreams and their interpretation, we are taught to think respectfully of every method by which God is pleased to communicate the knowledge of his will to mankind. And, when our own dreams, as they sometimes do, either call us to duty, or convince us of sin; when they recall to our memory what is past, or admonish us of what is to come, so that we -may profit thereby, we ought to consider them as warnings from Heaven, and the voice of God. But to attend to and seek a meaning in every wandering of a sleeping Riley is silly and childish; and to suffer them of whatever complexion they be, to influence the conduct of life, so as to induce us to neglect our duty, to vex and disquiet ourselves, or disturb others, is absurd, superstitious, and wicked.

There are three particulars in this part of the history of Joseph, which have exercised the learning and ingenuity of critics and commentators. First, whether the Hebrew word, Abrech, translated in our version, “bow the knee,” had not better have been rendered, as the word will bear, “tender father:” an appellation descriptive of his office and character; dignity and gentleness united. Secondly, it is inquired, what is the exact import of the name which Pharaoh gave to Joseph upon his promotion? It was customary for eastern princes and nations to distinguish by new titles, persons who had rendered themselves illustrious by superior abilities, or splendid and important actions; as in the case of Daniel and the three other children of the captivity. That which was given to Joseph, according to some, is an Egyptian expression which signifies “Savior of the world,” and this, if just, conveys a high idea of the importance which the king ascribed to Joseph’s information and advice. Others contend that it signifies no more than “revealer, or expounder of secrets.” This last interpretation has the most numerous, perhaps the most respectable support. The third particular alluded to, involves in it something like a censure of Joseph, as if, hurried away by motives of ambition and pride, he had been eager to form an improper and dangerous matrimonial connection with an idolatrous woman, nay, the daughter of a man who by profession, as priest of On, or Heliopolis, the city of the Sun, was concerned to support and promote an idolatrous worship. The critics who advance and maintain this opinion, represent Joseph as a mere

timeserving sycophant, imbibing in a moment the spirit and manners of a court, and sacrificing principle to conveniency. I confess myself so partial to this amiable and excellent man, that without hesitation I undertake to meet this charge; and would allege in his behalf, that, as the Spirit of God no where reprehends this conduct, which in cases deserving blame is done freely and without reserve, so we ought not, without just cause, and perfect knowledge to find fault; charity obliging us “to think no evil,” where we can ‘think well; to put the best construction on what is doubtful, and to judge of what is not clear and explicit, by that which is. When I see Providence blessing this union by the birth of two sons, raised in process of time to a double rank of dignity and importance in Israel, it is impossible for me to think uncharitably of the union itself, which was the origin of that blessing. What, did Joseph acknowledge God so closely in every thing, even to the very naming of his children, correspondently to the aspects of the Divine Providence towards him, and can we suppose he neglected God in a matter of so much higher consequence! Let me rather say, and say it without reserve, that the piety, the chastity, the fidelity, the self-government of Joseph, in flying from an illicit commerce with his master’s wife, was thus rewarded of Heaven by a virtuous and lasting union with a chaste virgin and a prince’s daughter. But we dwell too long on a vindication, which was perhaps altogether unnecessary. To proceed:

Joseph has arrived at a station of very high honor, but it is not to hire a post of emolument and ease merely; and I rejoice to see the same person who diligently and humanely served the jailer as a deputy, and who faithfully managed the affairs of Potiphar as a steward, attentively, humbly, industriously conducting the interests of a great king, and a mighty empire, as a minister of state. On which I found an observation frequently made already, I care not how often, that the fear of God is the best security of a man’s good behavior in every situation; and that “he is to be trusted in nothing, who has not a conscience in every thing.”

Joseph was but thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, seventeen of which he had passed under the wing of a fond, indulgent parent, and the other thirteen, at that period of life when the heart is most devoted to pleasure, he had lingered away in all the variety of human wretchedness; but in all the dignity of virtue, all the superiority of wisdom, all the delights, pure and sublime, of true piety. And now, at an age when most men are only beginning to reflect and act as reasonable beings, we see him raised, not by accident nor cabal, nor petulance, but by undisputed merit, to a situation, which one part of mankind looks up to with desire, another with awe, and a third with despair. And happy was it for Egypt, that ever this youth, this stranger, this Hebrew was sold for a slave into its bosom, for “God sent him to save much people alive.”

Egypt gloried that she was not, like other countries, dependent on the clouds of Heaven for the fertility of her soil, and the exuberance of her crops, but, that she derived her rich harvests from the flux and reflux of her own river. But in vain had the Nil, arisen to the desired height during the seven successive years of uncommon plenteousness, bad not the pathetic foresight of a Joseph taught both prince and people to take advantage of the favor of Providence, and to lay a good foundation for the time to come. Nothing do men so much abuse as plenty; nothing do they so soon and so severely feel as want of bread. These seven prosperous years seem to compensate to Joseph all his former ills. His honor is cleared, his predictions are accomplished. What seldom meets, the sovereign and the subject strive who shall exalt him most; his domestic felicity keeps pace with the public prosperity; conscience approves; and God, the great God, smiles. If there be a condition of humanity to be desired, to be envied, it was this. Shall I stop to express a wonder,

that during all this period, with all the power of Pharaoh in his hand, with a heart so tender, and a spirit so dutiful, he should make no attempt to convey to the wretched old man in Canaan, intelligence concerning his preservation and his present condition. But I check myself, when I consider that the whole was of the Lord of Hosts, “who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.”

It is worth while to observe, how the style of Scripture is adapted to experience, and the nature of things. Years of tranquillity and success glide away imperceptibly: but every moment of pain is observed and felt, as it halts along. Accordingly, the history of seven prosperous and abundant years is dispatched in a sentence or two; whereas seven years of famine, as they were more sensibly felt in their progress, so they afford more abundant materials to the pen of the historian; and the detail is lengthened out to the reader, as the distress was to the unhappy sufferers. Little do we think of this in the days of health, and ease, and joy; and therefore little thankful are we to God for our multiplied comforts. To instruct us in their value, he is constrained to put forth his hand, and either to withdraw or mar them; and we awaken, alas too late, to a sense of our obligations to an indulgent Providence! The seven years of famine are now commenced, and the honor of Joseph’s sagacity is established, but by a very different proof. When either the promises or the threatenings of the word are fulfilled, we have equally a demonstration of the truth and faithfulness of God: venerable when he blesses, and venerable when he punishes a guilty world. Happy the prince, who, circumstanced, like Pharaoh, can roll the cares and anxieties of government upon a minister of ability and integrity like Joseph. Happy the people, governed by a ruler, who, himself educated in the school of affliction, has learned to succor the distressed. The beginning and progress of scarcity is described in this part of the sacred history with wonderful exactness and energy. It represents men first parting cheerfully with their money for food. By and by they are reduced to part with their lands, their hope, and security, for years to come, in exchange for the subsistence of a day. And, at length, reluctantly and slow, we behold them surrendering itself for the support of life. The neighboring nations feel, with Egypt, the rod of God’s anger; but every neighboring nation is not blessed with a Joseph, capable of foreseeing the evil, and of applying the remedy. Canaan, in common with others, is visited with the general calamity: and Jacob, who lived there, Jacob, the heir of the promise, is ready to perish with his family for lack of food. But he ill understands the promises, and the power of God, who, under the pressure of any affliction trusts to a miracle for relief, when honest and lawful means are in his power.

After an interval of more than thirteen years, we revisit poor Jacob’s melancholy habitation, and find him what he was from the beginning, “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” Behold a wound which time could not cure, festering in his bosom. Behold him sinking into the grave under a load which reason could not alleviate, nor religion itself totally remove. His family indeed, greatly increased by a multiplicity of grandchildren; but that great blessing embittered and converted into a curse, by the dreadful pressure of famine. What a dismal condition! Children crying for bread, and none to give them; the wretched parents looking at their perishing offspring, and then at one another in silent astonishment and despair. Conscience, which had probably slept quietly in better days, would now, no doubt, awaken the bitter memory of guilt long past, and which they had endeavored to forget. The sight of their own children ready to die of hunger, could not but revive the dreadful recollection of the time, when, in cold blood, they resolved to starve a brother, an innocent brother to death. In Jacob himself, we behold a moving and instructive picture of every

child of God, and of that church whereof he was then the living bread and representative, “troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.” He “heard there was corn in Egypt.” He had silver and gold in abundance. Despondency was only adding to the evil; he therefore rouses his astonished sons from their lethargy and dejection, and proposes a journey into Egypt to buy food. There is no necessity so cogent as that of eating. It eagerly catches therefore at every prospect of relief, believes things incredible, attempts things impossible. The ten elder sons of Jacob, therefore, set out for the land of Egypt on this errand, and into Egypt they came. On making the necessary inquiries respecting the purchase of corn, they are directed, as all buyers, both natives and foreigners were, to Joseph; without whom “no man lifted up his hand or his foot in all the land.” The change produced in a youth of seventeen, by the addition of thirteen years; his new name, his dress, language and manners; his high station and his stately demeanor, have effectually disguised their brother from their knowledge; and Providence, determined to bate them not a single iota of the humiliation predicted by the dreams, prostrates their “ten sheaves before the sheaf of Joseph,” levels the ten proud spirits at their unknown brother’s feet. Want makes men wonderfully submissive and complying: and they who fight against God will sooner or later find themselves dreadfully overmatched. Unknown by them, they stand well known and confessed to him. At sight of them, natural affection resumes its empire in his heart, and the tide which bad long forgotten to flow, now rushes impetuously from its source. He beholds ten; but where are the two, more beloved and endeared than all the rest? It is impossible to conceive, much more to describe, the emotions of Joseph’s soul on hearing tidings of his father’s family: to learn that his dear, his tender parent was still in the land of the living; surviving, so long, misery so dreadful; that his dear brother, his own mother’s son, was alive with him also, and in health. The sovereignty of Egypt, I am persuaded, never yielded him satisfaction half so sincere. The singularity of his situation evidently suggested to Joseph the experiment which he now resolved to make of the temper and character of his brothers; and particularly of their disposition in an hour of trial, toward their father and Benjamin. I cannot suppose him for a moment actuated by sentiments of revenge. Had he been under the influence of such a passion, the means of gratification were certainly most amply in his power. But the whole tenor of his conduct shows that he was governed by a very different spirit; his severity is altogether affected, the better to carry on the design which he had formed; and the peculiarity of his behavior towards some of the brothers, is to be ascribed to some peculiar circumstances in the history of the family, which the sacred penman has not thought proper to record. Some rigid critics, however, while they acquit Joseph of cruelty and revenge, severely accuse him of impiety and profanity in swearing, and swearing repeatedly, “by the life of Pharaoh,” and that to a charge which he well knew not to be founded in fact. It is not our design to undertake a justification of Joseph in every particular. What character can stand throughout the test of a rigid examination? Sacred history exhibits men. Just as they are, not what they ought in all respects to be. Dark spots are most easily discerned in the whitest garments, and foul blemishes in the fairest reputations. But let no sanctity of character presume to shelter the slightest deviation from the path of God’s commandment. No; the smallest sin, if any sin be small, is a degradation and disgrace to the most sanctified and exalted character.

While Joseph, the better to conceal himself, talks and acts like a true Egyptian, God employs his affected sternness and severity to awaken the slumbering consciences of his brothers, and to show the sons of Jacob to themselves. Treated as spies, roughly spoken to, their most solemn

protestations disregarded, put in prison and bound--their treatment of Joseph in the evil day which put him in their power, rushes upon their memory, in all its guilt and horror, and they mutually upbraid and reproach each other with their barbarity, “saying one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us and we would not hear: therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child, and ye would not hear? Therefore, behold, also, his blood is required.”[*]Gen 42:21-22 This mutual and self-accusation excites in the tender heart of Joseph, emotions which he is unable to conceal. Hearing himself mentioned with so much tenderness and regret, by persons once so cruel, and in a language which he had been long unaccustomed to hear, the pretended Egyptian becomes in spite of himself, a real Israelite; his bosom swells, his visage warms, the tear starts to his eye. To prevent a premature discovery, he is constrained to retire and recompose himself. He returns and renews the conversation, and again assuming the lord of Egypt, sets nine at liberty, binds Simeon before their eyes, and commits him to close confinement, as a hostage for their return, together with Benjamin their brother. He then dismisses them loaded with corn for their families, and provision for the way having secretly given orders to his steward, in making up the bags of corn, to deposit each man’s money in the mouth of his respective sack. This was not discovered till they were considerably advanced on their journey homeward; when one, undoing his sack to give his ass provender, observed his money in his sack’s mouth. Upon their arrival in Canaan, the same thing is found to have happened to them all. Comparing this singularly strange circumstance with the rest of their eventful journey to Egypt, they discern the hand of God in it, and observing such an unaccountable mixture of flattering and of mortifying events, they remain, upon the whole, perplexed and confounded. When the mind is sore, and the conscience seriously alarmed, dispensations of every complexion, both mercy and judgment, are viewed with u fearful eye. When we know we are deserving of punishment, every thing becomes a punishment to us, either felt or feared. And now again, the unhappy father, reckoning his long expected sons, as they arrive, finds their number short by one. “Simeon too is not;” and the account given of his absence, instead of pouring balm into the wound, is “as vinegar upon nitre.” “Joseph is not, and Simeon is not,” and Benjamin is demanded. To recover what he has lost, he must risk still more. Simeon is not what he should be, but his kind forgiving father cannot think of giving him up, worthless as he is. To lose a pious, promising child by death, is painful: but the death of a thoughtless, graceless profligate, to a parent of piety and sensibility, is much worse. We see the distressed old man putting off and still putting off the evil day. He has more than one reason for sparing the corn which had been brought from such a distance, and procured at such a risk. Before a fresh supply can be obtained, and Simeon restored, “the son of his right hand” must be surrendered. Benjamin must be taken away; and the thought of this plants a dagger in his heart. But the famine continues, necessity presses, and a second pilgrimage must be undertaken. The account of it, however, must for the present, be deferred. The history swells upon us, and we shall rather entreat your patient attention to another Lecture on the subject, than hasten over a story so much calculated at once to please and to instruct. But behold a greater than Joseph is here.

Behold Jesus, “for the suffering of death,” “highly exalted,” distinguished by “a name that 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.”[*]Php 2:10-11 “All power is given unto me in heaven and in

earth."[*]Mat 28:18 "The Father himself judgeth no man: but hath committed all judgment unto the Son. That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son, honoreth not the Father which hath sent him."[*]John 5:22-23 "I am the bread of life that came down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread, which came down from heaven: If any man eat of this bread he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."[*]John 6:50-51 "He that cometh unto me shall never hunger: and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me: and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."[*]John 6:35;John 6:37 "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price."[*]Isa 60:1 It hath pleased the Father, that in him should all fullness dwell:"[*]Col 1:19 "and of his fullness have all ye received, and grace for grace." "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."[*]John 6:55 "Your fathers found corn in Egypt." "Your Fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead, but he that eateth of this bread shall live forever." "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up the last day."[*]John 6:54 "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else."[*]Isa 45:22 "Blessed are they that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham; and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."[*]Mat 8:11 "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."[*]John 14:2-3 "In those days, and in that time, with the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they, and the children of Judah together, going, and weeping: they shall go, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord, in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten."[*]Jer 10:4-5 "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me: that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."[*]Luk 22:28-30 "Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." "He that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."[*]John 16:33

034. Joseph--Greets Brothers

Joseph--Greets Brothers

Gen 45:3-5. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him: for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph saith unto his brethren, Come neat to me, I pray you: and they came near; and he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me hither before you to preserve life. The productions of human power and skill afford but an imperfect and short-lived pleasure. The delight of the artist himself is over long before his work is completed, and the wonder of the spectator lasts only till he is let into the secret, and admitted behind the scenes. It is not so with the works of God. When the mighty fabric of the universe was finished, God surveyed his work with perfect complacency and satisfaction, for “behold it was all very good.” And such, to this day, it appears in the eye of every beholder. No frequency of contemplation, no closeness of inspection, no keenness of investigation, or success in discovery, ever bring on weariness or disgust. The eye is eternally delighted with the magnificence and splendor of the azure vault, with the verdure- and variety of the fertile earth. The music of the grove never fails to charm the listening ear; the perfume breathed from “the flower and the shrub, and the tree,” never palls upon the sense. The whole order, harmony, majesty, and beauty of nature, forever astonish, compose, elevate, inform, and instruct the soul. The same may, with truth, be said of the word of God. What human composition so exquisite as always to please? What human composition have we patience to turn over a tenth or a twentieth time! The stores of human wisdom are quickly exhausted; the eye speedily reaches forward to the end of created perfection. But though the charm of novelty may have passed away, though memory may have stored itself with the very words, and the heart have felt the impression a thousand and a thousand times, yet the beauty, the force, the excellency, the importance of Scripture composition remain in undiminished luster. That sun in the firmament of grace, which has irradiated, cheered, and blessed ages and generations past, is also our light and our glory, and shall, with unimpaired strength, with unconfined liberality, diffuse light, and life, and joy to the final consummation of all things.

If serious minds be disposed to think thus of Scripture in general, ail persons of sensibility and taste will, I am persuaded, agree in forming such a judgment of the history of Joseph in particular. The unlettered man and the scholar; the child and the grown man; the ingenious and the simple; the believer and the infidel; Greek and Jew, have in all ages admired, delighted in, and edified by a story, which, clothed with all the graces of eloquence, exhibits the most uncommon, surprising, affecting and important events; and conveys the purest and sublimest lessons of piety and morality. The famine continued to rage with unrelenting severity in Egypt and the countries adjacent, and dire indeed must have been the pressure of that calamity, which compelled a father, tender and affectionate like Jacob, after losing two sons by a stroke heavier than that of death, to part with his youngest, darling hope, at the risk of never seeing him more. How horrid that plague which can force a fond mother to devour her own child for food! Let this awful reflection in a year of

scarcity, and at a season of waste and luxury,[*]December 25th, 1782 check profusion, awaken our compassion to the poor and wretched, and temper our joy. The old man yields tip his Benjamin, as if his own body were dismembering limb by limb. “If it must be so now” “take your brother, and arise, go again unto the man. And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.”[*]Gen 43:13-14 With double money in their hands, then, with a present consisting of the choicest productions of Canaan, for the Governor of Egypt, and with the heart and soul of their aged father in their custody, they set out on a second pilgrimage to buy food. What is a land producing “balm, honey, spices, myrrh, nuts, and almonds,” compared to a land of corn! What worthless things are gold and silver compared to bread. If our own country be less fertile in the wine and oil, the drugs and perfumes, the gems and gold of other regions, it is more abundantly productive of the staff and protection of life the “finest of the wheat,” the oak more firm and durable than cedar, and iron more precious than rubies. Their arrival being announced to Joseph, and his brother Benjamin appearing with the rest; Benjamin, whom having parted with a child, he could not have known, but from the company in which he was found, he gives orders to make preparation for a, great entertainment in honor of these strangers. The men were not more distressed at the harshness of the treatment which they met with at first, than they are perplexed and confounded at the excessive kindness and hospitality of their present reception; for an ill conscience is ever timid and suspicious. Against the time of Joseph’s arrival they make ready their present, and. being admitted into his presence, they again prostrate themselves to the earth before him. In vain do men set themselves to counteract the decrees of Heaven.

After the customary salutations, with a mixture of anxiety and hope, he inquires after the life and welfare of their father, and, to his inexpressible satisfaction, learns that he was alive and in health. But the sight of Benjamin awakens too many tender recollections to be resisted, too many fond ideas to be suppressed. The premature loss of their common parent, the partial affection of their kind father, the present anxiety and distress of the venerable man, his own strange eventful history, Benjamin’s tender youth, his distance from home, his separation from paternal care and protection, his exposedness to dangers which had almost proved fatal to himself; all, all rush upon his mind at once, and excite emotions too powerful to be concealed. He is obliged to retire in order to throw a veil over those feelings which must have betrayed him; and gives vent to his heart in secret. Having recomposed himself, he returns to the company, and, resuming the Egyptian, commands the entertainment to be served up. Three tables are set out, one for himself apart, as the governor of the country; another for his guests, by themselves: and a third for the Egyptians of his household, or such as might be invited on the occasion. For the Egyptians, either from religious scruples, or political pride and aversion, abhorred a communication with other nations in convivial or sacred entertainments. And here was presented a fresh source of wonder to the sons of Jacob. By Joseph’s direction, they are arranged at table in the exact order of their birth, without inquiry or information. This, in connection with the account which it behoved them to have heard concerning such an extraordinary person, must have conveyed to them an idea of a sagacity altogether preternatural. Nor would their surprise be diminished by the distinguished mark of respect shown to their youngest brother; for the mess sent from the governor’s table to him, was “five times” the quantity of any of the rest; and it was thus that in ancient times, among eastern nations, superior deference and esteem were expressed. However, the increasing festivity of the banquet gradually dissipated all their terrors. “They drank and were merry.” The Hebrew word unquestionably

insinuates that they drank to excess. It is natural for men to rush from one extreme to another, and it is not improbable that Joseph threw this temptation in their way, in order to obtain a more thorough insight into their temper and character, by observing them attentively, in a situation when the heart overflows, and -he tongue conceals and disguises nothing. Whatever be in this, he is preparing a trial for them more severe than any which they had as yet experienced, and which in some measure compensated the anguish they had occasioned to their father, when they impressed him with the belief of his son's death.

Loaded with civilities, provided with a supply of corn for their starving families, Simeon restored, Benjamin not detained; they set out on their journey to Canaan, with a merry heart, talking one to another of the strange things which had come to pass. But scarcely are they got clear of the city, when they are pursued and overtaken by Joseph's steward, charging them with theft, and commanding them instantly to return to his master to answer for it. With terror and astonishment, though in the confidence of innocence, they deny the charge, and reason upon the improbability of it. Search is made among their stuff for the goods alleged to be stolen; ten are acquitted with honor, and they are just beginning to exult in the detected falsehood of such a scandalous imputation, when, to their utter confusion, Joseph's cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Overwhelmed with shame and terror, they are again conducted to his presence. The crime is proved. To deny it were vain, to excuse it nugatory and absurd; and to account for it, it is impossible.

Judah, who had been the most urgent with his father to send Benjamin, and had solemnly pledged himself for his safe return, feels himself now called forth: and, in a strain of the most pathetic eloquence that ever flowed from an aching heart, attempts not to extenuate or exculpate, but to raise compassion, and to obtain mercy. The piece is of exquisite beauty and elegance, and, being in every one's hands, may be re-perused at your lei sure. The Jewish writers take delight in dwelling upon, and expanding it. Philo, in particular, in his treatise entitled, "Joseph," has given a paraphrase of this speech of Judah, which possesses wonderful elegance and propriety of expression, and force of thought. Some of you, perhaps, may not be displeased with having an opportunity of comparing the diffusive labored eloquence of the paraphrast, with the energetic simplicity of the sacred text. The former puts into Judah's mouth the following address.

"When we appeared, six, before you the first time, we answered without reserve, and according to the strictest truth, all the questions which you were pleased to put to us concerning our family. We acquainted you, that we had a father heavily laden with years, but still more heavily with misfortunes; a father, whose whole life had been one continued struggle with adversity. We added, that we had a brother peculiarly dear to him, as the children born towards the end of their life, generally are to old men, and who is the only one remaining of his mother: his brother having come, in early youth, to a most tragical end. You commanded us, as the proof of our veracity and innocence, to bring that brother unto you, and your command was delivered with such threatenings, that the terror of them accompanied us all the way back to our country, and embittered the remainder of our journey. We reported every thing minutely to our father, as you directed us. Resolutely and long, he refused to entrust us with the care of that child. Love suggested a thousand causes of apprehension upon his account. He loaded us with the bitterest reproaches for having declared that we had another brother. Subdued by the famine, he at length reluctantly consented; and putting his beloved son, this unhappy youth, into our hands, conjured

us by every dear, every awful name, to guard with tenderness his precious life, and as we would not see him expire before our eyes in anguish and despair, to bring him back in safety. He parted with him as with a limb torn from his own body; and in an agony of grief inexpressible, deplored the dreadful necessity which separated him from a son, on whom all the happiness of his life depended. How then can we appear before a father of such delicate sensibility? With what eyes shall we dare to look upon him, unless we carry back with us this son of his right hand, this staff of his old age, whom, alas, you have condemned to slavery? The good old man will expire in horrors dreadful to nature, as soon as he shall find that his son is not with us. Our enemies will insult over us under these misfortunes, and treat us as the most infamous of parricides. I must appear to the world, and to myself, as the perpetrator of that most horrid of crimes, the murder of a father; for it was I who most urgently pressed my father to yield. I engaged, by the most solemn promises, and the most sacred pledges, to bring the child back. Me he entrusted with the sacred deposit, and of my hand he will require it. Have pity, I beseech you, on the deplorable condition of an old man, stript of his last comfort, and whose misery will be aggravated by reflecting that he foresaw its approach, and yet wanted resolution to prevent it. If your just indignation must needs have a sacrifice, here I am ready, at the price of my liberty, or of my life, to expiate this young man's guilt, and to purchase his release? Grant this request, not so much for the sake of the youth himself, as of his absent father, who never offended you, but who venerates your person and esteems your virtues. Suffer us not to plead in vain for a shelter under your right hand, to which we flee, as to an holy altar, consecrated as a refuge to the miserable. Pity an old man, who, during the whole course of a long life, has cultivated arts becoming a man of wisdom and probity, and who, on account of his amiable qualities, is almost adored by the inhabitants of Syria and Canaan, though he profess a religion, and follow a mode of living totally different from theirs." This address, it must be acknowledged, possesses uncommon grace and tenderness. But it is evident from whence the modern, pretended Jew, has copied his tenderest and most delicate touches. And when the copy and the original are brought close together, it will be apparent to a discerning eye which is the most finished piece. If Philo has made Judah speak well, it will hardly be disputed that Moses has made him speak better. The words of Judah penetrated the heart of Joseph. The affectionate manner in which his father was mentioned, the unfeigned earnestness expressed to save him from the impending blow; the generosity of his offer to put himself in Benjamin's place, to purchase a parent's comfort and a brother's release, at the price of his own liberty; all this satisfies him, that time, and affliction, and a sense of duty, and the powerful constraint of returning nature, had introduced another and a happier spirit into the family. He finds himself incapable of any longer deferring the pleasure which he should both receive and communicate by making a discovery of himself. The curiosity of his domestics must have been greatly raised by the unaccountable peculiarity of his behavior to these strangers, but he does not choose to have any spectators of that scene of nature which he was meditating, except those who were to be act ors in it. The heart likes not to have its stronger emotions seen of many witnesses. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with its joy." He therefore commands every Egyptian out of the apartment, and being left alone with his eleven brothers, whose consternation must have been greatly increased by the orders which they had now heard given, he bursts into an agony of tenderness, and in words inarticulate and indistinct through tears, declares in one breath who he was; and in the next, with accents that pierce the soul, pours out his heart in a tender inquiry after his old kind father. Two short words unfold the whole mystery of this strange conduct. But what

language can convey an adequate idea of Joseph's feeling at that moment; the feelings of a heart glowing at the thought of once more beholding his venerable sire, of being pressed to his bosom, of cheering and cherishing his declining years; a heart melting into sympathy, forgiveness, and brotherly love, exulting in the joy of rendering good for evil; a heart lost in wonder and overflowing with gratitude, while it contemplated the wisdom and goodness of all-ruling Providence, in producing such events by means so incomprehensible. The feelings of the brothers too, are rather to be conceived than described. Thunderstruck with astonishment, oppressed with shame, stung with remorse, petrified with terror: no, not terror; the words, the looks, the tears of their relenting brother, assure them in a moment that they have nothing to fear. But, unable to make any reply, they afford the noble minded, and the condescending Joseph, an opportunity of so far recovering himself, as to be able to administer this strongest of all consolation, that their unkindness to himself had been intended, ordered, and overruled of God, to answer the most valuable and important purposes to him, to themselves, to their father's house, and to many nations. "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you, to preserve life."[*]Gen 45:5 In this address of Joseph, I know not which to admire most; his magnanimity in pardoning offences so atrocious, losing sight of the criminals in the brothers; his wonderful skill in adapting the style of his consolatory arguments so exactly to the circumstances of the case; his invincible humility in carrying the spirit and temper of the lowliest condition and relations of humanity, into the loftiest, most envied, and most corruptive station of courtly grandeur; or his pure, fervent, and sublime piety, in considering and acknowledging all that had come to pass, as the design and operation of Heaven. With infinite judgment and propriety, the sacred historian has put no reply whatever, into the mouths of the brothers. There are certain situations which defy description; certain emotions which silence best, which silence only can explain. And such was theirs. Joseph however is not so lost in joy, as to forget that it was far from being perfect till one more became a partaker of it, nor so much swallowed up in the present, as to neglect the future. With gladness of heart would he have flown to Hebron, and been himself the messenger of his own life and prosperity, to the good old man. But the duties of his station forbid. This is one of the taxes which greatness is doomed to pay. It must learn to repress the inclinations and forego the pleasures of the private citizen. Princes live not to themselves but to the public; and the happiness of millions, is a felicity infinitely superior to every sordid, every selfish gratification. He could not, must not go to his father: but it was not impossible to remove his father into Egypt. The excellence of his disposition appears in every thing. In characters like his, we do not find duty justling duty out of doors, but every one in its proper place. Passion tempered by prudence; and wisdom animated by passion. To render the projected remoral of his venerable parent as easy and comfortable as possible to his advanced age, and increasing infirmities, he proposes for his residence the land of Goshen, which was a province of the lower Egypt, on the east side of the Nile, bordering upon Arabia, and a frontier to Palestine. This province was fit for feeding cattle, the profession which his father and brethren followed; and it was not far from the city where the Egyptian monarchs usually resided, and where Joseph's stated habitation of course was. It is called Zoan in the seventy-eighth Psalm, and Tanais by profane authors. This nearness of situation, Joseph alleged as one motive to induce his father to undertake the journey; and there he engaged to maintain him and all his family, in affluence and comfort. In Pharaoh we have an amiable instance of qualities rarely to be found in the character of princes-attachment and gratitude. He cheerfully confirms all the engagements of his minister, though they extended to the

disposing of a whole province of his empire. He outruns the wishes and desire of even filial duty and affection, and strives to repay the kindness of Joseph, whom God had made a father to him, by becoming a shield and protector to his father's house. But what shall we say, what shall we think of Joseph himself? Men suddenly and remarkably elevated, are apt to forget themselves, to forget those from whom they sprung, and the means by which they rose. But behold the prime minister of a mighty empire, the favorite of a great and powerful prince, the lord of Egypt, attending to the conveniency and comfort of an old shepherd, whose person was unknown in the country which he governed, his religion abhorred, and his occupation despised. O nature, nature! How honorable is thy empire, how glorious are thy triumphs!--Joseph is now as eager to hasten the departure of his brethren, as he was before artful to detain them. And at Pharaoh's command, dismisses them with a retinue suitable to the rank and dignity of the man who was next the throne. But it is with pleasure we observe, that the splendor of this retinue was not the silly ostentation of wealth and power, but the display of much better passions, the kindness, the liberality, the gratitude of a good and honest heart.

And, is the sun indeed at length going to arise upon Jacob's hoary head? And shall the heart so long dead to joy, yet once more awaken to transport? And shall his eyes at last close in peace? Alas, alas! are we not all dying to the world, before we begin to live to comfort? Is not the drama of life over, before we are well sensible that our part in the scene has commenced? Is it not rather too late in life to purchase a blessing so transitory, by a change so great? What will a man not do to save his family from perishing, and to be joined to such a son as Joseph? It is indeed late in life, before we die to hope; and wisely and well it is ordered, that we should hope to the end. The man who has suffered so much, who has died se often, has not much nacre either to feel or to fear. This dawning of happiness upon the head of the aged patriarch, is to himself so new, so unlike the common complexion of his lot, opens so many interesting views of Providence-that I trust you will deem with me the prosperous period of Jacob's history deserving of a Lecture by itself. Here then we break off, after having suggested to your minds a few texts of Scripture, tending to illustrate and to apply our subject. And "there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee; and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father: but when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."[*]Luk 15:14-20 "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."[*]Mat 11:28-29 "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive: and let thy widows trust in me."[*]Jer 49:11 "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."[*]Luk 12:32 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."[*]Mat 23:37 "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together: for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."[*]Acts

4:27-28 “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men: and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”[*]1Co 1:25 “This cometh forth from the Lord of Hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.”[*]Isa 28:29 “Trust in the Lord, and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon day. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way.”[*]Psa 37:3-6;Psa 37:23 “Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee.”[*]Job 22:21 “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”[*]Pro 3:6

Chapter 35

035. Jacob and Joseph--Joseph Lives!

Jacob and Joseph--Joseph Lives!

Gen 45:24-28. So he sent his brethren away, and they departed: and he said unto them, See that ye fall not out by the way. And they went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob their father; and told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not. And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived. And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die.

If there be such a thing as pure and perfect joy upon earth, it is that which fills the heart of a parent, when he hears of the wisdom, the virtue, and the prosperity of a darling child. If there be sorrow that admits not consolation, it is the sorrow of a father, for the vice or folly of an ungracious, thankless son, and for the misery in which he has plunged himself. The patriarch Jacob felt both of these in the extreme. He had now lived to the age of one hundred and thirty years; and had proved all the bitter variety of human wretchedness. Every change of condition he has hitherto undergone, is only the sad transition from affliction to affliction. The brethren at length becomes too heavy to bear, and we see a miserable old man sinking into the grave under the accumulated weight of woes insupportable. In parting with Benjamin, he had yielded up his last stake, and renounced all hopes of happiness in this world; calmly looking forward to that peaceful region "where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest." But the full estimate of human life cannot be made till the scene be closed. The shades of night at last begin to disperse, and the day dawns. While he is tormenting himself in Canaan, with the apprehension of never seeing more his last, his only remaining hope, Providence is maturing in Egypt a gracious design in his behalf, which is in a moment to turn his sorrow into joy.

Joseph having discovered himself to his brethren, hastens their return homeward, and dismisses them provided with every accommodation for the safe and comfortable removal of their aged father, and their tender children. What a triumph was Joseph's! What a glorious superiority! the triumph of Heaven, the superiority of God himself, who "overcomes evil with good." But he is unable to conceal the partiality of his affection to Benjamin. As he distinguished him at table by a five-fold portion, he distinguishes him at parting with a more splendid and costly present than the rest, consisting of three hundred pieces of silver, and five changes of raiment. In a wardrobe of great value and variety, a considerable part of ancient magnificence consisted. This we learn both from Scripture, and from profane authors. Samson proposed as a reward to him who should expound his riddle, "thirty changes of garments." Naaman the Syrian, among other valuable commodities, carried "ten changes of garments," as a gratification to the prophet from whom he expected the cure of his leprosy. Under the first Roman emperors, this vanity and extravagance were carried to such an excessive pitch, that the Praetor Lucullus, according to Plutarch, his biographer, had two hundred changes of apparel; and Horace insinuates, in one of his epistles,

that by some the luxury was carried to the enormous extravagance of five thousand suits. And it is, without doubt, to this ostentatious profusion, the apostle James alludes, when he thus censures the abuse of wealth, “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries; your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth eaten.” But was it wisely done, sage governor of Egypt? was it wisely done, thus to scatter the seeds of jealousy and envy in hearts so susceptible of these dreadful passions! Have you forgot the coat of many colors, the dangerous badge of your father’s fondness to yourself! Have you not rendered your own advice necessary, “See that you fall not out by the way?” Happily, the recollection of past disasters, and the kind behavior and gentle admonition of their affectionate brother, have subdued their boisterous spirits, and attuned their hearts to love. The anxiety of the old man for their return is better to be conceived than described. How often in a day would his fond eyes turn to the way by which Benjamin was expected back? How would the tardy hours linger, as the heart languished with hope deferred? At last the blessed moment arrives, the train appears; the number complete, Benjamin safe, Simeon restored. But what can this mean? Instead of eleven men driving their asses laden with corn, a splendid retinue, the glory of Egypt, the wagons of Pharaoh! The heart that has been long inured to affliction, interprets every appearance against itself. Some things are too good, others too evil to be hastily credited. The utmost height of Jacob’s expectation was to behold his youngest son again, with a supply of corn for his starving family. But to hear that his long lost, his much lamented Joseph was still living, that he was the ruler of all Egypt, the savior o£ a great nation, the fattier of a mighty prince, O! it is, it is too much. Nature tottering under a load of woe, now sinks and faints under an excess of joy. Such tidings are too flattering to be believed. Did the brothers now disclose the whole of the mighty secret, and take shame to themselves for their vile conduct to so excellent a father, to so amiable a brother? Or, trusting to Joseph’s generosity, did they conceal the part which they had acted in this strange, mysterious drama? Probably the latter is the truth. The soul shrinks back from the discovery of its own. wickedness. To confess, and condemn themselves, could do now no good, and must greatly have marred and diminished their aged parent’s satisfaction, if indeed he had no suspicion how the case stood. The good man has been so long a stranger to felicity, that the possibility of it is called in question; that slowly and cautiously he yields to the sweet demonstration. Convinced, satisfied at length, what joy is equal to the joy of Jacob? Is it not worth wading through a sea of trouble, to come to such a shore at length? The blessings of Providence are well worth waiting for. They may seem to linger; they are not always such as we wished and expected but they are ever seasonable, ever suitable, and they compensate in a moment the pain and misery of a whole life. But is it not late in life to undertake such a journey? No; it is to see Joseph, to be joined unto him; to be an eye-witness of his grandeur, and a partaker of his liberality. How often has Egypt sheltered and nourished the church of God! Abraham, Joseph, Jacob, Moses, Jesus Christ himself, there successively found protection. The same place, according as Providence ordains it, is either a trying furnace or a refuge and sanctuary. A king that knows Joseph is a nursing father to Israel; another arises who knows him not, and he wastes and destroys. But our patriarch was not merely following the impulse of natural affection, though that had been warrant sufficient for even a still greater removal; he is also obeying the dictates of wisdom, in making a prudent provision for his numerous and increasing family, and he is listening to a special call and encouragement from Heaven. Before he leaves Canaan, probably forever, he visits Beer-Sheba, the chosen and favorite residence of his father; and there he renews his covenant with God by sacrifice. Those enterprises are most likely to succeed, those comforts to

afford most genuine satisfaction in which God is seen, acknowledged, and enjoyed. The sacrifices of the devout by day, are answered by the visions of the Almighty in the night season. A man can proceed with cheerfulness and confidence, when he has got his Maker's permission. The vision assures him that he should arrive in safety, should prosper in Egypt, should embrace his son, and that "Joseph should put his hand upon his eyes," that is, perform the last offices of filial duty and humanity. We meet with the same expression and idea in many passages of the heathen poets. Penelope, in Homer, prays that Telemachus her son may close her eyes, and those of his father Ulysses. The mother of Euryalus in the Aeneid, among many other bitter expressions of sorrow over her dead son, laments that she was denied the wretched consolation, since he must die before her, of pressing down his dying eyes. Human nature thus strives to outlive itself, and the heart, while it is yet capable of feeling, consoles itself with the hope of receiving marks of tenderness and attachment after it can feel no more. The old man's heart is now at rest, he is acting obedience to the command of Heaven, he is complying with one of the worthiest propensities of nature. He is indebted for the commodiousness with which he travels, to the person whom on earth he most dearly loved, and to whom, of all others, he would most willingly be obliged.

How different the patriarch's situation, every different journey he undertakes? His first was to Padan-gram, when he fled from the face of an angry brother. Then he was solitary and friendless, but free from care, free from sorrow. The second, flying from unkind relations back again to Canaan, rich in children, rich in cattle, but troubled in spirit, oppressed with anxiety. And now we see him the third time in motion towards Egypt, richer than ever both in possessions and in prospects, but bending under the pressure of age, and its concomitant infirmities, worn out with calamity, and almost dead to joy. The family of Jacob, including the addition of what Joseph had gotten in Egypt, now amounted to seventy souls. And the priest of On's daughter, whose alliance was doubtless intended as an honor to Joseph, is honored and ennobled by being ranked in the family of Jacob, and by having become a mother in Israel.

Scripture describes in its own inimitable manner, the meeting between the father and son. "And he sent Judah, before him unto Joseph, to direct his face unto Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen. And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen; and presented himself unto him: and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive."[*]Gen 46:28-30 This is honest nature, this is the genuine language of the heart. In Joseph we see filial piety and fraternal affection happily blended with wisdom, humility, and discretion. His will was law in Egypt. To what honors, preferments, and emoluments, might not the brothers and nephews of the governor-general have aspired? But he consults their true happiness, by guarding them at once from the languor of idleness, and the madness of ambition. Shepherds they were bred, and shepherds let them continue. Violent transitions ill suit the staid and serious periods of human life. His behavior as a subject of Pharaoh is equally amiable and praiseworthy. he never loses sight of the duties of his station, never becomes arrogant and assuming, in the confidence of royal favor. "Without him no man lifted up his hand or foot in all the land;" but without Pharaoh's consent he will not dispose of a single field to his nearest relations. He is too wise, and too good, to make the mad attempt of some upstart favorites, to overcome national prejudices by dint of power and authority. The Egyptians held the profession of a shepherd in contempt, and he is not

silly enough to dream of forcing it into respect.

We have already taken occasion to praise the gratitude, generosity, and attachment of this prince, and with pleasure we repeat it. We see him nobly striving to discharge some part of the mighty obligation which had been laid upon him and his whole kingdom, by the son of the patriarch, by showing all possible kindness to his father's house. "And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: the land of Egypt is before thee, in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell, in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle."[*]Gen 47:5-6 The interview between the venerable man himself, and this good prince, is highly interesting and instructive. Old age and virtue are honored with the kind regard and attention of a king. Royalty is instructed, admonished, and blessed by the wisdom of the sage, by the miseries of the man, by the piety and prayers of the prophet. Who gains by this visit? Pharaoh, to be sure. His kingdom is strengthened by the accession of seventy good subjects, with their skill, industry, and wealth: and "the effectual, fervent prayers" of holy Israel were surely, Pharaoh himself being judge, compensation sufficient for the poor subsistence which a decayed, dying old man received from his bounty.

It is with a mixture of shame and sorrow, that we bring forward the next passage in the history of Joseph. It exhibits him indeed as a most exquisite politician, who thoroughly understood the interests and the passions of mankind; who knew perfectly well how to take advantage of the occasion; but, over-devoted to the prince who had advanced him, employing his exorbitant power, his superior skill and address, in planning and perfecting a system of despotism, by which the whole property of Egypt, together with the persons and liberties of all that mighty empire, were transferred to the sovereign. We behold him most ungenerously seizing the opportunity, which the growing distress of a lengthened famine afforded him, to aggrandize one at the expense of millions. He first conveys all the money in the land into the royal treasury. The cattle speedily follow. The increasing miseries of another unfavorable season, determine the wretched proprietors to part with their lands for food, and even reduce them to the dreadful necessity of offering to sell themselves for slaves, that they might live by their master's bounty. It is true, the prime minister of Pharaoh did not push his advantage to the extremest length. But it must be acknowledged, he carried it much farther than became the friend of misery, and of mankind. With so good a man as this Pharaoh, perhaps absolute power might be lodged with some degree of safety; but who shall answer for other Pharaohs who may arise, with the awful ability of doing mischief; possessing authority unfettered by legal restraint; possessing power not prompted by goodness, not tempered by mercy, not deigning to stoop to the sacred rights of mankind? Do we not see, in the hardships which under the following reign the posterity of Israel endured from Egyptian despotism, the danger of extending regal authority beyond the limits of reason? And thus, in the justice of Providence, the family of Joseph first felt the rod of that tyranny, which, with his own hands, he had established and aggrandized. Absolute sway can never be deposited with safety in any hands, but in his, who is constantly employing his power for the salvation of men, not their destruction. But we turn from a scene, which it is impossible to contemplate without both regret and resentment; happy to reflect, that we live in a country, where law, not will, is the rule of government; where the strong voice of royal prerogative is drowned and lost, in the sterner, louder proclamation of, "Thus it is written." We hasten from the vast, depopulated regions of state politics,

to the pleasanter, fairer fields of private life.

Jacob's last days are by far his best. Seventeen years of unruffled tranquillity he passed in Egypt, enjoying the most pure and complete of all human gratifications-that of witnessing the prosperity, and experiencing the attachment of a favorite and dutiful child. But how comes it to pass, that periods of happiness shrink into so little a measure in description, while scenes of woe lengthen themselves out both to the sufferer, and to the relator? We record our mercies on the sand of the sea-shore, which the washing of every wave smoothes again, and the perishing memorial is obliterated and lost. Calamity we engrave upon the rock, which preserves the inscription from age to age. But the famine has long been over, and why has not the patriarch thought of returning again to the land of his fathers? Young men love to ramble from place to place; but old age is steady and stationary. Removal was attended with increasing difficulty every day, from the increase of his age and infirmities, and from the number of his family. Besides, Joseph's presence was bee: become necessary to the government of Egypt; and to part with him again, had been much worse than death. In a word, the whole was of the Lord, who was now laying the foundation of a fabric of wonders which should astonish the next generation, and every future age of the world, by the report of them. One hundred and thirty years of woe, and seventeen of comfort and happiness, come both at length to a period. Let the wretched think of this, and bear their affliction with fortitude; let the prosperous consider it well, that they "be not high-minded, but fear." How dreadful is that misery which issues in despair of change! How exquisite the happiness which fills every faculty of the soul, and whose measure is eternity! But though Jacob be satisfied to live and to die in Egypt, he feels and expresses the natural desire of all men, that his ashes should rest in death with the venerable dust of his forefathers. Perceiving therefore in himself the decay of nature, and the approach of dissolution, he sent for his beloved son, and bound him by a solemn oath to carry his dead body to the cave of Machpelah; that he too, in death, might become an additional pledge to his family, that God would in due time make good to them that possession of Canaan which lie had promised.

Having obtained this security, his heart is at rest; and for himself he has no further worldly concern. But the symptoms of approaching dissolution are now upon him, sickness, weakness, and loss of sight. All the authority and wealth of Egypt cannot repel these irresistible invaders. Old age is a disease which death only can cure. But, even in old age and death, Jacob's early affections are his constant and remaining ones, Rachel and Joseph, and leis two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. So long as the vital fluid visits his heart, the memory of his beloved Rachel vibrates upon it. The last beams of his expiring eyes seek for her image and representative, her son and grandchildren: and even Benjamin seems, for awhile, forgotten. Soon that wounded heart shall beat no more, and those weary eyes shall close in everlasting peace. The sickness of his father being reported to Joseph, he instantly quits every other employment, and, attended by his two sons, hastens to visit him to receive his last dying commands, his dying paternal benediction, and to cherish and soothe his departing spirit with that cordial of cordials, filial tenderness and love. Though nature was come to its lowest ebb with our patriarch, grace was in full springtide. The eye of the body could not discern the nearest objects, could not even distinguish the sons of Joseph, but the eye of the spirit, the spirit of prophesy that was in him, penetrated through the shades of night, and contemplated, with clearness and accuracy, ages the most remote; persons, situations, and events the most distant. In this last and tender interview with his beloved son, he

declares his intention to raise the children who had been born to him in Egypt, to their hereditary rank and honor in Israel; and lie bequeaths to Joseph a particular possession which he had acquired by conquest in Canaan: “Moreover I have given to you one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite, with my sword, and with my bow;”[*]Gen 48:22 deeming him entitled, and not without much appearance of reason, to the double portion of the first born. For his mother alone was the wife of Jacob’s choice. And had the course of reason and justice taken place, he should have had no children but by her. The posterity of Rachel, then, had an undoubted claim of preference, considering that in strict equity the whole would have belonged to them. At the same time he predicted the future fortunes of his grandchildren by Joseph; and, Heaven-instructed, foretells, that the younger should in time obtain the pre-eminence in rank, populousness, and importance over the elder. And now nothing remained but to declare and publish his last will, or rather the will of God respecting his posterity, for many generations to come. But this would require a much larger space than is now left for it. And we cannot conclude our discourse without having brought Jacob and Joseph somewhat nearer to the times which they foresaw and foretold; and to the glorious and exalted person, from resemblance to whom they derive all their dignity and consequence.

Joseph sold into Egypt, degraded into the condition of a servant, exalted from the dungeon to the right hand of the throne, invested with power, drawing his perishing kindred unto him, and bestowing upon them a possession “in the best land,” still prefigures to us, Jesus “humbled and made of no reputation,” “betrayed and sold into the hands of men,” “lifted up,” on the cross, and thence to a throne above the skies: “ascending on high, receiving gifts for men,” attracting an elect world unto him, to give them ,an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.”

“Their eyes were holden, that they should not know him.”[*]Luk 24:16 “And it came to pass as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened and they knew him, and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?”[*]Luk 24:30-32

“And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph: what he saith to you, do.”[*]Gen 41:55 “The Father judgeth no man: but hath committed all judgment unto the Son. That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son, honoreth not the Father which hath sent him.”[*]John 5:22-23 “God did send me before you,” says Joseph to his brethren, “to preserve life.” “I go,” says Jesus to his disciples, “to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.”[*]John 14:2-3 Joseph dispatches chariots and wagons to convey the feeble and infirm part of his father’s family to the land of Goshen; and supplies them with all necessary and comfortable provision by the way. It being expedient for Christ to go out of the world, he promises, and he sends the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, to show his people things to come, “to lead them into all truth,” saying of him, “He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you.”[*]John 16:14-15 “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.”[*]Psa 118:18 “He that descended, is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. 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 fullness of Christ.”[*]Eph 4:10-13 Is your heart, O Christian, like Jacob’s, ready to faint, through unbelief, or through an excess of joy! Let your spirit, with his, revive as you ponder “the exceeding great and precious promises” of the gospel in your soul, as you consult the sacred record, as your evidence brightens up, as the first fruits of the Spirit are given and tasted. From Canaan there is a going out, from Goshen a going out, as an entering in; but from the Canaan that is above, there is no more “going out:” “they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”[*]Rev 7:15-17 “He which testifieth these things, saith, Surely, I come quickly; Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”[*]Rev 22:20-21

036. Jacob and Joseph--Blesses Children

Jacob and Joseph--Blesses Children

Gen 49:1;Gen 49:33. And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days. And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.

It is the wise ordinance of nature, that men should wish and endeavor to live as long as they can. A life even of pain and misery extinguishes not the love of life. Nay, the mind by a sort of pleasing delusion, creates to itself an imaginary immortality, and strives to extend its mortal interest and existence beyond the grave. Hence the anxiety of men, to provide for their families and friends that subsistence and comfort, which they are never to see them enjoy. Hence the trembling forebodings of paternal solicitude about his surviving offspring. Hence the hope that glistens in the dying eye, the blessing and the prayer that quaver on the faltering tongue, and the last gush of joy that visits the scarcely palpitating heart. At every period of existence, we are thinking of some future period of existence; and we fondly carry the feelings of the present hour into the distant scenes of life; as if we could be susceptible of pleasure and pain after we have ceased from feeling. The child connects, in idea, the amusements of his inexperienced age with the attainments of maturer years; the dying father continues to live in his offspring; and, till we are indeed gone, we dream and dream of being longer here.

We have attended the progress of the patriarch Jacob through the various stages of a life unusually long if we reckon woes for years, and compare it with the present standard of longevity; but short if we consider the antediluvian scale; short, if we consider to what a span the history of it shrinks; short, if we compare it with eternity. The sun has shone upon his head at length, but not till it is covered with gray hairs. He has found his Joseph again, and even embraced his sons; but not till the hands are reduced to do the office of the eyes. He walks down the steep of life in tranquillity, but his limbs tremble under him. His favorite son is wise and good, exalted to deserved honors; but his advancement has its foundation in the unexampled villany of nine of his brothers. He is now arrived at that point to which the sorrows and joys of life equally tend, in which all events of whatever complexion must finally issue. Feeling in himself the approach of dissolution, and warned by that Spirit who had been his comforter in all his tribulations, he summons his children to his presence, and, with a mixture of paternal severity and tenderness, anxiety and confidence, administers his last dying counsels to them.

It belongs to another province than that of history, to illustrate and expound this address of the expiring patriarch to his sons. Indeed, it is a passage of perhaps as much difficulty as any in Scripture. The imperfect knowledge we have of the sacred language, the abundant use made of metaphorical and figurative expression, allusion to historical facts, which are either not recorded at all, or rather hinted than related, together with the natural ambiguity and obscurity of prophesy, all concur here to render Jacob’s meaning in many places hard to be understood, if not totally

inexplicable. Instead therefore of spending your time, and abusing your patience, by dry unprofitable criticism on points which we frankly acknowledge we do not comprehend, we shall endeavor to look through the passage just as it stands in the common translation, into the dying patriarch's heart, and observe how the affections of the man blend themselves with the sagacity and penetration of the prophet. Following the order of nature, he addresses himself first to Reuben, and fondly recollects the first emotions which filled his heart on becoming a father. He speaks, to him as raised up and destined of Providence to birthright honors and privileges, but as having degraded and dishonored himself by a base unnatural crime, and therefore rejected of God. And thereby men are instructed, that no superiority of birth, of fortune, of abilities, can counterbalance the weight of atrocious wickedness. In this censure, the shame, sorrow, resentment and regret of a dying father seem to mingle their force. The two next sons of Jacob had associated together for the perpetration of an unheard of piece of cruelty, impiety and deceit. Jacob had sharply reproved them at the time it was committed, and now gives his dying testimony against their barbarous and perfidious conduct, in terms of just indignation and abhorrence, and prophetically threatens them with division and dispersion. But this, which was, and intended to be a severe punishment to themselves, turned out in the accomplishment of the prediction, as the punishments of Heaven often are, an unspeakable honor and benefit to their posterity. Levi in particular, "divided in Jacob, and scattered in Israel," was thereby rendered only more illustrious and important, being dignified as the priests and ministers of the most high God, in the presence of all their brethren. The crime of Reuben affected his descendants to the latest posterity. For they never regained their original advantage of birth; never furnished judge or general, priest, prophet, or prince to Israel; but the offence of Levi was expiated in his own person, and reached not in its effects to his offspring. The moral consequences of guilt ought in justice to extend to the guilty themselves alone; but the civil effects may and often do involve the innocent; and that without any imputation of justice. The son ought not to suffer death for the murder which his father has committed; but he may forfeit forever his hereditary honors by his father's treason. By what apparent title was Judah, the fourth son of Jacob, raised to a supremacy over his brethren? Neither his moral character, nor intellectual abilities, neither natural pre-eminence nor parental partiality seem to confer upon him this high distinction. It must therefore simply be resolved into the will of Him who "doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou."[*]Dan 4:35 It was of Providence, who raiseth up one, and bringeth another down. But how came Jacob acquainted with this? The son on whom he conferred the double portion of primogeniture; the son whom he early dressed out in a coat of many colors; the son of his Rachel; the son of his old age; the son already so near a throne and still nearer to his heart, would undoubtedly, could a father's fondness have disposed, succeeded to the royal dignity, or the sanctity of the priesthood, or the still higher dignity of giving birth to the promised Messiah, or to all the three. But the purposes of Heaven do not always keep pace with the destinations of men. They conform not themselves to the conclusion of human reason, or the propensities of the human heart. Not gentle and forgiving Joseph, but stern, unrelenting, merciless Levi, gives birth to a race of priests. And lewd, incontinent, incestuous Judah, not chaste, modest, self denied Joseph, becomes the father of kings, and the progenitor of Shiloh. For what with men is all-essential, all important, is with God only some little petty circumstance. And what human understanding treats as merely a casual, accidental circumstance, Providence exalts into the mighty hinge on which the fate of empires and of worlds depends. And

bend before a throne and despise virtue; God pours respect upon goodness, and tramples upon a throne.

I must now express a wish, which I ought to have done earlier in my discourse, namely, that those who attend the Lecture of this evening, had with attention previously perused the whole of this forty-ninth chapter of Genesis. As without at least a general knowledge of it, much of what has been said, and still may be said, will possibly be unintelligible: and one great, perhaps the principal end of the Lecture, will be obtained, if any are thereby induced to search the Scriptures more carefully, and to compare spiritual things with spiritual more diligently.

Jacob then, guided by the spirit of prophesy, as lately in preferring Ephraim to Manasseh, and not following his own spirit, which would gladly have given the preference to Joseph, as his father's partiality would have set Esau before himself, assigns the kingdom to his fourth son, with a profusion of images and emblems significant of power, authority, and plenty. "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies: thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey my son thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion: who shall rouse him up."[*]Gen 49:8-9 "A lion's whelp, a lion, an old lion; garments washed in wine, and clothes in blood of grapes; eyes red with wine, teeth white with milk," is the strong figurative language employed by a prophetic father, to represent the invincible force, the secure dignity and majesty; the rich abundance, allotted of God the disposer of all things, to this prerogative tribe. But the prediction of importance above all the rest, is that which we have in the tenth verse, "The, scepter 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." Now, whatever difficulties may occur in the solution of particular words and phrases in this prophesy, it is certain the patriarch has his mind filled with an object peculiarly great; that he foresees regal and legislative power conferred on this branch of his family, for a long succession of ages, and until the arrival of a certain distinguished person or event, expressed by the term Shiloh, who should make a remarkable change in the state of Judah's family, and of the world in general. And of all the persons and events that have appeared from the death of Jacob to this hour, to none are the words, with any degree of propriety, applicable, but to Jacob's Son and Lord, in whom the royal line terminated; in whose trial and condemnation the posterity of Jacob solemnly renounced all regal and judicial authority, and voluntarily submitted to Caesar as their sovereign; and to whom, Providence, by a chain of miracles at first, and an uninterrupted interposition, for almost one thousand eight hundred years, has drawn and united the nations of the earth, according to the letter of the prophesy, "to him shall the gathering of the people be." We pretend not to say, that the dying patriarch had a clear and distinct foreknowledge of the object; or that his words are a full historical description of the period to which they refer. It is sufficient for our purpose, if events which have certainly come to pass, are such as warrant a sober application of them to a prediction so singular, in circumstances so peculiar, and at a period so remote. A very close investigation of the history, character, and local circumstances of the six tribes whose fathers are next named in order, would probably be found to justify what their prophetic parent here foretold concerning them. But, with him, we hasten them by, with him to come at a nobler, dearer object; where parental affection fixes with peculiar delight; which the understanding, the heart, and the prophetic soul unite to establish, to exalt, to enlarge. The only way to do justice to the prophet, to the prophesy, and to the Spirit which inspired the one to utter the other, is simply to

read the words, and then to ponder them in our hearts. “Joseph is a fruitful bough even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall. The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him. But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob: from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel. Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee, and by the Almighty who shall bless thee, with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breast, and of the womb. The blessings of thy father have prevailed, above the blessings of my progenitors: unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.”[*]Gen 49:22-26 Is there an appearance of incoherence here, is there a redundancy of expression, is there a mixing of metaphor? It is but the more emphatically expressive of the meltings, the overflowings of an affectionate heart, collecting its last remains of vigor, retarding for a moment the stroke of death, returning yet once again but to return no more-to ancient feelings and propensities; expiring in the contemplation of the lasting felicity of a dearer self: the lover, the husband of Rachel, before his nerves are forever unstrung, his eyes forever closed, his tongue forever silent, dwelling on the name of her beloved offspring, turning the almost extinguished orbs towards his amiable countenance, and straining his darling Joseph in his last embrace.

He has hardly strength left to mention the name of Benjamin. But nature, while death leaves to Jacob any remainder of her empire, continues possessed of a sound memory, a discerning judgment, and glowing affections. But she can no more; the voice fails, the limbs contract, the breath departs, the artery beats no more; the heart of Jacob is at length at rest. The death of a parent is an event peculiarly affecting. The source of our own life seems thereby as it were dried up. While our parents live, we think we have a barrier betwixt us and the grave: but that being removed, the bold invader appears advancing upon us with hastier strides. If we look forward, behold no bulwark to defend us; if backward, our very children are warning us of the necessity of our departure; they press upon our heels, they are ready to lay their hands upon our eyes. Death ever so long expected, ever so visibly approaching, nevertheless shocks and surprises when it comes at length.

Joseph, having given way to a burst of sorrow over the lifeless clay of his honored father, sets about the speedy execution of his solemn trust, in discharge of the oath which he had taken. The highest respect we can pay the dead, is to fulfill their living desires: He accordingly gives commandment to have the body embalmed according to the manner of the Egyptians. This practice, which had its origin in necessity, degenerated in process of time into the grossest ostentation, and the most absurd vanity.--During the inundations of the Nile, it was necessary to employ art to preserve dead bodies from putrefaction, till the waters subsided. But what was at first merely a temporary expedient against the inconveniency of heat, moisture, and corruption, at a season when sepulture was impossible, by degrees--refined, shall I say? in the hands of that ingenious people, into a work of infinite shill and expense. For so silly and vainglorious is the human mind, that it strives for the gratification of pride, in objects the most humiliating and mortifying We are far from charging Joseph with acting from a motive so wretched. The journey to Canaan was long; it was needful to use the common methods, to keep the corpse from becoming offensive; perhaps he deemed it decent and wise to conform, in a matter not directly sinful, to the practice, and to yield to the prejudices of the people among whom he dwelt. Whatever were his

motives, certain it is, that in embalming persons of distinction, a considerable time was employed, and large sums expended. Threescore and ten days at least were necessary; forty in filling the body with aromatic drugs and spices, and thirty in hardening and drying it with salt and niter. Some Jewish writers, fond of magnifying in every thing their extraction, give out, that Jacob, by express order of Pharaoh, was embalmed after the manner of the princes of Egypt as a farther mark of gratitude and respect to Joseph; and that this explains the account we have in Scripture, of the general mourning of the Egyptians for him, during the seventy days of the embalming. At the end of that period, Joseph makes application to the king for liberty to go to Canaan, to bury his dead father. And here we have another not unamusing picture of the ancient manners of an Egyptian court. Joseph the savior of Egypt, the second man in the kingdom, might not go into the royal presence in a mourning habit. At such pains has the world been, and such pains it still takes, to keep truth from the eyes and the ears of kings. Unhappy wretches! How can they be wise and good? Every creature with whom they are connected is in a conspiracy to keep them from the knowledge of themselves. The poor man called a monarch must not see a memorial of death, because death brings him to the level of other men. Pity it is, so well conditioned a prince as Pharaoh should want any help to wisdom. Studious of the honor and comfort of so good and faithful a servant, he grants an immediate assent to his request, and permits him to employ the whole pomp of Egypt, if it might testify respect to the memory of the honest patriarch. Mark, my friends, how short the transition, how sudden the change. It is but a few short years since the wagons of Pharaoh were sent, with much form, to carry Jacob into Egypt; and now the same pomp is employed to convey his breathless clay back to Canaan again. Alas, alas! the ceremonies of a coronation, and of a funeral differ only in a few trifling circumstances. Jacob is embalmed by the physicians; but behold he is preserved by a more precious perfume than all the spices of Egypt-the pious tears of a dutiful and affectionate child; and his memory preserved on this never dying record, sends forth a fragrance which time cannot waste, nor use diminish. The account is now at length closed, and the balance struck. And how does it stand? A life of one hundred and forty-seven years in all; of which not above a ninth part passed in any tolerable degree of peace and comfort, and that portion of it at a period when the heart has scarcely any taste of pleasure at all. The early, the susceptible part of his life was filled with a succession of distresses of the most disastrous and overwhelming nature; he was stricken, smitten there where the heart most sensibly feels. But let us turn the page, and examine the articles which make for him. An early declared, and continually supported favor and preference of Heaven in his behalf--Early, constant, habitual impressions of piety--The covenant promise and presence of the Almighty--The testimony of a conscience void of offence--The aggrandizement, and the virtues of his beloved son--Seventeen years of uninterrupted quiet, with daily growing prospects of prosperity to his family; and the consolation of expiring at last in the arms of Joseph--O, the balance is greatly in his favor! Who shall dare to say God has dealt hardly with him? We shall make Jacob himself judge of the case now, and defy him to say, “All these things are against me.” The patriarch makes a greater figure in death than ever he had done in his life. The house of Israel, the seed of Abraham is now beginning to make a considerable appearance in the world. Egyptians forego their prejudices to do honor to the remains of the old shepherd of Beer-Sheba; and the nations of Canaan are awakened to attention and respect, to a family which they hated or despised.

But, while the world is conferring empty, unavailing respect on the insensible dust, the immortal spirit has winged its flight to those bright regions, where the faithful repose in perfect and

everlasting peace; where the smile of God obliterates all recollection of the favor of princes, and buries in eternal oblivion the pains and sorrows of a few transitory years. If saints in glory have any recollection of what passed upon earth, as undoubtedly they have, what satisfaction must it afford the glorified patriarch to call to remembrance the various stages of his pilgrimage state, the dark and dreary paths through which Providence led him, and which he once feared were leading him to destruction and death, now that he finds them all certainly and directly tending to his Father's house above? If saints in glory have any knowledge of what passes upon earth, as perhaps they may, what must it have been to Jacob from the lofty height of a throne above the skies, to mark the order and course of Providence, in bringing to pass upon his family the things which were seen in prophetic vision, darkly, and at a distance, and spoken in much weakness and obscurity? What must it be to see the Gentile nations gathered together to Shiloh; to see the glory with the scepter departed from Judah, but a crown, whose luster shall never fade, put upon the head of Messiah the Prince? If saints in glory have any intercourse with their fellow partakers in bliss, what must it have been to Jacob, after treading in the footsteps of Abraham and Isaac his fathers, to overtake and be joined to them in that world, where men are as the angels of God in heaven; and to see his faithful children, his Joseph in particular, gathered unto him, every one in his own order, their day of trial also over, and their warfare accomplished? What must it have been to all the ransomed of the Lord, to see their common Savior returning on high, leading captivity captive, triumphing over principalities and powers? If there be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, what must have been the joy of that day, when an elect world, in the person of their divine Head, took possession of a throne eternal in the heavens? The next Lecture will conclude the history of Joseph, and the book of Genesis, and bring down that of the world to its two thousand three hundred and ninth year, one thousand six hundred and ninety-five years before Christ.

Jacob, like his forefathers, died, and was buried, and saw corruption; but he whom God raised up died indeed, and was buried, but saw no corruption. Jacob could observe, be offended with, and reprove the faults of his children, but Christ has power to forgive sins, and to change a, sinful nature. The day which Jacob saw afar off, is that which arose under Jesus in all its meridian splendor, and continues to shine unto this day. The body of Jacob, by the skill of physicians, was for awhile saved from putrefaction; the body of Christ, by the almighty power of God, was preserved, so that not a bone of it was broken on the cross, not a particle of it lost and left in the grave. The corpse of the patriarch, deposited in the cave of Machpelah, in Canaan, was a token and pledge to his family, that in due time they should return thither, and enjoy lasting possession; the resurrection and ascension of Christ's glorious body, gives full security to all his spiritual seed, that "those who sleep in Jesus, God will bring with him;" Christ the head first, afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming." The possession, of which Jacob's burial was the pledge, was itself partial and transitory, was long ago forfeited, and has long ago expired; but the succession ensured by the ascension of Christ, is "to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Egyptian art might keep together the dust of Jacob for awhile; but the power of God, through the grace that is in Christ, guards every fragment and shred of it even until now, and "will raise it up again at the last day." The afflicted man Jacob saw the end of all his troubles in the friendly tomb; Jacob, the believer, the saint in bliss, sees no end to his joy, but a still beginning, never ending eternity. "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." To me to live let it be Christ and then to die it shall be gain. Let us be followers of them "who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises." "Be faithful unto death, and ye shall receive a crown of

life.” “The hour cometh, when all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall live.” “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God, and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”[*]Rev 20:6

037. Joseph--Commissions Family in Faith

Joseph--Commissions Family in Faith

Gen 50:24-26. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land, unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. The events of a short and uncertain life upon earth, derive all their importance from the relation which they bear to a future and eternal state of existence. Remove the prospects of immortality, and what is left worthy the attention and pursuit of man! What is reputation! A breath of empty air; honor, a bubble; riches, a bird eternally on the wing; youth, beauty, health, fading flowers of the spring; the splendor of kings. childish pageantry; a crown, a toy. That alone is valuable which time cannot impair, nor mortality destroy; that which, though the man die, continues to live and speak; that which, despised or neglected of men, is of high estimation in the sight of God. If in this life only there were hope, the happiest of mankind were a wretched, dark, comfortless being. But for the consolations of religion, Jacob must have sunk under the accumulated weight of calamity upon calamity: and Joseph, destitute of a principle of grace in the heart, had fallen in the hour of temptation, or despaired in the day of adversity; had risen into pride when exalted to honor, or deviated into resentment and revenge when armed with power. But, directed and supported by this celestial guide, he descends into the pit undejected, undismayed; spurns with holy indignation the solicitations of illicit desire; preserves moderation in the height of prosperity, and sinks the resentments of the injured man, in the meekness and gentleness of the affectionate brother. A character so near perfection seldom occurs; we have therefore been tempted to dwell upon it the longer, and now that we must part with it, we bid it farewell, with no little regret. The last office in which we left Joseph employed, was the burial of his venerable parent. In this he at once acquitted a solemn obligation; fulfilled the law of humanity, gratitude, and filial duty; and acted faith in the covenant and promise of God given to his forefathers. He is never so much an Egyptian, as to forget he is an Israelite; but, engaged in the duties of a son of Israel, he remembers he was a naturalized Egyptian. Having deposited the sacred pledge in the cave of the field of Machpelah, he and his brethren, and all his retinue return into the land of Egypt.

Terror ever haunts the guilty conscience; and men, whether they be good or bad, are apt to judge of others by themselves. The brothers of Joseph considered the life of their father as the only bulwark betwixt them and their brother’s anger. Knowing themselves to be criminal, they conclude he must be resentful: knowing he had the power, they suppose he must needs have the inclination to punish them. O how guilt degrades, debases the spirit of a man! In bad minds, how quick the transition from extreme to extreme! How nearly allied to each other, vices seemingly remote, contradictory, and opposite! These reflections are all strikingly exemplified and illustrated in the conduct of Jacob’s sons. We see malice and cruelty passing into suspicion and timidity: insolence but a single step removed from fawning, flattery, and submission; and bold defiance of Heaven

changing in a moment into superstitious horror. They had before done obeisance to Joseph, not knowing who he was, and so fulfilled the dreams of his early youth, which had given them such mortal offence. With a meanness equal to their former haughtiness, they now voluntarily prostrate themselves in his presence, and humbly deprecate that wrath which they had so unjustly provoked. What a pitiable, what a contemptible figure a man makes, overtaken and reproved by his own wickedness! A little mind would have enjoyed this triumph of acknowledged superiority, if it did not resort to retaliation. But a great soul like Joseph's gives only into emotions worthy of itself. Seeing his father's children thus humbled before him, he dissolves into tears. Had he been ever so much inclined to vengeance, adjured by the awful names of his father and his God, his heart must have relented, and anger must have turned to pity. But in truth, he had never harbored one thought of revenge, and the offenders possessed an infinitely better security in the generosity and compassion of their brother, than in the protection of their father's feeble arm, parental authority, or frail life. Being at no variance with them, entertaining no grudge, mark what pains he takes to reconcile them to themselves; "But as for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now, therefore, fear ye not: I will nourish ye and your little ones. And he comforted them and spake kindly unto them."[*]Gen 1:20-21

Such is the exalted triumph of true goodness. Not satisfied with merely bestowing forgiveness, it strives to close the wounds which guilt has made: it aims not only at bettering the external condition of the penitent, but also at meliorating his inward frame; it not only proclaims peace to the offender, but likewise generously studies the means of restoring him to peace with his own conscience. This is the glorious triumph of God himself, who overcomes evil with good, turns enmity into love, and obliterates the foul traces of undutifulness and ingratitude, by painting over them the fairer, softer features of filial tenderness and dutiful submission. And in no one respect can human nature so nearly resemble the divine, as in pardoning transgression, in showing mercy, in bestowing on the guilty outward and inward peace; and burying and effacing painful and mortifying recollections in total and everlasting oblivion. Thus Joseph comforted his brethren, and spake kindly unto them. This spirit a greater than Joseph by precept, by example, and by the model which he prescribed for our devotions, has recommended and enforced; and thus, by habitually drinking into it, "men shall at length become perfect, as their father in heaven is perfect." At the death of his father, Joseph was fifty-six years old. The history of the remainder, containing a period of fifty-four years more, shrinks into a few short sentences. But they exhibit a beautiful and instructive picture of a generous spirit, of great and growing domestic happiness, of a capacious prophetic soul, and of a faithful, obedient, and believing heart. He had the satisfaction of living to see his posterity of the fourth generation, by Ephraim his younger son, and of the third, by Manasseh his first-born. He had the felicity of beholding Israel greatly increased, and the promise of God hastening to its accomplishment; resigned to die in Egypt, but looking and longing for a sepulcher in Canaan. Jacob's, a life of almost uninterrupted misery, is lengthened out to the hundred and forty-seventh year; Joseph's, with the exception of a very few years, a scene of splendor, usefulness, and prosperity, is cut short at a hundred and ten. But the difference dwindles into mere nothing before Him, with whom "a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thou sand years." Grief has its cure, usefulness its period, glory its decay, and pride its destroyer in the grave. As his dying father held him engaged by a solemn oath not to bury him but in Canaan, so Joseph binds his posterity by a similar obligation to carry his remains, when

opportunity offered, to the sacred spot where the sleeping dust of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob reposed. Whatever had been his power or possessions in Egypt, this is all he bequeaths to his children; his last, dying will, disposes of nothing but his bones. But it is not merely the natural desire of the man, to rest in death with his fathers; it is the zeal, piety, and wisdom of the believer, leaving to his family a solemn pledge of his dying confidence in the truth and faith fullness of God. Accordingly, the dead body of Joseph becomes no inconsiderable object in the history of Israel, from this time forward, to their final establishment in Canaan. With much pomp it was now embalmed, with much care it was preserved in their deepest distresses and affliction; in all their wanderings it accompanied them, and never, till they rested in the peaceable possession of the land of promise, did it rest in the peaceful tomb. But had the credit of Joseph declined before his death? Had Pharaoh died, and Egypt forgotten to be grateful, that no royal mandate is issued for a splendid public interment; that an affectionate nation accompanies not, with tears, the son, as they did the father, to his long home? Miserable would Joseph have been, had not his happiness rested on a surer foundation than the smile of kings, or the applause of a multitude. Who shall be vain of any thing, when such a man as Joseph must be content to obtain that by entreaty and permission, which once he could have enjoyed by authority. His pious attention to the dead is now requited by the pious attention of the living. And thus of all the debts contracted by us, none is so certain of being repaid, as the last solemn offices of humanity. Here, we only give and receive a little short credit; and the day of our burial hastens on, with rapid wings, to bring the account to a balance.

Thus lived, and thus died, Joseph the son of Jacob. A man whom all nations and every description of mankind, have united to praise and admire. Whose character and fortunes the pen of inspiration has vouchsafed to delineate with singular accuracy, and with uncommon strength of coloring. Who, in every stage of life, in youth, in manhood, and even to old age, interests, instructs, and delights every reader of taste, virtue, and sensibility. Who, in adversity, preserved inflexible constancy; and, in elevation next to royalty, adorned his high station by unaffected simplicity, incorruptible integrity, native, unassuming dignity, fervent piety, invariable moderation, and uniform modesty and humility. Who, as a son, a brother, a servant, a father, a master, a ruler, is equally amiable and praiseworthy. Who, to the sagacity of the statesman, added the penetration of the prophet, the firmness of the believer, and the purity of the saint. Who, by the blessing of Providence, was saved through dangers the most threatening, to pity, to forgive, and to preserve those who meant to have destroyed him; and who, in a word, was miraculously raised up of God from an obscure station, to be an instrument of much temporal good to nations; to mature and execute the plans of eternal Wisdom, and to typify to a dark age, Him who is fairer than the children of men, and through whom all the blessings of nature, of providence, and of redemption are communicated to mankind. We cannot therefore, as Christians, conclude his history better, than by considering it somewhat more particularly, as a typical representation of the person, the character, the offices, and the work of the Messiah.

We know the generation of Joseph the son of Rachel, and the well beloved of Jacob but “who shall declare the generation” of the well beloved Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth?” Early, unambiguous prognostics foretold the future greatness of Joseph. Thus the tongues of a thousand prophets; signs in heaven, and signs in earth; the disposition of angels singly, and of a multitude of the heavenly host together, before and at his birth, conduct the babe of Bethlehem from the manger to the throne. Some allegorists, who inquire rather curiously then

wisely, have carried the analogy so far as to represent Joseph's coat of many colors, the distinguishing badge of his father's partial affection, as typical of the body prepared for Christ, "curiously wrought in the lower parts of the earth." When imagination, unrestrained by reason, and unconducted by Scripture, is set to work, any thing may be made to resemble any thing. But if the interests of true piety be promoted, we must give, as we need and expect, much allowance; and so long as a metaphor presumes not to pass for a text or an argument, let metaphorical language be examined with candor, and the bold flights of an honest heart be treated with tenderness and respect. While we thus plead indulgence for others, we are perhaps making an apology that is necessary to ourselves; and far, very tar from this place be the vanity of thinking that "surely we are the people, and that wisdom shall die with us."

We remarked of Joseph, that in making his observations upon, and in giving the report of his brothers' conduct, a mixture of self-sufficiency, malevolence, and presumption might possibly insinuate itself; but in the censure and reproof administered by the Brother and Friend of mankind, we always discover unmixed benevolence and gentleness; severity against the offence, without acrimony towards the offender; slowness to condemn, readiness to forgive; a disposition to palliate and excuse the worst of crimes, instead of eagerness and zeal to detect, magnify, and expose the least. Jacob's affectionate embassy to his sons in the wilderness, by the mouth of his beloved Joseph, in all its circumstances, has already been noticed as exactly typical of the message borne from the compassionate Father of men, to his wandering exile children, by the Son of his love. Who can think of Joseph following his brethren from place to place with thoughts of peace, and meeting in return with hatred and violence, without reflecting the next moment on the words of the evangelist, "he came to his own, and his own received him not." "Not this man, but Barabbas." "Away with him, crucify him, crucify him." "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."[*]Mat 23:37

Joseph was sold at the suggestion of Judah to the Ishmaelites for a few pieces of silver. The counterpart of this forces itself upon our imagination. "The Son of Man shall be betrayed into the hands of men;" "mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me."[*]Psa 41:9 "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?" Joseph faithful and just to Potiphar and to Pharaoh; Joseph in the form of a servant, and the business and affairs of his master prospering in his hand, lead us directly to him of whom it is spoken in prophetic vision, "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high."[*]Isa 52:13 Joseph assaulted with temptation, resisting and overcoming, conducts us with our tempted Savior to the top of the exceeding high mountain, to the pinnacle of the temple, and shows us all the fiery darts of the wicked one falling. harmless on the ground, because striking on the shield of faith; and "the sword of the Spirit, the word of God," like lightning, penetrating and piercing the armor of the adversary. Joseph unjustly accused, condemned, and punished, without straining for an allusion, points to Jesus, "numbered with transgressors," charged with crimes which he never committed, and upon a trial, a mockery of all legal proceeding, condemned with the vilest of mankind to the death of a slave. But we see Joseph even in prison and disgraced, preserving dignity, exercising usefulness, disclosing futurity to his fellow-prisoners, restoring the one to the presence and favor of Pharaoh, leaving the other to perish under the weight of the royal displeasure. Thus we see Jesus, from the exalted infamy of the cross, dispensing more than life

and death, opening and shutting the gates of heaven, assuming to himself the right of disposing of seats in the paradise of God; carrying the penitent with him to the presence of his father and his God; leaving the impenitent to die in his sins. But there is here this remarkable difference, Joseph besought the chief butler to remember him, hoping to owe his enlargement to the powerful, compassionate, and grateful intercession of that officer; but Jesus, as Lord of the worlds visible and invisible, as the sovereign disposer of all things, by his own power exalts his fellow-sufferer from the cross to a throne above the skies. Behold Joseph translated from the dungeon to the palace, from the condition of a prisoner and a slave, to that of a mighty prince; and in that, behold Jesus emerging from the tomb, ascending above all height, exalted to the sovereign administration of all things in heaven and in earth. “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and, to enter into his glory?”[*]Luk 24:26 “It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”[*]Heb 2:16 Joseph revealed to Pharaoh and to all Egypt what was the will of heaven concerning them for many years to come: thus Jesus revealed to a guilty, perishing world the will of God for their salvation, and made timely provision, not for the transient and ineffectual support of a few fleeting years, but for the eternal entertainment and felicity of men, who were devoted to death, and threatened with everlasting misery. Joseph employed the pressure of famine to enslave Egypt, and to subject a whole people to the will of the sovereign: but Jesus, armed with all power for our destruction, employed it only for our deliverance; and instead of sinking and degrading the subjects of his government, such is his love, he raises them all to the dignities, privileges, and possessions of the sons of God. He is the true prophet, “the true light which enlighteneth everyman that cometh into the world,” “in whom the Spirit of God is; none so discreet and wise as he,” Zaphnathpaaneah, the true revealer of secrets, who “is worthy to take the sealed book,” which contains the secrets of the eternal mind, and to open its seven seals. The clemency of Joseph to his unkind, unnatural brothers, is a lively and affecting representation of the patience, gentleness, and mercy of Christ to his brethren after the flesh, in the first instance, and to guilty, un grateful men in general. “Father, forgive them,” said he, as he was expiring on the cross, “they know not what they do.” And not many days after that with wicked hands men had crucified and slain him, many thousands of these very men were made to taste of his grace, were admitted into his family, and exalted to a place with him on his throne. But we must not pursue the similitude through every particular; it would protract our discourse to an immoderate length. Finally then, Joseph piously referred every thing that befell him to the provident, wise, and gracious destination of the Almighty: and what saith Jesus? “I seed not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.” “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” And thus have we finished the history of the patriarch Joseph: the various stages of whose life may be thus calculated. He was born in Haran, in the year of the world two thousand two hundred and fifty-nine, where he lived till six years old. He was then removed with the rest of his father’s family into Canaan, where he lived eleven years; at which period he was by his brethren sold to the Ishmaelites, and carried into Egypt, where he served Potiphar ten years, and remained in prison three: so that he was thirty, when he first stood before Pharaoh, and was raised immediately to the dignity of viceroy. Supposing the seven plenteous years to commence immediately, he was thirty-seven when they ended: and the second year of famine being ended, he being them thirty-nine, Jacob and his family descended into Egypt; and the aged patriarch lived there,

cherished by his son, seventeen years, which brings himself forward to his fifty-sixth year. After his father's death he lived fifty-four years more, in all one hundred and ten. So that Joseph lived in Egypt full ninety-three years: a slave and a prisoner thirteen; a prince and ruler eighty; under several successive monarchs: being justly esteemed a necessary minister of state in all reigns. He died before the birth of Moses sixty-four years, and before the departing of the children of Israel out of Egypt, one hundred and forty-four. And with the account of his death and embalming, ends the book of Genesis, containing the most ancient, authentic, interesting, and instructive history extant; during the space of two thousand three hundred and sixty-nine years: from the deluge, seven hundred and thirteen; and before Christ, one thousand six hundred and thirty-five.

These things seem as a tale that is told. But time is hurrying on a period and an establishment of things, under which Adam and his youngest son shall be contemporaries; in which intervening ages shall be swallowed up and lost; and that only remain, which time, and death, and the grave cannot affect when the cave of Machpelah shall surrender up its precious deposit; when Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and all the faithful shall live again, and reign for ever and ever. "Blessed are they who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." "Blessed are they who shall come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."[*]Heb 12:22-24

038. Moses--Birth and Hiding

Moses--Birth and Hiding

Exo 2:1-10. And there went a man of the house of Levi. and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bare a son; and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could no longer hide him site took for hits an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein: and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink. And his sister stood afar off to wit what would be done to him. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river, and her maidens walked along by the river's side: and when she saw the ark among the flags she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child; and behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children. Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, shall I go, and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she ma nurse the child for thee? And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Go, And the maid went, and cared the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages: and the woman took the child, and nursed it. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son: and she called his name Moses, and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

If the ingenious fictions of ancient bards afford an innocent and rational amusement, and be therefore held in high estimation; what superior obligation is the world under, to that divine Spirit who has vouchsafed to draw into light the most remote antiquity, and preserve from oblivion the venerable men who first cultivated and peopled the earth; and, in the language, not of fiction, but of truth, has delineated the ways of Providence, and unfolded the deep and intricate recesses of the human heart? Were it not for the sacred pages of divine revelation, we should have been entirely ignorant of what happened in the world for at least one half of its duration. But borne on the wings of inspiration, we fly back to the very birth of nature, we behold the first dawning of light scattering the gloom, and converse with the first man whom God created upon the earth. And how much more pleasant, as well as profitable, is it, to expatiate in the field of real history, than to wander and lose ourselves in the idle regions of romance! If we owe much to the illustrious poet of Greece, for his amusing pictures of early life and manners, how deeply are we indebted to the more illustrious Jewish historian and poet, who has furnished us with so much juster and more exalted ideas of Deity, more faithful and instructive pictures of human life; and who has so successfully interwoven the history of redemption with that of mankind. The sacred book which has afforded us during the year past, so much pleasing instruction, is altogether, extraordinary in its kind, whether we consider the beauty of the composition, the importance of the information which it contains, the internal marks of authenticity which it bears, or the noble purposes to which it has been, and may be made subservient. Moses its inspired author, who has with so much accuracy, elegance, and force, described the characters and lives of the patriarchs from Adam to Joseph, is now entering on his own wonderful and interesting story. The man who henceforth acts, is the same who writes: the events which he is about to record, come not from the information of

others, but from his own immediate knowledge; and the simplicity and candor of his narration are sufficient vouchers of its truth and faithfulness.

Sixty-four years had now elapsed from the death of Joseph, and one hundred and thirty-four from the descent of Jacob into Egypt and what surprising changes have taken place! A little hand of seventy persons is multiplied into a great nation: the mild and gracious prince who took pleasure in cherishing and protecting the father and brethren of Joseph, is exchanges for a jealous and sanguinary tyrant, determined to depress and extirpate their descendants: the country which once gave them support and shelter, is now moistened with their tears, and with the blood of their infant offspring; and favored guests, made to dwell in the best of the land, are turned into odious slaves condemned to the furnace. Such are the alterations which time is continually producing in human affairs, such the impotency of man to secure blessings to his posterity, such the misery of a people subjected to the will of a despotic sovereign. In vain do men dream of national generosity and gratitude--they exist not: in vain do the claims of humanity and justice oppose themselves to the interest, the ambition, or caprice of princes. Joseph had very unwisely contributed to the aggrandizement of the Egyptian monarchs, and his own family is the first to feel the roil of that power which he had helped to raise. Injustice in princes is always bad policy. A nation so certainly favored of Heaven as Israel was, must have proved the strongest bulwark to Egypt, if treated as friends. Increased from seventy souls, to six hundred thousand men, besides women and children, it was dangerous to irritate them, and difficult, if not impossible to subdue. Too proud to enter into treaty with them as allies, too timid to attempt their extirpation by open force, and too suspicious to confide in their gratitude and attachment, Pharaoh adopts the barbarous policy of undermining their strength by excessive labor; of breaking their spirit by severity, and of preventing their future increase, by putting to death their male children as soon as they were born. Such a state of things was very unfavorable to marrying and giving in marriage. Nevertheless marriages were contracted, and children procreated; for it is absurd as it is wicked, for any earthly power whatever to set itself to counteract the great plans of God and nature. God has said, “increase and multiply;” in vain has Pharaoh said, “abstain.” Amram, of the family of Levi, accordingly, in these worst of times, takes to wife Jochebed of the same tribe, indeed his own father’s sister, by whom he had three children; Aaron, probably born before the bloody edict for destroying the males was published; Miriam, whose sex was a protection from the rigor of it, and Moses, who came into the world while it was operating with all its horrid effects.

Josephus in his Jewish Antiquities relates, that about the time of the birth of Moses, one of the Egyptian seers informed the king that a child was about to arise among the Israelites, who should crush the power of Egypt and exalt his own nation to great eminence and splendor, if he lived to the years of maturity: for, that he should distinguish himself above all his contemporaries by his wisdom and virtue, and acquire immortal glory by his exploits. He farther alleges; that the king, instigated by his own fears of such an event, and by the cruel counsels of the seer, issued the bloody decree which must be an eternal blot upon his memory. The distress of Jochebed upon finding herself pregnant, is to be conceived, not described. The anxiety and apprehension naturally incident to that delicate situation, must have been aggravated by terrors more dreadful than the pangs of child-birth, or even the loss of life itself. As a wife and a mother in Israel, she was looking and longing for the birth of another man child; but that sweet expectation was as often checked and destroyed by the bitter reflection that she was subject to the king of Egypt; that if she

bare a son it was for the sword, or to glut some monster of the river. The Jewish antiquarian informs us, that the anxiety of the parents was greatly alleviated by assurances given to the father in a vision of the night, that the child with whom his wife was then pregnant, should be miraculously preserved, and raised up by Providence to the glorious and important work of delivering the seed of Abraham from their present misery. And indeed, this fact is countenanced and supported by the short hints which Scripture has given us of the subject. Among the other instances of victorious faith, recorded in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews, that of the parents of Moses is marked with honor and approbation by the Apostle. “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child, and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment.”[*]Heb 11:23 It is not unreasonable to suppose, that their faith might have some particular promise or intimation from Heaven to rest upon. The time at length came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son, according to the same historian, without the usual pains and consequent weakness of child-bearing; by which means no foreign aid being required, concealment was rendered more easy, and the exertions of the mother in behalf of her child, were scarcely, if at all, interrupted. “A goodly child” is the modest language which Moses employs in describing himself: “exceeding fair,” or fair to God, that is, divinely fair, is the stronger expression of St. Stephen, in his recapitulation of this period of the Jewish history. From which, without the fond encomiums of profane authors, we may conclude, that Providence had distinguished this illustrious person from his birth, by uncommon strength, size, and beauty. Every child is lovely in the partial eye of maternal affection: what then must Moses, the wonder of the world, have been to his enraptured parents! But the dearer the comfort, the greater the care, and that care increasing every hour. Not only the child, and such a child, was continually in jeopardy, but certain and cruel death was hanging every instant, by a single hair, over the heads of all who were concerned in the concealment; nay, the salvation of a great nation was at stake; nay, the promise and covenant of God was in question. In the conduct of these good Israelites, the parents of Moses, we have a most instructive example respecting many important particulars of our duty. They teach us, that no circumstances of inconveniency, difficulty, or danger, should deter us from following the honest impulses of our nature, or from complying with the manifest dictates of religion and, at the same time, reprove that would-be wise generation of men among us, who, from I know not what reasons of prudence, or others which they dare not avow, defraud their country, the world, and the church of God, of their due and commanded increase Their faith in God, employing in its service secrecy, vigilance, and circumspection, admonishes us ever to connect the diligent use of all lawful and appointed means, with trust in and dependence upon Heaven, as we wish to arrive safely and certainly at the end proposed. In them, as in a glass, we see confidence without presumption, diligence, zeal, and attention, free from incredulity; we see Providence firmly, undauntedly resorted to, with the consciousness of having done their utmost to help themselves. Without this trust and this consciousness, yielding their joint support, what must the wretched mother have been, compelled at length, by dire necessity, to expose the son of her womb on the face of the Nile, in a basket of rushes?

I love to see a perseverance of exertion that leaves nothing undone which is possible to be done; and a faith that holds out as long as hope exists. Why not cast the whole burden on Providence? Is not he who preserved the child floating in an ark of bulrushes, able to save him naked in the stream, or even in the jaws of the hungry crocodile? If an ark must be prepared, is it also necessary to employ all this curious attention in daubing it with slime and with pitch, to prevent the

admission of the water! What, leave nothing to him who has marked the infant for his own, and solemnly charged himself with his safety? Yes; after we have done our all, much, every thing depends on the goodness of Heaven. But the careful mother did well when she pitched every seam and chink of the frail vehicle as attentively as if its precious deposit had been to owe its preservation solely to that care and diligence. “Cast all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”[*]1Pe 5:7 Mark it well, it is our care, not our work, which we are encouraged to cast upon that God who careth for us, and who hath said, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”

Mark yet again the diligent use of means, and the interpositions of Providence; how they tally with, unite, strengthen, and support each other. The anxious mother does not yet think she has done enough. Miriam her daughter must go, and, at a distance, watch the event. And here ends the province of human sagacity, foresight, and industry; and here begins the interposition of providential care. The mother has done her part. “The rushes, the slime, and the pitch,” were her prudent and necessary preparation. And the great God has at the same time been preparing his materials, and arranging his instruments: the heart of a king’s daughter, the power of Egypt, the flux of the current; the concurrence of circumstances too fine for the human eye to discern, too complex fox human understanding to unravel, and toe mighty for created power to control.

We pointed to the interposition of Heaven: but, we beseech you to observe, it interposes not by working a miracle, but by the seasonable, simple, and natural disposition of second causes, operating to one and the same end, without any design, consciousness, or concert of their own. And, be it ever remembered, that the wise, gracious, almighty Ruler of the world, pleases not himself, nor amuses his creatures, by a profuse, ostentatious exhibition of wonders, but by an intelligent, dexterous management of ordinary things. He carries on his righteous government not according to new and surprising laws, but by the surprising, unaccountable, unexpected methods in which he executes the laws which he has established from the beginning.

Let us dwell a little on the minuter circumstances of the case before us: as they serve to illustrate a subject of all others the most comfortable and tranquillizing to a race of beings, beyond measure wretched and pitiable, if there be not a God who rules in wisdom and in loving kindness all the affairs of men. We are first led to the humble cottage of Amram, and mingle in the tender solicitudes of an obscure family, in one of the most common situations of human life. From thence, we step immediately to the palace, to attend the humorous caprices and pleasures of a princess. Jochebed, the wife of Amram, and Termuthis, the daughter of Pharaoh! What can they have in common with one another, excepting those particulars in which all mankind resemble all mankind: and yet Providence brings them together, gives them a mutual concern, a mutual charge, a mutual interest. By how many accidents might this most fortunate coincidence have been prevented? A day, an hour earlier or later, in the active care of the one, and the contingent amusement of the other, and the parties concerned had never met. The slightest alteration in the setting in of the wind or the tide; the particular temperature of the fleeting air, or the more variable temperature of a female mind, apt to be corrupted by unbounded gratification and indulgence, unaccustomed to contradiction, governed by whim, following no guide but inclination, and occupied only with the object of the moment: the operation of all, or any ore of these, might have defeated the design. But these and a thousand such like contingencies, unstable as water, and changeable as the wind, subdued by the hand of Omnipotence, acquire the solidity of the rock, and the steadfastness of the poles of heaven. The mother could not part with her child a moment sooner, durst not I retain him

a moment longer. The princess could betake herself to no other amusement or employment, could pitch upon no other hour of the day, could resort to no other part of the river, could divert her attention to no other object; the tide could not run, nor the wind blow in any other direction, nor with greater or less rapidity. Moses was not safer when king in Jeshurun, encompassed with the thousands of Israel, was not safer in the mount with God, is not safer within the adamantine walls of the New-Jerusalem than Moses in the flags, Moses at the mercy of the waves, of the monsters of the Nile, and of men more merciless than wild beasts. What power threatened the life of Moses? The king of Egypt. What power preserved it? The king of Egypt's daughter. What were the steps which led to his elevation? Those which foreboded his destruction. What circumstances forwarded the accomplishment of the oracle? Those which attempted to defeat it. Could all this have been the work of man? No; it must have proceeded from "the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." "Who doth 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?"[*]Dan 4:35 The usual train of common events led Pharaoh's daughter to the river side; the ark in which little Moses was laid happened to catch her eye; curiosity prompted her to examine its contents, and pity at the sight touched her heart. If there be an object in nature more interesting and affecting than another, it was that which now presented itself to this great lady's eye. A beautiful infant, of three months old, deserted by its own parents, exposed to ten thousand dangers, and expressing by the tender testimony of tears, its sense of that misery of which it had not yet acquired the consciousness.

"Behold the babe wept." Pity is a native plant in a noble heart. The story told itself. The situation in which the child was found explained the cruel occasion. The sacrament he carried engraven on his flesh, declared to whom he belonged. Compassion was fortunately connected with power, and Providence wisely balanced one thing with another, the jealousy and severity of the father, with the tenderness and generosity of the daughter.

Josephus, with whom Moses is justly a favorite object, has recorded many little particulars relating to this part of his history. And, among others, that when the child was applied to the breasts of several successive Egyptian nurses, he turned from them with signs of much disgust and aversion, and that this encouraged his sister Miriam, who was anxiously attending the event, and observed the eager concern of the princess about her little foundling, to propose a nurse of her own nation, and thereby artfully introduced the mother herself to the tender office of suckling her own child. Whatever be in this, one useful lesson is taught us, on better authority than that of Josephus, namely, that perseverance in difficult and painful duty is the shortest and safest road to the attainment of our just and reasonable desires. What a blessed change! The mother of Moses is permitted to do that for princely hire, and under royal protection, which she would have purchased with her life the privilege of doing for nothing, could she have done it with safety to her child. Moses finds shelter in the house of Pharaoh, from the wrath of the king; and he who was destined to be the plague of Egypt, and the deliverer of Israel, is trained to power, wisdom, and consequence, by the Egyptian Magi, and the favor of her who was next the throne.

But, the Providence which saved him amidst so many perils, is pleased to record and perpetuate the memory of his deliverance in his name. It was customary to name the child on the day of circumcision, the eighth from its birth. Perhaps the anxiety and distress of their situation might have broken in upon some of the ceremonies practiced upon that occasion; or, if a name had been

given him by his parents, he has not thought proper to hand it down to posterity. It being his own design and the will of God, that he should be known to all generations by the appellation which Pharaoh's daughter gave to the babe whom she saved from perishing; Moses, "drawn out," "because," said she, "I drew him out of the water." The Jewish writers take delight (and who can blame them?) in expatiating on the extraordinary accomplishments, external and mental, natural and acquired, of their great lawgiver. They ascribe to him the most perfect symmetry of features, uncommon height of stature, a noble, commanding demeanor, the most engaging sweetness of disposition, the most winning address and eloquence, the most undaunted courage, the most profound erudition. Indeed, the singular beauty of his person is hinted in no obscure terms in many places of Scripture, and the additional lustre which it afterwards acquired by intercourse with Heaven, luster which remained unimpaired to the latest old age, convey to us a very high idea of his external appearance. But he stands in no need of the pen of a Philo or a Josephus to make his panegyric. His own actions and writings are his noblest monument; and will live to instruct, delight, and bless mankind, as long as good sense and good taste, virtue, patriotism, and religion exist, and are held in estimation in the world. The parallel between the Jewish and the Christian legislators is so striking, and supported by so many Scripture authorities, that he who runs may read it. Previous to the birth of Moses, the Isrealitish state was reduced to the lowest ebb of distress and despondency; the birth of Christ found a lost world sunk into the most deplorable corruption, guilt, and misery. Of the appearance of Moses there was a general expectation over all the land of Egypt. Christ, "I the desire of all nations," was earnestly looked for by "all who waited for the consolation of Israel," who searched the Scriptures, and observed the appearances of the times; and by infallible signs was his approach announced to mankind. The deliverer of the seed of Jacob was no foreign potentate, with a strong hand and stretched out arm, but a child of their own nation. And who is the Savior of perishing sinners? "Verily he took not on him the nature of angels: but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people."[*]Heb 2:16-17 "As the, children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."[*]Heb 2:14 The extraordinary circumstances attending the birth of Moses were ascertained to the world, and transmitted to posterity, by means of an edict of the king of Egypt. The birth of Christ, in like manner, as to time, place, and situation was marked out for the knowledge of mankind by a decree of Caesar, the emperor of Rome. Both the one and the other, but for the special interposition of Heaven, had fallen victims to the jealousy and apprehensions of two bloody and ambitious princes. Moses escaped the hands of Pharaoh by falling into those of his daughter. Christ avoided the cruelty of Herod by retiring for a while into Egypt. All history agrees in representing Moses as a person of extraordinary grace, wisdom, and comeliness; and of whom is the prophet speaking, when he says, "Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee for ever."[*]Psa 45:2 Moses was brought up in all the learning of the Egyptians. Christ was anointed with the Spirit without measure. Moses stands distinguished by a name which commemorates a temporal deliverance. Christ by two names, descriptive of his high and important office, "Jesus," the Savior, and of the manner in which he was set apart to it, "Christ," the anointed of God. Moses began not to exist till the day that his mother Jochebed bare him in Egypt, but Christ says of himself, "Before Abraham was, I am." Moses from the beginning was faithful as a servant to Him who appointed him; but

“Christ as a son over his own house; for in all things he must have the pre-eminence.” Now to God in Christ be ascribed, by all nations, and generations of men upon earth, and by every angel in heaven, kingdom, power, and glory forever. Amen.

Chapter 39

039. Moses: Volume III

Moses

Volume III

Chapter 40

040. The God of the Living

The God of the Living

Luk 20:17-38. Then came to him certain of the Sadducees (which deny that there is any resurrection) and they asked him, saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, if any man's brother die, having a wife, and he die without children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise tip seed unto his brother. There were therefore seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and died without children. And the second took her to wife, and he died childless. And the third took her; and in like manner the seven also. And they left no children, and died. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection, whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife. And Jesus answering, said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage Neither can they die any more; for they are equal unto the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him.

One of the most obvious and natural consolations of reason, under the loss of those whom we dearly loved, and one of the most abundant consolations furnished by religion is the belief that our departed friends are, at their death, disposed of infinitely to their advantage. We weep and mourn while we reflect upon the deprivation of comfort which we have sustained; but we wipe the tears of sorrow from our eyes, when we consider that our loss is their unspeakable gain. "Rachel weeping for her children," refuses to be comforted so long as she thinks "they are not;" but her soul is tranquillized and comforted when her eyes, in faith, look within the veil, and behold them softly and securely reposing in the bosom of their Father and God. It is an humbling and a mortifying employment to visit churchyards, to step from grave to grave, to recall the memory, while we trample upon the ashes of the young, the beautiful, the wise, and the good; but we find immediate relief, we rise into joy, we tread among the stars, when aided by religion, we transport ourselves in thought to those blessed regions where all the faithful live, and reign and rejoice; where "they that be wise shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."[*]Dan 12:3 Distance is then swallowed up and lost, and we mingle in the noble employments and pure delights of the blessed immortals who encircle the throne of God.

It is astonishing to think, that there should have been men disposed willingly to deprive themselves of this glorious source of comfort; men ready to resign the high prerogative of their birthright, and by a species of humility strange and unnatural, spontaneously degrading themselves to the level of the brutes that perish. And yet there have been, in truth, such men in every age. But it is no wonder to find those who satisfy themselves with the pursuits and enjoyments of a mere beastly nature while they live, contented to he down with the beasts in death, to arise no more. They first make it their interest that there should be no hereafter, and then they fondly persuade themselves that there shall be none.

Error of every kind, both in faith and morals, prevailed in the extreme at the period when, and in the country where, the Savior of the world appeared for our redemption.--The nation of the Jews was divided, in respect of moral and religious sentiment, into two great sects or parties, who both pretended to found their opinions upon the authority of the inspired books, which were held in universal estimation among them; and particularly the writings of Moses. But they drew conclusions directly opposite, from the same facts and doctrines; and both deviated, in the grossest manner, from the spirit and design of that precious record which they both affected to hold in the highest veneration. The Pharisees, earnestly contending for the strict observance of the law, confined their attention to its minuter and less important objects, and paid “the tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin,” but omitted “the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith:” and, raising oral tradition to the rank and dignity of scripture, found a. pretence for dispensing with the plainest and most essential obligations of morality, when these contradicted their interests and opinions. Heinously offended at the neglect of washing of hands previous to eating, they were wicked enough to establish, by a law of their own, neglect of, unkindness, and disobedience to parents; thus, according to the just censure which our Lord passed upon them, “straining out a gnat, and swallowing a camel.” The Sadducees, on the other hand, the strong spirits of the age, disdaining the restraints imposed on mankind by a written law, thought fit to become a law unto themselves. They left the austerities of a strict religion and morality to vulgar minds; and that they might procure peace to themselves in the enjoyment of those sinful pleasures to which they were addicted, they denied the existence of spirit, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retribution. They alleged that the law was silent on those points, and that this silence was a sufficient reason for rejecting the belief of them. They went farther, and contended, that were such doctrines contained in the law, they ought not to be admitted, because they implied a contradiction, or at least involved such a number of difficulties as it was impossible satisfactorily to solve. The chief of those difficulties they propose to our blessed Savior, in the passage which I have read; and they do this, not in the spirit of docility and diffidence to have it removed, but in the pride of their hearts, vainly taking for granted that it was insurmountable. My principal intention in leading your thoughts to this subject, at this time, is the occasion which it afforded to the great Teacher who came from God, of discoursing on a theme nearly connected with the design of these Lectures; and of disclosing to us sundry important particulars, respecting the venerable men whose lives we have been studying, and those which we are still to examine; and respecting that world in which we, together with them, have a concern so deeply, because eternally interesting. To these we shall be led by making a few cursory remarks on the preceding conversation which took place between Christ and the Sadducees. And this shall serve as an Introduction to the farther continuation of a Course of Lectures on the history of the memorable persons and events presented to us in the holy Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments. The Sadducees insidiously begin their attack by professing the highest respect for the authority of Moses and of his writings: “Master, Moses wrote unto us.” The most pernicious designs, the most malevolent purposes, are frequently found to clothe themselves in smiles; often while mischief lies brooding in men’s hearts, “their words are smoother than oil.” The father of lies himself can have recourse to truth, if it be likely to serve his turn; and the enemy of all goodness will condescend to quote that scripture which he hates, if it can help him to an argument for the occasion. With this affected deference for Moses, the Sadducees are aiming at the total subversion of every moral and religious principle, by weakening one of the strongest motives to virtue, and undermining the

surest foundation of hope and joy to man. They allege, that obedience to the law might eventually lead to much confusion and disorder: and they suppose a situation, for none such ever existed, in which compliance with the revealed will of God in this world would infallibly lead to discord and distress in that which is to come. In this we have an example of a very common case; that of men straining their eyes to contemplate objects at a great distance, or totally out of sight, and willfully neglecting or overlooking those which are immediately before them: troubling themselves about effects and consequences of which they are ignorant, and over which they have no power, while they are regardless of obvious truth and commanded duty, though these are their immediate business and concern. The Sadducees, in order to cloak their licentiousness and infidelity, affect solicitude about the regularity and peace of a future state, which in words they denied, if they did not from the heart disbelieve.

I make but one remark more before I proceed to our Lord's reply. Eagerness and anxiety to bring forward and to establish an opinion, betray an inward doubt or disbelief of it.--Truth is not ever proclaiming itself from the house tops, is not forward to obtrude itself upon every occasion, but is satisfied with maintaining and defending itself when assaulted; but falsehood is eternally striving to conceal or strengthen its conscious weakness by a parade of words, and a show of reason. The zeal of the Sadducees to explode and run down the doctrine of the resurrection, plainly betrays a secret dread and belief of it. Our Lord, in his answer, points out directly the source of all error and infidelity, "ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, and the power of God." Not knowing the Scriptures, ye suppose a doctrine is not in them, because ye have not found it there: because ye have willfully shut your own eyes, ye vainly imagine there is no light in the sun; and take upon you to affirm there is none. Not knowing the power of God, you call that impossible which you cannot do, deem that absurd which you do not comprehend, and pronounce that false which you wish to be so. The whole force of the objection to the truth of the resurrection, goes upon the supposition, that the future world is to be exactly constituted as the present; that the relations and distinctions which subsists among men upon earth, are to subsist in the kingdom of heaven. But the supposition is founded in ignorance and falsehood; and, the moment it is denied, the mighty argument built upon it falls to the ground. "In the resurrection," says Christ, "they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." In these words, the condition of men in the world to come, is described, first, negatively, "they neither marry, nor are given in marriage." The power which created the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, might undoubtedly, had it pleased him, have created the whole human race at once, as easily as he formed the first of men, Adam, and as easily as he rears up one generation of men after another, in the course of his providence. But, thinking it meet to people the earth by multiplying mankind gradually upon it, difference of sex, and the institution of marriage, were the means which he was pleased to employ. In the resurrection, the number of the redeemed being complete at once, that difference, and that institution, being unnecessary, shall be done away. Our Savior adds, "neither can they die any more." Death, too, enters into the plan of Providence for the government of this world. Men must be removed to make room for men. But because this sphere is narrow and contracted, and unable to contain and support the increasing multitudes of many generations, is the Lord's hand shortened, that he cannot expand a more spacious firmament, and compact a more spacious globe, to contain, at once, the countless nations of them that are saved? O how greatly do men err; not knowing the power of God! Death is no part of the plan of Providence for the government of that world of bliss. In our Father's house above there are many mansions; there

is bread enough, and to spare; there is room for all, provision for all: the father need not to die, to give space to the son, nor the mother to spare, that the child may have enough. For they are “as the angels of God,” says our Lord, according to Matthew, “equal to the angels,” says our evangelist, and are the children of God.” This describes their happiness positively. Men on earth “see in a glass darkly; know in part, prophesy in part,” are encompassed with infirmity; but the “angels in heaven” excel in strength, stand before the throne of God, serve him day and night in his temple, without wearying, see face to face, “know as they are known.” Their number is completed, their intercourse is pure and perfect, without the means of increase, and union which exist here below.

Having thus reproved their ignorance and presumption, respecting the “power of God,” our Lord proceeds to expose their ignorance respecting “the Scriptures,” and produces a passage from Moses, in whom they trusted, which they had hitherto overlooked or misunderstood, wherein the doctrine in dispute was clearly laid down; and which we had principally in view in leading your attention to this passage on the present occasion. The passage quoted, is that noted declaration of God to Moses, from the midst of the burning bush, “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”[*]Exo 3:6 That God should have condescended to hold this language concerning Enoch, “who was translated that he should not see death,” had been less wonderful; for that holy man, who walked with God upon earth, was exalted immediately to a more intimate union with God in heaven. But to speak thus of men who were long age moldered into dust, of whom nothing remained among men but their names, conveys an idea of human existence, before which the life of a Methuselah dwindles into nothing, an idea which swallows up mortality, and gives a dignity and a duration to man that bids defiance to the grave. That God should say to Abraham, while he lived, “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward,”[*]Gen 15:1 was a miracle of grace and condescension; but to speak thus, more than three centuries after he had been consigned to the tomb, “I am the GOD of Abraham,” this exhibits a relation between God and the faithful, which perfectly reconciles the mind to the thoughts of dissolution. Indeed it is impossible to conceive any thing more elevating, any thing more tranquillizing to the soul, than the view of future bliss with which the text presents us. And this tranquillity and elevation are greatly heightened by the consideration, that Jehovah from the midst of flaming fire, under the Old Testament dispensation, and Jehovah, in the person of the great Redeemer, under the New, taught the same glorious truth to the world. And what is it? “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” When God was pleased to express his favorable regard to Abraham upon earth, what did it amount to? He led him through a particular district of land, in the length and the breadth of it, and said, “I will give it thee.” But Abraham now expatiates through a more ample region, and contemplates a fairer inheritance, an inheritance his own, not in hope, but in possession. Abraham, though following the leading of the Divine Providence, saw the Redeemer’s day only afar off: but, in virtue of his relation to God, he has now beheld the dawning of the morning expanded into the pure light of the perfect day. He once felt the events which affected his family, with the emotion natural to a man; he has since beheld them extending their influence to nations which he thought not of; and he now looks forward in holy rapture to that period when he, and his Isaac, and an earthly Canaan, and every thing of a temporal and transitory nature, shall bring their glory and their honor, and lay all at the feet of “Him, who sitteth upon the throne, and before the Lamb.” From Abraham we are removed to a distance of time and place, in which thought is lost, and we seem to have no more interest in

him than if he had never existed. But the doctrine of the text brings us so close to him, that we recognize the friend of God, in the midst of myriads of saints in glory; we converse with him, and continue to be instructed by him. The dust of Abraham sleeps unnoticed and forgotten in the cave of Machpelah; but lift up thine eyes and behold Abraham on high, and Lazarus in his bosom; his spirit united to God “the Father of spirits,” and to all the spirits of just men made perfect.” “And even that dust” also “rests in hope:” It shall not always be left in the place of the dead; it shall not remain for ever a prey to corruption. Abraham purchased a tomb, and buried his Sarah out of his sight; but he has overtaken, regained her, in the regions of eternal day, where virtuous and believing friends meet, never more to be disjoined. Abraham received his Isaac from the wonder-working hand of Heaven, when nature was dead hope; at the command of God he cheerfully surrendered him again, and devoted him upon the altar: again he receives him to newness of life, and that darling son lives to put his hand upon his eyes. But they were not long disunited; the son has overtaken the parents: they rejoice in God, and in one another; they are the children and heirs of the resurrection; “they are as the angels of God in heaven.”

“I am the God of Isaac.” This Isaac the heir of Abraham’s possessions, of his faith, and of his virtues, was on earth united to the God of the spirits of all flesh, by many tender and important relations: by piety, by filial confidence, by goodness, by patience and submission, on his part; by election by special favor, by highness of destination, on the part of his heavenly Father. Yet these distinguished advantages exempted him not from the stroke of affliction. Many years did this heir of the promises, this chosen seed, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed,” many years did he go childless. Early in life was he visited with the loss of sight, and thereby exposed to much mortification and dejection of spirit. Children are at, length given him, and they prove the torment of his life; they excite a war betwixt nature and grace in his own breast; discord and jealousy arm them against each other; he is in danger of “losing them both in one day.” The one must be banished from his father’s house the other mingles with idolators. Behold a wretched, blind old man, a prey to “grief of heart.” But these things, on the other hand, dissolved not, interrupted not his covenant relation to God: they served but to cement and strengthen the divine friendship: and death which, to human apprehension, separates every connection, and indeed tears asunder every mortal tie, only brought him into a clearer light, and to intercourse and intimacy, which can never expire.

“I am the God of Jacob.” In all the wanderings, in all the dangers, in all the distresses of this patriarch; in all his successes, all his acquisitions, all his joys, we discover the relation of God to him, expressed in these words; and we behold the presence of God with him whithersoever he went, constantly relieving the wretchedness of one state; dignifying and supporting the felicity of the other. This gave him security from the violence of an incensed brother; this cheered the solitude of Luz, and turned it into a Bethel; by this the slumbers of a head reposed on a pillow of stone were made refreshing and instructive; this repressed and overbalanced the rapacity of Laban; this supported and sanctified the loss of Joseph; this sweetened the descent into Egypt, and dissipated the gloom of death; by this, though dead, he exists, though silent, he speaketh, “absent from the body he is present with the Lord;” the moment of his departure is on the wing to overtake that of his redemption from the power of the grave. Before God, the distance shrinks into nothing. That word, that one little word, I AM, unites the era of nature’s birth with that of its dissolution, it joins eternity to eternity, “and swallows up death in victory.” The same gracious

declaration applies, with equal truth and justice, to every son and daughter “if faithful Abraham,” to every “Israelite indeed.” We speak of departed friends in the past time, we “cannot but remember such things were; and were most dear to us;” but it is the glorious prerogative of Jehovah to employ eternally the present in describing his own essence, and his covenant relation to his people: “I AM THAT I AM.” “I AM the God of thy father,” of thy buried, thy lamented brother, friend, lover, child. And to us also is the word of this consolation sent, “Fear not, for I am with thee, be not dismayed, I am thy God.” “Thus with the Lord, that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel: Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by name, thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior.” Believing and resting upon this sure foundation, the Christian triumphs in the prospect of “departing and being with Christ:” he smiles at the threatening looks of the king of terrors, exults and sings “with the sweet singer of Israel,” “yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, thy rod, and thy staff, they comfort me. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever:”[*]Psa 23:4;Psa 23:6 and triumphs with the enraptured apostle of the Gentiles, “O death, where is thy sting; O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”[*]1Co 15:55;1Co 15:57

It is a transporting reflection, that the fond wishes and desires of the human heart are warranted, encouraged, and supported by the revelation of God: that the life and immortality which we naturally pant after, are brought to light by the gospel. It is pleasant to find wise and good men, guided only by the light of reason, and the honest propensities of nature, cherishing that very belief, cleaving to that very hope, which the text inspires. Cicero, in his beautiful treatise on old age, while he relates the sentiments of others, sweetly delivers his own on this subject. The elder Cyrus, according to Xenophon, thus addressed his sons before his death: “Do not imagine, O my dear children, that when I leave you, I cease to exist. For even while I was yet with you, my spirit you could not discern; but that it animated this body you were fully assured by the actions which I performed. Be assured it will continue the same, though still you see it not. The glory of illustrious men would sink with them into the grave, were not their surviving spirits capable of exertion, and concerned to rescue their names from oblivion. I can never suffer myself to be persuaded, that the man lives only while he is in the body, and dies when it is dissolved; or that the soul loses all intelligence on being separated from an unintelligent lump of clay; but rather that, on being liberated from all mixture with body, pure and entire, it enters upon its true intellectual existence. At death, any one may discover what becomes of the material part of our frame; all sinks into that from which it arose, every thing is resolved into its first principle; the soul alone is apparent neither while it is with us, nor when it departs. What so much resembles death as sleep? Now the powers of the mind, in sleep, loudly proclaim their own divinity: free and unfettered, the soul plunges into futurity, ascends its native sky. Hence we may conclude how enlarged those powers will be, when undepressed, unrestrained by the chains of flesh. Since these things are so, consider and reverence me as a tutelary deity. But, granting that the mind were to expire with the body, nevertheless, out of reverence to the immortal gods, who support and direct this fair fabric of nature, piously, affectionately cherish the memory of your affectionate father.” The great Roman orator puts these words into the mouth of Cato, in addressing his young friends Scipio and Laelius:

“Those excellent men, your fathers, who were so dear to me in life, I consider as still alive: and indeed, as now enjoying a state of being which alone deserves to be dignified with the name of life. For as long as we are shut up in this dungeon of sense, we have to toil through the painful and necessary drudgery of life, and to accomplish the laborious task of an hireling. The celestial spirit is, as it were, depressed, degraded from its native seat, and plunged into the mire of this world, a state repugnant to its divine nature and eternal duration.” And again, “Nobody shall ever persuade me, Scipio, that your father Paullus, and your two grandfathers, Paullus and Africanus, and many other eminent men whom it is unnecessary to mention, would have attempted and achieved so many splendid actions, which were to extend their influence to posterity, had they not clearly discerned that they had interest in, and a connection with the ages of futurity, and with generations yet unborn. Can you imagine, that I may talk a little of myself, after the manner of old men, can you imagine, that I would have submitted to so many painful toils, by night and by day, in the forum, in the senate, in the field, had I apprehended that my existence, and my reputation, were to terminate with my life? Were this the case, would it not have been much better to doze away in indolence an insignificant and useless life? But I do not know how the soul incessantly exerting its native vigor, still sprung eagerly forward into ages yet to come, and seized them as its own.

“I feel myself transported with delight at the thought of again seeing and joining your fathers, whom on earth I highly respected and dearly loved; and, borne on the wings of hope and desire, I am speeding my flight to mingle in the Honored society, not of those only whom on earth I knew, and with whom I have conversed; but of those also of whom I have heard and read, and the history of whose lives, I myself have written, for the instruction of mankind. I have the consolation of reflecting, that I have not lived wholly in vain: and I quit my station in life without regret, as the wayfaring man, whose face is towards home, bids farewell to the inn where he had stopped for a little refreshment on his way. O glorious day, when I shall be admitted into the divine assembly of the wise and good! When I shall make an eternal escape from this sink of corruption, and the din of folly! When, amidst the happy throng of the immortals, I shall find thee also, my son, my Cato, best, most amiable of men! On thy ashes, I bestowed the honors of the tomb. Ah! why did not mine rather receive them from thy hand! But your spirit, I know it, has never forsaken me; but, casting back many a longing, lingering look to your afflicted father, has removed to that region of purity and peace, whither you were confident I should shortly follow you. And I feel, I feel our separation cannot be of long continuance.

“If, indulging myself in this fond hope, my young friends, I am under the power of delusion, it is a sweet, it is an innocent delusion. I will hold it fast and never let it go, while I live. I despise the sneer of the witling, who would attempt to laugh me out of my immortality. Suppose him in the right, and myself under a mistake, he shall not have the power to insult me, nor shall I have the mortification of feeling his scorn, when we are both gone to the land of everlasting forgetfulness.”

How pleasing the thought my dear Christian friends, I again repeat it, how pleasing the thought, that the honest propensities of nature, the fairest conclusions of unassisted reason, and the most ardent breathings of truth and virtue, are here in unison with the clearest and most explicit declarations of the holy Scriptures! But the sacred Dove soars into a region which nature and reason could never have explored. Revelation, to the immortality of the soul, has added the resurrection of the body. And “wherefore should it bethought a thing incredible that God should raise the dead?” The Spirit says to “these dry bones, Live.” “We believe that Jesus died and rose

again.” What a sure ground of hope, that “them also who sleep in Jesus, God will bring with him!” Delightful reflection! Who would be so unjust to God, and so unkind to himself, as to part with it? How it smoothes the rugged path of life, how it tempers the bitterness of affliction, how it dissipates the horrors of the grave! One child sleeps in the dust the diameter of the globe separates me from another, but the, word of life, “I AM the God of thy seed,” rescues that one from corruption, and puts the other in my embrace. Time dwindles into a point, the earth melts away, “the trumpet sounds,” “the dead arise incorruptible.” Behold all things are made new! “New heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” “Arise, let us go hence,” and “sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.”

Chapter 41

041. Moses--Egyptian Glory Forsaken

Moses--Egyptian Glory Forsaken

Heb 11:24-27. By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. The history of mankind contains many a lamentable detail of the sad reverses to which human affairs are liable; of the affluent, by unforeseen, unavoidable calamity, tumbled into indigence: of greatness in eclipse; of the mighty fallen: of princes dethroned, banished, put to death. In some instances of this sort, we see the unhappy sufferers making a virtue of necessity, and bearing their misfortunes with a certain degree of patience and magnanimity; but in general, sudden and great distress either sours or depresses the spirit, and men submit to the will of providence with so ill a grace; that it is evident they are not under the power of religion, and that they flee not for consolation to the prospects of immortality.

We are this evening to contemplate one of those rare examples of true greatness of mind, which made a voluntary sacrifice of the most enviable situation, and the most flattering prospects, which human life admits of; and that at an age when the heart is most devoted to the pursuit of pleasure, most susceptible of the allurements of ambition. It is the singular instance of Moses, the prophet and legislator of Israel, who, brought up from infancy in a court, instructed in all the learning of the Egyptians, treated as the heir of empire, and encouraged to aspire to all that the heart naturally covets, and that Providence bestows, on the most favored of mankind; at the age of forty cheerfully resigned all these advantages, and preferred the life of a slave with his brethren, and of a shepherd in the land of Midian, among strangers, to all the luxury and splendor belonging to the son of Pharaoh's daughter, to all the dazzling hopes of royalty or of power next to majesty.

Scripture, in its own admirable concise method, dispatches the history of this great man's life, from his infancy to his fortieth year, in a few short words, namely, "and Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds:"[*]Acts 7:22 as not deeming information concerning attainments in human science, or feats of martial prowess, worthy of the knowledge of posterity, compared to the triumphs of his faith, the generous workings of his public spirit, and the noble ardor of fervent piety.

Philo and Josephus, however, and other Jewish writers, have taken upon them to fill up this interval of time, by a fanciful, fabulous, unsupported account of the earlier years of Moses; which we should perhaps be disposed, in part, to retail for your amusement, if not for your instruction, had not the Spirit of God supplied us with well authenticated memoirs of a more advanced period of his life. In the perusal of which, with serious meditation upon them, we shall, I trust, find pleasure and profit blended together.

Taking inspiration then for our guide, we divide the history of Moses into three periods of equal duration in respect of time, namely, of forty years each; but very different in respect of situation, notoriety, and importance. The first, and of which the Bible is silent, or speaks but a single word, presents him to us a student in the schools of the Egyptian Magi, one among the princes in the court of Pharaoh, a poet, an orator, a statesman, a general, or whatever else imagination pleases to make him. The second, exhibits an humble shepherd, tending the flocks of Jethro his father-in-law, and fulfilling the duties and exemplifying the virtues of the private citizen. In the third, we attend the footsteps of the savior of his nation, the leader and commander, the lawgiver and judge of the Israel of God: under whom the chosen race was conducted from Egyptian oppression, to the possession of the land promised to Abraham and to his seed; the instrument chosen, raised up, and employed of the Divine Providence, to execute the purposes of the Almighty, in a case which affected the general interests, spiritual and everlasting, of all mankind.

It is of the second of these periods we are now to treat; and though our materials be small and few, if we be so happy as to make a proper use of them, we shall find that, by the blessing of God, our labor has not been in vain. In Moses, then, in the very prime and vigor of his life, we see a mind uncorrupted by the maxims and manners of an impious, tyrannical, idolatrous court; a mind not intoxicated by royal favor, not seduced by the allurements of ambition, not deadened by the uninterrupted possession of prosperity, to the impressions of humanity and compassion. And what preserved him? He believed in God. The mind's eye was fixed on Him who is invisible to the eye of sense. And what is the wisdom of Egypt compared to this? It was a land of astronomers, a land of warriors, a land of artists; and the improvement which Moses made in every liberal art and science, we may well suppose was equal to any, the first, of the age and nation in which lie lived. But a principle infinitely superior to every thing human, a principle not taught in the schools of the philosophers, a principle which carries the soul where it resides, beyond the limits of this little world, inspired high thoughts, dictated a noble, manly, generous conduct. And first it taught him to despise and to reject empty, unavailing, worldly honors. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter."[*]Heb 11:24 Ordinary spirits value themselves on rank and distinction. Ordinary men, raised unexpectedly to eminence, strive to conceal and to forget the meanness of their extraction; but Moses would rather pass for the son of a poor, oppressed Israelite, than for the adopted son and heir of the oppressing tyrant's daughter. Putting religion out of the question, true magnanimity will seek to derive consequence from itself, not from parentage or any other adventitious circumstance; will not consider itself as ennobled by what it could have no power over, nor debased by what has in its own nature no shame. To be either vain of one's ancestry, or ashamed of it, is equally the mark of a groveling spirit. Art thou highly descended, my friend? Let high birth inspire high, that is, worthy, generous sentiments. Beware of disgracing reputable descent by sordid, vulgar, vicious behavior. Hast thou nothing to boast of in respect of pedigree? Strive to lay the foundation of thine own ability: convince the fools of the world, that goodness is true greatness; that a catalogue of living virtues is much more honorable than a long list of departed names. Know ye not, that faith makes every one, who lives by it more than the son of a king? For the son of a king may be a fool or a profligate; but faith makes its possessor a son of God, that is, a wise and a good man; and by it, Moses was more noble in the wilderness of Sinai, than in the imperial court of Pharaoh. As this divine instructor taught him to undervalue and to refuse empty honors, so it inspired him with pity to his afflicted brethren. "And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his

brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren."[*]Exo 2:11 Ease and affluence generally harden the heart. If it be well with the selfish man himself, he little cares what others endure. But religion teaches another lesson: "Love to God whom we have not seen," will always be productive of "love to men whom we have seen." From the root of faith many kindred stems spring up; and all bring forth fruit. There, arises the stately plant of heavenly mindedness, producing the golden apples of self-government, self-denial, and contempt of the world; and close by its side, and sheltered by its branches, gentle sympathy expands its blossoms and breathes its perfumes; consolation to the afflicted, and relief to the miserable. The progress of compassion, in Moses is described with wonderful delicacy and judgment. First, he foregoes the pleasures of a court. Unable to relish a solitary, selfish gratification, while he reflected that his nearest and dearest relations were eating the bread and drinking the water of affliction, he goes out to look upon their misery, and tries by kind looks and words of love, to soothe their woes. Unable to alleviate, much less to remove their anguish, he is determined at least to be a partaker of it; and since he cannot raise them to the enjoyment of his liberty and ease, he voluntarily takes a share of their bondage and oppression. There is something wonderfully pleasing to a soul in trouble, to see one who might have shunned it, and have turned away from the sufferer, out of pure love drinking from the same bitter cup, and submitting to the same calamity. At length an honest zeal breaks forth, and overleaps the bounds of patience and discretion. Seeing a brutal Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, incapable of suppressing his indignation, he assaults the oppressor, and puts him to death. "Moses was meek above all the men of the earth." But "surely oppression maketh a wise man mad." This we allege as an apology for the conduct of Moses, not a vindication of it; for we pretend not to say it was in all respects justifiable. But it is one of those singular cases to which common rules will not apply. The day after, he had the mortification of seeing two Hebrews striving together. Unhappy men! as if they, had not enemies enough in their common cruel taskmasters; as if condemnation to labor in making bricks without some of the necessary materials, could not find employment for their most vigorous efforts; as if an edict to destroy all their male children from their birth, had not been sufficient to fill up the measure of their woe;they pour hatred and strife into the bowl, already surcharged with wormwood and gall. Wretched sons of men! eternally arraigning the wisdom and goodness of Providence; eternally complaining of the hardships of their lot; and eternally swelling the catalogue of their miseries, by their own perverseness and folly: adding vinegar to niter, and then wondering how their distresses came to be so great! Moses reproved the offending Egyptian by a blow, and a mortal one; he tries to gain an offending brother by meekness and gentleness; he makes reason and humanity speak; but they speak in vain; for the same spirit that leads men to commit cruelty or injustice, leads them also to vindicate and support their ill conduct. "And he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us; intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian?"[*]Exo 2:13-14 From this, Moses discovered that the rash action which he had committed the day before, was publicly known and talked of, and might prove fatal to him, unless he instantly fled from the danger. The affair had reached the ears of Pharaoh, who, it would appear, wanted only a decent pretence to rid himself of a man of whom all Egypt was jealous. He hurries away therefore out of the territories of the king of Egypt, into that part of Arabia which is called Petra, from its mountainous or rocky aspect; and by a singular concurrence of providential circumstances, is stopped at a city of that country called Midian, and is induced to remain there for many years.

There lived in this city a person of distinguished rank and station; but whether possessed of a sacred or civil character, the ambiguity of the term in the holy language permits us not to determine; and the scripture leaves us totally uncertain whether he were a priest or a prince of Midian. But we are left in no doubt respecting his moral and intellectual qualifications; and we shall have no reason to be displeased at finding the history of Moses blended with that of so sensible and so good a man as Jethro, or Ragual, turns out to be. Whatever his dignity was, the sacerdotal or royal, we find his daughters trained up in all the simplicity of those early times; following the humble, harmless profession of shepherdesses. Wise is that father, kind and just to his children, who, whatever his station, possessions, or prospects may be, brings up his sons and his daughters to some virtuous and useful employment; for idleness is not more odious, dishonorable, and contemptible, than it is inimical to happiness, and irreconcilable to inward peace.

Moses, being arrived in the neighborhood of Midian, weary and faint with a long journey, through a barren and inhospitable country, sits down by a well of water to rest and refresh himself. And, as a good man's footsteps are all ordered of the Lord, Providence sends him thither just at the moment, to succor the daughters of Ragual from the violence of some of their neighbors In those countries, the precious fluid bestowed upon us in such boundless profusion, being dispensed as it were in drops, became an object of desire and a ground of contention. The daughters of Jethro, sensible of their inferiority in point of strength, endeavor to supply it by diligence and address. They arrive at the well before their rival shepherds, and are preparing with all possible dispatch to water their flocks, when behold they are overtaken by these brutals, who rudely drive them and their flocks away, and cruelly attempt to convert the fruits of their labor to their own use. Moses possessing at once sensibility, courage, and force, takes part with the injured, and affords them effectual support against their oppressors. An helpless, timid female, assaulted and insulted, is an object of peculiar concern to a brave and generous spirit; and for this reason, courage and intrepidity are qualities in men, held in great and just estimation by the female sex.

If the heroic behavior of Moses merit approbation and respect, the modest reserve of the virgin daughters of Raguel is equally amiable and praiseworthy. It does not appear that they solicited protection, but modestly received it; they look their thanks rather than utter them; and they deem it more suitable to their sex and character to I appear ungrateful to a generous stranger, than to offend him by forwardness and in delicacy. They hasten home to their father, who, surprised at the earliness of their return, inquires into the cause of it. Happy, I doubt not, to celebrate the praises of a man whose appearance and behavior must have made a deep impression upon them, they relate the adventure of the morning; and Raguel, struck with the magnanimity, gallantry, and spirit of this stranger's conduct, eagerly inquires after him, sends to find him out, invites him to his house and table, and endeavors to express that gratitude, which the young women could not, by every effort of kindness and hospitality.

Minds so well assorted as those of Moses and Jethro, and attracted to each other by mutual acts of beneficence, would easily assimilate and unite in friendship. And the pleasing recollection of protection given and received, natural sensibility of a female mind to personal accomplishments, but more especially to generosity and courage on the one hand; and the irresistible charm of feminine beauty and modesty to a manly heart, on the other, would speedily and insensibly, between Moses, and some one of the priest of Midian's fair daughters, ripen into love. What follows, therefore, is all in the course of honest nature, which never swerves from her purpose,

never fails to accomplish her end. But it was Providence that furnished the field and the instruments with which nature should work. That Providence which saved him forty years before from perishing in the Nile; that Providence which delivered him so lately from the hands of an incensed king ; the same Providence now, by a concourse of circumstances equally beyond the reach of human power or foresight, fixes the bounds of his habitation, forms for him the most important connection of human life ; and for another space of forty years makes him forget the tumultuous pleasures of a court, in the more calm and rational delights of disinterested friendship, virtuous affection, and heavenly contemplation.

It was in this delicious retreat, that the man of God is supposed to have composed, by divine inspiration, and to have committed to writing, that most ancient, most elegant, and most instructive of all books; which contains the history of the world, from the creation down to his own times; a period which no other writer has presumed to touch upon; holy ground, which none but the foot of God himself has dared to tread. Here also, and at this time, as it is conjectured by interpreters, he wrote that beautifully poetical, moral, and historical work, the book of Job: which, for sublimity of thought, force of expression, justness of sentiment, strength of reasoning, and variety of matter, holds a distinguished place in the sacred code. If from the schools of the Magi he drew such stores of wisdom and eloquence, high must our ideas rise of those noble seminaries of learning. But Moses derived his wonderful accomplishments from a much higher source, even from the everlasting Spring of all knowledge, even from Him who made the heavens and the earth, and caused the light to arise; even from Him who can make the desert of Horeb a school of wisdom, and the simple to be wiser than all his teachers. Here, also, he has the felicity of becoming a father; and, even in Midian, God builds up one of the families of Israel. And now at last the time to favor that despised, oppressed nation, was come. Egypt had changed its sovereign in the mean time, but the seed of Jacob had felt no mitigation of their distress. Every change which they have undergone is only from evil to worse. Moses was now arrived at his eightieth year, but remained in the full vigor of his bodily strength, and of his mental powers. Erring, reasoning, caviling man will be asking, Why was the employment of Moses in so import ant a service so long delayed? Wherefore bury such talents for such a space of time in the inglorious life of an obscure shepherd? Wherefore call a man at so late a period of life, in the evening of his day, in the decline of his faculties, to a service that required all the fervor, intrepidity, and exertion of youth? To all which we answer in the words of our Savior on a well known occasion, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power?” Man is perpetually in a hurry, and often hastens forward without making progress; but “he that believeth shall not make haste.” God, the father of believers, advances to his end not in a vehement and hurried step, but in a solemn, steady, majestic pace; his progress, which we may in our folly account slow, in the issue proves to have been the most expeditious; and the course, which human ignorance may condemn as irregular and circuitous, will be found in the end the shortest and the surest. The course of the history then has brought us to that important, eventful hour, when the shepherd of Midian, trained up in retirement and contemplation, and converse with God, was to shake off his disguise, and stand confessed the minister of the most high God, the king in Jeshurun, the scourge of Egypt, the deliverer of Israel. As the commission which was given him to execute, and the station assigned to him, were altogether singular and uncommon, we are not to be surprised if the seal and signature affixed to that commission, and the powers bestowed for the faithful and effectual execution of it, should likewise be out of the usual course of things, and should announce the power and authority

of Him who granted it. But as this merits a principal place in the course of these exercises, we shall not compress it into the conclusion of a Lecture; hoping, through the Help of God, to resume and continue the subject next Lord's day.

Such was Moses, the Jewish legislator and hero, during the two first great periods of his life. But a greater than Moses is here, even He, "the latchet of whose shoes Moses is unworthy to stoop down and unloose;" to whom Moses and Elias, on the mount of transfiguration, brought all their glory and honor, and laid them at his feet!

Moses "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;" and Jesus disdained not to be called "the son of the carpenter." Supreme, all divine though He was, yet he declined not the society of the poorest, meanest, most afflicted of mankind! Was the humiliation of Moses cheerful and voluntary, not forcibly obtruded upon him, but sought out and submitted to? Christ, though "in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant." Was sympathy a leading feature in the character of Moses? Jesus "hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, neither hath he hid his face from him, but when he cried unto him he heard."[*]Psa 22:24 "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them, and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old."[*]Isa 63:9 Did Moses, through the vale of obscurity, arrive at the summit of glory? Of Christ it is said, as following up the scene of his humiliation, "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." But the time would fail to point out every mark of resemblance. Christ derives no glory from similitude to Moses, but all the glory of Moses flows from his typifying Christ the Lord, in whom "all the promises are yea and amen," and who "is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

042. Moses--Commission

Moses--Commission

Exo 3:13-14. And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: And he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. The objects presented to us in the commerce of the world have a relative greatness, but those with which we converse in solitude and retirement possess a real grandeur and magnificence. A vast city, a numerous and well disciplined army, a proud navy, a splendid court, and the like, dazzle the eyes of a stranger, and produce a transient wonder and delight. But a little acquaintance dissolves the charm; the dimensions of created greatness speedily contract, the glory departs, and what once filled us with astonishment is regarded with calm indifference, perhaps with disgust. The eye, almost with a single glance, reaches the end of human perfection, and instantly turns from what it has seen, in search of something yet undiscovered, striving to find in novelty and variety a compensation for the poverty, littleness, nothingness of the creature. But when we withdraw from the haunts of men, and either retire within ourselves or send our thoughts abroad to contemplate God and his works, we meet a height and a depth which the line of finite understanding cannot fathom; we expatiate in a region which still discloses new scenes of wonder; we feel ourselves at once invited and checked, attracted, and repelled; we behold much that we can comprehend and explain, but much more that passeth knowledge; we find ourselves, like Moses at the bush, upon “holy ground,” and the same wonderful sight is exhibited to our view--“JEHOVAH!” in a flame of fire! whose light irradiates and encourages our approach; but whose fervent heat arrests our speed, and remands us to our proper distance. That great man had now passed the second great period of his life in the humble station of a shepherd, and the shepherd too of another man’s flock. He had quitted the enchanted regions of high life, not only without regret, but with joy; not impelled by spleen, not soured by disappointment; but filled with a noble disdain for empty honors, with generous sympathy towards his afflicted brethren, animated by exalted piety, which settled on an invisible God, and inspired with a soul which looked at pomp with contempt, and on obscurity with acquiescence and desire. It was in this calm retreat that he cultivated those qualities which proved more favorable to the designs of Providence than all the learning which he had acquired in Egypt. At the age of eighty the race of glory is at an end with most men: nay, the drama of life concludes with the generality long before that period arrives. But the fame, activity, and usefulness of Moses commenced not till then; for as it is never too early, so it is never too late to serve God and to do good to men; and true wisdom consists in waiting for and following the call of Heaven, not in anticipating and out running it. Abraham was turned out a wanderer and an exile at seventy-five. And Moses at fourscore was sent upon an enterprise, which it required much courage to undertake, much vigor to conduct and support, and a great length of time to execute. But before the divine mandate, every mountain of difficulty sinks, “every valley is exalted, the crooked becomes straight, and the rough places plain.” Abraham, at the head of a handful of servants,

subdues five victorious kings, with their armies: Sarah, at ninety, bears a son; and Moses, at eighty, with a simple rod in his hand, advances to succor Israel, and to crush the power of Egypt. The solemnity with which the commission was given, suited the dignity and importance of the undertaking. The whole was of God, and he does every thing in a manner worthy of himself. While Moses was, employed in the innocent cares and labors of his lowly station; and faithful attention to the duties of our several stations is the best preparation for the visits of the Almighty; a very unusual and unaccountable appearance presented itself to his eyes. A bush wholly involved in flames, yet continuing unchanged, undiminished, unconsumed by the fire. Whether nature preserves her steady tenor, or suffers an alteration or suspension of the laws by which she is usually governed, the finger of God is equally visible in both; for, what power, save that which is divine, could have established, and can maintain the order and harmony of the universe? And what power short of Omnipotence can break in upon that order; can make the sun to stand still, or its shadow return back to the meridian after it had declined; can leave to fire its illuminating, but withdraw its devouring quality; and render artificial fire, such as that of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, harmless to the three children of the captivity, but fatal to ministers of the king of Babylon? Were our hearts right with God, miraculous interpositions would be unnecessary; every creature, every event should promote our acquaintance with our Maker. And such is the condescension of the Most High, that he vouchsafes to cure our ignorance, inattention, or unbelief, by making the mighty sacrifice of that stated course of things, which his wisdom settled at first, and which his power continues to support. Rather than man shall remain unchanges, unredeemed, the great system of nature shall undergo alteration; fire shall cease to burn, the Nile shall run blood instead of water, the sun forget to shine for three days together; the eternal, untreated Word shall become flesh, and the fountain of life to all, shall expire in death.

It required not the sagacity of a Moses to discover, that there was something extraordinary here. But mistaking it at first for merely an unusual natural appearance, whose cause, by a closer investigation, he might be able to discover, he is preparing by nearer observation to satisfy his curiosity; when lo! to his still greater astonishment, the bush becomes vocal as well as brilliant, and he hears his own name distinctly and repeatedly called, out of the midst of the flame. Curiosity and wonder are now checked by a more powerful principle than either. Terror thrills in every vein, and arrests his trembling steps. How dreadful must the visitations of God's anger be to his enemies, if to his best beloved children, the intimations of his goodness, clothed in any thing like sensible glory, be so awful and overwhelming? When I meet thee, O my God, stripped of this veil of flesh, may I find thee a pure, a genial, and a lambent flame of loving kindness, not a consuming fire of wrath and vengeance!

Moses instantly comprehends that the Lord was there; or, if he could for a moment have doubted who it was that talked with him, in a moment his doubt must have been removed by the continuation of the voice of Him who spake. We find here, as in many other places of the Old Testament, the same person who is styled in the course of the narration, the "Angel of the Lord," styling himself Jehovah and God; exercising divine prerogatives, manifesting divine perfections, and claiming the homage which is due to Deity alone. The person, therefore, thus described, can be none other than the untreated "Angel of the covenant," who "at sundry times, and in divers manners," in maturing the work of redemption, assumed a sensible appearance; and at length, in the fullness of time, united his divine nature to ours and dwelt among men, and made them to

behold his glory, as the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth."

Every thing here is singular, and every thing instructive. The first interview between God and Moses inspires terror; but the spirit of bondage gradually dies away, and refines into the spirit of adoption and love. Acquaintance begets confidence, "perfect love casteth out fear;" and the man who spake to God with trembling in Horeb, by and by becomes strengthened to endure his presence forty days and nights together, in Sinai. "Enduring, as seeing Him who is invisible," he "despised the wrath of an earthly king." When he comes to the knowledge of that same God, by the seeing of the eye and the hearing of the ear, he "exceedingly fears and quakes; abhors himself and lies low in dust and ashes." But, following on to know the Lord, he comes at length to converse with Him, as a man with his friend. "Acquaint thyself then with Him, and be at peace, thereby good shall come unto thee." Miserable beyond expression, beyond thought are they, whose acquaintance with God has to begin at death; who, having lived without a gracious, merciful, long-suffering God in the world, find they must, by a dreadful necessity, fall into the hands of a neglected, forgotten, righteous, incensed God, when they leave it. The appearance of Jehovah in the bush was not only preternatural, but emblematical; it not only sanctioned the commission given to Moses by the seal of Deity, but exhibited a lively representation of the state of his church and people in Egypt; oppressed, but not crushed, brought low, but not deserted of Heaven, in the midst of flames, but not consumed. And it is a striking emblem of the church of God in the world, to the end of time: "troubled on every side, yet not distressed, perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, cast down, but not destroyed." The same voice which solicited intercourse with Moses, which tendered friendship, which encouraged hope, sets a fence about the divine Majesty; it reminds him of his distance, of his impurity; it forbids rashness, presumption, familiarity. In veneration of the spot which God had honored with his special presence, he is commanded to "put off his shoes from off his feet;" a mandate, which by an image natural and obvious, enjoins the drawing near to God in holy places and in sacred services, with seriousness, attention, and reverence; divested of that impurity which men necessarily contract by coming into frequent contact with the world. And surely, it is owing to the want of a due sense of the majesty of God upon our spirits, that his house is profaned, and his service marred by levity, carelessness, and inattention. Did we seriously consider that the place where we stand is "holy ground," that the word which we speak and hear is "not the word of men, but of the living God," could one short hour's attendance betray us into slumber? Could the little jealousies and strife of a base world intrude into a worshipping heart? Could the eye find leisure to wander upon the dress and appearance of another? Durst a scornful leer or simpering countenance communicate from one vain, silly, irreverent spirit to another the private sneer and censure! Would there be a contention for place and pre-eminence? Now, surely, God is as really though less sensibly, in this place, as he was in the bush at Horeb: and though we see him not, his eyes are continually upon us, and he will bring every thing into judgment. O Lord, open thou our eyes, that we may behold Thee, and every other object shall instantly disappear. The words which follow, if any thing can increase their intrinsic force and importance, derive a peculiar energy and value to the Christian world, as the passage quoted by our blessed Lord, from an authority which they could not deny, to confute the Sadducees, on the subject of the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection of the body. "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." We speak of the dead, uncles the idea that they were; but God represents them as still existing, and his relation to them as unbroken, his care of them as uninterrupted. The effect which this declaration had upon Moses, is

such as might have been expected; no more “turning aside to see this great sight;” he hides his face, “afraid to look upon God.” It is ignorance of God, not intimate communion, which encourages forwardness and freedom. Angels, who know him best, and love him most, are most sensible of their distance and are represented as “covering their faces with their wings,” when they approach their dread Creator. In the declaration which immediately follows, under a sanction so solemn and affecting, which shall we most admire, the mercy and goodness of God, or his perfect wisdom and foreknowledge? Four hundred years have elapsed since this wretched state of his posterity had been foretold and revealed to Abraham. For wise and gracious purposes it was appointed and brought to pass. But the days of darkness are now almost ended, and the sun returns. Like rain from heaven to a dry and thirsty land, the promises of favor and salvation fall upon a persecuted, oppressed people; and “that Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and judge?” is after an interval of forty years sent back to Egypt, on the kind, merciful errand of salvation to an oppressed and persecuted people.

Moses however, it would appear, has not forgotten the surly reception which his well meant interposition had met with from his brethren so long before; and presumes to urge it as a reason, why a person of more influence and authority should be entrusted with the commission.

He considered not, that formerly he acted from the impulse of his own mind; with indeed an upright and benevolent intention, but with a zeal rather too bold and impetuous; whereas now, he was following the direction of Providence, and was therefore certain of success. As there is a sinful pride which urges men to seek stations and employments, to which they have neither pretension, title, nor qualification; so there is manful humility, which shrinks from the call of God, which, in the guise of self-denial, contains the spirit of rebellion and disobedience; and which, under the affectation of undervaluing and debasing our own persons and qualities, indirectly charges God with foolishness in choosing an instrument so inapt and improper. Such humility is of the very essence of pride, and such, with regret we observe it, was the spirit by which Moses was on this occasion actuated. The heavenly vision removes the objection at once, by assuring him of the divine presence, blessing, and support: and refers him for the proof of it, to a train of events closely succeeding each other; and all issuing in the people’s assembling together, in that very spot, to worship, after their enfranchisement, all forming a chain of evidence, that the authority under which he acted was divine.

Still doubting and irresolute, Moses ventures to urge another difficulty, which he expresses in these terms; “And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, the God of your fathers bath sent me unto you: and they shall say unto me, what is his name! What shall I say unto them?” God had already declared his name, and purpose, and given his charge, and yet Moses dares to make inquiry. How rare a thing it is, to see a soul wholly resolved into the will of God! How seldom do we find a faith entirely disposed to be, to do, and to endure, neither more nor less than what God is pleased to appoint! But the incredulity and presumption of Moses shall not render the design of God of none effect. When men are contradicted, or opposed, they fly out, and storm, and threaten. But the great God bears with our frowardness and folly, gives way to our scruples, and, yielding to our obstinacy, over-comes evil with good. And we are almost tempted to rejoice that Moses stood out so long, as it gave occasion to the most solemn and satisfying proclamation of the name and nature of God, from his own mouth, and the most amiable and engaging picture of tender .mercy and long-suffering that ever

was exhibited. “And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: And he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.”

What flimsy things are commissions issued under the handwriting and seals of kings, compared to this! a shred of parchment, a morsel of wax, an unmeaning scrawl: a slender, contracted, short-lived power, delegated from one worm to another. Where is now the signet of Ahasuerus, which pretended to communicate irreversible authority to the writing whereto it was affixed? Where are the warrants under which the statesmen and heroes of other times deliberated, fought, and conquered? With the princes who granted them they are gone to oblivion. They were what they were. They fulfilled their day, and then they fell asleep, and now are seen no more! What avail the long list of empty titles, which potentates and princes, in the pride of their hearts, affix to their perishing names? All, all shrink and fade, before that tremendous Power, whose authority no change of circumstances can affect, whose existence no succession of ages can impair; who, yesterday, today and for ever still proclaims of himself, “I am.”

Nothing can equal the simplicity, sublimity, and force of these remarkable words. Independency of existence, eternity of duration, immutability of purpose, faithfulness and truth in keeping covenant and showing mercy, are all conveyed in one little sentence, “I am that I am.” Longinus, the celebrated critic, has, with equal judgment and taste, quoted a well known passage from the writings of Moses, as an instance of the true sublime, viz. the first words pronounced by the Creator in the formation of the world, “And God said, Let there be light, and there was light.” Why did not Longinus dip deeper into the works of this great historian; why did he not enrich and embellish his own beautiful little book, and farther approve his exquisite taste, by inserting other passages from the page of inspiration, particularly the passage under review? A passage which Jews, Heathens, and Christians, as one man, have consented to admire.

Under the sanction of this most awful name, God repeats his commission, repeats his charge, repeats his promise of support, assistance, and success; success with the elders of Israel; success with the people; success against Pharaoh. And yet, Moses “staggers at this promise,” although it be the promise of the Eternal, “through unbelief!” What have we most to wonder at here, the strange incredulity and perverseness of the prophet, or the singular fidelity and exactness of the historian, in recording his own errors? God had said, “they shall hearken to thy voice:” yet Moses presumes, in the face of this express declaration, to gainsay and draw back.--“And Moses answered, and said, But behold, they will not believe me; nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee.” Surely “the LORD is God, and not man, and therefore the children of men are not consumed.” A man of common spirit would here have broken off the conference, and left the timid, froward shepherd to his own folly, and permitted him to remain destitute of the honour which he obstinately persevered to decline. But it pleased God to show us patience, at least in one instance, too powerful for unbelief: “for his ways are not like our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts.”

He who would cure infidelity in others, must first be purged of the old leaven himself. To effect this in the heart of his servant Moses, God vouchsafes to perform miracle upon miracle. He turns the rod which was in the hand of Moses into a serpent; and from a serpent to a rod again: in order to intimate to him and to the world that the most harmless things become noxious, and the most pernicious things innocent at his command. His hand is in a moment covered with leprosy, and in

a moment restored--to show the power of God's holy law to fix guilt upon the sinner, and of his grace to remove it from the penitent. He is enjoined and authorized to perform these signs before all Israel, in order to produce that conviction in them, which they had first wrought upon his own mind. Should these still happen to fail, he is permitted to go a step farther. Nature shall submit to a thorough alteration, rather than the seed of faithful Abraham continue slaves in Egypt, or perish through unbelief. Water shall become blood before their eyes, rather than the blood of their innocent children be poured out any more like water upon the ground. And now, surely, Moses is gained, and the work of God shall no longer stand still. Alas! the sullen spirit is not yet subdued. Though forced to retreat, he continues to fight as he retires. The slowness of Israel to believe, was formerly the plea; now his own want of talents is urged in excuse of his strange backwardness and disobedience. That objection too is immediately removed, by a promise of wisdom and eloquence suited to the occasion. The language of the oracle, and the longsuffering of the speaker, are miraculous and supernatural, as all the other circumstances of the case, "And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now, therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say."[*]Exo 4:11-12

"Wonder, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth!" This, instead of producing humble submission and instantaneous compliance, without a reason and without a plea, meets with a direct refusal; "O my Lord, send I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send." And now what heart does not tremble for fear, that the fire which had spared the bush, should wax hot, to punish the madness of the prophet? What patience can endure such a repetition of insult? The anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses; and--and what? O it becomes a flame of love to melt his heart, and purify it of its dross. "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and he said, Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also behold, he cometh forth to meet thee; and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart." Providence had all this while been preparing a concluding, a convincing proof of power, wisdom, and goodness inconceivable. Lo, Aaron is already far advanced on his way from Egypt, in quest of his brother.

That, after so long an interval, through a field of so many chances, he should at that very instant of time arrive--How is it to be accounted for? On no other principle but this, the Lord is "wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." "He seeth the end from the beginning." He saith, "My counsel shall stand, and I will fulfill all my pleasure." "He doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." Let every knee bow, let every tongue confess, let every heart adore, and love, and submit.

Moses is at length subdued, and we stand with astonishment and joy to contemplate the triumph of mercy over judgment. God grant we may improve the example of his divine patience as a pattern. God in mercy preserve us from presuming upon it, as an encouragement to offend. And may God bless what has been spoken. Amen.

043. Moses--Bondage of Egypt

Moses--Bondage of Egypt

Exo 6:9. And Moses spake so unto the children of Israel; but they hearkened not unto Moses, for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage.

Every nation has in its history events of peculiar importance, which latest posterity is disposed fondly to commemorate. But the memory of remarkable deliverances is necessarily blended with the recollection of heavy distress or imminent danger, and whether as men, or as citizens, we greatly rejoice, by that very joy we expressly declare that we, or our fathers, once had cause to mourn. Perpetual sunshine suits not the state of the natural world; perpetual success is by no means favorable either to human happiness or virtue. Hunger is necessary to give a relish to food; the gloom of winter is the happiest recommendation of the cheerfulness and bloom of spring. We discover the value of health by disease; and the blessings of peace would be but half understood, were it not for the antecedent anxieties and calamities of war. Men therefore act foolishly as well as impiously when they charge the wise, righteous, and merciful Governor of the world, with carelessness or unkindness, because he admits into the system of his works, or into his moral government of the universe, what ignorance calls disorder, what presumption cries down as unnecessary, and pride condemns as unjust.

What so irregular at first sight, and always so to the vulgar eye, as the face of the starry heavens? A handful of little sparks, scattered at random in the air! But to the attentive, inquiring, enlightened spirit, they present a vast combination of worlds, each in its place, every one moving in its proper orbit; the whole possessing every quality that can at once excite astonishment and inspire delight; greatness, order, beauty, harmony, utility! They present excellencies obvious to the slightest observation of the most shallow understanding; excellencies undiscoverable by the closest investigation of the most penetrating genius. Now, clownish thoughtlessness and stupidity is not more incompetent to judge of the order and frame of nature, than passion and prejudice, by which all men are governed, are to determine upon the wisdom and goodness of the ways of Providence. Every man would have everything bend to his humor, convenience, indolence, or interest. This would produce, were it permitted, endless confusion and misery, did not God overrule and employ the activity and the indolence, the senseless caprices and the jarring interests of men to execute his purposes, and without their intention, nay, in spite of their efforts, make them productive of regularity, stability, and happiness. In contemplating, therefore, agents and events, those of which we have heard and read, or those which we see and in which we are concerned, the only road to composure and improvement is, to consider the whole as the work of a supreme, intelligent, almighty, invisible Agent, who is carrying on a plan which we comprehend not, or understand only in part, and who, from all that we can know of him from nature, from experience, and from revelation, takes delight in showing mercy and doing good, but who, in the exercise of even these gracious prerogatives, governs not himself by the partial lights, hasty conceptions, and contracted views of ignorant, erring men, but by his own all-comprehending intelligence, all-pervading

benignity, all-subduing love.

If, in that portion of ancient history which is now to come under our consideration, we observe Providence treating one nation with uncommon severity and another with indulgence altogether as singular, we are to regard the parties not as they are in themselves, or in relation to each other, but in their relation to God and to mankind in general, as an important link in the great chain of Providence, as serving and instructing the human race to the end of the world. The perverseness and unbelief of Moses met with pity and forgiveness, and were cured by a series of miracles. The impiety and unbelief of Pharaoh met with resentment and punishment, and were even confirmed and strengthened by a most awful series of miracles; not for the sake of Moses and Pharaoh merely, but to illustrate in the eyes of the whole world the goodness and severity of God; the wisdom and safety of repentance and submission on the one hand, the madness and danger of impenitence on the other. Egypt was plagued, and Israel saved, that violence and cruelty might be awakened to see the naked sword of justice suspended by a single hair over its guilty throat; and that misery and depression might find a refuge from despair.

We have seen with what solemnity the commission to Moses for the deliverance of Israel was granted, and the awful seal which was appended to it; even the great and fearful name, Jehovah, “I am that I am.” We have seen the backwardness, irresolution, and timidity of the prophet, in undertaking an employment so flattering to ambition, so desirable to the spirit of patriotism, so elevating to a mind awake to the influence of religion. We have seen the goodness and condescension of God in deigning, by repeated exertions of power and mercy, to remove the scruples and level the objections of incredulity and fear. And we have seen Aaron, the brother of Moses, providentially conducted to the spot, and at the moment, to establish a belief in the divine power and veracity, to confirm the wavering, trembling soul, and constituted to a share of the diligence, difficulty, danger, and glory of the illustrious enterprise.

Behold then two plain old men, one of eighty, and the other of eighty-three years old, setting out from the deserts of Arabia, on an undertaking to human reason the most wild and romantic that ever was attempted; to persuade or to constrain one of the most powerful princes of the world to enfranchise, nay, to dismiss the tenth part of his most valuable and useful subjects! And how are they provided for this vast undertaking? The pleas of reason, the powers of eloquence, the calls of humanity, the claims of justice it is well known, make but a feeble impression on the hearts of kings, when their pride, ambition, or interest oppose. For such a vast multitude to slip away by stealth is impossible, and to think of forcing an escape from a power so greatly superior is rashness and ruin. When men engage in hazardous and difficult expeditions, they levy armies, accumulate treasure, provide magazines, strengthen themselves with alliances. But when God addresses himself to action, we behold no apparatus, no effort. Is an universe to start out of nothing? “God speaks, and it is done.” Is a sun to arise, and light to shine? God says, “Let there be light.” Is a great nation to be subdued, and a little one asserted into liberty? Our eyes are directed, not to a general at the head of a mighty host, but to a shepherd with his crook in his hand. But the commands of Heaven break not in upon the sacred duties and the virtuous charities of private life. The charge given to Moses was pressing, the object most important, and the authority under which it was issued, supreme; but yet he is permitted to return for a little while, to attend to the calls of nature, of gratitude, to the gentle claims of filial piety, of conjugal and paternal affection. He went back to his father-in-law to acknowledge his protection, hospitality, and kindness to him when a

stranger, to inform him of the extraordinary commission he had just received, and the necessity he was thereby laid under of immediately entering upon the execution of it; to obtain his consent for this purpose, and to ask his paternal benediction. Religion is in a happy state in the soul of that man, who has learned to unite and reconcile the views and pursuits of the citizen with those of the private man; who pleads not the performance of one duty as an excuse for the omission of another; whose life exhibits every moral and divine principle in action, every one in his season, every one in his place. How simple and affectionate the dismission which honest Raguel gave to Moses, compared to that of the selfish, rapacious Laban to Jacob:[*]Gen 31:26, etc.--“Go in peace!” says Raguel; an adieu expressive at once of submission to the will of Providence, and of affection to his son-in-law, mixed with regret at the thought of parting with him.

It pleased God again to confirm the confidence of Moses, by assuring him that all who had ever harbored a design against his life were now dead; and that nothing therefore remained but to address himself boldly to his great work. Accompanied with his wife and two sons, he leaves the land of Midian, and proceeds towards Egypt. On this journey, a very extraordinary incident occurs: but the conciseness of the sacred history leaves it involved in much darkness and difficulty. God had blessed him with two sons in Midian, whom, in compliance with the commandment of God, and as a son of Abraham, he ought to have circumcised on the eighth day from their birth. This, however, either for want of the proper minister, from inattention, or out of improper respect to the feelings or prejudices of Zipporah his wife, or some other reason that appears not, had been hitherto wholly neglected, and thereby his children, the younger at least, through his neglect, seems to have incurred the dreadful penalty denounced by the terms of the covenant against uncircumcised persons, that of being “cut off from his people.” This punishment God seems disposed to exact at the hand of Moses himself; who was indeed the guilty person, by attacking him either with a threatening bodily distemper, by remorse of conscience for his criminal neglect, by the appearance of an avenging angel, or some other sensible token of displeasure. But the difficulty is, Why the conduct of Moses in this respect was never called in question before? Why he was not purged of this guilt before he was honoured at all with the divine commission? Why the precept was enforced upon a journey, and at an inn, where the operation could be performed less commodiously, and was accompanied with some degree of danger? What could Zipporah mean when she reproached Moses as “a bloody husband?” The passage is evidently enveloped in much obscurity; and probably with design. Instead of curiously inquiring into its hidden meaning, an attempt vain and unprofitable, we may, by the blessing of God, learn from it more than one practical lesson, neither obscure nor unimportant; and this, no doubt, the Spirit of God principally intended. The first is, that no circumstances of prudence or convenience can ever be with propriety urged as a dispensation with a clearly commanded duty. Secondly, that as there may be a sinful undervaluing of the feelings, prejudices, and inclinations of our near and dear relations, so there may be a sinful tenderness for, and compliance with them, to the neglect of God’s known and declared will, and at the risk of falling under his just censure. Thirdly, that he who is to be the interpreter of the law to others, ought in all points to be blameless, and in all things conformed to the law himself. To which we may add yet, a fourth, not of less importance than any of these; namely, that when God has procured the proper respect to his revealed will, the controversy between him and the offender is at an end, the object of his government being not so much to avenge himself as to amend the criminal. This scene of domestic danger and distress is speedily followed by another of a pleasanter kind, namely, the interview between the two brothers, in the

wilderness; an interview attended with many circumstances to render it mutually interesting and satisfactory. It must have been highly gratifying to Moses, after living forty years among strangers, to meet his own brother, to receive particular information concerning his family and nation, and to communicate to a friendly ear the knowledge of his own situation during so long an interval. What must it have been on the other hand, to Aaron, to learn from the mouth of his brother the great designs of Providence respecting themselves and their people? With what over-flowing of heart would they mingle their sighs and tears? With what ardor would their united prayers, and vows, and praises ascend to heaven? How confirmed the faith, how forward the zeal of each, strengthened and stimulated by that of the other. They go on their way rejoicing; they are following God, and they must prosper.

Moses had found the evidence of his divine mission completed, in the opportune arrival of his brother Aaron, according to the declaration of the oracle at the bush; and he soon finds a resolution of his first doubt, in the very entrance upon the discharge of his office. Compare the first [Exo 4:1], and the two last verses [Exo 4:30-31] of this fourth chapter, and see what a contrast, they form to one another. “And Moses answered, and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice; for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee.” “And Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed: and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.” The tremendous name JEHOVAH affixed as a signet to the record, and vouching its authority by sign upon sign, quickly produces belief; and inspires gratitude and joy corrected by reverence and godly fear. So far, then, the way is cleared, and Moses is no longer rejected as an upstart and intruder, as presuming to take upon himself the office of prince and judge over his brethren. But this is the smallest difficulty in the way. Who does not eagerly cleave to the prospect of returning liberty? Men believe things incredible, attempt things impossible, endure things intolerable, when freedom, precious freedom is the object. No wonder then that oppressed, groaning Israel should greedily listen to the voice of this heavenly charmer. But the grand difficulties are yet behind. Their fetters will not fall off by a wish. Their fond desires dictate not the edicts of Pharaoh. The smarting of the strokes of their task-master whips are not to be conjured away by a sound. The question is not, will Israel believe; but, will the king of Egypt comply? Every step Moses advances, he finds a new and growing proof of the truth and faithfulness of God. For the same mouth which declared concerning the children of Israel, “they shall hearken unto thy voice,” declared concerning Pharaoh, “I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no not by a mighty hand.” The faith and obedience of the one, therefore, and the insolence and pride of the other, equally and conjointly demonstrated to Moses, that the Lord had spoken unto him.

Armed, therefore, with a command from on high, confident of the goodness of their cause, and exalted above the fear of man, Moses and his brother advance boldly into the presence of the king, and make their requisition in these lofty and majestic words; “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.” In some ancient Jewish fragments, we have an account of four miracles, by which Moses signalized his entrance into Egypt. First, he made fire to issue out of the earth, in the eyes of all Israel, and thereby produced confidence in him as their deliverer. Secondly, being shut up in prison by order of Pharaoh, he broke the bars, burst open the gates, struck the guards with death, and released

himself. Thirdly, he pronounced in the ears of the king, the name of JEHOVAH--at the sound of which that prince became deaf, and after a certain interval recovered his hearing, through the interposition of him who had taken it away. Fourthly, by the use of the same awful name, he deprived all the Egyptian priests of sense and motion. To this the Rabbis add, that on entering the palace of the tyrant, he was suddenly clothed with a dreadful form, and a countenance bright and majestic, like that of an angel. But we have no need to resort to fancy for a description of the magnificence of the scene, neither is there reason to suppose that any part of the glory of Moses consisted in personal luster. His Employer and his errand lend him sufficient dignity and importance, without the glare which dazzles the eye.

Whatever were the outward appearance of Moses, his message, we know, was treated by Pharaoh with insolence and contempt in these words; “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice, to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.” We are not to conclude that Pharaoh was an atheist, from his using this impious language. No: Egypt was a country wholly given to superstition; a land which had multiplied deities to itself. It was Jehovah whom he scorned to acknowledge. It was the God of Israel whom he despised. He judged of the power of their Patron and Protector from their own present forlorn condition. The methods which Moses and Aaron employed to obtain the end of their mission, is a beautiful, an instructive, and an alarming representation of the conduct of Providence towards sinners in general. They begin with delivering a plain message in the name of their Master. Being repulsed, they proceed to argue and expostulate. A deaf ear being turned to the voice of reason and humanity, they have recourse to more extraordinary proofs of the weight and authority of their commission; proofs which, indeed, mark an Almighty arm; but an arm stretched out to convince, not to crush. A bold defiance being given to Omnipotence, what other method of working conviction and of procuring respect is left, but to let it fall with all its dreadful weight on the head of the defier?

It happened to Israel as it often does to men struggling to get free from the pressure of calamity, their efforts only serve to plunge them deeper in the mire; and it happened to Moses and Aaron, as it sometimes befalls men actuated by a similar good intention, but with less title and encouragement, their interference hurts those whom it was meant to serve; and they have the mortification of seeing the miseries of their poor brethren cruelly increased, through what might be deemed their own zeal and officiousness.--The inflexible tyrant avenges himself, for the freedom taken with the king of Egypt by persons so low and contemptible, upon the bleeding shoulders of thousands of wretches, who could not redress themselves, and who durst not complain. Miserable condition indeed! where the caprice of one man determines the fate of millions! Happy the nation where not men but laws, govern!

Providence, in this instance, seems resolved to try how far savage cruelty and patient suffering can go; but ready to interfere in both, when they have come to the extreme. Israel is not prepared for salvation, till the cup of woe is full, and deliverance is despaired of from every quarter save Heaven: and Pharaoh feels not the rod of God’s anger, till having filled up the measure of his iniquity, hardened his heart against God and against man, poured contempt upon mercy, and braved infinite justice, he exalts himself into an awful monument to every impenitent sinner, of the desperate madness of fighting with his Maker.

Moses is ready to sink afresh, under this cruel disappointment. The reproaches of the unhappy sufferers, called, forced, lashed into labor, beyond what their strength could bear, cut him to the heart, and again he shrinks from the task which was imposed on him and in these desponding words, he ventures to pour out the anguish of his soul before the Lord; “Wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? Why is it that thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people, neither hast thou delivered thy people at all.”

Thus far has flowed the angry tide of proud, imperial passion: and thus low has ebbed the trembling, retreating stream of baffled expectation. And now, “it is time, Lord, that thou work!” To the one he saith, “Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.” To the other, “Return, and fill all thy channels, and overflow all thy banks.” The angel of the Lord begins with reassuring Moses himself, by a recapitulation of the tenor of the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, under the sanction of his name as the Lord God Almighty. In all their wanderings, weaknesses, and distresses they had been encouraged to trust in a Being, omnipotent to protect them, all-sufficient to supply their wants. But their posterity were henceforth to know him by another name, and under a new description, even the incommunicable, unutterable name which denotes eternal, unchangeable self-existence; deriving nothing from any, but conferring upon all, life, and breath, and all things; who is above all, through all, and in all; “the same yesterday, today, and forever:” and, of consequence, true to his word, faithful in keeping covenant, unalterable in his decrees!

Under the seal of that most tremendous, most animating and inspiring name, Moses is again dispatched to the people, with the assurance of a speedy, an instantaneous appearance in their behalf. But alas! their spirit is broken by the long continuance and accumulated weight of their calamities. They have been disappointed so often, that they can believe, can hope no loner; and the message delivered by Moses is like a charming song upon the ear of a deaf or a dead man. He is sent from the people to Pharaoh, with a repetition of the demand of Heaven upon him. But alas! the messenger himself has caught the desponding spirit of the unhappy men whom he had been last visiting; and the heart of Pharaoh has not in the least relented. Heaven seems to have interposed somewhat too late; the cause appears lost. Let us judge nothing rashly; let us not judge before the time. Let us humbly and patiently wait the issue, and then condemn if we dare, if we can.

Moses at the bush saw God, under the appearance of a flame of fire; but no man can see God and live. “No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” The deliverer of Israel needed himself to be nurtured and prepared for the discharge of his high office; but a Savior of a lost world entered upon the execution of his infinitely more arduous task, every way qualified to bring it to a happy conclusion. The Jewish lawgiver stood himself condemned by the law, and was a partaker with others in guilt and transgression; the Christian Leader was “holy, harmless, and undefiled.” Moses undertook the work assigned to him, slowly and reluctantly; but, O with what readiness did the friend of mankind press forward to the perfecting of his kind design; “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.”[*]Psa 40:7-8 “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished?”[*]Luk 12:50 And yet there was no shame, no pain, no cross in the way of Moses; whereas the Captain of salvation was to be “made perfect through sufferings;” nevertheless he advanced undismayed to the combat.

“With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.”[*]Luk 22:15 Moses frequently recoiled from the conflict, shrunk from the difficulty and danger, failed in the hour of trial; but our great Leader and Commander went on “conquering and to conquer;” turned not back; desisted not from doing and from suffering, till he could say, “It is finished.” The Sun of righteousness shineth in his strength, let every star hide his diminished head. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

044. Moses--Pharaoh Judged

Moses--Pharaoh Judged

Exo 6:1. Then the Lord said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do unto Pharaoh; for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land. The history of the divine conduct is the best illustration of the nature of God. Do we desire to know what the Supreme Being is? We have but to consider what he does. Are we anxious to be satisfied of the truth of the declarations made by the great Jehovah concerning himself in his word? Let us compare them with the history and experience of men in every age. The proofs of the divine goodness and mercy are written in characters so fair, and are so frequently presented to our view, that not to observe them must argue the grossest stupidity and inattention; and not to acknowledge, love, and adore the glorious source of that unbounded goodness, must argue the blackest ingratitude. When the Lord makes himself known by the judgments which he executes, we see him advancing, to use the ideas and the language of men, with slow and reluctant steps. When misery is to be relieved, benefits conferred, or sins forgiven, the blessing outruns expectation, nay, even desire. But when the wicked are to be punished, justice seems to regret the necessity under which it is laid, to maintain itself, and the sinner is not destroyed till, to his own conviction, his condemnation is acquitted of unrighteousness, and till every thing around him calls for vengeance. The wickedness of the old world was so great, that God is said to have “repented that he had made man.” Nevertheless, after God had threatened to destroy the human race with a deluge, a reprieve of many years is granted, to afford space and means for averting the calamity by repentance. Abraham was permitted, nay, encouraged to intercede for the sinful, the devoted cities of the plain of Jordan; and the righteousness of so small a number as, five persons would have saved the whole people of those regions. The nations of Canaan were not expelled, to make way for Israel, till the measure of their iniquity was full; and the haughty spirit of Pharaoh was not brought low, by wonder upon wonder, by plague upon plague, till he had hardened his heart against the power of God, and the sufferings of men, and thereby made himself a “vessel of wrath fitted for destruction.” The awful scene which we are this night to contemplate, is, in more respects than one, singular and unexampled. We are not only presented with a series of miracles, a demonstration of the tremendous power of Almighty God, but, what is still more extraordinary, they are a series of miracles, all marked with uncommon rigor and severity. The wise and righteous Governor of the world seems, in this instance, to have deviated from the usual lenity of his proceeding; as if determined to make men tremble before him, and to stand in awe of his power and justice, as well as to hope in his mercy.

Moses and Aaron, though their former embassy to Pharaoh had met with a reception so mortifying to themselves, and so fatal to their afflicted brethren, are obliged and encouraged, at God’s command, to undertake a second. And the haughty tyrant having dared to reject the first, as delivered in the name of an unknown God, they are now furnished with credentials which carried their own authority on their foreheads, and which were calculated to convince everything but rooted infidelity, of the divine power by which they were issued. First, they make reason speak.

And had Pharaoh been wise, no other monitor had been necessary. But a deaf ear being turned to that meek and heavenly charmer, it becomes needful to employ a stronger and more forcible language. Being again introduced, they again deliver their message, and are again treated with scorn. Aaron, as he was commanded, having the rod of God in his hand, casts it upon the round before Pharaoh and his court, and lo! it instantly becomes animated; it is converted into a serpent, armed with deadly poison. When Moses first beheld this strange sight, he “was afraid, and would have fled:” but Pharaoh appears not in the least alarmed. The same fire melts wax, and hardens clay; the same doctrine is the savor of life unto life in them that believe, and of death unto death in them that perish.

Some interpreters have alleged, that this transformation was not only miraculous, but emblematical, and that it was intended to humble this tyrannical and sanguinary prince; by exhibiting a representation of his own character, and of his subservience to the power of that God whom he had presumed to defy. What a sudden and striking change, through the permission of Providence, takes place! A harmless rod or shepherd’s crook, the emblem of mild, wise, and good government, is changed into a poisonous snake, the emblem of cruelty and oppression. And lo, at the divine pleasure, the poison is again extracted, the deadly tooth is plucked out, and the fiery serpent becomes a harmless rod again. And thus in general, afflictive providences are either the gentle rod of a wise father to admonish, to correct, and to reform; or the keen two-edged sword of an adversary, to cleave asunder, to devour, and to destroy. Whether this were intended or not, it is evident Pharaoh understood it not, or disregarded it. And, as infidelity is always desirous of fortifying itself by something that has the semblance of reason: and, while it pretends to doubt of everything, is, in truth, the most simple and credulous principle in the world. Pharaoh affects to treat the miracle which was wrought by Moses and Aaron, as a mere trick, a feat of necromancy or magic. He calls for such of his own people as professed these arts, to confront them with the Israelitish ambassadors: in order to oppose skill to skill, and to diminish the respect and attention claimed by Moses and Aaron, to their mission, and to their God, by showing similar or equal signs, performed by Jannes and Jambres, the votaries of an Egyptian deity. The magicians confidently undertake the task, and, through the permission of Heaven, partly succeed. Their rods cast upon the ground, likewise become serpents. The heart of Pharaoh exults, and the magicians of Egypt laugh the Jewish shepherds to scorn. But the triumph of unbelief is only for a moment. Aaron’s rod, in its serpent state, swallowed up their rods. Reasoning man will ask, why were not impiety and infidelity checked in their very first attempt! Why were the demons of Egypt left in possession of the slightest vestige of power, to oppose or to imitate the mighty power of God? Why grant to Pharaoh and to his magicians, even the momentary triumph of their incantations? The reason is obvious. Had the Egyptian enchantments been attended with no success, and produced no effect, infidelity would have had its plea at hand. “Your pretended miracle is mere illusion, it is an attempt to mislead our understanding, by imposing upon our senses. Though we cannot produce this particular effect, or perform this particular trick, by our art, we can effect wonders equally or much more astonishing.” But, by being permitted to succeed in their first effort, and to rival Moses and Aaron so far in power and reputation, they are insensibly drawn in to give their sanction to the sign performed by the Hebrews, for the sake of their own credit; and no sooner is it stamped for currency, with their image and superscription, than they and their abettors are confounded, by seeing the wretched impression of their art effaced, absorbed, annihilated; and no image remains visible, but that of the living and true God. The power which swallowed up the magicians’ rods,

could as easily have prevented the transmutation; but the confutation is much more complete by the one than it would have been by the other. Impiety has shut her own mouth, and infidelity stands stripped of her last and only plea. An opportunity is here presented of instituting an inquiry, which has greatly employed and violently divided the learned and ingenious; namely, whether the supernatural effects, here and elsewhere in Scripture ascribed to the agency of demons and malignant spirits, through the practice of magical arts, were real miracles, that is, alterations of the known and established laws of nature, by the permission of God; or only dexterous impositions, practised by subtle artists, on the simple and credulous, giving the appearance of reality to what had no existence? We shall not take upon us to determine, whether of these two opinions is most conformable to reason, and to the analogy of faith. But the opportunity having offered, we shall take the liberty of suggesting some considerations, tending less to settle the question, than to show that, perhaps, it is not capable of a solution. But our grand aim shall be to show, that, whichever side men are pleased to take, the miracles wrought in support of truth, through the agency of the Author of all good, preserve all their superiority, and the truth itself shines in all its luster.

And, first, if we try the cause by the letter of the narration of Moses, it will immediately strike every reader, that these extraordinary feats were actually produced by the power of the devil. The history relates the change that passed on the magicians' rods, in the selfsame terms which describe the transmutation of Aaron's; and the name given to these execrable men, is the same that belongs to persons who have devoted themselves to the wicked one. On the other hand we know, that Scripture, in describing natural objects, usually accommodates itself to the prevailing notions of the ages and nations in which the inspired authors lived and wrote; that it condescends even to adopt the language, the ideas, and the prejudices of the vulgar; and, that it employs, not the accurate language and just ideas of philosophy, but those of common life, in treating the greatest and most important subjects. We thence conclude, that whether the enchantments of the magicians produced real miracles, or were deceptions merely, the Spirit of God would certainly have narrated the fact in the selfsame terms. From the letter of the sacred history, therefore, we can draw no conclusive argument for either side of the question.

We shall have equal reason to suspend our judgment, if we try, secondly, to decide it by the relations transmitted to us, from various ages and regions of the world, concerning real or seeming enchantments. It would, perhaps, be as difficult to persuade the men of our own age, that such a thing as witchcraft ever existed, as it would have been, to convince our ancestors in some former ages, that most of the effects ascribed to Satan and his agents, had no foundation but in the cunning, dexterity, and knavery of one part of mankind practicing on the ignorance, credulity, and simplicity of another. But, as it would betray a silly and ridiculous easiness of belief, on the one hand, to admit as true, the ten thousand stories, which the times of ignorance devised, related, and believed; and with which our own childhood may have been seared and alarmed: so, it would certainly be an unreasonable and absurd degree of skepticism, on the other, to reject as fabulous every relation of this sort, however well authenticated. Wise and good men have proved, by arguments amounting almost to demonstration, the absurdity of admitting the actual interference of a diabolical power in order to deceive mankind. And wise and good men, by evidence apparently as clear and satisfactory, have endeavored to establish the certainty of such interference in particular instances. And this seems a good reason against pronouncing hastily

upon the nature of the sorceries practised by the magicians of Egypt.

We shall find ourselves equally in the dark, if we attempt to form our judgment, in the third place, on metaphysical notions. Our minds are exceedingly limited with respect to all objects, and particularly with respect to the nature of spirits. We know, from experience, that the soul, little as it comprehends its own nature and essence, has a wonderful influence over every particle of that body to which it is united: but we can form no notion of the power and influence, which spirits of a different order may possess over larger portions of matter, and even over our bodies, and, of consequence, over our minds. Much less are we able to conceive what an extent of power the Father of spirits may, for wise purposes, have permitted to evil spirits, over the whole world of nature, which has fallen into disorder, and is laboring under the curse of Heaven, on account of man's apostasy. The limited nature of human understanding, therefore, likewise forbids us to decide too peremptorily on a subject so obviously involved in difficulty.

Finally, the principles of religion here refuse to lend us their aid. In whatever tends to convey saving light to the soul, or peace to the conscience; in all that relates to the government of the heart, or the wise conduct of the life, religion is ever at hand, and kindly offers her aid, nay, presses it upon us; but, in questions of doubtful disputation, in which men rather aim at gratifying a restless curiosity, or wild imagination, than at improving the understanding, or mending the heart, revelation rather checks and represses inquiry, than promises or lends her assistance. It is sufficient then, for our purpose, to say, that of whatever nature were the incantations of the Egyptian magicians, and whatever their effects, the God of truth, by the hand of Moses and Aaron, put his infinite superiority beyond a possibility of doubt; and extorted an acknowledgment of it from the mouths of the magicians them selves. But though they are put to silence, and Pharaoh is confounded, by the miracle of Aaron's rod swallowing up their rods, yet they are not brought to see the insufficiency of their art, neither is he yet reduced to yield obedience to an authority asserted by so high a hand. A miracle, therefore, which only threatened, but continued harmless; a miracle which proved fatal only to the instruments of sorcery and enchantment, failing to produce compliance, it becomes at length necessary to follow up the remonstrances of reason and humanity and the evidence of signs, powerful indeed, yet innocent, by the operation of signs that shall be felt: signs, which shall address themselves to the understanding, and the senses, at once: and shall force conviction upon the most careless and incredulous. The river, the Nile, was the chief ground of glorifying to the Egyptians. It was the ornament of their country, and the source of its fertility. Deriving the moisture, necessary to fructification, from thence, they vainly boasted that they were independent of the heavens; standing in no need, like the rest of the world, of the refreshing drops which fall from thence. Egypt, therefore, is first smitten, in the darling source of its pride; and that which presumptuously put itself in the place of God, first feels the power of God; and becomes, not a cause of vain-glorious boasting, but a loathing and an abomination to its worshippers. Smitten with the awful rod, its waters are instantly and universally turned into blood. Horrid change: an inundation of the river too scant, threatened a famine: an inundation too copious, threatened a deluge. But, O dreadful reflection! the river no longer flows with that precious refreshing fluid, which gives drink and renewed vigor to thirsty man, to thirsty cattle, to the parched ground; but a fluid which taints the air; which excites abhorrence, instead of satisfying the appetite; and which kills what it contains, instead of communicating life and fruitfulness wherever it is diffused. And should it rise and swell, what is it? An abominable deluge of blood. Its streams had

been often stained with the blood of Hebrew innocents; and its savage master is now punished with seeing its vast channel filled, from shore to shore, with one crimson tide. In this awful glass we are made to see, that whatsoever men exalt into the room of God, and worship as God, will sooner or later become a loathing or a curse to them; and that the instrument of their sin assuredly will be converted, at length, into the instrument of their punishment.

“And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments.” Foolish, unhappy men; to try to increase an evil which was already intolerable! If their art could have done anything, it had been more wisely employed in endeavoring to purify and sweeten those polluted streams. To succeed in multiplying blood was ruinous. The greater the power of their art, the more pernicious it was to themselves and to their country. And this is the whole extent of the boasted power of Satan: it is a power to do evil, a power to destroy: but a power destitute both of capacity and of inclination to do good. Whereas that of Heaven, though it be an ability to do evil, is an ability to this effect, which it exercises rarely, and with reluctance: whereas the doing of good, and the diffusing of happiness, is its habitual object, and its constant employment.--Vain man would be independent, and sometimes boast that he is so; and yet, what is he? A creature sustained by bread, and refreshed by water; he lives by respiring the air which he sucks in; he depends, every instant of his existence, on the aid of every element. Let the quantity or the qualities of any one of them be ever so little changed, and that moment he becomes miserable. One rainy or droughty season makes whole nations to languish; the frost of a night destroys the hope of a year; and a single blast of wind sends mighty navies to the bottom. There is no need of a miracle to plague those whom God means to punish. All nature is at war with his adversaries: the stars, in their courses, fight against those who fight with God. O may we never be so mad as to provoke that Power by which we are continually supported, and from which we cannot flee!

After a chastisement so awful, who could have imagined that Pharaoh was able still to stand out? But the human heart exhibits a mystery of iniquity, which nothing but multiplied experience could render credible. The next summons has a threatening annexed to it; and the moment of refusal is to be the moment of execution. The plague threatened, being particularly specified beforehand, was likely to excite the greater alarm, and thereby to drive the offender to the means of prevention; but, it would appear, Pharaoh despised it. What, terrified at a swarm of frogs! vermin, loathsome indeed, but despicably harmless. How ignorantly do men estimate the judgments of God, when they consider only the instrument which he employs. Men effect little with large and abundant means; God performs wonders with things mean and contemptible. Is a haughty tyrant to be subdued? There is no need of more than twelve legions of angels; an army of frogs, in the hand of God, is sufficient for the purpose. Again, the magicians are weak enough to assist the plague; at least, they affect to lend their aid; and rather than not be thought mighty, will seek to themselves a name by doing mischief. Again, the river, which ministered so much to their pride, is made the minister of avenging Heaven to punish them. As its waters were lately all blood, to poison the fishes which it contained, and to taint the air, so now they are all putrefaction, to give dreadful life to an innumerable race of odious vermin, for humbling the proud. Every creature is, and does, just that which God would have it to be, and to do--it becomes either a blessing or a curse, at his command! And, were we wise enough, to assist our weak, or to correct our erroneous vision, by the optics of the sanctuary, we should behold, under many a fair and flattering form, much loathsomeness and deformity.

Pharaoh despised this plague, while it was only threatened, but feels it to be no slight one, when it falls upon him: and he is, in this respect, the image of many a thoughtless sinner, who trifle with the judgments denounced in the Word of God, till bitter experience teaches them, that every arrow from the quiver of the Almighty is both penetrating and poisonous. The proud heart which refused to bend, at length begins to break; and a slow, lingering, partial, reluctant consent is given to the demand of Heaven; and permission is granted to the people, to go, “that they may do sacrifice unto the Lord.”--The concession, slight as it is, procures a respite. Mercy, ever on the wing, flies to succor the miserable.

We have seen Moses and Aaron executing the judgments of avenging Heaven, by the agency of a rod. Christ himself is the powerful word, by which God made and sustains worlds; the all potent instrument to save, and to destroy. “With righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity, for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.” Moses acted by a delegated power: Jesus has all power in himself. “Moses verily was faithful in all his house as a servant: but Christ as a son over his own house.” The same Moses was the deliverer of Israel, and the scourge of Egypt: the same Jesus, who is the author of eternal salvation to them that believe, “shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire: taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” “All judgment is committed to the Son.” “He shall reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet.” “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”

“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Amen.

Chapter 45

045. Moses--Let the People Go!

Moses--Let the People Go!

Exo 10:7. And Pharaoh's servant said unto him, How long shall this man be a snare unto us? Let the men go that they may serve the Lord their God: knowest thou not yet, that Egypt is destroyed?

How very different an appearance do objects wear, according as they are beautified and exalted by the favor of Heaven, or blasted and disfigured by the curse of an offended God! Eden, before man's apostasy, Eden, fresh planted, by the sovereign hand of the Creator, containing every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, and in the midst of it was the tree of life; but O sad reverse, the fatal effect of transgression! "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee;" and the tree of life is removed to happier regions, or guarded from guilty man's approach, by the flaming swords of the cherubim. The plain of Jordan, well watered everywhere, and beautiful as the garden of the Lord, delighted the eyes, and allured the heart of Lot, when he separated himself from his uncle Abraham. But O how awfully changed that once delicious spot! The day when Lot went out of it, "Abraham looked towards Sodom and Gomorrah, and towards all the land of the plain, and beheld, and lo, the smoke of the country went up, as the smoke of a furnace." What a charming prospect did Egypt present in the days of her glory? Her fertile surface, covered with the silver flux of her stately, overflowing river, except where thousands of populous cities lifted up their proud heads to the skies; or, when the river retreated, her golden, luxuriant harvests waving with the fragrant wind. How changed the scene, when the Nile ran, not water, but blood: after the murrain had destroyed all their cattle; after the lightning and the hail had blasted every tree, had devoured every herb, and the "locusts had consumed what the hail had left!" What makes earth resemble heaven; and men like angels! The presence, the blessing, and the image of God! What once covered the earth with water, and shall at length destroy it by fire? What sinks men to the level of diabolical, dammed spirits, and adds tenfold horror to gloomy hell? The wrath of the Almighty, and the deprivation of his glorious similitude. Nature sinks under the description and the denunciation of the divine displeasure. What must it be to endure its dreadful effects, without intermission, and without end!

Instead of going into a particular detail of the subsequent plagues wherewith God afflicted Egypt, we shall suggest a few historical and practical remarks upon the subject in general, serving to unfold the windings and the workings of the human heart, to illustrate and vindicate the ways of Providence, to expose the madness of striving against God, and to display the wisdom, the safety, and the happiness of submitting readily, cheerfully, and universally to the divine authority.

And, first; We observe, that as God has many inconceivable methods of doing good to men; so his power of punishing is unlimited, and the treasures of his wrath are far beyond what fear itself, which magnifies every object, can fancy. Of his glorious capacity and disposition to bless mankind, who has not enjoyed the sweetest, and frequently repeated experience? Whose life is so short, as not to contain a history of benefits, a display of mercy, a profusion of loving kindness, which astonish while they delight? Whose portion of felicity is so scanty, as not to exhibit wonders of

goodness infinitely above the desert of angels? What understanding is so brutish, what heart so ungrateful, as not to recur, at the first call, to a multitude of special blessings, pressing upon the memory, urging prior or superior claims of acknowledgment and praise? Need you to be told, ungrateful, forgetful children of men! Need you to be told, the value of an uninterrupted and steady course of good health; or of the more sensible benefit of recovery from sickness and pain? Shall I send you back to years that are long past, or recall yesterday to your recollection? Shall I remind you of that common bounty which gives you, day by day, your daily bread; or of that singular, shall I say miraculous, interposition, which seemed to drop down manna around your tabernacle? Must all ages, and nations, and regions of the world be made to pass in review before your eyes; or will you confine your observation to your own moment of existence, your own handbreadth of space, your own two or three acquaintances and contemporaries, your own pittance of knowledge? Shall the glories of nature, or the wonders of Providence, be unfolded to your view? Will you contemplate the fatness and fragrance of the fertile earth, or the vastness and brilliancy of the azure vault of heaven? Will you confine yourselves to things seen and temporal: or borne as on the eagle's wing contemplate things which are unseen and eternal? Will you converse with your fellow mortals on the surface of this molehill, or join in the songs and raptures of angels, who surround the throne, and of the spirits of just men made perfect, immortal intelligences, perfectly awake to the full perception of their blessedness? Choose you to dwell on the transitory comforts of the life that now is, or to anticipate the joys substantial, sincere, and lasting, of that which is to come? Creation spreads her fair, her ample, her splendid page to the delighted eye. The mysterious volume, sealed to the careless reader as with seven seals, to the serious and attentive soul unveils the hidden wisdom of God, and, written with a sunbeam, there stands recorded the gracious purpose of Him, who "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

Wouldst thou be satisfied, O man, that the great God has means innumerable, unutterable, incomprehensible, of conferring happiness on mankind? Think, O think, how he has loved the world, in the redemption of it by Christ Jesus! Think how many demonstrations of grace meet in that one, "God spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all!" And when you have ruminated, and ruminated on the history of redeeming love! when you have recovered from the astonishment and joy of contemplating what God has done for you, lose yourself afresh in the prospect of what the Lord hath laid up for the heirs of salvation--in the prospect of that great, exceeding, and "eternal weight of glory," "which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and of which it hath not entered into the heart of man" to form any adequate conception or idea! Fly, O my soul, whithersoever thou wilt; settle wherever thou wilt, infinite goodness still supports thy flight, and settle thou must on the rock of ages at last.

But, ah! my friends, this God, almighty to save, is also mighty to destroy. As his bounty is an unexhausted source of plenty to bless his friends, so his justice is a capacious quiver, stored with innumerable poisoned arrows, to shed the blood, to drink up the spirits of his adversaries. Think, in how many parts art thou vulnerable? In every particle of thy frame, in every faculty of thy soul. Every sense opens a passage for the entrance of an avenging God. The understanding at his command, expands to the dreadful perception of justice that will not bend; of severity that knows not to relax; of vengeance that admits not of pity. Memory, roused by that trumpet which awakes the dead, gives new form and substance to the hideous specters of transgressions long since departed, and which were vainly imagined to be laid in the grave forever; and the guilty wretch is

dragged to the bitter recollection of what he once dwelt on with unhallowed delight, and now would fain bury in eternal oblivion; or which he gladly would, at the price of worlds, redeem from the history of his wretched life. As memory, to fulfil the righteous judgment of God, can readily summon up all that is past, in order to awaken remorse, and inspire terror; so fear launches forth into the boundless, endless regions of futurity, and rouses despair; and in the very abysses of burning hell, shudders at the thought of a deeper gulf, and of a hotter flame. Read, O sinner, the history of the plagues of Egypt, and tremble! Suppose, for a moment, the cup wherewith thou art ready to quench thy burning thirst, instantly turned into blood, to the loathing of thy soul and thy flesh. Suppose thy body struck with an universal leprosy, or the dust under thy feet quickened into abominable vermin: the air around thy head impregnated with swarms of noisome insects; thy sun extinguished for three tedious lingering days, and the thunder of an angry God rolling over thy guilty, devoted habitation; and suppose all this to be but the beginning of sorrow; the mere threatenings of wrath to come; woe that may be endured, torment that may expire: for ah! from yonder fearful pit arises the smoke of a fire that shall not be quenched; smoke that shall ascend forever and ever. I hear groans bursting from the bosom of despair; and the rattling of everlasting adamantine chains. Behold the wild looks, the agonizing pangs of that poor rich man, when, from the flames of his torment, he beholds Lazarus in Abraham's bosom: when he beholds heaven removed to an inaccessible distance: heaven disjoined by an impassable gulf. Heaven, the rest of the weary, and the reward of the faithful, affords to him a momentary glimpse of its joys, only to embitter remorse, only to pierce the soul with keener pangs, and to heat the furnace seven times hotter than it was before. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

After serious reflection upon these things, our second observation would seem ill founded, and destitute of all probability and truth, did not all history, and daily experience confirm the woeful certainty of it. It is this: that by frequent indulgence, and inveterate habits of sin, the heart may at length become quite callous; may be rendered equally insensible to the calls of mercy, and the alarms of justice. We are struck with astonishment, at the sight of a poor, infatuated wretch like Pharaoh, repeatedly braving that power which returned to crush and humble him, and slighting that grace which as often relented and afforded space and means for repentance. Would to God there were room to think the representation more unnatural than it is, and that the character of Pharaoh were a rarity in the world. But alas! what is the life of most men, but an habitual fighting against God? Upon whom falls the weight of our remark! Upon a few thoughtless, hardened wretches only, who have found out the secret of lulling conscience to rest; who, having conquered the sense of fear and of shame, commit iniquity with greediness; who "hide not their sin, like Sodom, but publish it like Gomorrah?" Let us not deceive ourselves, but watch over our own hearts, and "exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." "There stands Pharaoh, the daring, the presumptuous sinner: whom goodness could not mollify, nor judgments subdue; and let him who is without sin cast the first stone at him. Who can flatter himself with the thought, that the errors of his life were the mere inadvertencies of haste and inattention? Who can say of himself, "This fault I corrected, as soon as I discovered it? Having been once made sensible of the danger and wickedness of that sinful course, I instantly forsook it, and have returned to it no more. Smarting from the effects of my folly, I have never again dared to provoke the lash of my Father's chastening rod. The resolutions which I made in the clay of sickness, and sorrow, and calamity, I have faithfully remembered, and diligently kept. Vows made at the Lord's table, have made conscience to perform. The threatenings of God's word I have not

disregarded; the long-suffering of my God I have not abused." Alas! alas! the reverse of all this is the truth which condemns every one. Not a single, but repeated acts of intemperance, injustice, impurity, impiety; not casual and undesigned expressions, but deliberate and indulged habits of falsehood, malevolence, selfishness, and uncharitableness, place us as criminals at the bar, by the side of Pharaoh, and forbid us to condemn him, because we also have sinned. What avails it me to say, that my offence is not the same with his? Perhaps I had neither power, nor inclination, nor opportunity, for committing that man's transgression. Have I therefore washed my hands in innocence? Can I therefore plead, "not guilty?" The great question is, Have I kept myself free from mine own transgression? And, spared of God to make the inquiry--let Pharaoh's impenitence, and Pharaoh's doom, awaken us to a sense of our danger; and urge a speedy flight from the wrath that is to come.

Thirdly, This history leads us to remark the great difference between the slow, reluctant, partial submission of fear, and the prompt, cheerful, and unreserved compliance of a grateful and affectionate heart. Pharaoh, like a sullen, sturdy slave will not move a step, till stimulated by a fresh application of the whip; the moment that the pain of the stripe ceases, he stands still, or turns back. The first summons is treated by him with insolence and scorn; and he resolves that Israel shall not have a single moment's relaxation from their burdens. Brought to himself by a few strokes of the rod of God's anger, he yields a tardy consent to the intermission of their labors for a little while, and to their doing sacrifice to their God: but it must be "in the land where they dwelt, every in Egypt." That alternative being rejected, and a new demand made, backed with a new threatening, and followed with a new plague, he agrees to permit the male part of Israel who were arrived at man's estate, to resort to the place appointed; but he is determined to detain their wives, children, and cattle as hostages for their return. Constrained, at length, by dint of judgments, to let the whole congregation depart, he endeavors to stipulate, that they should not go very far off; and not till broken by the last dreadful plague, can he be brought to resign his usurped authority over the freeborn sons of God.

We often find men pretending to make a merit of giving up what it is no longer in their power to retain. After a man has squandered away his means, in riot and extravagance, deserves he praise for living sparingly? Another has ruined his constitution by intemperance; is his forced continence an object of admiration? By no means. He has discontinued his debaucheries through disability, not from inclination and conviction of his error. Old age has debilitated a third! is he therefore virtuous? No, no: his vices have forsaken him, not he his vices. When a man serves through fear, he does no more than he needs must; but love is liberal and generous, and stands not questioning, "yea hath God said?" but, ever on the watch, ever on the wing, the moment that the voice of God is heard, it is ready to reply, "Here am I, Lord, send me." This leads me to remark,

Fourthly, The wisdom of giving up, at the command of God, with alacrity what we must give up at last, whether we will or not.--What a pitiful figure does Pharaoh make in the end! baffled in every attempt, driven out of every fortress, dishonored in the eyes of his own servants, transmitted to latest posterity a monument of pride and impotence. Were not the proud man blind and infatuated, he would yield through self-love; he would submit to preserve his own consequence, at least the appearance of it. Unhappily for us, our will stands but too often in opposition to the will of God. When they come to clash, who ought in reason to give way? Who must of necessity submit? Knowest thou not, O man, that to destroy thyself, thou needest but to follow thy own headstrong

inclination: knowest thou not, that the gratification, not the disappointment of illicit desire, is ruinous? But who ever made a sacrifice of inclination to duty, and had reason to repent of it? Who knows not, that to yield submission is to obtain a triumph? In a contention where there is a probability, or even a possibility of our prevailing, it may be worth while to risk a combat; but who, except a madman, will seek to encounter a foe by whom he is sure to be defeated? And yet, in that mad, that ruinous strife, see how many are engaged! Behold the stars in their courses ranged on the part of their Creator; behold all nature standing in arms to espouse his cause; and who must be overcome? Against whom is this formidable preparation made? There stands the enemy, in all his weakness and folly; a crawling worm on a dunghill provoking his fate, tampering with eternal ruin, hardening himself against God, and yet thinking to prosper. The influence of no malignant star is necessary to blast him; there is a necessity for no earthquake to swallow him up no archangel armed with a sword of fire, need descend to cut him asunder: his breath is in his own nostrils; he is sinking into his dust; his own ridiculous efforts are wasting and consuming him. Foolish creature and unwise! why wilt thou contend longer? “Wherefore shouldst thou be stricken any more?” Constrain not him to be thy foe who has towards thee the disposition of the best of friends, and who is mighty to save, even “to the uttermost, them that come unto him.”

Fifthly, In the course of these dreadful plagues, we observe, not only the pride of man effectually humbled, but the power of Satan trampled in the dust, under the feet of the Most High. It is highly interesting to observe, by what gradual steps the enemy and the avenger is laid low, till he is at length destroyed. Presumption, at first, induces him, in confidence of a permitted power, to enter the lists and to try his strength with God. Aaron’s rod is turned into a serpent. The magicians attempt the same, and succeed. Their rods also become serpents. But Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods. By and by the water of the river is turned into blood, and the fishes die. The magicians, by their enchantments, madly assist the plague, and acquire a little transitory reputation, by doing mischief. Flushed with this farther success, they go on to imitate the miracles of Moses and Aaron; but, to their confusion, they fail there, where it seemed most probable that they should with greatest ease support their fame. That loathsome vermin, lice, is to be produced miraculously, which slovenliness and filth naturally produce without any effort. At the word of Moses the dust of the land is transformed into this noisome, nauseous insect. But the whole power of hell cannot effect, at the time, and in the manner which it would, what time and carelessness alone, in the usual course of things, would certainly have produced: and they feel themselves attacked with a plague which their art could not bring upon others. Finally, after having become the subjects of a miraculous calamity which might be borne, they are at length attacked with one absolutely intolerable, which drives them from the competition: they give up their silly arts of sorcery, and attempt to rival the true God no more. And thus, when the mystery of godliness shall be finished an astonished world shall behold the sleight and devices of Satan falling upon his own head, his momentary triumphs covering him with more accumulated disgrace, and his infernal malice and diabolical craft made ministering servants to the wisdom and goodness of God. A good reason, among many others, why we should judge nothing rashly before the time till the Lord cometh, who shall bring light out of obscurity, and fully vindicate his ways to men.

Sixthly, We observe how unlike the latter ends of things are to their beginnings. The world laughs at the idea of two feeble old men, issuing forth from a desert, the patrons of liberty; to force a mighty prince, and a powerful nation, to listen to the dictates of justice and humanity, and to

liberate a million of wretched creatures, whose spirits were totally broken by their miseries, and who seemed to have lost even the inclination of vindicating their own rights. Pharaoh despised them; the magicians defied them; Israel distrusted them; they themselves are ready to sink under the difficulty and danger of the enterprise. But, conducted of Heaven, they attempt, they proceed, they prosper, they overcome. They invade Egypt, two solitary, unsupported individuals! They leave it at the head of six hundred thousand men, fit to bear arms, with a corresponding number of females, besides old men and children, and a mixed multitude of non-descript persons; bidding defiance to the whole force of a wise and populous, and warlike country. And we see them in the course of a few years taking forcible possession of one of the strongest, most impracticable, and best defended countries in the world.

I need but hint to you the counterpart of this. Behold the unconnected son of a carpenter, at the head of twelve simple, illiterate fishermen, attacking the religious establishments of the whole globe, and prevailing. Behold him, armed with a few plain facts, and a few doctrines as plain, overturning the whole fabric of heathen mythology and worship; engrafting on the stock of Moses, and the legal dispensation, a scion from a nobler root; which has swallowed up the parent tree, has filled the earth with its branches, is feeding the nations to this day with its fruit, and is likely to maintain its place till all the gracious purposes of Heaven are accomplished. “It is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.” “When the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.” The next Lecture will, by divine favor, exhibit the institution and celebration of the first passover, with the event which gave occasion to it. May God bless what has been spoken. To him be glory and honor forever and ever.

046. Moses--Passover

Moses--Passover

Exo 12:1-3. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for a house. In the history of all nations, there are eras and events of peculiar importance, which extend their influence to future ages and generations, and are fondly commemorated by latest posterity. Hence, every day of the revolving year becomes, in its course, to one people or another, the anniversary of something memorable which befell their forefathers, and is remembered by their sons with triumph or with sorrow. Most of the religious observances which have obtained in the world, when traced up to their source, are found to originate in providential dispensations; and history thereby becomes the best interpreter of customs and manners. It is a most amusing employment, to observe the operation and progress of the human mind in this respect; and to consider how variously different men, and at different periods, have contrived to transmit to their children the memory of similar achievements, successes, or disasters. A great stone set up on end, a heap of stones, a mound of earth, and the like, were, in the earlier, ruder, simpler state of the world, the monuments of victory; and to dance around them with songs, on an appointed day, was the rustic commemoration of their rude and simple posterity. The triumphs and the death of heroes came, in process of time, to be remembered with conviviality and mirth, or with plaintive strains and solemn dirges. The hoary bard varied and enlivened the feast, by adapting to his rough voice or rougher harp the uncouth rhymes which he himself had composed, in praise of departed gallantry and virtue. As arts were invented and improved, the wise, the brave, and the good were preserved from oblivion by monuments more elegant, more intelligible, and more lasting. A more correct style of poetry, and a sweeter melody were cultivated. Sculpture and painting conveyed to children’s children an exact representation of the limbs and lineaments of the venerable men who adorned, who instructed, who saved their country. And thus, though dead, they continued to live and act in the animated canvass, in the breathing brass, or the speaking marble. At length, the part of the historian took up the cause of merit, and diffused over the whole globe, and handed down to the very end of time the knowledge of the persons and of the actions which should never die.

We are this evening to bestow our attention upon an institution altogether of divine appointment, intended to record an event of singular importance to the nation immediately affected by it, and which, according to its intention and in its consequences, has involved a great part of mankind.

Moses and Aaron having, as the instruments in the hand of Providence, chastised Egypt with nine successive and severe plagues, inflicted in the view of procuring Israel’s release, are at length dismissed by the unrelenting tyrant, with a threatening of certain death, should they ever again presume to come into his presence. Moses takes him at his word, and bids him a solemn, a long, and everlasting farewell. When men have finally banished from them their advisers and monitors,

and when God has ceased to be a reprover to them, their destruction cannot be very distant. Better it is to have the law to alarm, to threaten, and to chastise us, than to have it in anger altogether withdrawn. Better is a conscience that disturbs and vexes than a conscience laid fast asleep, than a conscience “seared as with a hot iron.”

What solemn preparation is made for the tenth and last awful plague of Egypt! God is about to reckon with Pharaoh and his subjects, for the blood of the Israelitish male children, doomed from the womb to death, by his cruel edict His eye pitied not nor spared the anguish of thousands of wretched mothers, bereaved of their children the instant they were born; and a righteous God pities, spares him not in the day of visitation. The circumstances attending this tremendous calamity are strikingly calculated to excite horror. First, God himself is the immediate author of it. Hitherto He had plagued Egypt by, means and instruments; “Stretch out thy hand:” “Say unto Aaron, Stretch forth thy hand with thy rod.” But now it is, “I will go out into the midst of Egypt.” “And it came to pass that at midnight the Lord smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sat on his throne, unto the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of cattle.” As mercies coming immediately from the hand of our heavenly Father are sweeter and better than those which are communicated through the channel of the creature; so judgments, issuing directly from the stores of divine wrath, are more terrible and overwhelming. The sword of an invading foe is a dreadful thing, but infinitely more dreadful is the sword of a destroying angel, or the uplifted hand of God himself.

Secondly, The nature and quality of the calamity greatly increase the weight of it. It is a wound there, where the heart is most susceptible of pain; an evil which undermines hope; hope, our refuge and our remedy under other evils. The return of another favorable season, may repair the wastes and compensate the scarcity of that which preceded it. A body emaciated or ulcerated all over, may recover strength, and be restored to soundness; and there is hope that the light of the sun may return, even after a thick darkness of three days. But what kindness of nature, what happy concurrence of circumstances, can reanimate the breathless clay, can restore an only son, a firstborn, stricken with death? The universality of this destruction is a third horrid aggravation of its woe. It fell with equal severity on all ranks and conditions; on the prince and the peasant; on the master and the slave. From every house the voice of misery bursts forth. No one is so much at leisure from his own distress as to pity, soothe, or relieve that of his wretched neighbor.

Fourthly, The blow was struck at the awful midnight hour, when every object assumes a more sable hue; when fear, aided by darkness, magnifies to a gigantic size, and clothes in a more hideous shape the real and fantastical, the seen and the unseen disturbers of silence and repose. To be prematurely awakened out of sleep by the dying groans of a friend suddenly smitten, to be presented with the ghastly image of death in a darling object lately seen and enjoyed in perfect health, to be forced to the acknowledgment of the great and holy Lord God, by such an awful demonstration of his presence and power! what terror and astonishment could equal this? The keen reflection that all this accumulated distress might have been prevented, was another cruel ingredient in the embittered cup. How would they now accuse their desperate madness, in provoking a power, which had so often and so forcibly warned them of their danger? If Pharaoh were not past feeling, how dreadful must have been the pangs which he felt, while he reflected, that after attempting to destroy a hapless, helpless race of strangers, who lay at his mercy, by the most unheard of cruelty and oppression, he had now ruined his own country, by an obstinate

perseverance in folly and impiety; that he had become the curse and punishment of a nation, of which he was bound by his office to be the father and protector; and that his own hopes were now blasted in their fairest, most flattering object, the heir of his throne and empire, because he regarded not the rights of humanity and mercy in the treatment of his vassals.

Finally, if their anguish admitted of a still higher aggravation, the distinction from first to last made between them and Israel, the blessed exemption which the oppressed Hebrews had enjoyed from all these calamities, especially from this last death, must have been peculiarly mortifying and afflictive. “But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast; that ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.” This partakes of the nature of that misery which the damned endure: who are represented as having occasional, distant, and transitory glimpses of the blessedness of heaven, only for their punishment, only to heighten the pangs of their own torments. Of the approach of their other woes, these unhappy persons had been repeatedly warned. But this, it would appear, came upon them suddenly and in a moment. They had gone to rest in security. The short respite which they enjoyed from suffering had stilled their apprehension; “surely,” said they, “the bitterness of death is past.” But ah? it is only the deceitful calm which precedes the hurricane or the earthquake. Let men never dream of repose from the righteous judgment of God, whatever they may have already endured, till they have forsaken their sins, and fled for refuge in the divine mercy.

It is now worth while to consider the notice given to God’s own people of this approaching evil, and the means which were appointed and employed to secure them from being involved in the general ruin. The event so destructive to Egypt, was intended to be the era of their liberty, and the means of their deliverance. They had hitherto reckoned the beginning of their year from the month Tisri, which answers to our September; which, as they supposed, was the time when the creation was begun and completed; but they are now positively enjoined to begin to reckon from the month Abib or Nisan, that is, March, in memory of a new creation; whereby their condition was totally changed, from servitude of the most abject kind, into freedom the most exalted and perfect, even the glorious liberty of the sons of God. They are distinctly informed of the stroke which Providence was meditating against Egypt, and of the precise time when the blow was to be struck. They are accordingly directed to two things; first, to provide for their own safety; and, secondly, to hold themselves in perfect readiness to take advantage of the permission to depart, which the panic occasioned by the death of the first-born should extort from Pharaoh. For the former of these purposes, every particular family, or the two adjoining, in proportion to their number, the lowest, according to the Jewish writers, being not under ten, nor the highest above twenty, were commanded to choose out, and to set apart, every household, a male lamb, or kid, of a particular description, on the tenth day of the month, and to kill it on the evening of the fourteenth. The flesh of the victim was commanded to be eaten by every several household apart, roasted with fire. They were all enjoined carefully to keep within their houses. And the blood of the sacrifice was to be taken and sprinkled on the two side-posts, and the upper door-post of every house where it was eaten. This sprinkling of the blood was to be the token of God’s covenant, and a protection to the families so distinguished, from the sword of the avenging angel.

But, a positive institution so immediately from heaven, an institution so full of meaning and instruction, of such celebrity in the history of the world, and connected so closely with an ordinance of still greater notoriety, and of much more extensive influence, an ordinance of much longer

duration, and which commemorates an event of infinitely greater importance, surely demands the most minute attention, and the most serious inquiry. We pretend not to comprehend, and therefore undertake not to explain every particular circumstance of this solemn, divine institution: but the moral and religious design is, in general, so obvious, that a reader of ordinary capacity has but to run over it with a common degree of seriousness and attention, in order to understand what the Spirit of God is saying in it, for the edification of mankind. And first, God was about to distinguish Israel by special marks of his favor. In order to this, they must carefully distinguish themselves by a punctual observance of his command. Is more expected of an Israelite than of an Egyptian? Undoubtedly. The blessings which come down from above, from the Father of lights, are not mere arbitrary and capricious effusions of liberality, falling upon one spot, and passing by another with out reason or design. No, they are the wise and gracious recompense of an intelligent, observing, and discriminating Parent, to faithful, affectionate, and obedient children, Israel had been forewarned of the ensuing danger to no purpose, had one iota or tittle relating to the ordinance of the paschal lamb been neglected. Calamity is to be avoided, not by foreknowing that it draws nigh, but by running to a place of safety. Salvation by Christ, consists, not merely in head-knowledge of his person, doctrine, and work; but in a cordial receiving and resting upon him alone for salvation, as he is freely offered to us in the gospel, for “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” The careful selection, then, of a proper victim, and the exact application of it, according to the commandment, have a plain and an instructive meaning.

Secondly, as Israel was to depart in haste, the Spirit of God was pleased to enjoin a memorial of that haste, in the quality of the bread which they were to use, during the celebration of this festival. When liberty, dear liberty is in view, who so silly as to care whether the taste be gratified or not, for a few days, with a less palatable kind of food? Our most perfect enjoyments in this world, and our highest attainments have a mixture of bitterness or of insipidity attending them like the flesh of lambs eaten with bitter herbs, and unfermented bread. The Jews, we know, were singularly diligent and curious, in searching out and removing from their houses every thing leavened, during this sacred season. With superstitious scrupulousness, they prepared unleavened bread for themselves, and the poor, for months before the solemn day arrived. A few days previous to the feast they cleansed all their vessels and furniture. What could stand the fire, they purified with fire; what could not, they dipped in or rinsed with water. Their marble mortars they had hollowed anew. The night preceding the day of unleavened bread, they lighted wax tapers, and prepared for a general search after every remainder of leaven. The master of the family began the ceremony with this solemn address to God: “Blessed art thou, O Lord, who has commanded us to put away all that is leavened out of our houses.” All the males of the household; master, children, domestics, assisted in searching the whole house over, and examined into the most secret corners, lest peradventure some lurking particle of leavened bread, or fermented dough, might have been overlooked, in order to its being destroyed. As if this had not been sufficient, that the family might be purged of at least all intentional violation of the commandment, the father of it concluded the search with this solemn execration: “Let all the leaven that is in my house, and which I have not been able to find out or to remove, be scattered, and become like the smallest dust of the earth.” An inspired apostle is our interpreter of this part of the paschal observance; so that we can be at no loss about the meaning of the Spirit in its institution. “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven; neither with the leaven of malice and

wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."[*]1Co 5:7-8 The scrupulous exactness of the Jews, in their literal obedience to the commandment, is a severe and just reproof of many, too many professing Christians, who rush to the celebration of the gospel passover with little preparation or seriousness; and some, alas! deliberately hoarding up in their hearts, and secretly, greedily feeding upon "the old leaven of malice and wickedness."

Thirdly, the victim itself claims our most serious attention. "A male lamb, of the first year,"--"without blemish," to be taken, on the tenth day of the month from his dam, kept apart for four days, and then killed?--These are all tender and touching considerations. "A lamb:" the most innocent and gentle of animals; in the idea and language of all ages and nations, another name for gentleness, harmlessness, and simplicity; removed early from its only comfort and protection, its fond mother's side; deprived of liberty, and destined to bleed by the sacrificing knife. Who can think of his plaintive bleatings, during the days of separation, without being melted? What Israelitish heart so insensible as not to yearn at the thought, that his own life, and the comfort of his family were to be preserved, at the expense of the life of that inoffensive little creature, whom he had shut up for the slaughter, and which, in unsuspicious confidence, licked the hand lifted up to shed its blood?

We have not long to search for the spirit and substance of this part of the institution: for all Scripture presses upon our notice, "the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world;" slain, "in the eternal purpose, from and before the foundation of the world; holy, harmless, and undefiled;" "delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God"[*]Acts 2:23--suffering "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."--"Who was wounded for our transgressions, who was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed:" the Lord laying on him "the iniquity of us all;" withdrawn, separated from the bosom of his Father-delivered into the hands of men-pouring out his soul unto death.

It was to be "a lamb of the first year," eight days old at the least; a year at the most. Not less than eight days, say the Jews, that there might intervene one Sabbath from the birth of the victim; and that so the sacredness of this holy festival might render it worthy of being offered unto God. More probably, because that, till then the animal was considered as too near a state of imperfection or impurity. It was not to exceed one year; because to that age it retains its lamblike harmlessness and simplicity. Superstition, which is ever sinking the spirit in the letter, has asserted, that a single hour beyond the year vitiated the victim, and rendered it profane. But the figure, without straining for a resemblance, presents unto us Jesus, "a Son born, and a Saviour given;" ours from the manger, ours to the tomb. His days cut off in the midst: at that period of life when men are coming to their prime of vigor, beauty, and usefulness. "A lamb without blemish." Those who love to fritter away the spirit and meaning of divine institutions in literal interpretation, have gone into a particular enumeration of the various kinds of blemishes which disqualified a sacrifice upon this occasion; and these they have multiplied to considerably above fifty. And what folly has taken pains to invent, superstition has been idle and weak enough to follow. The later Rabbis tell us, that the lamb was set apart four days before the sacrifice, in order to afford time and opportunity to inquire into its soundness and perfection; that if any unobserved spot should appear, there might be time to reject it, and to substitute another in its room. The law itself is plain and simple; and no good Israelite, of common sense, with the sacred charter in his hand, could possibly mistake its meaning; which is simply to signify, that the good God is to be served with the choicest and best of

every thing. But the law evidently looked further than to the mere corporeal perfection or defects of a silly lamb: and we should but ill understand both the text and the commentary, did we not look through the whole type to Him who is “without spot and blemish;” who, though born of a sinful mother, “did no sin;” who lived many years in the “midst of a sinful and adulterous generation,” without contracting any taint of moral pollution: in whom “the prince of this world, when he came, found nothing;” and whom his agents, Judas and Pontius Pilate, the instruments of his condemnation and death, were constrained to acquit. “I have sinned and betrayed innocent blood;” said the one. “Take ye him, and crucify him, for I find no fault in him,” said the other. “And when the centurion saw what was done, he said, Surely this was the Son of God!” The very act of selecting the one victim from among many, must have been an affecting office. Why should this innocent creature bleed and die, rather than another?--Why should the notice of my eye, or his accidentally presenting himself first of the flock, or his superior beauty and strength, or the determination of the lot, doom him, in preference to the slaughter? But one must die. Here the choice is fixed; and pity must not spare what heaven has demanded. These emotions of compassion must have been frequently excited during the four days of separation. The plaintive bleating, issuing from a tender, aching heart, robbed at once of its natural food, protection, and comfort; feeling the bitterness of death in the deprivation of maternal care and tenderness; the mournfully pleasing employment of supplying the devoted victim with aliment, up to the appointed hour; the cherishing and sustaining with solicitude, that life today, which the strong hand of necessity must take away tomorrow; all these awaken a thousand indescribable feelings. How the heart is wrung, as often as the eye, or the ear, or the hand, is attracted to attend or to minister to the little trembling prisoner! At length the fatal moment is come: and the afflicting alternative presses, “This innocent, or my own firstborn must suffer. If my heart relent, lo, the flaming sword of the destroying angel is, within my habitation. My resolution is formed. There is no room for deliberation. Die thou, that my son may live.” But the paschal victim could have no presentiment of its approaching fate. Happy in its ignorance, it could die but once. Christians, need your eyes be directed to your great gospel passover? Behold your atonement--deliberately chosen of God; fixed upon, in the maturity of eternal counsels; under the pressure of the great decree; voluntarily presenting and surrendering himself!--Behold him continually admonished of his approaching sufferings and death; by his own divine prescience; by the perpetual insults and violence of wicked men; by the descent of Moses and Elias to the mount of transfiguration. “The decease which he should accomplish” at length, “at Jerusalem,” was continually assuming a blacker and a blacker complexion, from being foreseen, foreknown, and more keenly felt, as the hour drew nigh. Lo, he “treads the winepress alone.” The dreadful conflict is begun. What “strong crying with tears” do I hear? “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” What “great drops of blood” do I see, distilling from every pore, and “falling to the ground?” Ah! the unrelenting executioner has begun to perform his infernal task: and yet, the bleeding “Lamb opens not his mouth.” What sigh is that which pierces my soul? What strange accents burst upon my astonished ear! “My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?” The conflict is at an end. He bows his head. “It is finished.” The victim has “poured out his soul unto death.” He has given up the ghost. These “things the angels desire to look into.”

“O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and love of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” Who “can comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height:” who “can know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge!”

047. Moses--Egypt Smitten

Moses--Egypt Smitten

Exo 12:26-27. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean you by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped. with

Psa 91:5-8. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold, and see the reward of the wicked. The great Jehovah, in all the works of his hands, and in all the ways of his providence, is ever preparing still grander displays of his divine perfection than those which have been already submitted to our view. This visible creation, fair, and vast, and magnificent as it is, being composed of perishing materials, and destined, in the eternal plan, to a temporary duration, is passing away, to give place to "new heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." He who made all things at first, saith, "Behold, I make all things new." The whole Jewish economy, "The adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises:" The patriarchs and the prophets, with all they said, acted, and wrote, were but "the preparation of the gospel of peace;" and all issue in Christ the Lord, "in whom all the promises are yea, and amen, to the glory of God the Father." And the kingdom of grace, under the great Redeemer, is only leading to the kingdom of glory.

It is both pleasant and useful, to observe the nature, the occasion, and the design, of sacred institutions. A closer inspection generally discovers much more than is apparent at first sight. The ordinance of the passover owes its institution to an event of considerable importance in the history of mankind; and its abrogation to a still greater. Its celebration commemorates the destruction of all the first-born in Egypt, and the redemption of Israel. Its abolition marks that most memorable era, the death of God's own eternal Son, and the redemption of a lost world, by the shedding of his precious blood. It is not therefore to be wondered at, if, in an ordinance which was intended to expire in the sacrifice of the great "Lamb of Atonement," slain "from the foundation of the world," its divine Author should have thought proper to enjoin many particulars, which figuratively and symbolically pointed out "good things to come," as well as literally expressed good things present.

Several of these significant circumstances, we took occasion to point out to you in the last Lecture. The commencement of the year was changed. The memory of nature's birth was sunk as it were in the memory of the church's deliverance; and a joyful expectation was excited of the gradual approach of "the fulness of time," the day, the new year's day of the world's redemption. In that sacred festival was seen, God drawing nigh to his Israel, in loving kindness, tender mercy, and faithfulness; and Israel drawing nigh to their God, in gratitude, love, and obedience. The feast was prepared by the removal of all leaven, the emblem of "malice and wickedness;" and eaten with

unleavened bread, the emblem of “sincerity and truth.” The victim was appointed to be a “lamb of the first year, without blemish.” chosen from among the flock, set apart and killed, to preserve the life of him who poured out, and sprinkled its blood; the figure of Him who was to come; “the Lamb of God, who beareth the sin of the world;” holy, harmless, gentle, patient; ,delivered according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God:” “suffering, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.” We are now to continue the subject.

All Israel was engaged in the same service at the same instant of time, and for the self-same reason. All had descended from the same common stock, all were included within the bond of the same covenant, all were involved in the same general, distress, all were destined of Heaven to a participation in the same salvation. They appear, in the paschal solemnity, a beautiful and an instructive representation of the great, united, harmonious family of God; who are “one body, one spirit, and are called in one hope of their calling:” “who have one Lord, one faith, one baptism:--one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in all.” And they are all coming, “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.”[*]Eph 4:4-6;Eph 4:13 As the Church in general had one and the same sacrifice, a lamb of the description which has been mentioned; so every particular family or neighborhood, according to their number, had their own particular sacrifice, and in that their particular protection and repast. The charity which comprehended the whole Israel of God, was thus invigorated and enlivened by being collected and concentrated; and the sacred fire of love, which was in danger of being extinguished by being dispersed too extensively, being thus confined within a narrower circle, lighting on fewer and nearer objects, and aided by reciprocal sympathy and ardor, was blown up into a purer flame. A happy pre-figuration of the blessed influence of the gospel, and of its sacred institutions, to rectify, to rivet, and to improve the charities of private life: to shed peace and joy upon every condition and relation; gradually to expand the heart, through the progressive, continually enlarging circles of natural affection, friendship, love of country, love of mankind, love to all the creation of God.

What must it have been to an Israelitish parent, standing with his children around him, to eat the Lord’s passover, to reflect, that while the arrows of the Almighty were falling thick upon the tents of Ham, his tabernacle was secured from the stroke: that while all the first-born in Egypt were bleeding by the hand of the destroying angel; of him, a holy and righteous God demanded no victim, but one from the flock; spared a darling son, and accepted the blood of a lamb! What must have been the emotions of the Israelitish first-born themselves, at that awful hour, to reflect on the state of their unhappy neighbors, of the same description with themselves, and on their own condition, had justice, untempered with mercy, struck the blow! Such as this, but superior, as the deliverance is greater, must be the joy of a truly Christian family, which has hope in God, through Christ Jesus the Lord, in reflecting on that grace which has made a difference between them and their sinful neighbors; which has seasonably warned them “to flee from the wrath that is to come;” which has “delivered their souls from death, their eyes from tears, their feet from falling.” What must be the inexpressible satisfaction of every believer in Christ Jesus, in the confidence of being sprinkled with the blood of atonement, of “being at peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ,” of being “passed from death unto life?” What a happy community is the redeemed of the Lord! Wherever scattered on the face of the whole earth; they are nevertheless gathered together in their glorious Head: separated by oceans and mountains but united in interest and affection:

hated, despised, persecuted of the world; yet cherished, esteemed, protected of the Almighty! The sacrifices of the Mosaic dispensation were many because they were imperfect. The sacrifice of the gospel is one, because once offered, it “for ever perfects them that are sanctified by it.” The ancient institution prescribed a whole lamb for every several family; the gospel exhibits a whole and complete Savior for every several elect sinner: and that Savior at once a teacher, an atonement, a ruler: “Wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.” The application of the blood of the destined victim in this institution is a most remarkable circumstance. “They shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side-posts, and on the upper door-post of the houses wherein they shall eat it.” It must not be spilt upon the ground as a worthless thing, nor sprinkled in the entering in of the door, to be trampled upon as an unholy thing; but above and on either side; to be a covering to the head and a bulwark around. “When I see the blood I will pass over you.” Could the all-discerning eye of God stand in need of such a token, in order to judge between an Israelite and an Egyptian? No. But the distinctions of God’s love avail not them who wilfully and wickedly neglect the distinctions of faith and obedience. The blood in the basin is the same with the blood on the door-post, but it is no protection till it be believingly applied. The virtue is dormant till sprinkling call it forth. Surely, this part of the ceremony speaks to the Christian world for itself. Why is mention still made of blood, blood? “the shedding of blood,” “the sprinkling of blood,” “redemption through blood,” and the like? It denotes the life, which consists in the blood of the animal; and it instructs us in this momentous doctrine, that life being forfeited by sin, the blood must be shed, that is, the life must be yielded up, before atonement to justice can be made: that the substitution and acceptance of one life in the room of another, must depend upon the will and appointment of the offended lawgiver: that the blood of slain beasts, having no value nor virtue of its own to take away sin, must derive all its efficacy from the appointment of Heaven, and from its relation to a victim of a higher order: and, that the blood of life of this one victim, yielded up to divine justice, is, through its intrinsic worth and the decree of God, of virtue sufficient to take away the sins of the whole world.

But, as in the original institution, the blood of the lamb slain was no protection to the house, till it was sprinkled with a bunch of hyssop on the parts of the building, and in the manner directed, so the sovereign balm appointed of the Most High for the cure of the deadly plague of sin, the price of pardon to the guilty, the life of the dead, becomes effectual to the relief of the guilty, perishing sinner, by a particular application of it to his own “wounds, bruises, putrefying sores.” Faith, eyeing the commandment, the power of God, and the grace of Christ, is like the bunch of hyssop in the hand of the paschal worshipper, sprinkling the blood of atonement upon “the upper door-post, and the two side-posts,” the understanding, the heart, the life, the ruling and the governing powers of our nature, that the whole may be accepted through the Beloved.

I conclude this part of my subject with quoting a passage from the Targum of Jonathan, respecting the sprinkling of the blood of the paschal lamb, as it was performed by the children of Israel in Egypt, which has struck myself as uncommonly beautiful and sublime.

“When the glory of the Lord was revealed in Egypt in the night of the passover, and when he slew all the first-born of the Egyptians, He rode upon lightning. He surveyed the inmost recesses of our habitations; He stopped behind the walls of our houses: His eyes observed the posts of our doors: they pierced through the casements. He perceived the blood of circumcision, and the blood of the paschal lamb, sprinkled upon us. He viewed his people from the heights of heaven, and saw them

eating the passover roasted with fire: He saw, and had compassion upon us; He spared, and suffered not the destroying angel to hurt us." The inferior circumstances respecting the sacrifice are these. The flesh of the victim was to be eaten in the night season, not in a crude state, nor boiled in water, but roasted with fire; no bone of it was to be broken; no remnant of it left until the morning; or else the remains were to be consumed by fire. I am unwilling entirely to pass over these circumstances as if they were of no especial meaning or importance; for I am thoroughly convinced every iota and tittle relating to this ordinance, has a specific meaning and design. But l frankly acknowledge I cannot discern that design in every particular; and am far from being satisfied with the fanciful and unsupported illustrations of some commentators upon the passage. Should I myself seem to any to have given too much into imagination and conjecture in my ideas of it, or in what is farther to be offered; the nature of the subject, the silence of Scripture, the consciousness of honestly aiming at your rational entertainment and religious instruction, and the humble hope that these conjectures are and shall be conformed to the analogy of faith, and if erroneous, innocently so; these will, I am persuaded, secure me a patient hearing, and a candid interpretation. The time of the feast was the night season; the very juncture when the awful scene was acting, which marred the glory and blasted the strength of Egypt. Inconsiderate man must have his attention roused and fixed by strong and striking circumstances. The moment of execution, the hour of battle, and the like, are awfully interesting to a serious, humane, and public spirited person. Every son of Israel knew, that at the very moment he was eating his unleavened cake with gladness, and the flesh of lambs with a merry heart, "Thousands were falling at his side, and ten thousand at his right hand." What an alarming demonstration of divine justice! What an encouraging display of goodness and mercy! Were the eye opened to see God as he is, were the powers of an invisible world habitually felt, every creature, every season, every event, would possess a quickening, an active, a constraining influence over us. But blind, stupid, sluggish as we are, the midnight bell must toll to rouse us to reflection; death must assume the complexion of sable night, and add artificial to natural horror, in order to force a way into our stony hearts. And God, who knows what is in man, vouchsafes to instruct his thoughtlessness and folly, by acting through the medium of powerful and awakening circumstances upon our imagination and senses. Hence possibly the injunction to eat the passover by night.

It was to be "roasted with fire," not eaten raw, nor sodden with water. To eat flesh in, a crude state is unnatural and unwholesome. And we never find the religious institutions of the living and true God, doing violence to innocent natural propensities and aversions, or encroaching on the .health and life of his worshippers: for he saith, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." Why the one method of preparing it was commanded of God in preference to the other, we pretend not satisfyingly to account for. Was it to secure an uniformity of practice in the minutest circumstances relating to his worship? Was it to form his church and people to implicit obedience to his will, in points which they comprehend not, as in those which they well understand; in all cases whatever, whether he be pleased to render or to withhold a reason? Was it intended as a symbolical representation of their late condition; tried, and prepared, and refined in the fire of Egyptian oppression; purged, but not consumed by it? Was it a figurative view of the judgment of God then executing: Egypt scorched with the flame; Israel enlightened, seasoned, purified by it? Did it look forward unto, and signify some particular circumstance in the person, the doctrine, or sufferings of the great evangelical sacrifice? O Lord, thou knowest. "Secret things belong to thee, but things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children." We thank thee for what thou hast condescended to reveal to

us, and would not presume to “be wise above what is written.”

“Not a bone” of the paschal lamb was to “be broken.” This, as well as some of the foregoing circumstances, is by sundry commentators supposed to be intended as a contradiction to various Pagan superstitions and particularly to the frantic behaviour of the votaries of Bacchus; who, in the fumes of intoxication or of religious frenzy, committed a thousand abominations and extravagancies; they fell into violent agitations, the pretended inspiration of their God; they devoured the yet palpitating flesh of the victims which they had just killed, and broke all their bones to pieces. But, the idolatrous rites of the heathen nations were so various and so contradictory one to another, that we can hardly imagine the great Jehovah would condescend to express any concern, whether the rites of his worship were, in every instance, either conformed or opposed to the usages of idolatry. A very famous critic[*]Bochart, Hieroz par. i. lib. ii. cap. 1. fol. 609. assigns a very silly reason for this branch of the commandment. He alleges it was another indication of the extreme haste with which the passover was to be eaten. “Men in a hurry,” says he, “do not stand to pick bones; much less do they take leisure to break them, for the sake of the juice or marrow.” As if it required more time to sever the joints, and break the bones by violence, than to dissect and disunite the parts without a fracture. The simple meaning of the precept seems to be, that what was once offered to God should not be unnecessarily disfigured and mangled. The blood must be shed, for that was the seal of God’s covenant; the flesh might be eaten, for it was given for the sustenance of man’s life; but the bones, forming no part either of food or sacrifice, were to be left in the state in which they were found, till consumed by fire with the remainder of the flesh, if any remained, the next morning. And is it not extremely probable that God might intend, by certain arbitrary tokens, to describe the Messiah; and that the prohibition to break the bones of the paschal lamb was designed to be a type of a remarkable circumstance attending the crucifixion of our Savior which Providence watched over with special attention, and brought about by a miracle? “But when the soldiers came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs.”[*]John 19:33 And it is clear from what follows, that the evangelist considered the precept of the law as a prophesy of Christ; “For these things were done,” says he, “that the scripture should be fulfilled. A bone of him shall not be broken.”[*]John 19:36 In many cases it happens, that the prediction was either not attended to, or had not been understood, till the event has explained it.

Nothing of it was to be “left until the morning.” This circumstance was not peculiar to the sacrifice of the paschal lamb, but common to almost every other kind of oblation. This will appear if we consult the general laws respecting sacrifice. Thus the prescription runs: “And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten the same day that it is offered; he shall not leave any of it until the morning.”[*]Lev 7:15 And again, “When a bullock, or a sheep, or a gout is brought forth, then it shall be seven days under the dam, and from the eighth day and thenceforth it shall be accepted for an offering made by fire unto the Lord. And whether it be cow or ewe, ye shall kill it and her young both in one day. And when ye will offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving unto the Lord, offer it at your own will. On the same day it shall be eaten up; ye shall leave none of it until the morrow: I am the Lord.”[*]Lev 22:27-30 The solemn affix, “I am the Lord,” seems to insinuate, that the reason of the commandment was to be sought in the majesty and authority of the lawgiver.--And, independent of authority, decency seems to require, that what has once been devoted to a hallowed use should never afterwards appear in a mangled, impure, or putrid state. Perhaps superstition was, by this precept, obliquely or intentionally reproved and

repressed; superstition, which loves to feed upon scraps, and to hoard up relics, as if they were sacred things; superstition, which gives to the fragments of the sacrifice the veneration due only to the sacrifice itself, and to the great Author of it.

We must notice the remaining particulars of this service in the manner in which it was originally performed; “in haste,” “standing,” “with loins girded,” “with staff in hand,” ready to depart. The lamb was to be eaten with “bitter herbs.” A representation, perhaps, of the mixed nature of every sublunary enjoyment; and of the wholesome uses of unpalatable adversity. The “standing posture, and the implements of travelling, speak a plain and distinct language.” “Arise ye, and depart, for this is not your rest.” “Here we have no abiding city, but look for one to come.” “Now we desire a better country, that is, an heavenly.” “Arise, let us go hence.” A provision was graciously made for such as might be ceremonially unclean at the future seasons of celebration, and the door of mercy and communion was opened to strangers. Blessed prefiguration of the remedy provided for the chief of sinners: of the refuge opened for the reception of “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel;” of the liberal, condescending, comprehensive spirit of the gospel! Christians, ye “are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” “Those who were afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ.”

Men and brethren, the time is at hand, when a more fearful midnight cry shall be heard than even that which smitten, groaning Egypt raised in the hour of vengeance. “The day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night.” “Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, end they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” Behold, a careless, slumbering world, a world lying in wickedness, is threatened with a death infinitely more dreadful than that which destroyed the first-born; with “the second death,” a living death of everlasting banishment “from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.” From that last plague there is no security but one; that security, of which the “blood of sprinkling” under the law was but a type. “Run to your strong hold, ye prisoners of hope.” “Flee, flee for refuge; lay hold of the hope that is set before you.” “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” “If God be for us, who can be against us?” “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth: Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”[*]Rom 8:32-34

How many things in the Scriptures; in Moses, in the prophets, in the law, in the gospel, are dark and hard to be understood? But the hour cometh when the veil shall be removed from our eyes; when the truth as it is in Jesus shall stand confessed without a mystery; and shall be seen and read of all men. “What” he doth, “ye know not now, but ye shall know hereafter.” “We know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.” “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know, even as also I am known.”[*]1Co 13:12

Chapter 48

048. Moses--Joseph's Bones Moved

Moses--Joseph’s Bones Moved

Exo 13:17-22. And it came to pas when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although it was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt. But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea. And the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt. And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you. And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Ethan, in the edge of the wilderness. And the Lord went before them, by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night. He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

All that weak, ignorant, erring man can know, is a few of the smaller objects which are immediately around him; and of these but a few of the more obvious qualities which they possess, and the relations in which they stand to one another. Remove them but a little as to space or time, and they gradually disappear, till they are at length involved in total darkness. The distance of a few leagues terminates our vision; the lapse of a few years erases all traces from our memory. The cloud of night conceals or changes the appearance of things the nearest to us, and the most perfectly known. Here, we are dazzled and confounded by an excess of light; there, we are checked and repulsed by dimness and obscurity. The sun forbids us to behold his face by reason of his splendor; the earth and the ocean present to us but their surface; and the heavens oppose to the eager eye a vault of crystal, saying, “Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further.” We feel ourselves hedged in, fettered, confined on every side. And our condition in this respect is that of every created, limited being. Open prospect after respect; expand system upon system; add faculty to faculty; yet the prospect is bounded at length. Suns and worlds are capable of being numbered, and there is a height and depth still beyond, which the understanding of an angel cannot fathom.

There is only one Being whose duration is immeasurable--whose space is unconfined--whose power is uncontrolled--whose understanding is infinite. With Jehovah “a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years.” He alone can “declare 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.”[*]Isa 46:10 He is “above all, and through all, and in all!” An impenetrable veil hides futurity from every created eye; but the Spirit of prophesy is pleased sometimes to remove it. Abraham saw the Redeemer’s day afar off, and rejoiced. He saw in prophetic vision the servitude, the affliction, and the deliverance of his posterity, at the distance of four hundred years. To mortal man, whose longest span of existence is diminished to much under a century, four hundred years have something like the appearance of an eternity; but before God, time and space are contracted to a point, to a moment. With him, that which is to be done is already done. Men shape events

according to their fancy, their fears, their wishes, or their hopes. “But the counsel of the Lord it shall stand, and he fulfilleth all his pleasure.”

What was the word of the Lord to Abraham? “And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety, that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them four hundred years. And also that nation whom they shall serve will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.”[*]Gen 15:13-14 What was the doing of the Lord in conformity to that word? “And it came to pass, that at midnight the Lord smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sat on his throne, unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of cattle.” “And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses: and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver and jewels of gold, and raiment. And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required: and they spoiled the Egyptians.” Israel came into Egypt few in number, weak and indigent; but they go out from the land of their oppression greatly increased, mighty and formidable; laden with thus of their cruel oppressors, the well earned reward of the labors of many years, and of much sorrow.

It is repeatedly remarked, that the prediction relating to the deliverance of God’s people was fulfilled to a single day. Of this we have a confirmation in the preceding chapter, Exo 12:41; “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.” Again, at Exo 12:51; “And it came to pass, the self-same day, that the Lord did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies.” And yet, on comparing numbers in the prediction and the history of its accomplishment, we find a difference of thirty years. The seventy interpreters were aware of this difficulty, and have obviated it by thus paraphrasing the passage in Exodus, “The sojourning of the children of Israel in the land of Canaan, and in the land of Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years.” To justify which computation we need but to observe, that Moses in the four hundred and thirty years, includes all the time that Abraham had passed in Canaan, previous to the birth of Isaac. And a learned prelate of our own country, Archbishop Usher, in his valuable chronology, has proved this calculation to be just. For Abraham was exactly twenty-five years in Canaan before Isaac was born.[*]Jacob was born to Isaac when he was sixty years old; and at the time he went down to Egypt, according to his own declaration to Pharaoh, he was one hundred and thirty; which, added to the twenty-five years of Abraham’s pilgrimage, from his leaving Ur of the Chaldees to the birth of Isaac, make two hundred and fifteen. He and his posterity continued in Egypt a like period of two hundred and fifteen years. So that it is plain Moses reckoned in the whole sum of four hundred and thirty years, all the pilgrimages of Abraham and his posterity, from his first leaving his kindred and father’s house in Mesopotamia down to their triumphant exit from Egypt, and their setting out on the conquest of Canaan, whose iniquity though not before, was now full. From the birth of Isaac to the exodus from Egypt was four hundred and five, which completes the four hundred and thirtieth year mentioned in this passage, and by Paul in Gal 3:17. Thus perfect are all the ways and works of God; thus absolute his power over all persons and all events! No skill, no ardor, no violent efforts on the part of Israel, could accelerate their enlargement. Nor could the combined strength of Egypt, of mankind, of created nature, retard it one single hour! In order to preserve to all generations the memory of a period so singular and so important in their history, the ordinance of the passover was to be honored with an annual celebration; and, as

positive and arbitrary institutions derive all their value and use from a right understanding of their meaning, and the design of their author, express words are put into the mouths of parents and heads of families for the instruction of generations to come, in the nature and reason of this solemn service. “And thou shalt show thy son in that day, saying, This is done, because of that which the Lord did unto me, when I came forth out of Egypt. And it shall be for a sign unto thee, upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the Lord’s law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath the Lord brought thee out of Egypt. And it shall be when thy son asketh thee, in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man, and the first-born of beasts: therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the first-born of my children I redeem.” Hence it appears that, besides this great annual sacrifice, a law was enacted at this time, though it was not to be enforced until they should be put in possession of the promised land, that in grateful remembrance of God’s passing over their first-born when he destroyed those of Egypt, the first-born of the human species, and also of the brute creation, through every age, should be dedicated and set apart as a sacred property. The great Legislator was pleased afterwards, by a particular injunction, to appropriate to himself one whole tribe out of the twelve, in room of the first-born out of every tribe, to minister unto him in, holy things; and in this ordinance the church of God, at that early period, both exhibited and enjoyed an emblematical representation of the evangelical priesthood; not vested in and exclusively belonging to a particular description of men, but the common character and dignity of all Christians; a generation chosen of God, in Christ, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people--that they should show forth the praises of Him, who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light.” And they are introduced before the throne, with this song of praise in their mouths, “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 forever and ever. Amen.”[*]Rev 1:5-6 Is it not worthwhile to compare, seeing the Spirit of God has thought it meet to transmit to us the very numbers, the entire state of Israel, as it were, at the time of its descent into Egypt, and at its departure thence? The whole number which accompanied Jacob from Canaan, when driven thence by the famine, himself included, was sixty-six; which added to the family of Joseph already in Egypt, consisting of himself, Asenath, the daughter of the priest of On, adopted by marriage into the family, of Abraham, and their two sons, the amount is seventy, when they left that country. In a period of little more than two hundred years, they are increased to the amazing sum of six hundred thousand men of military age, without reckoning females, children of both sexes under twenty, and old men of sixty and upward: for that was the age of super-annuation among this people. Taking therefore the calculation so low as four of all the other descriptions for one of the military age, that is, males from twenty to sixty, the whole number of the descendants of Abraham that left Egypt, must have been at least three millions. So that, dividing the whole time of their sojourning there into periods of twenty years, it appears that their number was multiplied nearly three times every twenty years. Now, if we consider, that the most rapid state of population in the ordinary course of nature, and in circumstances the most favorable to it, is a doubling the number of inhabitants every twenty years; and that only in the earlier ages of a people or colony; what must we think of this amazing increase in circumstances the most unfavorable: in a people cooped up in a narrow district, and that district not their own, but the property of a nation much

more powerful than themselves; a people among whom marriage was grievously discouraged by the want of liberty, by hard and oppressive labor, by subjection to the despotism of a foreign prince, by penal edicts which doomed all their male children to death, and by which doubtless, multitudes perished, together with their natural increase? The multiplication of Israel in a proportion so great, in a progress so rapid, in a situation so unfriendly, will be in reality found a miracle, though less striking to a superficial observation, being gradually and imperceptibly performed, upon closer attention, a prodigy equal or superior to any that were wrought in immediately effecting their enfranchisement. And this leads us to the grateful acknowledgment of God's wise and gracious providence, in its ordinary operations and effects. What is daily preservation but creation--one omnific "let there be," daily, every instant repeated? What is the progress of vegetation, of life and reason, but the continual interposition of the great Source of all being, life and intelligence? What is dissolution and death, but the supporting, vivifying power of God withdrawn from the body which is just now inhabited? This vast host was accompanied with what Moses calls a mixed multitude. This is supposed to have been made up of the produce of marriages between Israelites and Egyptians; of Egyptians, who, from the miracles which they had seen wrought in favor of Israel, had been determined to follow the fortunes of that people; and of neighbors who, in the ordinary intercourse of mankind, might be brought into contact with them, and who, through fear, interest, or curiosity, might be induced to follow their camp.

Man, with his usual ignorance and haste, would have been for conducting this mighty army directly to Canaan. And no doubt the same Almighty arm which had thus asserted them into liberty, could have led them straight forward to conquest. But, in studying the history of the divine conduct as ordering and governing the affairs of men, we find it is composed partly of the interpositions of Heaven, and partly of the exertions of men. It is not all miracle; that were to encourage eternal indolence and stupidity in rational beings, formed after the image of God, and to reduce men to mere passive clods of earth; nor is it all, on the other hand, the effect of human skill, industry, and diligence; for that were to resign the government of the world to the frail and the foolish; that were to weaken the power of religion, which is the life, the joy, the guide, the support of the universe. But we discover divine interposition, to a certain degree, so as to inspire a reasonable confidence in and dependence upon God; and we discern the exertions of men crowned with success through the blessing of Heaven upon them, and this enforcing the necessity of bringing out and exercising the powers and faculties of our intellectual nature. Israel is delivered from Egypt at once; but is introduced into Canaan by degrees. The former, an act of sovereign power, unmixed with independent upon human efforts; the latter, the less perceptible operation of Omnipotence, blending itself with, subduing, directing, and promoting the designs and endeavors of reasonable beings, who had a great object in view, and a clear rule to walk by. Thus, in a case of universal importance, the justification and adoption of the sinner, are acts of free, sovereign grace, whereby sin is forgiven, and the right and privileges of sons conferred; whereas, sanctification is the gradual work of the Spirit, supporting us by the way, overcoming our enemies by little and little, and making us "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." A great multitude of people is always an object of serious attention, and of deep anxiety. Many mouths were to be fed, many humors to be studied, many talents to be employed. Some were to be gained by love, others to be governed by fear; the impetuosity of one was to be repressed, the timidity and diffidence of another to be countenanced and encouraged; care was to be exercised about those who were either unable or unwilling to exercise any about themselves. What a charge then was that of

Moses and Aaron! bearing on their shoulders the burden of such an assembly; a vast multitude agitated with the ordinary passions of human nature; unarmed, unaccustomed to discipline, intractable; one moment elated with extravagant hopes, the next depressed with unreasonable fears. The wisdom of a Moses had been unequal to the task, unsupported by the Wisdom which sees all things at one view, and the Power which “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”

There is a happy disposition in all the evils to which our nature and condition are subject, to find out and to apply their own remedy. Necessity always sets invention to work. Invention puts the machine in motion; and once in motion, every wheel keeps its place, exerts its power, performs its office. But here the mighty machine, prepared in all its parts according to the plan of infinite wisdom, put together and regulated by the hand of almighty power, and conducted by unchangeable truth and faithfulness, could not vary its motion, could not deviate from its design: and the passage of perhaps four millions of people, with their immense possessions of flocks and herds, and other property, from Egypt to Canaan, will appear one of those singular phenomena in history, which no principles of human conduct, no natural and ordinary concurrence of events, are able to explain: and which must finally be resolved into a wisdom and power preternatural and divine. Accordingly, we find Providence taking immediately the charge of them; but not in the usual way, not by forming a regular discipline, and raising up commanders and magistrates of unusual address and ability, but declaring by sensible tokens, which were seen, read, and understood of all, “I am the Leader and Commander of my people.” But before we proceed to the consideration of this wonderful symbol of the divine presence, we must attend our author, and take notice of a tender and touching circumstance in the departure from Egypt, namely, the removing of the bones of Joseph. That truly great man had been the savior of his father’s house when he was alive, and was now the hope of Israel after he was dead. In all their afflictions, his precious dust had been to them the pledge of deliverance; and now, when that deliverance is come, they bear it with them to the land promised to their forefathers, for burial. Thus respectable and useful, in life and in death, are the wise and the good; thus anxious ought we to be to promote the best interests of mankind, not only while we are yet with them; but to leave something behind us that may benefit and instruct after we are seen and heard no more. Christians, we carry with us, as our hope in this wilderness, not the bones of a departed deliverer, but the memory of a risen Savior. The sacred pledge of our final redemption is deposited, not in the coffin, but in this precious record--but in the history of facts well known and firmly believed by you--but in many great and precious promises given unto you. “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again; even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.” The ashes of the patriarch Joseph could not rest in the tomb till Israel came to the possession of their promised inheritance; so the Spirit and providence of the great Redeemer are in perpetual motion and exercise, till he shall have gathered into one all his redeemed unto himself; till the youngest of his sons, the meanest of his daughters, being glorified, shall take possession of their purchased inheritance, “the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.”

Thus then Israel takes his departure; thus joyfully, thus triumphantly, thus increased; and “not one sickly or feeble among them;” a wonder not inferior to any of the rest. But all “is of the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.” The plain of Rameses was the first great rendezvous of the Lord’s host. They had built, as part of their task work, a city of that name,

at the command of Pharaoh. But it was also the name of a region of Egypt elsewhere called Goshen; the same which Joseph chose for the reception of his aged parent; because being situated nearest to Canaan, it diminished the length and fatigue of his journey, and being a grassy country, suited his family's employment, that of shepherds. The nearness to Canaan might accordingly be now again considered as a favorable circumstance to the return of Israel thitherward. If we may credit Philo, the two countries were not above three days' journey distant the one from the other. And certain it is that the patriarchs, encumbered with a convoy laden with cereal, easily performed a journey to a distant part of Egypt, and back again, in the distant part of many weeks at most. Moses might therefore have, without much difficulty, conducted the people of his charge to the place of their destination in a very small space of time. But was the distance of place the only difficulty which they had to encounter? How could men inured to slavery, men just so, caged from the rod of a tyrannical oppressor, have the courage to meet the prowess and discipline of the warlike nations of Canaan; unprovided with arms for the field, and with military engines for the attack of fortified towns, had they been bold enough to attempt to take possession by force. Some interpreters, indeed, render the word harnessed, in Exo 13:18, armed. But the term in the original is so equivocal, and the learned attempts to determine its meaning are so unsuccessful, that we remain still in the dark about its true meaning. The presumption certainly is, that the Israelites were not armed. What had a nation of shepherds, living by sufferance in a foreign land, to do with arms? Would the policy of Egypt have permitted it? But Moses, the most accurate of historians, takes care to point out a circumstance which furnishes the first idea of putting arms into the hands of Israel. After the waves of the Red Sea had swallowed up the Egyptian army, their dead bodies with their arms were miraculously cast on shore, and provided Israel with armor from their spoils.

It is evident that God intended to form the courage and discipline of his people in the wilderness; before he tried these upon the nations whom they were destined to subdue. Nay, further, it was evidently his design to settle their whole civil and religious polity, while they were yet in an erratic state, that when they came to Canaan there might be nothing to do but to take possession, and to execute the laws which they had already received. And alas, what shall we say? This swarm of people, numerous as the sand upon the sea-shore, with the exception of one or two, and Moses their leader among the rest, thus pompously and powerfully saved, were saved from Egypt, but to die in the wilderness. Men die, but the church lives; and the church is the care of God. "Thy way O God, is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known; Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron."[*]Psa 77:19

Instead then of marching straight northward, in the direction of Canaan, their course is bent eastward, to the great wilderness which bounds Egypt and Arabia Petra: God himself leading the way, in a most wonderful display of his glorious presence and power, described in the words which I read at the opening of the Lecture. "And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness. And the Lord went before them, by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night. He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people."[*]Exo 13:20-22 In this, God space at once to the understanding and to the senses. Could any Israelite doubt that the Lord was there? He had but to open his eyes, whether it were by day or by night, and lo, a thick cloud obscuring the brightness of the one, or a flaming fire dispelling, the

shades of the other, proclaimed the dread presence of Jehovah. Could any one call in question his kindness, when he saw darkness become a guide, and fire a protector? Durst any one presume to approach too nigh, when dimness impenetrable, and light inaccessible, alternately guarded his pavilion? Was it possible for any heart to fear, when the Most Mighty thus declared, in language more emphatic than can be conveyed by words--“Lo, I am for you! Who is he that can, that dare to be against you?” The appearances of God are suited to the circumstances of his people. Cloud by night would have been to increase the horror, and to multiply the unwholesome damps of that season. Fire by day would have been adding fuel to a flame, already intensely hot, in a burning climate and parched soil. But tempered, adapted, distributed, according to wisdom not capable of error, the peculiar inconvenience of each season is relieved; and the ills of nature are remedied by the dispensations of grace. The cloudy fiery pillar is a manifestation of Deity, suited to a wilderness state. In heaven, a God of love is light, without “any darkness at all.” In hell a God of implacable wrath is perpetual darkness, without one ray of light. On earth, a God of justice and mercy is darkness and light, in successive order and perfect harmony. In heaven, he is a flame that irradiates, cheers, and quickens; in hell, a fire still consuming, never to be extinguished; on earth, fire in a cloud, mercy flowing in a spacious channel, judgment restrained. Men can only discover that of God which he is pleased to reveal to them. Whether he is pleased to turn his dark or bright side to us, we are stationed equally at a distance from him. To be sensible of our own darkness is to be partakers of his marvellous light. All that the brightest noon of human reason can discover is, that it is ignorance and folly, when placed in comparison with the wisdom of God. Might not this wonderful pillar prefigure to the ancient church the person and office of the Redeemer of the world? Behold the divine essence wrapped up in, and closely united to a veil of flesh and blood. Behold Deity raising our nature to incorruptibility and glory “in Christ, the first-fruits; afterwards in all that are Christ’s at his coming.” Do we not perceive in it, humanity bringing down the divine nature to our bearing and perception: “the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, declaring him to us.” “The word made flesh” instructing the ignorant, cheering the disconsolate, directing the wanderer, refreshing the weary; guiding our waking, guarding our sleeping moments; “a partaker of our flesh and blood, that he may be a merciful High-Priest:” declared the Son of God with power; men adoring and submitting; the powers of hell broken and discomfited: the triumph of heaven complete. “The Lord our God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”[*]Psa 84:11 “Fear not, O Israel, 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. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil; he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out, and thy coming in, from this time forth, and even for evermore.”[*]Psa 121:5-8

049. Moses--Red Sea Crossed

Moses--Red Sea Crossed

Exo 14:21-22. 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. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. In the little benefits which men confer upon each other, it generally happens that some untoward circumstance insinuates itself, and occasions, to one of the parties at least, mortification, disappointment, or disgust; for nothing human is perfect. A gracious action is frequently resented as an injury, from the ungracious manner in which it is performed. I am charmed with both the matter of that kindness shown me, and the affectionate disposition which prompted it; but alas, it arrived an hour too late! Another prevented my wishes; and I prized not the blessing, because I was not instructed in its value by feeling the want of it. This favor done me is very great; but it is not precisely the thing I looked for; or, it is so clogged with some unpleasant condition, that I would rather be without it: it affords me present relief, but will it not involve me in greater difficulties hereafter? Had I failed in my expectations from this quarter, I should easily have gained my end by applying to another friend. In a word, there is a perpetual something, in the friendly communications of men, which continually mars the worth of what is given and received. And no wonder, if we consider that favors are not always granted from affection, nor accepted with gratitude. But the bounties of Heaven possess every quality that can enhance their value, and endear their Author to a sensible heart. Infinitely valuable in themselves, they flow from love. The “good and perfect gifts, which come down from the Father of lights,” are given “liberally, and without upbraiding.” Exactly what we need, they come precisely at the moment when we want them most, or when they are most beneficial to us. Worthy of God to bestow, they cannot be unworthy of us to receive. Were he to withhold his gracious aid, in vain should we look for relief from any other quarter. Productive of present satisfaction and joy, his benefits involve us in no future distress, shame, or remorse. Serviceable to the body, they are at the same time improving to the mind. Important and interesting for time, they have an influence upon eternity. The gracious interpositions of Jehovah, in behalf of his chosen people, have this peculiar recommendation to our attention, as to that people’s grateful observation and acknowledgment--that they were not in the usual course of things; they were the fruits of the constant and unremitting care of a special providence; they were the suspension or alteration of the established laws of nature they were the operation of a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, sensibly controlling the winds, the waves, and the clouds; and subduing the most ungovernable elements to its purpose. Other parents are endued with transitory afflictions and attachments, suited to the transitory nature of the trust committed to them. The hen tends her unfledged brood with the vigilance of a dragon and the boldness of a lion. But maternal tenderness and anxiety diminish and expire with the occasion of them, namely, the weakness and inexperience of her young ones. When the son is become a man, paternal care relaxes, and parental authority is at an end. But as the authority of our heavenly Father never ceases, so his bowels of compassion are

never restrained; his vigilance is never lulled to rest, his care never suspended; because his offspring is, to the last, impotent, improvident, imperfect. In vain had Israel, by a series of miracles unparalleled in the annals of mankind, been rescued from Egyptian oppression, had not the same almighty arm which delivered them at first, continued to protect and support them. The strength of Egypt, broken as it was, had been sufficient to force them back. The wilderness itself had been fatal to them, without a foe. How easily are the greatest deliverances forgotten; how soon are the most awful appearances familiarized to the mind! The very first threatening of danger effaces from the memory of these Israelites, all impression of the powerful wonders which had just passed before them, and eclipses the glory of that cloud which, at that very instant, presented itself to their eyes, and overshadowed their heads. But, let not self-flattery impose upon us, as if we were more faithful and obedient than they were. It is the mere deception of vanity and self-love to suppose, that “if one were to arise from the dead, we would be persuaded;” that, if we saw a miracle wrought, we would believe, that, if we heard Christ teach in our streets, we would “forsake all and follow him.” The man whom the usual appearances of nature do not move, would soon become insensible to more uncommon phenomena. For, extraordinary things frequently repeated, are extraordinary no longer, and consequently soon lose their force. If the daily miracles of God’s mercy and loving-kindness fail to convince men, what reason is there to hope, that mere exertions of power would produce a happier effect? If Christ, speaking by his word and ministering servants, be treated with neglect, is it likely that his person would be held in veneration? If men “hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead”[*]Luk 16:31 Is it not notorious, that Christ’s personal ministrations were slighted, his miracles vilified, his character traduced? Whose conduct is the more absurd and criminal, that of Pharaoh, in pursuing after and attempting to bring back a people who had been a snare and a curse to himself and his kingdom; or that of Israel, in trembling at the approach of an enemy whom God had so often subdued under them? Frail nature looks only to the creature; to surrounding mountains, opposing floods, persecuting foes: hence terror, confusion, and astonishment. But faith eyes the pillar, the residence of divine majesty, and then mountains sink, seas divide, the chariot and horsemen are overthrown. Every passion, when it becomes predominant, renders us silly and unreasonable; and none more so than fear. In danger and distress it is natural, but it is foolish, to impute to another the evils which we fear or feel. It seems to be an alleviation of our own misery, if we can contrive to shift the blame of it upon the shoulders of our neighbor. Hence Moses is loaded with the imputation of a deliberate design of involving his nation in this dire dilemma, between Pharaoh and the Red Sea, and of selling them to the foe. A high and responsible situation is far from being an enviable one. If things go well, the conductor of the undertaking receives but a divided, a mutilated praise. If an enterprise fail, the whole blame of the miscarriage is imputed to him. The astonished multitude dare not directly attack God himself. No: the cloudy pillar hangs over their heads, ready to burst, in thunder and fire, on the man who presumed to aim his shafts so high. But their impiety seeks the pitiful shelter of a subterfuge; they murmur against Moses, because they imagine they can do it with impunity; and think to escape the resentment of the master, though they are wounding him through the sides of his servant. Mark yet again the folly and unreasonableness of fear. “Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.” What were they

afraid of now? A grave in the wilderness. What do they put in comparison with, and prefer to it? A grave in Egypt. It was a grave at the worst. Their wretched lives had got at least a short reprieve. If they died now, they died at once; and died like men, defending their lives, liberty, and families: not pouring out life, drop by drop, under the whip of a taskmaster. But slavery has broken their spirit. They are reduced to the lowest itch of human wretchedness; for this, surely, is the last stage of it. “It had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.” To this abject view of degeneracy and dejection, two objects are placed in contrast the calmness and intrepidity of Moses, and the majesty and power of God. In contemplating the former of these, as one great object of these Lectures is to unfold human character, and to hold up to imitation and applause praiseworthy conduct, let me endeavor to fix your attention upon the more obvious features of the great man, who is here drawing his own portrait.

All the great interests of Moses were embarked, with those of the commonwealth of Israel. His lot was cast into the common lap. He had made a sacrifice unspeakably greater than any individual of the congregation had done. His prospects, for either himself or his family were neither brighter nor more flattering than those of the obscurest Hebrew among them. If there were danger from the pursuing host of Pharaoh, his share, most assuredly, was not less than that of any other man. He had rendered himself peculiarly obnoxious to that stern, unrelenting tyrant, and must have been among the first victims of his resentment. But the pressing danger of Moses did not arise from Pharaoh, and the Egyptians, but from an intimidated, distracted multitude, who were ready to wreak their vengeance on whoever might first meet their resentment, or could be most plausibly charged as the author of their misfortunes. The composure of Moses, in such circumstances, is therefore justly to be considered as an instance of uncommon heroism and magnanimity. But why do we talk of heroism? the man who fears God knows no other fear. In the confidence of faith, though he knew not yet which way God was to work deliverance for Israel, he thus attempts to diffuse the hope, which he felt irradiating his own soul: “Fear ye not; stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you today, for the Egyptians which ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.”

Let me entreat you to observe, that the agent in this great transaction is also the historian of it; and that the resolution and spirit of the one is to be equaled only by the modesty and simplicity of the other. In the hands of one of the eloquent orators of Greece or Rome, what a figure would this passage of the life of the Jewish legislator have made, could we suppose them entering into the situation of a stranger, with the warmth which they feel in delineating the characters and conduct of their own heroes, and embellishing the dignity of modest merit with the glowing ornaments of rhetoric? But Scripture says much, by saying little. And the meek reserve, the unaffected conciseness of the sacred historian, infinitely exceed the diffusive and labored panegyrics of profane poetry or history. We have already, perhaps, deviated too far from that beautiful simplicity; and diminished instead of magnifying our object, by multiplying words. We hasten therefore, with our author to contemplate an object of infinitely higher consideration than himself; to which he constantly brings his own, and instructs us to bring our tribute of praise.

Behold the obstructions, which nature, and art, and accident have assembled to distress, to discourage, and to destroy the church of God! An impassable ridge of mountains upon the right hand and upon the left; the roaring sea in front; a powerful, exasperated, revengeful enemy

following close behind; internal weakness, irresolution, and dissension: the voice of sedition loud; Moses on his face before God. In such a situation as this, Omnipotence alone can save. No voice but that of a God, is worthy of being heard. Be silent then, O heavens, and listen, O earth, it is God who speaks. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward!” What sublimity, simplicity, and force was here! “Go forward!” What, into the raging billows? Great God, thy commands declare thy name and thy nature! What power except thine own, but must have been exposed and disgraced, by assuming such a high tone of authority! But what obstacle can oppose Him, who said, “Let there be light, and there was light?” “who spake, and it was done, who gave commandment, and it stood fast?” My heart is agitated with a mixture of fear and joy as I proceed. “The Lord God has given the word--Let the people go for ward.” When lo, the conducting pillar instantly changes its position, and solemnly retreats to the rear of the Israelitish host. The word given clears all the way before them, and ‘,the glory of the Lord becomes their rere-ward.” Now, behold the double effect of this symbol of the divine presence! To Israel, the cloud is all light and favor; to the Egyptians, all darkness and dismay. To those, night shineth as the day--to these, there is obscurity at noonday! “And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed, and want behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them. And it came between the camp of the Egyptians, and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud of darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night.” Awful distinction! Where shall we find the solution of the difficulty? where, but in this, “He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy; and whom he will he hardeneth.”[*]Rom 9:18 To prepare us for the history of the miracle which follows, give your attention, for a few moments, to what every man and woman among you may have observed a thousand and a thousand times. Go to the bank of the river, go to the shore of the sea, and twice in every twenty-four hours, as certainly as light proceeds from the sun, what is, now dry land will be covered with water, and what is now overflowed shall infallibly become dry ground. Farther, when a little wandering star, called the moon, is in this direction, or in this, the whole waters of the globe, in the ocean, in the seas, in the rivers, are elevated or depressed to such a certain degree. Let that planet be in an eastern or a western direction, the tide is precisely, at the same pitch of height or depth. After we have made this remark, which is obvious to the notice and level to the understanding of a child; the question will naturally occur, What, does this never fail? May we depend and act upon the certainty of such a regular succession and change taking place? Do the waters of the earth thus certainty feel, or seem to feel the various appearances of the moon? Then it cannot be without the design and interposition of an intelligent and powerful cause, which never misses its aim, is never off its guard, is never thwarted or defeated by unforeseen obstacles. Then, that invisible, unknown, incomprehensible power, may exercise a discretionary influence over the stream of a particular river, over the billows of a particular sea. He may, with or without apparent second causes, make the current overflow its banks, or the channel to become dry.

Or, to make another appeal to common observation and experience, when the sun is in such a certain position with respect to our earth, and the wind blows in such a direction, the water in that lake will be liquid and transparent, and the smallest, lightest pebble will sink to the bottom. But let the elevation of the sun be changed to an angle somewhat more acute, and let the wind shift into the opposite quarter, then, beyond all doubt, the selfsame water shall become solid as the rock, lose its transparency, and become capable of sustaining any weight that can be put upon it. How

easy had it been for Him, who produces regularly these changes in the course of every changing year, to have given the globe such a position, as would have rendered the hoary deep one vast mountain of ice, all the year round, or have prevented a single drop of water from ever being congealed. And “wherefore should it be thought a thing incredible,” that such an one, willing to make his power known, and his grace felt, should at his own time, and in his own way, do that in a particular instance, which he could have done perpetually and universally. Grant me the usual appearances and operations of nature, and I am prepared for all the uncommon, miraculous phenomena, with which the God of nature may see meet to present me. We come, accordingly, to the history of dividing the Red Sea, perfectly convinced that he who made it at first, can make of it whatever he pleases; and thoroughly satisfied that the occasion of such a notable miracle, as it is related by Moses, was entirely worthy of it.

If it be a just rule in criticism, that a Deity is never to be introduced but when his interposition is necessary, and on occasions becoming his dignity, the Mosaic account of this wonderful event stands fully justified in point of taste as well as authenticity. The powerful rod is once more stretched out. The east wind blows: the sea retires; and a safe and easy passage is opened for Israel, through the channel of the deep. “This also cometh forth from the Lord of Hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.”

“Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.” The word which commands the progress, also prepares the way. As in latter times, by the effectual working of the same almighty power, the grace which cured the father’s unbelief, at the selfsame instant likewise cast the devil out of the son. It is the sensible language of the common proverb, “The king said, Sail; but the wind said, No.” The command of the King of kings alone procures prompt obedience from every creature; for all are his subjects in fact, as well as of right. Thrones, principalities, and powers are subject unto him; and “a sparrow falleth not to the ground without our heavenly Father.” When we behold our blessed Savior, in the New Testament, saying to the stormy wind and the foaming billows, “Peace, be still,” and a great calm instantly ensuing; and compare it with the work of the great Jehovah under review, we are led directly to the conclusion of the Roman centurion who observed the wonders attending the crucifixion, “Truly this was the Son of God.” In the history of our own country, there is a passage, which the event we are considering suggests to our thoughts, and which does honor to the piety, modesty, and good sense of the prince whom it concerns. Canute, one of the early kings of the southern division of England, justly disgusted at the gross and impious adulation of some of his courtiers, who ascribed to him the attributes which belong only to God, and called him “lord of the earth and of the sea,” that he might check their folly by something more than a simple reproof, commanded his chair of state to be placed on the beach near Southampton, during the flowing of the tide. Arrayed in his royal robes, and attended by all the nobility and great men of his court, he sat down with his face towards the sea, and thus addressed it: “I charge thee, upon thy allegiance, O sea, to advance no farther. Here I, thy lord, have thought proper to fix my station. Know thy distance; respect my authority, nor dare to touch the feet of thy sovereign, under pain of his highest displeasure.” The swelling billows, regardless of his command and threatenings, continued to rush in, advanced impetuously to the steps of his throne, and speedily constrained the monarch and his train to retire. Upon which, turning round to his flatterers, he observed, “that he only deserved to be acknowledged as Lord of the land and the sea, whose will the winds and the waves obeyed.” The breadth of the passage opened through the

Red Sea must have been very considerable, indeed, to have afforded to such a multitude as four millions of people, for less there could not be, space to get over in a single night's time. To determine this, we must have recourse to calculation. But your time being far spent, this, together with an attempt to solve some of the difficulties of the dispensation, and to remove some of the objections which infidelity has raised to the credibility or miraculousness of the history, must make a constituent part of another Lecture. In practically applying this subject, we may consider the Red Sea, by which the armies of Israel were stopped short, as an emblematical representation of that great fight of affliction, that sea of trouble, through which every believer must pass in his way to the heavenly Canaan. Through the furnaces of Egypt, through the paths of the Red Sea, through the swellings of Jordan, God's ancient people at length got possession of the promised land. And it is "through manifold tribulations that we must enter into the kingdom of God." It is of importance not only that we be going forwards, but that we be making progress; that growth in grace should keep pace with the uninterrupted flux of human life. The course which Providence leads us, though neither the shortest nor the most desirable, will be found, upon the whole, the safest, the surest, and the best. The possession of Canaan is not always the next step to our escape from Egypt. Justification by the grace of God puts us beyond the reach of our enemies, and adoption makes good our title to "the inheritance of the saints in light;" but it is sanctification that makes us meet for the enjoyment of the purchased possession. The Red Sea seemed to put an end to Israel's progress, but actually shortened the distance. So affliction, while it appears intended to overwhelm, is accelerating the believer's speed to his Father's house above. "All these things are against me," saith frail, faltering, erring man, in his haste. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God," saith the better informed, the experience taught Christian, on reviewing, the mysterious ways of Providence; and on having attained "the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul." If we look to the creature only, all is dark and comfortless; nothing but cloud. When through the creature we look to an invisible God, all is peace and joy. We cannot remove mountains, nor turn floods into dry ground. It is not meet we should be trusted with such power. Obedience is our proper province; submission to the will of God our truest wisdom; and when we follow the direction of Providence, our way cannot but be prosperous. "Lord, we will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." Human conduct is a woeful inversion of this rule. We torment ourselves about the event over which we have no power, and trifle with the commandment with which alone we have to do. We neglect our duty, and then foolishly and impiously complain that we are unkindly dealt by, when Providence promotes not, or crosses our inclinations. Let us show cheerful and unreserved compliance; and be the issue what it may, whether our wishes be opposed or succeed, we shall at least have the consolation of reflecting, that the miscarriage is not chargeable to our own perverseness or folly. It is a dreadful, it is a two-edged evil, at once to lose our aim, and incur the just displeasure of God by disobedience. "Thy will," O Father, "be done on earth, as it is in heaven." Amen.

Chapter 50

050. Moses--Song of Deliverance

Moses--Song of Deliverance

Exo 15:1-2. Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my Father's God, and I will exalt him. To no one man has the world been so much indebted for rational pleasure and useful knowledge, as to the inspired author of these sacred books. Moses, as he is the most ancient, so he is by far the best writer that ever existed. Never in one and the same character were united talents so various, so rare, and so valuable. He may without hesitation be pronounced, the most eloquent of historians, the sublimest of poets, the profoundest of sages, the most sagacious of politicians, the most acute of legislators, the most intrepid of heroes, the clearest sighted of prophets, the most amiable of men. The qualities of his heart seem to strive for the mastery with those of the understanding: so that it is difficult to determine whether, as the reputed son of Pharaoh's daughter, as a voluntary exile from the splendor of a court, as the sympathizing friend of his afflicted brethren, as the bold protector of virgin innocence, as the contented shepherd of Jethro's flock, as the magnanimous assertor of Israelitish liberty, or finally, asking in Jeshurun, ruling the thousands of Israel with meekness and wisdom--he most challenges our admiration and praise. Had the world never been favored with his works, or were it now to be deprived of that precious treasure, the loss were inconceivably great. Who does not shudder at the thought? What a fearful gap in the history of mankind! What a blow to take, what a blank in science, what an impoverishing of the public stock of harmless pleasure, what an injury to the dearest, the best, the everlasting interests of mankind! The venerable man, who has for so many evenings past condescended to delight and instruct us by the relation of events the most singular, interesting, and important, assumes this night a new character; and in strains the sweetest and boldest that bard ever sung; in verses the loftiest that the imagination of poet ever dictated, rouses, warms, transports the mind. We forget the distance of three thousand years. We feel ourselves magically conveyed to the banks of the Red Sea. We join in the acclamations of the redeemed of the Lord, as this song of Moses swells upon our ear. "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. For the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots, and with his horsemen into the sea, and the Lord brought again the waters of the sea upon them; but the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea. The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone." Exo 15:1;Exo 15:19;Exo 15:5. How wonderfully suited to each other, the event and the celebration of it! In fulfilling the promise made in the conclusion of the last Lecture, and executing the business of the present, three objects are proposed. First, to attempt a vindication of the history of the passage of the Red Sea, from some objections which have been made to the credibility or miraculousness of it. Secondly, to make a few criticisms on the sacred hymn which was composed on the occasion, and now, in part, read in your hearing; in the view of pointing out a few of its more

striking beauties. And, thirdly, to make a few remarks on sacred poesy in general, tending to evince its superior excellency; and to point out the delicacy and difficulty of attempting to amplify or imitate what the inspired poets have written, as helps to devotion. In the first I shall, without ceremony or apology, borrow the assistance of the pious and learned author of Dissertations, historical, critical, theological, and moral, on the most memorable events of the Old and New Testament history,--James Saurin, late minister of the French church at the Hague.[*]Tom. i. Disc. xlix. In the second, I shall submit to be instructed by an ingenious, pious, and eloquent professor of rhetoric in the university of Paris, who has made choice of this passage, expressly for the purpose of exemplifying the majesty, beauty, and simplicity of the Scripture style.[*]Rollin Bel. Let. Tom. ii. Eloq, de Liv. Sacr. And in the third, I shall do little more than transcribe from an elegant, penetrating, and instructive moralist of our own age and country.[*]Johnson's life of the poet Waller. To return:

If we collect the several circumstances of this wonderful piece of history, it will readily be acknowledged, that there is here presented to the mind, one of the greatest, or rather a series of the greatest miracles, which the hand of Omnipotence ever wrought in behalf of any nation. It is not therefore to be wondered at if the enemies of revelation have endeavored to sully their luster, and impeach their credibility.

Three methods have been employed for this purpose--To ascribe these events to natural causes--To put them on a footing with others related in profane history, and to represent them as contradictory and inconsistent. Three bulwarks of infidelity; as many grounds of triumph for truth.

First, these events, which we ascribe entirely to the almighty power of God, have been accounted for from the common and natural operation of cause and effect. Eusebius has preserved and transmitted to us a fragment from an ancient author, Artapanes,[*]Euseb. Prepar. lib. ix. chap. xxvii. to this purpose: "Those of Memphis, one of the chief cities of ancient Egypt, allege, that Moses perfectly understood the country; that he had accurately observed the ebbing and flowing of the sea, and took advantage of the retreat of the tide to lead the people over. But they of Heliopolis relate the matter differently, saying, that while the king was pursuing the Israelites, Moses, by the command of Heaven, struck the waters with a rod, upon which they immediately separated, and left a spacious and safe passage for that great multitude; and, that the Egyptians attempting to follow them the same way, were dazzled and confounded by preternatural fires, lost their way, and by the reflux of the sea, were overtaken in the midst of the channel, and thus all perished either by water or by fire."

Now, granting to this quotation all the force that unbelief can give it, this evidently appears upon the face of it, that Moses has vouchers of his divine legation, even in Egypt, even among the idolaters themselves. If the Memphites accuse our historian of endeavoring to make a natural pass for a miraculous event, the Heliopolitans acknowledge that it was preternatural, and ascribe it to an immediate interposition of Heaven. And this concession is important, when we consider that it comes from the mouth of an enemy.

Again the supposition of the Memphites must be rejected by all those who pay any regard to the authority of Moses, and of the other sacred writers. He himself indeed admits, that the effect was forwarded by the assistance of a strong east wind. And whatever he ascribes to that, may seem so far to derogate from the greatness of the miracle. But it is no less true, that he throws out nothing

like an insinuation that the passage of the vast host of Israel was produced by the intervention of second causes. And all the inspired authors, who, after him, have mentioned it or alluded to it, acknowledge only a supernatural agency. Thus Joshua, who was an eye-witness and a party deeply concerned in the event. “For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over that all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God forever.”[*]Jos 4:23-24 Thus, Psa 66:6,--“He turned the sea into dry land; they went through the flood on foot; there did we rejoice in him.” And Psa 78:13,--“He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through, and he made the waters to stand as an heap.” And Psa 106:9,--“He rebuked the Red Sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths as through the wilderness.” And Heb 11:29,--“By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians essaying to do were drowned.” So that Moses, Joshua, David, and Paul, have but one and the same opinion on this subject. But farther, the essence of a miracle does not always consist in counteracting or suspending the laws of nature. One of the most contemptible of the adversaries of religion has weakly imagined,[*]Spinosa Tract. Theol. Polit. cap. vi. that by a single objection he was able to invalidate one of the bulwarks, and shake one of the pillars of revelation. “These miraculous effects,” says he, “are referred, by the confession of Scripture historians themselves, to the operation of second causes. It was by warming the body of a child, that Elijah brought him to life again. It was by applying clay, or dust mingled with spittle, to the eyes of a blind man, that Jesus Christ restored him to sight. It was by a wind, that Moses brought locusts upon Egypt, and obtained a passage through the Red Sea.” To this it is replied--That the most common and natural things become miracles, when they present themselves precisely at the time and in the manner prescribed by Him who commands their appearance, for the confirmation and establishment of a certain doctrine. What so natural and common, for example, as to see the sun shining one moment in full, and unobstructed glory, and the next darkened and concealed by clouds? But if a person publishing a new doctrine as divine, should undertake to prove his mission by changing the appearance of the bright orb of day, at his pleasure, and by showing him either in unclouded majesty, or eclipsed and shorn of his beams, according as he gave the word; and should we behold this very ordinary natural phenomenon actually and uniformly obeying the mandate, would not such an event, however natural in itself, become preternatural and miraculous from its circumstances? Thus, there might be occasion for the influence of the wind, to favor and facilitate the passage of Israel. But, how was it possible for their leader, by mere human sagacity, to discover that a wind from such a quarter, springing up exactly at such, an hour, should harden the bottom of the deep?

But, supposing the philosophy of Moses sufficiently accurate to assure him, that at such a time he might in safety march over his cumbersome retinue; could it inform him also that Pharaoh and his captains would certainly be mad enough to follow him through that dangerous route? Could it assure him that the rashness of the tyrant, and the law which regulated the flowing of the sea, would exactly keep time, so as effectually to produce the destruction of his whole army? The flux and reflux of the tide were known to Moses; but, was it entirely unknown to the Egyptians? What, in so great an army, led by the sovereign in person, in a land renowned for natural knowledge, was there no man astronomer enough to know, that the difference of a few hours is everything in a case of this sort; that to be in such a spot, at such a time, was inevitable destruction? Incredible! impossible!

Finally, it is altogether inconceivable that the space of three or four hours, the utmost that an ebb merely natural could have afforded them, was sufficient for the transition of such an astonishing multitude as that which Moses conducted. The learned Calmer has so fully demonstrated this point,[*]Dissert. sur le Passage de la Mer Rouge. as to enforce the conclusion, that no degree of human knowledge could have disclosed to Moses a foresight of the events which proved so propitious to him. Not therefore to the superiority of genius, but to a power divine, the praise is to be ascribed. And to the same principle we must recur in order to explain the mighty difference which Providence puts between the Israelites and the Egyptians, in the midst of the Red Sea.

Attempts have been made to debase the dignity of this great event, by reducing it to the level of similar appearances recorded by profane historians. That degenerate son of Israel, Josephus, first started this objection. These are his words; “this,” speaking of the passage of the Red Sea, “I have related with all the circumstances, as I find them in our sacred authors. Nobody ought to think it an incredible thing, that a people which lived in the innocence and simplicity of the first ages, might have found a way through the sea to save themselves. Whether it was that the sea itself opened it for them, or whether it was done by the will of God: since the same thing happened long after to the Macedonians, when they passed through the sea of Pamphylia, under the conduct of Alexander, when God thought fit to make use of that people for the destruction of the Persian empire, as it is affirmed by all the historians who have written the life of that Prince. However, I leave all men to judge of this matter as they think fit.” Thus far Josephus.[*]Antiq. Jud. lib. ii. cap. vii. Antiquities 2.347 The other instances which some presume to be put in competition with this, are the approach of Scipio with his army to the attack of New Carthage, by means of an extraordinary ebb at the change of the moon, recorded by Livy;[*]Lib. xxvi. cap. xlv. a similar ebb of the river Euphrates, related by Plutarch, in his life of Lucullus; and, a flood altogether as singular, upon the coast of Holland, in the year 1672. which kept up for twelve whole hours, and was apparently the means of preserving that republic from the consequences of a joint attack of the fleets of England and France. It is handed down to us in the life of the famous admiral De Ruyter, who had the command of the Dutch squadron at that time. Neither your time nor patience admitting of an inquiry into the truth of these several facts, we satisfy ourselves with observing, that admitting them to be true, not one of them is any way worthy to be compared with the Mosaic account of the passage across the Red Sea. The pointed and particular prediction of Moses; the rod employed, and the instantaneousness of the effect; the facility and speed of the passage; the rashness of the Egyptians; their tragic end; everything in short concurs to render this an unparalleled event. And nothing but an immoderate desire of depreciating the miracles of the sacred history, could have attempted to diminish this celebrated transit into a comparison with any of the other events which are alluded to. The third objection is, to the truth of the history; pretended to be taken from the history itself. The time allotted by Moses, by his own account, for the congregation, consisting of so many myriads, to pass over, is considered by the objectors as much too short for the purpose. But in order to support it, they are obliged to go into uncertain, fanciful, and unsupported conjectures, about the breadth of the Red Sea at the place where the passage was opened. They make the breadth of that passage just what it suits their own arbitrary conjecture and calculation. They must needs constrain a great multitude, in very peculiar circumstances, unaccustomed to discipline, stimulated by fear, and borne on the wings of hope, to move with the leisure and deliberation of a regular army. They will not deign to acknowledge the power and grace of the Most High in every part of the transaction. They overlook the description

given of that people, Psa 105:37, as a people full of strength and vigor, and “not one sickly among them.” They forget what God himself soon after says of them, “You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagle’s wings, and brought you unto myself.” We conclude, that as the case taken all together was singular, unprecedented, and followed by nothing like it; so the particular circumstances of it are likewise singular and unexampled, and will, with every candid person, bear out Moses, the sacred historian, against the charge of being inconsistent with himself.

We proceed to the second object which we proposed, namely, to point out a few of the more striking beauties of the sacred song, which was composed and sung in grateful acknowledgment of that great deliverance which we have been contemplating. What will undoubtedly give it a high value in the estimation of many is, that it is the most ancient morsel of poetry which the world is in possession of: being three thousand three hundred and thirty-seven years old, that is, six hundred and forty-seven years before Homer, the most ancient and the best of heathen bards, lived or sung. But its antiquity is its slightest excellency. The general turn of it is great, the thoughts nobly simple, the style sublime, the expression strong, the pathos sweet, the figures natural and bold. It abounds throughout with images which at once strike, warm, astonish, and delight. The occasion of it you well know. The poet’s view is to indulge himself in transports of joy, admiration, and gratitude, and to inspire the people with the same sentiments. Accordingly he thus impetuously breaks out,

Exo 15:1. “I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.” Here the tremendous majesty of God the deliverer, and the lively gratitude of the people saved, the leading object of the piece, are placed instantly and powerfully in sight; and they are never dropped for one moment, to the end. ., in the singular number, is much more energetic and affecting than we in the plural would have been. The triumph of Israel over the Egyptians did not resemble the usual triumphs of nation over nation; where the individual is overlooked and lost in the general. No; everything here is peculiar and personal. Every Israelite for himself reflects with joy on his own chains now forever broken in pieces. He seems to exult over his own tyrant-master now subdued under him, and hails his personal liberty now effectually secured. For it is natural to the heart of man, in extreme danger, to refer everything to himself, and to consider himself as all in all. “The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea:” for the same reason the horse is much more forcible than horses would have been; it marks strongly the suddenness, the universality, the completeness of the destruction. The Egyptian cavalry, numerous, formidable, covering the face of the ground, is represented in a moment, by a single effort, at one blow, overthrown, overwhelmed, as if they had been but one horse and one rider.

Exo 15:2. “Jehovah is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt him.” Is it lawful to say that the poet employs the most exquisite art, in representing this great deliverance, in every part and every view of it, as the work of Jehovah: the great “I am that I am:” that name of God, by which he chose to be known to Israel through the whole of those memorable transactions? my strength, that is, the source or cause of my strength: and it points out the great God as the courage and force of Israel, without the necessity of their exerting any of their own. “My song,” that is, the subject of it. No instrument divides the praise with him. No power, no wisdom is employed but his own. He planned, arranged, executed every thing by himself. “He is become my salvation.” The fine writers

of Greece or Rome would probably have said, “He hath saved me.” But Moses says much more; the Lord hath undertaken himself to work deliverance for me: he hath made my salvation his own, his personal concern, and is become to me everything I can want.

“He is my God.” Every word is emphatic. “He,” in opposition to the gods of Egypt, which cannot hear, nor see, nor save. “My God:” all-attentive to my interest and safety, as if he had no creature but me to care for: and therefore my God: for I acknowledge not, I never will acknowledge, any other. “My father’s God.” This repetition is most beautifully tender and pathetic. He whose greatness I adore, is not a strange God, unknown till now; a protector for a moment. No, he is the ancient patron of my family, his goodness is from generation to generation. I have a thousand domestic proofs of his constant, undiminished affection; and he is now making good to me only that which he solemnly promised to my forefathers. And how has he effected this?

“The Lord is a man of war.” An ordinary writer would probably have represented the Almighty here as the God of armies: and as such discomfiting the host of Pharaoh. But Moses does more; he brings him forth as a champion, a soldier; puts the sword into his hand, and exhibits him fighting his battles, the battles of Israel.

Exo 15:4-5 contain a very fine display and amplification of the simple idea suggested in the first, “the horse and his rider.”

“Pharaoh’s chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains are also drowned in the Red Sea, the depths have covered them, they sank into the bottom as a stone.” Image rises and swells above image. Pharaoh’s chariots, his hosts, his chosen captains--cast into the sea, drowned in the Red Sea--covered with the depths, sunk to the bottom, at once, as a stone. Notwithstanding their pride and insolence, they can make no more resistance to the power of Jehovah, than a stone launched from the arm of a strong man into the flood.

Every writer but a Moses must have stopped short here; or flattened his subject, by repeating or extending the same ideas. But the seraphic poet, upborne by an imagination which overleaps the boundaries of the world, and an enthusiasm which cannot rest in any creature, springs up to the Creator himself, in these rapturous strains.

“Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in thy power: thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. In the greatness of thine excellency thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee.” When the heart is full of an object, it turns it round, as it were on every side, returns to it again and again; never tires in contemplating it, till admiration is lost in astonishment.--Moses after this effusion of joy and praise returns again to the matter of fact: but not in the language of more description, as in the 4th verse; but in a continuation of his bold animated address to God himself; which gives it a life and fervor superior to anything human. As if the strength of one element had not been sufficient to destroy God’s enemies every element lends its aid. The deep opens its mouth, the fire consumes, the wind rages; all nature is up in arms, to avenge the quarrel of an incensed God. The poet ennobles the wind, by making God the principle of it; and animates the fire, by making it susceptible of fear. In the same style of address to God, he throws himself as it were into the person and character of the enemy, previous to their defeat, and pours forth their sentiments of threatening and slaughter; the more strongly to mark their disappointment, by contrasting the folly and impotence of man, with the power and justice of God. “The enemy said, I

will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil: my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them." You see here vengeance hastening to its object, regardless of opposition. The words, unconnected with a conjunction, seem to hurry on like the passion that prompts to them. And in what does it issue?--"Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them." And the picture is finished with this happy stroke, "They sank as lead in the mighty waters." But I feel I have undertaken a task far beyond my ability, and the limits of your time. And therefore break off with another borrowed remark, namely, that whatever grandeur and magnificence we may discover in this song, as it stands in such a place and connection, its beauty and force must greatly rise upon us, were we permitted to penetrate through the mysterious sense concealed behind the veil of this great event. For it is certain, that this deliverance from Egypt covers and represents salvation of a superior and more extensive nature. The Apostle of the Gentiles teaches us to consider it as a type of that freedom which the Christian obtains by the waters of baptism and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, from the yoke of the prince of this world. And the prophet, in the book of Revelation, makes it to shadow forth the final and great deliverance of the redeemed, by introducing the assembly of those who overcome the beast, holding the harps of God in their hands, and singing "the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints! Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy; for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest."[*]Rev 15:3-4 Now, as the Scriptures declare that the wonders of this second deliverance shall infinitely surpass the first, and shall entirely obliterate the remembrance of it; we may easily believe that the beauties of the spiritual sense of this divine poem may totally eclipse those of the historical.

Having endeavored imperfectly to unfold some of the excellencies of this ancient sacred composition, I should proceed, as I proposed, to point out the delicacy of attempting, and the difficulty of succeeding, in imitating or extending devotional poetry; but your time and patience, perhaps, will be better employed in hearing me read to you a short passage, containing the sentiments of an excellent modern critic[*]Dr. Samuel Johnson. on the subject; with which I shall conclude this exercise.

"It has been the frequent lamentation of good men, that verse has been too little applied to the purposes of worship; and many attempts have been made to animate devotion by pious poetry. That they have very seldom attained their end is sufficiently known; and it may not be improper to inquire why they have miscarried.

"Let no pious ear be offended, if I advance, in opposition to many authorities, that poetical devotion cannot often please. The doctrines of religion may, indeed, be defended in a didactic poem; and he who has the happy power of arguing in verse, will not lose it because his subject is sacred. A poet may describe the beauty and grandeur of nature, the flowers of spring, and the harvests of autumn, the vicissitudes of the tide, and the revolutions of the sky, and praise the Maker for his works, in lines which no reader shall lay aside. The subject of the disputation is not piety, but the motives to piety; that of the description is not God, but the works of God.

"Contemplative piety, or the intercourse between God and the human soul, cannot be poetical. Man admitted to implore the mercy of his Creator, and plead the merits of his Redeemer, is already in a higher state than poetry can confer.

“The essence of poetry is invention; such invention as, by producing something unexpected, surprises and delights. The topics of devotion are few, and being few are universally known; but few as they are, they can be made no more; they can receive no grace from novelty of sentiment, and very little from novelty of expression.

“Poetry pleases by exhibiting an idea more grateful to the mind than things themselves afford. This effect proceeds from the display of those parts of nature which attract, and the concealment of those which repel the imagination; but religion must be shown as it is; suppression and addition equally corrupt it; and such as it is, it is known already.

“From poetry the reader justly expects, and from good poetry always obtains, the enlargement of his comprehension, and elevation of his fancy; but this is rarely to be hoped for by Christians from metrical devotion. Whatever is great, desirable, or tremendous, is comprised in the name of the Supreme Being. Omnipotence cannot be exalted; infinity cannot be amplified; perfection cannot be improved.

“The employments of pious meditation are faith, thanksgiving, repentance, and supplication. Faith, invariably uniform, cannot be invested by fancy with decorations. Thanksgiving, the most joyful of all holy effusions, yet addressed to a being without passions, is confined to a few modes, and is to be felt rather than expressed. Repentance trembling in the presence of the judge, is not at leisure for cadences and epithets. Supplication of man to man may diffuse itself through many topics of persuasion, but supplication to God can only cry for mercy.

“Of sentiments purely religious, it will be found that the most simple expression is the most sublime. Poetry loses its luster and its power, because it is applied to the decoration of something more excellent than itself. All that verse can do is to help the memory and delight the ear; and for these purposes it maybe very useful; but it supplies nothing to the mind. The ideas of Christian theology are too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction, and too majestic for ornament; to recommend them by tropes and figures, is to magnify by a concave mirror the sidereal hemisphere.”

051. Moses--Marah

Moses--Marah

Exo 15:23-27. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah; for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there, he proved them, and said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee. And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm-trees; and they encamped there by the waters.

Unless the mind be under the regulating power of religion, it will be perpetually losing its balance, and changing its tenor: at one time accelerated into indecent and dangerous speed, through the impulse of desire, ambition, or revenge; at another it is chilled into languor and inaction, through fear, despondency, and disappointment. We shall behold the same person now believing things incredible, and attempting things impracticable; and anon staggering at the shadow of a doubt, and shrinking from the slightest appearance of difficulty and danger. Insolent, fierce, and overbearing in prosperity, the unsteady creature becomes groveling, dispirited, and mean in adversity. “It is a good thing,” therefore, “that the heart be established by grace:” grace, that calm, steady, uniform principle, which veers not with every wind of doctrine; rises not, nor falls, like the mercury, in the tube, with every variation of the atmosphere, according to the alternate transition of disappointment and success, censure and applause, health and sickness, youth and age. In the day of prosperity, religion saith to the soul where it dwells, “Rejoice,” and in the day of adversity, “Consider;” for a wise and a merciful God hath set the one over against the other. This divine principle corrects immoderate joy, saying to the happy, “Be not high minded, but fear;” it consoles and supports the miserable, by breathing the sweet assurance, that the “light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”[*]2Co 4:17 The want of this balance of the soul, and the dangerous consequences of that want, are strikingly exemplified in the history of the chosen people, whom Providence, by a series of miracles, undertook to conduct from Egypt to Canaan. Elated or depressed by the aspect of the moment, we find them haughty in the hour of victory, and sunk into despair, by a defeat. The deepness of the waters of the Red Sea, and their miraculous separation, afford matter of triumph today; the bitterness of the waters of Marah causes universal discontent and dejection tomorrow. But alas! we need not recur to distant periods of history for an example of the ruinous effects produced by a destitution of religious principle, and of the fatal power of unbelief. The history of every man’s own experience is illustration sufficient. To what must we ascribe the envy, jealousy, rage, pride, resentment, timidity, diffidence, and dejection, which successively and unremittingly agitate the human mind? Men walk by Night, not by faith. They feel the powers of the world that is, and are

insensible of that which is to come. They look at “things temporal,” and neglect those which “are unseen and eternal.” They stand in awe of the creature, and despise the Creator. While then we discover, deplore, and condemn a selfish, a perverse, and discontented spirit, and an unbelieving heart in others, let us study, by the grace of God, to reform the same or like dispositions in ourselves.

What a magnificent concert filled the shores of the Red Sea, after Israel was passed over! Everything was suited to another. The words were adapted to the occasion, the music to the words, the performers to the music. There Moses, leading the bolder, rougher notes of manly voices; here Miriam, the prophetess, his sister, in sweet accord, blending the softer harmony of female strains with the notes of the timbrel, in praise of their great Deliverer. Never surely did such music strike the vault of heaven, and never shall again, “till the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; when they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away:”[*]Isa 35:10 never, till the song of Moses be closed with the song of the Lamb. At length they quit the scene of their terror and of their triumph; for the world admits not of a long continuance of either; and they advance three days’ march into the wilderness. Escaped effectually and forever from the oppression of Egypt, no more opposed in front by an insurmountable barrier, nor hemmed in on either side by impassable mountains, nor pursued by a numerous and well disciplined army; but the sea, once their hindrance, now their defence; every foe subdued, and the road to Canaan straight before them, what can now give disturbance? On how many circumstances does life and the comfort of it depend! The failure or disagreeable quality of one ingredient corrupts and destroys the whole. In Shur they found no water; in Marah they find water, but it is bitter. The unavoidable condition of a wilderness state! Always too little, or too much! Here there are children and penury; there affluence and sterility. This year there is drought parching and consuming every plant of the field; the next, an overflowing flood sweeping everything before it; and unhappy mortals are eternally augmenting the necessary and unavoidable evils of human life, by peevishness and discontent.

Oblige an ungrateful person ever so often, and disappoint or oppose him once, and lo, the memory of a thousand benefits is instantly lost. All that Moses, all that God has done for Israel is forgotten, the moment that a scarcity of water is felt. For it is with this spirit as with that of ambition: nothing is attained in the eye of ambition, while there is yet one thing to be attained. All the favor of Ahasuerus avails Haman nothing, while Mordecai the Jew sits in the king’s gate. So ingratitude says nothing is granted, while one thing is denied me. One scanty meal in Shur, or one unpalatable beverage at Marah, has obliterated all remembrance of the recent wonders of Egypt, and the more re cent miracles of the Red Sea. And as one evil quality is ever found in company with its fellows, we here find ingratitude and impiety toward God blended with unkindness and unreasonableness toward man. And cowardice pitifully levels its keen arrows at the servant, not daring to attack the master. “The people murmured against Moses.” A worldly mind under distress either flies to the creature for help, or accuses the creature as the cause of its woe. Piety leads the soul directly to God; it views the calamity as his appointment; and finds its removal, its remedy, or its compensation in the divine mercy. Israel tastes the bitter water, desponds, and charges Moses foolishly. Moses cries to God, and is enlightened.

Observe the goodness and longsuffering of God. Readier to listen to the entreaties of Moses than to punish the perverseness and unbelief of the people, he instantly directs to a cure for the nitrous

quality of the waters of Marsh. “The Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.” Of little consequence is it to inquire, because it is impossible to determine, whether the wood of this tree had in it an inherent virtue which naturally corrected the brackish taste of the water; or, whether the sweetening quality were preternaturally communicated to it to fulfil the present design of Providence. Whether I see water sweetened by a log of wood cast into it, or issuing from the flinty rock, or flowing naturally in the brook; whether I see Israel fed with bread from heaven, or Moses and Christ subsisting forty days without bread at all; or mankind in general supported by bread growing gradually out of the ground; I still behold but one and the same object; “good gifts coming down” but in so many different ways “from the Father of lights.” The wise man, in the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus, has made a happy use of this passage, to inculcate the necessity of using appointed means in order to obtain success. “The Lord (says he) hath created medicines out of the earth, and he that is wise will not abhor them. Was not the water made sweet with wood, that the virtue thereof might be known? and he hath given men skill, that be might be honored in his marvellous works. With such doth he heal men, and taketh away their pains. My son, in thy sickness be not negligent; but pray unto the Lord, and he will make thee whole.” A fondness for allegory has represented the effect produced by this tree cast into the waters, as emblematical of the virtue of the cross, in sweetening and sanctifying affliction to the believer, and taking the sting out of death. Undoubtedly, when an object so important and a doctrine so instructive can by whatever means be impressed upon the heart, we ought not too squeamishly to reject application and illustrations of this. sort. In order to promote the ends of true piety, what though we relax a little of the laws of rigid criticism? If imagination serve as an handmaid to virtue and devotion, let men be as fanciful as they will. If a serious soul be edified or comforted, shall I mar his joy and disturb his tranquillity, by forcing him to comprehend the meaning of Greek and Hebrew particles? Whether it be warrantable or not to give this evangelical turn to the passage before us, its moral intention and import will hardly be disputed. It exhibits the reluctance which men feel to encounter affliction, their impatience and unreasonableness under it, the wise design of Providence in affliction dispensations, namely, to “prove men, whether they will diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord their God, and do that which is right in his sight.” And finally, it illustrates the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, in counteracting one natural evil by another evil; making poison serve as an antidote to poison, and healing the greater plague of sin by the less, that of suffering.

Some commentators have conjectured, that it was about this very spot that Hagar was relieved and supplied with water, she and her son, by the angel of the Lord, when they were banished from Abraham’s house; and they reprove the incredulity of the Israelites by the example of her faith. After all, it was undoubtedly a very severe trial; whether we consider how much water, sweet water, is connected, not merely with the convenience and comfort, but with the very existence of human life; the immense quantity necessary for the support of such a vast multitude of men and women, besides cattle; or the peculiar demand occasioned by a vertical sun and a parched soil. We pass on from Marah as men, and as the inhabitants of more favored regions, praising God, “who walks upon the clouds,” and refreshes us from heaven above; gushes upon us in a thousand streams of limpid comfort from the earth beneath, and gently flows through every field in a tide of delight; and as Christians we flee for refuge and refreshment to that Wonderful Man, described in prophetic vision in such beautiful figures as these; “A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest: as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great

rock in a weary land."[*]Isa 32:2 Gold, silver, and precious stones, are produced in small quantities, and are of difficult and dangerous investigation. And happily the life of man consists not in such things as these. Whereas the things which really minister to human comfort, and constitute the real support of human life, are poured down upon us with unbounded profusion. The choicest blessing which ever was bestowed upon the world, is common and free to all as the water in the stream, as the light and air of heaven. But though the bitter waters are sweetened for present use, Israel must not think of continuing encamped by them. They are to be but the transient refreshment of the wayfaring man, not the stated supply of the land of promise. Whatever we have attained, whatever we enjoy, the voice of Providence still summons us away, saying, "Arise ye and depart, for this is not your rest." Their next journeying is from Marah to Elim, "where were twelve wells of water and threescore and ten palm-trees; and they encamped there by the waters." In the preceding station, their provision was partly from nature, partly from the kindness of a gracious Providence. Nature furnished the substance, a miracle endowed it with the suitable qualities. But at Elim, nature seems to do the whole, with her "threescore and ten palm-trees, and twelve wells of water." And what is nature, but the great Jehovah performing the most astonishing wonders in a stated and regular course? Water issuing from a rock when smitten by a rod, is not in itself a whit more miraculous than the continually supplying one little stream from the same spring. Being arrived at Elim, they encamped "by the waters." The word "Elim" standing in our version untranslated, is generally considered as the proper name of a place; but it is by some, and with a great appearance of reason, rendered, "the forests." This is supported by a passage of Strabo,[*]Lib. xvi. the famous geographer and historian of Cappadocia, to this purpose; that "at five days' journey from Jericho there is a forest of palm-trees, which is held in great veneration throughout all that country, on account of the springs of water which are found there in great abundance." The numbers twelve and seventy in the sacred text, instead of signifying a determinate quantity, may undoubtedly denote indefinitely, according to a license common in all languages, a large abundance. And then the account of Strabo, and the narration of Moses, will naturally confirm and strengthen each other. Two writers of no less eminence and credit than Tacitus[*]Hist. lib. v. and Plutarch[*]Tom. II. Sympos. lib. iv. plainly allude to this passage, when they say that the Jews, being ready to perish with thirst happily discovered springs of running water,"

But, instead of settling the geography of the spot, and the import of the word Elim, let us look into the fact recorded, and through it into the volume of human nature. "They encamped there by the waters." The self-same spirit which murmured at the taste of a bitter stream, disposed them to seek repose by the side of one that was sweet and placid. Mistaken in both, a carnal mind is easily unhinged and soon satisfied.--Like children, they are put out of humor with a straw, and presently pacified they know not why; and behold unbelief lying at the root of both one and the other. Now, eager to get home before the time; by and by drowning all thoughts and hopes of it in the bauble of the present hour. See Israel at one time disconcerted and chagrined to find that the wilderness did not produce everything to a wish; at another, ready to forego the prospect of Canaan for Egypt, and to accept the land of dates and water for that flowing with milk and honey. Never did any good come of sitting down contentedly in temporal possessions. No sooner do men become easy and comfortable in their circumstances, than they grow capricious and fantastical in their wishes and desires. If Providence visit them not with scarcity, or unpleasantness of water: their own restless appetite shall visit them with an absurd and unreasonable craving for flesh. The fruit and shade of

the palm-tree, and the deliciousness of a fresh spring, please not long. Put an end to novelty, and farewell delight. But a month and fourteen days have elapsed, since with so much joy they quitted the house of bondage: and they are weak and wicked enough to wish themselves thither again. And why? because, in a march of a few short weeks at most, through a wild and desert country, they wallowed not in the profusion of Egypt which they were obliged to purchase at the price of their liberty and blood. When we hear of such an universal mutiny, for it was not the murmuring of a few factious discontented spirits, but of the whole congregation of Israel, what have we not to fear from the just resentment of a holy and righteous God, thus insulted by mistrust and unbelief? We find him immediately taking up the cause, and, in a manner peculiar to himself. Wonder, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold I will rain”--what? Fire and brimstone from heaven, upon this generation of incorrigible rebels, until they be utterly consumed? No, but “I will rain bread from heaven upon you.” Is this thy manner with men, O Lord God? Surely, “it is of thy mercy we are not consumed, because thy compassions fail not.” The historical fact which follows, as the accomplishment of this promise, is one of the most singular upon record; and so mixes itself with the leading objects of the New Testament dispensation, that it well merits a separate and particular consideration. Being arrived at another of the great epochal, or periods of ancient history, the going out of Egypt; we shall make a brief recapitulation of the whole, from the beginning. The first great period of the history of the world,, is from the creation down to the deluge; containing the space of one thousand six hundred and fifty-six years; and a succession of eight lives, from Adam, to the six hundreth year of Noah. The second is, from the flood to the calling of Abraham, and contains four hundred and twenty-seven years; and a succession of ten lives, from the hundred and eighth year of Shem, the son of Noah, to the seventy-fifth of Abraham, the father and founder of the Jewish nation: six of the patriarchs, after the flood, being now dead, Noah, Phaleg, Rehu, Serug, Nahor, and Terah; and four of them still living, Shem, Arphaxad, Salah, and Heber. So that one life, that of Shem, connects the antediluvian world, and the call of Abraham. For he was ninety-eight years old before the flood came; and lived till Abraham was one hundred and fifty, and Isaac fifty years old. The third grand period of the world, containing four hundred and thirty years, commences on the fifteenth day of the month Abib, which answers to the end of our April, or the beginning of May. And some learned chronologists have undertaken to prove, from the Scripture history and astronomical calculations, that Abraham departed from Haran, the paschal lamb was sacrificed in Egypt, and Christ expired upon the cross, as the propitiation for the sins of the world, on Calvary, in the identical month of the year, day of the month, and hour and minute of the day. This period contains a succession of seven lives, including Abraham’s, from his seventy-fifth year to the eightieth of the life of Moses. From the creation, then, to the exodus, is the space of two thousand five hundred and thirteen years, and a succession of twenty-four lives. The date of this event, is relation to other important and well known events in the history of mankind, stands as follows: it happened after the death of Abraham, three hundred and thirty years. After the death of Isaac, two hundred and twenty five. After the death of Jacob, one hundred and ninety-eight. After the death of Joseph, one hundred and forty-four. Before the destruction of Troy, about three hundred. Before the first Olympiad, or the earliest reckoning of time among the Greeks, seven hundred and fourteen. Before the building of the temple, when the Israelitish glory was in its zenith, five hundred and six. Before the Babylonish captivity, nine hundred and sixty-three. Before the building of Rome, seven hundred and thirty-eight. Before Christ was born at Bethlehem, one thousand five hundred and fifty-one.

Before the present year 1793, three thousand three hundred and forty-four.

What is the conclusion of the whole matter? “A thousand years,” O Lord, “in thy sight, are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.”[*]Psa 90:4 “Our fathers, where are they? the prophets, do they live for ever!” “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be, in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”[*]2Pe 3:11-13 “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”[*]Psa 90:12 “Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.”[*]Mat 8:11 “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.”[*]John 1:17 “And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.” “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely, I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”[*]Rev 22:20

052. Moses--Manna Sent

Moses--Manna Sent

Exo 16:11-15. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel; speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread: and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God. And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host. And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar-frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat.

Man, composed of body and spirit, is giving continual indication of the origin from which he springs. His creative imagination, his penetrating understanding, his quickness of apprehension, loftiness of thought, eagerness of desire, fondness of hope; nay, even his erect figure, and a countenance turned upward to the skies, bespeak him the son of God, into whose nostrils Jehovah has breathed the breath of life, and whom he has framed after his own image. On the other hand, appetites perpetually craving a supply out of the earth; the law of his nature, which stretches him in a state of insensibility upon the lap of his mother, for one third of his existence, in order to support the employments of the other two; and rational powers subjected to the will of sense, show us a creature taken from the dust of the ground, always dependent upon it, and hastening to return thitherward again.

Providence permits us not for a moment to forget who and whence we are. Have we labored an hour or two? Hunger, and thirst, and weariness irresistibly draw us to the grosser elements of which we are compounded. A little bread and water having dispensed their nourishing virtue, a short sleep having restored our wasted powers, the soul starts up into conscious immortality, it springs forward to eternity, grasps the globe, expatiates from sphere to sphere, ascends to the throne of God himself. At one time, we behold a groveling, contemptible being, all body, absorbed in the low and gross desire of the moment, a fit companion to the beasts that perish; and anon we see that very same wretched creature becoming all spirit, leaving the earth behind hint, mixing with angels, and holding fellowship with the Father of spirits.

Religion is constantly aiming at the restoration of our fallen nature, is still exerting her quickening power to raise the bestial into rational, the rational into divine; she graciously employs herself in gradually detaching us from things seen and temporal, and in uniting us to those which are unseen and are eternal. The world, on the contrary, is as constantly striving to degrade, to depress, to extinguish the immortal principle, and to sink the man in the brute. Hence we see the worldling dreaming of much goods laid up for many years, endeavoring to confer duration even upon his sensuality; while Christ teacheth his disciples to pray, saying, “Give us this day our daily bread.” And by this admonition, he powerfully checks immoderate anxiety about the future. “Therefore, I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your

body, what ye shall put on: is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"[*]Mat 6:25-26 To teach men their constant dependence, their provision is bestowed in a gradual, daily supply; not in heaps but in handfuls. And when God was pleased miraculously to feed Israel in the wilderness for forty years together, the food of every day came in its day. All attempts to hoard were defeated. Everyone's portion was sufficiently ample; and accumulation became a nuisance instead of wealth.

Men, under the impulse of their passions sluggishly crawl, or eagerly run to the objects of their pursuit; but God is ever advancing towards his in the same steady, majestic pace. When we hear of the birth of Moses, the deliverer of Israel, we immediately conclude that the time of their redemption is now at hand. But behold forty years elapse before a single effort is made for this purpose. And, it is then the feeble effort of a solitary individual to avenge a private wrong; while the general enfranchisement seems rather retarded than accelerated by it; and another period of forty years passes, without one apparent step taken towards public liberty. The fetters of Egypt are at length broken, and Israel is enlarged; but the possession of Canaan is still at a distance; and a third space of forty years consumes that whole generation in the wilderness; and Moses, their conductor, dies at the age of one hundred and twenty years, before the sole of one foot enters into the land of promise, as a possession. So unlike are the preconceptions of erring men to the designs of the infinitely wise God. When we behold that vast congregation, by such a display of Omnipotence rescued from bondage, conducted through the Red Sea, made to triumph over all their enemies, we are apt to consider them as the favorites of Heaven, destined to personal honors and possessions. But the event teaches us to correct our hasty judgment, and instructs us that not the particular interests of individuals, but the great interests of the church of God, are the care of Heaven; that, though Aaron and his sons may die, the priesthood ever lives; and that while prophet after prophet retires, it is only to make room for the Prince and Lord of all the prophets. Of little consequence is it to obtain possession of expected good, unless we be fitted for the enjoyment of it. A nation of slaves was unqualified to exercise the rights, and to enjoy the privileges of citizens. Israel had no existence in Egypt but merely a natural one. They had no civil constitution, no laws, no government. To have been conducted directly to Canaan in such a state had been the reverse of a benefit. Providence therefore thought proper to employ a series of years in the wilderness, in training the people for empire, in modeling a government suitable to their future condition, and by enacting wise laws, respecting both religion and civil polity, prepared them for that exalted rank which they were to hold among the nations; and that duration of power and importance, with which the salvation of the whole human race was so closely connected. Thus the eternal decree makes the possession of the heavenly Canaan sure to every heir of glory; which decree, the justifying grace, and adopting love of his heavenly Father declare and confirm; but he is not brought home to his Father's house above, till through the school of discipline, and by the Spirit of holiness, he is "made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light."

Men, through impatience and peevishness, miss the very end at which they aim. Canaan flies but the farther off, from being grasped at too soon. The homely provision brought from Egypt was now spent; the milk and honey of Canaan were not yet bestowed. The wilderness naturally produced nothing for food, hardly water to quench their thirst. The wonders of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the sweetening of the bitter waters of Marah, all, all is forgotten the moment distress comes

upon them. “And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.” God immediately takes up the cause as his own; but instead of expressing the resentment of an insulted sovereign and benefactor, declares his gracious resolution to overcome this ungracious spirit, by compliance and kindness; and men, unworthy of the meanest earthly fare, have a promise of a daily supply of bread from heaven. But as God does not always withhold in displeasure, so he does not always grant from love. When Providence deigns to indulge the humors and gratify the lusts of men, it is far, very far from being a token for good. A promise of bread in the morning is precious information; but the addition of flesh to the full in the evening wears rather the appearance of a threatening. When our desires exceed the bounds of wisdom, the accomplishment, not the disappointment of them, becomes our punishment.

It is remarkable too, that the luxurious part of their demand was granted before that which was necessary. The quails came in the evening; the manna appeared not till the next morning. Another Proof, that the supply granted flowed not from unmixed affection.

Without going at present into any of the critical inquiries which have been pursued, respecting either the name or the nature of this wonderful bread, we proceed to make a few practical observations upon it, founded upon the letter of the history, as it stands in our Bible.

First. Then and then only is faith warranted to expect relief from a miracle, when means have been tried without effect; or, when we are in such a situation, that no means can be used with a probability of success. If God in his providence has brought us into the wilderness, where no corn can grow, where no water flows, we may reasonably look for an interposition from above for our support, which we should expect in vain in a land of corn and vineyards. Where there is a field for the exercise of foresight, industry, and diligence, we tempt God instead of honoring him, when we cast our work, and not our care upon him. And yet it is not uncommon to see a listless, indolent disposition, wanting to pass itself for reliance on the goodness of Heaven. Herod desired to see Christ merely in the view of gratification to an idle curiosity in hope of seeing a miracle performed; but his motive being wrong and unworthy, his desire was not indulged. The Pharisees, from a captious, unbelieving spirit, tempted Christ, “asking a sign from heaven;” but though signs innumerable were everyday exhibited in compassion to the miserable, and condescension to the weak, no sign but that “of the prophet Jonas,” was given to the self-conceited infidel. Jehovah performs the wonders of his power and goodness, neither to save the exertions of the lazy, nor to tickle the imaginations of the curious. His object is not to make men stare and wonder, but to do them good.

Secondly. Man’s happiest estate is to feel his daily, constant dependence upon his Maker, and to see the regular promised supply evincing the truth and faithfulness of its bountiful Author. With a monitor for God pressing in upon us through every avenue of the soul, we are nevertheless apt to be inattentive and unthankful. It is therefore an instance of great goodness, when God is pleased to force himself upon our thoughts, and to invite us to communion with “the Father of our spirits,” in the commerce of a constant, habitual friendship. Here then the poor have infinitely the advantage over the rich. They see, or they are blind indeed, they see their “dry morsel and their dinner of herbs,” coming at the expected hour from the bounty of indulgent Heaven. They are not suffered to be careless, impious, and ungrateful. Their homely fare is garnished and seasoned with what gold cannot purchase, nor power compel, the gentle whispers of a Father’s love, the kindly welcome of

an affectionate friend. And yet the bulk of mankind is striving and straining to get out of this happy state; eagerly catching at a situation which would infallibly betray them into self-sufficiency, insolence, and irreligion. That proud word, independence, is continually in their mouths, and the thing itself is in their hearts; not considering, that the real happiness of man consists in mutual connection and dependence, and that the glory and felicity of every rational being is founded upon union with, and a sense of his constant and entire dependence on his Creator.

Thirdly. No fulness and no excellency of created comforts will produce real happiness to rational beings without the aid of religion. During the abode of Israel in Egypt, the observance of the Sabbath had been greatly neglected, if not altogether disused. The religious principle of course must have been much weakened, if not wholly destroyed. There was nothing done, then, till this matter was re-established. For there can be no good government but what is founded upon religion; and religion cannot long exist in any degree of either fervor or purity, where no attention is paid to the Lord's day. Providence, therefore, employed a certain method to point out that day to Israel, and to enforce the observance of it. On that day no manna fell. But to compensate the failure, a double quantity was given the day before;, and the manna of that day, contrary to its usual custom, retained its sweetness during the sabbath: it neither melted away, nor became putrid. But, alas! long disuse had so much diminished public respect for the ordinance, that a discipline of forty years is scarcely sufficient to restore it to its ancient dignity and estimation. The restraints of religion are no encroachments on human liberty. "The sabbath was made for man," a season of rest for his body; a season of contemplation for his mind. It was intended to be his comfort, as a citizen of this world; and his condition as a candidate for another country, that is, an heavenly, is closely connected with it. Can the great God be honored by our resting from the usual employments of life for a seventh part of our time? Surely not: but God is honored and glorified, when man is made wise, good, and happy.

Fourthly. The folly and perverseness of men exhibit a melancholy contrast to the wisdom and goodness of God. The promise of the Almighty gave full assurance of a daily, certain, stated supply. But either through mistrust at one time they attempt to hoard up tomorrow's provision from the superabundance of today; or, through impiety at another, they violate the divine appointment, by going out to gather on that day when they were expressly assured they needed to expect none. Thus we are always doing too little or too much: impatiently and impetuously outrunning Providence, or sluggishly and carelessly lagging behind. And what do we get to ourselves, in either case but disappointment and dishonor? The man who diffidently labored to accumulate for five days of the week, when he looks upon his store, finds he has been treasuring up to himself nothing but stench and putrefaction; and the Israelite who presumptuously trusted his Sabbath day's entertainment to the manna of that day, must fast for his folly.

Fifthly. Observe the care of Providence to preserve among this highly favored people a constant sense of their equality. All had their constant supply; everyone was entitled to his fair proportion; and no good purpose did it answer to grasp at a double portion. For the hand which miraculously rained down this heavenly bread, miraculously modified it to everyone's use. "He who gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack." Now if we attend to the conduct of. Providence to this day, and in every state of the world, we shall find the same equality of distribution still going on. A man has just what he uses and no more. With a chest full of gold, he has a desire to eat but twice or thrice a day at most. With a thousand suits of apparel in his

wardrobe, he can use but one at a time. His neighbor, therefore, who has but one dinner, and one coat at once, is, upon the whole, just as rich as he. Beyond what nature requires, reason approves, and the Almighty crowns with his blessing, all is childish and fantastical. “There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.”[*]Pro 11:24 If this were felt and understood as it ought, we should see less eagerness, rapacity, and selfishness in one part of mankind, and less unthankfulness and discontent in another.

Sixthly. Mark the danger of giving way to a light, wanton, fanciful disposition. Even manna pleased not long. An imagination filled with the luxurious dainties of Egypt, soon spurned at it, as “light bread.” There is no end to wishing and desiring. Unadulterated nature craves but little, and is not difficult to please. But once give the reins to fancy, and the wealth of Croesus, the magnificence of Solomon, the elegance of Lucullus, and the luxury of Heliogabalus, will soon stink and be despised. Men ate angels’ food, and loathed it. Of what importance then must it be, to check in ourselves, and to repress in those whose virtue and happiness are entrusted to our care, the first workings of a wild and fantastical appetite. Children can not be too simply clothed and fed. Solicit the palate by delicacies, and you kindle a fire in the imagination to which no wealth can administer a sufficient supply of fuel, which no reason can keep within bounds, which will certainly produce a thousand real evils, and render the possession of the real felicities of life tasteless and insipid. Teach young ones to value themselves on dress and appearance, and you undermine the fabric of their true consequence. In proportion as you lead them to derive their importance from the adorning of their bodies, you strip and expose their minds.

Seventhly. The same Power which corrupted the manna on the second day, and which preserved it from corruption every seventh day, commanded a small portion to be laid up, for a memorial to future generations; and for that purpose miraculously kept it in its original state of sweetness and perfection. In this we see the absolute subjection of all things to the will of God. They grow and decay, they continue and pass away, they live and perish just as he will. “I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living.” “And, I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” No power nor skill can redeem the body from the power of the grave; the arm of an archangel is unable to confine it there.

Finally. The manna from heaven is likewise an image of better things to come. The bread of angels could not confer immortality on those who did eat it: but “the true bread which came down from heaven,” communicates eternal life to all who partake of it. But the words of our Savior himself will best explain this subject. “Jesus saith unto them, I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath ever lasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and, are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that t a man ma eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread which I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews, therefore, strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, ye have no life in you. Whose eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day; for my flesh is meat

indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead. He that eateth of this bread shall live forever."[*]John 6:47, etc.

Having thus finished the Course of Lectures proposed for this season;[*]For the reason assigned, when these discourses were first submitted to the public eye, some of the occasional addresses from the pulpit were retained in the publication. But the Lectures of a season not corresponding exactly to the usual size of a volume, it become at length a matter of doubt, whether these addresses should be altogether suppressed, modeled into a more proper diction and station from the press, or given exactly is the order and words in which they were delivered. The doubt issued in resolving upon the last. This Lecture concluded the Course of the Spring, 1783. The Course of the ensuing season commenced with that which follows. Perhaps it was unnecessary to say so much, in explanation of a matter so little important as the conclusion of one discourse and the introduction to another. what remains, but that with a grateful heart I first acknowledge the great goodness of Almighty God, who has graciously lent health and strength for carrying on this undertaking thus far. If any savour of divine things has been felt, or communicated; if Scripture truth has, to any, been set in a new or an agreeable light; if a taste for sacred reading and meditation has been conveyed; if the connection between the Old and New Testament has been pointed out, and impressed upon any heart; and, if the young in particular have been induced, by any thing said in this places to think for themselves, and to compare spiritual things with spiritual;--the Lecturer has gained his end, and is already in possession of his reward. The praise he cheerfully renders to Him to whom it belongs. To you, my very dear friends, my thanks are in the next place unquestionably due, and are rendered with unfeigned gratitude. Your patient attendance and candid attention, during seven months together, I shall ever consider as a proof of attachment the most flattering and the most encouraging. Why should I conceal my feelings on the occasion? I engaged in this undertaking, at first with fear and trembling; I proceeded with solicitude; but I conclude with heartfelt satisfaction; because the countenance I have met with encourages me to hope that my labors may have been doing some good. If there be one circumstance which gives me pain, it is the excess of that liberality and approbation which has so far overrated and overpaid my endeavors to convey to you useful and pleasing instruction. In return, all I can do, is to wish and pray that your kindness may be returned a thousand-fold into your bosoms, in temporal, spiritual, and heavenly blessings. And now, my beloved brethren, farewell. To the grace of God I commend you all: even, "to Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; even to the only wise God our Savior."[*]Jude 1:24-25 That we shall never all meet again in an earthly temple is certain. For time is hastening to silence the tongue of the preacher, and to close the hearer's ear. But we have everlasting consolation and good hope, through grace, of meeting together, and of worshipping in that temple, which has no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day; for there shall be no night there."[*]Rev 21:23-25 Let us, therefore, "be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as we know that our labor is not in vain in the Lord."[*]1Co 15:58

Chapter 53

053. Moses--Water from Horeb

Moses--Water from Horeb

Exo 17:1-2;Exo 17:5-6. And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin; after their journeys, according to the commandment of the Lord, and pitched in Rephidim; and there was no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water, that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide you with me? Wherefore do ye tempt the Lord? And the Lord said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb: and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. The reconciliation of interrupted friendship is one of the chief delights of human life. The ecstatic pleasure of meeting again, after long absence, persons whom we dearly love, obliterates in a moment the pain of separation: and one hour of sweet communication compensates the languor, solicitude, and gloom of many years. After an interval of five months, I return, to converse with Moses, and to talk of him to you, with the satisfaction of one who has been upon a long journey, and, returning home, finds again those whom he left, those whom he loves; and finds them such as he wishes them to be. Let us, my dear friends, with increased ardor, affection, admiration, and gratitude, renew our intimacy with the venerable man to whom we are indebted for so much rational pleasure, and for so much useful instruction. Moses, thou prince of historians, sublimest of poets, sagest of legislators, clearest-sighted of prophets, most amiable of men! To thee we owe our knowledge of the ages beyond the flood! Thou first taught to string the sacred lyre, and to adapt the high praises of God to the enchanting concord of sweet sounds. By thee, king in Jeshurun, all succeeding princes have been instructed how to govern; and lawgivers are formed to political wisdom and sagacity. By thee, Jews were led to expect, and Gentiles are encouraged to rejoice in Messiah, the great prophet, after thy similitude; by whom alone thou art excelled. And by thee, sweetest, meekest, gentlest of mankind, the endearing charities of private life are most engagingly exemplified, and most powerfully recommended. But chiefly thee, O Spirit! thee only, we adore,

----“Who didst inspire

That shepherd who first taught the chosen seed,

In the beginning, how the heavens and earth

Rose out of chaos.”

Whatever wisdom we may have learned, whatever pleasure we may have enjoyed, whatever comfort we possess, whatever hope we feel--all, all is of thee, pure, eternal, unchanging source of light, and life, and joy.

Moses, in the passage of his writings which I have now read, is carrying on his own interesting eventful history. At the head of the myriads of Israel, he is now pursuing his march from Egypt to Canaan, following a guide who would not mislead them, and whom they could not mistake; protected by a power, which, like a wall of fire, bids defiance to every threatening foe; and, from day to day supplied by a bounty incapable of being exhausted. All these present and singular advantages, had the sweetness of hope mingled with them. They had just escaped from the most humiliating and oppressive of all servitude, and they were hastening to the inheritance of their fathers; yet we find them a people as peevish, irritable, and difficult to please, as if they had never known adversity, and as if they had just issued from the lap of ease and indulgence. Today, the bread is dry and stale; tomorrow, the water is bitter; the third day, there is a scarcity of it. The water is sweetened; manna descends; quails fall around their camp; but there is till “a cruel something unpossessed,” and all that went before is forgotten; all that is in possession becomes insipid. Bestow on the ungrateful person nine hundred and ninety-nine favors, and withhold the thousandth, and all you have done for him is lost. The present pressure always seems the heaviest. Mouldy bread and brackish water in the wilderness, are considered as evils more intolerable than all the rigors of slavery in Egypt. Where does this censure fall? On that moody, murmuring race, the Jews, and on them only? Alas! it overwhelms ourselves; it bears hard, not upon individuals here and there, but upon mankind! We expect more from the world than it possibly can bestow; and when we discover its insufficiency, we charge God foolishly; and because we have not everything that we wish, we are satisfied with nothing. Solacing ourselves, like Jonah, under the shadow of a gourd, we fancy it is a perennial shelter. We see not the worm which is gnawing its root! and when it is smitten down and withers, we are ready to say, with the sullen, testy prophet, “We do well to be angry.”

But, was the want of water a slight evil? And, is it sinful to complain under the pressure of calamity like this? And, was this the first time Israel had been in distress, and found relief? Who was it that sweetened the waters of Marah? Who divided the Red Sea? Who rained bread from heaven? And, who ever mended his condition by murmuring and discontent? Had God intended to destroy that people, why all this exertion of a strong hand, and stretched-out arm to deliver them. God in the failure of our earthly comforts intends not our mortification and ruin, but our wisdom and improvement. He thereby teaches us our dependence; it summons us to the observation of his providence; and levels, not the hope and joy, but the pride and self-sufficiency of man.

Water! precious fluid! infinitely more valuable than the blood of the grape, than rivulets of oil, or honey from the rock; refreshed, sustained every moment by thee, we are every moment wasting, neglecting, forgetting thee. We prize thee not, because of thy rich abundance; and, because thou enterest into every other mean of food and comfort, thy importance is unobserved, thy benefits forgotten. May I never know thy value from the want of thee.

“There was no water for the people to drink.” Wherefore the people did chide with “Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide you with me! Wherefore do ye tempt the Lord?” If in their calmest moments men are often incapable of reasoning justly, and distinguishing accurately, is it any wonder to find them, in the very tide and whirlwind of passion, acting foolishly and unreasonably? Who would envy pre-eminence such as that which Moses enjoyed? Is glory obtained? He comes in but for a moderate share. Is blame incurred, or distress felt? All is imputed to him. To what a severe trial was the temper of this

meekest of all men now put! What so provoking as to meet with censure when we are conscious of meriting praise? What so galling as to have the calamities of others charged upon us as crimes; to be accused as culpable, merely because we have been unfortunate? Surely the great are set in “slippery places;” and “uneasy must the head lie that wears a crown.”

We see Moses flying in the hour of danger, whither the people ought to have fled in the hour of their affliction. “He cried unto the Lord.” Religion opens a refuge when every other refuge fails: and it administers a remedy to ills otherwise incurable. I tremble for the life of Moses. He trembles for himself. “They are almost ready to stone me.” The voice of Jehovah is again heard, and Moses is in safety. But I tremble now, for these murmuring, unbelieving, rebellious Israelites: Is not the thunder of his indignation going to burst out? Is not the fire hastening to consume? Or, is the earth going to open her mouth, and swallow them quick up into the pit? Behold a solemn preparation is making! But it is an arrangement of love. It is the voice of God I hear; but it speaks mercy and peace. The tremendous rod of God, wherewith he bruised and broke Egypt, is again employed; but not as the instrument of punishment to Israel. It smites, not a sinful people, but the flinty rock; and it draws forth, not a stream of blood from the heart of the offender, but a stream of water to cool his tongue, and to restore his fainting soul. Surely, O Lord, “thy ways are not as our ways; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are thy ways higher than our ways, and thy thoughts than our thoughts.”[*]Isa 55:8-9 “Behold; therefore, the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but towards thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.”[*]Rom 11:22 Astonishing instance of the power and sovereignty of the Most High! The same rod which smote the river, and it became blood, smites the rock, and it becomes streams of water. Who is to be feared, who is to be trusted, but the God who can do these great things?

How honorable had it been for Israel, to have had this stage of their marching through the wilderness, distinguished by a name which betokened and commemorated their faithfulness, obedience, and submission. Instead of this, the names Massah and Meribah, must transmit to all generations the memory of temptation, chiding, and strife. Happily the monuments of human frailty, folly, and guilt, are also the monuments of the divine patience, forbearance, and tender mercy. “But the law had only a shadow of good things to come.” Where Moses leaves us, Isaiah takes us by the hand, and leads us on our way, pointing to Him whom all prophesy revealed, and saying, “Behold a King shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.”[*]Isa 32:1-2 And the apostle of the Gentiles conducts our weary, wandering steps from the rock in Horeb to the rock Christ, from whence issues the mighty “river, which makes glad the city of our God;” and which affords, not a transitory, temporary refreshment, but a perpetual, never failing supply. “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud, and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ.”[*]1Co 10:1, etc. The words of the apostle insinuate, that the stream which issued from the rock in the wilderness continued to flow, and accompanied their progress through the desert during the remainder of their long pilgrimage, till, being arrived at the land of promise, a land watered with the dew of heaven, and the abundance of the rivers, a

miraculous supply being unnecessary, was withdrawn.

Thus was the gospel preached to them of old time. The solid rock became, as it were moveable; “and followed them” wheresoever they went. The adamant was melted into a pool for their refreshment. Blessed type of Him who in his own person accommodated the immutability of the divine nature to the necessity and the relief of human misery! Blessed type of that stream of blood flowing from the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and “which taketh away the sins of the world!” Blessed type of that “consolation that is in Christ Jesus” for the weary and heavy laden, for the guilty and the wretched, for the faint and dying! Blessed type of that precious stream which has flowed in every age, and is flowing to every nation and people under heaven; and which never leaves the path of the Zion-traveller, till, through the midst of Jordan, he stands on the delightful shore of the Canaan that is above, where it becomes “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, there is the tree of life, which bears twelve manner of fruits, and yieldeth her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it: and his servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face: and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.”[*]Rev 22:1, etc. In the recapitulation of this wonderful history in the book of Numbers, an interesting and important circumstance is recorded, which in Exodus is suppressed; and which we must here insert, that we may view the event complete in all its parts, and that we may feel it in all its force. The miracle of extracting water from the rock, which proved so salutary to the people, became fatal to Moses himself: And this he, with his native candor and simplicity, thus relates: “And. Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice; and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel; therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.”[*]Num 20:9, etc. For the illustration and improvement of which, we beg your attention to the following remarks.

Observe, first, The credit which is due to the sacred writers in general, and to Moses in particular, for their fidelity and integrity in relating those particulars of their temper and conduct which are the object of censure and condemnation, as well as those which merit applause. Indeed they do both with the same “simplicity and godly sincerity.” They never appear solicitous to celebrate their own praise, and if glory may redound to God, and edification to men, they honestly publish their own shame. Unlike the generality of mankind, who are perpetually catching at opportunities to introduce their dear selves, that they may be valued and admired: and, with equal anxiety, drawing a veil over their errors and imperfections. But these holy men delivered not their testimony “according to the will of man,” nor in the spirit of the world; but, spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” And, with candid judges, this candor of theirs will be deemed no slight argument of their veracity in general, and no slender proof of the credibility of the Scripture history.

Secondly, Remark the mixture of frailty and imperfection which enters into every human character. Moses himself is not faultless. And what is more observable still, he fails on the side of his greatest

excellency; he is found weak there where he seemed most strong. “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.”[*]Num 12:3 Nevertheless, what saith the history? He loses temper, and speaks unadvisedly with his lips; “Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?”[*]Num 20:10 He takes glory to himself instead of ascribing it to God: “Must we fetch you water?” He presumptuously exceeds his commission. He lifts up his hand and smites the rock twice with his rod, whereas he was commanded only to speak unto it, before the eyes of the people.

Seems it not as if God intended to write vanity and shame on all the glory of man, “that no flesh should glory in his presence?” by showing us faithful Abraham mistrusting his God, and seeking refuge in falsehood: the patient Job growing peevish, and “cursing his day:” the affectionate and zealous Peter basely denying his Master; and the meek and gentle Moses waxing warm, and in his haste speaking disrespectfully of God, and unkindly of men. “Be not high-minded, but fear.” “Let him who thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”[*]Pro 4:23 “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, keep the door of my lips.”[*]Psa 141:3

Observe, thirdly, The delicacy and the danger of assuming a latitude and a liberty in sacred things. In what concerns the conduct of human life, and our intercourse one with another as the citizens of this world, many things must be left to be governed by occasion and discretion; but, in what relates to the immediate worship of God, and where the mind of the Lord has been clearly made known, to assume and exercise a dispensing power is criminal and hazardous. The tabernacle must be constructed, to the minutest pin and loop, according to the pattern delivered in the mount. If Uzzah presume to put forth his hand to support the tottering ark, it is at his peril. A holy and a jealous God will be served only by the persons and in the manner which he himself has appointed; and the intruder into sacred offices and employments is ready to be broken in upon in hot displeasure. Has God said, “Speak to the rock.” Who has the boldness to strike it? Moses dares to do it; and his rashness forfeits his title to a part and lot in the promised inheritance. Into Canaan he shall never enter, but only see it at a distance with his eyes. The offending, chiding, murmuring congregation is pitied, forgiven, and relieved. The offending, hasty, presumptuous prophet is punished. “Our God is a consuming fire.” “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins, let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.”

Remark, in the fourth place, The rashness and folly of man shall not, cannot render the purpose of God of none effect. A whole people shall not be permitted to perish for thirst because the prescribed mode of relief has not been exactly followed. Though the rock be stricken, instead of being spoken unto, it shall not fail to yield the promised fountain of water. Moses is frail, but God is good. There has prevailed, since the beginning, a strange contention between the folly and perverseness of the fallen, apostate creature, and the wisdom and goodness of the gracious Creator. And, glory be to God, our evil is overcome of his good. And when all struggle and opposition are at an end, when the will of God shall finally prevail, “and every high thought shall be brought into captivity to the will of Christ,” it shall then be found, that “the wrath of man” has all along been “working the righteousness of God;” that the elementary strife which was permitted to take place in the natural world; the jarring, discordant passions which seemed to convulse and

disturb the moral government of God, and even the infernal devices of the powers of darkness, were all, without their design, nay, contrary to their intention, carrying on the great plans of the divine providence to their consummation. Glorious, transporting thought! I will henceforth command my troubled soul into peace. I will calmly wait the issue, and leave it to the great God, in his own time and way, to explain the reasons of his conduct, and fully vindicate his ways to men. The troubles which I see, the troubles which I feel, the troubles which I fear, though they may come nigh, shall not overwhelm my soul; “I shall not be afraid when I hear of evil tidings; my heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.”[*]Psa 112:7 “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”[*]Rom 8:28 “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory.”[*]2Co 4:17

Fifthly, When we behold a holy and righteous God thus severely punishing what may be deemed, by some a slight offence, in one of the dearest and best of his children, let none dare to trifle with his justice. If Moses, in one rash moment, by one unadvised step, incurred a displeasure, which he could never remove, and forfeited an inheritance, which he never was able to recover, what hast thou, O man, to expect, whose whole life has been an accumulation of offence; has been the addition only of sinfulness to weakness, and of presumption to folly? “If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear.”[*]1Pe 4:18 Take care how you estimate the malignity, guilt, and danger of sin, by the erroneous and fluctuating standard of your own weak understanding, or still weaker passions. Not according to these, nor the maxims of the world, nor the prejudices of a misguided spirit; but by a steadier rule, by an unchanging law, thou shalt be judged, and finally justified or condemned. If Moses lost an inheritance in an earthly Canaan for neglecting to give glory to God in one instance, tremble to think of being eternally excluded from “the inheritance of the saints in light,” for ten thousand offences of the same nature. Beware of reckoning any transgressions small, any sin venial, any temptation contemptible. Behold the mighty fallen, and be humble.

It is truly affecting to find Moses in the sequel earnestly entreating a remission of the sentence, but entreating in vain; and, when unable by supplication to prevail, submissively resigning himself to the will of God. But the world has seen a still more awful demonstration of God’s displeasure at sin. When the Lord laid upon the head of the great atonement “the iniquity of us all; it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and put him to grief.” “God spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all.” Is it possible to conceive a motive so cogent to abstain from evil, and even from the appearance of it; and to loathe and put off from us the garment spotted with the flesh? But again, one offence; though it may provoke the anger and call down the chastisement of a holy God, breaks not off all intercourse, and forever, between him and a good man. With the firmness of a wise and just father, he denounces the punishment and inflicts it. With the tenderness and love of a gracious and relenting parent, he carries on the correspondence; and even admits the offending child to closer intimacy, and to familiarity more endearing. For the great God is not like them who mar and embitter their pardon with hard conditions, cruel upbraiding, and mortifying recollections; and who plainly show, that though they may be capable of forgiving, they know not what it is to bury injuries in everlasting forgetfulness. The conduct of Moses too, under the weight of this awful displeasure, is amiable and instructive. He mutters not, with sullen Cain, “my punishment is greater than I can bear;” he sinks not into dejection; he replies not in resentment. While he deprecates the penalty,

he attempts not to extenuate the guilt of his crime; and though well assured he is not to have the honor of conducting Israel into Canaan; nor the happiness of enjoying a personal possession in that promised inheritance, yet he withdraws himself from no particular of duty, relaxes not his diligence, cools not in his zeal; he labors to the last; does what he can, though he be not permitted to do what he would; he goes before Israel to the land of promise, though access into it was denied him. This, as much as any thing in his history, marks his character and evinces the greatness of his soul. And this teaches a lesson of no mean importance in friendship among men, namely, to cultivate with diligence and assiduity the charities which we have in common, and to suffer those things to rest and sleep, which, if stirred and awakened, are likely to disturb and separate us.

It is not the design of Providence that we should think exactly the same way on all points. But, shall I agree with my brother in nothing, because we happen to differ in one thing?

I detain you till I have made only one remark more upon the whole history. The distress of the cattle for want of water, is mentioned as a circumstance of importance both in the books of Exodus and Numbers, and it is especially attended to in the miraculous relief which heaven provided. Is the great God degraded, when he is represented as “caring for oxen, and feeding the ravens, and hearing the young lions when they cry?” No, no; these minuter views of his providential care and kindness endear him but the more to the understanding that discerns, and the heart that feels. I know not a more tender stroke of the pathetic eloquence than that which we have in the prophesy of Jonah, when God extended mercy in a manner peculiar to himself, to Nineveh, that great and sinful city. “Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd for the which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow, which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than threescore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle.”[*]Jon 4:10-11

One stage more will bring us with Israel to the foot of Sinai, to observe and to improve one of the most notable dispensations of Providence upon record; “The giving of the law.” But here let us pause with devout acknowledgment of that bountiful hand, which fed the seed of Abraham immediately from the clouds for forty years together; and which feeds us, through rather a longer process, by blending and compounding the qualities and influences of earth, air, fire, and water. While we adore the providential care which refreshed Israel by streams from the rock, let us rejoice together, that it refreshes us by keeping our rivers ever flowing, our fountains constantly supplied, and the clouds of our atmosphere, in their season, always impregnated with the rain and the dew. “With the bread that perisheth,” gracious , God! grant us that “which endureth to life everlasting.” Amen.

Chapter 54

054. Moses--War with Amalek

Moses--War with Amalek

Exo 17:8-13. Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass when Moses field up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat thereon: and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

Nothing can be more afflicting to a humane and serious mind, than to reflect on that strife and contention which have in every age deluged the world with human blood. Who could believe, if all history did not prove it, and who can think of it without horror, that men should be continually lying in wait, like beasts of prey, to catch and devour men; that the strong, the cunning, and the fierce should be forever on the watch, to take advantage of the weak, the simple, and the gentle? And must it be? Father of Mercies! must it needs be, that war should continue to waste the nations! shall the earth be forever a field of blood? Must the peace of private families, and the repose of kingdoms, be eternally disturbed by lust and pride, avarice and ambition, envy and revenge? Blessed God! send forth the Spirit of thy Son into the hearts of men. Prince of Peace! command this troubled ocean into a calm. Spirit of Love! put a full end to bitterness and wrath. Subdue this carnal mind, which is enmity against God. Glorious gospel of salvation! as thou bringest goodwill from God to men, restore good-will to men among themselves.

It is difficult to say whether men suffer most from their own folly, or from the cruelty and injustice of others. We generally find, that when evil from without would, for a while, permit wretched mortals to breathe and be at peace, they perversely become self-tormentors, and ingeniously contrive sources of vexation to themselves. And, which is the greater evil of the two? That, undoubtedly, of which we are the authors to ourselves. We have, then, to encounter an enemy from whom we cannot hope to escape, and whom we are unable to overcome. From a conflict with Amalek, Israel comes off with both credit and comfort; but a strife of discontent, impatience, and rebellion against God, must of necessity issue in shame and loss.

God, rich in mercy, slow to anger, and of great kindness, has graciously forgiven the murmuring at Horeb, and extracted water from the rock, for the relief of his people. But this woe is no sooner past than another overtakes them. "Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim." The transaction recorded here, so simply and uncircumstantially, is mentioned again in Deuteronomy, with many circumstances of aggravation, which greatly increase our detestation of this conduct in Amalek, and explain the deep resentment which a holy and righteous God himself expresses upon the occasion, and which, by a positive statute, he transmits to Israel. "Remember what Amalek did

unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; how he met thee by the way and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God. Therefore it shall be, when the Lord thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it."[*]Deu 25:17-19

Amalek, the father of this nation, as we learn from Gen 36:12, was grandson to Esau, and son to Eliphaz, by a concubine named Timna. The Amalekites indeed are mentioned much earlier in Scripture, even in the days of Abraham when Chedorlaomer is represented, with his victorious army, as ravaging all their country. But it is well known that the sacred writers, when treating of various periods, give appellations to regions and countries which did not belong to them till ages afterwards, but by which they wore better known at the time when the historian wrote. They possessed a large tract of country, extending from the confines of Idumaea to the eastern shore of the Red Sea; and from their neighborhood to, and commerce with, Phoenicia, they are by some called Phoenicians.

Immediately on their passing through the Red Sea, it behoved the children of Israel to enter into this territory, on their way to Canaan. And probably the paternal relation which subsisted between them and Amalek, encouraged the posterity of Jacob to advance on their way with greater confidence. "It is the land of our brethren through which we are to pass;" would they say one to another. "The heart of Esau himself relented, when he saw his brother Jacob return, encumbered with a train of women and children, and cattle. He forgot his resentments: he became the protector of the man whom he had, in the hour of passion, vowed to destroy. The injury done him in the matter of the birthright, and of the blessing, he generously forgave. Surely the posterity of Esau, after many generations, will not revive a quarrel which is extinguished and forgotten, first in the reconciliation, and then in the death of the original parties to it. After a servitude so long and so bitter in Egypt, we shall at length find a time and a place to breathe; and the soothings of fraternal love shall console us for the rigors of oppression."

Vain expectation! What foe so dreadful as a brother disaffected! Egypt smote with the rod; Amalek smites with the sword; he basely, cruelly seizes the moment of Israel's languor, weakness, and dejection, and attempts to crush those whom a sanguinary tyrant had persecuted, and whom Heaven itself had bruised. The cowardice of this behavior is equal to the unkindness of it. Had they boldly appeared at the first, to dispute the passage of the Red Sea, and to repel by force of arms the invasion of their country, their conduct, though ungenerous and unkind, had been ingenuous and manly. But, either through fear or policy, they permit Israel to advance, they watch the moment of their difficulty and distress, and, like dastards, steal upon the rear of an army whose front they dared not to oppose.

Neither good qualities nor bad are found single in the human breast. And, in the nation whose character is now the object of our censure, we find a combination of the worst qualities of which our nature is capable, all originating in the deficiency of one great principle, which is at the root of all the evil which men commit, "he feared not God." Why did Amalek rake up the ashes of an ancient grudge? "He feared not God." Why did he join to afflict the miserable, and to overwhelm the oppressed? "He feared not God." Why did he meanly attack the weaker and more vulnerable

part of his adversary, in the hope of safety and impunity? “He feared not God.” Wherefore, in general, are men subtle, revengeful, cunning, and selfish? “They fear not God;” they “harden themselves against him,” and yet think “to prosper.” They “love not their brother whom they have seen,” because they are wilfully ignorant of, or hate God, “whom they have not seen.”

Such is the union which Providence has established between all the parts of the natural and of the political body, that the weakness or distress of one member is the infirmity and suffering of the whole. The hindmost and the feeble of Israel are smitten; the foremost and the strong feel and immediately resent it. “And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill, with the rod of God in mine hand.” We have here a combination which ought never to be separated, and in which safety and success are ever to be found, namely, the acknowledgment of Heaven, and the use of appointed means, the sword in the hand of Joshua, the rod in that of Moses, the embattled host below in the valley, the intercessor with God, “wrestling” and “making supplication” upon the hill. In vain had Moses prayed if Joshua had not fought. Destitute of “the effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous man,” the skill and courage of the warrior had failed before the enemy. The rod of God! in how many different services is it employed! how many various purposes does it answer! It smites the river of Egypt, and it becomes blood. It smites the rock in Horeb, and it sends forth a stream of water. It is extended towards heaven, on the top of the hill, and Amalek is destroyed. Striking and instructive type of that “rod of God’s mouth,” wherewith “he slays the wicked:” of that sword of the Spirit “which is the word of God: of that hammer which breaketh the rock in pieces:” of that gospel, which is “a savour of God in them that believe, and them that perish.”

Observe how God appoints to every man his station of usefulness and importance. It was not for want either of zeal or courage, that Moses takes his post at a distance on the hill. It is not for want of piety, that Joshua leads on the armies of Israel on the plain. The mistakes and miscarriages of the world arise from the weakness and wickedness of men; at one time overrating their talents, and thrusting themselves forward into situations for which they are wholly unfit; and at another, through timidity shrinking from the duties of that station which Providence has assigned them; and at a third, treacherously, through some bias of private interest, passion, or party, selling the trust committed to them, to the foe. Happily, in the case before us, the head which directed, and the hand which executed, were in perfect unison. The spirit that fought, and the spirit that prayed, were one.

Let us first ascend the hill with Moses and his two friends, and adopt the feelings of men, who at once felt for the public cause, were not without well founded apprehensions from the common enemy, and at the same time feared and trusted the Lord. Moses has given his orders to Joshua, and he has so far done well; but to stop there had been doing nothing. He has set the means to work, and now he can confidently look up to Heaven for that blessing which can give success to the means. He ascends to meet God, but ascends not alone. As wickedness seeks to fortify and to keep itself in countenance by the society of the wicked, so the fire of devotion keeps itself alive by the sacred communication of a kindred flame. The hands of Moses alone had soon become feeble, and must have dropped down, and Amalek finally had prevailed; supported by Aaron and Hur, they continue. “steady till the going down of the sun;” and Amalek and his people are discomfited with the edge of the sword. Of Aaron, one of the companions of Moses upon the mount, we know much; of Hur, the other, the Scripture account is more sparing. Those who are

never at a loss so long as fancy and invention can create, make him the son of Caleb, and the husband of Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron. It appears from the history, that he was the father of Uri; and the grandfather of Bezaleel, the famous artist, employed, by special endowment and appointment of Heaven, for the construction of the more curious and costly furniture of the tabernacle and sanctuary. But it is of more importance for us to know him, and for him to be reported, as a person of the first quality, and his quality supported by that which gives rank its highest luster, genuine piety. Moses left him, in commission with Aaron, to judge the people, when a short while after this he went up alone into Mount Sinai, to meet God. This is argument sufficient of his high rank; and the assumption of him to assist his devotion in Mount Horeb, while Israel was engaged with Amalek, is a proof equally clear and decisive of his extraordinary piety.

Behold then the man of God, supported and encouraged by two such companions, discovering all the honest anxiety of the patriot, together with all the confidence and fervor of the saint; with his eyes eagerly bent on the conflicting armies in the plain below; and his hands, with his heart, lifted up to God in the heavens, from whom his help came. It was clearly the intention of Providence, that the deliverance which should be wrought for Israel on this occasion, though not wholly independent on the use of means, should evidently appear to flow chiefly and only from the interposition and grace of Heaven. “It came to pass when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, that Amalek prevailed.” This is the first battle which Israel was called to fight; and it was designed to be a model of all that should follow; of assured success to them, and victory over all their enemies, provided they constantly acknowledged God, with hands continually lifted up to heaven. And it had undoubtedly a farther view, namely, to represent in general, the powerful and certain effect of prayer to God, and of a sense of dependence upon him; to show that our strength is in exact proportion to the perception of our own weakness, and to our confidence in almighty grace. The lesson inculcated in this history is the same which Christ taught his disciples in the parable of the unjust judge and the importunate widow, “That men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”[*]Luk 18:1 If importunity and the love of ease have power to constrain a man to do his duty, though he have no inclination to it, how much more certain the effect of earnestness and importunity with the Hearer of prayer, the Father of mercies; who is ever more ready to grant than man to ask? “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him.”[*]Mat 7:11 Have you considered then, my Christian friend, what a powerful instrument is put into your hand, mighty as the rod of God in the hand of Moses, wherewith he did wonders? “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth for the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.”[*]Jas 5:17-18 Surely, then, “the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”[*]Jas 5:16 God has not given you assurance of success in all your undertakings, but he has bestowed upon you the privilege, and promised you the spirit of prayer, by which you shall certainly obtain one of two things; either that blessing from above upon your honest endeavors, which maketh rich, which insures success, and makes it durable; or, that resignation of spirit, and submission to the will of God, which subdue misfortune, and which turn calamity and disappointment themselves into advantage. God has not given thee, my friend, the promise of riches; but he has given thee, what is much better, the spirit of grace and supplication to form thy soul to contentment. You have no security against pain and sorrow; but you have that which

produces patience and fortitude. You cannot promise yourself long life; but habitual intercourse with God by prayer, overcomes the fear of death.

Glorious privilege! Whatever my situation in life be, here is something to improve it, if good; something to mend it, if evil. Here is the ornament and essence of prosperity, the cure and cordial of adversity. Here is the guardian and the guide of life; the sweetener and subduer of death. Prayer brings all the glorious perfections of Deity into our possession. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”[*]Jas 1:5 “When I am weak, then am I strong:” “for I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” Is the thorn not removed, the messenger of Satan not rebuked, though the Lord be thrice besought that they may depart? No matter. Is it not said, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness? Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”[*]2Co 12:9 But where are the hands which never hang down? Those of Moses himself became heavy. “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Fatal omen to Israel! Amalek instantly gains the ascendant. But happily, Moses was not alone in the mount “And they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.” “As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend;” and so devotion kindles and keeps alive devotion. Secret prayer, like the melody of one sweet-toned voice stealing upon the ear, gently wafts the soul to heaven: social worship, as a full chorus of harmonized sounds, pierces the sky, and raises a great multitude of kindred spirits to the bright regions of everlasting love, and places them together before the throne of God. How happy are Aaron and Hur, in lending this aid to the wearied hands of Moses, and to the declining interest of the Israel of God! How happy is Moses in being thus supported! But there is an Intercessor whose hands never hang down, whose fervor never cools, whose mediation never fails, whose attention is never relaxed. “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.” Him “the Father heareth always:” “as a Prince he hath power and prevaileth.”

Let us now turn our eyes to the struggle in the valley below. There we meet “the confused noise of the warrior, and garments rolled in blood:” the alternate shouts of acclamation and triumph, mingling with the piercing shrieks of the wounded, and the groans of the dying. Israel, now hurrying on to victory, and anon flying before the insulting foe. The event for a while is awfully in doubt; turning upon the strength and feebleness, not of thousands, but of one single arm; decided at length, not by the edge of the sword, but the elevation or depression of a rod; and that rod swayed, not by the skill and prowess of Joshua, but the firmness and devotion of Moses. But now, doubt and anxiety are at an end. The hands of Moses are propped up, and Israel finally prevails. And what heart save that of an Amalekite but must rejoice in the issue? “The cunning is taken in his own craftiness.” A design of violence and blood falls upon the head of him that contrived it. The righteous and innocent cause bears down pride and cruelty. We behold the destination of heaven standing good, the birthright sold away, the blessing anticipated; the elder made subject to the younger. “God is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him and hath prospered?”[*]Job 11:4

Israel has conquered. But it is impossible to mistake the means by which he has gotten the victory. “The hand of the Lord, and his holy arm, they have gotten him the victory.” The altar, therefore,

which was built to celebrate this signal success, shall by its name perpetuate the remembrance of God the deliverer. Jehovah-Nissi, “the Lord my banner,” was inscribed upon it by the divine appointment; and a reason is assigned in the sixteenth verse. “For he said, Because the Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.”

These words, having been variously rendered, have given occasion to various opinions among interpreters. Some read the passage thus, “Because the hand of Amalek is against the throne of the Lord, the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” This reading, resolves the guilt of Amalek, not into an insidious and cruel design against Israel, but into a rash and impious attempt to defeat the plan of Providence, which was to bring Israel into the quiet possession of Canaan, and to exalt that nation, favored of God but envied of man, to wealth, power, and empire. God therefore was pleased to vindicate in person the cause which was his own, and to write disappointment and a curse upon every plan which Amalek could form, of greatness and prosperity. So “fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God,” so dangerous to form a combination “against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.”[*]Psa 2:2-4

Others literally translate the words thus, “With the hand upon the throne of the Lord, he hath sworn that he will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” He, that is, Moses, hath sworn, with the most awful solemnities, and recorded the oath in a book for perpetual preservation, that there shall be no peace between Israel and Amalek till he be utterly destroyed. The hand which was extended towards heaven, the throne of the great and terrible God, with the rod in it; the instrument of a victory which was interrupted by the going down of the sun, has been lifted up, to “swear by him that liveth forever,” that the triumph of that day shall be followed up, till the hated name of Amalek be extinguished from under heaven.

Some make Jehovah himself to be the person who binds himself by this solemn oath. “The hand,” that is, Jehovah’s own hand, upon the throne of the Lord. “Because he could swear by no greater, he hath sworn by himself, that He will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” We have a prophesy in the mouth of Balaam to the same effect; “And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable and said, Amalek was the first of the nations, but his latter end shall be that he perish forever.”[*]Num 24:20 The execution of this dreadful sentence was reserved to the days of Samuel, four hundred and twelve years after; and was committed to Saul, who, through an impolitic and sinful lenity, failed to fulfill the design of Providence, and thereby incurred the displeasure of Heaven, and forfeited his life and crown by his disobedience. I transcribe the passage.

“Samuel also said unto Saul, The Lord sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel; now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel; how he laid wait for him in the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go, and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.”[*]1Sa 15:1-3 This order Saul obeyed but in part. He assumed and exercised a dispensing power, and it became a snare to him. He took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive; and reserved the best of the spoil. The prophet is sent of God to reprove his disobedience; which Saul attempting to

palliate, brings down this censure upon his head. “When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel? And the Lord sent thee on a journey, and said, Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord. And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.”[*]1Sa 15:17, etc. Has God commanded to destroy? Who shall presume to save? Has he commanded to spare? Who dares destroy? “I say unto you, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: fear him, which, after he hath killed, hath power, to cast into hell: yea, I say unto you, fear him.”[*]Luk 12:4-5

055. Moses--Family Reunited

Moses--Family Reunited

Exo 18:7-12. And Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and did obeisance, and kissed him: and they asked each other of their welfare: and they came into the tent. And Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done unto Pharaoh, and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, and all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and how the Lord delivered them. And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel: whom he had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians. And Jethro said, Blessed be the Lord, who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh, who hath delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods: for, in the thing wherein they dealt proudly, he was above them. And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt-offering and sacrifices for God. And Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God. The great Author and Ruler of the world has evidently in view the pleasure and happiness, as well as the wisdom and virtue of his rational creatures. We find, through the widely expanded frame of nature, and the extensive plan of Providence, as many sources of joy as there are means of improvement. What an infinite, beautiful, and pleasing variety in the works and in the ways of God! all ministering to human comfort, all aiming at making men good. The mind of man is formed to desire and to relish variety. The objects with which he is conversant are therefore varied without end, to gratify that desire, and to correspond with that relish. The glare of perpetual sunshine and the fervid heat of an eternal summer, would speedily oppress and destroy mankind but, relieved by the tranquillity of darkness, the freshness of spring, the sedateness of autumn, and even the gloom of winter, they become no less grateful than they are beneficial. In surveying the globe, the eye is not permitted to tire by having to crawl along a boundless plain; but sparkles with delight as it springs from valley to valley, and from hill to hill. And even the glories of the starry heavens are rendered still more glorious by being kept in continual motion; and thereby are made continually to exhibit a different appearance. The events of human life, for the same reason, are endlessly variegated like the objects of sense. Wretched were the dull stagnation of constant prosperity, success, and ease. Intolerable would be the agitation and distress of unceasing, unabating, unrelenting toil, pain, disappointment, and vexation of spirit. But, one thing being set over against another, the great, the prosperous, and the happy are forever admonished, reproved, and brought low; the poor, the despised, and the miserable are cheered, supported, and exalted. The word of God exhibits a resemblance to the system of nature, and to the conduct of Providence. In it we have the same pleasing, engaging variety; the same happy accommodation to the tastes, occasions, and necessities of mankind. The antiquarian and the naturalist, the politician and the legislator, the poet and the philosopher, the moralist and the divine, the man of retirement and the man of the world, the man of reason and the man of fancy, all find in Scripture an helper toward the discovery of truth, and the attainment of happiness; a guide to the understanding, a corrector and supporter of the imagination, a comforter of the heart, a teacher of wisdom, a rule of faith, a source of joy. The very structure of the sacred compositions

is inimitably calculated, by a beautiful and easy transition from subject to subject, and from scene to scene, to relieve and yet to preserve the attention: presenting always a new and interesting object, or the same object placed in a new and interesting light. Thus the tumultuous, noisy, and bloody scenes of Horeb and Rephidim--scenes of murmuring, rebellion, and war, are happily relieved by scenes of domestic tranquillity, love, and joy; and we are prepared to attend Moses, to meet God in the mount, by mixing in the virtuous, cheerful, and affectionate intercourse of his private family.

Let us then thankfully take the relief which a gracious God has in his word provided for us; and contemplate one of those calm, but neither uninteresting nor uninstructive representations of human life, which come home to the bosom and the fireside of every man who has a heart, who has a relation, who has a friend. The history of Moses now looks back, and reminds us of his being “a stranger in a strange land:” namely, of his fleeing from Egypt into Midian, of his arriving there, conducted of Providence, just at the moment to render a seasonable service to the daughters of Raguel, or Jethro, the priest of Midian; of the hospitable reception afforded him by that worthy man, and of the alliance which he formed with him, by marrying his daughter Zipporah. Upon his being called back to Egypt to undertake the weighty charge which God had assigned him, he had intended and attempted to carry his wife and children along with him. But being reproved of God by the way for neglecting in his own family the rite of circumcision, the seal of God’s covenant, and, either specially admonished from Heaven, or following the dictates of human prudence, he sends them all back to his father-in-law, as likely to prove either a burden or a hindrance to himself, in the discharge of his great trust. For true piety, while it reposes entire confidence in God, will never presumptuously load Providence with what is the proper work and business of man. Diligence and foresight, as well as faith and hope, are its genuine offspring. But the tempest being now blown over, and Moses, of a messenger and a suppliant unto Pharaoh, being now become the head and leader of a great nation, it was natural for him and for his family mutually to desire to be restored to each other. Jethro, therefore, having received information where Israel was, and what the Lord had done for them, takes his daughter and grandchildren, and carries them with him to the camp of Israel. The innocent endearments of natural affection, and the honest communications of private friendship, are graciously intended to alleviate the cares of public life, and to strengthen the mind by diverting it from incessant and intense application to serious business. No man can always be a general, a statesman, or a king. And happy it is for those who occupy these exalted but troublesome stations, that they are frequently permitted to sink the public in the private character, and to drop the hero, the senator, the judge, the sovereign, in the man.

Distance has not alienated affection between the man of God and his family. A slighter affection is effaced and destroyed by absence; a stronger love is confirmed and inflamed by it. Good old Jethro satisfies not himself with sending by the mouth of another a compliment of congratulation to his son-in-law; neither will he permit Zipporah and her sons to go unaccompanied, unprotected through the wilderness; but, aged and infirm as he was, chooses himself to be their companion and their protector.

Moses seems to take delight in delivering to us this passage of his life. He is amiably minute and circumstantial in the detail of it. He dwells upon the tender and affecting recollections of sorrows and of joys that are past. His heart is in it. He stops in his narration to tell us the names of his two sons, and his reason for giving them those names. “The name of the one was Gershom: for he

said, I have been an alien in a strange land: and the name of the other was Eliezer; for the God of my fathers, said he, was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh." Is this beneath the dignity of history, of sacred history? No, it is the most honorable province of history, to exhibit the honest, unsophisticated feelings of nature, the genuine workings of the human heart, the real, though humbler scenes of human life. What signifies to us the meeting of two old men three thousand three hundred years ago? Much every way. One of them is a Moses, and that Moses is describing his own sentiments, unveiling his own heart. He can serve as an instructer and an example to none, in respect of the prophetic dignity, as the bearer of the potent rod, as the man whose face shone, by forty days' intimate communion with God. He can instruct but a few, by his wisdom and sagacity as a prince and a lawgiver. But as a son, a husband, and a father, he is a pattern to myriads, and shall continue to teach to the end of the world.

How pleasant it is to find this great man the same in retirement and privacy that he is upon the great theater; and delineating a battle, a triumph, and a family meeting, with the same simplicity and godly sincerity! Public men have too often two different characters. Plausible and specious, humble, modest, and insinuating before the world, they are self-willed and tyrannical, confident, assuming, and brutal in private; they often fawn where they fear, and domineer where they have power. Not so the meek and gentle prophet and judge of Israel. He waits not in state till his relations are admitted to pay their homage. He reckons it nothing derogatory to his high dignity to go forth to pay the respect due to age; and to humble the son, however high in place, at the feet of the parent. "And Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare; and they came into the tent." Were it after the separation of but a day, friends have a thousand questions to ask, a thousand little incidents to relate: about their health, their entertainment, their dangers, their deliverances; about the observations which they have made, the projects they may have formed. What must it then have been for two such friends, for such a father and son, after a separation of many months, during which, events of such high moment to both had taken place, to meet together again in health and comfort, to communicate mutually the full soul, to retire into the tent, to shut out the world, and give vent to the overflowings of tenderness and affection! And with what a subject of conversation are they furnished; "And Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done unto Pharaoh, and to the Egyptians, for Israel's sake, and all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and how the Lord delivered them." The most trifling incidents which befall a brother, a friend, a child, are interesting and important. What must then have been the emotions of Jethro to hear the wonders of Egypt, to learn the great things of God, astonishing in themselves, and acquiring an additional weight, creating a new interest, from the person who related them, and who was himself so deeply concerned in the event? But the good man is elevated, as he wondering listens to the wonderful tale, above all personal and selfish regards, above the partiality of private friendship, above the tenderness of natural affection. His heart dilates at the thought of a whole nation delivered, of a tyrant trampled in the dust, of the power, wisdom, and mercy of God magnified. "And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel; whom he had delivered out of the hands of the Egyptians. And Jethro said, Blessed be the Lord, who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh, who hath delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods; for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them." This friendly interview issues in a solemn, religious service, in which Aaron and all the elders of Israel are called to assist. What a blessed

influence has true religion, in conciliating kindness and confirming friendship! When men cordially agree in the same glorious object of worship, the little peculiarities of form will not obstruct the mutual attraction of brotherly love. Prejudice will droop and die, and charity will draw a veil over its neighbor's singularities and imperfections. Happy the family whose union is cemented by piety; the family whose happiness and peace are built upon the love of God; whose employments, communications, and pursuits are improved and sanctified by prayer!

Due attention having been paid to the calls of hospitality, the dictates of private friendship, and the demands of filial duty, Moses reverts next day betimes to the discharge of the duties of his public station. The time, the talents of the minister of God are not his own, they belong to mankind. Superficial observers who consider but the eminence of the place which a magistrate fills, the robe which he wears, the respect with which he is attended, look up to him with envy, and call him blessed. They think not of the thousand sacrifices which he his constrained to make of his ease, of his inclination, of his health, of his natural propensities, of his private attachments. They talk of the honors and emoluments of his office, but they overlook his anxious days, his painful toils, his sleepless nights, the causeless hatred which he incurs, the unprovoked insults which he must bear, and must not resent, the surrender which he must make of solid and substantial felicity, and the exchange of real and certain tranquillity, for uncertain usefulness or precarious reputation. Who would not be Moses, to sit on high and judge the people? But who would be Moses, to have the people stand by him for judgment, "from the morning to the evening!" The obscure part of mankind are little sensible what they owe to Providence for their obscurity. They can go out and come in unnoticed. They can go to rest when they will, and continue it as long, as they please. They have no vigilant, jealous, envious eye over them. They are free from the dreadful conflict of inclination and duty, of interest and conscience, of reverence for God, and respect for man. They can enjoy their families and friends. What they have, however little they can call their own. What, compared to these, and such advantages as these, Is the ermine cloak, the ivory scepter, the gem-encircled crown? Rejoice, O man, that the world knows thee not, cares not for thee, condescends not to trouble thy repose. Creep thy way silently, I beseech thee, to heaven; unafraid of being overlooked, neglected, and forgotten in the multitude of the redeemed, who there live, and reign, and "rejoice, with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

Observe how even a Moses may err in an excess of zeal, through ignorance, inexperience, or inattention. Desirous of doing good by administering justice impartially, he cares not what trouble and labor it may cost him self. The service of fear or of necessity is slow, reluctant, partial, and imperfect; the labor of love is cheerful, active, and persevering. Moses is in the way of his duty early and late. If the public be served faithfully, if equity be dispensed, if God be glorified, he is willing to spend and to be spent in such a cause. "And Moses said unto his father-in-law, because the people come unto me to inquire of God: when they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws."[*]Exo 18:15-16

We have seen Jethro in the character of a pious man, an affectionate neighbor, and a kind relation. We see him now blending with these excellent qualities the character of an able statesman and sagacious politician. There is no man so wise as not to need instruction, and none so simple as to be incapable of sometimes giving advice. Jethro plainly perceived, that the course of life which his son-in-law was pursuing must soon prove fatal to him. That, by attempting what

was beyond his strength to bear or perform, he was in the way of quickly rendering himself unable to do any thing at all. He therefore proposes a subdivision of the toil, by the appointment of proper men to the office of judge, who might try and determine the causes of less importance, and apply to Moses, and to God, through him, only in matters of high moment, and as the last resort. Thus Moses would be greatly relieved, many good men would be trained up to the useful, honorable and important employment of judging between his brethren, and the people meanwhile sustain no damage. The qualities which he points out as requisite to constitute this character, show how carefully he had considered the subject, and how well fitted he was to advise in a matter of this kind. Let those who have the appointment of judges study well what he says, and act accordingly. “Thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness: and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.”[*]Exo 18:21 The first requisite in a judge, according to Jethro, is ability. He must be a man of sense, penetration, and discernment. Because with the best intentions, a stupid, weak, or dissipated man, will be apt to err in judgment; either because he is unable to comprehend the cause, or will not employ the necessary time and pains to understand it. But what are the greatest and most shining abilities, destitute of a principle of conscience? They are but a mischievous weapon in the hands of a bad man. A judge, therefore, ought to be a man that fears God. A man, not only restrained by respect to the world, or actuated by regard to reputation: these are found feeble and inefficacious in the hour of temptation; these are fluctuating and unsteady, as the opinions, passions, and interests of men; but the fear of the Lord is a perpetual, unchanging motive and restraint, the same in darkness as in the light, the same in secret as before the eyes of the whole world. This principle is closely connected with, and indeed it naturally produces, a third quality, of primary importance in this character. A judge must be a man of truth. A sacred observer of truth in what he says himself; a diligent promoter of truth, and an impartial avenger of falsehood and injustice in others. Even a regard to some of the principles of religion, unconnected with the love of truth and justice, which are of the number of those principles, might be apt to mislead a man. Compassion, for example, might dispose a judge to favor the poor man, though he has the worst cause. The all-wise God, therefore, thought it necessary to throw in a special caution to this purpose, lest a principle, amiable and excellent in itself, should be perverted into a source of injustice, and has enjoined, by a positive statute,[*]“Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause.”--Exo 23:3. that the cause, not the person or condition of the man, should be considered by him who sits in judgment.

Jethro finally lays it down as essential to the character of a judge, that he be a man who hates covetousness. In which there is a strong insinuation, that where the love of money predominates, the exercise of all other necessary and suitable qualities are likely to be obstructed or perverted; ability under such influence rendered only more dangerous and hurtful; the fear of God lulled asleep; the heart hardened; the conscience, by the strong opiate of gold, reduced to a state of insensibility, and truth and justice hoodwinked on the tribunal. The history of our own country affords a melancholy example of the truth of this observation, in the conduct of that “greatest, wisest, meanest of mankind,” Sir Francis Bacon. Lord Verulam, and Lord High Chancellor of England, in the reign of James I. who with a soul that comprehended, filled, extended, enlarged the circle of science; a genius that penetrated through the whole vast system of nature, an imagination that transcended the flaming boundaries of the world, and a heart devoted to the love of God and mankind--basely received the wages of unrighteousness, accepted a bribe to pervert

justice, was accused and convicted of corruption in the execution of his high and important trust, acknowledged his own shame, and was deservedly driven, with disgrace to himself, and with the indignation, shame, and pity of a mortified and astonished world, from an honorable station which he filled so unworthily. But alas, after all, when we read of the appointment of judges and of generals and of their requisite qualities, of what does it remind us but that men are selfish, covetous, litigious, and violent: tenacious of their own and ready to encroach upon others? Wherefore is law? Wherefore are there tribunals? They are for “the lawless and disobedient.” Make men just, gentle, kindly affectioned; make them Christians indeed, and then war is at an end; the courts are shut up; then there would be no need of a judge, because there would be no offender. The advice which was wisely and kindly given, is graciously and candidly received. A proud and self-sufficient spirit would have rejected the council, however salutary, because tendered by a stranger. But true wisdom only considers whether the hint be useful, practicable, and necessary, without regarding from what quarter it comes. And such was the wisdom of Moses, and he was prepared for converse with God, who had learned deference and respect for the opinions of men. And thus the very first rudiments of the Jewish constitution, were suggested by the observation and experience of a stranger and a Midianite. And the great Jehovah disdained not to permit his prophet to be taught and his people to be governed, by the wisdom and intelligence of a good man, though he was not of the commonwealth of Israel. If men were capable of learning to be wise and good, He who is wisdom and goodness itself would vouchsafe to teach them, not by precept only, but by example also. As Jethro suggested, so it was done. Moses was eased of a burthen intolerable, the course of justice was not stopped, God was glorified, and the world edified.

You must have observed, that I have once and again held out to your expectation a subject of discourse, from which I have once and a second time shrunk back. It is still before me, and I feel myself as reluctant as ever to proceed. Who is not ready to sink under the awful terrors of the dispensation of the law from Sinai? “Who is sufficient for such things?”. But I must venture to go on, and endeavor to carry you with me to the foot of that tremendous mountain. And I flatter myself you have not been altogether disappointed or injured in being stopped a little in your progress. With recruited strength and spirits, we shall attempt to advance on our way. But we shall first from this eminence survey the ground over which we have travelled. Eminence did I say? No. Let us join the innocent, cheerful society in the tent of Moses, and learn to cultivate the endearing charities of private life; and having considered it well, let us retire, making such reflections as these-- That it is not fortitude, but folly, unnecessarily to expose ourselves, or those whom we love, to hardships and danger. “If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”[*]1Ti 5:8 It is our care, not our labor and reflection, which we are encouraged to cast upon God. That it argues a deficiency in some moral principle or another, when persons whom nature, and the obligations of society have united, discover an inclination to live asunder. Wisdom or necessity may impose a temporary separation: but well-disposed minds ever look to, and eagerly lay hold of the means and the season of restoration and union. That regard to public utility, exalts and improves private friendship. That to promote the glory of God, his own virtue, and the good of his fellow creatures, is the great and constant aim of every good man. That as none are too wise to learn, it is a proof of affection to communicate useful hints; and a high proof of wisdom to take and use them, from whatever quarter they come. There is one Being only who is not to be instructed. “How unsearchable are his

judgments, and his ways past finding out; for who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor."[*]Rom 11:32;Rom 11:34 And finally that, though we cannot successfully imitate eminent men in every particular of conduct, or in the display of talents which may be denied to ourselves, we are not thereby precluded from the exercise of the inferior talents which we possess, and from a virtuous emulation where it is possible for us to succeed. Let me strive to be a Moses in some things, though I be conscious I must fall inconceivably behind him in most. Amen.

Chapter 56

056. Moses--Mount Sinai Experience

Moses--Mount Sinai Experience

Exo 19:16-22. And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice. And the Lord came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount, and Moses went up. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish. And let the priests also, which come near to the Lord, sanctify themselves, Lest the Lord break forth upon them. In man, as he came perfect from the hands of his Creator, the immortal principle, the “breath of life,” “the living soul” exercised its just dominion over the earthly and sensual part of his nature. In man, degraded by sin, we behold the grosser domineering over the purer, the heavenly subjected to the terrestrial, the soul a slave to the senses. When our nature through grace shall be restored, the soul shall resume its empire; the body itself shall become spiritual, shall shake off the power of gravitation, and “ascend to meet the Lord in the air,” being “fashioned like unto Christ’s glorious body.” The dispensations of Heaven are suited to the condition of man. “God knows our frame, and remembereth that we are dust.” He makes sense his road to the mind: he seizes the conscience, and melts the heart, by speaking to the eyes and the ears. And when we consider how easily, and through how many different channels he can force his way to the inmost recesses of the man, who but must shudder at the thought of meeting the Father of spirits, ourselves disembodied spirits; at the thought of dropping the clay tabernacle in its native dust, and of becoming all eye to see God as he is, all ear to hear his voice, all soul to perceive and comprehend him! If God, encouraging and amiable in purifying and directing fire, in the cloudy pillar, and in harmless, unconsuming fire to the bush at Horeb, be awful; If dreadful at Sinai, coming in flashing, dazzling, threatening fire to promulgate his law; what must he be “coming in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ?” If the sound of that trumpet, which proclaimed the approach of God to Israel, was ready to kill the living with fear, what must be the trumpet which shall awake the dead? Whatever majesty and solemnity may appear in the giving of the law, everyone shall in a little while behold it infinitely exceeded in the consummation of the gospel.

God has hitherto declared his divine perfections by the effects which they produced. The plagues of Egypt awfully manifested his power and justice. The daily showers of manna, and water following them from the rock, bespeak his power and goodness. But he now opens his mouth, to proclaim in the ears of men, his name, his nature, and his will. Let us, with Israel, at a trembling distance contemplate this great sight, and listen with reverence to the Almighty uttering his voice.

The posterity of Abraham, according to the promise, is now become a great nation. But what are multitudes without government, and what government is a blessing without law? Happiness consists not in having such and such possessions, but in being fitted to enjoy what we have. The constitution of other states is the work of time, is the result of experience, arrives at maturity by degrees. Laws and restrictions, encouragements and restraints are suggested by events. But when the great Jehovah condescends to become a legislator, the utmost extent of possibility lying open to his view, provision is made from the beginning, for every case that can happen. The rule of his government is laid down at once; and the civil and religious constitution of that nation over which he chose to preside, is established by a wisdom which cannot err.

It was not unpleasant, as we were contemplating the scene exhibited in the preceding chapter, to listen to a wise and good man giving advice with respect to the administration of public justice. But we now tread upon holy ground; and we listen not to a man like ourselves, but to the only wise God. The whole taken together unfolds an unparalleled display of mercy and majesty, of goodness and grandeur.

Forty-seven days have now elapsed, since that “night much to be remembered,” when the destroying angel walked through the midst of Egypt, and slew all the first-born. And how many singular and interesting events have taken place in that short period? The Red Sea has been divided; the bitter waters of Marah sweetened; bread from heaven rained down; a living stream extracted from the flinty rock of Horeb; Amalek discomfited! Whether of the two shall we most admire, the greatness of the works which God performs, or the facility with which he brings them to pass? What a high value are we taught to put upon time, when we see to what valuable purposes, through the blessing and assistance of Heaven, a little time may be made subservient.

Three days more are employed in making solemn preparation for this celestial visitation; so that the law was delivered exactly on the fiftieth day after the celebration of the feast of passover: and in commemoration of it, the Jewish feast of Pentecost was ever after observed and rendered illustrious in the annals of the Christian church, by a new dispensation, not of terror but of grace; the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles of our Lord, in the miraculous gift of tongues. Even the minute circumstances of times and places, may have a significancy and an importance of which we have at present no apprehension. And I am fully persuaded, when God shall be pleased to vouchsafe us clearer light, and fresh discoveries of his will, numberless instances of coincidence and resemblance between the legal and evangelical dispensations shall rush upon us, of which we can now form no conception. Why God has appointed the seventh day to be the weekly sabbath; why the law was proclaimed from Mount Sinai just after seven times seven days had elapsed from the going out of Egypt; why, in the possession of Canaan, the land was to be permitted to rest every seventh year; why the general release, or year of jubilee, was to be statedly observed, after a constant revolution of seven times seven years; and why the Holy Ghost was given “when the day of Pentecost was fully come,” or after seven times seven days from the day that “Christ our passover was sacrifice for us?” These are questions which we pretend not to resolve. But certain it is these things have a meaning: “I know it not now, but I shall know it hereafter.”

Sinai, the scene of this splendid exhibition, is the highest eminence of a vast ridge of mountains, which run from east to west through Arabia Petra, as you go from the north-east coast of the Red

Sea to Palestine. The adjoining eminence is called Horeb, and is rendered illustrious by the miracle of the water issuing from, the rock. And from their propinquity, and their forming part of the same chain of mountains, they are often put the one for the other; and the adjacent desert country is called, indifferently, the wilderness of Horeb, or the wilderness of Sinai.

Moses was first called up into the mount alone, and thence sent back to the people with repeated messages full of tenderness and love. Preparation was made for the tremendous appearance of the glory of the Lord, by the most gracious and reiterated assurances of favor and protection. This is the endearing language which the great God condescends to employ on the occasion; “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bear you on eagle’s wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.” The beautiful image of the eagle, and her young ones, is happy beyond expression, and evidently proceeds from Him from whose view no part of the world of nature lies concealed. The natural history of that king of the feathered race, were this the time and the place to introduce it, would be the best commentary on the passage. But we may at least stop to illustrate, by comparing it with the same image, delineated by the same masterly hand, with still greater strength of coloring, and greater force and variety of expression. “For the Lord’s portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange God with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock.”[*]Deu 32:9, etc. The sagacity and vigilance of the eagle in providing the means of support and safety for her callow brood, her strength and fierceness in defending them, her tender sympathy with their weakness, her anxiety to hasten on their maturity and capacity to provide for themselves, the pains which she takes to instruct them to fly,--as they are all fully justified by facts, so they are conveyed to us in language the most simple, plain, and elegant, and raise us to the contemplation of an object, of all others the sublimest, sweetest, most interesting, and most composing to the soul. They, represent to us, the all-comprehending view of eternal Providence, the never-sleeping eye of the Watchman of Israel, the unassailable protection of the heavenly Guardian, the more than maternal care, diligence, and zeal which Jehovah continually exercises over them that are his. Happy is that people that is in such a case; yea, “happy is that people whose God is the Lord.”[*]Psa 144:13 As the friendship between God and Abraham, the father and founder of that great nation, commenced and was confirmed in the solemn ratification of a covenant, performed according to rites of God’s own appointing; so the political existence and importance of that nation were directed to take their rise in the cutting or dividing a covenant, with similar solemnities. And this was the tenor, these were the conditions of it. On the part of Israel, in one word, obedience to the voice of God; submission in all things to the will of their best friend, and kindest benefactor, who could have nothing in view but their happiness. On the part of God, the promise of a profusion of blessings temporal, spiritual, and everlasting; a rank among the nations, which should render them the envy and wonder of the world; an establishment, which length of time should not impair; a succession of prophets, of priests, and of princes, which was to issue in the eternal priesthood and unlimited

sovereignty of one, whose government was to be an universal and everlasting blessing to them and to mankind. “Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine.” Segulah, “a peculiar treasure,” something exceedingly prized and sedulously preserved, a gem of peculiar luster and value, which an affluent and powerful prince culls out from among many, takes under his own particular charge, and will not entrust to the care of another.

Moses takes up this striking idea again in that beautiful song of praise, in which, at the close of life, he recapitulates the wonderful ways of Providence to that chosen family “The Lord’s portion is his people: Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.”[*]Deu 32:9 The promise which follows in Exo 19:6, is wonderfully calculated to inspire ideas of dignity and importance: “Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” They had just left a country where the priesthood was held in high estimation; where the persons of those who bore that sacred character were inviolable, and their property exempted from the imposts which were laid upon that of other subjects. But the peculiar respect paid to this order of men, and the immunities which they enjoyed, served only to expose more glaringly the contrast, the degradation, and distress of the great body of the people. Whereas here was a whole nation destined of Heaven to equal honors; not a king and subjects, but a commonwealth of kings; not one ministering at the altar in the name of thousands, one admitted within the veil, and myriads removed to a humbling, mortifying distance: but a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, majesty and sanctity in one.

These are the words which Moses is commanded to rehearse in the ears of all the people. Having descended from the mount, collects them accordingly by their elders, the men first in age, first in wisdom, first in dignity and authority; and delivers to them the high message which he had in charge. Impressed at once with the power and grace of their heavenly King, they as one man reply; “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.” Which answer Moses again reports to his dread Employer. Thus, in the very preparatives for the publication of the law, the mediation of the gospel was clearly taught and inculcated; and thus throughout we perceive that guilty creatures can have no safe nor comfortable access to a holy God, but by means of “a days-man to lay his hands upon both;” and thus, the very minister of a fiery law exhibited a type of that great High Priest, at once “merciful and faithful;” “faithful in the things pertaining to God;” “merciful, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.”

Moses is upon this informed, that God intended on the third day from that time to manifest himself to all the people as the Leader and Ruler of that vast army, and as the Employer and Patron of Moses his prophet, in a manner that should leave no room to doubt in whose name he spake, and by what authority he acted: “And the Lord said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee forever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the Lord” “I come to thee in a thick cloud.” God already resided among Israel, and presided over them in a pillar of fire and a cloud. But whatever be the medium of communication between the Deity and his creatures, it is capable of being increased and improved beyond imagination. There is a darkness grosser, and a cloud thicker, and more awfully impregnated than any of which we have had experience. There is a voice louder, and a glory brighter than any which we have heard or seen. Who can declare, who can conceive the utmost extent of the power of the Almighty? There is a splendor infinitely superior to that of “the sun shining in his strength.” There may be an angel excelling in might “Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God.” Know we ever so much, there is a field of discovery before us infinite as the

immensity of Jehovah, to employ a duration of inquiry endless as his eternity. A command is now issued to the people to employ themselves that day and the next in solemn preparation for this august visit. They are directed, as an external mark of respect to the most holy God, as a token of obedience, and as an indication of inward purity, to wash their clothes, to abstain from whatever might defile the body or the mind, and even to deny themselves such innocent and lawful gratifications as might have a tendency to disturb their attention and distract their thoughts. When God came to give the law, he came after solemn warning, he gave evident signs of his approach, he declared to a moment when he was to be heard and seen in his majesty. But, when he shall come to execute the law, we are informed that he shall take the world by surprise, that men may be always ready. “Behold I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.”[*]Rev 3:3 “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.”[*]Mat 24:42 “Be ye ready: for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.”[*]Mat 24:44 When but a friend or neighbor is expected to visit us, decency requires that our persons, our houses, our entertainment, be rendered as inoffensive and as acceptable as we can make them. The anxiety which men feel, and the pains which they take to receive and entertain their superiors, is too well known to need any remark. It is only when the King of kings, and the Lord of lords announces his approach, that men are incurious, unceremonious, careless, and indifferent. The great Jehovah was to manifest himself first to the eye. “Be ready against the third day; for the third day the Lord will come down, in the sight of all the people, upon Mount Sinai.” All is hitherto attractive and encouraging. The face of God is clothed with smiles. He comes “to dwell with men upon earth.” But the grace and condescension of God, while they invite to the communications of friendship, forbid the boldness and freedom of familiarity. While he makes himself known as a Father, a Protector, a Guide, he permits us not to forget that he is at the same time “a great God, and a great King.” Therefore a strict injunction is given in Exo 19:12-13, “And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall surely be put to death. There shall not a hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live when the trumpet soundeth long, ye shall come up to the mount.” This last expression, “When the trumpet soundeth long, ye shall come up to the mount,” is evidently a caution and a threatening, not an invitation; and seems to import, “Let him who dares, presume to approach nearer; let him come up into the mount, if be will.” At the sound of that tremendous trumpet, they were ready to sink into the earth with terror, instead of desiring or attempting a nearer intercourse with the great and terrible God, who hath put all nature into consternation. As they were commanded, so they did. All impurity is carefully removed; and they see, in solemn silence and earnest expectation, in hope mingled with fear, the gradual approach of this all-important, this eventful day. At length, in all its pomp and importance, the third day arrives. Every creature, every element feels and gives witness to the appearance of its God. Heaven and earth, angels and men, the water and the land, air and fire, announce the presence of their great Creator and Ruler. I tremble as I read. What must it have been to see and hear? “And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders, and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.” Lo, the hoarse thunder is lost in the louder sound of the trumpet; and that awful sound, in its turn sinks into silence, before the all-penetrating, all-commanding accents of the voice of God himself. The thick darkness of a cloud, impregnated with the terrors of divine justice,

threatens one moment to extinguish forever hope and joy; and that darkness the next moment is dispelled by the more terrible flashes of celestial fire. How poor the state of an earthly prince compared to this! “God maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flame of fire.” What heart is not melted in the midst of this wild uproar? There is not an object of astonishment which we are acquainted with, but what enters into this description. Thunder, lightning, blackness of darkness, tempest, earthquake, the trumpet of God; and all these are but the coverings of terror, the harbingers of majesty and might. Behold, God is in the thunder, in the lightning, in the tempest, in the earthquake! they are mere instruments to do his pleasure. But we are directed to one object perfectly placid and composed in the midst of tumult and confusion: “even when the voice of the trumpet sounded long and waxed exceeding loud,” Moses possessed his soul in patience. “Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.” It is guilt that gives force to fire, that lends fury to the stormy wind, that shakes the earth by first shaking the soul. Faith in God controls the elements, and soothes the soul to rest in communion with God, as the child falls asleep in the fond maternal bosom.

Moses comes up at the command of Him who is King and Lord of nature, and there. fore he has nothing to fear. The three children fall down bound in the midst of the burning fiery furnace, but the flames have no power to kindle upon them; they consume only the cords with which they are bound; they themselves walk at liberty through the midst of the fire; they rest as on a bed of roses, for behold another is in company with them, and “the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.” Daniel sleeps secure in the den among lions, more composedly than Darius in his palace, surrounded by his officers and guards; he sleeps calmly, as a father in the midst of his children. He who fears God has nothing else to fear. But what new doctrine is to be ushered in under all this formidable apparatus? What law, unknown, unheard of before, is to be introduced and enforced by ceremonies so dreadfully august and solemn? Just that which was from the beginning, that which the finger of God more silently and curiously interwove with the very texture and frame of the human soul. The voice of God says, from the heights of Sinai, none other things than those which conscience speaks to every man, from the deep recesses of his own breast. It is this that gives weight to both the law and the gospel. They have their counterpart in the nature and condition of man. They are of God, who knows what is in man and what is good for man. But can He whose “presence fills heaven and earth,” change his place? Can God be said to ascend, or descend? The devout eye sees him in every creature, in every place, in every event. The pious soul feels and acknowledges him incessantly. But to rouse stupidity, to reprove carelessness, to convince infidelity, God must assume state, clothe himself with thunder, involve the top of Sinai in clouds, and shake its foundation. As in the composure of Moses we behold the confidence of divine friendship, and the security arising from union with God, so in the caution which is given in the twenty-first verse, “Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish,” we see the danger of unlicensed curiosity, of presumptuous boldness. Fire and darkness equally repel and intimidate, equally compose and encourage. All the dealings of God with man, are “line upon line, and precept upon precept.” The similitude of the legal and evangelical dispensations, and their difference, would necessarily occupy a much larger portion of your time and attention than now remains. It were better, therefore, to bring them together in one discourse calculated for the purpose.

I conclude the present Lecture with simply reading two or three short passages of Scripture, closely connected with and serving to illustrate our subject; written at two very different periods, and in two very different states of the church. The first is in the history of Elijah, the great restorer of the law, near six hundred years afterward. “And he rose, and did eat, and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights, unto Horeb, the mount of God. And he came thither unto a cave and lodged there. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him; and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only am left; and they seek my life to take it away. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire, a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave: and behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.”[*]1Ki 19:8, etc. The second is the winding up of that wonderful comparison and contrast of the law and the gospel, which constitute the great body of the epistle to the Hebrews, and which the apostle sums up in these remarkable words, sixty-four years after the advent of Jesus Christ. “For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more. For they could not endure that which was commanded. And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart. And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake. But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels: to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh: for if they escaped not who refused him that spoke on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven; whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.”[*]Heb 12:18, etc.

057. Moses--The Law-Giver

Moses--The Law-Giver

Jos 1:17. According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the Lord thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses.

John 1:17. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. In forming estimates of greatness, it is natural for men to consult their senses, not their reason. With the idea of royal majesty we connect those of a chair of state, a numerous and splendid retinue, an ermine robe, a scepter, and a crown. But wisdom and goodness are the qualities which confer real dignity, and command just homage and respect. Our preconceptions of earthly magnificence much exceed the truth, and knowledge speedily levels the fabric which imagination had raised. But the wonders of nature, the mighty works of God, grow upon us as we contemplate them. No intimacy of acquaintance reduces their magnitude or tarnishes their luster. And if the very frame of nature, the vastness, the variety, the harmony and the splendor of the visible creation be calculated to fill us with astonishment and delight, how must the plan of Providence, the work of redemption, the great mystery of godliness, excel in glory! In the discoveries which it has pleased God, at sundry times and in diverse manners to make of himself to mankind, he has at one time addressed himself directly to the understanding: at another, made his way to the heart and conscience through the channel of sense. The law was given in every circumstance of external pomp; it was accompanied with everything that could dazzle the eye, fill the ear, and rouse the imagination. The kingdom of God, in the gospel of his “Son, came not with observation.” The great Author of the dispensation of grace, according as it was predicted concerning him, “did not strive nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets.” He had, in the eyes of an undiscerning world, “no form nor comeliness, no beauty why he should be desired.” And therefore, “he was despised and rejected of men.” But we are taught to think very differently of his second appearance. “He shall come in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory:” “In his Father’s glory, and all his holy angels:” “With the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God.” The manner of delivering the law corresponded with its nature. It was clothed with thunder. It was surrounded with the blackness of darkness. It emitted flaming fire. It denounced death. The spirit of the gospel, in like manner, breathed in the mode of its publication. The doctrine of peace and reconciliation was delivered to men, in the tenderest accents of human friendship. And temporal mercies and deliverances prepared the way for “spiritual and heavenly blessings in Christ Jesus.”

We are now to bring these two dispensations together, and to compare the one with the other, in order that we may discover and admire that uniformity of design which they jointly aim at promoting, the mutual luster which they shed upon, and the mutual aid which they lend to, each other. By “the law” we understand the whole of that scheme of the divine providence which related to the posterity of Abraham; the promises which were made to them, the ordinances prescribed, the character which they bear, the events which befell them, from the day in which that patriarch left his kindred and country, till the day when the whole was swallowed up and lost in the person,

doctrines, ordinances, life, sufferings, and death of Him, who was held up from the beginning as the great, leading, commanding object in the eternal eye! the accomplishment of the promises, the substance of the types and shadows, the “end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.”

Moses and Christ frequently speak of their mutual relation and resemblance. “I will raise them up,” says God by Moses, “a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words, which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.”[*]Deu 18:18-19 “Search the Scriptures,” says Christ, “for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words.”[*]John 5:39, etc. The persons, characters, and offices of the two legislators, therefore, naturally fall to be first considered, in tracing the resemblance of the two covenants which were established with mankind through their mediation. Of the birth of Moses, and salvation to Israel by him, there seems to have been a general expectation in his own nation, and an apprehension of such an event as general in the minds of the Egyptians. Hence the bloody decree of Pharaoh, to destroy from the womb all the male children of the Hebrews; and hence, on the other hand, that eagerness to save a child, who, from the moment of its birth, exhibited unequivocal signs of his future greatness and usefulness. When Christ came into the world, multitudes were looking for the “Consolation of Israel.” The prophecies concerning the promises of the Messiah, were evidently hastening to fulfill themselves. The Jews expected their king: Herod dreaded a rival. The person of the promised Savior was pointed out by signs in heaven, and signs on earth, which it was impossible to misunderstand. An extraordinary star describes an unknown path through the air to the place of his birth. A multitude of the heavenly host proclaim the joyful event to the shepherds. It was revealed unto Simeon by the Holy Ghost, “that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.”[*]Luk 2:26 Conducted of the Spirit he came into the temple at the moment when Christ was presented there, according to the law. He recognizes the promised of the Lord, and closes his eyes in peace. Anna, the prophetess, instructed by the same Spirit, gives a similar testimony, and speaks of “the holy child to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.”[*]Luk 2:38 The circumstances of extreme danger which attended the birth of Moses and of Christ, and the wonderful means of their preservation and deliverance, constitute a striking mark of resemblance between them. Behold the long-looked-for deliverer of the Jewish church and nation, ready to perish by the hand of Pharaoh: and the great King and Head of the Christian world, threatened by the murdering dagger of the tetrarch of Galilee; while the earth was watered with the blood of their infant brethren. Moses is saved from destruction by the daughter of the tyrant who sought his life; he finds an asylum and a school in the house which he was destined to plague and to humble. And Jesus of Nazareth finds shelter in Egypt from the fury and jealousy of Herod. The personal beauty and accomplishments of the Israelitish lawgiver were probably intended to typify, in an inferior degree, the personal glory and excellency of Him, concerning whom the prophet thus writes--“Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee forever.”[*]Psa 45:2 The wretched state of Israel when Moses was born, and of the world when Christ came to save it, are a melancholy and affecting counterpart to each other. The former, subjected to the arbitrary authority of a sanguinary tyrant; the latter in dreadful captivity to the prince of the power of the air, that “murderer from the beginning;” “that spirit which ruleth in the children of disobedience.” Their

mental qualities present a lovely and an instructive similitude. “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.”[*]Num 12:3 “Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”[*]Mat 11:29 Compassion for his afflicted brethren, early discovered the temper, and marked the character of Moses, the man of God. Sympathy with the miserable, and that sympathy effecting seasonable relief for them, marked the paths of the Son of God through a world of wretchedness. “I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue now with me three days, and have nothing to eat: And I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint by the way.”[*]Mat 15:32 “When he saw the multitudes he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd.”[*]Mat 9:36 Over the grave of Lazarus “Jesus wept.” “When he was come near, he beheld the city and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, A things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.”[*]Luk 19:41-42 The offices which Moses and Christ were called of Providence to execute, present us with points of likeness which it is impossible not to see, and equally impossible to mistake. “And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face; in all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants, and to all his land: and in all that mighty hand, and in all that great terror, which Moses showed in the sight of all Israel.”[*]Deu 34:10, etc. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”[*]John 1:18 Moses was king in Jeshurun, and conducted the thousands of Israel through many difficulties and dangers to their destined habitation; Jesus, God’s “anointed King over his holy hill of Zion,” brings his “many” spiritual “sons unto glory.” To constitute one deliverer for Israel, Moses and Aaron must unite their talents, must combine their force, must conjoin their offices: the prophet must co-operate with the priest; two distinct persons carry on one design; but, in the Savior of the world, all talents, all virtues, all offices meet and center: the prophetic inspiration of Moses, Aaron’s pleasantness and grace of speech; the regal dignity of the one, the sacerdotal purity of the other. In order to put Israel in possession of the promised land, Joshua must succeed to Moses, and happily finish what his master has so successfully begun. But the great Captain of salvation needs no coadjutor, can have no successor: “He gives grace and glory;” He leads his redeemed through the wilderness, introduces them into Canaan, maintains them in quiet and everlasting possession.

Other lines of resemblance will appear as we prosecute the history, and shall not therefore be anticipated. But we must not dismiss the subject without pointing out wherein the likeness fails, and how much the type falls short of the object which it represents. The wonders performed by Moses in Egypt were wrought by a power delegated to, and conferred upon him for the purpose. The miracles of Christ were produced by a power original and inherent. Moses, though the meekest of all men, was betrayed into rashness, lost temper, and “spake unadvisedly with his lips.” But in Jesus behold a spirit which was never ruffled, a tongue in which guile was never found; lips that never offended; a mind which no insult could disturb, no unkindness provoke; nor even the horrid pangs of an unmerited death rouse to resentment. “Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honor than the house. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God.

And Moses verily was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a Son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of hope firm unto the end."[*]Heb 3:1, etc.

Moses died and was buried. Jesus died and "was buried, and rose again." Moses received the law; Christ gave it. Moses and Elias attend the Savior on mount Tabor, as his ministering servants; Jesus receives their attendance and homage, as their Lord.

Having spoken of the resemblance between the authors of the two dispensations, we proceed, as was proposed, to speak in the same view of the two dispensations themselves. And first, They rest on one and the same authority, are dictated by the same unerring wisdom, and are directed to the same great and glorious end. Indeed, one of the great proofs that both are of God is the conformity of both to the nature and condition of man. The precepts of the law are not novel constitutions, which had no existence till the days of Moses: neither are the consolations of the gospel new discoveries of grace, unheard of till the four thousandth year of the world. Sinai thundered and lightened in Adam's conscience the moment he tasted the forbidden tree, and drove him to seek refuge "from the presence of the Lord God amidst the trees of the garden." The terrors of the law raged in Cain's guilty breast, long before there was any record written on brass or stone. And the promises of pardon and salvation are coeval with the conviction of the first offender, and the denunciation of his punishment. The tongue which pronounced on man the doom of death, proclaims the glad tidings of life and recovery.

I know that the law is of God, for I have that within me which acknowledges and approves its rectitude and excellency; and even when it condemns me, I am constrained to call it "holy, just, and good." I know that the gospel is of God for I feel that within me which welcomes its approach, discerns its suitableness, rejoices in its fulness, rests upon its truth. It is of God, for it descends to the level of my guilt and misery, corresponds with my hopes, suits my necessities. Our blessed Lord took an early opportunity of explaining himself on this subject. An absurd idea prevailed, that the kingdom of the Messiah was to be a total subversion of the Mosaic dispensation. An absurdity into which some Christians have inadvertently, given, for want of making a plain and necessary distinction, between those particulars of the law which are in their own nature eternal and unchangeable, like the nature of that God who is its author; and those, which being typical and prophetical, ceased of course when the predicted event arrived, and the type, having fulfilled its design, was lost in the thing typified; and those which, being temporary and transitory, ceased with the occasion of them. Of the first sort are the precepts of the Decalogue, or the ten commandments; which, under every constitution that affects such a being as man must be immutable and everlasting. Of them it is that Christ said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."[*]Mat 5:17-18 Of the second class are the laws of the daily sacrifice, the great annual feasts, the Levitical priesthood, and the like. They pointed out Christ the Lord, they led to him, they were lost in him. And in the third rank we place the law of circumcision, the political economy of the Jewish nation, all that related to the possession of Canaan, and which ceased of course with the dissolution of their government, and the loss of their national importance. These observations being attended to and kept in mind, will prevent the confusion arising from the ambiguous acceptation of the word "law," as expressing the Old Testament dispensation. The law, then, and the gospel, the two

tables of stone delivered to Moses, and the “grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ,” coincide, secondly, in this, that they both point out with equal clearness and force the necessity of a Savior. Every word pronounced by the voice of God from Sinai, is in truth a sentence of condemnation. While it enjoins future obedience, it fixes past guilt. While it says, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath,” it accuses of idolatry. While it recommends the observance of the Sabbath, it charges home the violation of it; and so of the rest of the precepts of the Decalogue. The law, therefore, carried the gospel in its bosom, as the new changed moon exhibits a great body of obscurity, embraced by a small semicircle of light; but which is to be irradiated by degrees, till the whole becomes one great globe of light and glory; and Moses performs the part of “a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.” To hear of a constitution by which I might have lived, after my life is forfeited, is only to embitter my misery. It is like hearing of a cordial after a man has swallowed poison. Now it could never be the design of the gracious Lawgiver to insult human misery, by holding out a system which could avail the guilty nothing. While, then, the divine justice lays down the law in all its strictness, purity, and extent, saying, “I am the Lord who will by no means clear the guilty;” “Cursed is everyone who continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them;”[*]Gal 3:10 the goodness which condescends to give a law at all, the wisdom which explains it, the patience that forbears to punish its transgression, all plainly and distinctly proclaim the necessity and the existence of an atonement, and lead to “the bringing in of a better hope.”

Thirdly, The spirit of both dispensations is a spirit of love. God enforces upon Israel obedience to the law from Sinai, by the consideration of his being the Lord, which “brought them up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage:” “who has borne them on eagle’s wings, and brought them to himself.” And “love” on the part of man “is the fulfilling of the law.” “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”[*]Mat 22:37, etc. The gospel, in like manner, has its source in love, the love of God: and its great aim and end is to produce love to God. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”[*]John 3:16 “And we love him because he first loved us.” “The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”[*]2Co 5:14-15 And, “By this shall all men know that ye are in disciples, if ye have love one to another.”[*]John 13:35 “He that says he loves God, and hateth his brother, is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”[*]1Jn 4:20 And, when both shall have produced their full effect, “perfect love shall cast out fear,” the voice of God shall be unaccompanied with thunder and lightning, cloud and tempest. The storm is in the mind of the guilty creature. The wrath of fire is not in God, but in fallen man; in “the carnal mind, which is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” When that is extinguished, all is at peace. The aim and labor of the gospel is not to reconcile God to man: but to reconcile men to God: for “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God and God in him.”[*]1Jn 4:16

Fourthly, Both the legal and evangelical dispensations equally discover to us our distance from God. The one, by enumerating and declaring our offences; the other, by enumerating and

declaring the tender mercies of our God. The law treats us as alienated friends, whom it is needful to convince, to reprove, and humble. The gospel considers us as friends restored, no “longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;” “once darkness, but now light in the Lord: once afar off, but made nigh by the blood of Christ.” The law shows us how far we have deviated from the path of duty and happiness; the gospel conducts us back through our wanderings, unravels the intricacies and errors of our dark steps, and replaces us in our father’s house. Moses informs us that we are wrong, “like sheep going astray:” Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life,” and takes us under the care of “the shepherd and bishop of souls.” Moses points out the dreadful depth into which we have fallen, the dreadful distance from heaven to hell; Christ reveals the glorious height to which we are raised, the glorious distance from hell to heaven. Moses tells me what I ought to be and to do; Christ makes me such as he would have me to be. “And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ; (by grace ye are saved) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”[*]Eph 2:1, etc. But the law was delivered to the world in a very different manner from the publication of the gospel; in fire that burned, in tempest that roared, in a cloud that darkened, in words that threatened. It awed men into distance; it inspired terror. But the gospel comes in light that consumes not, in glory that dazzles not, in language that threatens not. The law says, “Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever touches the mount shall surely be put to death. There shall not a hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live; when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they, break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish.”[*]Exo 19:12 The gospel says, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”[*]Mat 11:28 “He that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.”[*]John 6:37 But to the impenitent and unbelieving, the gospel speaks the same terror which the law did from Sinai; nay, it wears a still more frowning aspect. “Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile.”[*]Rom 2:8-9 “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.”[*]Heb 2:3 “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of grace.”[*]Heb 10:28-29 And on the other hand, to them that believe, the law speaks in the mildest, gentlest language of the gospel; for “there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.”[*]Rom 8:1 “And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, 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.”[*]Exo 34:6-7 “And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my

commandments."[*]Exo 20:6 I know not whether the whole Bible contains an expression of goodness more singular and striking than these words which issued from the mountain that burned with fire. Our fears are alarmed at the mention of the great and dreadful name--"The Lord God, a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the father's upon the children." But justice has its limits. It may be stretched out to the third or fourth generation of offenders. Yet the "Lord will not strive continually, neither will he keep his anger forever." But grace knows no bounds. When mercy is to be extended, it looks forward and forward, from a third and a fourth, to thousands of generations of them that love God. In what promise of the New Testament is the love of God preached more sweetly than in this precept of the Old?

Both dispensations then 'have their mildness, and both their terror. Their mildness from the grace of the Creator; their terror from the guilt of the creature. And if the proclamation of the law were thus dreadful; if the alarm of judgment to come, shake the foundation of the everlasting hills; if Sinai tremble, and the rocks melt before the Lord, coming as a Protector and a Friend, what must the sessions be, the great day of doom, the awful hour of execution when the judge shall come "in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."[*]2Th 1:8 "When the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat."[*]2Pe 3:12 "Consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver."[*]Psa 50:22

"Now of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum: We have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord had pitched and not man. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this Man have somewhat to offer. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry; by how much also he is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For 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 minds, and write them in their hearts; I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins, and their iniquities I will remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away."[*]Heb 8:1, etc. And all "this is of God, who hath made us able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the Spirit: for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly 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? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which was done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious."[*]2Co 3:6, etc.

We are assembled this night, my brethren, the subjects of the law; the students of the gospel; the expectants of Christ's second appearance. "See then that ye resist not him that speaketh from heaven." Ye are happily set free from the law of ceremonies; happily subjected to the law of morality; and "not without law unto Christ." "Stand fast therefore in that liberty wherewith Christ bath made you free." Enjoy and improve what you have; affect not more than a wise providence permits. look forward to that day when you shall join an innumerable company of angels,

yourselves like the angels of God in heaven; when you shall associate with the spirits of just men made perfect, yourselves perfect as they are; when you shall add your voices to the celestial choir, in singing “the Song of Moses and the Lamb;” when you shall see the face of God without dying, and hear his voice without quaking for fear. “Now 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 forever and ever. Amen.”

Chapter 58

058. Moses to Balaam: Volume IV

Moses to Balaam

Volume IV

059. Foreordination

Foreordination

2Ti 1:8-10. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God; who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began; but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Every dispensation of the Divine Providence seems to be the basis and the preparation of a farther display of wisdom and goodness. The last discovered purpose of the Eternal Mind, is the continuation, the extension, and the improvement of that which immediately preceded it; and the glory hitherto displayed in the ways and works of God, however excellent, is hastening to lose itself in “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” yet to be revealed. Periods of immeasurable, incomprehensible duration had flowed, before this fair and majestic frame of nature was called into existence. For we read of a purpose of grace formed and given “before the world began,” and of “a kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world;” of an election made, and of “eternal life promised, of God who cannot lie, before the foundation of the world.” Who can tell what systems have preceded that which now exists? We know from Scripture that one more glorious is to succeed it. “According to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”[*]2Pe 3:13--And who can tell what future systems may arise in endless progression? As well might the fluttering insect, which was born in the morning and perishes at night, presume to dive into the ages beyond the flood, or with bold, adventurous wing attempt to soar into the heaven of heavens, and declare the wonders of the world of spirits. But though system may succeed system, though dispensations change, one thing is immutable, “the gracious purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” One great object was kept in view before the world began, is still kept in view through the whole extent of its duration; and is to be pursued through the endless ages of eternity. Do you need, Christian, to be told what it is? The salvation of the world by Christ Jesus. It is a little thing to say, that Abraham saw his day afar off: that of him Moses wrote, Isaiah prophesied, David sung, and Paul preached. “These things the angels desire to look into.” On this exalted theme the everlasting counsels of peace revolved; to mature them, the powers of heaven and earth were shaken; and to bring them to their consummation, a new creation shall expand infinite space, and a succession of ages that are never, never to expire. Placed at whatever point in this immense sphere, our eyes are still attracted to the glorious Center, from which all light, and life, and joy, issue; and in whose light every inferior orb revolves and shines. The epistle of the great apostle of the Gentiles from which I have taken the subject of this Discourse, is addressed to Timothy, whom he styles his “dearly beloved son in the gospel,” and who had been ordained first bishop of the church of the Ephesians. Paul himself was at that time a prisoner at Rome, and totally uncertain respecting the issue of a cause which affected his life, before the imperial court. What mercy, what justice was to

be expected from such a prince as Nero--the monster who could fire his country, shed the blood of his virtuous preceptor, and destroy his own mother? But we behold in the prisoner a spirit much exalted above the roar of a tyrant, a mind prepared for the worst that could befall him, and expressing anxiety, not about personal safety, but about the success of the gospel, and the steadfastness of a beloved disciple. He solemnly charges that disciple not to suffer himself to be one moment shaken in the faith, by the persecution to which the cause of Christ had exposed himself, or the ills which he might still be called to endure for the testimony of Jesus: and, to enforce his charge, he suggests a view of the gospel which eclipses all created glory, “stills the enemy and the avenger,” plucks from death his sting, and robs the grave of its boasted victory. He represents Timothy and himself as engaged in a cause, which the great God himself, before all worlds, regarded as of superior importance, and made peculiarly his own; which “at sundry times and in divers manners” he disclosed, and which at length, “by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, be made manifest” to all men. Paul glories in the idea of being a worker together with God in this generous design; in his appointment to the office of “a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles,” in the great mystery of godliness; in displaying and dispensing to a guilty, perishing world, the unsearchable riches of Christ--who had “abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” In tracing the history of the patriarchs who lived both before and since the flood, from Adam to Abraham, and from Abraham to Moses, we have endeavored to point out this unity of design, this steadiness of co-operation, this progress of discovery. By whatever name the typical person is designated, patriarch, prophet, high priest, under the Old Testament dispensation; whatever be the designation of the ministering servant under the New, apostle, evangelist, pastor, or elder, the office and the end of the institution is one and the same--to declare the Son of God, the Savior of men, “for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, onto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”[*]Eph 4:13

Borne down the current of divine revelation, we have arrived with Israel at the mountain that burned with fire, and at awful distance, with trembling eyes beheld its summit involved in clouds, clothed in terror; and with wonder and joy contemplated the cloud dispersing, the thunder ceasing, the terror done away, and Mount Sinai transformed into Mount Zion. Whatever farther progress we make, in whatever direction we proceed, we shall find this exceeding high mountain still in view; and, whether under the conduct of the leader and commander of Israel, or of the Champion of Christianity, we are equally led by “one” and the same “Spirit” in “one hope,” to “one Lord, one faith, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all.”[*]Eph 4:5-6

We shall endeavor to connect our past and following Course of Lectures, by the view here presented to us by the apostle, of the plan of Providence in the redemption of the world; and the execution of it, “by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ.”--And you will be pleased to observe,

I. It is God’s own purpose. The contrivance, the discovery, the progress, the accomplishment, all, all is from heaven. In what relates to this world, in what contributes to the sustentation and comfort of a transient life, human sagacity, ingenuity, and industry may challenge a little praise. Men soon invented and improved the necessary, useful, and ornamental arts. They soon learned to build cities, to work in brass and iron, to “handle the harp and organ.” But their dexterity, address, perseverance, and success in the pursuit of perishable interests, form an humiliating contrast with

their awkwardness, indolence, inattention, and incapacity in their higher, their spiritual, and everlasting concerns. Wise in trifles, or to do evil, how to do good they find not. The experiment was permitted to be fully made. It was proved how far the powers of nature could go. Egypt, Assyria, Greece, Rome, improved one upon another; and what was the result? “The world by wisdom knew not God.” They became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.”[*]Rom 1:22-23 To increase our wonder and mortification, when God’s purpose of mercy was declared, when his method of salvation was revealed, men were “slow of heart to believe.” They “resisted the Holy Spirit;” Christ “came to his own and his own received him not.” The disciples themselves understood not, believed not “what the prophets had spoken.” No wonder then that the doctrine of the cross was “to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks, foolishness.” Here then is a purpose, which not only is not of man’s forming, but which man uniformly and violently opposed. In other cases, we behold the wisdom of God blending itself with human counsels, directing, subduing them to its determination, and the great God graciously condescending to divide his glory with the creature. But if there be a design more peculiarly his, from which he claims undivided praise, which was not, which could not be of man, nor “according to our works,” it is this, the gracious design of “saving them that believe,” by Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

II. This leads us forward to observe, that as the work of redemption is Jehovah’s own peculiar purpose, so it is a purpose of grace. The thoughts of “the Father of Spirits,” are unfolded, and they are “thoughts of peace.” Transporting view! Behold the greatest and most glorious of all beings employing himself in devising the means of doing good, of communicating happiness, of relieving the miserable; and forming a scheme of benevolence which extends from eternity to eternity, and comprehends innumerable myriads of rational beings restored, recovered from ignorance, from guilt, from misery, to wisdom, to holiness, to perfect and exalted felicity. Blessed purpose! The formation of man, the creation of an universe are only parts of it. Man was formed that he might be redeemed; was sent into this world to be prepared “for heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” The firmament was expanded, adorned, lighted up, to witness the display of “the exceeding riches of the grace of God, in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus;” and every successive opening of the plan of Providence is only a new discovery, a more endearing expression of the love of Christ, “which passeth knowledge,” of “the peace of God which passeth all understanding.” Think, O guilty man, think, O my soul, what a purpose of justice, think what a purpose of wrath would have been, had “God sent his Son into the world to condemn the world!” The spirit fails at the dreadful thought. Behold an insulted God descending to confound the pride and presumption of the builders of Babel; and mark their speedy dispersion. Behold a righteous God descended on a purpose of fiery indignation against polluted Sodom; and consider, in trembling silence, the smoke of her torment ascending up to heaven. Behold a whole world of ungodly men overwhelmed with the waters of a deluge; and learn how dreadful, how inconceivably dreadful a deliberate purpose of vengeance is. And, when you have pondered it well, reflect with wonder, gratitude, and delight, that “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;”[*]John 3:16 that Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. Again,

III. This purpose of God, this purpose of grace was formed before the world began. Human purposes are feeble, fluctuating, unenlightened; obstructed by unforeseen events, they are constrained to change their direction, and to assume a new form. The imperfect work which through many difficulties is at length executed, bears no manner of resemblance to the original design. Man performs what he may, because he cannot effect what he would. He is governed by circumstances over which he has no power. But the distinctions of past and future, vanish away from before the eye of God. There can be no difficulty in the way of almighty power, nothing concealed from the view of omniscience. The duration of a world shrinks into a single moment before Him who is “from everlasting to everlasting.” Contingency and chance can have no effect on the counsels of Him “who seeth the end from the beginning,” and saith, “My counsel shall stand, and I will fulfil all my pleasure.”

Christianity as old as the creation! It boasts a much more ancient date. The creation is of yesterday, the world is not yet six thousand years old; but Christianity is of the essence of God himself. It bears date “of old, even from everlasting.” “This pure river of water of life” proceeds out of the throne of God, who dwells in inaccessible light. Imagination wearies itself, thought is lost, in tracing it up to its source. Bless the Lord, O my soul, who from eternity, in the greatness of his might, in the plenitude of his goodness, in the incomprehensibility of his wisdom, condescended to fix the bounds of thy habitation, to arrange the events of thy mortal existence, to prepare thy place in the heavenly mansions; who “before the world began” surveyed with complacency and delight his own benevolent design, his own glorious work, the universe which he was about to speak into being, the bit of clay he was to fashion into a man, the immortal spirit which his breath was to inspire, the needy, perishing wretch whom his mercy was to redeem. But,

IV. The blessed Author of this gracious, everlasting purpose, has revealed and bestowed it in his own way. He “hath saved us,” “not according to our works,” nor in the way of our own wisdom--it is given us in Christ Jesus. From the formation of the merciful plan of salvation to its consummation in glory, the necessity of a mediator is never for a single moment left out of view. His name, like a sweet perfume, is wafted on the wings of every wind. Survey the world of nature through all its vast extent, and in its minutest particle, and we behold the omnific “Word by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made that is made.” He also “upholdeth all by the word of his power;” “all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth.” Open the history of redemption at whatever page, and it still unfolds the mercy of God through Christ Jesus our Lord. Conducted of the Spirit back to the eternal days of uncreated light, admitted to the deliberations of the councils of peace, we hear the Son of God proclaim, “I am Alpha,” “the beginning.” Carried forward in joyful hope to the day when he shall “make all things new,” the same voice still proclaims, “I am Omega,” “the ending,” “who was, and is, and is to come.” Search the Scriptures; consult the prophets; to him they “all give witness.” Meditate the promises; “all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God.” Examine the record; 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.”[*]1Jn 5:11-12 Consider the ministration of angels; the covenant of promise “was ordained by angels in the hand of a Mediator.” Hearken to a voice from the most excellent glory: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear him.” All is light and glory; but not a single ray of light is transmitted through any medium but this. All is grace--free, sovereign grace; but there is not one intimation given, not one act of favor conferred, but through the “one Mediator

between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus." To him let every knee bow, to him every tongue confess, of things in earth and things in heaven. What saith the Scripture? "He putteth no trust in his saints, and his angels he chargeth with folly." Is not this a plain declaration, that the highest and holiest of created beings are imperfect and dependent; that they stand in need of a Mediator and Advocate in order to their acceptance with a holy God? And is it not for this reason, that, "when he bringeth in the First-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him?"--It being the fundamental law of God's everlasting kingdom before the world was, and after it shall be burnt up and pass away, with all that it contains, under patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, under the legal and under the evangelical dispensation, under the dominion of grace and in glory, on earth and in heaven, that there should be access to hope in, and acceptance with God, for men and for angels, only through the Son of his love, the eternal Word which made and supports all things.

V. In conformity with this glorious purpose and grace in Christ Jesus, what hath been executed? Everything worthy of a design so grand, everything worthy of its great "Author," worthy of the glorious "Finisher of our faith." His appearing hath made it manifest. The clearest sighted of the prophets, like the blind man only half restored to vision, saw men but as trees walking, but now, under the gospel, the dullest and most despised among believers sees everything plainly; he sees the eternal purpose of God written in characters which he can read and understand; he compares the model with the structure, and finds the tabernacle erected in the plain, the perfect counterpart of the pattern delivered in the mount--He finds the Scriptures fulfilled, the predictions verified, the types explained, realized, justified; all things finished in and by the Lord Christ.

What hath been executed? He hath abolished death, that hated, hideous specter, through fear of whom the fallen posterity of Adam are "subject to bondage." He path restrained the power, put an end to the dominion, annihilated the existence of the king of terrors. Through sin death gained admission into the world; in sin his empire is founded; by sin he is armed with a mortal sting. By the great propitiation for sin he is banished thence, his reign is terminated, his sting is plucked out. Ask that sickly, pining creature, what it would be to have the disease which is perceptibly preying upon his vitals abolished? Ask that dejected prisoner of despair, what it would be to have his debt discharged, and the writ of his confinement abolished? Ask the wretch condemned, what it would be to have the fatal handwriting of judgment that is against him abolished! And let the answers you would receive convey, as well as they can, a sense of the obligation under which we lie, to Him, who hath done away the deadly, plague which wastes, which threatens, which destroys the soul; to Him, who hath paid the enormous debt "to the uttermost farthing," purchased a release, set open the prison doors; to Him who hath cancelled the awful sentence of a righteous God, "nailing it to his cross." He hath abolished death, with all the woe that leads to it, all the dreadful woe that is in it, all the more tremendous woe that succeeds sickness and pain, anguish and old age: the bitter pang that rends asunder the body and the spirit; the hell that follows. And by what wonderful means hath all this been effected? "through death" he has destroyed "him that had the power of death." Into his own snare the deceiver has fallen; by his own weapons the enemy has been disarmed; his own triumph hath proved his ruin. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."[*]1Co 15:55-57

What hath been executed? He hath brought life and immortality to light. It is more than flattering hope or fond desire; it is more than the speculation of a philosophic mind, or the presumptuousness of reasoning pride; it is more than patriarchal confidence, or the dawning light of Mosaic revelation. It is desire warranted, and hope supported by facts: it is reason justified and confirmed by demonstration; it is the morning light of promise, advanced to the perfect day of discovery and accomplishment. “He that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”[*]Rom 8:11 “For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.”[*]1Th 4:14 This is not the cold peradventure of a sage, saying, “If in this I err, I willingly err;” but the blessed assurance or an apostle, saying, “I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”[*]2Ti 1:12 “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”[*]2Ti 4:6-8 And can it be necessary to inquire who caused this light to arise? Who removed the veil, and disclosed the hidden glories of eternity? What power could tune the human tongue to such raptures, and inspire a mortal breast with such holy and triumphant joy? “God is the Lord, which hath show ed us light.” It is “the revelation of Jesus Christ, who showeth to his servants things which must shortly come to pass.” “By the gospel life and immortality are brought to light;” “Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”[*]Col 1:26-27

Learn hence the folly and danger of all opposition to the plans of eternal Providence. “He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength who hath hardened himself against Him and hath prospered?”[*]Job 9:4 “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: The Lord shall have them in derision. Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.”[*]Psa 2:2-4;Psa 2:6;Psa 2:8 “If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.”[*]Acts 5:38-39 “Verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”[*]Mat 5:18 “Woe be to him who striveth with his Maker.” Sinner, learn wisdom in time; cease from the ruinous contention; “it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks;” thou art wounding, destroying only thyself. “Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”[*]Psa 2:12

Christians, be of good courage; “in patience possess ye your souls.” God will support and vindicate the cause that is his own. His truth and faithfulness, evinced by the interposition of ages past, are a full security for his care and attention through ages to come. Time, which impairs all things else, gives stability, force, and effect to the purposes of Heaven. The dissolution of the frame of nature is the consummation of the work of redemption. As the writings of Moses are an improvement upon the traditional knowledge of the antediluvian world; and as the gospel is an

improvement upon the law and the prophets, so, “according to his promise,” we look for a new economy, which shall be an improvement upon, and an extension, confirmation, and accomplishment of the gospel dispensation.

Learn to aspire after the honor and happiness of working together with God in forwarding this gracious design: It is the glory of the most exalted of all beings; and therefore, surely, deservedly claims the employment of the noblest powers of man. What heart would not rejoice in putting forth a helping hand towards rearing this blessed fabric, were it but to drive a pin, or fasten a cord. Remember that carelessness here is highly criminal; that to sit still is not only robbing yourself of the most exquisite pleasure, and declining the highest honor of which your nature is capable, but is at the same time the highest insult to your Creator, and the most certain means of incurring his displeasure. Look around you, and observe these myriads of fellow-creatures, less favored of heaven than you are; consider them well, and be to them in the place of God. Extend to them that compassion which the Father of mercies hath extended toward thee.

See, my brothers, they are deformed, diseased in body; they are distressed in their circumstances; they are grieved in mind; alas, they “are dead in trespasses and sins!” Lost to God, lost to all the valuable purposes of existence, better for them they had never been born. But yet they are your brethren; they are susceptible of pleasure and pain like you; the same sun enlightens them; the gospel aims at relieving them as well as you; the same God created, and sustains, and cares for you both. Have pity upon them; strive to restore them to peace with themselves, to peace with the world, to peace with God. “It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.”[*]Mat 18:14 “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy upon them.” Let the purpose of grace comprehend them, even them also.

Son of God, who didst restore agility to the lame, sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, the faculty of speech to the dumb, life to the dead, and who givest wisdom to the wise,--thou shalt renovate all things, thou shalt abolish death and point out the path of life! O, I shall bless thee with transports of joy ineffable, in the day when the powers of heaven shall be shaken, and the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the earth with all that it contains shall be consumed. Then thy suffering creatures, delivered from all the ills which oppressed them, shall be clothed upon with a glorious and immortal body, fashioned like to thy glorious body; shall be perfectly conformed to thy blessed image--the image of the first-born among many brethren! Then the Savior of the world shall pronounce, not from the expiring agony of the cross, but from the radiance of a throne above the skies, “It is finished!” Then He who “maketh all things new,” shall with complacency contemplate this second glorious creation, and proclaim “all is good, yea, very good!”

060. Moses--The Tablets

Moses--The Tablets

Exo 24:15-18. And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount. And the glory of the Lord abode upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days; and the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud. And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount, in the eyes of the children of Israel. And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount; and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights.

Bread is not more necessary to the support of human life, than religion is to the happiness of a rational being. Man, in his better, his immortal part, “lives by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” In more than one instance the miracle has been exhibited, of sustaining the body without food, and yet no pain nor inconveniency felt; but for the soul to exist, and to exist in comfort, undirected by the precepts, unenlightened by the discoveries, unsupported by the consolations of religion, is a miracle not to be performed. It is the more to be lamented that the attempt is so often fatally made, of living “without God in the world;” of pursuing a happiness that is independent of the great Source of light and joy; of seeking peace, rest, and enjoyment in the neglect or violation of his commandments. Happy it is for man, if after having made the fruitless experiment of “seeking the living among the dead,” and after having at length discovered that success is vanity, and that disappointment is vexation of spirit, have been persuaded, before it was too late, to draw their felicity from the pure and never-failing sources of faith and a good conscience; happy they, who, reconciled to God through Christ Jesus their Lord, enjoy real tranquillity in life, and well-grounded hope in death.

We tremble as we behold Moses advancing to the summit of the burning mountain to meet God. Who can walk into the midst of a flaming furnace and live? But is it possible to remove from God an instant of time, a hair’s breadth of space? No: God is about our path and our bed, is watching our going out and coming in, our lying down end rising up. God is in this place: and, were our eyes opened, we should even now behold his face clothed with the frowns of just displeasure, or beaming with the smiles of paternal love. Was the law given by “the disposition of angels,” arrayed in all their majesty and might? O how benign their aspect, how affectionate their assiduity, how vigilant their care, could we but behold them, while they aid the preaching of the everlasting gospel, while they attend the assemblies of a Christian church, and minister to them who are the heirs of salvation! As the awfulness and solemnity of the prophet’s condition are not peculiar to him, and to that important occasion, so neither are the privileges which he enjoyed, nor the communion to which he was admitted, peculiar and personal. Christian, you have but to retire into your closet and to shut the door after you, and you are immediately on the top of a higher mountain than Moses climbed, and are near to God as he was in the most precious moments of the most intimate communication. Alone, or in company, we have access at all times to the throne of grace; and we have what gave him safety and confidence in drawing nigh unto God--an

Advocate with the Father, a great High Priest, a Mediator betwixt God and us. The great Jehovah, having delivered in every circumstance of magnificence that could excite attention, procure respect, and enforce obedience, that law, whose general nature, tendency, and design, together with its relation to the evangelical dispensation, were the subject of a former Lecture, proceeded to regulate their civil polity. But not by an audible voice, in the ears of all the people, as he had done the law of the ten commandments, but in private conference with Moses, to be by him delivered to the people, he delivered those institutions of a civil and political nature, which regarded their social and national capacity. In studying these, the lovers of Scripture will rejoice to trace the justest and most comprehensive views of human nature, the noblest and most liberal ideas of legislation, the most perfect equity, the profoundest sagacity, and the most unbounded kindness and benevolence. But it exceeds our strength, and it consists not with our plan, to go into the detail of these excellent statutes. We pursue the history. The voice from Sinai having, in dreadful glory, proclaimed the conditions of this new covenant, directions are given for the solemn and public ratification of it. This was done that the obligation, which was originally, invariably, and necessarily binding upon the parties, might acquire additional force from voluntary consent, and from the intervention of august and significant ceremonies. I trust it will be neither unentertaining nor uninstructive to attend to the description of these ceremonies as they stand upon the sacred record. They are highly interesting, whether we consider them as the venerable remains of a very remote antiquity, being no less than three thousand three hundred and forty-three years prior to the present time;[*]A. D. 1792 or as the original compact in the constitution of an ancient, important, well-known, and generally interesting national government; or as forming part of the plan of a divine administration, whose force can never be spent, whose influence on human virtue and happiness can never expire.

God has “spoken once in his holiness,” in a sensible manner, has made himself seen, heard, and felt by a whole people together. But it is neither consistent with his dignity, nor favorable to man’s improvement, that he should always or often make himself known in that manner. He has spoken thus once, that every hearer might have a personal reason for acknowledging and adoring the dread Jehovah, the Fountain of all power, the supreme Author of every establishment. And he speaks thus but seldom, that all men may learn to revere conscience, his vicegerent upon earth, to study his word, the interpreter of his nature and will; and to respect, and “be subject to the powers which he ordained of God, not only for wrath, but for conscience’ sake.” Directions are accordingly given to ratify the covenant, not by the whole people in person, but by their representatives. The persons summoned to attend on this great occasion, are; first Moses himself, who was to represent the Mediator between the high contracting parties; then Aaron and his two sons, Nadab, and Abihu, who represented the Levitical body, or order of priesthood; and finally, seventy of the elders of Israel, who were to act in the name of the congregation at large. When we observe the names of Nadab and Abihu in this respectable list, and look forward to their dreadful and untimely end, we are led to a reflection of no small importance in studying the sacred volume; namely, that, the destination of Providence in raising particular persons to eminent, honorable, and important stations in civil society, is something extremely different from “the election according to grace.” A Cyrus and a Nebuchadnezzar may be the servants of God, to execute his vengeance or his love, without knowing any thing of their Employer; and their private and personal character may remain unaffected by their public conduct. The man according to God’s own heart, in the view of some great object of public utility, has sometimes been found dishonoring God by private vice, and

degrading, destroying himself, while he has been materially serving the world. This most serious consideration dictated to the great apostle of the Gentiles that necessary rule of conduct. “I keep under my body and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast away.”[*]1Co 9:27 And it is a loud call to everyone who acts in a public capacity, to support and adorn it by private virtue and unaffected piety. While the great God was thus putting honor on these seventy-three persons in the eyes of all the people, he sees it necessary to put and to keep them in mind of their distance and dependence; “Worship ye afar off: Moses alone shall come near the Lord, but they shall not come nigh.” This message being reported to the people, they express their cheerful and unanimous consent. “All the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do.”[*]Exo 24:3 Moses upon this reduces into writing the articles of the treaty between God and the people, to be recited aloud in the hearing of all the parties concerned, previous to the solemnities of the ensuing ratification. According to the form observed upon such occasions, rising up early in the morning, he builds an altar under the hill, the emblem of the divine presence, on the one side; “and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel,”[*]Exo 24:4 or an heap consisting of twelve large stones, according to the number of the tribes, to represent the people, on the opposite side; and upon it offers a burnt-offering, a sacrifice made by fire unto the Lord. The application of theblood of the victim principally challenges our attention in the celebration of this awful rite. It was divided into two equal parts: one half was put into basins, and placed by the twelve pillars of stone; where in all probability were arranged the seventy elders, the representatives of every tribe standing by the pillar peculiar to their tribe, the other half was sprinkled upon the altar on the other side. Thus, that which constituted the life of the sacrifice was separated, and Moses, standing between the divided parts, and having some of the blood now denominated the blood of the covenant, or of the purifying victim, in his hands, rehearsed aloud the words of the covenant in the audience of the people who were represented by their elders, and then solemnly demanded whether they acceded to the conditions of it. The form of adjuration employed in such cases, as you heard in a former Lecture,[*]Lecture XIII now in the hands of many of you, was inexpressibly awful and tremendous. “As the body of this victim is cleft asunder, as the blood of this animal is poured out, so let my body be divided and my blood shed, if I prove unsteadfast and perfidious.” Under an engagement of this dreadful import, they consent to the conditions of the treaty, saying, “All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient.”[*]Exo 24:7 Whereupon Moses takes of the blood, and sprinkles it upon the people, in the persons of their representatives, as he had before sprinkled it upon the altar, expressing thereby God’s acceptance of their persons and services, and his engagement to fulfill all that the covenant promised on his part. Matters being thus adjusted, and peace established, the burnt sacrifice is succeeded by a peace-offering, and the parties, as friends, sit down to partake of a common repast. This is evidently the meaning of the expression in the end of Exo 24:11 : “Also they saw God, and did eat and drink,” that is, as in the presence of the most high God, at peace with him, and at peace among themselves, they did eat of the same bread and drank of the same cup. It would be easy, were it necessary to confirm this interpretation by quoting the practice of other nations in later times, undoubtedly borrowed from rites of God’s own institution. It would appear from the letter of the narration, that the scene of this sacred feast was a higher region of the mountain than that where the covenant was ratified. He builded the altar under the hill, and set up the pillars, as it is Exo 24:4; and when the solemnities of that inferior station were duly celebrated, the nation whom God had thus chosen is exalted to a superior rank, and admitted to a

more intimate union with their Maker. “Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God now shines, calling to the heavens from above, and to the earth, Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.”[*]Psa 50:5 Purified by blood, the blood of the covenant, they are encouraged to mount higher and higher, to approach nearer and nearer; they are enabled, with enlightened eyes, to discern more clearly, and to look more steadfastly. Being sprinkled with blood, “then went up Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink.”[*]Exo 24:9-11 What a stream of splendid ideas here rushes in upon us! “They saw the God of Israel.” They saw Him whose presence is the glory of heaven, the light of whose countenance is the joy of angels and archangels; they saw him descended to earth, to be the light, glory, and joy of his people, to dwell among them, and to be their friend, their father, and their God; they saw Him engaging himself by everything that could affect the senses, kindle the imagination, or melt the heart, to guide and protect them, to provide for them, to bless them, and to do them good. “They saw the God of Israel,” their father’s God, their own covenant God, and the God of their seed to the latest generations. They saw God! but what did they see? That face whose luster constrains the cherubim to cover their faces with their wings--those eyes, which “as a flame of fire to go up and down through the earth,” which discern impurity in the heavens and folly in angels--that mouth which spake the universe into existence, and whose lightest word shakes the foundations of the everlasting hills--the hand that wields the thunder, or the feet that walk upon the swift wings of the wind? No; the nobles of Israel had shrunk into nothing before such an awful display of Deity. He needed not to have laid his hand upon them; one glance of those piercing eyes which guard the law, had been sufficient to consume them in a moment. What then did they see? What was under his feet; and even that, something which could not be represented, expressed, or described; “as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.”[*]Exo 24:10 Like Paul caught up into the third heaven, but incapable to tell whether in the body or out of the body: caught-up into paradise, and listening to the conversation of its blest inhabitants, but what he heard were words unspeakable, “which it is not lawful for man to utter.”[*]2Co 12:4 Was it needful to caution such men and such a people against idolatry? What similitude could they employ, who, though they enjoyed the fullest and most satisfying demonstration of Jehovah’s presence, felt their understanding confined, their imagination checked, their senses confounded. They are lost in a splendor which at once attracted and repelled; which was only the foundation and external vail where glory resided, the pavement not the ceiling, the habitation not the inhabitant; a splendor resembling the transparency of the gem, which seems to transmit the light, and the solidity of the gem, which no force can penetrate. Is it too fanciful to suppose, that there is singular beauty in the color of the jewel here specified by the sacred penman, who was an eye-witness of this glorious appearance, and who attempts to convey an idea of what he saw? “Paved work of a sapphire-stone,” the happy medium between the fair and dazzling luster of the diamond, and the dim, familiar complexion of the emerald: not the fiery glare of the empyrean, nor the sober verdure of the earth; but the pellucid azure of the crystal sky, which equally corrects and tempers the dazzling power of the noontide sun, and the oppressive gloom of the midnight hour; which possesses light enough to discover the object without distressing the organ, and shade sufficient to relieve without sinking into obscurity! Not overwhelmed, but cheered and elevated by this moderated display of the divine glory; having seen

God and yet living; feeling his hand upon them yet uncrushed by its weight; the nobles of the children of Israel conclude the service of this eventful day by the banquet of peace and love. They must now return to secular employments, and descend from the mountain; but Moses has yet farther manifestations of the will of God to receive, and is commanded to ascend still higher. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written: that thou mayest teach them.”[*]Exo 24:12 Be our attainments what they will, who is he that “hath attained, or is already perfect?” Our arrival at one eminence is only to see from its summit another, and thence another still rising above us: but in moral and intellectual pursuits, this is a disappointment that mortifies not, an exercise that fatigues not: the joy of heaven is to make progress in the contemplation and discovery of perfection that knows no limit, knows no end. From this higher elevation, Moses is informed that he is to receive the same law in a different form: “I will give thee tables of stone, and a law and commandments which I have written: that thou mayest teach them.”[*]Exo 24:12 As he arises towards heaven, the dispensation of which he was the minister becomes more and more plain and palpable. A matter of such deep importance must not be trusted to the vague and varying traditions of fallible and changing men, but collected into a record that can defy the lapse of time, and preserve unchanging truth and dignity amidst the revolutions of empire and the wreck of nations. This was graciously intended to prevent the necessity of a frequent interposition of Deity, which must at length have diminished its impression by commonness and familiarity. What God, therefore, at first, with his creative finger, curiously engraved on the heart of man, he audibly pronounced amidst the awful glories of Sinai, and afterwards committed to writing on tables of stone for perpetual preservation. And happy it is for man, that he has not been left, for moral and religious instruction, to the traditions of men, who are ever changing and inconsistent with themselves, or to the flimsy, imperfect, contradictory systems of philosophy and science, falsely so called; but that he is brought to the law and to the testimony, to Moses and the prophets, to the Savior himself and his apostles, to a Bible and a Sabbath. Happy it is that everyone is furnished with one and the same light to his feet, and lamp to his paths, and that all are taught of God from the least to the greatest. But indeed the care of Providence, in preserving this precious record, and transmitting it to us unaltered, unimpaired, is a perpetual miracle, a series of revelations, which we are bound to acknowledge with wonder, and to improve with gratitude. In the next ascent into the mount, Moses is accompanied, a certain length at least, and no doubt by divine appointment, by Joshua, his minister, on whom God began to put honor thus early, in order to exalt him in the eyes of the people whom he was destined one day to command, and to prepare him betimes for the wise and faithful discharge of his high office, by communion with God. As this absence of Moses, from the weighty duties of his charge, was to be of longer continuance than usual, the management of civil affairs, and the administration of justice were committed in the mean time to Aaron and Hur, his companions and coadjutors on the mount, when, by the lifting and holding up of his hands, Amalek was smitten before Israel. Was ever spot of this earthly ball so highly honored as that barren mountain in the midst of the desert? Persons, not places, possess dignity. The presence of God confers greatness and importance; He can receive none from created, much less from artificial pomp and magnificence. The great God “dwelleth not in temples made with hands.” “The heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain him;” but “Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the

heart of the contrite ones."[*]Isa 57:15 The curiosity of travellers has been excited to visit this scene of wonders. But is there not an intentional obscurity spread over the description, to baffle idle curiosity, and to call us to the spirit and intention of the dispensation, not the external apparatus of it? Wherever there is this book; wherever there is a principle of conscience; wherever there is common reason and understanding, there is the law, there is Sinai, there is God. It is not to make a pilgrimage to the holy sepulcher, to stand on Calvary, to drive infidels by force of arms out of Jewry, that constitute the faith and piety of the gospel; but to know Christ Jesus, and him crucified, in "the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."[*]Php 3:10 The appearance of God's presence and providence vary their aspect, according to the distance at which they are contemplated, and the medium through which we view them. What to the nobles in the mount appeared "as it were a paved work of a sapphire-stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness,"[*]Exo 24:10 to the multitude in the plain wore a more threatening and terrible appearance. "The sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire, on the top of the mount, in the eyes of the children of Israel."[*]Exo 24:17 Fire at once consumes and refines, leaves to the pure gold all its solidity and value, and lays hold only of the dross. Moses undismayed, because following the command of God, advances into the midst of consuming fire; and so far is nature from being overpowered and destroyed by this keen, piercing element, that it is rather cherished and strengthened by it. Flame supplies the place of food; instead of perishing in a moment, at the end of forty days, without any other means of subsistence, we see the prophet descend in additional glory and renovated vigor; for all creatures are, and do that which their Creator wills. The next seven chapters contain a minute description of that sacred structure and its service, which God intended should be "the shadow of good things to come;" of which every iota and tittle was of divine contrivance and appointment, and undoubtedly had a meaning and significancy which we cannot in every particular find out to perfection. The pattern of it was showed unto Moses in the mount, and particular directions were given for its construction; in these were employed the forty days mentioned in the close of this chapter; when the history suddenly breaks off to exhibit a scene of a very different nature, which, if God permit, will form the subject of the next Lecture; namely, the unprovoked revolt of Israel to idolatry, the fabrication of the golden calf, and the hasty descent of Moses, to stem that dreadful torrent of guilt and wrath which had begun to flow. In the ratification of the covenant between God and Israel, we see the stress that was laid upon blood. The blood of the innocent victim must be poured out, and the altar must be sprinkled with blood. The elders of the people must be purified with blood. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission, no friendship, no peace, no access: life must be paid to redeem life. Blood in the sacrifice is the one thing needful, the one thing significant: blood in religious offices is all in all. Blood applied to any other purpose, is contaminating, unhallowed; unwholesome for food, polluting not purifying to the flesh, is a source of corruption and death, not of health and life. The idea of blood, in one view or the other, runs through the whole history of redemption. It occurs not more frequently in the Old Testament than in the New. One great sacrifice has indeed put an end for ever to the future effusion of blood; but it is still symbolically held out as the medium of reconciliation and access to God. "We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace."[*]Eph 1:7 We are redeemed, "not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."[*]1Pe 1:18-19 "We draw nigh to God through the blood of his Son." When we approach to ratify everyone his personal covenant with God at the communion

table, we commemorate the death of Christ in the symbols of his body broken, and his blood shed. “This is the blood of the covenant,” said Moses, “which the Lord hath made with you,” and “This is the New Testament in my blood,” saith Christ, “shed for the remission of sins.” When we look toward eternal rest, the holy city, the Jerusalem that in above, the new and living way which leads thither, which conducts into the holiest of all, is through the rent veil of the Redeemer’s flesh. “His blood be upon us and on our children,” exclaimed the Jews, while they were crucifying the Lord of glory. Dreadful imprecation!

O Lord, require not our blood of our own hand, nor of every man at the hand of his brother, O Lord, let this man’s blood be upon us and upon our children, not as an oppressive load, as it was on those who with wicked hands impiously shed it, but as an atonement for our sins, as a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour, acceptable unto God; that “being justified by faith, we may have peace with God, throughout Lord Jesus Christ. By whom also we may. have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Amen. Amen.

061. Moses--Aaron's Calf

Moses--Aaron’s Calf

Exo 32:1-4. And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods which shall go before its; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what in become of him. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden ear-rings which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden ear-rings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving-tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods; O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. The real instances of human folly and extravagance far exceed the conceptions of the most lively imagination. All history, and every day’s experience, justify the mortifying account which the prophet gives of our corrupted nature--“The heart is deceitful above all thins, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”[*]Jer 17:9 The partiality of self-love, and the charity of a kind disposition, would at times lead us to form a more favorable judgment both of ourselves and of others, than we deserve. The form of sin, seen in its nakedness, is so hideous, that we shrink from it with horror: but use familiarizes the specter; and we are insensibly led to bear, to be, and to do that which once we abhorred. Could a prophet have foretold one half of the irregularities, the excesses, the enormities of our lives, we should have deemed the prediction a falsehood and an insult; and, with the resentment of conscious virtue, we should have been ready to exclaim in the words of Hazael, “Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing!” Yet alas! the event has woefully verified the cruel imputation; and exhibited the man fallen from his excellency, become the very monster he justly detested; the man sunk into an object of pity, of scorn, or of detestation to himself and mankind.

Many practices appear to us absurd and unnatural, merely because we are not accustomed to them. Herodotus relates, that Darius, king of Persia, having assembled the Greeks who were under his command, demanded of them what bribe they would take to induce them to eat the dead bodies of their parents, as the Indians did? Being answered that it was impossible for them ever to abandon themselves to so great inhumanity; the king, in the presence of the same Greeks, demand of some Indians what consideration would prevail with them to burn the dead bodies of their parents as the Greeks did? The Indians expressing the utmost horror, entreated the king to impose upon them any hardship rather than that. Among the Hottentots, the aged, so long as they are able to do an work,are treated with great tenderness and humanity; but when they can no longer crawl about, they are thrust out of the society, and put in a solitary hut, there to die of hunger or age, or to be devoured of wild beasts. If you expostulate with them upon the savageness of this custom, they are astonished you should reckon it inhuman: “Is it not much greater cruelty,” they ask, “to suffer persons to linger and languish out a miserable old age, and not put an end to their wretchedness, by putting an end to their days?”

Idolatry is one of those practices, to our apprehension, so foolish and unreasonable, that we wonder how it ever obtained footing in the world; and with difficulty are we brought to believe the avidity with which whole nations have given into it. The particular circumstances of the Israelites in the wilderness, render their idol worship peculiarly monstrous unaccountable. The chain of miracles which accompanied their deliverance from Egypt; that constant symbol of the divine presence which attended them, the pillar of fire and cloud; the daily miraculous supply of bread from heaven; the recent anathema pronounced against the worship of images from the dreadful glory of Mount Sinai; the scrupulous care employed, if we may use the expression, to exhibit no manner of similitude of the Deity in Horeb, to prevent the possibility of a pretence to use, themselves, or to transmit to posterity, any sensible representation of the invisible God; all these, superadded to the plainest dictates of common sense and reason, clothe with a blackness and malignity not to be expressed, the strange conduct which is the subject of this chapter.

Moses foreseeing the length of his absence in the mount, had wisely delegated his power to Aaron and Hur, that the operations of government and the administration of justice might suffer no interruption. God, the great God, was now vouchsafing to employ himself in prescribing a mode, and a ministry of worship for his Israel, which should possess all the pomp and splendor displayed by the nations in the service of their false gods, together with a sacredness and dignity peculiar to itself. He was preparing to gratify their very senses by external show, as their souls by heavenly wisdom. He was planning a tabernacle, establishing a priesthood, and appointing festivals and sacrifices, whose magnificence should leave them nothing to regret in the glory which they had seen in Egypt; and at that very time, they are employing themselves in devising and executing a plan of religious service, equally disrespectful to God and dishonorable to themselves. Their guilt begins in sinful impatience and presumption. In matters both of life and of religion men greatly err, when they take upon them to carve for themselves. “Vain men would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass’s colt.”[*]Job 11:12 The transition is so sudden that it seems incredible. Not many days are past since they had given the most solemn, explicit, and unreserved consent to the whole of the divine law. “All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient.”[*]Exo 24:7 The treaty had been but just ratified by a covenant, a sacrifice, and a feast, with a solemnity not easily to be forgotten. The noise of the mighty thunderings has scarcely ceased; the ineffable glory of the God of Israel is yet present to their eyes; they have not well recovered from the terror inspired by that voice which made heaven and earth to tremble. Yet even thus circumstanced, as one man they fly to the appointment, not of a new leader and commander, though that had been ingratitude without a parallel, but with an impiety the most shocking and confounding, to the creation of new god. And the very first exercise of power which was committed unto Aaron for the public good, is to be the leader, the abettor, and an example, in practicing the abominations of that country from which they had been so happily delivered.

“And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.”[*]Exo 32:1 There is a sottishness, a madness, as well as a wickedness in certain vices, which, at first sight, we should deem inconsistent with each other. The irrationality of the brute, the frenzy of the lunatic, and the malignity of the demon, here discover themselves at once; and leave us perplexed which we are most to wonder at and deplore. What shall we say of

the stupidity which talked of making gods, and of following that as a guide which itself could not move, but as it was carried? With what notes of indignation shall we mark our abhorrence of that base ingratitude which could speak contemptuously of such a benefactor as Moses; “This Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what has become of him?”[*]Exo 32:1 With what holy resentment must we execrate the spirit that could deal thus perfidiously, presumptuously with God?

After we have vented our anger and astonishment upon the conduct of these vile Israelites, let us pause and examine ourselves. Asserted by a strong hand and a stretched-out arm into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, have we never reverted in thought, in desire; in practice, into that very thralldom of sin from which the Son of God came to set us free? Lying under the weight of benefits much more precious, and bound by engagements equally solemn and explicit, have we never swerved from the path of duty, never lost sight of our vows, never failed in our obedience? With so much clearer and fuller discoveries of the being, nature, and will of the one living and true God, have we feared and loved him, and only him; have we never bowed the knee to mammon, never worshipped in the house of Rimmon, never kissed the image of Baal? Alas, alas! we hate and condemn some sins merely because they are not our own, while we stand chargeable in the sight of God and man, with equal or greater offences of a different kind; so blinded as not to perceive, so self-deluded as not to feel their enormity. Is it not amazing to observe on the part of Aaron no reluctance against this horrid proposal; to hear from his lips no remonstrance? Is it thug he discharges his sacred trust? Is this the man whom Jehovah was, in the meanwhile, designing to advance, and promoting to the dignity of the priesthood? Many things have been alleged in extenuation of his fault, though nothing can amount to a full vindication of his conduct. The conciseness of the sacred history, it has been said, may have suppressed some of the more favorable circumstances, and exhibited only a general view of the subject. Some of the Rabbis[*]InSchemoth Rabba, Sect. xli. fol. 156. pretend that his colleague in office, Hur, had lately been massacred in a popular commotion for daring to resist the prevailing frenzy; and that Aaron complied, through fear of similar treatment, after having thus deprecated the divine displeasure; “O Lord, I look up to thee, who knowest the hearts of men, and who dwellest in the heavens: Thou art witness that I act thus contrary to my own will. Lay it not to my charge.”

Others explain away great part of the criminality, both of Aaron and of the people, by alleging that all they demanded, and all he gave them, was an external object, where they might deposit the homage which they wished to render to the Supreme God; and thus they interpret the request of the people, “Make us a sensible object of divine worship, which may always be before our eyes, and supply the place of God, when we shall be told of all the wonders he wrought for us in Egypt.”[*]R. Juda, inLib. Cozri. Part 1. Sect. xcvii. fol. 47. And a learned prelate,[*]Patrick, Bishop of Ely, onExo 32:4, p. 635. of our own country labors to prove, that Aaron presented only a hieroglyphic of the strength and power of the Deity, and he produces a few passages from ancient authors to prove, that the ox was an emblem of royal and sovereign authority, and the horns, in particular, a common and well known emblem of strength. A fourth excuse has been pleaded in behalf of Aaron, founded on the letter of the sacred text. He feigned readiness to comply, according to these apologists,[*]August. Tom. IV. Quaest. xli. in Exod. page 118: and Theodoret, Tom. 1. in Exod. Quest. lxvi. page 3. in hope that the demand of the golden ornaments for the fabrication of the idol, acting upon their love of finery, or of wealth, might bring them to a stand,

and break their resolution. But why set up an elaborate defence for a man who stands condemned by his own brother, who had the best means of information; and for one who himself had nothing, or worse than nothing, to produce in his own behalf, when charged by Moses with his fault?

These spoils of the Egyptians had not been obtained in the most honorable manner. Israel “borrowed and paid not again;” and it proves a dreadful snare to them. If they had not carried off the gold, they might perhaps have kept clear of the gods of Egypt. But ill-gotten wealth never was and never can be a blessing; and unwarrantable devices sooner or later come to entangle the feet of those who use them. Mark, how one rapacious domineering passion swallows up many others. “Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?” And yet behold the daughters of Israel cheerfully sacrificing the darling embellishments of their persons to a mistaken principle of religion! If there be a passion more violent than another, it is the love of gold in the heart of a Hebrew; but we see one more violent than even that, the delirium of idolatrous superstition.

It is dangerous to have the patterns of evil before our eyes. We soon learn to bear with what we see frequently; we are insensibly led to approve what we have learned to suffer without being shocked; and what we heartily approve we are not far from adopting. Israel has sustained greater injuries in Egypt than we are at first aware of, and they have been more deeply hurt in their minds than in their persons. The stripes of an Egyptian taskmaster are healed by the lenient hand of time: but the wounds inflicted by the impure rites of Egyptian idols, are still festering at the heart, and threaten death.

Aaron is too eager and intent upon his shameful work, to escape, the suspicion of being hearty in it.. “And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving-tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.”[*]Exo 32:4 All that industry, all that art could do, is employed to confer luster and value on this worthless object; and yet he would have it believed, when he is called to account, that the form and fashion of the idol was the effect of accident, not of design: “I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf.”[*]Exo 32:24 What a pitiful figure does ingenious, industrious wickedness make, when it stands exposed, convicted, self-condemned! But the framing and erecting of this idol is not the whole extent of Aaron’s criminality. I am still more shocked at beholding an attempt to blend with its profane worship, the sacred day, the sacred ceremonies and services of the true God. “And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord.”[*]Exo 32:5 What concord hath Christ with Belial? An attempt to form such an union as this, is more grossly insulting than even avowed neglect or opposition. It freezes the blood to observe a repetition of the same august ceremonies which were lately employed in the mount, for confirming the grand alliance between the great Jehovah and his people, in the settling of this strange league between Israel and a bauble of their own invention. “They rose up early,” as men intent upon their purpose; the altar is reared, the sacrifice is offered up, the peace-offering is provided, the feast of friendship is prepared and eaten. “They offered burnt-offerings, and brought peace-offerings: and the people sat down to eat, and to drink, and rose up to play.”[*]Exo 32:6 These last words are supposed by some commentators of note to be descriptive of a scene of extreme lewdness and debauchery. And certain it is, that one of the principal instruments of propagating and supporting idolatry, was the attraction of beauty and wantonness, vilely prostituted to decoy strangers into the homage of the impure and worthless deity of the place. That people must be in a dreadful state indeed, among whom religion, the

foundation of good morals, the guard of virtue, is employed as a minister to unhallowed pleasure, and a handmaid to vice. The prevalence of evil practices is a lamentable thing, but the establishment of wrong principles is much worse. The most wholesome stream may be accidentally tainted and polluted, and work itself pure again; but if the fountain be poisonous, nothing but death can flow from it. “When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”[*]Jas 1:15

We are now conveyed from this awful scene of pollution in the valley, to a much more awful scene of meditated vengeance on the mount. While Moses was solacing himself in the pleasing prospect of being soon dispatched to the people of his charge with messages of love; while he was rejoicing in the important transaction so lately past, confident that all was now settled between God and his people; the joy of this exalted communication is suddenly interrupted by intelligence of a new, unprovoked, and unexpected revolt. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Go, get thee down: for thy people which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These by thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.”[*]Exo 32:7-8 An offended God refuses any longer to acknowledge as his, a generation of wretches who had rendered themselves so entirely unworthy of his slightest regard. Justice awakes to a recapitulation of the benefits which they had received and the offences which they had committed, and concludes with a resolution totally to consume them. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” In the dialogue which passed upon this occasion, some of the most interesting objects that can be contemplated present themselves to our view. The condescension of divine friendship: As God would not “hide from Abraham the thing which he was about to do;” would take no step towards the destruction of Sodom till that friend of God had been fully heard in its behalf; and could do nothing till Lot was departed; so the same God, rich in mercy, will not arise to vengeance against Israel, till Moses has been consulted and has acquiesced in the sentence. O the wonderful power of faith and prayer! Moses is represented as possessing a constraining power over omnipotence, the anger of Jehovah refuses to burn till his permission is obtained. O the wonderful grace and condescension of the most high God! Thus is justice ever tempered with mercy: “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.”[*]Lam 3:22 A proposal is made to Moses, (and what is too hard for the Lord to perform?) which a selfish heart would eagerly have grasped at; “I will make of thee,” says God, “a great, nation.” But selfishness in this truly great man was controlled by much nobler and more generous principles; zeal for the honor of God, and compassion for a devoted people. The intercessory address of Moses is a masterpiece of eloquence, and discovers a soul superior to all regards, but such as are worthy of a prophet, a hero, a patriot, and what is superior to all, the friend of God. “And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt, with great power and with a mighty hand. Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever.”[*]Exo 32:11-13 The holy man of God is concerned not only that the Judge of all the earth should do right, but that the

divine conduct should stand vindicated in the eyes of the heathen. He proposes to himself the same end which Jehovah himself has in view in all that he does--the glory of his great name. He nobly prefers the fulfilling of the ancient covenant with his venerable ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to the establishment of a new covenant with himself and his seed. He is willing to decrease, willing that his family continue obscure, that his head be laid low, provided the Lord be magnified, and Israel saved. This is a greatness of mind which alone could, inspire. Like a true son of Israel, he wrestles and makes supplication; and as a prince he too has power with and prevails, if, not to prevent every expression of displeasure, at least to prevent the execution of the general doom. Having obtained this great point, he descends with haste from the mount, bearing in his hand the most precious work of art that skill ever executed. Who does not shudder at the thought of its having been destroyed? “And Moses turned and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables.”[*]Exo 32:15-16 But why should we regret that a piece of curious workmanship, in dumb matter, was destroyed? That loss soon might be and soon was repaired. Alas! we behold a more shocking, spectacle every day--a race of thoughtless wretches deliberately, presumptuously defacing God’s image, destroying his signature, engraved “not on tables of stone, but on the fleshly tables of the heart;” inflicting on themselves a loss never to be repaired, not in a fit of holy zeal, but in a paroxysm of diabolical frenzy.

Moses might destroy the tablets, but the spirit of the writing he could not disannul. When all sensible monuments are dissolved, the law maintains its adamantine solidity, its uncontaminated purity, its unpliant steadiness, its unbending dignity. The tablets were written on both sides, within and without. Every fragment therefore had some part of the law and testimony written upon it. Thus, in every particle of the human frame, there are self-evident traces of the finger of God--the understanding, the heart, the conscience, the memory; shivers indeed, mutilated, defaced, but capable of being repaired and united. But I find it impossible to collect into one efficient point of view the sequel of this eventful history, within the limits of one discourse. Here therefore we set up another resting place, and from it take a cursory view of the ground over which we have travelled.

I. What a melancholy view presents itself, of the corruption, the degeneracy, and degradation of human nature. Behold a people lost to every-noble, generous, manly principle: restrained by no law, awed by no threatening, susceptible of no endearment, influenced by neither shame nor gratitude; boldly overleaping the bounds of reason and religion--and inthat people behold “the carnal mind, which is enmity against God: which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Behold “the wickedness of man, how great it is in the earth; and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart how it is only evil continually.” Think not, however, O man, that thou art surveying a distant prospect, or travelling through a foreign land. Think not that these Israelites are sinners above all the men of the earth. When thou hast thoroughly searched and known thyself, no account of human frailty will appear exaggerated. They framed, and worshipped a golden image. How many myriads hourly bend the knee to the same idol, changed only a little in form! See the temple of mammon, how it is crowded. His votaries, see how much in earnest they are in their devotions: Early and late the incense ascends. Neither Jewish nor Christian sabbath interrupts their attendance or cools their ardor; while truth, and justice, and mercy, and the love of God are offered a perpetual sacrifice to the insatiate demon, who never says, “it is enough.” Nor think that

gold is the only deity which men adore. On searching into thy own bosom, some lurking imp, of different form, complexion, and texture will be found; hid in close disguise, unknown indeed of men; but to the eye of God and conscience clearly confessed. Down with it; it is thy dishonor, and threatens thy ruin.

II. Rejoice with trembling, while you contemplate the affecting prospect which opens of the severity and mercy of the great God--the severity, which by the hand of Levi cut off three thousand of the offenders, in the heat of their offence; which threatened to exterminate the whole race, and which, in "the day of visitation, visited their sin upon them"--the mercy which relented, which pitied and spared the guilty, which listened to the voice of intercession, and accepted the atonement. Thou thyself, O sinner, art a monument of both the one and the other. Thy life is forfeited to justice; thou art daily enduring the punishment of thy transgressions; thou standest continually exposed to severer ills than any thou hast yet felt, and far beyond what fear itself can figure. Yet mercy suffers thee to live; there is hope concerning thee: the glad, tidings of salvation are in thine ears; "Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world!" "Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation!" "Wherefore, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor: it may be" more than "a lengthening of thy tranquillity," it may prevent eternal misery.

III. Behold a greater than Moses is here--an Intercessor more compassionate, more earnest, more powerful: "A Prince with God" who ever prevails; a propitiation ever meritorious and successful; "blood that cleanseth from all sin." "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins the whole world."[*]1Jn 2:1-2 "Who in the days of his flesh when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared. Though he were a Son; yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered: and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all; them that obey him:"[*]Heb 4:7;Heb 4:9 "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every just transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto as by them that heard him?"[*]Heb 2:1-3

IV. Let us look forward to "that great and notable day of the Lord," when the law which was delivered audibly from Sinai, which Moses with a rash is inconsiderate hand could break in pieces; but was unable to repair, shall be restored in all its purity and perfection; shall be engraved on every heart, and become legible to every eye: when the hidden glory of the legal dispensation shall be unveiled, and the greater glory of the gospel displayed: when the divine image shall be again impressed on the soul of man, in all its beauty and exactness--and, we ourselves, degraded and lost as we are, shall "be raised together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Jesus"--and "beholding with open face as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, shall be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." "Beloved, now are we the sons, of God, and it doth not yet appear, what we shall be; but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as, he is."

062. Moses--Intercessor

Moses--Intercessor

Exo 33:8-11. And it came to when Moses went out unto the tabernacle, that all the people rose up, and stood every man at is tent door, and looked after Moses, until he was gone into the tabernacle. And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door. And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.

Guilt is the parent of fear and suspicion; conscious innocence and integrity inspire confidence and tranquillity. “The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous, are bold as a lion.”[*]Pro 28:1 “Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God; amongst the trees of the garden.”[*]Gen 3:8 Moses ascends undaunted to meet the Lord, into the midst of tempest and fire. Behold the height of heaven, how great it is! What so distant as the Creator and a fallen creature! But lo, the distance is done, away; and, what is so intimately near as a God reconciled, and a fallen creature restored! Jehovah descending in mercy and grace; the soul arising, upborne on the wings of faith and love, must meet and unite, whether on the mount or in the tabernacle; in the temple or the closet. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him: and he will show them his covenant.”[*]Psa 25:14 We have heard of Abraham, who was called the friend of God; and we behold a communication of the same distinguished honor, to that illustrious son of Abraham who has instructed and blessed mankind by transmitting the history of this sacred friendship to the latest generations of the world. We see it still expressed in the same manner; on the part of Moses by humble submission, holy zeal and importunity, and childlike freedom and confidence: on the part of God, by the most unreserved communication of his intentions, the most endearing expressions of affection and good will. The history delivered in the preceding chapter of this book exhibited the blessed communion on the mount, suddenly interrupted, by the dreadful scene of madness and rebellion in the plain beneath. Behold all Israel eating and drinking, dancing and playing; before a dumb idol, the similitude of a brute beast. Behold “a covenant with hell” ratified by the same dread solemnities which had been so recently employed, to join a great nation in alliance with the God of heaven. The law which the plastic hand of Omnipotence had impressed on the soul of man in its very constitution: the law which he lately had condescended distinctly to pronounce in the trembling ears of all Israel; that law he had still farther condescended, with exquisite art and skill, by his own finger, to engrave on two tablets of stone, for perpetual preservation. Moses descending in haste, with this precious record in his hand, perceives at a distance the disorder which raged in the camp, and, in a transport of indignation, dashes the tablets on the ground, and breaks them in pieces. The motive was good and commendable, but the action was rash and presumptuous. We find, however, no expression of anger against that rashness; the frailty is lost and overlooked in approbation of the principle which led to it. But had not Moses’ punishment sufficient for his hasty conduct, in the irreparable loss occasioned by it, to

himself and to the world? There was no occasion to chide him; his own conscience must have smitten him sufficiently, as often as he reflected on what, in the moment of impatience, he had done.

Without inflicting a positive chastisement, a righteous God can easily reprove men by making them to feel the native consequences of their own folly, and, of all the infirmities to which our nature is subject, anger most certainly and most severely punishes itself. The man who is thus animated with zeal for the glory of God, has forgotten what fear is. Aaron, under the influence of the fear of man, yielded to the popular frenzy, and fabricated the golden calf: Moses, inspired with the fear of God, defies and despises the multitude, consumes their idol in the fire, and grinds it to powder. This is that Moses of whom they talked so contemptuously a little while ago. What, not one of the thousands of Israel who worshipped the image of the beast bold enough to protect his Dagon! No; abashed they stand, and feel “how awful goodness is, and see virtue in her own shape how lovely.” A most remarkable circumstance is added to the history of the destruction of the idol, which has greatly exercised the ingenuity, learning, and imagination of critics and commentators. Moses took the dust into which he had pounded the calf, and “strewed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it.”[*]Exo 32:20 This seems nothing more than an expression of sovereign contempt, poured upon a most worthless object: and a practical demonstration of the absurdity of idolatry. And it may, perhaps not unwarrantably, be employed as a reproof of the inordinate love of money, that root of all evil. Gold, as an instrument of commerce, as the means of procuring the things that are needful for the body, as a natural production possessed of very singular qualities, may be lawfullysought after and innocently used; but erected into a deity, valued on its own account, swallowing up every other object, engrossing the whole heart, becomes unprofitable and pernicious, as incapable of gratifying the real appetites of a rational being, as gold in its simple state is incapable of satisfying hunger, or, mingled with water, of allaying thirst. An imagination perpetually on the stretch to discover evangelical ideas in every iota of the sacred history, has perceived the method of gospel salvation, in this passage of Moses; as if the prophet intended to signify that the Messiah, typified by the water which issued from the rock in Horeb, could alone purify from the guilt of idolatry, and from all other sin.

Moses having executed just vengeance on the idol itself, turns in holy indignation to his weak and guilty brother, who had so readily fallen into and abetted so gross a deviation from all duty and decency. “And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?”[*]Exo 32:21--An anticipated instance of obedience to the apostolic injunction, “Thou shalt not suffer sin upon thy brother, but in any ways reprove him.” Justice on the tribunal, knows not a brother in court, but examines the cause.--Justice, with the pen of the historian in his hand, knows not blood in recording facts, but declares the truth. Justice, as the minister of God, must stifle the calls of natural affection and condemn the guilty. And here again Moses becomes a pattern to all judges and magistrates, to every minister of religion; and every relater of events. His own faults, and those of his nearest relations, are told with the same artless simplicity, as their good qualities and praiseworthy actions. Praise and censure are distributed, with the same candor and impartiality, to his own family and to strangers. .

Aaron, formerly an object of condemnation, now sinks into an object of pity; as every man must, in the day when he is called to account, and has no defence to make. “And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people that they are set on mischief. For they said unto

me, Make us gods which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf."[*]Exo 32:22-24 Alas, alas! What a profusion of words is guilt constrained to employ in order to cover what it cannot extenuate or excuse. What must it be to behold a guilty world stand self-condemned before the Judge of the quick and the dead! How dreadful must it be, to appear in the number of that guilty crowd, without being able to escape unnoticed in the crowd! The scene that follows is one of those from which we turn away our eyes in anguish, or which we contemplate in silent horror and astonishment--Thousands of criminals falling at once by the hands of their brethren! The sons of Levi destined to shed the blood of many victims, to make atonement for the guilty--called to the dreadful ministry of offering up part of the guilty themselves, a sacrifice to justice to make atonement for the rest! Mark how the courage of one man has roused that of many. A whole tribe has fortitude sufficient to follow in a cause, wherein not one man was found daring enough to profess himself a leader. This is one motive, among many, to aim at being singularly good. Mark the timidity of conscious guilt. Levi was the least numerous of all the tribes; but, engaged in the cause of God and truth, the myriads of offending Israelites shrink from their attack, or fall down before them. Mark how dreadful is the brow of justice roused to vengeance. "Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother, that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day."[*]Exo 32:29 What a night of horror and remorse must have succeeded a day of impiety, madness, and slaughter! What an awful tomorrow, the day of reckoning, to follow that dismal night! But the case, though dangerous, is not desperate, while there is a Moses to intercede. Has my offended Father so much tenderness left, as to upbraid, to reprove, to chastise me? His displeasure, though depressing, is not intolerable; but silent anger, resentment that neglects, that shuns, that leaves me to myself, is a burthen too heavy for me to bear. "If God vouchsafe to speak to me, though in thunder; to answer me, though from the whirlwind; there is hope concerning me. But if he say within himself, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone," then I am indeed lost and undone. The intercession of Moses, in behalf of the people, now assumes a tone peculiarly earnest and affecting. "And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin: and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written."[*]Exo 32:31-32 It is hardly credible that, on this passage, a system of piety has been built so refined as to issue in absurdity and contradiction. Moses is here supposed, by interpreters of a certain complexion, to express the utmost readiness to renounce his eternal salvation for what he apprehended to be the greater glory of God, and if it could be the condition of procuring salvation to Israel. Resignation to the divine will, according to them, is imperfect, till a man can cheerfully and deliberately prefer his own everlasting damnation to all the joys of heaven, if the higher interests of pubic good, and the glory of God can be thereby promoted. This, to some visionary minds, may have a specious appearance of a more sublime piety: but it is both unnatural and unscriptural; and therefore is not piety at all. As it has fallen in my way, and as this text in Moses has been connected with a famous passage in the New Testament of similar import, I will take the liberty to speak at some length, and with much plainness, upon the subject; it being a principal object in the plan of these Lectures to unfold and recommend the religion of the Bible; that is, the religion of good sense, to the neglect of all human systems, and all useless speculations, which have not an obvious foundation in Scripture and reason, and which do not obviously tend to

promote human virtue and happiness.

Now, we hesitate not a moment to affirm, that the doctrine attempted to be built on the united texts of Moses and of Paul, has not the foundation of the prophet and of the apostle to rest upon; and that it is not calculated to serve any one purpose of religion, wisdom, or virtue. The passage in the New Testament alluded to, is that of the great apostle of the gentiles, and runs thus, “For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsman, according to the flesh.”[*]Rom 9:3 It is too well known to need any proof, that there are in every language, and among all nations of the world, certain modes of expression in common use, which it were unfair to interpret according to the literal import of the words, and which accordingly, if translated into a foreign language, and applied to the modes of thought and expression, used in a different age and country, might convey a meaning very different from the original one, perhaps diametrically opposite to it. Is there a man in his senses, who will pretend to assert that Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, one thousand five hundred and fifty years before Christ, affixed the same idea to these words, “Blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written,”[*]Exo 32:32 which a dogmatic maker of systems in France or England in the eighteenth century thinks proper to affix to them? Is it a certain point that the apostle Paul, and such a one, mean precisely the same thing, when the former writes “anathema,” and the latter in the phraseology of his own language, thinks fit to render it by the word “accursed?” In truth, both expressions evidently are figurative, and can be fully understood only by appealing to the genius of the original languages, the spirit of the men who use them, and the occasion on which they are employed. Moses, in a moment, explains what he understands by “the book which God had written.” For what saith the answer of God to this expostulation? “Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.”[*]Exo 32:33 And what saith history? “All that generation died in the wilderness,” without being admitted into the land of promise, according to the original destination of Providence, or as it was “written in God’s book.” Follow Moses to a similar situation on another occasion, and see how he expresses himself; and let the one passage explain the other. The people became discontented with their food at Taberah, and lusted for the provision of Egypt; God was displeased and threatened to consume them’; Moses, grieved in spirit, thus presumes to expostulate. “And Moses said unto the Lord, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant; and wherefore have I not found favor in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? Have I begotten them that thou shouldst say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, (as a nursing father beareth the sucking child) unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers? Whence should I gave flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh that we may eat. I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me: And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favor in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.”[*]Num 11:11-15 The expression, “Kill me out of hand,” is plainly equivalent to that used in Exodus, “Blot me out of the book which thou hast written.” What then is the fair meaning and construction of the words of Moses? “Lord, grant the pardon of this people to the prayers of thy servant; who would rather submit to everlasting misery than fail to obtain his request?” Horrid, blasphemous, absurd! No, but nature, piety, and patriotism unite in saying as he does. “Lord, if thy decree against this people may not be reversed; if justice demand their utter extermination, let mine eyes be first closed in peace. Subject me not to the cruel mortification of surviving all my nation, and of enduring the insults and scorn of our enemies. In mercy take me first out of the world, where I should only lead a life of sorrow find regret, heavier than death itself.”

The word anathema used by the apostle is of the same import with the Hebrew word used by Moses. They both denote a person or thing devoted, separated by a vow or curse, one excommunicated and separated from society. And his meaning is this, “I most solemnly protest; God and my own conscience are my witnesses, that I speak the truth as it is in my heart; the infidelity of my countrymen after the flesh, is the matter of the deepest concern and regret to me; to such a degree, that if it could be the means of curing their prejudices, and bringing them to Christ the Redeemer, I care no what estimation I might be held in the church. Let me cease to be an apostle, let me be as one cut off from the society of the faithful, for some atrocious crime; let me be vile and contemptible in the eyes of the world; but the Israel of God be gathered to the Redeemer, and brought within the bond of the covenant of grace.” Moreover, Paul does not directly form even this wish: but conditionally, “I could wish,” were it lawful for me to form such a wish, and if the granting it could any way contribute to the accomplishment of a purpose so desirable. The sentiment, then, of those mystics, has no warrant either in the language or in spirit of any of the persons whom God has proposed to us as patterns in Scripture.

Besides their being unscriptural, what can be more extravagant and unnatural, than those ranting expressions of one of that order?[*]Angele de Foligni. Eveque de Meaux Instruct. Pastor. Page 341. “Though I were sure of being condemned to hell, I would not cease from my penitential acts, and from depriving myself of all comforts for the love of God. If I am to be cast into hell, O my God, stay no longer, make haste, and since thou hast forsaken me, finish thy work, precipitate me into the bottomless pit.” Catharine of Sienna thinks fit to express herself thus on the same subject: “Though it were possible to feel all the torments of devils and damned souls, yet should I never call them pains, so much pleasure would the pure love of God make me to find therein.” These are evidently the idle speculations of persons too much at their ease, whom one hour of exquisite torment would bring to their senses, and teach a sounder divinity. What is the foundation of our love to God? His love to us: the good which he has done to us, and that which we still expect from him. I feel it impossible for me to love one, whose interest or caprice requires that I should be tormented everlastingly. I love the Lord because he hath delivered me from the curse of the law; because he hath saved me from going down to the pit: because he “hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”[*]Eph 2:6

Moses by entreaty obtains a short reprieve for the offenders; but a plain intimation is given that they should not pass wholly unpunished. “In the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.”[*]Exo 32:34 The meaning of this threatening is fully explained in the sequel. All that generation of men were blotted out of the of the living; their carcases fell gradually in the wilderness; they were not permitted to see the good land promised to their fathers; plague upon plague overtook them, till they were consumed for their idolatry; of the worshippers of the golden calf not one entered into Canaan.

God had hitherto condescended to conduct defend Israel, in that wonderful symbol his presence, the pillar of cloud and fire. Provoked by their rebellion, their Protector and Guide withdraws from them, and they are left to pursue their march, through paths of their own choosing. The adage says, “Whom God means, to destroy, he first infatuates.” Had it run more simply, “Whom God means to destroy, he first forsakes,” it had been just and more consonant to the tenor of Scripture. When Jehovah has withdrawn as a friend, he is not far off as an enemy. But what must it have been to one who felt like Moses, to be commanded to proceed to the conquest of Canaan,

destitute of the presence and support of God, the glory and the strength of Israel? It was like sending a ship into a tempestuous ocean, without ballast, without a mast or sail, without a rudder or compass, to be driven at the mercy of every blast; and laid under the necessity of sinking in the mighty deep. Moses apprehends the full extent of an attempt so perilous, and deprecates it with all the energy of supplication. He apprehends no ill, save one, that of being deserted of God. He trembles at no foe, but their best friend estranged. The wretched multitude now see their nakedness, and are ashamed. In vain do gold and jewels attempt to hide the deformity of a soul that has lost its innocence. They were not more eager, the other day, to contribute their ornaments to the formation of an idol, than they are now to hide them out of sight, as the monuments of their dishonor. “What fruit have they now in those things whereof they are ashamed?” A face of mourning is seen over the whole camp, and every face is clothed with despair. Direction is given to remove the tabernacle without the camp. A few who had continued faithful, adhere to that divine instrument of protection, and follow it. The cloudy pillar, which, during the period of riot, sedition, and revolt, had in wrath departed, returned to its destined residence, the tabernacle. In the eyes of astonished Israel; Moses enters undismayed into that mansion of divine glory, proceeds to meet God, as a man to meet his friend; renews the conference in the plain, which had been broken off on the mount, The result is, God graciously relents, being mindful of his covenant, and again undertakes the safe conduct of his people, “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest,”[*]Exo 33:14 and all again is peace. And thus conclude the controversies between disobedient and gainsaying children, and their tender-hearted relenting Father. He is not to be “overcome of evil, but overcomes evil with good.” But what is this I hear? Moses soliciting for still farther manifestations of the divine perfections? Who had seen, who had heard, who had felt and enjoyed so much of God as he? And yet still he is importunately entreating, “Lord, show me thy glory.” O my friends, how many things of God do “angels still desire to look into?” There is “a breadth, and length, and depth, and height, in the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.” The response of the oracle to this request, is not less extraordinary than the request itself. “And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me and live. And the Lord said, Behold there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock. And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock; and will cover thee with my hand, while I pass by. And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not, be seen.”[*]Exo 33:19-23 This opens a field of meditation too ample to be now entered upon. Let it be reserved for the entire ground of another evening’s excursion into the region of Scripture: and let us contemplate with wonder the scene which has just passed before our eyes. Does the whole story seem to any one incredible? Let the horrid scene which this great metropolis exhibited not many years ago,[*]June, 1780. arise upon his recollection. Let him think on the frenzy, which, like a mighty torrent, carried every thing before it: which fired the city, overawed the senate, and threatened the dissolution of all regular government. Who can tell the dire effects which desperate enthusiasm, suddenly bursting out and exciting universal terror and consternation, may produce. Had we not seen it with our eyes, we could scarcely have believed, that consequences so momentous should have issued from a source so contemptible. The resolutions and operations of a lawless multitude are truly formidable. Unopposed, they rush on as an overflowing flood; resisted, they melt away; they are scattered like chaff driven by the wind.

Observe, O man, how the most difficult lessons of religion, patience, and forbearance, and forgiveness, are taught thee by the example of the great Jehovah himself. Dare thou to think of vengeance for a petty, a misconceived, and imaginary offence, when thou beholdest the most glorious of all beings, passing by, blotting out the most heinous, the most unprovoked insults, and when thou hearest him proclaiming his name, “the LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin?” “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thins enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”[*]Rom 12:19-21 “I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you: that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”[*]Mat 5:44-45

“Follow on to know the Lord.” Expatiate in nature’s ample field, and you will, find profit and instruction blended with delight. Explore the wonders of eternal Providence, and you will see constant cause to rejoice in the thought that there is a GOD who judgeth and ruleth in the earth. Dive deeper and deeper into those mysteries of grace which “angels desire to look into,” and break forth into songs of joy, that “GOD is love.” “This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”[*]John 17:3 Now “we know part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.”[*]1Co 13:9-10

Nature now presents in every plant, in every pebble, mysteries that defy the searches of the wisest and most acute; then “the wayfaring man, though a fool,” shall comprehend systems the vastest, most complex, most abstruse. Providence now exhibits an apparent inconsistency and disorder, which confounds the reasoning pride of man; then, God will fully vindicate his ways to man, obviate every difficulty, resolve every doubt, remove every scruple. In Scripture “are some things hard to be understood,” in our present state of ignorance and imperfection: then, the veil shall be removed, and “we shall see face to face,”--“then shall we know even as also we are known.” Then the promised Spirit of wisdom and revelation shall “teach us all things, and bring all things to our remembrance.” Then shall he “open” our “understanding,” that we may “understand the Scriptures.” “Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

063. Moses--Witness of God's Glory

Moses--Witness of God’s Glory Exo 33:18. And he said, I beseech thee, show me thy glory. The greater progress any one has made in science, the deeper must be his conviction of his own ignorance and imperfection; and the higher our attainments in religion, the stronger is the impression of our infinite distance from God. A little knowledge puffeth up; but modesty and humility are the constant attendants on profound wisdom.--Thoughtless men make light of the name, the house, the day of God; but angels “cover their faces with their wings,” when they approach his awful presence. Human friendship admits of freedom and familiarity; but while the great Jehovah condescends to “dwell with man upon earth, even with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit;” he permits us not to forget, that he is “the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy.” Are we elevated, as on eagle’s wings, up to the eternal throne? It is only that we may feel the hand which supports our flight, and discern our own darkness by that “light which is inaccessible and full of glory.” Abraham, the friend of God, in the highest intimacy of that honorable character, loses not for a moment the sense of his distance and dependence; “Behold now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes.”[*]Gen 18:27 “O let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but this once.” A voice from heaven reaches his ears, saying, “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.”[*]Gen 15:1 And that instant we behold him prostrate, with his face to the ground. Moses, the friend of God, to whom Jehovah revealed more of himself than to any other man, is still but in the outer court of the habitation where God dwells. What he knows has only created a thirst for knowledge; what the has seen has but inspired in earnest desire of seeing more and more; and after communications so ample, and communion so sweet, this is still his desire, this his request, “Lord, show me thy glory.” From the reiterated rebellions and provocations of Israel, this good has resulted--New, endearing, encouraging discoveries have been made of the divine nature, perfections, and will. Mankind; to the latest generations, have been instructed to revere that justice which “will by no means clear the guilty,” and to triumph in that mercy which “forgiveth iniquity, transgression, and sin.” The revolt of the people cemented and improved the union between God and their leader.

Joshua, the son of Nun, who was destined to make so distinguished a figure, and to act a part so conspicuous and important in the history of Israel, is represented as trained up from his youth in the service of Moses, and in communion with God. We find him in the mount with his master when he went to receive the written law, while the multitude below were polluting themselves with idols. We find him entering with his master into tie tabernacle, when it was removed out of the camp, and the glory of the Lord over-shadowed it; and there he remained, while Moses returned to confer with the people. Early habits of acquaintance with God, and employment in his service, are youth’s best security and preservative against sin, and the surest foundation of honor and usefulness, of distinction and comfort in advanced age. A man must be formed to command by obeying. “Joshua, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle.”[*]Exo 33:11 What a severe reproof of that spirit of profligacy and dissipation, that criminal love of pleasure and coldness to intellectual attainments, that irreligion and profanity which characterize youth in general?

It is pleasing to look forward to this good man's latter end, and to observe a career of glory supported and adorned by piety; a youth of seriousness, fidelity, and usefulness, ripening into an advanced life of reputation and usefulness; declining into an old age of tranquillity, vigor, and joy: and closing in the well-grounded hope of immortality.--Joshua was trained for the camp, in the tabernacle and on the mount, and was prepared to be the great general and statesman, by learning first to be the humble saint and faithful minister. The characters of Moses and of Joshua delightfully illustrate and embellish each other. Moses knew from the beginning that this young man was to be his successor in office; was to finish the work which he had begun; was to have the glory of conquering Canaan, of establishing Israel, there, according to the promises. An ordinary mind would have marked the progress of this growing rival with jealousy; would have attempted to obstruct his advancement; would have repined at the preference given him, the neglect of his own family. But every selfish, every domestic consideration gives way to the rising merits of Joshua, and to the choice and appointment of Heaven. It was equally natural, on the other hand, for a young man like Joshua, who knew that he was destined to rule, to surpass his master, to reach the highest summit of human grandeur; it was natural for such an one to become impatient of authority, to be weary of restraint, to be eager to bring himself forward, and make himself conspicuous: but the son of Nun discovers true magnanimity in cheerfully yielding the subjection becoming an inferior; in observing Moses and learning of him; in patiently waiting for the time and manner which Providence should choose of exalting him to honor. Moses treats him, and speaks of him, as of a favorite son, rising into eminence and distinction; he behaves to Moses as to a beloved parent, crowned with years and honor, which he hopes to see him long enjoy. These are lessons not taught in the school of the world, where natural affection, decency, and discretion, are daily sacrificed on the altar of pride, selfishness, avarice, and ambition.

Moses has, by importunity, prevailed that the usual symbol of the divine presence should continue to lead and protect Israel, by the way in which they went to the promised land. In answer to the prayer of faith it is thus promised, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."[*]Exo 33:14 His Spirit is now therefore tranquillized with respect to the people of his charge. God is yet again "for them, and who can be against them?" But his personal acquaintance with God seems only beginning. As if he had seen nothing of the divine glory in the bush at Horeb, which burned, but was not consumed; as if the awful glories of Sinai had been nothing: as if God had not spoken to him in the tabernacle of the congregation, face to face, "as a man to his friend;" he continues to entreat, "Lord, show me thy glory!" My friends, if you can rest satisfied with what you know of God, it is a melancholy proof that you know him not. Eternity is too short, the capacity of an angel too limited, "to find out the Almighty unto perfection."

What a field of discovery does the vast frame of nature present! Supposing, O man, thy duration sufficiently extended, thy understanding sufficiently enlarged, and opportunity afforded thee, equal to thy utmost wish, when couldest thou have made a complete survey of the little globe wherein we dwell; when couldest thou have explored the innumerable secret wonders of the hoary deep; when examined the precious contents of the everlasting hills; when discovered the nature and properties of air and fire? Supposing the mighty task performed; supposing the untried regions of the air, the untrodden paths of the sea, the deep and the high places of the earth rendered accessible to thy approach, laid fully open to thy view--and lo, the race of knowledge is but beginning. Behold another orb at hand, presenting a new world of wonders: an orb possessing an

inconceivably greater extent than our earth, containing an infinitely greater variety of objects, answering a much nobler end in the scale of being; and after that, another; and another still, in endless succession. Suppose the whole planetary system, in order, to have passed under review, the mind rests not there: the wonders of divine power and wisdom end not then: the soul wings its way to other systems, lighted by other suns, and finds itself but entering on the glorious career. Were the whole expanse of nature explored, the moral government of God over all these spheres and all that they contain, expands the same vast field afresh to the astonished eye, and invites to a second excursion. When that is performed, redeeming love, almighty grace display the ample theatre a third time, and lead us by the hand through the “nations of them that are saved,” and point out the successive triumphs of sovereign goodness. As if it were possible to see an end of all this glorious perfection, Scripture announces the dissolution of all these things, as a space too small for the soul to expatiate in, as an object too mean for its contemplation; and promises a new and more glorious system of things, suited to its endless duration and exalted powers, “new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.” And what is it, even then, that men behold? The works of God, not God himself; the writing, not the hand that writes; the palace that is inhabited, not the divine inhabitant; the emanation, not the essence of his glory. Every gracious spirit, then, will with Moses be “following on to know the Lord;” still and ever inquiring, still and ever imploring, “Lord, show me thy glory.” The answer of God to this request is not less remarkable than the request itself. Moses prayed, saying, “Lord, show me thy glory.” Alas, like the disciple on the mount of transfiguration, “he knew not what he said.” To have been answered according to the letter of his desire, had been fatal to him; for what created eye can behold the glory of God and live? But a gracious God returns an answer suitable to the condition of his servant, “And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.”[*]Exo 33:19 This is the glory of God to man, the riches of his grace, the glory of his goodness, the wonders of his love. In a display of the most striking imagery, God points out to Moses what was weak, ignorant, and presumptuous in his petition, and commends what is pious, dutiful, and affectionate. “And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock. And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock; and I will cover thee with my hand, while I pass by. And I will take away mine hand, and then shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.”[*]Exo 33:20-23 Expressions plainly importing, that by creatures such as we are, the great Jehovah can be seen and known only from those tokens of his presence which he leaves behind him. He comes upon us, as it were, imperceptibly, unveils his glory for a moment, in his word, in his ordinances, but his hand is upon our eyes. As he departs, he permits us to look up, and to know by infallible marks, that he has been with us. Thus, Jacob’s vision at Bethel was over, before he was aware into what glorious company he had been introduced. “And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.”[*]Gen 28:16 Thus at Peniel he wrestled apparently with a man; but in departing, his divine antagonist, by a touch, convinced him who he was; and he discovers, that he had seen “the visions of the Almighty,” after he had withdrawn. And thus, the glorified Redeemer talked with the two disciples by the way as they went to Emmaus, and opened unto them the Scriptures, while their heart burned within them, but their eyes were held that they did not know him. At length, while he brake bread and blessed it, “their eyes were opened, and they knew him.” Is God in this place?

We see him not; we cannot see him and live; but by this we shall know it hereafter--Has his word been made quick and powerful to any soul? Has the dignity and importance of communion with him been felt? Is a man departing with a deeper and more humbling sense of his own unworthiness and guilt; and penetrated with a more lively apprehension of the mercy of God through a Savior? Is sin rendered more odious, and holiness more amiable in the eyes of any one? Is the heart glowing with desire to know more of God, to love him more, and serve him better? Is the spirit of a man pressing “toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus?”[*]Php 3:14 Then of a truth God is in this place; and a day spent thus in his courts, is better than a thousand. But how is the language of this concluding passage of the chapter to be reconciled with that in Exo 33:11? “The Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.” The expression, “to see the face,” is evidently taken in two different senses. In Exo 33:11, it signifies to be regarded with favor or approbation, as it is in Psa 4:6. “Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us;” that is, show thyself gracious unto us, for we prize thy loving kindness far above every earthly blessing: but in Exo 33:20 and Exo 33:23, “to see the face of God,” imports the knowledge of his nature or essence, which to a creature is impossible. Here even a Moses is in darkness, through an excess of light: into this angels desire to look, but instantly shrink back, and shut their trembling eyes. But “the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him;”[*]John 1:18 and “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.”[*]John 1:14 Such was the care employed by Him who knows what is in man, to prevent the possibility of idolatry, and to expose the folly of it. Even Moses shall not be trusted with any thing like a representation of Deity; and what so absurd as to frame a similitude of what never was, never can be seen?

“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,” says the apostle James; and what a notable instance have we of the truth of this in the passage before us! Moses rises in his demands, as he succeeds by supplicating, and he still prevails. First, he pleads that the presence of God, the light and glory of Israel, might not be withdrawn, as was threatened, but might accompany and lead them to their destined habitation. And lo! God grants his request, with an assurance of peculiar regard and affection to himself, “Thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name.”[*]Exo 33:17 Upon this he presumes to ask some new, some special manifestation of the divine glory, for his own satisfaction and comfort. This too he obtains, in a promise that the goodness of God, all his goodness should be made to pass before him. Emboldened by this success, he cannot rest till he has obtained for the people a remission of their offence. And he said, “If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go amongst us, (for it is a stiff-necked people) and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance.”[*]Exo 34:9 And behold he carries this point also, and the covenant is renewed between God and Israel. Let us see that our requests be proper to be granted, and we have them already, before we make them. Let us be solicitous to obtain spiritual blessings in the first place, and the temporal good things which we prized not, asked not, may perhaps come unexpected, unsought. “Give thy servant,” said Solomon, “an understanding heart, that I may discern between good and bad.” “And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said until him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life, neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment: behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given

thee a wise and an understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honor: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee, all thy days."[*]1Ki 3:10-13 To enjoy this heavenly vision of all God's goodness, as it passed by, Moses must again ascend the mount, and draw nigh unto God. He was going up as to meet a friend; but that almighty friend must protect him from himself, as from his most formidable enemy. "While my glory passeth by, I will put thee in a cleft of the rock; and will cover thee with my hand, while I pass by."[*]Exo 33:22 An inspired apostle tells us that "this rock was Christ."[*]1Co 10:4 And it sheds a pleasing light on the subject. What afforded safety to Moses in the tremendous hour, when the glory of God appeared? A cleft of that rock from whence the living stream issued forth for the refreshment of God's heritage when it was weary, and which was the type of that wonderful "Man," who is "a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in dry places; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."[*]Isa 32:2 Did Moses flee thither for shelter, did he foresee his danger, and provide a covering for his defenseless head? No, the refuge was of God's providing. "I will put thee in a cleft of the rock." Not human sagacity, but divine mercy discovers, and prepares a retreat for the miserable. Observe the solid foundation on which that man is established who rests on the word of God: "thou shalt stand upon a rock." Remove the promise of him who is faithful, of him who is true, and we immediately sink into a horrible pit, and stick fast in the miry clay; but "Behold," says God, "I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste."[*]Isa 28:16

Moses is now directed to make all needful preparation for this important visit. In his haste he had thrown the two tables which contained the law, on the ground, and had broken them in pieces under the mount: but no act of man can disannul the law of God. The loss, though great, was not irreparable. But God will not entirely repair it, that Moses may have somewhat to regret in the effects of his impatience. The former two tables were wholly of God--the substance, the form, the writing, the subject; but the last must partake of human ignorance and imperfection. The choice of the stone, and the hewing it into form, are of Moses: the writing and the words are still of God. And these were the tables which were laid up in the ark of the testimony for preservation, and were transmitted to posterity. And it is thus that the precious things of God are still conveyed to men. The casket is human, the jewel which it contains is divine. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."[*]2Co 4:7 And thus, though a merciful God express not displeasure at our rashness and folly, they become in the end their own punishment.

Moses is commanded to be ready in the morning. The operations of human state loiter and linger, and seek to acquire importance from expectation and delay; but the movements of Deity prevent the dawning, and derive all their importance from themselves. Unless prayer be followed out by vigor and exertion, men pray in vain. One hour lost in slumber rendered ten thousand petitions fruitless and ineffectual; but Moses, like a man in earnest, like a man who knew the value of what he had so ardently desired, is ready betimes; he is at the appointed place at the appointed hour; with the tablets prepared to receive the impress of God. He carried them with him, a dead, vacant, useless lump of stone; he brings them back turned into spirit and life, clothed with meaning, speaking to the eye, to the heart, to the conscience; for if God breathe on dry bones, they instantly live, and stand up a great army.

If we can conceive a situation more awfully solemn than another, it was that of Moses on this occasion. Consider the stillness of the morning, the elevation of the mountain, the pleasing gloom of solitude, the expected display of a glory which he could not behold but as it departed. Every circumstance is great and affecting, but altogether suitable to the glory that followed: for “the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord.”[*]Exo 34:5 At the inauguration of kings, it is customary to proclaim their names and titles, and to bid defiance to every challenger or usurper of their rights. This is the mere pride of state, the mere insolence of possession. But the names of God are his nature, peculiar to himself, inapplicable, incommunicable to any other. And mark how the tide of mercy flows and swells till it has overcome every barrier; from “the soles of the feet to the ankles, from the ankles to the knees, till it becomes a river, wherein a man may swim;” and from an overflowing river converted into a boundless ocean, without bottom, without shore. “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.”[*]Exo 34:6-7 While justice is confined in one steady, deep, awful stream, threatening destruction only to the impenitent and unbelieving; expressed in these awful words, “and that will by no means clear the guilty.” This was the commencement of an interview “which lasted forty days and forty nights,” and which contained a repetition of the instructions formerly given respecting the tabernacle and its service. But this merits a separate and distinct consideration: as likewise does the alteration of the external appearance of Moses, on coming down from the mount; of which we mean to discourse next Lord’s day. “Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone, while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come nigh him.”[*]Exo 34:29-30

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Moses--Radiant Glory

Exo 34:29-30. And it came to pass when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount) that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone, while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come nigh him. The sun, the great light of the natural world, communicates to all bodies a portion of his own splendor, and thereby confers upon them whatever luster they possess. In his absence, all things assume the same dismal sable hue. The verdure of the meadow; the varied glory of the garden; the brightness of the moon's resplendent orb; the sweet attractions of "the human face divine," pronounce in so many different forms of expression, "The light of yonder celestial globe has risen upon me: if I have any beauty or loveliness, with him it comes, and with him it departs." The whole order and system of nature is designed to be a constant witness to the God of grace--"the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world." If there be in angels any beauty of holiness, any fervor of love, any elevation of wisdom, any excellency of strength; if there be in man any bowels of mercies, any kindness of affection, any gentleness of spirit, any endearment of charity, any humbleness of mind, any meekness, patience, long-suffering, it is a glory reflected from "the Father of lights." It neither exists nor can be seen, but as it is supplied and discovered by the eternal Source of light and joy. Say to that tulip, at the gloomy solstice of the year, or at the dusky midnight hour, "Array thyself in all those beautiful tints of thine wherewith thou charmest the eye of every beholder;" it hears thee not, it exhibits no color but one. But with the return of the vernal breeze, and the genial influence of the sun, and the moment the dawning has arisen upon it, unbidden, unobserved, it puts on its beautiful garments, and stands instantly clothed in all the freshness of the spring. Why is that face clouded with sorrow, why grovels that spirit in the dust, why lacks that heart the glow of benevolence, the meltings of sympathy? The genial current of the soul is frozen up, it is the dreary winter season of grace. The sun, the Sun of righteousness has withdrawn; but lo, after a little while, the winter is past, cheerful spring returns, the voice of joy and gladness is heard, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."[*]Isa 60:1

We naturally assume the tone of those with whom we frequently converse, and whom we dearly love. "He who walketh with wise men shall become wise; but the companion of fools shall be destroyed." At the social friendly banquet, the eye sparkles with delight, the heart expands, the brow is smoothed, the tongue is inspired by the law of kindness; every look is the reception or communication of pleasure. In the house of mourning, we speedily feel ourselves in unison with the afflicted; our eyes stand corrected, our words are few, our heads droop. In the cell of melancholy, the blood runs cold, the features relax, our powers of thought and reflection are suspended, with those of the moping wretches whose misery we deplore. What wonder then if Moses, descending from the mount, after forty days' familiar intercourse with "the Lord God, merciful and gracious," had not the appearance of an ordinary man; that he had acquired a luster

not his own! “He was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread nor drink water.”[*]Exo 34:28

What a sublime idea does this suggest of communion with God! What created enjoyment has not lost its relish in a much shorter space! What powers of unassisted nature could have so long sustained the want of aliment! No one thing in a more humiliating manner teaches us our frailty and dependence, than the constant necessity of recurring to the grosser elements for support. Man, the lord of this lower world, must, with the subject tribes, and in a much greater proportion than many of them, pass a very considerable portion of his existence in a state of unconsciousness and insensibility during the hours of sleep: he must purchase with the suspension of his reason, during a third part of his being, the exercise of it during the other two. The happiness of an immortal being is, oftener than once in a day, subjected to a little bread that perisheth; the spirit, however willing, quickly feels the oppressive weight of a body frail and infirm. But behold the triumph of the spirit over the flesh or, rather, the power and grace of God, which vouchsafing in general to employ means, call upon us diligently to use them; but which, sometimes neglecting these, and conveying immediate supplies and support, lead us at once to Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”

Moses descends, not with impaired, but with recruited strength; strength, which, to the end of life, never more abated: not with a sunk, darkened, extinguished eye: but an eye, which, having seen God, never afterwards became dim: not with a visage pale and emaciated from a fast of forty days; but with a countenance that dazzled the eyes of every beholder. What a glorious creature is the friend of God; “Lo, O Lord, they that are far from thee shall perish, but it is good for me to draw nigh unto God.” When Moses descended before, he was clothed in just resentment and displeasure; he came a minister of vengeance, and all Israel trembled as he frowned; he now returns with the covenant renewed, the tables of the law restored, a messenger of peace, and yet the luster of his appearance is intolerable. What must the great JEHOVAH be in his own glory, when reflected, imparted glory--glory communicated to a creature, thus intimidates and astonishes! How dreadful the glory of wrath and fiery indignation, when the glory of infinite goodness we are not able steadfastly to behold!

Moses descended the first time, with the tables in their original state, altogether of God; and in his haste he effaced and destroyed them: but we read of no attempt to collect the scattered fragments, and to reunite them. Superstition might have made an improper use of what could not be distinctly read, and of consequence, but partially understood; and true piety will seek some surer rule of faith and conduct, some more powerful assistant in devotion, than the scattered shivers of even a sapphire from the throne of God. It has been woefully demonstrated, to be an easy matter to mar the work of God. Adam defaced the divine image in his own person, by one willful transgression. Moses cancelled the hand writing of ordinances in one rash moment: and every thoughtless transgressor is pulling down, in his own person, a fabric of God’s rearing. But all the powers of nature united, are incapable of rebuilding that temple, of renewing that writing, of restoring that image. He who in the beginning “commanded light to shine out of darkness,” alone can illumine the extinguished life of God in the soul. The hand which at first created man out of “dust of the ground,” alone can form of the dead in trespasses and sins, “a new creature in Christ Jesus unto good works.” And what was afterwards laid up in the holy place, and preserved while the tabernacle remained? Not that which came pure and perfect from the hands of the Creator, but

that which God, by an act of grace and the intervention of a Mediator, recovered. Thus “the general assembly and church of the first-born written in heaven,” is not composed of men that never “left their first estate,” but of “just men made perfect;” not of creatures like Adam, in a state of innocence, but of creatures redeemed by the blood of the Son of God; “justified by the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and sanctified by the Spirit of the living God.” Let us not, then, regret the loss of an earthly paradise, nor the destruction of the image of a changeable, though perfect creature, while, through grace, we may regain the paradise of God, and be fashioned in body and in spirit like unto our glorious Redeemer.

Moses has acquired a glory on the mount which he is not conscious of. “He wist not that the skin of his face shone, while he talked with him.”[*]Exo 34:29 The choicest of God’s gifts, and humility is one of the most precious, come not with observation, announce not their approach, are not first visible to the possessor. But it is impossible to converse much with God, without appearing more glorious in the eyes of men. Has a man been in the mount with God? He needeth not to sound a trumpet before him, to proclaim from whence he has come; he has but to show himself, and the evidence of it will appear. The man has been in the mount with God. What are the signs of it? Is he ostentatious, self-sufficient? Is he eager to talk of his attainments, to exhibit the shining of his face, to abash and confound a less favored brother? He is not like Moses, he has not been with the God of Moses, his pretensions are vain. That man has been in the mount with God. How does it appear? Is he gloomy and sullen, harsh and uncharitable? Is his tongue filled with anathemas? Flashes his eye destruction on mankind? He is a liar and an impostor, believe him not; he is not come down from the God of the law, from the God of the gospel, from the relenting Father of Israel, from the compassionate Father of the human race: No, he has been conversing with, he has ascended from the malignant enemy of God and man: by his spirit you may know who he is.

Pretenders are at as much pains to display the luster of their outside, as Moses was to conceal his. By this then you shall try and know yourselves, and form your judgment of others. Does a man issue forth from his closet, return from the temple, retire from the Lord’s table, with his temper sweetened, his heart enlarged, with the law of kindness on his tongue, with the tear of compassion, or the luster of benevolence in his eye? Is he, like Moses, more attentive to the condition, necessities, and instruction of others, than earnest to blaze abroad his own excellencies, in order to obtain reputation for himself? How gloriously does such an one shine in the dyes of men: but that is nothing, how glorious does he shine in the eyes of God! And that is true only which God sees to be such.

“The face of Moses shone and they were afraid to come nigh him.”[*]Exo 34:30 Of what importance is it to inquire, at what particular moment, and through what particular medium, this singular appearance was produced? Is it not sufficient for me, that I see the fruit hastening to its maturity. though the commencement and progress of vegetation escape me? I look up and “behold the face of the sun,” and draw comfort from his beams, though the discriminating instant of darkness and the dawning was too fine for my perception. Let me be able to say, with the man restored to sight, “One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see,”[*]John 9:25 and I shall leave to others a minute inquiry into the process of the cure. Show me a man shining in the beauty of holiness; a man really changed in heart and in life, and I will not trouble him to tell me, what perhaps he does not know, and therefore cannot declare, at what place, by means of what preacher, or by what dispensation of Providence, the important change passed upon him. A truly

good man is among the first to discover, to acknowledge, and to correct his own errors and imperfections; but humility spreads the veil which conceals his good qualities first over his own eyes, and he is among the last to discern the splendor which confounds others. What a powerful charm is there in undissembled goodness, when the wicked themselves are constrained to venerate and to approve it, even while it condemns them.

Besides the instance in the text, Scripture has furnished us with at least another, and a most illustrious one, in the history of Stephen, the first martyr to Christianity, after its divine Author. An enraged multitude, blood-thirsty accusers, and a partial tribunal feel themselves awed into a temporary reverence; their fury stands suspended while they behold him. “All that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”[*]Acts 6:15 But there is a greater than even this upon record. The band which broke into the garden, with their officers, under the commission of the chief priests, and headed by the traitor, to apprehend Jesus of Nazareth, were so struck with an inexpressible something in his presence and address, “that they went backward and fell to the ground.”[*]John 18:6 But what made Israel to shrink from the presence of their gracious leader, intercessor, and friend? What could render the presence of his affectionate brother formidable to Aaron? That which drove the first transgressor to “hide himself from the presence of the Lord God.” It is conscience that makes cowards of all men; it is conscience that converts the rustling of a leaf, the shaking of a bulrush, into a specter from the grave, or a flaming minister from heaven to execute vengeance. Under the lawful terrors of divine glory, they had lately entreated, saying, “Let Moses speak to us, and we will hear:” but now, even the look of Moses, though he say nothing, is too much for a guilty people to bear. Alas, how little do men reflect, when engaged in criminal pursuits, that the pleasures of sin in which they riot, are one day to become hideous ghosts to disturb their repose, to scare the imagination, to harrow up the soul, to accuse them at the tribunal of God, to be their tormentors for ever.

Moses, conscious of good-will at all, exulting in the thought of having procured pardon and reconciliation for them, but unconscious of the change which had passed upon his own person, observes with concern and surprise that everyone avoided him. At length he discovers the brightness of his own countenance reflected from their guilty blushing foreheads; and by words of kindness encourages them to return, whom the terror of his looks had dismayed and put to flight. We then find him, with the condescension of true goodness, accommodating himself to the circumstances of the people whom he was appointed to instruct. Intercourse with heaven has raised him to a higher pitch of exaltation; guilt and fear have degraded them: but love levels the mountains, and fills up the valleys of separation. The interposition of a veil reduces him to their standard, because the confidence of innocence raised them not to his. The law of God must be taught to the people, though the teacher is become more glorious. This is a plain and striking lesson to all who undertake to instruct others. It is a wretched ambition merely to shine. The great, aim of a teacher should be to communicate knowledge; and he shows himself to be possessed of most, who knows best how to convey it to others. He is the truly rich man, who, by the proper use of his wealth, assists in making many rich; not he who possesses a vast hoard which he knows not how to enjoy; nor he who makes an ostentatious display of riches, merely to insult his poorer neighbor. And he who speaks three words in a known language, to the edification of the hearer, has more real learning than the babbler of ten thousand, in a language which no one understands.

“Till he had done speaking,” then, “Moses put a veil on his face;”[*]Exo 34:33 so that the sound of his voice might be heard, while the terrifying luster of his face was obscured. But this was not merely an. incidental circumstance, arising out of the occasion, and done away with it; but was designed, in providence, to be a symbolical representation of the whole Mosaic dispensation: which was nothing else but the gospel under a veil. That this is not a fanciful conjecture, we appeal to the great apostle of the Gentiles, who has removed the veil, and discovered the hidden glory which lies under it, and thus writes, “Not that we,” meaning the apostles of the Lord Jesus under the New Testament, “not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is of God. Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly 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? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious, had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech. And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished. But their minds were blinded; for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away, in the reading of the Old Testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.”[*]2Co 3:5-16 From the days of Moses down to those of Paul, and by Paul himself, in the days of his ignorance, Moses was heard and read with the veil over his face; was understood in the letter, not in the spirit; and even after the veil was done away in Christ, who is “the end of the law for righteousness;” after the types were explained, the predictions accomplished, and the great prophet of the Jews had brought all his glory, and laid at the feet of the great Apostle and High Priest of our profession, still the people who had the best means of information, who had the power of comparing spiritual things with spiritual, read them, and continue to read them to this day, under the power of passion and prejudice. And he who sees in Moses, and the other writings of the Old Testament, nothing but the histories of certain events long since past, and confined in their operation and effects to a particular district; nothing but the religious usages and ceremonies practised by a particular people, that man looks with a bandage upon his eyes, understands not what he reads, and therefore cannot profit.

There is a gracious intimation in the passage we have just now quoted, that a period is approaching when Israel too shall turn unto the Lord; when the veil shall be taken away, and Moses, in whom they trusted, shall be seen without a covering; and “if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?”[*]Rom 11:15

What glorious views of God, of his providence, of his grace, does the gospel disclose! The gentile nations behold their admission into the family of God, and their privileges, as his children, in the promises which were made to Abraham and his seed. And the Jews will in time discover the intention and design of their political and religious establishment, in the nature, duration, and extent of the Redeemer’s kingdom: when “Israel also shall be saved:” as it is written, “There shall

come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob."[*]Rom 11:26

Human frailty rendered the interposition of a veil necessary between Moses and the people; because "they could not look steadfastly to the end of that which is abolished;" but when Moses went into the tabernacle, to converse with God, a veil to cover his face being unnecessary, it was laid aside.

It is natural to hold out our most favorable appearance to men, to catch at their good opinion, to secure their approbation; but we see in Moses a mind intent only upon usefulness. He joyfully gives up a little fame, for the sake of doing much good. If the church of God be enlightened, what is it to him that he himself is a little obscured? His luster is to illuminate Israel. Vainglory always defeats the purpose which it had formed; humility as certainly gains the point at which it aimed not. Who does not esteem Moses, modestly shrouded in a veil, infinitely more than all the loquacious boasters and exhibiters of themselves that ever existed? Moses, in talking with the people, employed a veil, not as a mask to insinuate a false idea of what he was not, but to conceal the real excellency which he had; unlike the hypocrisy and disguise of the world; and, to use disguise with God he knew would be impious, profane, and unavailing. We find him changing his appearance, as the occasion required. This was not, in him, versatility and address, a cunning accommodation to circumstances for selfish ends; but the compliance of wisdom and necessity, in order to be more extensively useful. Thus Paul "became all things to all men, that he might gain some." And, for the same reason, a greater than Moses, a greater than Paul disdained not the festivity of a marriage solemnity; refused not the invitation of one ruler, nor rejected the visit of another; abhorred not to eat with publicans and sinners, if by any means the ignorant might be instructed, the proud and selfish checked and reproved, the modest encouraged, and the mourner comforted. At the first descent of Moses from the mount, we see the glory of a man zealous for God: at his second, the glory of a man owned and honored of God; "the skin of his face shining." But at his appearance many days afterwards on Tabor, we behold a saint, from the world of bliss, altogether glorious. Such is the blessed effect of being with God and: seeing him as he is," not for forty days only, but during a series of ages. And what must it then be, to "be ever with the Lord," to glorify God, and to be glorified of him "in body and spirit which are the Lord's?" And why was Moses again exhibited on the mount of transfiguration? Wherefore again displayed in glory? Again to put a veil upon his face, to empty himself, and to deposit his glory at the feet of Him in whose light and likeness he shone--To talk with Jesus "concerning the decease he should accomplish at Jerusalem." The Jewish Rabbis pretend to account for the unabated vigor, the unfailing luster of the latter years of the life of Moses, from these very circumstances. The eye, say they, which had endured the sight of God, could not become dim: the natural strength which supported a fast of forty days, could not sink under any future decay.

Christian, consider Moses, the man of God, invested with luster which dazzled the eye of every beholder, and which length of time could not impair; and reflect, to what a height of glory communion with God can raise a fallen creature; and aspire after a participation of that grace which adorned him. The glory of his person was a rare and singular attainment; but that of his spirit may be imitated and attained by all. His piety, resignation, and obedience; his meekness, gentleness, and compassion, present amiable patterns, and they are the ornaments suited to your present state. It is given but to a favored few to exhibit heroic virtue, to perform splendid actions, to acquire extensive reputation; but none is excluded from the honor of simple, modest worth, of

habitual beneficence, of honest fame. And those are the most valuable and solid acquisitions, which “are in the sight of God of great price.”

Steady and persevering intercourse with Heaven will infallibly transform the whole man into the image of God. The very exterior will be meliorated and improved, and the world itself will “take knowledge” of the disciple who “has been with Jesus.” The exercises of the closet will be seen and felt in the serenity of the countenance, the kindness of the eye, the melody of the voice, the affability and graciousness of the whole deportment. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”[*]Mat 5:16 The time is at hand when the glory which irradiated the face of Moses shall be imparted to the whole company of the redeemed; when the name of God and the Lamb shall shine in every forehead. Behold, and wonder, behold, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, “A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.”[*]Rev 12:1 “They that be wise, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.”[*]Dan 12:3 “The Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”[*]Psa 84:11

065. Moses--The Tabernacle

Moses--The Tabernacle

Exo 39:42-43. According to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so the children of Israel made all the work. And Moses did look upon all the work, and behold they had done it as the Lord had commanded, even so had they done it: And Moses blessed them.

If reason were to maintain its full dominion in man, were the senses perpetually under the control of the mind, a motive to religion would be continually supplied from the natural impulse of a grateful and affectionate heart. The vast universe would become one great temple; every pebble, every plant, every star would be a witness for God; and the heaven-born spirit would arise on the wing of every bird, of every breeze of air, to its glorious Author. But man, degraded by sin, blinded by passion, involved in error; man, impaired in understanding, groveling in affection, in captivity to sense, needs to be frequently admonished of his obligation to, and dependence upon God, his Creator and Preserver. He needs forms, and seasons, and places of worship; the heart must be approached through the channels of sense; and our acquaintance with the Father of spirits must be preserved, by means of things seen and temporal. Hence a sabbath, a tabernacle, a temple; sacrifices, sacraments, sermons, are the institution of Heaven; are the ordinances of Him “who knows what is in man,” and what is necessary to man.

It is easy to conceive what the world would be, destitute of the modes and offices of religion, when we consider what men are, with the advantage of “line upon line, precept upon precept,” revelation upon revelation. The religious ceremonies and services in use among ancient nations, whatever were their origin, become respectable in our eyes, merely from their antiquity: but when to antiquity is superadded divine authority; when we behold the great JEHOVAH condescending to describe and to appoint the rites of his own worship, to exhibit a model of all the instruments to be employed in his service, we feel something more than respect; we are filled with veneration: we break out into the exclamation of Solomon. “Will God indeed dwell with men upon the earth?”

Moses had now finally descended from the mount, furnished with complete instructions for settling the civil government and the religious polity of the nation which God “chose, to place his name there.” Under the direction of men divinely inspired for the work, he addresses himself to the execution of the plan which God himself had vouchsafed to delineate. From the liberality and zeal of the people, materials are speedily and amply supplied. Through the skill and assiduity of the artists, the business is speedily and successfully dispatched: and, on the first anniversary of the departure out of Egypt, the tabernacle is ready to be reared up.

It is not my design to attempt a minute description of that sacred structure, and of its furniture. But I find it impossible to pass them by entirely, as I apprehend a few remarks of a practical nature, fall directly within the design of these exercises, and may, by the divine blessing, render the awful monuments of religion in the wilderness, instructive and useful in gospel times. The name and the nature of the tabernacle were, perhaps, intended to be emblematical of the whole dispensation, of

which it was a leading instrument. A tent, or tabernacle is a temporary and portable habitation, suited to a state of journeying or warfare; and this, in particular, was to be the guide to Canaan, to give the signal of motion and of rest; to lead the way to victory and peace: and when full possession was at length given, the tabernacle transferred its transitory glory, to the stationary glory of the temple; or rather was consolidated into one glory with it. Thus, all the positive institutions of religion are designed to be our monitors, guides, and comforters in the wilderness; to introduce us into the promised land; and then the objects of faith shall become objects of vision, and the redeemed of the Lord shall worship together in that temple, from which there is no more going out.

Jehovah declared himself not only the spiritual Head of the Israelitish church and nation, but also their temporal Sovereign; the supreme Head and Governor of their political economy. As such, he gave commandment to pitch a tent for the leader and commander of his people, from whence orders were expected and issued; over which the royal standard was seen perpetually hovering in the dreadful glory of a pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night. And the final fulfilling of the Scriptures is the gathering into one, to the standard of the Redeemer, “a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,”[*]Rev 7:9 when at the sounding of the seventh angel, there shall be “great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.”[*]Rev 11:15 From the contemplation of a tabernacle constructed of parts that might be separated, and joined together again, as occasion requited, we are led to contemplate the “city of our solemnities,” Jerusalem that is above, “a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down, not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby.”[*]Isa 33:20-21 The fabric in the wilderness was not a design of human skill, nor fashioned according to models seen in Egypt, but planned of infinite wisdom, erected, to a single pin, according to a pattern shown to Moses on the mount. In things which relate to the management of this world, a latitude is given to the exercise of human prudence and discretion; but in what regards the immediate worship and service of God, men are tied up to an iota and a tittle. “Thus saith the Lord.” The work of God is perfect, his law is perfect, his word is perfect, none can with safety add thereto, or diminish from it. A holy and a jealousGod has fenced himself and his ordinances as with a wall of fire, which presumption attempts to break through at its peril. “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophesy of this book: if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophesy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”[*]Rev 22:18-19 When we consider the dreadful import of these words, who but must tremble to think on the rash, the irreverent, the profane use that is daily made of the name and the book of God. Is it thus ye requite your Maker, foolish creatures and unwise? “He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength, who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?[*]Job 9:4 The tabernacle consisted of three several apartments one within another--the court, the holy place, and the most holy place, or the holy of holies. The temple of Solomon was built upon the same plan. And the earliest Christian churches preserved something of a resemblance to it. For they consisted first, of a spacious porch, where the penitents who implored the prayers of the faithful, the catechumens, the Gentiles, the Jews, and the

heretics, were stopped short. The second compartment was the Naus, the nave, or body of the temple, where the faithful assembled, and performed their devotions; and the third was the Beema, or choir, into which ecclesiastics only were admitted, and in which were placed the altar, the throne of the bishop, and the stalls of the clergy.

Some learned men have given it as their opinion, that the Grecians borrowed their noble and beautiful style of architecture, from the perfect Hebrew models described in the sacred volume; that it was transmitted by them to the Romans; from whom it has descended to all the provinces of their great empire, and continues to be the ornament and the glory of the modern world. Indeed, it seems to be something more than human invention and art, that, through the lapse of so many ages, so many revolutions of empire, so many changes of taste and opinion, the same arrangement and proportions should excite universal admiration, and yield universal delight; and that the slightest deviation from the principles of that noble art should instantly be observed, and universally offend the eye. Does it not seem as if he who formed the eye, had also deigned to design the model of what would fill and please it? The court, then, was rather the large space of ground in which the tabernacle was erected, than any part of the tabernacle. Its form was an oblong, whose length was double its breadth, being an hundred cubits by fifty, that is, according to the most approved calculation, an hundred and fifty feet by seventy-five. It was encompassed on all sides by curtains of fine twined linen, fixed to fifty-six pillars of Shittim, that is, as the seventy interpret it, incorruptible wood, filleted with silver, of the height of five cubits, or seven feet and a half. The gate or passage into the court was a hanging of twenty cubits, curiously embroidered, and supported by four pillars of the same materials and workmanship. On all which particulars, I shall detain you to make this only remark: when we see the great God condescending to give directions concerning the formation and use of the most minute implements pertaining to sanctuary service, of pins, rings, loops, and hooks, man is taught to consider nothing as beneath his notice which can affect his own credit, usefulness, and comfort, or the same, virtue and happiness of his neighbor. “Let all things be done by us decently and in order.” Be it the glory of a fabulous Jupiter, that it is beneath his dignity, and inconsistent with his higher occupations, to attend to small matters. It is the glory of the living and true God, the Maker and Preserver of all things, it is the excellency of his administration, the beauty of his providence, that “the hairs of our head are numbered of him.” “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.”[*]Mat 10:29 On entering the court, the objects which first presented themselves were, on the one hand, the altar of burnt-offering, and on the other the laver for the priests to wash in. The materials and form of these two instruments of divine worship, have afforded to the learned and ingenious, many curious subjects of speculation, some of which might perhaps amuse, but could not greatly edify you. As the whole service of the tabernacle was typical, and represented the “shadow of good things to come,” it will not, I trust, be deemed a mere flight of imagination to suppose, that by the altar of burnt-offerings, and the use to which it was devoted, the great atonement, the means of pardon and acceptance with God were shadowed forth; and that by the laver and its use, on the other hand, was represented the purity which becomes all who approach to a pure and holy God. In their nearness to, and union with each other, they exhibit that which brings the guilty near unto God, and that which fits them for communion with God. Justification freely by the race of God, “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;” and sanctification by the Spirit of God, whereby we are prepared to be “partakers of the inheritance of saints in light.” An altar without a laver were to encourage the offender to “continue in sin, because

grace abounds;" a laver without an altar would be to inspire a vain confidence in an external and imperfect righteousness, to the neglect of that which is of God by faith, and which purifieth the heart. In conjunction, they represent man's happiest state, and highest glory, sin forgiven, and nature renewed.

"The holy place," which was properly the tabernacle, presented itself at the upper end of the court. Its dimensions are not laid down by Moses. Those who take it for granted that the tabernacle was a miniature representation of the temple from the measurement of that great edifice as described in the first book of Kings, make the length of the holy place of the tabernacle to be twenty cubits, or thirty feet. It was separated from the court by a curtain, within which none but the priests were permitted to enter, and where they officiated at the altar of the Lord, in the order of their course. Josephus affirms, that when the priests ministered in the holy place, the separating veil was drawn up, so that they could be seen of the people. Philo, with greater appearance of truth, maintains the contrary opinion. It is clear from a passage in the gospel according to Luke, that the priest who officiated in the holy place of the second temple, was out of the sight of the people; for it is said of Zacharias, when he was offering incense in the holy place, "the whole multitude was praying without;" that they waited for him, and "marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple,"[*]Luk 1:10;Luk 1:21. and they discovered not the cause of it till he made it known to them by signs.

Though we are not informed of the exact dimensions of the "holy place," we know that it was a covered tent, with one fold of various materials upon another. First, ten curtains of equal size, of blue, purple, scarlet, and fine twined linen; embroidered with cherubims; and coupled together with loops of blue and taches of gold. Above these were extended eleven curtains of goats' hair, hung together by taches of brass. These again were covered with rams' skins dyed red; and over all there was a covering of badgers' skins, probably as a protection from the injuries of the air and weather. The intention and meaning of this multiplied and variegated ceiling we pretend not to explain. Was it intended to represent the impenetrable recesses of the Eternal Mind; to check the folly and sinfulness of an over curious inquiry into mysteries which are intentionally concealed; and to teach men to make a wise and temperate use of known and revealed truth? Was it not sufficient to every pious Israelite, that the altar of burnt-offering and the laver of purification were under the open canopy of heaven, seen of all, accessible to all? And by this circumstance, did not even the law teach the open and unlimited extent of salvation by the great Atonement? Religion forbade, and the structure prevented, the body of the people from entering within the veil, or penetrating into the mysteries concealed under such a covering; one fold passed, another, and another, in almost endless succession, opposed itself. Woe be to him who makes a mystery of what God has graciously disclosed; and woe be to him who presumes to pry into what God has intentionally hid from his eyes. Thus sublimely sings the enraptured British Psalmist.

Chain'd to his throne a volume lies,

With all the fates of men;

With every angel's form and size,

Drawn by th' eternal pen. His Providence unfolds the book,

And makes his counsels shine:

Each opening leaf, and every stroke

Fulfils some deep design.

Here he exalts neglected worms

To scepters and a crown;

Anon the following page he turns,

And treads the monarch down. Not Gabriel asks the reason why,

Nor God the reason gives;

Nor dares the favorite angel pry

Between the folded leaves.[*]Watts,Horae Lyricae The furniture of the holy place is minutely described, and its meaning and use are not obscurely pointed out in many places of the sacred writings. It consisted of three articles, the golden candlestick with seven lamps; the golden altar of incense; and the table of shew-bread. Each of which might easily furnish matter for a separate discourse; but we confine ourselves to general ideas, and practical observations. The first piece of furniture in the holy place was “the golden candlestick to give light;” all whose appurtenances were of pure beaten gold. It was placed on the south side, that is on the left hand as you enter the tabernacle, directly opposite to the table of shew-bread. It was a talent in weight; which is about one thousand five hundred ounces, or one hundred and twenty-five Roman pounds, whose value, according to the calculation of the learned bishop of Peterborough, was five thousand and seventy-five pounds fifteen shillings and a fraction, of our money. It is the most generally received opinion, that all; or some of these seven lamps in the candlestick, were kept continually burning: that they were extinguished in turn, to be cleansed and supplied with fresh oil; and that their parts were made to separate for this very purpose. As the priests alone could enter the holy place, to them of course was committed the whole charge of lighting, trimming, and cleaning the lamps. It is much easier to ask many questions on this subject than to answer one. Why the number of seven lamps in one candlestick; that number of perfection, as some have called it, and under which so many mysteries are supposed to be concealed? Why should it burn in a place where no eye was to see its light, or to receive benefit from it, except a solitary priest? Wherefore this waste of treasure for no apparent equivalent use? To all such questions it must be replied, “Thus the great Lawgiver would have it.” “We know in part, and we prophesy in part. What he doth we know not now, but we shall know hereafter.” From this created, confined, imperfect, self-consuming light, we are led to contemplate that pure, eternal, undecaying light which communicates, of its own splendor, whatever glory any creature possesses. “We are led to Him who is the true light of the world.”

We silently turn from the tabernacle in the wilderness to adore Him who in the beginning said, “Let there be light: and there was light.” We are conducted in the visions of God, to contemplate the splendor of the Christian churches, and behold “the Son of Man, walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.” We are hurried forward to the last awful hour of dissolving nature, when “The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.” We are transported to that celestial city, which “has no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God doth lighten it, and

the Lamb is the light thereof.”

Without encroaching on your time and patience, or running over the subjects with indecent and unprofitable haste, it were impossible to convey any proper and useful idea of the remaining utensils of this venerable structure, and the still more venerable recess inclosed within it, styled “the most holy place.” The description of these, therefore, with the history of the august ceremonies of setting up the tabernacle, and the relation of the whole to the “better things to come,” of which they were the shadows, shall be postponed to another Lecture, which will conclude the second book of this Sacred History, and another annual revolution of our own frail, transitory life.--“Teach us,” O God, “so to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”[*]Psa 90:12 Vouchsafe to dwell with us in thy word and ordinances; let “Christ dwell in our hearts by faith,” and raise us one after another to dwell with thee in the holiest of all, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

066. Moses--Tabernacle Furniture

Moses--Tabernacle Furniture

Exo 40:17;Exo 40:34-38. And it came to pass in the first month, in the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was reared up. Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And when the cloud was taken up from ever the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journies. But if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not, till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of the house of Israel, throughout all their journies.

Every production of human power and skill bears this inscription, “I am made to perish.” Man himself the moment he begins to breathe begins to die, and his noblest, most durable, and most glorious works are no sooner completed, than they begin to all to decay. In vain we look for the monuments of ancient grandeur and magnificence; they have either wholly vanished away, or present to the eye scattered fragments or tottering ruins, ready to dash themselves upon the ground. Where is now that city and tower which raised its proud head to heaven, in defiance of the waters of a second deluge? Neither the solid and costly materials of which it was composed, the sacred purposes to which it was applied, nor the awful glory which once presided over and resided in it, have preserved from decay and loss, the tabernacle of the congregation, the work of divinely inspired Bezaleel and Aholiab. Of the magnificent structure on mount Zion, the wonder and glory of the whole earth, not one stone remaineth upon another.

All that was formal and instrumental in the ancient dispensation seems to have been, by the special appointment of Providence, destroyed and annihilated, that the spirit of it alone might remain. The tabernacle, and temple, and their service exist only in description: and in those simpler and more spiritual ordinances to which they have given place. And the institutions which now remain, are only preparing the way for a more august, more splendid, and more durable manifestation of the divine glory. The legal economy introduced that of grace by the gospel and then passed away. The dispensation of grace, in like manner, is now performing its work, fulfilling its day, announcing, unfolding, introducing the kingdom of glory; and “when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.” The satisfaction of Moses, when the whole work of the tabernacle and of its furniture was completed, is more easily to be conceived than expressed. To see the pattern showed him in the mount exactly copied, the design of the great Jehovah perfectly fulfilled, must have filled the good man’s mind with delight ineffable. With a holy joy, similar to this, must every lover of the gospel observe the exact coincidence between “the shadows of good things to come,” and “the very image of the things;” between the prediction concerning the Savior of the world, and their accomplishment; between the promises made unto the fathers, and the blessings enjoyed by their children. And what will it be, Christians, in that world of bliss, which is the end of our faith, and the grand object of our hope; what will it be, to find

the entire coincidence between the descriptions contained in this book, of future and heavenly glory, and the things described; between the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel, and the glorious realities of our Fathers house above; between the spirit which Christianity now teaches and inspires, in order to dignify and bless mankind, and the spirit which all the redeemed shall feel, enjoy, and express, when raised to the dignity of being kings and priests unto God? In the preceding Lecture we endeavored to lead your attention to the form, use, and end of the tabernacle erected in the wilderness, and of the several parts of its sacred furniture. The outward court, under the open canopy of heaven, containing “the brazen altar of burnt-offering,” on which incessantly burnt the consecrated fire for offering up the daily sacrifice; and close by it the laver of brass for the priests to wash in.” We conducted you with trembling feet into the “holy place,” concealed in front from every profane eye, by a veil which it was death to draw aside; and from above, by covering upon covering which no eye could penetrate. In this sacred recess were placed “the golden candlestick to give light, the golden altar of incense, and the table of shew-bread.” Having spoken briefly of the first of these, we now proceed to recommend to your notice the other two. The “altar of incense,” was made of shittim, or incorruptible wood, overlaid with pure gold, of a cubit square, and its height double that dimension, with a golden horn arising at each angle, and the top encompassed with a golden border or crown. It had two rings of gold immediately under the border, to which were fitted two staves of the same wood, also overlaid with gold, for the convenience of transporting it from place to place, as occasion required. Its use was to burn, at stated times, a sacred perfume of a certain quality and composition, which it was unlawful to compound, or apply to any other use, or in any other place. It is clear from many parts of Scripture, that the smoke of the sweet incense which ascended from this altar, was intended to represent prayer or intercession. “Let my prayer,” says the Psalmist, “be set forth before thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”[*]Psa 141:2

While the priest, invisible to every eye, was employed in burning incense in the holy place, the multitude were praying without. This leads us directly to consider the great “Apostle and High Priest of our profession, who has for us entered, not into the holy place made with hands, which was the figure of the true, but into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for us.” Though the veil be let down that we cannot behold Him, the eye of faith penetrates it, sees Him who is invisible; sees Him lifting up holy and unwearied hands in our behalf; sees the Prince with God prevailing. The veil was drawn aside, and discovered to the ravished eyes of the beloved disciple, an angel coming, and standing “at the altar, having a golden censer: and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God, out of the angel’s hands.”[*]Rev 8:3-4 The solitary perfume of secret prayer, the combined incense of family worship, the mingled odors of public devotion, the prayers of all saints derive an activity, a force, an elevation from the merit and mediation of the Redeemer, which raise them to the throne of God, where, being accepted through the Beloved, they descend again in showers of blessings on the believer’s head.

Behold the altar which sanctifies the gift, the ladder whose foundation is on the earth, but its summit reacheth heaven, along which the ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation convey the vows, the praises, the holy desires of the faithful, up to their Father and their God; and reconvey the gifts and graces of their heavenly Father to his children upon earth. The approach to the

golden altar of incense was by way of the brazen altar of burnt-offering: the new and living way that conducts “into the holiest of all,” is through the rent veil of the Redeemer’s flesh. Jesus having suffered the things which were appointed, entered into his glory. As by the altar of burnt-offering, so by the lever of purification, the holy place was approachable; for “without holiness no man shall see God;” and “everyone that nameth the name of Christ must depart from iniquity.” The horns at the corners of the altar have been considered as emblematical of strength, and being tipped with the blood of the atoning victim, are conceived to represent the power of God, and the grace that is in Christ Jesus, united in the work of man’s redemption. The quadrangular figure of the altar, and the equality of its sides, may point out the impartial regards of the great Father of all, under the dispensation to which that given by Moses conducted, to men of every nation under heaven, and they prefigure the day when, according to the words of the Savior himself, “men should come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.”[*]Mat 8:11 The materials of the altar, shittim-wood overlaid with pure gold, by a bold imagination have been supposed a figure, of the twofold nature of Christ: the purity, solidity, impassableness of the one, encompassing, supporting, securing the fragility of the other, defending it at all points, and bestowing upon it a value, strength, and duration which it possessed not before.

Finally, the staves fitted to the rings, and perpetually in their place for the convenience of motion, have been, with what propriety you will judge, construed into an emblem of the transitory nature of the whole dispensation, which looked continually forward to something better than itself; which forever warned the comers thereunto of their pilgrimage state, saying, “Arise ye and depart, for this in not your rest.” It is remarkable, that after Israel was come to his rest in the land of promise, and the holy furniture of the tabernacle was lodged for perpetuity in the temple at Jerusalem, this memorial of motion and change still offered itself to view: the altar, the table, the ark, had the instrument of removing them always in its place, and, in concert with every part of the system of nature and providence, call upon men with a loud and distinct voice, saying, “Seek ye another country, that is an heavenly.” But we proceed. The third and last piece of furniture in this solemn repository was “the table of shew-bread,” of the same materials with the altar, but of different dimensions, two cubits in length, by one of breadth, and one and a half in height: and, like it, furnished with staves fitted to four rings for the purpose of conveyance. Its use was to hold the shewbread, consisting of twelve cakes, according to the number of the twelve tribes, of the finest flour, prepared according to a special prescription, in two piles of six each, to be renewed every sabbath-day, and that which was removed to become the property of, and to be eaten in the holy place by the priests, the sons of Levi, who ministered at the altar. Now upon the very first sight of it, this ordinance, besides those circumstances which it possessed in common with others, seems designed to be a perpetual acknowledgment, on the part of man, of the care and kindness of a gracious Providence, which gives to men the rich enjoyment of the principal support of human life, bread, and with it, all the inferior accommodations and comforts which render it desirable. It was, on the other hand, the security and pledge which God vouchsafed to give to his church and people, that bread should continually be given them that while Israel owned and acknowledged God in the way of piety and devotedness to his service, he would own and acknowledge them, by an unwearied and effectual attention to their necessary demands and reasonable wishes. A common table is the badge of familiarity and friendship, is the sweetest emblem of domestic union and happiness; of paternal concern, of filial tenderness, of brotherly love. The “shew-bread” was

appropriated to persons of a sacred profession, to sacred seasons, and a holy place; unless when the greatness of the occasion superseded the strictness of the letter, and the law of mercy took precedence of the law of sacrifice. O how much more extended the grace of the gospel! David alone and his company, and that only once, on a necessitous occasion, was admitted to the privileges of a son of Levi, to a participation of the consecrated bread; but “behold,” says the great head of the Christian church, “I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”[*]Rev 3:20 What an honor was it to these Levites to be received and treated as the guests of the great Jehovah! But it is not once to be compared with the unspeakable felicity and honor of receiving and entertaining the King of glory. And such felicity is the portion of the meanest of the saints: thus shall it be done to the man, however poor or despised among his equals, whom He by whom kings reign delighteth to honor: for “behold the tabernacle of God is with men.”[*]Rev 21:3 The twelve tribes, represented by so many cakes of bread, presented without ceasing before God in the holy place, were without ceasing admonished of their common relation to one another, and their constant security under their heavenly Father’s watchful eye, and the shelter of his expanded wings. “Can a woman forget her sucking-child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.”[*]Isa 49:15 The renewal of the cakes every returning sabbath, different yet the same, removed yet remaining, the old applied to one use, the new to another, may not unfitly represent that bread of life which our heavenly Father’s love has provided for the fare of our Christian sabbaths--the very food which our forefathers lived upon; not another gospel, but that which was from the beginning; but served up for our use, by men possessed of different gifts, “according as God hath distributed to every man the proportion of faith:” and it is the happiness and the praise of every scribe who “is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, to be like unto a. man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.”[*]Mat 13:52

Once more, might not this table of the Lord, perpetually covered, perpetually furnished, be intended as a figure of that table, which the eternal wisdom of the Father” has prepared and provided with “the bread which came down from heaven, to give life to the world?” And from thence, by an easy and natural transition, the eye ascends to our Father’s house above, in which “there are many mansions,” and where “there is bread enough and to spare;” and O how happy is that man who “shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.”

Such was the holy place and its furniture; the uses to which it was applied, and the spiritual objects which it presents to our view. With reverence we draw nigh to the last solemn recess of this venerable structure, called “the ark;” by way of eminence and distinction; sometimes, “the ark of the covenant;” the ark of the “testimony;” the ark of “his strength;” the ark “whose name is called by the name of the God of Israel.” We shall pass by those circumstances which were in common to it, with the other implements of the worldly sanctuary, the holy places made with hands; and point out a few of those which were peculiar to itself. It was a close chest of two cubits and a half long, one and a half broad, and one and a half in height: of the self-same materials with the rest. The covering was denominated the mercy-seat; from the two ends of which arose two figures of cherubims, of beaten or solid gold, with their faces turned, and their wings extended towards each other: looking down together towards the mercyseat and concealing it from the eye. For any one to touch this with so much as a finger, or to presume to look into it, except those who were divinely

appointed for the purpose, was instant and certain death, as the dreadful punishment of Uzzah and of the men of Bethshemesh awfully evinced. Its contents were the two tables of testimony, the golden pot with manna, the memorial of Israel's miraculous supply in the wilderness, and Aaron's rod that budded. Its principal use was to point out a way in the pathless wilderness for Israel to march in. From between the cherubims the divine oracles were delivered, at first to Moses by a voice; for God conversed with him as a man with his friend; and afterwards to the high priest, who consulted by Urim and Thummim, which is supposed to have been a supernatural declaration of the divine will, by means of rays of glory darted from the most holy place, upon the breastplate which was studded with twelve gems. But the nature and manner of this consultation and response, now are, and likely to remain so, a secret to mankind.

Besides marking out the way, and directing the several encampments in the wilderness, we shall meet in the course of this history with a special interposition of it in many noted particular cases. By it the waters of Jordan were divided asunder, and opened a passage for Israel into the promised land. Before it the proud walls of Jericho were leveled with the ground, after having been encompassed by it for seven days: its presence confounded Dagon, and plagued the Philistines. Treated with respect, or approached carelessly and presumptuously, it became a protection and a source of blessing to one family; a terror and a curse to another. The king of Israel reckoned it the glory of his house, and the protection of his kingdom; and had it conveyed with all suitable solemnity to the place prepared for it. And, finally, it completed the splendor and magnificence of the sacred edifice on mount Zion, the joy and wonder of the whole earth. And the divine presence, of which it was the symbol, constitutes the safety, strength, and happiness of every living temple which the Holy Ghost hath reared. Let my heart, O God, be an altar, from whence the sweet incense of gratitude, love, and praise may continually. ascend. "Arise, O Lord, into this thy rest; thou and the ark of thy strength. Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; let me with all thy saints shout for joy. Turn not away the face of thine anointed." The conjectures of the learned on the subject of the cherubim, are various, many of them fanciful, and for the most part unsatisfactory. The most obvious and most generally received opinion is, that they were emblematical representations of the angelic or heavenly host: and the attributes here assigned to them, their attitude, and their employment in the tabernacle service, correspond exactly to the idea given us in other parts of Scripture of those flaming ministers who stand continually before God, execute his pleasure, adore his divine perfections, minister to the heirs of salvation. The ark may be considered as the throne of God. The cherubim encompassed that throne, as the attendants in earthly courts surround the throne and person of their prince. This is the precise idea suggested by the prophet Isaiah, of the nature and office of these blessed spirits, in the sixth chapter of his prophesy. "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims; 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."[*]Isa 6:1-3 Thus, also, Daniel represents the same glorious object; "The Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him."[*]Dan 7:9-10 Micah saw in vision, "the Eternal sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven standing before him, and on the right hand and the left." "The chariots of God," says the

psalmist, “are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the holy place.”[*]Psa 68:17 And in several other passages he addresses the Deity as sitting and dwelling among the cherubim.[*]Psa 80:1;Psa 99:1 The cherubim had their faces turned one toward another. This might be intended to represent the perfect union of sentiment and co-operation which subsists among these sons of light. In other places of Scripture, we hear their voices in concert, raising one song of praise, as in the passage just now quoted from Isaiah, and Revelations, chapter fourth: “They rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.”[*]Rev 4:8 “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honor, and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created,”[*]Rev 4:11 These glorious beings, differing in degree, infinite in number, have nevertheless but one heart, one desire, one will, one aim, to praise and serve Him who is the author of their being, and the source of all their happiness. The cherubim are represented as furnished with wings. This denotes the alacrity, promptitude, and instantaneousness, with which angels obey the divine will. Thus, the angel who appeared to Zacharias at the hour of incense, “I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God;” and hence, elsewhere, in Scripture, the activity of angels is compared to the velocity of the wind, and the rapid, irresistible force of fire. “He rode upon a cherub, and did fly; yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.” “He maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire.” “Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments; hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure.”[*]Psa 103:20-21

Once more; the faces of the cherubim were not only turned one to another, but bended together toward the mercy-seat, and their looks were attentively fixed upon the ark. This expresses the holy admiration, with which angels are filled, of those mysteries of redemption which the ark prefigured. To this remarkable circumstance the apostle Peter alludes in his first epistle, when speaking, of salvation through “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow,” he adds, “which things the angels desire to look into.” The words literally translated import, “which things, angels stoop down to contemplate.” It conveys a beautiful and striking idea of the gospel dispensation. Angels are exalted to the height of glory and felicity. They behold God face to face, and drink of the river of pleasure at its very source. They see his untreated splendor shining before their eyes. They see his goodness in the blessings which they enjoy. They see his justice in the punishment of angels “which left their first estate.” They see his wisdom in the government of this vast universe. In a word, everything that is capable of filling the enlarged comprehension, of satisfying the inquiring spirit, is set before these pure and exalted intelligences. Nevertheless, amidst so many objects of wonder and delight, in the midst of all this felicity and glory, angels desire to be more and more acquainted with “the things which belong to our peace.” They discover a God rich in mercy to men upon earth, as wonderful, as incomprehensible as a God abundant in loving kindness to angels in heaven: and forgetting, if it be lawful to say so, the luster and happiness of the church triumphant, descend and mingle with the church militant, and find fuel to divine love, find materials for pleasing, advancing, endless investigation, in the work of redemption of Jesus Christ. “These things the angels,” from the heights of heaven, “bend down” with humble earnestness, with holy desire “to look into.”

I conclude with quoting a passage of the Rabbi Maimonides[*]More Nevoch, part III. ch. xlv. on the subject. “God commanded Moses,” says he, “to make two cherubim, in order to impress upon the

human mind the doctrine of the existence of angels. Had there been but one cherub placed over the mercy-seat, the Israelites might have fallen into a grievous error, they might have imagined, with idolatrous nations, that it was the image of God himself, which they were required to worship under that form. Or they might have been led to believe, on the other hand, that there was but one angel. But the command given to make two cherubim, joined to this declaration, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Jehovah, settles both articles beyond the power of disputation. It proves that there is an angelic order, and that it consists of more than one: it prevents our confounding the idea of God with that of angels; seeing there is but one God who created the cherubim, and created more than one." In this sacred repository were laid up, for perpetual preservation, the awful monuments of the Sinai covenant, of the church established in the wilderness; the memorials of mercies past, the pledges of good things to come--"the tables of the covenant," the incorruptible manna, and Aaron's rod that budded: signifying to all future generations, the permanency and immutability of the divine law, the unremitting care and attention of the divine providence, the dignity, and stability of the Levitical priesthood. But the whole economy, and every instrument of it, in process of time passed away. All was at length carried to Babylon. But the dissolution of the empire which dared to violate their sacredness, was involved in their violation and dissolution. Read the history of it, Daniel 5.[*]Dan 5:1-6 "Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. Belshazzar whiles he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels, which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, that the king and his princes, his wives and his concubines might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God, which was at Jerusalem; and the king and his princes, his wives and his concubines drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone. In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another." Read the writing, with the interpretation of it. "This is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing; MENE, God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL, thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES, thy kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."[*]Dan 5:25-28 Read the issue. "In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom."[*]Dan 5:30-31

Such was the wonderful structure erected to the honor of God, and by his special direction, in the wilderness of Sinai. It was begun and perfected within the compass of little more than six months. Everything was executed according to the pattern showed to Moses in the mount. At length it was set up in all its splendor, with a mixture of holy joy and godly fear: and the divine Inhabitant took solemn possession in the eyes of all Israel. "A cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle."

"Now of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum: we have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man. Who hath obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which

decayeth and waxeth old, is ready to vanish away."[*]Heb 8:1-2;Heb 8:6;Heb 8:13

067. Aaron--Moses' Brother

Aaron--Moses’ Brother

Num 20:23-29. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying, Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazer his son, and bring them up unto mount Hor: and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazer his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there. And Moses did as the Lord commanded: and they went up into mount Hor, in sight of all the congregation. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazer his son: and Aaron died there in the top of the mount. And Moses and Eleazer came down from the mount. And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel. The lives of most men, from the womb to the grave, pass away unobserved, unregarded, unknown. When their course is finished the whole history of it shrinks into two little articles; on such a day they were born, and after so many days, they died. Of those who emerge out of the general obscurity, some begin their public career at an advanced period of life, and of course it consists of a few shining, interesting, important events, and is confined within the compass of a very few fleeting years. While the progress of a little selected band, whom an indulgent Providence has vouchsafed signally to nobilitate, and whom the historic pencil is fond to delineate, is distinguished from the cradle to the tomb, by an uninterrupted series of splendid incidents, exemplary virtues, and brilliant actions. The characters of men are mixed like their fortunes. The most perfect instruction, for the generality of mankind, which history furnishes, is perhaps supplied from the exhibition of mixed, that is, of imperfect characters. Unvarying scenes of fraud, violence, and blood; the representation of undeviating, unrelenting, unblushing profligacy, must, of necessity, create disgust, or diminish the horror of vice. The real annals of mankind present no model of pure and perfect virtue, but one: and from its singularity, it cannot, in all respects, serve as a pattern for imitation. We contemplate it at an awful distance; we feel ourselves every moment condemned by it: we turn from the divine excellency, which covers our faces with shame, and casts us down to the ground, toward the mercy which has sealed our pardon, and the grace which raises us up again. The fanciful representations of perfect virtue, which are supplied from the stores of fiction, can but amuse at most; edify they cannot. They want truth, they want nature, they come not home to the bosoms of ordinary men. I might more easily ape the state of a king, than imitate the affectedly sublime virtue of the heroes of romance. Many of the persons whose profession it is to retail those ideal virtues, are notoriously among the most abandoned and profligate of our race. Those examples, therefore, are to be considered as the most useful, as I flatter myself they are more frequent, which exhibit a mixture in which goodness predominates, and finally prevails; in which virtue is seen wading through difficulties, struggling with temptation, recovering from error, gathering strength from weakness, learning wisdom from experience, sustaining itself by dependence upon God; seeking refuge from its own frailty and imperfection in divine compassion, and crowned, at length, with victory over all opposition, and the

smiles of approving Heaven. Of this sort, is the history and character which the pen of inspiration, which the pencil of a brother has drawn for the instruction of this evening.

Aaron, the first high priest of the Hebrew nation, and the only brother of Moses, their celebrated legislator, was born in the year of the world two thousand three hundred and seventy; before Christ one thousand six hundred and thirty-four; and before the birth of his brother three years. It is probable he came into the world before the edict of the king of Egypt was published, which commanded all the Israelitish male children to be put to death. For that edict seems to have been directed by a special interposition of Providence, precisely to mark, and eminently to signalize, the first appearance of the great prophet of the Jews. Exposed to no special danger of infancy, the subject of no interesting memoir in early life, distinguished by no memorable talents or exploits in manhood, we see him far declined into the vale of years before we see him at all; and, for all our knowledge of him, earlier or later, we are indebted to the labors of his younger brother. Another, among a cloud of witnesses, to prove that the birthright of nature, and the destination of Providence, are intended to confer distinctions of a very different kind. Moses has shone forty years in the court of Pharaoh, has formed an alliance by marriage with a foreign prince, and cultivated the virtues, and prosecuted the employments of private life for forty years more, before his elder brother is heard of. And when he is at length brought upon the scene, at the advanced age of eighty-three, it is to occupy an inferior department to his brother, and the elder is yet again designed to serve the younger. His first introduction, however, to our acquaintance, places him in a most interesting, respectable, and honorable point of view. We behold a venerable man, fourscore and upwards, agitated with public cares, and moved with fraternal tenderness and affection, on his way through the wilderness, in quest of his long absent brother. In these our days of speedy conveyance and communication from pole to pole, from the east to west, by land, by water, through the air, we can form but a slender idea of the anxiety of friends, removed but a few leagues' distance from one another, and their consequent ignorance of each other's situation. Proportionally sweet must have been the delight of meeting together, after long separation. Scripture has described this, as it does everything else, in its own inimitable manner. "Aaron thy brother, behold he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart."[*]Exo 4:14 Behold the interview of two brothers, not the result of previous concert, not the effect of human sagacity, not the fortuitous coincidence of blind, blundering, accidental circumstances; but planned and conducted of Heaven, and effected by Him, "who worketh all things after the counsel of his will," and for a great and noble purpose. The occasion of Aaron's first appearance in the sacred drama, is not less memorable. Moses having received the divine commission to proceed to the deliverance of his nation from Egyptian bondage, repeatedly excuses himself from undertaking that honorable employment, particularly on the footing of his deficiency in the arts of eloquence and persuasion. Did this arise from timidity in Moses? was it a false modesty and humility? or did he indeed labor under a defect of this kind? If the last, can we avoid reflecting on the wonderful equality with which nature distributes her gifts? In conception who so sublime, in composition who so elegant, in narration who so simple, in written language who so perspicuous, so forcible, so impressive as Moses? Can it be true, then, what he says of himself, "O, my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue."[*]Exo 4:10 Who is so favored of nature and Providence, as to possess every talent, every blessing? Who so hardly dealt with, as to be left destitute of all? The praise of eloquence certainly belongs to Aaron; for it is bestowed by him, who

is best able to estimate his own gifts. “Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well.”[*]Exo 4:14 But O how different the nature, the importance, the effect, the duration of one talent compared to another! The tongue which overawed Pharaoh, which astonished all Egypt, and charmed the listening ear of Israel, speedily became mute; and of its powerful charm, not a single trace remains behind: while the productions of Moses’ pen exist and shall exist till nature expire, to instruct, delight, and bless mankind. The various instruments which heaven employs are ever suited to their seasons, occasions, and ends. The interview between the brothers takes place according as infinite wisdom had contrived it; and it behoved, on many accounts, to be a pleasant one. Two wise and good men, so nearly related, so fondly attached to each other, after a separation so tedious, to meet again in health, to confer together on matters of such high moment, to enter, under the assured protection of Heaven, upon the noblest and most generous enterprise that can engage great and lofty spirits, the deliverance of their country! What a field for the exercise of private friendship, of natural affection, of public spirit! On Aaron, according to the divine appointment, fell that most grateful of all tasks, to announce to the wretched the period of their misery, “to proclaim liberty to the captives,” the truth and faithfulness of God to the desponding and dejected, and the possession of Canaan to the slaves of Pharaoh.

Eloquence has an enchanting power, even over those who have no interest in the subject of it. How potent, then, the enchantment of the heaven-taught eloquence of Aaron the Levite! What grace must have been poured into his lips, when delivering the message of love from the great “I AM,” the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to their hapless offspring, assuring them, that the time to favor them was now come, that his covenant was sure! With what ravished ears must the elders of Israel have listened to such tidings, flowing from such lips! Happy Aaron, thus accomplished, thus commissioned, thus prospered! Happy people, thus remembered, thus addressed, thus persuaded! But wherefore envy his honor or their happiness? A greater than Aaron is with us; even He who says of himself, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound:”[*]Isa 61:1 We announce to you, that Jesus “in whom all fulness was pleased to dwell,” whom admiring multitudes worshipped, saying, “never man spake like this man!” whose all-commanding voice checked the boisterous elements, put demons to flight, and pierced the ear of death.

Christians, we come not to you with the eloquence of an Aaron; but we bear a message infinitely more important than his. Our “speech and preaching is not with enticing words of man’s wisdom:”[*]1Co 2:4 O that it might be “in demonstration of the spirit, and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”[*]1Co 2:4-5 He proclaimed freedom from fetters of iron, and the oppression of an earthly tyrant: we proclaim liberty from the bondage of -sin; from everlasting chains under darkness; from the cruel tyranny of the devil; from the dreadful curse of God’s violated law, which arms Satan with his tremendous power, digs the vast recesses of the unfathomable abyss, and feeds the inextinguishable flame of the fiery lake. He published a covenant of a temporary effect, which conveyed temporal advantages, which was clogged with hard and hazardous conditions, which has passed away. We publish a covenant, “ordered in all things and sure,” whose stability depends not on our fidelity, which possesses a commanding influence on eternity, which proposes everlasting benefits, which makes provision for

human frailty, which outruns our utmost wishes, composes our justest apprehensions, transcends our highest hopes. The message of Aaron issued in the prospect yet distant, of a land flowing with milk and honey, of a pure air, and a fruitful soil; but infested with enemies, influenced by, and exposed to, inclement seasons, and liable to forfeiture. But our preaching, men and brethren, looks beyond time, and the flaming boundaries of this great universe: it holds out the distant, but not uncertain, prospect of a celestial paradise, stored with every delight that is suited to the nature of a rational and immortal being: which is exposed to no hostile incursion, to no elementary strife; and whose eternal possession is insured by the almighty power of God, and the purchase of a Savior's blood.

Aaron preached, alas! to men who could not enter in because of unbelief, and the tongue itself which announced Canaan to others, was silenced before Jordan divided. Avert, merciful Father, avert the dreadful omen. Let not the preacher, let none of the hearers of this night, be missing in the day when thou bringest home thy redeemed ones to thy heavenly rest. The events of Aaron's life are so blended with, and dependent upon those of his brother, that they cannot be separated. Many of them have accordingly been already adverted to, and shall not therefore now be repeated, our intention being to select those passages of his history, which are more personal and peculiar; which more clearly mark a distinct character; and which represent him invested with an office which was to be hereditary in his family, and typical of the unchangeable priesthood of the Son of God. In the conclusion of the sixth chapter, Moses interrupts the thread of his narration, to deliver the genealogy of the family of Levi; a matter of no little moment in the settlement of that political and religious economy, which God was about to erect for the better government of his people Israel. From this it appears, that Aaron and himself were in the fourth generation, in a direct line, from Levi, Jacob's third son; being the sons of Amram, the eldest son of Kohath, the second son of Levi. Hence, they are in the fifth generation from Jacob, in the sixth from Isaac, and the seventh from Abraham. It farther appears, from this genealogical deduction, that Aaron had connected himself with the tribe of Judah, by marrying Elisheba, the daughter of Aminadab, and sister to Naashon, who became soon after the head of the prerogative tribe, the progenitor of its long succession of princes, and the root, according to the flesh, of the promised Messiah. By her he had four sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazer, and Ithamar. On all which I have only to observe, that as the miseries of Egyptian bondage deterred not Aaron from entering into that state which Providence has established for improving the happiness and mitigating the sorrows of human life, so the God in whom he trusted, rendered this virtuous union productive of a race of high priests to minister unto the Lord, and to support the honors of their father's name and office, to the latest ages of the Jewish commonwealth. With what care has Providence watched over, and preserved entire, the royal and sacerdotal line, till the great purposes of Heaven were accomplished, till the descent of the promised seed was ascertained! From that period genealogy was, as it were, broken into ten thousand fragments, the connection and succession of families were blotted out, as a thing of nought, and a new family was established on different principles, in endless succession, all claiming and holding of this "first-born among many brethren." As Aaron is represented in the possession of the most pleasing powers of speech, to soothe the woes of Israel, so we see him armed with a tongue, sharp as a two-edged sword, to smite and to break the pride of Pharaoh and of Egypt; and bearing a potent rod, endued with power to deliver or to destroy. And in this the world is taught to respect, to revere the weakest, meanest, most contemptible weapon, which the hand of Jehovah vouchsafes to use. Its virtue lies not in itself, but

in the arm that wields it. Through the whole of the astonishing transactions which follow, we find an exact order and method observed. Aaron uses not the rod at his own discretion, neither does God ‘communicate his pleasure immediately to him; but the Lord gives the word to Moses, who delivers it to Aaron, who follows the instructions given him. And thus, by an example of the highest authority, we are instructed, in obedience to an injunction given long after under another dispensation, “that all things be done decently and in order.” The next memorable event of Aaron’s life, after assisting in the plagues of Egypt and the consequent deliverance of Israel, is his contributing to the defeat of Amalek, by aiding Hur in supporting the weary hands of Moses his brother upon the mount. To the observations already made on this part of the history, I have only to repeat and to urge upon your minds the reflection of the Psalmist, “Behold how good a thing it is,” in every point of view, “and how pleasant, for brethren to dwell together in unity!”[*]Psa 133:1 By concord the weakest powers grow and stand through disunion the strongest are dissolved and fall.

Aaron and his two eldest sons, with seventy of the elders of Israel, by divine appointment, accompanied Moses to the lower region of mount Sinai, when he went up to meet God, in order to receive the civil and religious constitution of the state: and with them, as the federal heads and representatives of the nation, the political union and covenant were ratified and confirmed. And this brings us forward to the eventful period of Aaron’s history, his solemn destination to the office of priesthood, his preparation for it, and his investiture in it. The appointment was of Heaven; for “no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron:”[*]Heb 5:4 and even a king, in later times, who presumed to thrust himself into the priest’s office, paid the price of his rashness, by a leprosy which cleaved to him till the day of his death.[*]2Ch 26:16-21 “Take thou,” says the great Source of all honor and authority, “take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office, even Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazer and Ithamar, Aaron’s sons.”[*]Exo 28:1 It has been objected to Moses, as a proof of a selfish and worldly spirit, that he employed his authority, to perpetuate a station of the first dignity and emolument, in his own tribe and family, by the appointment of Aaron to the priesthood, and by the entail of it upon his posterity for ever. But surely the objectors must have studied the case very superficially. The priesthood, though of high dignity, possessed very slender emoluments, and still less authority. It subjected the possessor of it to much painful attendance, to much laborious and much unpleasant service, considered as a mere secular employment. It was a post, if of distinguished honor, so of high responsibility. But supposing it were as lucrative and honorable as it is alleged, why did not Moses assume it to himself? Why did he pass by his own sons? Why not secure the reversion, at least, for his own children and their heirs! When a man has immediate descendants of his own body, he is seldom solicitous about the aggrandizement of more distant relations, especially to the prejudice of his own children. The conduct of Moses, therefore, in the disposal of this high office, on the supposition that he had a choice in the matter, is the reverse of selfish; it is generous and disinterested to the last degree. The dignity of magistracy is, in his own life-time communicated with Joshua; and, at his death, is wholly transferred to him. The office of high priest is conferred upon Aaron, and made perpetual to his branch of the family; while the sons and descendants of Moses sink into the rank of private citizens, without the stipulation of so much as a foot of land, extraordinary, in Canaan, in consideration of their father’s eminent services. Does this look like avarice and ambition? But the truth is, Moses had no choice at all in the case, and presumed to

exercise none. God had declared his will, and that was sufficient to him, and will be so to every good man.

If we attend to some lines in the character, and some steps in the conduct of Aaron, we shall find more just reason of surprise at his appointment to this sacred office. We behold him, at the very era of his appointment, an abettor of idolatry, and even after his installment in it, we find him meanly and wickedly envying the distinction which was put upon his meek and gentle brother, and, with his sister Miriam, heading a revolt from his just authority. But, alas! were perfect men only to minister before God, the altar must soon be deserted. Were not sinful men to be addressed by sinful men, the world must speedily be destitute of preachers. “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”[*]2Co 4:7 The design of Providence, from the beginning, seems to have been, to convince the world, that in every hand his work must prosper; that if he interpose, all instruments, the most inadequate, must prove powerful, and shall succeed. A few remarks on the particulars of Aaron’s sacred dress, the services in which he was employed, his solemn consecration to the performance of them, and the subsequent events of his life up to the age of one hundred and twenty-two, together with a cursory view of his typical importance, as the figure of the great High Priest of our profession, shall, with divine permission, furnish the subject of the next Lecture.--We conclude the present with earnestly exhorting you, To be instructed by the history of Aaron to begin to live betimes: if not to public observation, utility, and importance, at least to the purposes of piety, and to the duties and virtues of the private man and of the citizen. He lived long in obscurity, before he arose into distinction, and was nurtured in the school of affliction, for station and eminence. And it is generally found that those persons fill high and difficult situations most respectably, who arrive at them through painful study, many obstacles, and much opposition. It was late, very late in life with him, better he began to appear on the great theater: let none be thereby deluded into the vain, deceitful hope of living long. The instances of a longevity so vigorous, and so extended, and so distinguished, are too rare to encourage any one to trifle with the season of improvement, to neglect the present hour, to presume on a distant uncertain futurity. Old age, should you be one of the few who attain it, never can be supported with dignity, nor enjoyed in comfort, if youth be wasted in dissipation, or permitted to rust in ignorance. In order to possess the vivacity and soundness of youth, under the pressure of years, a portion of the reflection, steadiness, and composure of age, must be called in, to temper and direct the pursuits and enjoyments of early life.

If is natural to be dazzled with the display of shining talents, and to envy the possessor of them. But these also, are the portion of only a favored few. The eloquence of an Aaron is, perhaps, more rarely to be found, than a man of a hundred and twenty-two years old. Covet, then, and cultivate the virtues which are attainable by all, and are in themselves infinitely more valuable than the gifts which are bestowed more sparingly, which do not always prove a blessing to their owner, and are not always accompanied with true goodness, which alone is in the sight of God of great price. Has an indulgent Providence, however, distinguished you by those rarer accomplishments, which lead to fame, to honor, to usefulness? See that you bury them not, pervert them not, abuse them not. Ability, unsupported by worth, by moral excellence, only renders a man more odious and contemptible, as well as more dangerous, more mischievous; and criminal. He is responsible both to God and man, for the use or abuse of his superior powers; and to be conspicuously criminal and wretched, is a dreadful aggravation of quilt and misery. “Covet earnestly the best gifts:” and yet it

were easy to show unto you “a more excellent way.” If you know it, happy are you if you pursue it.

068. Aaron--High Priest

Aaron--High Priest

Num 20:23-29. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying, Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazer his son, and bring them up unto mount Hor: and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazer his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there. And Moses did as the Lord commanded: and they went up into mount Hor, in the sight of all the congregation. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazer his son: and Aaron died there in the top of the mount. And Moses and Eleazer came down from the mount. And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel.

What subject so interesting to man as his intercourse with God, his Creator, Preserver, and Judge? And yet on no subject have men fallen into wilder and more dangerous mistakes. A mad and bold enthusiasm has at one time elevated rash and presumptuous spirits to the level of Deity; and the grossest terms of human familiarity have been employed, in addressing that infinitely holy and glorious Being, in whose presence angels veil their faces. A timid and groveling superstition, on the contrary, has barred to others all access to God; and an affected, over-refined devotion has subverted the interests of true piety. The love of this world has encroached upon, and extinguished the spirit of religion; and a misguided, ill-informed religion has. attempted to detach some teen from the duties and employments of life.

Men, ever in extremes, have either banished God entirely from their thoughts, or affected a higher degree of reverence for his service, by an avowed neglect of some of the more obvious and more important dictates of his will. Could they but be persuaded to take the holy Scriptures for the rule of their conduct in all things, many of these practical errors might be prevented. They would thence be instructed to draw nigh to a holy and righteous God with reverence and confidence, as children to a father; and to rejoice before a merciful and compassionate Savior with fear and trembling. While the eye of a guilty conscience beheld “cherubims and a flaming sword turning every way, to keep the way of the tree of life,” the eye of faith would discern “a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.”[*]Heb 10:20 The whole of divine revelation, and indeed it is the chief end of revelation, represents the great Jehovah as accessible to the guilty and the miserable; but accessible only in a method, and by means of his own appointment. To the vilest, meanest, most wretched of mankind there is hope towards God, through Christ Jesus the Lord; but to the purest and most perfect of our fallen race, “there is not salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.”[*]Acts 4:12 All the stores of divine grace are laid open, all the energy of divine eloquence is employed, to assure and encourage the humble. “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,"[*]Exo 34:6-7 while one denunciation of justice serves to check and repel the impenitent and the proud, "but who will by no means clear the guilty." The institution of the priesthood under the law, was an explicit and a standing declaration to the same purpose. It consisted of a succession of men, and of a service, ordained of God to be a perpetual memorial to mankind of their apostasy and guilt, and of the means of pardon and reconciliation: of their being by nature and wicked works afar off, but made nigh by the blood of atonement.

Aaron, the first who was called to execute this high office, had already attained his eighty-fourth year, and of course had become venerable in the eyes of men by reason of age. He possessed an insinuating and commanding address; he had acquired a high degree of estimation, from the honorable share that belonged to him, in effecting the deliverance from Egypt: and he was only brother to the illustrious and renowned legislator of Israel. But his noblest and most honorable distinction was his appointment and call from Heaven, to the discharge of the duties of this exalted station. The pen of inspiration, however, always faithful and true, represents him as a man liable to many infirmities. At the waters of Strife he was betrayed into anger, self-conceit, and presumption; in the matter of the golden calf, we find him chargeable with timidity and sinful compliance: he stands convicted of unkindness and ingratitude to the best and most affectionate of brothers; of the most daring irreverence and impiety towards God, and of dissimulation bordering on falsehood. And even after his consecration to the priesthood, with shame and sorrow we behold him wickedly giving in to the mean and contemptible passions of envy and jealousy; and, to heighten this base offence, the unoffending, unprovoking object of these passions, was his own nearest relation, and the man to whom he was indebted for all that eminence to which he was himself raised, and which he transmitted to his family. But with all these imperfections on his head, and many others, doubtless, of which it was not the business of this record to convey the memory to us, he was the man whom God was pleased to choose, to minister in the first rank at his altar, and to typify the High Priest who became us, "who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." As in everything that related to the construction of the tabernacle and its sacred furniture, Moses was confined to a pattern shown, and to directions given him in the mount, so also in all things that related to the dress, the services, and the attendance of the high priest and his assistants. And you will please to observe that Moses himself, having been called and consecrated in an extraordinary manner, was constituted the temporary high priest, to officiate in the consecration of Aaron and his sons. They saw, therefore, the person of a mediator interposing between themselves and God. They saw an extraordinary priesthood, conjoined to legislative authority, residing in their brother, the man whom God chose, and from whom their honor immediately flowed; they saw an image of the station they were henceforth to occupy, and the purposes which they were to fulfill towards the whole nation. Moses was between God and them, they were to be between God and the people. He offered sacrifice to make atonement for them, they were to offer sacrifice to make reconciliation for the sins of all Israel. And in this we see a priesthood more ancient and more honorable than that of Aaron, from which it derives its existence, dignity, and use, and in which it is now absorbed. As nothing is unimportant on this subject, nothing but what has a significance, though that significance we are unable in every instance to discover, we find the sacred historian entering into a minute detail and description of the sacerdotal robes, in which, however, it is not our purpose to follow him, as we would rather suggest ideas than repeat words, aim at instruction rather than indulge in speculation, and without pretending to explain everything, would aim at the praise of inculcating useful truth. The vestments

for the priests are distinguished by the term holy: “Thou shalt make the holy garments for Aaron.”--“Thou shalt put upon Aaron the holy garments, and anoint him, and sanctify him; that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office.”[*]Exo 40:13 Now this epithet must undoubtedly refer to the nature of that pure and perfect Being in whose worship they were employed; to the sacredness of the character which was invested with them; and to the spotless purity of Him, whose person was hereby prefigured, and whose sanctity, independent of garments of such a texture and quality, consisted in a total freedom from moral pollution, “who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.” The vestments of the Israelitish high priest, however splendid, could not but cover much weakness and imperfection. Like the dispensation which enjoined them, they had only “a shadow of good things to come, and could never make the comers thereunto perfect.” But even in a moral and religious view, surely they were not without their use. They were a constant and affectionate admonition from God to the persons who wore them; saying, “Be ye holy for I am holy.” They were a constant and pathetic admonition to the people; saying, “I will be sanctified in all them that draw nigh unto me.” They are an everlasting admonition to the Christian world, who are all kings and priests unto God, that they are called and engaged “to holiness in all manner of conversation.” If times, and places, and dress, serve as guards to virtue, if they preserve decency, and prevent vice, do they not answer a valuable and important purpose to mankind? In perfect conformity to this idea, the loftiest and most conspicuous article of the high priest’s dress, was a plate of pure gold, affixed with a blue lace to the forefront of the mitre, having engraved upon it this remarkable inscription, in order to be seen and read of all men: “Holiness to the Lord.” Thereby the wearer became “as a city that is set on a hill, which cannot be hid:”[*]Mat 5:14 and this bright memorial incessantly, though silently, proclaimed to the eye, to the heart, to the conscience, “a holy God, a holy service, a holy minister, a holy people, a holy covenant.”

We accordingly observe the strictest attention to external decorum run through the whole of this divine institution. The eye being one of the great avenues to the soul, guilt being the parent of shame, and the dispensations of the divine wisdom and mercy being adapted to the condition and character of men, as they are, depraved and degraded by sin, not as man was, pure and perfect from the hand of his Creator, the heart and conscience must be addressed through the senses. The next most observable and significant part of Aaron’s dress, was the splendid breastplate, consisting of twelve several precious stones set in gold, inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes in their order: placed externally upon the seat of the heart, to keep for ever alive, a tender concern about the whole Israel of God, to remind Aaron and his sons for ever, that they were elevated to this high station, not for their own sakes merely, but to be a public benefit. It aimed at producing a most important effect on three different sorts of persons, and was well calculated for this purpose. It presented unto God, according to his own ordinance, a memorial of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their seed after them. It taught the high priest to consider the case of the people as his own, to regard them with impartial, undivided affection, to be watchfully attentive to their temporal, but especially to their spiritual concerns, to wrestle and make supplication in their behalf. It inspired the people with affection and gratitude to the man, whose whole life and labors were devoted to their service, who watched for their souls, who had renounced an earthly portion among his brethren, and all the gainful walks of life, to be subservient to their best interests. It formed a most endearing bond of union between them who were administered unto, and them who ministered. It formed a most endearing bond of union among the tribes themselves. Twelve gems of various complexions, set in two different frames, composed

nevertheless but one breastplate; so twelve tribes constituted but one congregation, one church, one Israel. The loss of any one mast have marred and destroyed the whole; tended to diminish its luster, to impair its strength. It taught them to love as brethren the children of one father, the worshippers of one God. It inspired confidence in the care and protection of that God. They saw their representative bearing upon his heart, into the holy place, their names and their condition. They had the consolation of reflecting that their memorial would ascend to heaven, with the sweet perfume of that incense which he daily burned upon the golden altar. And the whole looked forward to the day, to the office, to the person, to the work of Him, of whom, and of whose body, the church, Isaiah thus speaks in prophetic vision: “But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me:”[*]Isa 49:14-16 and who thus speaks of himself, “Those that thou gavest me I have kept. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those Whom thou hast given me, that they 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. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world;”[*]John 17:11-12;John 17:21-24 and of whole the apostle thus speaks, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is Cod that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”[*]Rom 8:33-34 Hence Christians are united in still dearer bonds, animated with superior confidence, secured by a firmer and more durable covenant. Hence Christian ministers are encouraged with greater boldness, with more ardent importunity, with more assured hope of success, to draw nigh to the throne of grace, as for themselves, so for sinful and wretched creatures of every description.

Under the gospel dispensation, every hour is the hour of incense, every believer a minister of the sanctuary, every individual, a name engraven upon the heart of the great “Apostle and High Priest of our profession,” and recorded in “the Lamb’s book of life, among the living in Jerusalem.” The other particulars of Aaron’s official dress, we shall not now stop to commemorate; partly because we have not a distinct idea of them, and partly because, through such a thick cloud as time, change of manners, and the general disuse of the sacred language have interposed, it is difficult, if not impossible; to discover their meaning and import, with reference to the evangelical dispensation; in which great part of the beauty, excellency, and usefulness of the Mosaic economy consists. The ceremonies of Aaron’s inauguration, were in a high degree solemn and august. They were performed by Moses himself, in the most public manner. Aaron and his sons were conducted to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, in the presence of a public assembly called for the purpose; were stripped of their usual garments, and washed with water. He was then arrayed in the several parts of the sacerdotal habit, in their order. The holy vessels of the sanctuary, and all its sacred utensils, were then, one after another, anointed with the holy oil of consecration; and, last of all, Aaron himself, the living instrument of divine worship, was set apart to his momentous charge, by a copious sprinkling of the same sacred perfume. That the savor of this odorous compound must have been extremely grateful to the sense, is evident from the lofty terms in which

David speaks of it, and the subject which he illustrates by it--“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard that went down to the skirts of his garments.”[*]Psa 133:1-2 The sons were then invested with their proper habits, and a threefold sacrifice was performed: a bullock for a sin-offering; a ram for a burnt-offering; and a second, denominated the ram of consecration. Without going into a minute detail, or pretending to explain the specific difference, use, and end of each, we observe in general, that, by the ceremony of the imposition of Aaron’s hands and those of his sons upon the head of the victim, a solemn wish was expressed, that their guilt might be transferred and imputed to the victim, and its blood accepted as a ransom for their forfeited lives. Here, then, was the innocent suffering for the guilty; the substitute, not the criminal himself; bleeding and dying: so that the very form of their consecration taught the necessity of atonement, and pointed to Him whom “it pleased the Lord to bruise, and to put him to grief; and who was wounded for our transgressions, was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”[*]Isa 53:5

The, first of the three sacrifices, or the sin-offering, seems to have been intended as a public and explicit acknowledgment of guilt, and the expiation of it. The second, that is, the burnt-offering, was the token of the divine favor towards them, and of his gracious acceptance of their persons and services: and the third, the ram of consecration, part of which was eaten by the priests in the holy place was the ratification of God’s covenant of peace with them, and the emblem of perfect reconciliation and friendship; sitting at one common table being the most express declaration of union and good will among men. God was pleased to exhibit a most unequivocal proof of his being well pleased with the whole transaction; for when everything was arranged according to the form prescribed in the mount, fire from the Lord seized and consumed the burnt-offering on the altar. The sin-offering Moses burnt with material fire, without the camp: but the sacred flame from heaven laid hold of the sacrifice of pardon and acceptance. In vain do we look for the marks of grace and favor from above; insensible roust we be to the genial, penetrating flame of love, unless our repentings be kindled together. When we have been enabled to do our duty, then may we warrantably expect that God will appear for us.

It does not appear whether this striking interposition had been previously announced to the assembly, or whether it took them by surprise. In either case, it must have made a deep impression on the mind of every beholder. Were they taught to expect it? With what anxiety may we suppose every eye bent on the altar and the sacrifice, waiting the eventful moment which was to evince that God was among them of a truth; but in a way which should inspire reverence as well as joy. Did it overtake them unawares? What sudden consternation, what alarming apprehensions! The expression was perfectly natural in either case; “which, when all the people saw, they shouted and fell on their faces.”[*]Lev 9:24

Thus was the first high priest of the Hebrew nation inducted into his office. Thus explicitly were laid down the principles, form, design, and use of the most ancient, civil, and religious polity in the world. While the first beginnings of religion and government, in every other nation under heaven, he buried in darkness, confusion, and contradiction: aided by light from heaven we can trace up to its very source, the origin of a nation the most singular in the annals of mankind; raised out of an ancient pair, and “them as good as dead;” repeatedly threatened with utter extinction, during the first ages of their existence; but miraculously preserved in the very jaws of destruction: formed for

conquest, eminence, and empire, in a desert; raised, after many struggles and revolutions, to a pitch of affluence and grandeur, unparalleled in history, and declining again as fast into contempt and obscurity: but, even in contempt and obscurity, supported, preserved, fenced on every side--In captivity, undissolved; in the wreck of empire maintained, upheld, rescued, restored! At length, we behold them involved in one mighty ruin, driven from their capital and their country: their temple, the great bond of union, razed from the foundation: and themselves henceforward scattered among the nations, during a period of near two thousand years. And yet, by a strange and unaccountable interference of Providence, though hated, despised, and persecuted of all men, and evidently under the displeasure of heaven, we behold them preserved from total annihilation and oblivion; kept distinct from all men; as much a separate people, as in the zenith of their glory, under the reign of David and Solomon; the subjects, perhaps, of a revolution greater and more important than any they have already undergone: reserved, it may be, to be the last grand trophy of the Redeemer's triumph, the concluding evidence of the truth of Christianity, the final monument of the riches of free, sovereign grace! And need we ask, who conducted all these movements, whose pleasure was fulfilled by all these events, whose glory shines in all these successive changes, in all these opening prospects? A voice from heaven replies, "I the Lord, wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working; wise in heart, and mighty in strength. I see the end from the beginning: my counsel shall stand." When this great mystery shall be finished, the mighty chain extended, the connection and dependence of link upon link discerned, hell shall be confounded, the inhabitants of the world astonished, angels rejoice, and the praise of God ascend from every tongue. The solemn service being over, we may suppose Aaron and his family retiring with the complacency of good minds, rejoicing in the honor put upon them, in the eyes of all Israel; in the prospect of a dignity higher than the pomp of kings, which was about to descend to their latest posterity: and, above all, in that open declaration of the divine approbation, the celestial fire that consumed the fat of their sacrifice. But, alas! what condition of humanity admits of certain, unmixed, or lasting felicity? That useful, necessary, awful element, which signally interposed to declare the choice of heaven, speedily interposes to punish and to afflict that chosen family, and to serve as a warning for ever, that "God will be sanctified in all them that draw nigh to him." The remaining incidents of the high priest's life, which we have on record, are but few in number, but they are instructive, and interesting, as we hope to make appear, if God shall be pleased to indulge us with another opportunity of this kind. In reviewing the subject, we observe what it is that constitutes the. perfect character of a priest of the most high God; Holiness to the Lord on the forehead; uppermost, overlooking all, directing all; and Israel resting upon the heart. The ministers of religion are, by their office and station, perpetually admonished to shun every appearance of what is mean, selfish, or ungenerous. They are appointed of God to aid, instruct, and comfort their fellow creatures; to promote their best interests; to cherish in them the best and noblest principles of their nature; and they are urged to perform this, by the highest considerations which the human mind can feel. Whatever be the dispensation, the spirit of the office and the nature of the service are the same. They stand as mediators between God and men. They bear on their hearts the names, the infirmities, the wants, the distresses, the sorrows, the joys of the people; and carry them with sympathy and affection to the throne of grace: and they return from thence bringing on their lips the "answer of peace." They lose themselves in labors of love; they sink every unworthy aim, every low pursuit, in seeking the glory of God, and the prosperity of the Israel of God. The minister who understands, feels, and performs his duty is one of the most exalted of beings.

Aaron and his sons were consecrated to the service of God, and of the congregation, by the sprinkling of blood applied to the ear, the hand, the foot. Thus their whole faculties were claimed by their great Author, and were thus devoted to him: and the symbol of atonement became the seal of their dedication. And thus every Christian becomes a priest unto the most high God, redeemed by blood, set apart by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. “Wash me, Lord, and I shall be clean, sprinkle me, and I shall be whiter than snow:” “Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” “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.”[*]Rev 1:5-6

“Every high priest taken from among men, is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity:”[*]Heb 5:1-2 but “if perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there, that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?”[*]Heb 7:11 “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; 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 its. 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?”[*]Heb 9:11-14 The fire once kindled supernaturally by the celestial flame was to be kept alive by human care and attention. Miraculous interpositions of Providence are not to be expected, as an indulgence to carelessness and sloth. He only who diligently exercises the powers which God has given him, who employs the means which Providence has furnished, and which conscience approves, can with confidence look up to Heaven, and rejoice in hope of divine assistance. Would you that the sacred flame of devotion, of charity, should live in your heart, should glow upon your tongue, resort daily to the altar of God, and preserve its activity by “a live coal” from thence. Then your face shall shine, then your lips shall overflow with the law of kindness, then your hand shall open to the sons of want, then you shall “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

Chapter 69

069. Aaron--Death of Nadab and Abihu

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Num 20:23-29. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in mount Her, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying, Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazer his son, and bring them up unto mount Hor: and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazer his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there. And Moses did as the Lord commanded: and they went up into mount Hor, in the sight of all the congregation. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazer his sort: and Aaron died there in the top of the mount. And Moses and Eleazer came down from the mount. And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel. Were it not that life and immortality have been brought to light by the gospel, human life must appear in the eye of sober reason, a trifling scene of vanity and impertinence. Wherefore drops that babe into the grave its soon as he is born? Why was the wretched mother torn with anguish to bring him into the world? Was it only to be torn with more cruel anguish, to behold him prematurely snatched out of it again? Why is that old offender permitted to live, a burden upon the earth, the derision, hatred, and score of mankind? Why does that minion “fret and strut his hour upon the stage,” arrayed in the glitter of royalty? Wherefore strides that barbarian from conquest to conquest, from continent to continent? Why pines modest worth in indigence and obscurity, find wherefore, at length perishes it on a dunghill? Those, and a thousand such questions that might be asked, the doctrine of immortality, and of a judgment to come, resolves in a moment. “We know but in part, we see in a glass darkly.” What the great Lord of nature, providence, and grace doth, we know not now, but we shall know hereafter. The brevity and extension of life, difference of rank, talent, office, and condition, variety of fortune and success, acquire for importance not their own by their influence off character and moral conduct, by the changes which they produce on the soul of a man, by their reaching forward into eternity, and by producing effects which no length of duration can ever alter.

Men die, offices pass from hand to hand, dispensations change, but, the purposes of Heaven are permanent, the plans of Providence are ever going forward, and while one generation of men removes to that world of spirits from whence no traveller returns, another rises up to contemplate the wonders of that which now is, and to carry on the business of it. Hence wise and good men become not only concerned about their own future and eternal happiness, but about the prosperity and happiness of the world, after they have ceased to see and enjoy it. Hence they cheerfully engage in schemes which they cannot live to execute, and justly soothe their souls to peace, in the prospect of a kind of immortality upon earth. Hence among the other motives to excel in goodness, this has a pleasing and a powerful influence, “the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance,” “while the memory of the wicked shall rot.”

It is as difficult to make the proper estimate of death as of life. Death is an undoubted mark of the divine displeasure against sin, and is inflicted as a punishment upon the guilty. But like all the punishments of heaven, it is upon the whole, and in the issue, an unspeakable benefit to good men. The just estimate of death, then, must depend upon what we are, and upon the consequent change which death shall produce in our internal character, or outward condition. It is a light evil to be stripped of priestly robes, the work of man's hands; and to return naked into the earth as we came from it; it is a light thing to feel the earthly house of this tabernacle dissolving, and the head which wore the miter or the crown sinking into the dust; while the promise of Him who is faithful and true, rears for us "a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;"[*]2Co 5:1 while the eye of faith contemplates that "crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall give at that day: and not to one only, but unto all them also that love his appearing,"[*]2Ti 4:8 assured that "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

If ever there was an enviable domestic situation, it was that of Aaron elevated to the priesthood. Think of the honest pride of honorable alliance: and who would not have been proud of such a brother as Moses? Reflect on an office of the highest dignity and respect, procured not by cabal and intrigue, but bestowed by the voluntary appointment of Him who is the source of all honor. A suitable provision likewise made for the support of that dignity, and an external habit annexed to it, that could not fail to attract notice find reverence. The sacred office was entailed upon him and his family forever, and that family built up by four hopeful sons, his coadjutors and successors: and, to crown the whole, these pleasing, flattering circumstances were crowned with an open, unequivocal, indubitable mark of the divine approbation. The fire of heaven caught hold of their burnt-offering, and kindled a flame never to be quenched. But alas, how short lived was this tranquillity! The sons of Aaron are hardly consecrated to their office, when the two eldest profane and disgrace it. Celestial fire has scarcely proclaimed the favor and acceptance of God, when with unhallowed fire, which he commanded not, they defile his altar and his service: and thereby call down a second time fire from above, to avenge a holy and righteous God, as before to display the grace of Him who is good and merciful. The notoriety of the late transactions, the sacredness of their character, and the distinguished regard of Heaven expressed toward them, greatly enhance the atrociousness of their guilt, and justify the severity of their punishment. This tragic event is thus recorded by Moses, whose method it is neither to extenuate, nor to set down aught in malice. "And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord."[*]Lev 10:1-2 The words are few, but they convey a full and distinct idea of the guilt of the parties: though by attending to the context, we shall have reason to conclude their crime was of a very complex nature. And sure it could be no common transgression which drew down a judgment so dreadful. Bishop Patrick is of opinion that Nadab and Abdul had rendered themselves incapable of doing their duty by intemperance: that they indulged in the delicacies of the sacrifice to a criminal excess, till they were incapable of putting a difference between holy and unholy, and between clean and unclean. This conjecture is founded upon the injunction which immediately follows the narration of this dismal story in the ninth and tenth verses. "Do not drink wine nor strong drink, then nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever, throughout your generations; and that ye may put difference between holy

and unholy, and between unclean and clean." If there be truth in this conjecture, it is a melancholy proof, that the best things are most liable to abuse, that the brutal part of our nature is ever ready to run away with the rational: that as God is continually employing himself in bringing good out of evil, so men are for ever perversely employing themselves in bringing evil out of good.

Others have charged upon these two sons of Aaron, the criminality of attempting to enter the most holy place, which was not permitted but to the high priest, and that only at certain stated times. This charge is established in the following manner. In the passage we have quoted, it is said, that it was before the Lord that Nadab and Abihu offered incense with strange fire. Upon comparing this with what is recorded in the sixteenth chapter in the first and second verses, where Moses recapitulates this soul event, we find it added, "The Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place, within the veil before the mercy-seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy-seat." Hence it has been inferred that the two young men, uncalled, unauthorized, presumed to enter that august department of the tabernacle, assuming to themselves privileges that belonged only to the supreme priesthood, which in their father's life time it was unlawful to intermeddle with and which even he himself durst not at all times exercise. But though neither of these suppositions be improbable, we have no occasion to go so far for a discovery of their crime, nor to account for the severity with which it was punished. The sin of Nadab and Abihu consisted simply in this, they burnt incense with strange fire. Now the meaning of this expression we shall be able easily to collect, by comparing together a few passages that have an obvious connection, and serve to illustrate and explain each other. First, in Lev 9:24, it is said that "fire from the Lord," that is, either fire immediately descending from heaven, or issuing out of the cloud that covered the tabernacle, consumed the first victims which Aaron offered for a burnt-offering. Again,--This sacred fire, once miraculously kindled, was by a special ordinance to be kept for ever alive; as we read, Lev 6:12-13. Thus the vigilance, attention, and care of man, was to preserve and continue what Providence had begun. By another ordinance it was enjoined, that the incense to be offered on the day of atonement, should be kindled by it portion of that perpetual fire. This we read in Lev 16:11-13. This then was the fire which the Lord commanded to be used; and of course, every other kind of fire, however produced, and though in all other respects adequate to the purpose, was unlawful, forbidden, or strange. This accordingly constituted the guilt, they took upon them to kindle the incense, which their office obliged them to burn every evening and morning, with a fire different from that which burnt continually on the altar of burnt-offering; every other being strange fire, which the Lord commanded not. Now it was certainly fit and necessary that such a crime should be punished in the most exemplary manner. The sanctity of the whole institution was over at once, if the ministers of it might with impunity, in the very setting out, presume to dispense with its most august, ceremonies. The rank and station of the offenders was a high aggravation of their offence. It was their duty to have set an example of scrupulous regard to the known will of God. They had been admitted to more intimate communion with God than others; had seen more of the terrors of his power, more of the wonders of his grace. Unhappy men! how had they been betrayed into an error so fatal? Ignorance it could not be, the voice of the law was yet sounding in their ears. Dared they to be careless in any thing that related to the service of a holy God? They had seen the exactness of their pious uncle, in terming everything according to the pattern showed him in the mount. Was it indeed a willful and deliberate violation of the law? I fear, I fear it was; and dreadful was the expiation. The unhallowed fire of their own kindling was quickly absorbed in a hotter

flame: “they died before the Lord:[*]Lev 10:2 for there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them.” Neither their sacred character, the sacredness of the place, nor the sacredness of the employment, can protect them from the keen stroke of avenging justice. “Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire.”[*]Heb 12:28-29 Unhappy father! what were now thy feelings; bereaved in one sad day of half thy children, of thy first, thy darling hopes: to behold them thus immaturely cut off, taken away in anger! The bitterness of death is not relieved by one consolatory circumstance. What is the loss of children in infancy, and falling by the stroke of nature, compared to this? To heighten the old man’s affliction, he is expressly forbidden to mourn, or to assist in the last sad offices of humanity towards his deceased sons. Behold him in mute dejection and distress, ministering in the duties of his charge, attentive to the calls of the living, leaving to others the care of burying the dead. How severely must his own offences now have been brought to his remembrance! He had been guilty of a crime of equal or greater magnitude: he had led the worship in idolatry, and presided in the worship of a thing of his own fabrication; but justice suffered him to live, to live to see his own sons dying for a crime similar to his own. Alas, what is prolonged life but lengthened anguish! As the giving of the law was fenced round with fire, and the sanctity of the tabernacle worship guarded by a flaming sword, so the meeker, gentler institution of the gospel, fortified its first beginnings by executing judgment on presumptuous sinners. Severity is the soul of a law, especially when it is notified to those who are obliged to submit to it; indulgence, or the appearance of feebleness, are of the most dangerous consequence, especially in the commencement of a new constitution. One of the heralds of the Savior of mankind began his ministry by a clap of thunder; the first rays he shot from his eyes were mortal, and the sudden death of two false and perfidious disciples was the seal of his apostleship.[*]Acts 5 The second coming of the Lord himself is to be “in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”[*]2Th 1:8

Aaron had now arrived at an advanced period of life, and at the possession of an office and rank in life, which rendered him an object of envy to some, and of veneration to others. He had oftener than once been corrected by his own folly, and be was “the man who had seen affliction by the rod of God’s anger;” but neither the fire of calamity, nor the frost of age; neither the counsels of experience, nor the sanctity of office, have been able to subdue indwelling corruption; for we immediately find him in a plot, with Miriam his sister, to disturb the peace, diminish the respect, and distress the government of their brother Moses. Their pretence was his marriage with an “Ethiopian woman,” an event which had taken place forty years before; an union which had no immorality in it: which transgressed no law, for the law was not then given; and against which God himself had not expressed any displeasure; but had crowned it with the blessing of children, who were justly admitted to rank in Israel. The real cause was their envy of the preeminence, which their, younger brother had obtained over them in all things, civil and sacred. For this, in spite of all their art, breaks out in the malicious whispers which they scatter abroad to blacken their brother’s reputation. “Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath he not spoken also by us?”[*]Num 12:2 If Moses indeed erred by marrying Jethro’s daughter, he had severely smarted for it: for being induced, by an improper compliance with her humor, to neglect the circumcision of his son, he had nearly paid the forfeit of that neglect with his life, by the hand of God himself; and now his good name is bleeding on Zipporah’s account, by the envenomed tongues of his own brother and sister; and “who can stand before envy?” Who can think to escape, if Moses remain not unhurt? This

attack upon his fame and comfort, gives Moses occasion to deliver his own eulogium: and I believe it just, for he gives it with that lovely simplicity, which characterizes all that he relates of himself or of others. “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.”[*]Num 12:3 He either had not heard the scandalous speeches which were propagated to his disadvantage by Aaron and Miriam; or he pitied and neglected them. Who knows what length the mischief might have gone, had it not been heard and avenged by the Protector of injured innocence. “The Lord heard it” Let the slanderer hear this and tremble. The two brothers and their sister are now summoned to present themselves together at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord appears: and a voice from that glory pronounces aloud and at full length, the praise of the man who had spoken so modestly of himself, and who had been so wickedly maligned by his own nearest relations. “And he said, Hear now my words; 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 mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”[*]Num 12:6-8 In many respects Moses was “the figure of him who was to come,” and in both were peculiarly verified the words of Christ, “a man’s foes shall be they of his own house,” and, “a prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house.”[*]Mat 13:57 With God to resent is to avenge; having reproved the transgressors he withdraws in anger, and lo, the punishment is already inflicted. “The cloud departed from off the tabernacle, and behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and behold she was leprous.”[*]Num 12:10 A shocking example of divine displeasure against one of the most odious of crimes. My fair hearers, let me whisper an advice in your ears. I am no commonplace declaimer against your sex; I honor it, and I wish to improve it; you must hear me with the greater attention, and mark what I say. You lie under a general imputation, respecting the vices of the tongue; but general imputations are for the most part ill-founded. I do not mean, however, to insinuate that you are totally innocent, or more so than the other sex: for your affections are eager, and what the heart feels, by the eyes or the tongue you will express; and that expression is sometimes too strong for either piety or prudence. I mean to caution you at present, on a particular fault of the tongue, which affects my own profession, which is far from being foreign to the subject, and on which I deem myself both qualified and entitled to advise you.

Women, among other favorite objects, have their favorite systems of religion, and their favorite preachers; and, following the impulse of an honest affection, they are for establishing their favorite object on the ruins of every competitor. What is the consequence? In the event of difference of opinion, or of attachment, one man is unmercifully, unrelentingly run down, and another is, with equal want of reason, magnified and exalted. Women, young women, good young women, think they are only yielding to the impulse of a pious affection, when they applaud or censure this or the other public character. But what are they doing indeed? Blowing up one poor vain idol of straw into self-consequence and importance; and piercing through, on the other hand, an honest heart with anguish unutterable; perhaps robbing a worthy, happy family of its bread, or, what is more, of its peace and comfort. I am no stranger to what is by some termed religious conversation, and I am seriously concerned about the topics of it. It generally turns upon persons, not things. Now, it ought to be just the reverse. Persons always mislead us, for no one is wholly impartial; but truth is eternal and unchangeable. Apply then the test--Does the conversation dwell upon this man or his

neighbor, his rival or his enemy--check it, away with it; what have the interests of piety to do in the case? Had he never been born, “the foundation of God” would have stood as it does, without his feeble aid. Call no man master in sacred things, but Christ; and take care that you measure neither orthodoxy, sense, nor virtue, by the imperfect, fluctuating standard of your own caprice, affection, or understanding. Were similar punishment instantly to follow the vices of the tongue, as in the case of Miriam, I shudder to think how many a fair face now lovely to the sight, must by tomorrow morning stand in need of a veil; but not for the same reason that the face of Moses did on his descending from the mount, to temper its luster; but to shroud its loathsomeness and deformity. Consider what hath been said, and “set a watch on the door of your lips,” and “keep the heart with all diligence.”

070. Aaron--His Death

Aaron--His Death

Num 20:23-29. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying, Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazer his son, and bring them up unto mount Hor: and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazer his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there. And Moses did as the Lord commanded: and they went up into mount Hor, in the sight of all the congregation. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazer his son: and Aaron died there in the top of the mount. And Moses and Eleazer came down from the mount. And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel. The love of life is one of the most useful and important principles implanted in human nature; and death, the necessary end of all then, is an event mercifully and in wisdom hid from our eyes. Hoping that we may live till tomorrow, we feel ourselves impelled to exert ourselves today, to make some provision for it. Not knowing the time of their death, men are engaged to act as if they were immortal. And though no wise man would “wish to live always,” or can deem it possible, yet the precise period never comes, when we find ourselves so entirely unoccupied with temporal prospects or pursuits, so totally mortified to the world, as to be disposed with cheerfulness to leave it. Hence the business of the world goes on, which would otherwise stand still; and that God, of whose years there can be no end, is carrying on designs of everlasting moment, by frail and short-lived instruments. This man makes a few feeble, dying efforts, and expires. Another comes after him, takes up the instrument which his fellow had laid down, makes his stroke or two, and expires likewise; and yet by means of efforts so weak, so interrupted, and self-destroying, the purposes of Heaven proceed, the building of God rises; every loss is instantly repaired, every defect supplied, and no chasm in the chain of Providence is permitted to take place. Hence men are dignified with the title of fellow-workers with God, and the perishing attempts of perishing creatures are employed in maturing the plans of infinite wisdom, and are honored by the acceptance and approbation of Him who “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” What a motive to diligence, exertion, and perseverance!

“I paint for eternity,” replied the great artist of antiquity, when reprehended for an over curious, painful, and laborious attention to the more nice; and delicate touches of his favorite pieces. What a lesson of encouragement, admonition, and reproof to Christians! They are indeed acting for eternity; not like the painter, pursuing the empty bubble, reputation, but aiming at “the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls.” They are striving continually to bring a new tribute of praise to God, and to promote the everlasting happiness of mankind.

It is truly pitiable to see a poor creature cleaving to life after the relish of it is gone, merely from a fond attachment to the things of time. It is more lamentable still to behold a miserable wretch shrinking from death, through a well-grounded horror of its consequences. But to desire life from a

desire of doing good; to be willing to continue in the flesh, for the greater good of the church and of the world, argues a great, a noble, and disinterested spirit; it excites our love and admiration. That man is indeed immortal, the daily language of whose conduct is, “Let me perform at least one good action more, I know I am to die; let my tongue, then, yet once again speak praise to God and instruction to man, before it becomes for ever silent. Before the cold band of death freezes up the genial current at my heart, let it pour out the gentle stream of kindness, sympathy, and love. While this arm is able as yet to extend itself, and this hand to expands let it be extended to protect the oppressed, to support the weak; let it be expanded to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to relieve the miserable. Ere my eyes close, to open no more, let some one of the wonderful things, of God again pass through them, to revive my drooping spirits, to cheer and elevate my sinking soul; and before I divest myself of my robes of office, never to resume them, let me humbly endeavor to minister to the Lord, and to the spiritual wants of men, in the duties of my station.”

Calm and composed as was the death of Aaron, we advance toward it with slowness and reluctance, and therefore with eagerness seize the occasion which Scripture affords, of adverting to some farther incidents of his life, before we come to the history of that fatal event.

It was with astonishment and grief, we saw him engaged in a plan of disaffection and sedition against his amiable and excellent brother; and in wonder mixed with terror, we observed the mingled lenity and severity of the punishment inflicted by God on that impious, unnatural, and ungrateful conduct. But the offence was not expiated when Miriam was struck with leprosy, and Aaron thereby tacitly reprehended; when Miriam was restored, and Israel permitted to move forwards. Transgressors often flatter themselves that surely the bitterness of death is past, when a righteous God is but awaking to vengeance; and it is not seldom found that between crimes and punishments there is such an apparent affinity, that the criminal cannot but read his guilt in the evil which overtakes him; and the world is made to “see,” not only “the rod,” but “him that hath appointed it.”

Six years have elapsed, from the sedition of Aaron and Miriam, when a similar conspiracy is formed to discredit the government of Moses, and the priesthood of Aaron, by certain turbulent, envious, and ambitious men of their own tribe, in confederacy with some of a similar spirit of the tribe of Reuben. So widely and so suddenly has the malignity of revolt spread itself, that no less than two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown, with their adherents, have been infected by it; and Aaron has his large share of that obloquy, which he had before so unjustly employed, to weaken the hands, and to blast the reputation of his brother. But ah! my friends, a leprosy of seven days could not wash away the stain of this transgression; neither could the blood of one unhappy victim, make atonement for a crime in which so many were involved. The Lord creates “a new thing,” to mark the severity of his hot displeasure. When Moses had made an end of denouncing the judgment of God, it came to pass that “the ground clave asunder that was under them, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation. And there came out fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.”[*]Num 15:31-33;Num 15:35 A plague broke out among the people, which, before it was stayed by the interposition of the high priest himself, offering incense between the living and the dead, had consumed fourteen thousand seven

hundred.

What, O Aaron, were now thy feelings, surveying a field of blood so dreadful and so extensive! What were thy feelings in reflecting that for the very offence which thou thyself hadst committed, Miriam was a leper, and thousands were slain! Did not thy heart tremble, as the sword of the destroying angel laid heaps upon heaps, whilst thou stoodst in the fearful gap, lest its keen edge should reach thyself?

It is remarkable, that the enormity of the greater crimes which Aaron committed, was exposed by the judgments wherewith God visited similar crimes in others, not in himself; whereas, for an apparently lighter transgression, his life was irrecoverably forfeited, and he fell under a doom, which no penitence nor supplication could alter or avert. We cannot judge of the malignity of crimes from certain external circumstances. Both in the good which men do, and the evil they commit, God principally regards the heart and intention; but to discern and to judge of the thoughts and intents of the heart, is a prerogative, which with awful propriety he has reserved to himself.

God has punished the defection of Korah and his abettors in the most open and exemplary manner. Not satisfied with this, because the memory of judgments the most signal and alarming, is apt speedily to be obliterated--such is the thoughtlessness and folly of men! He was pleased to appoint a lasting memorial of the preference which he had bestowed on Aaron and his family, and to confer a fresh badge of distinction on the man whom he delighted to honor. Moses is directed to take of each of the tribes of Israel a several rod, and to inscribe everyone with the name of the prince of that tribe to which it belonged, writing the name of Aaron on the rod of the tribe of Levi. They were to be laid up together over night before the Lord, in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony, and previous intimation was given to all concerned, that by the next morning God would give an explicit, and unequivocal declaration of his will, respecting the office of priesthood. The God whom we adore, would rather make himself known by the wonders which he performs, and the mercies which he dispenses, than by the judgments which he executes. It was fulfilled accordingly. The rods of the eleven other tribes remained as they were deposited; separated from the parent stock, sapless, withered, and dead; but the rod of Aaron, as if it had been still a branch united to a living root, and by a progress of vegetation infinitely more rapid than nature knows, in the course of one night, brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds."[*]Num 17:8 And lo, a miracle as great as a lifeless twig bringing forth fruit, the fierce and angry spirit which acts of just vengeance had but irritated, is by a miracle of kindness and condescension, mollified, melted, subdued, extinguished: and thus necessary are signs and wonders to silence and persuade murmuring, unbelieving Hebrews, as well as to render inexcusable impenitent Egyptians. This mark of preference having been openly exhibited, for the conviction and satisfaction of all commandment is once more given to carry back this wondrous rod, and to deposit it by itself before God, with the other sacred furniture of the most holy place, to serve to latest posterity as one of the precious monuments of the divine favor to their forefathers. It is highly probable, that it always preserved that verdure to which it was thus preternaturally restored; and is a lively image of the constant preservation of the universe, by that all-powerful Word which spake it into existence at first; of the continued support of life, by the merciful visitation of that Spirit who "breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."[*]Gen 2:7

Aaron, thus again distinguished and honored of Heaven, continues to enjoy the dignity, and to perform the duties of the priesthood for thirty-one years longer; we doubt not, with credit to himself, and to the satisfaction and advantage of all Israel. But, alas! he has the mortification of seeing that people gradually and imperceptibly wasting away before his eyes; he feels himself the dying minister of a dying congregation; he observes the hand of justice doing that by slow degrees, which it might have accomplished at once, and employing forty years in what could have been made the work of a single moment. At length the stroke of death comes home to his own family, and it may be presumed to his very heart. In the one hundred and twentieth year of his age, and thirty-seventh of his priesthood, Miriam, his sister by nature, his friend by habit and affection, and, sad to think, his companion in offence, is removed to a world of spirits, and he is warned of his own departure, by the loss of one of his nearest and dearest relations. Moses delineates her character with singular conciseness and simplicity. The hand which she had in his preservation, when he was exposed, in early infancy, upon the Nile, procures her an interest in his affection, and in those of his readers, which the blameableness of some parts of her after conduct is unable wholly to destroy. Our censure of her envy and malignity, in more advanced life, is somewhat softened by the recollection of her childish tenderness, attachment, vigilance, and address; and, while we condemn the vehemence of her spirit, and the unruliness of her tongue, the edge of resentment is blunted, when we see her punished there, where a female is most vulnerable, in the fairness of her looks, and the agreeableness of her person, and we heartily join in the prayer of Aaron in her behalf: “Alas, my lord, let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed, when he cometh out of his mother’s womb;” and in that of Moses himself; “Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee.” From thence, to the hour of her death, a period of thirty-seven years, the history is entirely silent concerning her, and this is, perhaps, the highest praise that can be bestowed upon her. The sharp, reproof which she had received for presuming to intermeddle in public affairs, had taught her, we are bound in charity to believe, that the post of honor, for a woman, is a private station that she is then most distinguished, most respectable, most valuable, when the world knows and talks least about her. That self-same year the fatal summons is addressed to Aaron also, and one brother is made the messenger of death to the other. The same hand which arrayed him in splendid apparel, and consecrated him to the high and honorable office of priesthood, must strip him again, and anoint him to his burying. The whole progress of this solemn scene is highly pathetic and interesting. Let us attend the funeral procession to the top of mount Hor, and learn to die to the vanity and glory of this world, and to cleave, with increased ardor to that gospel, by which “life and immortality are brought to light,” and to trust in that great High Priest, who, though he “was dead, is alive, and lives for evermore,” and giveth “eternal life to as many as he will.”

Death, the most common of all events, at every season, and in whatever form it comes, is tremendous and affecting; but the appearance of death, in the scene before us, is altogether singular and uncommon. It is indeed the death of an old man, but not occasioned by any apparent decay of nature, not preceded by long sickness, not hastened on by disease or accident; but the spirit is surrendered at the command of God, in the fulness of health, in the composure of perfect recollection, without a hesitation of reluctant nature, without regret, without a pang. When sentence of death was pronounced upon Moses himself, and for the self-same transgression which shortened the life of Aaron, we find the fondness of nature, and the favor of religion, repeatedly uniting, to crave a reprieve at least, if not a total remission: but Aaron, when summoned

to depart, whether it was from superior fortitude of mind, from the consciousness of greater demerit, or that the historian has charitably drawn a veil over a brother's infirmity, while he frankly exposes his own, prepares instantly and cheerfully for the event. Were we to follow the impulse of imagination, we might, without overleaping the modesty of nature, represent to you the deep concern wherewith the good man's own family was affected when the award of death was pronounced: the concern of all Israel at the thought of being deprived of the labors, the advices, the example, and the prayers of their venerable high priest; the concern of Moses in being made the messenger, almost the executioner of death, upon his much beloved brother, associate, and friend; himself too lying under the same condemnation. If, after he received the command to ascend the mountain, that he might die, he was permitted to minister in the priest's office any more, to pour out the blood of the sacrifice, to burn incense upon the altar, to lift up his hands and bless the people, with what holy fervor may we suppose these sacred services performed! with what devout attention would they be listened unto and waited upon, when both minister and people knew for certain they were to meet no more! May we not suppose the good man, in strains such as these, taking a last, long farewell of those to whom he had for so many years stood in a relation so tender and so intimate. "The time of my departure, O Israel, is at length come, and I am ready to be offered up. That God who appointed me to serve you in holy things, permits me to wait at his altar no longer. I have fulfilled my day. I have finished my course. I have survived the greatest part of my contemporaries, but must die at length. I leave you with remorse, because I accuse myself of many failures in point of duty towards you; I leave you with regret, because I sincerely love you; I leave you with joy, because I can with confidence commit you to a guardian Providence, even to the God of your fathers, who can easily supply my place, by one wiser, holier, and more faithful than me; and who, I trust, will continue still to rule and to lead you by that best of men, of brothers, and of friends. My body leaves you, but my spirit cannot be separated from you; in death it will cleave unto you; and when set free from the clogs of sense, it will still hover over you, attend your journeyings, and, finally, rest in peace when Israel rests in the promised land. These forty years have I borne your names engraved on jewels, upon my heart, and I Will carry you with me in my heart, to the regions of eternal day. Farewell, my sons; Eleazer, the heir of my dignity and anxiety, and Ithamar, my youngest hope. Think of the dreadful fate of your elder brothers, and serve the Lord with reverence and godly fear. Think of your father's errors and learn wisdom. Ponder his approaching dissolution, and learn the nothingness of human grandeur. Call to your remembrance what Providence has done to and for me, and rejoice with trembling. Again I am summoned away; it is the voice of Moses, of my brother; it is the voice of God I hear. The Lord bless thee, and keep thee, the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. I come, my brother, I know whose command thou bearest; I know that I must obey. But to part with thee is the bitterness of death; endeared as we are to each other by friendship, as allied by blood--conjoined in office, knit together by habits of affection, united in life, and, blessed reflection, not to be long divided by death. Thou wilt bury all my unworthiness in the grave; thou halt already buried it in the profounder, silenter tomb of a gentle and forgiving heart. I come, O my God, at thy call; I desire not to live, if thou biddest me to die. Yet I mourn to think that my death is a mark of thy displeasure. But I see the sun shining through the cloud; it is not wholly in anger, thou art summoning me away; thou art graciously putting an end to my painful labors, my anxious thoughts, my imperfect services, to my weaknesses and wanderings, and exalting me to a dignity far beyond what I have

hitherto enjoyed. I shall see thee as thou art. I shall serve thee without wearying. I shall offend no more. Henceforth is laid up for me, a diadem for glory and for beauty, a crown of righteousness that fadeth not away. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Arise, let us go hence. Arise, let us ascend to the top of the mountain."

Having, in whatever language, bidden a final adieu to worldly connections; in the sight of all the people, the high priest; in all the splendor of his official habit, sad and solemn, climbs up the hill, from which he never was to descend. What were the emotions of Israel in gradually losing sight of their venerable patriarch, to see him no more again for ever? What were the feelings of the patriarch in surveying from the summit of the mountain the goodly tents of Jacob, in which he had an earthly concern no longer? Nature casts many "a longing, lingering look behind;" but faith looks forward, and beholds mortality swallowed up of life. Nature regrets a promised land; unseen, unpossessed, unenjoyed, because of unbelief: faith stretches the wing, and aims a bold but not uncertain flight, to a heavenly Canaan, where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are for ever at rest." The spirit fails as we proceed. The death warrant is again recited. The justice of the sentence is acknowledged, and the prisoner prepares for death. The golden crown, the mitre, the girdle, the ephod, the breastplate, are one after another deposited, and human glory is patiently surrendered. As they were severally yielded up by the father, they are severally assumed by the son. Stripped of all that covered the body, the body itself is at length laid down, and the mortal blow is at length struck by Him who saith, "I make alive, and I kill." Aaron dies, but Eleazer lives. The priest expires, but the priesthood is immortal. Three ascend, only two return. What matters it how the poor perishing clay tabernacle were disposed of? About the spirit of the man whom God thus called away, we can be under no anxiety nor apprehension. A general, and I doubt not, an unaffected mourning of thirty days takes place; and all Israel lament when dead, the man whom many had envied, maligned, and persecuted through life. This is one of the many happy consequences and effects of death! It shuts the mouth of scandal; it brings to light, unnoticed or obscured virtues; it draws the veil over blemishes and imperfections.

Let the son of pride, who is rising into splendor, and bears "his blushing honors thick upon him," turn his eyes to the top of yonder mountain, and learn the nothingness of all the glory of man. Is his station higher than that of the high priest of Israel? Are his vestments more magnificent, is his character more sacred, is his dignity more permanent, flow his honors from a higher source? Behold Aaron laid low: retiring, from the world, naked, as naked he came into it; the head which once wore the mitre, leveled with the dust; the tongue which once spoke so well, for ever dumb. The hour of rest nightly admonishes us of the last fatal hour. We strip ourselves of our garments one by one, and lay them down; we are reduced to the image of death; the eye is closed; our faculties are absorbed; the form of the man only remains. And the time is at hand, we know it, when we must put off this body, as an uneasy, worn-out, useless vestment, fit only for the moth or the dunghill. "Man must say to corruption, Thou art my father; and to the worm, Thou art my sister and mother." "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness of man as the flower of the field." Our very children are the harbingers of our dissolution. They are the pleasantest, but the plainest monitors. Every step they rise brings us a little lower; as they grow stronger and stronger, we grow weaker and weaker. They wait to assume our name, our place, our robes, our office: they are ready to array themselves in our spoils. The elevation of Eleazer is the fall of Aaron. The public life of the son, is the death of the sire.

Look to that mountain, O man, and reflect that he whom now you hate, envy, oppose, malign, will speedily be changed into a clod of earth, and rendered incapable of feeling or returning thy animosity; and learn to die betimes to these wicked and odious passions. Suppose him laid on the bed of death; stript of those honors, talents, advantages, successes which render him the object of jealousy and malignity to thee. How you are disarmed! Pity and tenderness awake in your breast. You now hate yourself, that ever you could hate your brother. Let the reflection of what may so soon happen reconcile thee to him now. Mar not thy own comfort, by seeking to disturb his repose. The cold hand of death will speedily extinguish the angry flame.

“They truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.--Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”[*]Heb 7:23-25 “Be, need not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. Fox 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.”[*]Heb 7:27-28

071. Balaam--His Way

Balaam--His Way

2Pe 2:15-16. These are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbad the madness of the prophet. Of all the evil propensities to which human stature is subject, there is no one so general, so insinuating, so corruptive, and so obstinate, as the love of money. It begins to operate early, and it continues to the end of life. One of the first lessons which children learn, and one which old men never forget, is, the value of money. The covetous seek and guard it for its own sake, and the prodigal himself must first be avaricious, before he can be profuse. This, of all our passions, is best able to fortify itself by reason, and is the last to yield to the force of reason. It most unremittingly engages the attention and calls into their fullest exertion all our powers of body and of mind. Ambition and pride, those powerful motives of human conduct, are but ministering servants to avarice. Reputation and power are pursued chiefly as the means of procuring wealth; and all the fierce contentions which have distracted the world, and deluged it with blood, may be traced up to an eager desire to obtain the territory, or the treasure of another. Age, which blunts all our other appetites, only whets this; and after the heart is dead to every other joy, it lives to the clear, the inextinguishable delight of saving and hoarding. In exact proportion to their incapacity and disinclination to make use of money, is the violence of men's thirst to possess it; and on the threshold of eternity it cleaves to them, as if life were just beginning. Philosophy combats, satire exposes, religion condemns it in vain: it yields neither to argument, nor ridicule, nor conscience. Like the lean kine in Pharaoh's dream, it devours all that comes near it, and yet continues as hungry and meager as ever. If a representation of the odiousness, criminality, and danger of this vile affection can be of any use, it must be to those whose hearts are not yet hardened, whose consciences are not yet blinded by habits of indulgence in it; for if it has once gotten possession of the mind, you might as easily reinvigorate feeble age by a discourse on the advantages and joys of youth, or restore a constitution wasted through consumption by an elaborate declamation on the blessing of health. Avarice, with the deaf adder, "will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely."[*]Psa 58:5

We have already had occasion, in the course of these exercises, to trace the character of a selfish man, and to observe the workings of the human mind, under the influence of this base and destructive passion, in the history of Laban the Syrian. There we saw every principle of generosity and gratitude, of truth and justice, of humanity and natural affection, of piety and decency vilely sacrificed to this insatiate idol, which, like the grave, "never says it is enough." We have, in the history referred to by the apostle, in the words which I have now read, another striking and instructive instance of the dreadful operation of covetousness, in a mind enlightened by wisdom, awake to all the worthier feelings and propensities of nature, capable of forming the justest notions of right and wrong, and of conveying these notions in the clearest and strongest expressions: fully instructed and firmly persuaded respecting; his duty; but actuated by this fatal passion deliberately deviating from the sight path, seducing those whom he durst not curse, degrading the dignity of

the prophet, in the venality of the courtier, and shamefully bartering conscience for gain. We shall find, then, the words of Peter a perfect key to the relation of Moses: and whatever inconsistency shall appear in the conduct of Balaam, whatever fluctuation in opinion; whatever plausibility of language and sentiment, combined with whatever irresolution in virtue, all is explained by this one discovery of his real character, he “loved the wages of unrighteousness.” We come to illustrate this position by the history itself.

Forty years almost have elapsed since the miraculous deliverance from Egypt; and the whole generation, which partook of the joy of that deliverance, because of their unbelief, is well nigh extinguished. Thousands and ten thousands have dropped into the grave. The individuals which formed the congregation of Israel are lost and forgotten; but Israel still lives, the care of Providence, the object of favor. The shafts of vengeance have spent themselves, and nothing can now stem that current of promise and destiny, which is carrying God’s favored people to victory, and the possession of Canaan. Their decampments and progress, therefore, are no longer the lingering and wanderings of a devoted people doomed to die in the wilderness: but the bold, direct, and successful progress of a warlike nation, from conquest to conquest. A multitude so great, subsisting in a desert so long, in a manner so singular, could not but attract the notice of all the adjacent nations, who must have been anxiously solicitous which way their route was directed, and where they were to attempt a settlement at length. Being arrived at the border of the wilderness, where it is contiguous to the country of the Amorites; not imagining that any part of their inheritance was to be allotted them on this side Jordan; they petition Sihon, the king of the country, to grant them leave to pass peaceably through his territories, to the place of their destination. This he roughly refuses, and, without waiting to see whether Israel meant to attempt a passage by force, he collects his whole strength, advances into the wilderness to attack them, and thereby hastens on his own fate; for his army is smitten with the edge of the sword, and his whole land falls an easy prey to the victor. Og, king of Bashan, is rash enough to follow his example, provokes his own destruction, is subdued in his turn, and the fertile plains, over which he reigned, swell the triumphs of Israel.

Advancing forward to Jordan, they pitch their camp in the plains of Moab. This nation was descended from Lot, the nephew of Abraham, by an incestuous commerce with his elder daughter. They had long before this been reduced into a regular form of civil government, that of monarchy, and were living in the quiet possession of a fruitful country, secured to them by the appointment of Providence, in consideration of their relation to their venerable ancestor: and Israel was expressly prohibited to disturb them, or their brethren and neighbors, the children of Ammon, the posterity of Lot by his younger daughter, in the possession of their inheritance. The report of their victories, however, over Og, and Sihon, has roused the attention and the jealousy of Balak king of Moab. Instead of employing the rational policy, of courting alliance and friendship with a people so formidable, and who were neither disposed nor permitted to molest them: or of adopting the manly policy of repelling bold invaders by open war, he has recourse to the mean, timid, and contemptible arts of necromancy or divination. For this purpose he sends messengers to Balaam, the son of Bosor, a noted enchanter of those times, with large money in their hands, styled in Scripture “the rewards of divination,” and “the wages of unrighteousness,” and a message to this purpose: “Behold there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me. Come now, therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they

are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed."[*]Num 22:5-6 Thus Providence fulfilled the words of the oracle, pronounced in the song of Moses thirty-eight years before, immediately on the passage of the Red Sea; "Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them: all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them: by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone."[*]Exo 15:15-16 Now the person, to whom Balak applied on this trying occasion, was a man of it very extraordinary character, and of very singular gifts and abilities. He seems to have united qualities, the most dissimilar and opposite. He exhibits in his language and conduct, a very uncommon combination and contrast of virtues and vices. What can exceed on the one hand, the generosity and disinterestedness which he expressed and put in practice, when repeatedly urged to employ his prophetic sagacity or magical skill against Israel? If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more."[*]Num 22:18 What can equal on the other, the vile prostitution for hire of his great talents in the service of an idolatrous prince against the people whom he knew to be favored and protected of Heaven! We see him this day seeking and enjoying the most intimate communication with the living and true God; and tomorrow recurring to the practice of infamous and infernal arts, to accomplish a most detestable and diabolical purpose: proclaiming at one time, in language which the spirit of wisdom and prophecy alone could inspire, the security, glory, and happiness of that people whom God delighted to honor; and, with the very next breath, insidiously suggesting counsels, which directly tended to destroy that security, to tarnish that glory, and to dissolve that happiness. In a word, we behold him fully impressed with the importance of a holy life, in order to a peaceful and happy end, and yet living in the commission of the most flagrant enormities, and prematurely cut off; with all his imperfections on his head; cleaving to the last to the mammon of unrighteousness, and yet sufficiently impressed with the loveliness of true goodness to pray in these words, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"[*]Num 23:10 For the farther clearing up of this very singular character and history, it may be of importance to observe, that though the descendants of Abraham for many ages after the death of that patriarch, were distinguished as the peculiar people of God, to whom were committed the lively oracles, and "to whom pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;"[*]Rom 9:4 yet Scripture permits us not to consider all divine knowledge as confined to that people, previous to their establishment in Canaan. The dispersion from the wild attempt of Babel, necessarily conveyed in everyone of its fragments some knowledge of the nature, will, and worship of the God of their fathers; which, though in process of time, obscured by tradition and forgetfulness, and disfigured by human invention, must still have retained somewhat of both its original form and substance. The example and instructions of so good a master, and a neighbor so respectable as Abraham himself, could not but have made a sensible effect on his numerous domestics, who were of various countries, and upon the princes with whom he came into connection and for this very end probably it was, that Providence kept him wandering from place to place,. By means of their intercourse with Abraham, we know that Pharaoh and Abimelech attained at least a certain degree of acquaintance with the true God. We find, in like manner, Job, at whatever period he lived, and his three friends, in Arabia, and particularly Elihu of the kindred of Ram, discovered very profound knowledge in divine things; and Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, in the land of Midian, appears evidently to

have possessed the same advantage. It is not therefore matter of very great surprise, that Balaam, a stranger and an enemy to the commonwealth of Israel, should enjoy this advantage in common with many of his neighbors, and that he should have made such an indifferent use of it: this alas, being the misery of multitudes, who are favored with a still clearer light than he was. Neither will it excite wonder, if we find superstitious and idolatrous rites gradually blending with the worship of the great Jehovah. Laban, though not to be set down as wholly given to idolatry, long before the period now under review, had his Teraphim or household gods, which he highly prized, either as objects of religious veneration, or on account of the precious materials of which they were composed. And this too will in part account, for that strange mixture which we find in the character of Balaam, his sudden transition from the acknowledgment of the God of Israel, to a participation in the profane rites employed in the worship of the idols of Balak and Moab.

But, notwithstanding this odious and abominable mixture, we observe in more than one instance, the great God winking at these times of ignorance, and condescending to make known his will, even to men who were daily. insulting him by their abominations as is the case of Pharaoh and Abimelech already mentioned, as in the case of Nebuchadnezzar, the grossest of idolaters, many ages afterwards, and in the case before us. All this leads to make an obvious and an important distinction, between the extraordinary gifts and the graces of God's Spirit. It to one thing to have a clear, enlightened head, and another, to have an affectionate and obedient heart. It is a blessed union where they meet, but the former without the latter only renders wickedness more conspicuous, and condemnation more just. The charge, alas! does not stop at wicked, covetous Balaam; it was matter of complaint down to the days of Micah, and of prophets of a different description. "The heads" of God's people judge "for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money." And our blessed Lord, to level all confidence in the possession of the choicest gifts, assures us, that many shall say to him in the great day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity."[*]Mat 7:22-23

We observe farther, that though God was sometimes pleased to bestow the gift of prophecy upon the unworthy, the prediction, though uttered by unholy lips, was the truth of God, which no weakness, perverseness, nor disinclination of the prophet was able either to alter or suppress. "For 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."[*]2Pe 1:21 They spake under an irresistible impulse; they spake sometimes what they understood not, and what they would have concealed, if they could. Thus Caiaphas, the avowed enemy of our blessed Lord, uttered a notable prophecy concerning him, not knowing what he said. Thus Jeremiah, disgusted with the ill success of his preaching, finding the Word of the Lord made a reproach and a derision daily, by the thoughtless men of his generation, resolved not to make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. "But," says he, "his word was in mine heart, as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." And Josephus, in perfect consistency with the character of Balaam, as drawn by Moses, puts into his mouth this address to the king of Moab, who upbraided him with breach of agreement, in pronouncing the warmest of benedictions, where he was expressly hired to curse: "Can you imagine, that when prompted by the Spirit of God to disclose futurity, it depends on us to be silent, or to speak out? He makes our voices the vehicles of his will, without permitting us a

choice in the matter. I well remember for what purpose the joint entreaties of you and the Midianites have brought me hither. I have undertaken this journey with a fixed determination to favor your earnest wishes: but God is more powerful than the bent of my inclination, which aimed at the gratification of your desires. For when he takes possession of our minds, he occupies them wholly, and leaves us nothing of our own. I had nothing less in my intention, than to trumpet the praises of this mighty host, or to display the blessings which God has in reserve for this favored race. But being graciously disposed towards them, and determined to exalt them to the highest pinnacle of glory and felicity, He suggested to me the predictions which I could not but utter."[*]Joseph Antiq. lib. iv. cap. 4.

Sometimes the representation of some dreadful punishment, to be instantly inflicted, if they dared to falsify the oracle committed to them, might serve as a curb to their own natural and unruly propensities; and, sometimes carried wholly out of themselves, they delivered, in an ecstasy, what was committed to them, unconscious of what they said or did. In the prosecution of the history, we shall find Balaam under both these kinds of inspiration; both awed by fear, and wrapped into the vision of futurity, in a trance.

I only make one observation more, for the clearing up of this remarkable story. It was a generally received opinion among the Gentile nations, that prophets, or diviners, had a power, by means of incantation, to inflict or to remove public calamities; that they understood the art of decoying from among their enemies, the tutelary deities who presided over them; in consequence of which, they were easily and certainly discomfited. Homer makes the capture of Troy to depend on the removal of the sacred image of Minerva from its residence in the citadel of that metropolis: and Joshua himself, in the conquest of Canaan, takes advantage of this vulgar prejudice, to encourage his men to proceed to victory; and to prevent the ill effects of the timid and terrifying report of his colleagues respecting the strength of the country. "Rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not."[*]Num 14:9 it was accordingly usual, on undertaking military expeditions, to nerve the arm, and to whet the sword of the soldier, by the tongue of the priest, and the tremendous forms of religion. They attempted to make the gods parties to their quarrels, and devoted to perdition the nations against whom they waged war. An ancient author has transmitted to us the form of execration employed on such occasions, which, on account of its relation to our subject, perhaps you will have the curiosity to hear. It is a perfect contrast to the blessing which Balaam was obliged, reluctantly, to pronounce upon Israel. The priest destined to this awful employment, after presenting the usual sacrifice, advanced to the head of the army, and in the presence of the general and principal officers, pronounced aloud words to this effect: "Almighty Father of gods and men, or if thou wouldst rather be addressed by the name of Jupiter, or if any other appellation be more grateful to thine ear; pour out, I conjure thee, upon this army," or "this city," according as the case required, "the spirit of terror and dismay; deprive of the sight of their eyes, all those who shall level their blows at us, our legions or troops; spread darkness over our enemies, over their cities, over their fields, over their armies. Look upon them as a thing accursed: bring them under the hardest conditions that ever an enemy was constrained to undergo. As for me, to destruction I hereby devote them; my curse I pour upon them, and take this prince, these captains, this people, to be witnesses of it."[*]Macrob. Saturnal. lib. iii. cap. 9. This ceremony being performed, and the soldiers inspirited by the sanctions of religion, they advanced to the combat, in

confidence of success.

It was for a purpose of this kind, that Balaam was now sent for by the confederated powers of Moab and Midian. How the latter of these two nations had been induced to join in such an embassy, we are not informed. The middle forty years of his life, Moses had spent among that people; had formed alliance with them, by marrying the daughter of Jethro, one of the princes of the country, with whom he maintained a most friendly correspondence, after he was raised to the command of the armies of Israel. He cannot, therefore, be suspected of forming a hostile design against his ancient hosts and relations; and it was much more natural for them to form an alliance with a man of Moses' well known wisdom and moderation, and with a people so sensibly favored of Heaven as Israel was, than with a nation of idolaters, and a prince, who was reduced to employ the poor arts of incantation against his enemies. But, in many cases it happens, that, aiming at an over-refined wisdom and policy, men prove themselves fools. Jethro was probably by this time dead, and the Midianitish estate was governed by councils, very unlike those which would probably have been suggested by that wise and good man: and a deputation of their princes joins those of Balak, in an application to Balaam, to strengthen their united forces, by laying Israel under a curse.

It is melancholy to think that from the beginning to this day, men have been more eager to bring mischief upon others, than to procure good to themselves. Had these Midianites, and Moabites, associated together to strengthen their borders; had they invited a prophet to come and confirm their bands of alliance, and encourage the hearts of their soldiery, by pronouncing a blessing upon themselves, they had not been reprehensible; but such is the corruption and malignity of the human heart, that it not only takes pleasure in the evil that befalls another, where our own interest is concerned, but in the very mischief that is wrought for mischief sake. The great evil is, men engage in transitory pursuits, as if they were immortal; and had they the power, together with the inclination, would prosecute momentary offences with everlasting punishments. What is it to one nation that another great nation be utterly exterminated, provided a favorite scheme of ambition, commerce, or revenge, be thereby promoted! When we hear a poor wretch, a common curser and swearer, on the most frivolous occasions, imprecating eternal damnation on his fellow-creature, we are filled with horror; and yet without surprise, we behold religious sects in their zeal, and mighty empires in their pride and fury, deliberately doing the same thing. What principle so important to individuals and to states, as a principle of true religion! It is a comforter in affliction, a counsellor in darkness and uncertainty, a refuge in danger and distress, a support in death. What so seductive and mischievous as an erroneous principle of this sort! "If the light that is in men be darkness, how great is that darkness?" False religion is a wandering fire of the night, hurrying men over a precipice; plunging them in the gulf--pretending to bring a tribute of glory to God by destroying mankind. It is the spirit of the great enemy of God and man, who is a liar and a murderer from the beginning.

It is the perilousness of the times that has tossed Balaam into notice, and consequence, and infamy. In a quieter period, he had floated unnoticed on the surface, and silently increased the paltry gains of his black art, by playing on the credulity of silly women and children. But the old wizard has had the good fortune to attract the notice of princes, and has the opportunity of selling his magical spells at his own price; and he fails not to make the most of his market. With the clue afforded us in Scripture, we will attempt in another Lecture, to follow the various turnings and

windings of that profoundest, darkest, most intricate of all labyrinths, a carnal, covetous heart. We conclude the present with calling upon you:

I. To remark and to revere the righteous judgment of God, in giving up to strong delusion those who seek and follow delusions. Every deliberate violation of God's law, every victory which a man gains over his own conscience becomes his punishment, as it is his crime. Let not him who has wilfully deceived himself, in the first instance, pretend to complain, that he has been flurried into mistakes which he never intended, but could not avoid. The first wrong step was in his power, but not the fourth or the fifth. The man needed not, unless he chose, to have set himself a running down a steep place, but, once in motion, it is not in his power to stop when he would. If therefore he plunge into the flood beneath, the fault is in himself, not the laws of motion, which only carried on what his own will had begun. The man who has destroyed his faculties by excess, must not charge his bad memory, his erroneous judgment, or the inconveniences in which they have involved him, upon nature or the God of nature. No, they only establish the work of his own hands. In this view, it is perfectly just that "to him who hath should more be given, and from him who hath not, even that which he hath should be taken away."

II. Let us rejoice that we have a clear and "sure word of prophecy," to direct and assist us in every doubtful and difficult case; and that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The gift of prophecy was not always a blessing to the possessor; and, as the mere knowledge of future events, it would be the reverse of a blessing. In tender mercy and in loving kindness, God conceals futurity from men. But all that pertains to the acquisition of wisdom, and the attainment of happiness; all that assures us of life and immortality, and makes us meet for the enjoyment of it, the words of this prophecy fully unfold. "The righteousness of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart: That is, the word of faith which we preach, That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."[*]Rom 10:6-9 To know but this, is more than "to speak with the tongues of men and of angels"--is more than to have the gift of prophecy, and to understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and to have all faith, so as to be able to remove mountains." "Covet earnestly the best gifts;" but rather cultivate the fruits of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."[*]Gal 5:22-23

III. While we admire the wisdom and goodness of God, in counteracting the intention of wicked Balaam, and turning the curse in his mouth into a blessing, let us bow the knee in gratitude to that great Prophet, who has wholly, and forever done away the curse; let us give glory to "God, who hath sent his Son Christ Jesus to bless everyone of us, in turning us from our iniquities;" and to introduce us into more than an Eden, more than a Canaan, even into the paradise of God; where there is no more curse"--"where God shall wipe away all tears from our 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."[*]Rev 21:4

IV. While we behold "the madness of the prophet"--a heart hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, let us tremble to think that the seeds of this very sin are implanted deeply in our own nature;

that they have even discovered their baleful shoots; that they bring forth fruit unto death. Every plant which our heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be plucked up and rooted out; and this is one of them. Look to it carefully, O man watch it with a holy jealousy. “It is the root of all evil.” “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”[*]1Jn 2:15-17

Chapter 72

072. Balaam--His Works Betray His Words

Balaam--His Works Betray His Words Num 22:21. And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. The eagerness which men discover in pursuing the objects of time and sense, is a melancholy contrast to their coldness and indifference respecting the things of God and eternity. The carnal mind needs but a hint to attach itself to the pursuit of riches, pleasure, or honor; and when engaged no argument is of weight sufficient to dissuade; no danger intimidates, no difficulty discourages. The understanding becomes the dupe of the passions, conscience is led hoodwinked by appetite, and the man is shamefully sunk in the brute. But the alarm must be louder than thunder, which awakens the thoughtless, the sensual, and the selfish to serious reflection; and it must be repeated every hour, else they will slumber and sleep again.

Water has in its natural coldness a tendency to congeal; and, once reduced to ice; has no principle in itself to recover from that torpid state. The cause of change must come from without. To dissolve and restore it to its liquid state, the sun must shine, the wind must blow; withdraw the action of air and fire, and it will gradually freeze again. In like manner, without any cause from without, the human body, by it principle of corruption within itself; must speedily dissolve and be destroyed; and the human mind, by a similar internal principle of moral corruption, degenerates from depravity to depravity, till, lost to shame, fear, remorse, and at length, to feeling, men come to commit iniquity with greediness, and to glory in their shame. To preserve the body in life, there must be constant supplies of nourishment administered; and to preserve the soul in health, there must be “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.”

It is truly affecting to see men enlightened and persuaded, yet wedded to their lusts; clearly informed of the right path, but wilfully and deliberately persisting in error; hardening themselves against God, and yet thinking to prosper; acknowledging God in words, but in works denying him.

These observations are all strikingly exemplified in the character and conduct of Balaam, of which we attempted to give you a general idea in the last Lecture, and to which were added some observations tending to elucidate his singular history. We are now to enter on the particular detail of it, as it is delivered in the sacred record. The Israelitish nation was now in the last year of their peregrination through the wilderness; their civil and religious government were fully settled, and the theocracy finally established. They were now approaching the banks of the Jordan: and by their number, order, and discipline, striking terror into all the neighboring nations. Two kings, their armies, and their people, have already fallen before their victorious arms; and nothing is left to oppose their progress to Canaan, but the river, the boundary itself of the promised land. They pitch their camp quietly in the plains of Moab, expecting the signal from their divine leader and commander to pass over, conquer, and take possession. Their warlike array and recent successes, have alarmed the apprehensions of Balak, king of Moab, as their prosperity and prospects had excited his envy and jealousy. Diffident of his strength, either to repel invasion, if attacked by so powerful an adversary, or to attack them first, and endeavor to obstruct their

progress, he enters into an alliance with the people of Midian, for their mutual security and defence. And even then, still doubtful of the force of their united arms, they agree to employ the arts of divination in aid of the sword, and dream of conquering by the power of enchantment, those whom they were afraid to encounter in the field. To such base, such wretched shifts do princes and nations resort, to gratify pride, ambition, or revenge. For this purpose, they send a joint embassy to Balaam, the son of Beor, a noted soothsayer in the neighborhood.

Balak and Moab had degenerated from the faith of Lot, their forefather, and were sunk into idolatry; it is therefore no wonder to see thorn of a jealous and hostile spirit towards Israel, their brother. A principle of religion, consisting in the fear and love of God, is the great bond of union among men; it strengthens the ties of natural affection, and even conciliates friendship between enemies: but irreligion, or what is worse, an erroneous principle of religion, turns men loose against each other, dissolves society, and fattens the earth with human blood. We cannot help recollecting, alas! that Abraham and Lot, the uncle and nephew, the progenitors of the two nations, were under the necessity of separating from each other, on account of their increasing wealth; and we see, many years after they were laid in the dust, the self-same cause, whetting the spirits and the swords of their posterity, and arming them for their mutual destruction. The whole world is a possession too scanty for avarice and ambition; the success of one seems to be a diminution of the happiness of another; and even the immense ocean is crimsoned with gore, that one may enjoy sole and sullen empire; as if that vast space could not accommodate the operations of two tribes of ants on yonder molehill. Blessed world, where envy and strife shall rage no more; where there is bread enough and to spare, room enough and to spare; where the felicity of everyone is an accession of felicity to everyone!

Balaam is described in Scripture by his parentage, his country, and profession. He was the son of Beor, or Bosor, the difference of which pronunciation is accounted for, from the difference of dialect in the oriental languages. The father exists to us only in his name, and in the history of his son: and happy had it been for that son, to have left behind him nothing too but a mere name, instead of one loaded with infamy and detestation. Pethor, the place of his residence, was a city of Aram, or Mesopotamia, the very country where Abraham himself was born, and where he resided till his seventy-fifth year; the native country of Rebekah, the wife of Isaac; the country where Jacob passed a great part of his youthful years; where he married; where all his children, except Benjamin, were born, and whence he obtained the name of a Syrian. Pethor was situated on the river Euphrates, called the river, by way of eminence or distinction, it being the largest in the country; and thence, in many passages of Scripture, styled the great river. The country adjacent, to a vast distance, being plain, it was favorable to the observation of the heavenly bodies; and accordingly we find the science of astronomy was early cultivated there; and the pretended science of astrology, that is, the power of foretelling future events, from the appearances and supposed influence of the stars, was speedily grafted upon it. Pride, presumption, and a little knowledge, soon arrogated to themselves a power of controlling those great luminaries, which seem in perpetual motion to encompass our earth, and of suspending or altering their influences; and ignorance, superstition, and credulity easily admitted the insolent claim, and resorted to it. This was apparently the profession of Balaam, for in the book of Joshua he is expressly termed “the soothsayer.” It was probably to his skill and power as an astrologer, that Balak had recourse for assistance against Israel, and when we come to his prophecy itself, we shall meet with some,

and these not obscure allusions to that art. The message put into the mouths of these ambassadors, is strongly expressive of terror and consternation. “There is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earthy and they abide over against me.”[*]Num 22:5 The dreadful plagues inflicted on Egypt, in effecting Israel’s deliverance, had been heard at the distance of Moab; and though forty years have elapsed, they are neither forgotten, nor have lost their impression. Fear ever magnifies its object; “they cover the face of the earth:” the word is, the eye or sight of the earth; their tents extend so far, that the earth and they seem to have one limit, and they are marshaled so close, that no ground can be seen. Another image, strongly expressive of the same passion, is that in the fourth verse. “Now will this company lick up all that are round about as, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field.” “Lick up,” it is the same word which is used 1Ki 18:38, to express the action of devouring fire. “Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.”[*]1Ki 18:38 The ox, as he feeds calmly and stately along, employs his tongue only, and the grass perisheth without pushing with the horn, or stamping with the foot, actions that denote strength and exertion, but by the easy motion of a soft and pliant film of flesh, he sweeps away all before him; thus easily and certainly, Balak apprehends, was Israel advancing to his and his people’s destruction. And how was this approaching plague to be resisted or averted? “Come now, therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people, for they are too mighty for me; peradventure I shall prevail that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land; for I wet that he whom then blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.”[*]Num 22:6 We have here an assemblage of all the baser and more contemptible passions of the human mind, called forth, and led on by the predominant one of fear: a low groveling superstition, expecting from magical spells, what ought to have been sought for from wisdom and valor: unprovoked violence and cruelty, in seeking the destruction of a people, who were dwelling peaceably by him, and who had given such strong and recent proof of their moderation, in submitting to a tedious and difficult march round the whole land of Edom, rather than offend an unkind brother, who had refused a passage through his land, which they could easily have cut with the sword; and unmanly, abject adulation of a vile wizard, whom he supposed capable of serving his turn. On the other hand, the two great leading passions of Balaam’s soul, vanity and covetousness, were likely to be gratified to the full. How would his heart exult, to see a train of princes standing at his gate, and presents, worthy of kings to bestow, poured down at his feet! A prophet indeed, would have known from the beginning, that the application was nugatory, and that it must come to nothing; and an honest man would have rejected it with firmness, and persevered in that rejection. But we see his heart is won from the first moment, and all that follows is a wretched struggle between inclination and conscience, in which the former, at length, carries off the victory.

He receives the messengers with great courtesy, and accommodates them in his house; for even a miser can be hospitable, if he be sure of gaining by it. Abraham’s servant, followed by a camel loaded with the good things of Canaan, can easily force open the doors of such a man as Laban, or Balaam. He affects an air of great mystery; he cannot give his response immediately. Night, the season of incantation and dreams, must intervene; and, horrible to think, the great and dreadful name of Jehovah is interposed, to sanction and conceal the wicked purposes of a heart hunting after its covetousness; and he promises to report in the morning the result of his consultation. How faithfully the report was made the sequel will show.

It appears, on the face of the history, that God waited not for an application from Balaam, concerning this business, but whether in a dream, a vision, or by a voice, prevented him, with an inquiry concerning the deputation from Moab. In many instances, Jehovah is represented as drawing information from men's own mouths, of what evidently lay revealed to his all-seeing eye, and thus making their folly and wickedness to expose, reprove, and condemn themselves. "And God came unto Balaam, and said, What men are these with thee?"[*]Num 22:9 This question must have put the prophet into great agitation. Awful is the voice of the Eternal, at whatever season, in whatever form, and on whatever occasion it is heard! How awful then to a bad man, harboring an ill design, shutting wilfully his own eyes, and yet flattering himself; and saying, Doth God see, and is there knowledge with the Most High? That he considered the very question as ominous, and fatal to the cause of his avarice and vainglory, is evident from the circumstantiality of his answer. It discovers a soul tremblingly alive to the voice of interest: it is minute and particular, as if, by a parade of words, he could deceive his Maker into an approbation of his purpose and desire. What then must have been his chagrin and disappointment, when a prohibition, so peremptory and positive, in a moment blasted all his prospects of gain and preferment!

"And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them, thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed."[*]Num 22:12 The application had two objects in view, permission to go into the land of Moab, and liberty to curse the children of Israel, and both meet with a flat denial. He must not accompany the ambassadors to him who sent them; neither must he, either at home, or abroad, in this place or in that, presume to curse, or in any shape whatever to molest that people. And, as if the sternness of interdiction had not been sufficient, a reason is assigned, "for they are blessed." The, commandments of God, in general, are so clear, that it is impossible to misunderstand them; it is not ignorance, but presumption, that ruins mankind.

Balaam, however reluctant, must next morning deliver an account of the night's success; and we find he does it in a very partial and imperfect manner. When he reported the message of Balak to God, having to do with the great Searcher of hearts, with whom disguise avails nothing, he is accurate and distinct; but in carrying back the answer of God, having to do with men, who knew no more than he had a mind to communicate to them, he delivers it in terms calculated only to stimulate the eagerness of the king of Moab, by encouraging a hope that something might be extorted, by dint of importunity and perseverance; or that, perhaps, he might be allowed to do that at a distance, which he might not do by a nearer approach. The command was clear and full, "Thou shalt not go with them;" but in the mouth of Balaam it is mutilated and perverted: "The Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you."[*]Num 22:13 This satisfies Balak at once, that the prophet's good will was with him; that it was not from want of inclination that the messengers returned without him; and, he justly concludes, that with such a proportion of the man on his side, it would not be difficult to make the rest to follow. The father of lies himself will speak truth, when it makes for his purpose; and Satan will quote Scripture, if he can but deceive by it; as in his temptation of our Savior in the wilderness. But then there is always some material circumstance disguised, perverted, or suppressed: and thereby a different meaning is conveyed from what was intended. The word of God, then, is handled deceitfully, not only when it is wrested, and made to speak a language not its own, but when any part of the truth is purposely, artfully, and wilfully concealed: and he "who shuns to declare the whole counsel of God," is equally criminal with him who presumes to deliver, as the word of God, what wants the stamp of his authority. Balaam

simply relates, that he is not permitted to go; not a syllable of the prohibition to curse Israel, nor of the reason assigned for that prohibition. As the message lost much by the way between God and the princes of Moab, from Balaam's manner of rehearsing it; so it loses still more between Balaam and their master, from their mutilated and partial report: so that by the time it reaches Balak, an entirely different turn and meaning is given to it. The words of the oracle are, "Then shalt not go with them: thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed:"[*]Num 22:12 rehearsed by Balaam, "the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you:"[*]Num 22:13 reported by the ambassadors, "Balaam refuseth to come with us."[*]Num 22:14 Thus, by the alteration of a few circumstances, even without a direct violation of truth, by passing through a very few hands, a plain proposition is made to contradict itself; and if we add to the easiness of varying facts, by varying phrases, and modes of expression; the difference, still more easily made, by the infinite diversity of tones, looks, and gesture, we shall not be surprised to find, what frequently happens, a man made to say diametrically the reverse of what he did say, and what he intended.

Balak having received this answer as the prophet's, with great color of reason, considers it as a mere artifice, employed with a view to raise his price and importance; and he hopes to conquer Balaam's reluctance, by assiduity, perseverance, presents, and flattery; for both good and bad men judge of others by themselves: and apprized, it would appear, of Balaam's weak side, ambition, and avarice, he dispatches a second embassy, consisting of a greater number of persons, and of still higher rank, with this weighty and importunate address: "Thus saith Balak, the son of Zippor, Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me: for I will promote thee unto very great honor, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come, therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people."[*]Num 22:16-17 How flattering all this to a worldly, selfish mind! Balak puts a carte blanche into his hands; leaves him to name his own terms. All the honor which a king could bestow, all the wealth of Moab is before him; the very things which his soul lusted after. Blessed Jesus, thou chief of the prophets, even the prince of this world, the chief of tempters, when he came, found nothing in thee! found no weak side, no vulnerable part. The kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them, dazzled not thine eyes: to the loudest calls of nature thou turned a deaf ear. The applause of men thou didst despise; thou soughtest not thine own glory, but the glory of Him that sent thee: thy "meat and drink was to do the will of Him that sent thee."

Balaam had now been at the summit of his wishes, but for a stern, pointed command of God; which, like a drawn sword, hung by a single hair over his head. Shocking dilemma! he is goaded on by desires as impetuous as ever took possession of a proud and covetous mind; he is bridled in by a prohibition, as decisive as words could make it. For a moment we are in hope that the good principle has got the ascendant, that the fear, if not the love of God is shed abroad in his heart. Who could speak better! "If Balak would give me his house fall of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more."[*]Num 22:18 It is the very sentiment of chaste and virtuous Joseph, when solicited by temptation of a different sort. But here is the difference:--Joseph fled from temptation and overcame: Balaam tampered with it, and fell. Even the worst of men feel themselves under a necessity, for their interest's sake, to save appearances; and something must be said, at least, to still the clamors of conscience. Unhappy man! steady, himself, to his own base and wicked purpose, he is weak enough to entertain the hope, that the great, the unchangeable Jehovah may depart from his. Thus deceiving himself, it is no wonder to see him attempting to deceive the king of Moab's messengers into the expectation of a response

more favorable to their united wishes. Accordingly, he courteously invites them to lodge with him that night also; if, peradventure, there might be obtained a reversal of the decree. And now the sable curtain is drawn, and Balaam is left alone, and no eye sees him but the all-seeing eye of God. Without waiting to be consulted, and the prophet, without doubt, was both afraid and ashamed to venture on this second reencounter, God again prevents him, and tacitly, though not directly, charges him with having invited this second application, in the face of a positive and decided answer. Balaam and Balak are both men of this world, and having one and the same spirit to govern them, they readily understand each other. Balaam evidently courts a second address; and Balak is not slow to pay it. Now, this is the very thing which gives so great and such just offence to a holy God--that two presumptuous, selfish wretches should presume to imagine, that the counsels of heaven could be shaken, in compliance with their humor or interest. “And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do.”* The word might have been rendered, “Seeing the men have come to call thee, Balaam, you have carried, thus far, your point. A more honorable embassy attends you. Your desire is to go: you are unable to withstand the allurements of riches and honor: you know the better course, but will pursue the worse. Well then, fulfill thy desire. I have declared my will; but thou preferrest thine own. I have said, Go not; curse not; but the demon of gain, Mammon, says, go and curse. Obey him. Go, and take the consequence.” This is clearly the language of the permission given him to accompany the messengers. And can there be a clearer proof of the divine displeasure, than when God yields to men, and gives them their own way? “My people,” says God, “would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me; so I gave them up into their own heart’s lust, and they walked in their own counsels. O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries.”[*]Psa 81:11-14 The wickedness of the old world at length overcame the patience of God; and he said, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man:” and so they were left to eat and drink, to dance and to play; but then the waters of a deluge were at no great distance: and when God says, concerning a people, or an individual, “Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone;” short of hell, it is the worst that can befall them.

Balaam flattered himself and the Moabites, with hearing more from God; but, as the punishment of abusing the light he had, he hears less than before; and the vision is obscured to the man who had wilfully shut his own eyes. He was formerly forbidden either to go, or to curse. He is now, at his peril, allowed to go: but should he be so rash as to proceed on so slender a warrant, he is, at his peril, warned to walk by the instructions which should be given him. How easily men believe, how promptly they obey, when the doctrine tallies with their prejudices; when the precept coincides with their inclinations or their interest. Balaam is weak, I ought to have said, wicked enough, to imagine his way perfectly clear. Having carried, as he thought, one essential point, all the rest, he presumes, will follow of course. Who so quick-sighted as a covetous man pursuing his gain? And yet, who so stupid and dull, as the man whose eyes the god of this world hath blinded? Balaam is up betimes in the morning, equipped for his journey, on his way for the land of Moab. “For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.”[*]Luk 16:8 And there, for the present, we shall leave him, with this melancholy, mortifying reflection--that a corrupted heart has infinitely greater power to pervert a sound understanding and a well informed conscience, than an intelligent conscience and a clear head have to reform and purify a corrupted

heart. If God permit, we shall continue the history next Lord’s day. May grace and wisdom be granted us to make a proper use of it; and to God’s holy name be praise. Amen.

073. Balaam--The Madman

Balaam--The Madman

2Pe 2:15-16. These are gone astray, following the way of Balaam, the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity; the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbad the madness of the prophet. The ordinary powers of nature, if we consider them attentively, are no less wonderful in themselves, and are not less a proof of the power and wisdom of God, than those extraordinary gifts which have been bestowed, and those preternatural powers which have been exercised at particular seasons, and for special purposes; and which have excited the admiration and astonishment of one part of mankind, and the incredulity of another. That a company of illiterate men should suddenly, and without instruction or study, be endowed with the gift of readily speaking various languages, justly raises our wonder, and conveys to our minds a very lofty idea of that divine intelligence which can communicate such power unto men: but we overlook the wonder equally great, because it is continually occurring, of the common gift of speech, and the conveyance of thought by it; and the acquisition of language by means of letters and memory. That a dumb ass should speak with man's voice, and the dull ass reason, fills us with surprise, because the instance is singular and unparalleled; but the gradual increase of the human body, the imperceptible expansion of the powers of the human mind, pass for a thing of course; though the hand of God be conspicuous in the one case as in the other. Nothing is incredible to them who know the Scriptures, and the power of God nothing is incredible to him who attends, with any degree of application, to the operations of his own mind; and to what, in the ordinary course of human affairs, is every hour pressing upon his observation. In to crowded assembly, without the utterance of a single sound, by one glance of the eye, the inmost thoughts, the most secret emotions, shall, quick as lightning, be conveyed from soul to soul: and the stranger be unable to intermeddle with, to partake of the sorrow or the joy. Let the veil of night be spread ever so thick, and the use of sight suspended, as if the eyeball were extinguished, the vibration of a little filth of flesh shall dissipate the gloom, and convey the accents of affection or of woe to the ear and the heart of sympathy. Place the diameter of the globe between my friend and rue, by an art subtle as the magic spell, what I know and feel in the frozen regions of the north, shall flee on the swift wings of the wind, and touch his soul under the more clement sky of the opposite hemisphere. Knowing from experience all this to be true, history can record no fact, promise suspend before my eyes no future event too wonderful for me to believe. The omniscience, omnipotence, and infinite goodness of God once admitted, every difficulty vanishes. Is there anything too hard for the Lord, to perform? No: Then Sarah conceives a son at ninety years old; the dumb ass reproves the madness of his master; unlettered fishermen speak with tongues; the dead shall arise; all these things shall be dissolved, and "new heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," shall be expanded, to endure for ever and ever.

Having premised these things, not altogether foreign, we trust, to our subject, we proceed to the farther prosecution of a history, as singular, and as instructive, perhaps, as any in Scripture.

Balaam having obtained what he was willing to believe the consent of God to his journey into the land of Moab, for we easily believe what we wish, loses not a moment in making preparation for it. He is mounted, and on his journey by the first dawning of the day, as if afraid of prevention, by a revocation of the permission; ill at ease in his mind, but smothering conviction, in the exultation of having princes in his train, and in the prospect of all the riches and honor which confederated kings had to bestow. Scripture gives us the idea of a holy violence offered unto God, with which he is well pleased, and to which he graciously submits to yield; as when it is said, “the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” Hence the commandment, to “strive to enter in at the strait gate,” to wrestle and make supplication, “to pray always and not to faint.” But there is also suggested the idea of an impious, a presumptuous, and a fatal strife and contention with our Maker, in which, woe be to the man that prevails. Such was the violence which worldly minded Balaam offered; and how could he think to prosper? God, justly displeased at his perseverance in a cause which he knew to be disapproved of heaven, leaves him not long in uncertainty respecting his will. The princes of Moab, it would appear, had now left him, and were proceeding with a quicker pace to apprise their master of the prophet’s approach; and Balaam remains attended by only two of his own servants, when the angel of the Lord places himself in the way for an adversary against him. We shall find, in the sequel, the person styled the angel of the Lord, as in other places, so here, assuming the character and exercising the prerogative of Deity: for he it is that afterwards says, “The word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak.” We are to understand, therefore, by this designation, the mighty, the uncreated Angel, by whom God made the worlds; the eternal Word, which was in the beginning, which was with God, and which was God, and which, in the fulness of time was made flesh, and dwelt among men: “And they beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”[*]John 1:14 But never, till now, did he appear in the character of an adversary. We find him on other occasions, appearing to direct the wandering, to protect the weak, and to succor the distressed; as in the case of Hagar, Lot, and Jacob: but the face of the Lord is set against them that do evil. And now behold him in the way to check the progress of pride, violence, and covetousness. The great enemy, foe to God and man, is termed by way of distinction the adversary: but lo! that awful character is assumed by a very different being--by one, infinitely greater and mightier than him; whose wrath is infinitely more terrible; who has power to save and to destroy; and, if he take upon him that form, it is still in consistency with his gracious characters of good and merciful: it is to humble the proud, to prevent and counteract the causeless curse; to disappoint malice, and make the purposes of revenge recoil upon itself; it is to support the friendless, to guard the innocent, and to relieve the miserable. This formidable apparition was observed neither by the prophet nor his servants. Neither the natural vision of the latter, nor the extraordinary and supernatural sagacity of the former, discerned any thing save empty space, where the dullest of brute animals descried the presence of Him, who makes all nature tremble at his nod; who “giveth understanding to the prudent, and to him that hath no might increaseth strength.” Is not this a striking representation of what daily comes to pass in the course of providence? We see men soaring in the clouds, with their eyes and imagination, while with their feet they stumble and fall into the ditch that is before them; possessing every kind of sense, except common sense: pretending to superior refinement, and yet stupid and gross, in the plainest and most essential things. Thus the simplicity of the gospel was “to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness:” and on this very account, the condescending Savior of mankind is represented as rejoicing in spirit, and saying, “I

thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."[*]Mat 11:25-26 Thus God destroyeth the wisdom of the wise, and brings to nothing the understanding of the prudent."[*]1Co 1:19

What an object of terror is here represented as obstructing the passage! An angel! The prince of angels armed with a sword, and that sword drawn in his hand! What was the strength of Egypt, in that dreadful night, when one of his flaming messengers walked through the midst of it, and made all its first-born to bleed to death under his stroke? How easy had it been for that arm, with one stroke of that sword, to have put an end to the life and madness of the prophet! But he chose to employ a meaner instrument, and thereby to vindicate to himself higher praise.

There is a striking progress described in the mode of admonition and reproof, administered to the prophet by the successive actions of the dumb creature. First, "he turned aside out of the way, and went into the field;" a plain intimation to his accustomed rider, that something extraordinary obstructed his path. Thus, in many passages of Scripture, the common instincts of the dullest animals, are employed to expose the greater thoughtlessness and folly of rational beings. "Ask, now, the beasts," says Job, "and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee; and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these, that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?"[*]Job 12:7-9 "Hear, O heavens;" says God by Isaiah, "and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."[*]Isa 1:2-3 "Yea, the stork in the heaven," saith God by another prophet, "knoweth her appointed times: and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow observe the time of her coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord."[*]Jer 8:7 Thus, in the passage before us, a more indirect reproof was given to the eagerness and speed of Balaam, pricked on by the spur of covetousness and ambition, by the action of the ass, in deviating from the right path; and had not the eyes of his understanding been blinded by the wages of unrighteousness, this, without the vision of an angel, might have taught him that the way in which he went was perverse before God. But following only the blind impulse of a carnal mind, he wreaks, in reiterated blows upon the unoffending brute, the resentment which ought to have been leveled against his own rashness and presumption. Who was here most worthy of stripes? Let the adage of the wise man determine. "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back."

Behold the patience and longsuffering of God. The ass, by dint of blows, is forced back again into the road, and the angel himself gives place and retires. Folly and obstinacy seem to have carried off the victory; but alas, how short is the triumph of impiety! If omnipotence yield, it is only to meet the sinner on ground more difficult and dangerous. The heavenly messenger now takes his stand in a place where there was no way to escape, "a wall on this side, and a wall on that," and a flaming sword wielded by the arm of the great Archangel, in front, to oppose. There is no way of safety but in turning back and fleeing for life, and yet he will madly push on to his own destruction. When men are once engaged in a way that is not good, difficulty only stimulates their ardor; they rush on through danger to danger, till they involve themselves in inevitable destruction; according to the fearful progress described by the prophet--"Fear, and the pit, and the snare shall be upon thee, O inhabitant of Moab, saith the Lord. He that fleeth from the fear shall fall into the pit, and he

that getteth up out of the pit, shall be taken in the snare: for I will bring upon it, even upon Moab, the year of their visitation, with the Lord. They that fled stood under the shadow of Heshbon, because of the force; but a fire shall come forth out of Heshbon, and a flame from the midst of Sion, and shall devour the corner of Moab, and the crowd of the head of the tumultuous ones."[*]Jer 48:43-45 The reproof now becomes more distinct and direct. The wretched animal, urged on by his furious rider, hemmed in with a wall on either side, and opposed in front as with a wall of fire, in making a desperate effort to pass by and advance, thrusts herself close to the wall, and crushes the prophet's foot. Thus slow, thus reluctant, is a merciful God to proceed to judgment. He first warns and threatens; then touches the extremities, if peradventure the sinner will take warning, and turn back: and not till all means have been tried and found ineffectual, is he provoked to strike the deadly blow that reaches the heart.

Mark on the other hand, by what dreadful degrees sinners harden themselves against God, till they become lost to feeling. The commission of one sin as naturally leads to another, as every step down a steep place accelerates the speed of that which is to follow: and yet transgressors vainly imagine it is in their power to stop when they please, or to turn against the bias. One of the most fearful symptoms of a reprobate mind, is, when the very means of awakening, convincing, and converting, serve as opiates to the conscience, and increase that insensibility which they were meant to cure. If the constitution of the patient be so vitiated as to convert medicine into poison, dissolution cannot be at a great distance. Affliction, that wholesome, though unpalatable potion, never leaves the mind exactly where it fund it. A cure is either begun by it, or the distemper is confirmed. The history of Balaam is the illustration of this position. The pain of his foot has only served to whet the asperity of his disposition; and the more he is opposed, the more earnest he is to get forwards. O that the children of light were thus perseverant in a good cause, and not weary of well doing.

It is astonishing that superstition, if not the fear of God, did not now turn him back. Surely never journey had a more ominous, inauspicious beginning: but the passions, by which he was actuated, are among the last to be discouraged; on he drives, and the angel, in patience mixed with displeasure, continues to retreat, till at length the path becomes so narrow, that it was impossible to turn to the right hand or to the left, when the patient brute, wearied and wasted with stripes, and scared with the dreadful vision immediately before her eyes, at last sinks to the earth under her burden. This was the third stage of admonition and reproof. God first waves the flaming sword, but cuts not; shakes the rod, but smites not. That being disregarded, he puts forth his hand and smites the heal, but spares the vitals. He then proceeds to block up the way, that the sinner cannot pass; but is constrained to fall down before him. Humanity is shocked as we proceed. "The merciful man is merciful to his beast, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." Behold an old, simple, uncomplaining drudge expiring under the angry blows of her unkind master. The very stones of the field are ready to cry out, and to upbraid the hardhearted, ungrateful wretch with his cruelty. "Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote her with a staff." In the history of the miracle which follows, a multitude of reflections crowd upon us. In the order and frame of nature, every creature of God has a special use and end; neither is there any schism, deficiency, or redundancy, permitted in the great body of the universe. Everything is in its place; everything is fulfilling the purpose of its Creator; and therefore nothing ought to be mean or contemptible in our eyes. The great Lord of all, exercises a tender concern about the lowest of the brute creation, provides for

them, and resents the cruelty and injustice which are offered them. “He feeds the ravens,” “the young lions ask their meat from God,” “he careth for oxen,” “a sparrow falleth not to the ground without our Heavenly Father.” And lo, the dull ass findeth compassion and an avenger, when under oppression, from him whom angels worship. Who so lofty as to be beyond his reach, as to defy his power? What so little as to be beneath his notice, or shut out from his pity. There is of consequence a return of attention and tenderness due from the human race to every order of creatures below themselves, and whose services, whatever their faculties may be, Providence permits them to employ either for pleasure or for use. The power and wisdom which stationed every creature in its proper place, and preserves it there, can at pleasure elevate it to a higher, or depress it to a lower sphere; can confer higher, or it a force unknown before, or deprive it of what it formerly possessed; can break the strength of Egypt, by an army of frogs or flies, or preserve Daniel unhurt in the midst of the lions; can catch the serpent in his own craftiness, and teach the dull ass speech and reason. The cunning of Satan, and the understanding of man, look out for likely; promising and adequate instruments to carry on their designs. The wisdom of God chooses to execute his by such as are apparently weak, unpromising, and inadequate. To seduce our first parents, the devil employed’ the agency of that creature which was the most sagacious of all the beasts of the field. The most stupid, in the hand of the Almighty, was sufficient to confound, and to convict, and to condemn, the proudest and most highly gifted of his race. And the gospel of Christ becometh effectual unto salvation, not through the wisdom of words, but by demonstration of the Spirit; for “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God bath 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.”[*]1Co 1:27-29

Finally, for we must make an end of our reflections on the subject--What creature so brutish, as a rational being under the dominion of his lusts! the novelty of an ass speaking, reasoning, remonstrating, seems to have excited no astonishment in the furious prophet: he is not awakened to one sentiment of compassion, nor of godly fear, by a phenomenon so singular. The only regret he feels, is the want of a deadly instrument to prosecute his resentment to the full. Men most vainly, and in the face of experience, imagine, that such and such means of conviction would certainly work their effect. “Nay, but if one went from the dead they will repent;” but the truth is too well confirmed by every day’s experience, to be called in question, that “if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”[*]Luk 16:31 A miracle greater than even opening the ass’s mouth must be performed, before Balaam be persuaded. A heart wedded to gain, is not to be reasoned out of its favorite pursuit; and unbelief, do what you will, always finds a strong hold whereto it can resort, and which it easily renders impregnable. “Show us a sign from heaven and we will believe.” Well, the very petulance of incredulity is humored, the sign is exhibited, Satan is cast out. Surely they will now believe. No such thing. “This man casteth out devils by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.” The eyes of Balaam are blinder, his heart more hard than when the tongue of the ass is mute. At length, God vouchsafes to effect that by a second miracle, which had been obvious to a tender conscience, much more to a prophetic eye, without any miracle at all; and the angel stands confessed to the sight of the soothsayer, clothed in all his terror. And now violence, ambition, and covetousness stand for a while suspended, swallowed up of fear at this alarming sight. His eyes are no sooner opened to see with whom he had to contend, than he shuts them again in consternation and

astonishment; “he bowed his head and fell flat on his face.” What a miserable figure a haughty man makes when caught in the snare! How vain the expectation of fleeing from God, or of opposing him with success! How dreadful it is to meet as an adversary, Him whose counsels we have alighted as a friend! Balaam has now the unspeakable mortification of discovering that he owed the preservation of his life to the slender sagacity and discernment of the poor brute whom he had treated so unmercifully; and he is again assured, without reserve or disguise, that the design of this journey was highly odious and offensive to God. Behold, I went out to withstand these because thy way is perverse before me. And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times; unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive.”[*]Num 22:32-33 But though intimidated and confounded, his heart still cleaves to “the wages of unrighteousness.” Disapprobation could not be expressed in clearer and stronger words, than had all along been employed, “thou shalt not go, thou shalt not curse,” “I went out to withstand thee: thy way is perverse before me,” and yet he has the assurance to make it a matter of doubt whether God were displeased with him or not. A conscience not quite callous, a heart not totally hardened like his, would have sought instantly to retreat, thankful that his presumption had not already cost him his life; but he cannot give up the hope of getting forward. “If it displease thee, I will get me back again.”[*]Num 22:34 “If it displease thee.” Could he doubt it? What kind of assurance would he have had? And yet, wonderful to be told, the angel continues once more to give way; and Balaam has still the hardiness to proceed; and the issue proves the truth of the wise man’s assertion: “He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”[*]Pro 29:1 The history now hastens on to the meeting of Balaam and Balak; the one eager to prevail over his enemies, by the power of enchantment; the other to possess himself of the riches and honors of Moab. The one lays aside the state of a king, and advances to his utmost border, out of respect to his expected guest. The other, with more speed than became a prophet, hastens to partake of the prince’s repast, little scrupulous whether the bill of tare consisted of things offered unto idols or not. But happily for Israel, God; their protector, had put a hook in his nose, and a bridle in his jaws. He himself feels and acknowledges it, however reluctantly. “And Balaam said unto Balak, Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say any thing! the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.”[*]Num 22:38 The prophecy itself, one of the most beautiful passages in the sacred history, though uttered by profane lips; and the power of God therein exemplified in making the wrath of man to praise him, will furnish useful matter for another discourse. Let what has been said, be improved as a solemn warning to observe, regard, and submit to the admonitions of God’s word and providence. Woe be to that man who sees no angel standing in the way of a sinful career, till the angel of death stop him with his fatal dart. Let the checks of conscience be listened to. Has the hand, or the foot been bruised, retreat in time. There is a lion in the way. He that proves too strong for his Maker, by a bold perseverance in an evil course, is only hastening forward his own destruction. The same person is the kindest friend, and the most formidable adversary.

God can find an instrument to punish, in the meanest and most contemptible creature; therefore despise none, abuse none. Be not weary in well doing. Take an example from Balaam, in respect of perseverance; but choose an honester and worthier object of pursuit. Honor God with your superior reason and use of speech. Behold an ass wise, and a prophet mad: blush at thy own folly, and be humble.

Let us go, as has been already suggested, and learn wisdom from the brute creation. “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib;” be instructed to acknowledge the hand that feeds thee: learn attachment to thy Protector, learn gratitude to thy Benefactor, repay kindness with kindness. Learn industry from the bee. “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?”[*]Pro 6:6-9 “The hen gathereth her chickens under her wings.” “There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise. The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; the conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; the spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in king’s palaces.”[*]Pro 30:24-28 May God open our eyes, and dispose our minds to receive instruction from everything around us; and preserve us from opposing his will, and make his way straight before our face.

074. Balaam--Blesses Israel

Balaam--Blesses Israel

Num 23:10. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.

Human conduct, as far as it is governed by the spirit of this world, exhibits a wretched and contemptible, but a dangerous and fatal opposition to the will of God. Men would be happy in their own way; but whether they succeed in their pursuits, or whether they fail, they find themselves miserable in the end. God is conducting us, if we would but be conducted, to real and substantial happiness, but it is through a narrow gate, and along a path in many paces strewed with thorns. The prosperous successes of vanity and wickedness, like a sweet poison, may afford a transient pleasure in the moment of swallowing: but lasting and unutterable anguish immediately succeeds. The bowels are torn with pain insupportable, and the man dies, dies for ever, for the indulgence and gratification of one poor instant of time. But the sacrifices we are enabled to make to God, and to the testimony of a good conscience, are like a nauseous medicine, which by means of a short-lived disgust, rectifies the constitution, sweetens the blood, confirms health, and prolongs a happy existence. The grievousness of affliction in due season, “yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby.” In whatever way men choose to live, and very different are the roads which they take, they have but one idea, one wish, one prayer, in the prospect of death and eternity. When man finds himself on the brink of the world of spirits, it will afford him but slender consolation, to reflect that he has lived. long enough to amass a fortune, to enjoy a banquet, to attain a post of honor, to acquire a name. And he will feel as little pain and mortification, on the other hand, in recollecting that he has passed life in obscurity, that he has struggled with poverty, that he has endured unmerited reproach. But this is the folly and the misery of man; we eagerly imbibe and follow the spirit of this world while we live; and fondly dream of assuming, in one propitious instant, the spirit of heaven, when we come to die. We think of passing our thirty or forty years with the gay, the giddy, and the vain; as if that could be a preparation for an eternity with God, and angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect. Our understanding and conscience are on the side of wisdom and piety; our passions and habits, and alas! they are more powerful, are of the party of dissipation and vice. “The fool says in his heart, there is no God;” and men, reputed wise, live as if there were none. The unhappy man, whose character is farther unfolded to us in the text, exhibits a most affecting example of this strange inconsistency and self-delusion. Who so enlightened as Balaam, “which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty?” Who so blind as the covetous prophet who “loved the wages of unrighteousness,” whose eyes the god of this world blinded? Hear him speak; the manna of heavenly eloquence falls from his lips: behold him act, and lo, a fiend from hell spreading snares and destruction. Under the control of God, not Moses himself thinks more affectionately, expresses affection more ardently towards Israel, than Balaam. Under the impulse of his own passions, not Satan could plot more malignantly nor more effectually. As the prophet of God, who so warm a friend? As the counsellor of Balak, who so dreadful an adversary? In the prospect of

death, who more devout! In life, who so profligate? In judgment and opinion, who so clear and sound? In practice, who so prostitute and abandoned? In the face of a prohibition, the clearest and fullest that words could convey, through the difficulties and dangers of a journey the most eventful upon record, Balaam is now arrived at Balak's metropolis, Kirjath-hazoth, the city of streets.--Greetings, such as may be supposed to pass between wicked and selfish men, being over, the sacrifice is offered up, and the banquet is prepared, according to the state of a king, and the sacredness and importance of his guest. The evening being passed in festivity, they retire to rest; and early on the morrow, Balaam permits himself to be conducted by the Moabitish prince into the "high places of Baal, that thence he might see the utmost parts of the people." Here the cloven foot appears at once. Balsam was too was too intelligent to believe that Baal was any thing; that his sacrifices or high places were any thing: but Balak's gold being, indeed, the god whom he himself worshipped, it is to him a matter of the last indifference before what idol the superstitious monarch bowed down. Reason and religion say, "What concord can there be between God and Belial; between him that believeth, and an infidel? Ye cannot serve God and mammon." But avarice will attempt any thing, submit to any thing, commit any thing; will adore the God of Israel, or bend at the altar of Baal, just as it serves the occasion. Balaam even volunteers in the service of the idol; feeds the superstition of Balak, which it was his duty to have corrected; and, as if there had been something potent and mysterious in the number, directs seven altars to be erected, and a bullock and a ram to be prepared for a sacrifice upon each of the seven.

Behold how soon the reproof of a speaking, reasoning brute, the terrors of the opposing angel, and the admonitions of the heavenly vision, are disregarded and forgotten! Balak is deliberately suffered to remain the dupe of his own credulity: he is fed with the vain hope of triumph, in a way by which it could not be achieved; and an attempt is impiously made to aid him in an enterprise which Heaven had repeatedly condemned; and, dreadful to think, this is done under all the awful forms of a religious service; and a purpose too vile to be avowed, even to men, is presumptuously obtruded upon the great Jehovah, as if his determinations were to fluctuate with the vile interests and caprices of mortals. "The sacrifice of the wicked," saith the wise man, "is an abomination, how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind." The religion of God is, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." But the leading article of Balaam's creed is, "Gain is godliness:" hence he attempts to sanction cursing and cruelty, under the solemn ordinances of the blessed God.

We have, observed formerly without pretending to assign a reason for it, that the number seven is, through the whole of divine revelation, connected with many important ideas, institutions, and events, in cases depending on the sovereign authority of the great God. This leads us to conclude, that it has a meaning and design, the knowledge of which is either lost to the world or never has yet been revealed to man. It cannot be for nothing that it presents itself so often, and in so many forms, upon the sacred page. That God rested the seventh day from all his work, and sanctified it--that on the solemn day of the atonement, under the law, the blood of the sin-offering was sprinkled before and upon the mercyseat seven times--that the altar of burnt-offering was consecrated by being anointed seven times with the holy oil--that the consecration of Aaron to the priesthood consisted of a service of seven days--that the leper was to be sprinkled, in order to purification, seven times; and after a separation of seven days, be admitted to his rank as a citizen--that every seventh year was ordained a year of rest, to the land of promise; and that a revolution of seven times seven years brought on the jubilee, or universal release--that seven

priests, bearing so many trumpets, were commanded to begin the conquest of Canaan, by seven days encompassing Jericho; and that, upon the seventh circuit, and at the seventh blowing of the trumpet, the walls of that city should fall to the ground--that the like number of priests should be employed to precede and announce the removal of the ark, when David brought it home; and not to multiply instances without end--that the Lamb, which John saw in vision in the midst of the throne, should be represented as having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God, sent out into all the earth--that the book in the right hand of Him who sat upon the throne, should be sealed with seven seals--that in these, and so many more cases, which the careful reader of the Scriptures need not have pointed out to him, the Spirit of God should see meet to press upon our minds, with such peculiar emphasis, this number of perfection, as it hath been called both by Jews and Heathens, though we cannot account for it, leads to this pleasing conclusion--That there are in the word of God, many precious mines of knowledge, yet undiscovered; endless mysteries of wisdom, goodness, and love, yet to be unveiled; depths of mercy, which the capacity of angels has not yet fathomed; heights of grace, to which the seraphim's wing hath not soared. Is it imagination, merely, to suppose that the felicity of saints in bliss may consist in diving deeper and deeper into the plan of redemption; in tracing its progress, its history, to its consummation; in reading this wonderful book, with the veil removed from our eyes; to find in it all the stores of natural, moral, and divine truth; in for ever learning, ever beginning to learn "the love of Christ which passeth knowledge?" I will indulge the dear, the delightful hope, that the period will come, when, taught of that Spirit, who is promised to "take of the things of Christ and show them unto us," I shall discover, in this blest volume, ten thousand excellencies to which I am now blind; ten thousand truths, of which I have at present no perception; ten thousand beauties I am now incapable of relishing. But to return.

It is no great wonder to find a man of so mixed a character as Balaam, employing altars and victims, according to a number and quality long before sanctified by the appointment of the true God. For all the rites of idolatry may easily be traced up to divine institutions. But what signifies the form, when the spirit and meaning is lost? Chemosh was the peculiar idol of the Moabites, as we learn from Num 21:29; for Baal, that is, lord, was a general term, descriptive of the whole tribe of deities, and applied by every particular nation to its respective patron; yet we find Balak easily persuaded by Balaam to offer sacrifice to Jehovah. For they that have false notions of Deity, cannot be very difficult in their choice of a god; and Balak probably was so weak as to imagine, that by this piece of flattery and respect, the God of the Israelites might be decoyed from them, withdraw his protection, and give them up to the sword of their enemies.

Balaam, now the sacrifice was set on fire, directs the king to stand by it, in solemn expectation of its success; he himself withdraws to an "high place," or, he went solitary; probably to some adjoining cliff of the rock, favorable either to meditation, or the practice of his enchantments: for observation of any preternatural signs that might be given, or for a clearer prospect of the camp to be devoted. Nothing astonishes me more than the boldness of this retreat. An ill conscience seeks concealment from the eye of God in noise and a crowd. To what a pitch of insensibility has this man attained, who has the dreadful courage to go forth to meet an offended God in solitude! "And God met Balaam." In what manner we are not told, neither is it of any importance to know; but it is of importance to observe that "God's ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts." Insulted in the same manner, what man but would have felt resentment, and have returned insult

for insult! In nothing, Father of Mercies! is thy glorious superiority more conspicuous than in thy gentleness and patience. God is not a man, that he should be ruffled and discomposed, nor the son of man, that he should oppose vehemence to vehemence. The wrath of man provokes him not, the haste of man urges him not, the tardiness of man delays him not, the flattery of man sways him not.

Balaam has the confidence to advance a plea of merit for the service which he had performed, in erecting so many altars, and offering so many victims; but he has not the assurance to avow the motive, nor directly to prefer the request to which it plainly led. Without paying the least regard to the one or to the other, God, the great God, puts the word he would have spoken into Balsam's mouth, and sends him back to pronounce it aloud in the ear of Balak, and his attendants. I see, with an honest satisfaction, the disappointed, mortified enchanter, returning with downcast eyes, sullen and slow from the solemn meeting: his schemes of malignity checked and prohibited, all his prospects of ambition and avarice forever blasted; cursing in his heart that inflexibility of purpose which he durst neither attempt to alter or oppose. I see the expecting monarch in the midst of his seven altars, all eye to watch the moment of the prophet's return; eagerly anticipating his message from his looks, and all ear to hear it delivered in articulate sounds. The emotions which filled the hearts of both, are to be conceived, not described, when the reluctant tongue of Balaam thus pronounced the immutable decree of the Holy Oracle, while the assembled princes of Moab listened with sorrow and disappointment. "Balak, the king of Moab, bath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me, Jacob, and come, defy, Israel. How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? Or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?"[*]Num 23:7-10 The first reflection that naturally presents itself, on hearing these words, is one that has frequently occurred in the course of these exercises, and which it is impossible to repeat too often:--How wonderful, how tremendous, how irresistible the power of God, which has thus all matter, all spirit, at its disposal! which can make the dumb ass speak what naturally he cannot, and the mad prophet to utter what wickedly and perversely he would not: "and out of the mouths of babes and sucklings perfecteth praise." Mark how God brings to nought the counsel of the heathen; writes vanity upon the counsels of princes, and "maketh diviners mad." Thus said Balak; thus did the king of Moab; how poor and contemptible, compared to "Thus saith the Lord." "The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters. Who is like unto thee, O Lord, amongst the gods! who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders!"[*]Exo 15:9;Exo 15:11 Mark how the slow and reluctant prophecy of Balaam accords with the predictions of former times, and the history of periods yet to come. "Look up now," says God to Abraham, "toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be."[*]Gen 15:5 And lo, the promise is more than fulfilled: it is infinitely exceeded by the accomplishment. "Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?" Look forward to the days of Solomon, when the glory of Israel was in its zenith, when the descendants of the men in the plains of Moab were multiplied as the sand on the sea shore; and thence rise higher still, to a greater promise, to a better covenant, to the spiritual seed of faithful Abraham increased "to a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and

kindreds, and people, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;"[*]Rev 7:9 encamped not in a fertile terrestrial plain, but expatiating through the vast regions of eternal day, and possessing, not a land flowing with milk and honey, but the pure and sublime delights of the paradise of God. How I envy Balaam the prospect from the top of the rock! A rich champaign country, skirted by the silver Jordan, meeting the distant horizon; the tents of Israel spread out like the trees in the forest, and covering an innumerable multitude; a whole nation of men beloved of God, and destined to conquest; the spacious tabernacle, the habitation of the Most High, expanded in the midst, and the cloud of glory, the unequivocal proof of the presence of the great King, resting upon it. How many objects to delight the eye, to swell the imagination, to elevate the soul! No wonder the tongue of envy was charmed from its purpose. But alas! the heart of malice and covetousness remains unchanged; a chest full of gold had been to Balaam a sight more enchanting. Place him in heaven, like Mammon his father; according to the description of our great poet, his attention had been fixed but on one object.

"Mammon, the least erected spirit that fell

From heaven; for even in heaven, his looks and thoughts

Were always downward bent, admiring more

The riches of heaven's pavement, trodden gold,

Than aught divine or holy else enjoyed

In vision beatific." The beautiful view beneath, therefore, was to Balaam what the conjugal bliss of our first parents in paradise was to Satan, according to the same great poet; who, beholding their pure and innocent affection, "turned aside for envy," and exclaimed:

"Sight hateful, sight tormenting! Thus these two,

Imparadis'd in one another's arms,

The happier Eden, shall enjoy their fill

Of bliss on bliss, while I to hell am thrust;

Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire,

Still unfulfilled, with pain of longing pines."

It was a spirit and a situation not unlike to this, which suggested to the wicked prophet the words of the text; "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"[*]Num 23:10 Unhappy Balaam! he descried from the top of the rock goodly tents, in which he had no part nor lot; he discerned the happy estate of the righteous, but chose to be a partaker with the ungodly; he admired and envied the happy end of the people of God, but felt his own end approaching without hope; he saw and approved the beauty and loveliness of virtue; he persisted to the last, pursuing and cleaving to the wages of unrighteousness. But what, I beseech you, could dictate this wish to Balaam? What but a strong and irresistible persuasion of the immortality of the soul, and an approaching unalterable state of rewards and punishments? What but a consciousness of having

acted wrong, and the dreadful knowledge of his being accountable to a holy and righteous God? And is it really possible for reasonable creatures to fall into such gross absurdity and contradiction? And can there exist such characters in the world? Let us bring the case home to ourselves. It is too evident to need a proof, that many indulge themselves in very unwarrantable practices, whose religious principles, notwithstanding, are exceedingly sound and just. Try them on the side of soundness in sentiment and opinion, and they talk and reason like angels from heaven: consider how they live, they are mere men of this world. They find a salvo for conscience, by making a sort of composition with their Maker, as some men find a salvo for their integrity, by putting off their good-natured creditors with a certain proportion of their debt, when they are either unwilling or unable to pay the whole. And, with equal insolence and presumption, the one vainly imagines that his Creator and Lord, the other that his credulous friend, may think themselves sufficiently satisfied with such partial payments as they think fit to render. Such of God's commands they will cheerfully obey; but as to others, why, they will make all the atonement in their power--the proud, the ambitious, the covetous, the dissolute, each in a way that shall not clash with his favorite pursuit. One will give his time, another his diligence, a third his money to God, just according as it is the article upon which he himself puts least value, and the conscious deficiency he attempts feebly to eke out, by faint hopes and half resolves, that some time or another he will exhibit a more uniform and thorough obedience to the will of God. When the command is clear and express, to question and reason on the subject is rebellion. By this the allegiance of man in a state of innocence was assailed; and, listening to this, he staggered and fell; "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" When temptation of this sort is once listened to, men will gradually come to doubt of everything and learn to explain away everything. Deliberation and doubt in the face of "Thus saith the Lord," are dishonesty and impiety: and to attempt to get rid of one uneasy text of Scripture, is a direct attack on the validity of the whole. When we see a man so intelligent as Balaam, duped by his passions into a train of folly and wickedness so gross and palpable, let us look well to ourselves. The absurdities into which we fall, escape our own notice: but a discerning by-stander sees them, smiles at them, perhaps makes his advantage of them. If we are conscious of the influence of any very powerful propensity or aversion, it is a just ground of suspicion, that we may be tempted to act unworthily; and it is a powerful admonition to watch our hearts narrowly on the side of that infirmity "which doth more easily beset us."

We see in the dying struggles of Balaam's conscience, a deep, a rooted concern about futurity: a concern which no one, let him say what he will, has been able to overcome. His ardent wish, "Let me die the death of the righteous," is the involuntary homage which vice pays to piety. Think what way, live what way men will, they have but one thought, one conviction, one prayer, when they come to die. After the pleasure or the advantage of a wicked action is over, who would not gladly get clear of the guilt of it? But this is the misery; the profit and pleasure quickly pass away, the guilt and pain are immortal. Could a lazy wish or two supply the place of virtue, all would be well: the conscience would go to rest, the "strong man armed would keep the house." But the very wishes of indolence and impiety betray their own flimsiness; and Balaam feels his own prayer falling back with an oppressive weight on his guilty head. Let us be instructed to mend it a little, and say with Paul, "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."[*]Rom 14:7-8 "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Lord help us so to live, as to be raised above the fear of death. Let me fall asleep in the bosom of my heavenly Father, and I shall

awake in perfect peace.

Happy, unspeakably happy, they, who in reviewing life, and in the prospect of death, can with holy joy and confidence adopt these words of the apostle, and say, “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not tome only but unto all them also that love his appearing.”[*]2Ti 4:6-8

075. Balaam--His Doctrine

Balaam--His Doctrine

Rev 2:14. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. The mystery of iniquity, which the human heart is daily bringing to light, is as strange and incomprehensible as any thing in the frame of nature, or in the conduct of Providence. In the first stages of a sinful career, a spectator could not conceive, the man himself cannot believe the desperate wickedness to which he may in time be brought. The latter end is so very unlike the beginning, that it becomes matter of astonishment how the same person could possibly be so much changed, and by what steps the man was gradually transformed into the devil. Scripture represents to us a man shrinking with horror from a prophetic display of his own character, and an anticipated view of his own conduct “What, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing!”[*]2Ki 8:13 He viewed it then, through the calm medium of reason, humanity, and conscience; and justly reprobated, what passion and opportunity afterwards prompted him to act, without pity or remorse. The progress of sin is like that of certain diseases, whose first symptoms give no alarm; to which a vigorous constitution bids a bold defiance, and treats with neglect; but which, through that neglect, silently fix upon some of the nobler parts, prey unseen, unobserved upon the vitals, and the man finds himself dying, before he apprehended any danger. It was but a slight cold, a tickling cough, a small difficulty of breathing; but it imperceptibly becomes an intolerable oppression, an universal weakness, an extenuating hectic, under which nature fails; the nails bend inwards, the hairs fall off, the legs swell, the eyes sink, and the cold hand of death stops the languid current at the fountain. Thus the giddy sallies of youth, the mistakes of inconsideration, the errors of inexperience, through neglect, presumption, and indulgence, become, before men are aware, habits pf vice, constitutional maladies, by which manhood is dishonored, old age becomes pitiable, and death is rendered dreadful beyond expression. These considerations clearly justify and enforce the advice of the apostle: “Exhort one another daily while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”[*]Heb 3:13

If there be a history and a character, which, more powerfully than another press this exhortation upon the conscience, it is the history and character of Balaam, the son of Besor, “who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.” We have traced his progress from Aram to Moab, and found him pertinaciously adhering to an impious purpose, with an understanding clearly informed as to his duty, and a conscience perfectly awake to his situation. It is unpleasant, but God grant it may not be unprofitable to attend him through the remainder of his wicked and abominable course.

Balak, chagrined and disappointed to hear the eulogy of Israel from those lips, which he had hired to curse them, weakly hopes to change the counsels of Heaven, by changing the place of his own view: and Balaam wickedly humors his fondness and credulity. The Moabitish prince ascribes the

rapturous expressions of the prophet to the full and distinct prospect which he had of the camp of Israel, and therefore proposes to view it from a new station, whence its extremity only was visible, in the hope that a partial survey of that glory might encourage him to blast it with a curse. He conducts him accordingly into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and another preparatory sacrifice is offered up of seven bullocks, and seven rams, upon as many different altars; and the hardened wretch has the impious boldness of retiring a second time to meet God on this ungracious errand. An answer is now put into his mouth, which levels a mortal blow at the hopes of his wicked employer, and the wrath of man serves but the more illustriously to praise God. Who but must shudder to hear such words as these falling from such a tongue? “Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor: 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? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn. Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought! Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion; and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain.”[*]Num 23:18-24 “Happy is that people that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.”[*]Psa 144:15 The time would fail to go into a particular detail of the events which justify this noble prediction. But we should do it infinite injustice to restrict its meaning to one particular nation, to transitory purposes, or to temporal events. It is gloriously descriptive of the unchangeable faithfulness, the undeviating truth, the almighty protection, the immoveable love of God to his people. It speaks the blessedness of the man “whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. The blessedness of the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.”[*]Psa 32:1-2 It exposes the impotence of Satan, and of all the enemies of their salvation. It exhibits the signal triumph of the church of God, through the great Captain of their salvation, who unites in his person, among other wonderful extremes, the character of “the Lamb slain, to take away the sins of the world,” and of the “Lion of the tribe of Judah,” the great Lion who lifteth up himself, “and shall not lie down, until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain.” And, it prefigures their last joyful encampment in the heavenly plains, where the shout of a king shall be forever heard among them, and the glory of the Lord arise upon them, to set no more. This decisive answer seems for a moment to have quashed the hopes of Balak, and he is now disposed to compound with the prophet for total silence. “Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all.”[*]Num 23:25 But O, the obstinate perseverance of the carnal mind in a sinful course! After all he had seen and heard, he returns a third time to the charge, and dreams of another station, a repeated sacrifice, and an altered purpose. How mortifying to think that good men are so much sooner weary of well-doing, so much more easily discouraged from the pursuit of duty. But though Balaam gave directions for the building of new altars, he can no longer be the dupe of his own sinful wishes and magical arts, and therefore dares not to have recourse to them again. Such is the awful, such the glorious power of God! Magicians may for a little while amuse themselves and deceive others, by their enchantments; but Aaron’s rod at length swallows up those of the Egyptian wizards; and Balaam is at length constrained to resign his fruitless arts, and to acknowledge the finger of God from the top of Peor, where Baal was worshipped. He again

surveys the tents of Israel, where Jehovah resided, and charmed, by the prospect, from his malevolent design, seems to give cordially in to the views of that Spirit who spake by his mouth. “And when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he went not as at other times to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness. And Balsam lift up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents, according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came upon him. And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor, hath said: and the man whose eyes are opened hath said: he hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river side, as the trees of lign-aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brought him forth out of Egypt, he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn; he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows. He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee.”[*]Num 24:1-9 Our chief object at present being to illustrate the character of Balaam, and to improve it, we are to consider his prophecy chiefly in that view, abstracted from the great and glorious truths which it contains. And we observe, first, that it behoved him now to be convinced by so many successive and corresponding revelations, of the steady, determined purpose of Heaven, in favor of Israel. In spite of all his subterfuges, after all his turnings and windings, he finds himself still brought back to the same point; a language is forced upon his tongue which his heart rejected, a glory is spread before his eyes, which excited only envy and sorrow: and this renders his after conduct more unaccountable, odious, and criminal. Indeed it is a complicated transgression, containing so many circumstances of aggravation, that we should be tempted to doubt its existence, did not melancholy experience too frequently confirm the possibility of it.

We observe, secondly, that truth is not injured by being conveyed through an impure channel, and therefore ought not to be rejected on that account. Indeed it rather confers a higher luster upon it, just as hypocrisy pays the most honorable compliment to true religion, by assuming its sacred habit and form. The word of God shall not fail of its effect, though Balaam, or though Satan speak it. It may do good to others, while he who bears it is injured, not benefited. And surely, when we hear such divine sentences coming from such unhallowed lips, a holy jealousy will be kindled, a holy watchfulness inculcated on all who bring the messages of God to others; as the great apostle of the Gentiles felt and expressed, when he says, “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast away.”[*]1Co 9:27

We are led, thirdly, to observe, and to lament how rarely fine talents and ample means of doing good, are in the possession of an honest, benevolent, and sanctified heart! The elevation of genius too seldom aims its flight to the feet of the Father of lights, “from whom cometh down every good gift and every perfect;” and affluence is frequently abused, to increase that misery which it was given to relieve. But then, surely, men are likest God, when enlargement of understanding, and plenitude of power, obey the calls of goodness, and strive to diffuse more widely the gifts of an indulgent Providence; and that benevolence is the most exalted, which aims at the highest good, and seeks to promote interests that are immortal. What then must be the malignity of that heart

which, in Balaam, perverted the soundest understanding, disfigured and misled the finest abilities? How dark and dismal that unfeeling passion, which scrupled not to devote a whole nation, for the sake of a little silver and gold! How greatly do men err in the estimation which they make both of their own qualities and those of others! Those of the head are the objects of universal admiration, the subject of universal praise; those of the heart are lightly esteemed, and do not always escape censure. But apply the balance of the sanctuary, and what a reverse! A little humility outweighs a great deal of learning; faith, as a grain of mustard-seed, preponderates against a mountain of gold; and charity, though with the simplicity of a child, brings down the scale, against the wit of men, and the eloquence of angels. By all means covet earnestly the best gifts, though they fall to the lot of but a few: but rather cultivate the more precious graces which God conferreth liberally on all that ask him. Whatever you solicit, whatever you receive, see that you have the blessing which sweetens, which sanctifies, which ennobles, which improves it.

Finally, we may observe the dreadful misery of that man whose heart and head are at variance; whom inclination drags one way, and conscience another; who lives with a drawn sword continually hanging over his head by a single hair; forever doing what he is constrained forever to condemn; and reluctantly ready to execute the judgment of God upon himself. What dismal and unpleasant progress must he make, who sees an angel in arms opposing him at every step, and whose way is hedged about on every side by thorns of his own planting!

Balak can now refrain no longer, but smiting together his hands in a rage, exclaims, “I called thee to curse mine enemies, and behold thou hast altogether blessed them these three times; therefore now flee thou to thy place: I thought to promote thee unto great honor, but lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honor.”[*]Num 24:10-11 An expostulation of no pleasant complexion ensues; for what is the friendship of bad men, but a commerce of interest, a confederacy that aims only at self, and it concludes on the part of Balaam with a prediction clearer, fuller, and more pointed than ever, of Israel’s glory and Moab’s downfall: “And he took up his parable and said, Balaam, the son of Beor, hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: he hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies, and Israel shell do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city. And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable and said, Amalek was the first of the nations, but his latter end shall be that he perish forever. And he looked on the Kenites, and took up his parable, and said, Strong is thy dwelling-place, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock; nevertheless, the Kenite shall be wasted until Ashur shall carry thee away captive. And he took up his parable and said, Alas, who shall live when God doeth this.”[*]Num 24:15-23 The burden of this prophecy has evidently a twofold object, the one improving upon, rising above, and extending beyond the other. Its primary and nearer object, David, God’s anointed king to crush the power of the enemy, and Moab in particular, and to perfect the conquest of the promised land. Its secondary and more remote one, though first in point of importance, “Jesus, the root and offspring of David.” In the one, Balak saw the death of all his earthly hopes, the approaching dominion of a hated power, established on the ruins of his own country. In the other, Balaam beheld the ruin of all his

prospects beyond the grave; a Light that should shine but to conduct him to the place of punishment; a Star that should arise to shed the mildest influence on others, but only to breathe pestilence and death upon himself; a Ruler who should exercise universal dominion, but who, while he presided over his willing and obedient subjects in mercy and loving-kindness, should rule rebels like him with a rod of iron. Indeed, if Balaam had any presentiment of a Savior when he uttered this prophecy, as is highly probable, his character is the most detestable, and his condition the most deplorable that can be imagined. Unhappy man, with one breath preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ to a guilty world, and with the next, teaching the arts of seduction to ensnare the innocent. In words exulting in the greatest blessing which God had to bestow upon mankind, but dreadfully conscious to himself that he had wilfully rejected the counsel of God against himself. With all the weight and importance of the soul and eternity before his eyes, but this world steadfastly enthroned in his heart; a prophet, yet a reprobate, descending to the grave with the blood of thousands upon his head. The twenty-fifth chapter of Numbers contains the history of the stumbling-block which “Balaam taught Balak to cast before the children of Israel--to eat, things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication,”[*]Rev 2:14 and of its dreadful success. As a prophet, he could not hurt Israel; but as a politician, he unhappily prevails. He was well aware where their strength lay; and unfortunately, it appears, he had likewise discovered their weak side. Their God could not be prevailed on to withdraw his protection; but may not they be persuaded or allured to change their allegiance? This will do the work of Satan equally well. Israel was now at ease, with the promised land under their eye, and part of it already in their possession. They were flushed with recent victory, assured of divine protection, and thereby confident of farther success. A situation full of danger; for then, when our mountain seems to us to stand most strong, we are most easily liable to be moved, cast down, destroyed. Balaam accordingly, deep read as he was in the book of human nature, suggests to Balak the diabolical counsel of attempting to decoy the people into idolatry by means of female insinuation and address. The experiment is made, and fatally succeeds. And it is this counsel which stamps the character of Balaam with infamy indelible; as it exhibits a dissolution of moral principle, to be equaled only by him who is a murderer from the beginning.

Think what it is to advise a father to expose his daughter to prostitution: think what it is to devise and to encompass the death of one fellow-creature, who has never offended us: think of the malice which aims its deadly shaft, not at the body, but at the soul: think of the presumption which flies directly in the face of the great and terrible Jehovah, and defies his power: and then think of the vile wretch, recommending the prostitution of a whole nation: in cold blood plotting the destruction of myriads; and what is worse, infinitely worse than any temporal evil, remorselessly involving them in guilt which threatened eternal ruin: and all this under the character of a prophet, whose office bound him to call the people away from their wickedness, and to save perishing souls from death; and all for what? “For so much trash as may be grasped thus.”--Base passion, what canst thou not make us do? “Surely the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” The history of Israel’s seduction, in consequence of Balaam’s horrid advice, falls not within our present design, and we are forbid by decency to pursue it. The guilt of this fatal defection cost no less than twenty-four thousand lives of them who died of the plague, besides those who suffered by the hands of justice. So horrid are the sacrifices which pride, ambition, and covetousness, are daily offering up! So dreadful the havoc which ungoverned passion makes amongst the works of God!--But short is the triumph of the most successful villany: remorse

embitters the enjoyment of it, and justice hastens to bring it to a period. In the very first attack made upon Midian, we find Balaam in arms, supporting his pernicious counsel by the sword; but it cannot prosper: Midian is discomfited on the first onset, and the hoary traitor falls unpitied in the field, leaving behind him a name to be detested and despised of all generations, while one iota or one tittle of this book of God remains.

We shall have attended, however, to the history of this singular man in vain, unless we learn from it the infinite danger of being under the dominion of any one ungovernable passion; and unless we are persuaded to watch over, to resist, and to subdue, “the sin which doth so easily beset us.” Of little avail is it that our vice is not the vice which governed, ensnared, and ruined Balaam, if it alienate the heart from God, dissolve the obligations of religion, disorder the understanding, and lull the conscience asleep. One disease for another, one vice for another, is but a miserable exchange. If the patient must die, it will not alleviate one pang, that he perishes by the fever rather than the hydropsy, the consumption, or any other distemper. The unrestrained dominion of any one sinful appetite must become fatal at length. Covetousness, pride, lust, envy, malice, revenge, are the mortal distempers of the soul, which, perhaps insensibly, but most certainly, are impairing its beauty, and wasting its strength. “Lust,” whatever be its particular name, “having conceived, bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Instead, therefore, of amusing or perplexing himself with inquiries into the general symptoms of disease, it concerns every man to study his own particular case; to watch against “the sin which doth so easily beset him;” to keep himself from his iniquity; to discover, and to rectify the disorder of his own constitution, “the plague of his own heart.” That where he is naturally, or by habit, weak, he may become strong, “through the grace that is in Christ.”

Let us be instructed to value qualities, whether natural or acquired, not from their currency and estimation in the world, but from their appearance in the sight of God. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”[*]Isa 55:9 “By him actions are weighed.” By his judgment we must stand or fall. Has Heaven blessed thee, O man, with extraordinary gifts? Let it be a motive to humility, not a source of pride. It is a trust. of which thou must render an account; and to whom men have committed much, of him will they require the more.” If he who buries his one talent in the ground be criminal, what shall become of that man who dissipates and destroys ten in riotous living?

There is but one road to a happy end--a holy life. There is but one ground of hope, in death, to a guilty creature--the mercy of God through a Redeemer. Abraham saw the Savior’s day afar off, believed and rejoiced. Balaam saw it afar off, persisted in impenitence and unbelief, and died without hope. On the one, “the Star of Jacob” darted a mild and healthful influence, which cheered the path of life, and dispelled the horrors of the grave. On the other, it shot a baleful fire which drunk up the spirits, blasted present enjoyment, and increased the gloom of futurity.--Arise, O Star of Jacob, arise upon my head with healing in thy wings! Let me walk in thy light; let me “hasten to the brightness of thy rising!” Christian, “arise, shine: for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”[*]1Jn 3:2 “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”[*]Col 3:3-4

Chapter 76

076. Moses: Volume IV

Moses

Volume IV

077. The Great Judgment

The Great Judgment

Rev 20:11-13. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it: and death and hell gave up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

It is a solemn thing for a man to be judged of his own conscience. How sweet is the approving testimony of that bosom monitor and witness! but more bitter than death its upbraiding and reproaches. To stand at a human tribunal, with life or reputation, death or infamy, depending on the issue, can never appear a light matter to one who understands and feels the value of either. Even conscious innocence and integrity, accompanied with good hope toward God, court not the eye of public inquiry, but prefer the secret, silent feast of inward peace, and of divine applause, to the public banquet of innocence proved and proclaimed by sound of trumpet. Serious it is to reflect that your name, your words, your conduct may become matter of record, and ages to come mention them with approbation and esteem, or with indignation and contempt. But every feeling of this sort is lost in the certain and more awful prospect of judgment to come. It is a light thing to be judged of man, who can only kill the body, and blight the reputation, and beyond that hath nothing more that he can do; but how formidable is the judgment of Him, who knows the heart, who records in “the book of his remembrance” the actions of the life, the words that fall from the tongue, the thoughts which arise in the heart; who will bring every secret thing to light, and “render to every man according to his works;” and who, “after he has killed, has power to destroy body and soul in hell.”

Aided by the light which sacred history sheds on ages and generations past, we have ventured into the solemn mansions of the dead, and conversed with those silent instructors who know not either to flatter or to fear; and whom the Spirit of God has condescended to delineate in their true colors and just proportions, that they may serve to us “for doctrine, and for reproof, and for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.” We have plunged into ages beyond the flood, and contemplated human nature in its original glory; “man,” as God made him, “perfect;” and man, as he made himself, lost in the multitude of his own inventions. The “first man, by whom came death--the figure of Him who should come, by whom is the resurrection of the dead: Adam, in whom all die: Christ, in whom all shall be made alive.”

We have attended “righteous Abel” to the altar of God, and beheld the smoke of his “more excellent sacrifice” ascending with acceptance to heaven: and “by which, he being dead yet speaketh.”

We have seen the hands of “wicked Cain” besmeared with a brother’s blood; and the earth refusing to cover that blond, but calling to Heaven for vengeance on the murderer; and the guilty wretch rendered a terror to himself.

We have seen these, one after another, dropping into the grave; and in that, the triumph of sin and death. But in Enoch we behold the triumph of faith and holiness, the triumph of almighty grace over sin and death, and over him who has the power of death. Our eyes follow “the holy man who walked with God,” not to the “dreary house appointed for all living,” but, through the higher regions of the air, toward the blessed, abodes of immortality, till a cloud receives him out of our sight.

We sought shelter with Noah, and his little saved remnant, from that deluge which destroyed a world of ungodly men, in the ark which God commanded, which that “preacher of righteousness prepared for the saving of his house;” and which Providence conducted and preserved amidst the wild uproar of contending elements--and with him perceived the wrathful storm spending its fury, and the dawning light of a day of mercy returning.

We have seen the renewed, restored world, again overspread with violence, ignorance, impiety, and idolatry: and the hope of the human race ready to be extinguished in the person of a wandering, aged, childless man; that in the decay of exhausted, expiring nature, the world might be made to see, and to acknowledge the vigor, the infallibility, the unchangeableness of God’s covenant of promise. We removed with that illustrious exile from place to place, and with joy beheld his faith crowned at length with the promised seed, “in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed.” From that “tender plant,” that “root out of a dry ground,” we saw a succession of fair and fruitful branches arise, while we studied the noiseless, sequestered, contemplative life of Isaac, and the active, variegated, checkered life of Jacob, his younger son. In the affliction of Joseph we felt ourselves afflicted, in his exaltation we rejoiced, and by his virtues and piety, in every variety of human condition, we received at once instruction and reproof. The sweet historian, who had disclosed all these wonders of antiquity to our view, opened to us all these stores of knowledge, all these sources of delight, comes forward himself at last upon the scene, and continues to minister to our pleasure and improvement, by a faithful and affecting detail of his own eventful story, and a candid display of his own sentiments, character, and conduct. What heart so hard as not to melt at sight of yonder weeping babe, a deserted, exposed, perishing Hebrew child, floating down the stream! What heart does not glow to see him the pride and ornament of Pharaoh’s imperial court, instructed in all the learning of the Egyptians! What bosom catches not the hallowed ardor of patriotic fire from the intrepid avenger of his country’s wrongs! In whatever situation or character we view him, whithersoever we follow his steps, we feel ourselves attracted, delighted, instructed.

He furnishes us with the history of his brother Aaron and his family, and of the establishment of the Levitical priesthood; a type of the everlasting and unchangeable priesthood of the Redeemer. We attended the venerable pair of brothers to the top of the mountain, and beheld Aaron stript of his pontifical robes, resigning his charge, closing his eyes in death; and heard Moses himself warned to prepare for his departure. Not only by display of worth and excellence, but by a delineation of vice, by the exhibition of a “heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,” has he conveyed to us the means of instruction, and improvement; in presenting us with the portrait of Balaam, who “loved the wages of unrighteousness.” In the character of that bad man, we behold

the humiliating union of great talents and a corrupted heart; prophetic gifts and moral depravity; knowledge of the truth, and willful adherence to error; admiration of virtue, and fixed habits of vice; an earnest wish to “die the death of the righteous,” with a deliberate determination to live the life of the wicked; and all this mystery of iniquity explained in one short sentence; his heart went out after its covetousness.

All these have passed in review before us; and their existence, in succession to one another, occupies a space of two thousand five hundred years. But the text collects them, and us, and all succeeding generations of men, into one great co-existent assembly, to undergo a judgment infinitely more solemn than ever was pronounced from human tribunal! a judgment infallible, final, irreversible; which shall bring to trial, and condemn all hasty, rash, erroneous judgments of men, clear injured innocence, bring to light and reward hidden worth, abase insolence and pride, detect and expose hypocrisy. Let the prospect of it direct all our inquiries, animate all our exertions, dictate all our decisions on the character and conduct of other men, and influence, form, and govern our own. Thus the review of preceding personages and events, and the prospect of those to come shall be animated, improved, sanctified; thus shall we feel our interest in, and connection with the church of God universal, of every age, and converse with Moses and the prophets as our contemporaries, countrymen, and friends, whom we shall shortly join, and be united to them in bonds of pure and everlasting love. Recollecting times past, anticipating ages to come, let us draw near and consider this great sight; and may God grant us to feel and improve its influence. The imagery of the scene is sublime and striking. “I saw a great white throne.” “A throne,” royal state, established empire, acknowledged away, the right and power of judgment united, universal, everlasting, uncontrollable dominion. A “great” throne. The seat of kings is raised a little above the people; that of Solomon had six steps; ivory and gold lent their combined aid to enrich and adorn it. But what is the glory of Solomon? his throne, once the seat of wisdom, to whose oracular voice foreign potentates and their nations listened with admiration and respect, was at length dishonored, degraded, defiled by the impurities of idolatry, and by the imprudence and apostasy of him who sat upon it; and thus deprived of one of its firmest supporters, it shook under him, and he at length dropped from it, a monument of the nothingness and vanity of human grandeur, wealth, and wisdom. Ten of its twelve props slipped from beneath it, through the imprudence of his son; and, after a few convulsive struggles, it sunk at length into the dust, a poor, precarious, subordinate throne, subject to the lordly state of an Assyrian prince. What is the glory of angels that excel in strength? Delegated power, derived splendor, imparted wisdom, dignity under authority. But, behold on yonder radiant throne, one “made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.” “He maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a scepter of righteousness, is the scepter of thy kingdom.” “Sit on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” Behold “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up,” surrounded with the seraphim, crying continually unto one another, and saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his goodness.”

“A great white throne,” the emblem of purity, truth, and righteousness; itself unsullied, and purifying all that approach it. “Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne; mercy and truth go before his face.” “Shall not the Judge of the whole earth do right?” With the purest intention, with the highest degree of human sagacity, with the most extensive knowledge of the

law, and the most determined resolution faithfully to apply it, earthly tribunals are not secure from error; craft may overreach wisdom; hypocrisy may disguise the truth, or cover falsehood; the stream of justice may be diverted or forced out of its channel, and the pellucid tide undergo a temporary pollution. The princes of this world must see with the eyes and hear with the ears of other men; the worthy and the wise may, of course, be kept at a distance, while demerit, wickedness, and folly bask in the sunshine of royal favor. But yonder radiant throne applies an infallible test to all that approach it: hypocrisy drops the mask, the windings of deceit and cunning stand exposed, the brazen, imposing forehead of impudence is covered with a blush, and the stony, unfeeling, unrelenting heart is dissolved into water--modest worth rears its drooping, head, conscious integrity expands its glowing bosom, and purity seeks the source from which it sprang.

Observe the difference; mark the changes which these undergo, as they draw nigh; see the hardened sinner, cased in sevenfold adamant, advancing with intrepid step, striving to make assurance pass for innocence. But, lo, the rays of that white throne have fallen upon him; the spots begin to appear, they grow blacker and blacker, he gradually becomes abominable and more abominable; odious to the beholder, a terror to himself, he shrinks from inquiry, darkness is diffused around from the brightness of that light; he calls upon the mountains to fall upon him, and upon the hills to cover him. Not so the humble follower of the Lamb. His countenance becomes more and more serene, his confidence increases, every blemish disappears, “the glory of the Lord is risen upon him,” his luster brightens as he proceeds, at length he is united to, he is lost in the fountain of joy.

“I saw him that sat on it.” “No man hath seen God at any time.” Remove that cloud, that vapour, and I am unable steadfastly to behold the face of the sun; how much more, the face of Him who arrays the sun in all his effulgence! If he raise his voice a little louder in the whirlwind, or in the thunder, I am overwhelmed and lost.

Ah! it is conscious guilt that appalls me, that clothes the face of God with terror, that roars in the tempest, that raises the voice of the mighty thunder: but, “reconciled unto God,” “justified by faith,” I “have peace with God,” I see as I am seen, I know as I am known; “beholding with open face as in a glass the glory of the Lord,” lo, the believer is gradually “changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” “The only begotten who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Did the pomp and wisdom of an earthly potentate dazzle and delight the eyes of a sovereign like himself, and constrain one inured to scenes of magnificence to cry out, “It was a true report that I heard in mine own land, howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and behold the half was not told me!” What then will it be to see, with the beloved disciple, “a great white throne, and him who sits upon it,” with the myriads of the heavenly host bending before it, rejoicing without trembling.

Grant me, gracious God, now to see thee in these thy lower works, in the wonders of thy providence, in the exceeding riches of thy grace, in the face of thy Son Christ Jesus, and thereby prepare me for seeing thee as thou art, and for being made like unto thee! Place me with thy servant Moses upon a rock, put me in a cliff of the rock, cover me with thy hand while thou passest by, remove thy hand, that I may trace thy presence in the blessings thou hast left behind thee, that I may be strengthened to meet the direct rays of thy countenance, when thou comest to “be glorified in thy saints, and admired in all them that believe. “From whose face the earth and the

heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them."

"All these things shall be dissolved. The heavens shall pass away with great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burnt up." "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." God "spake and it was done; he gave command went and it stood fast." "At his word earth and heaven rose out of chaos," and lo, he looks them into nothing again; they shrink from his presence, they vanish at his nod, they cannot abide the brightness of his coming. They have fulfilled their day, they have accomplished the purpose of him who made them, they have contributed their aid toward the rearing of a more glorious fabric, and having become unnecessary, that moment disappear. The local and transient effects of an earthquake, a hurricane, an inundation, are striking, impressive, and permanent: proud cities leveled to the earth, or swallowed up of it: fertile plains overwhelmed with a briny or a fiery tide; the glory of man sought, but not to be found. But what is this to the dissolution of a globe? Surely the balance must be destroyed, a blank in nature take place, and wild uproar ensue. No, the vision represents a whole system passing away; that sun, and all the surrounding planets, and innumerable other "planets circling other suns," lost, yet not missed; fled, "as the baseless fabric of a vision," and not a wreck left behind; and yet no schism, no deficiency in the body; for the promise of the Eternal immediately repairs the loss; he makes "all things new;" "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." With the heavens and the earth, the little, fading interests and distinctions of the world vanish also. Before his face all is reduced to one level, all is composed and tranquillized; everyone reads his doom in the face of the sovereign Judge. The heavens and earth have fled away, but the rational beings which peopled them remain; they are of a more enduring substance, they partake of the nature of God himself, they are immortal, eternal like him. "I saw," says John, the dead small and great stand before God." When time was, these were distinctive characters. There was the infant of days, and the hoary head, the inhabitant of the palace, and of the cottage, the learned and the illiterate, the slave and his master. But these marks of difference are for ever abolished. Indeed they were long before abolished. Before that great and notable day of the Lord came, before the judgment was set, or the books were opened, disease and death, and the grave had leveled all the distinctions of this world; had reduced the scepters monarch to the condition of the peasant, annulled the difference between the slave and his master. The decisive hour is now come which is for ever to determine who is henceforth to be accounted small, and who great: the hour that shall bring to light hidden worth, and thrust presumptuous pride into outer darkness; that shall exalt the good to the throne of God, and plunge the wicked into the depths of hell. The dead small and great. Even the awful distinction between the dead and the living shall then be done away. They were dead, but are alive again; "for all live to him." Behold the moldering earth, before it be for ever dissolved, restoring to existence every particle of itself which once entered into the composition of a human being, which was once animated with the breath of life. Behold the spacious sea, before it be for ever dried up, surrendering its hidden treasure, not the silver, and gold, and jewels which its vast womb contains, but the innumerable myriads of men and women it had been insatiately devouring during so many ages, and whom it can no longer cover or conceal. The sound of the last trumpet has dispelled their long slumber. See, they emerge from their watery bed, they spring up into newness of life, their eyes again behold the light, the light of an eternal day, they swim through regions of transparent air, they can die no more, they hasten to appear before their Judge. Behold the grim

king of terrors, faithful to his trust, giving in the exact register of his wide domain, resigning his awful empire, restoring his captives to life and liberty, and their rightful Lord; not one lost, not one detained: and the great destroyer is at length himself destroyed. And for what purpose this mighty preparation, this second birth of nature, this new creation of God? Behold an assembled world, from the father of the human race down to the youngest of his sons, stand before God. They stand as subjects in the presence of their Sovereign, as expectants before the eternal Arbiter of their destiny. In his eyes, in their own consciences they read their doom; they stand to hear the irreversible decree; their posture speaks acknowledgment of the right of judging, submission to authority, acquiescence in the wisdom and justice of the Judge. But that erect attitude must quickly change into the prostration of dutiful and grateful children, or of foes subdued, of wretches condemned: for lo. The books are opened, and judgment begins. It is spoken after the manner of men. Earthly judges refer to statutes as the rule of their decisions; men are tried by the laws of their country, and because human faculties are limited and imperfect, the memory unretentive, the understanding liable to error, the heart warped by partial affections, facts must be preserved in written documents, to prevent alteration or mistake, the law expressed in clear and distinct terms, and the cause, not the person, of the party, held up as the object of judgment. But what need of books or of records to assist the memory of Him who is omniscience, to whom are known all his own works, and all the ways of men from the foundation of the world; whose will is the law; and who knows no distinction but that between truth and falsehood, right and wrong? What need of external evidence, of the testimony of others, when every man carries the evidence in his own bosom, and is acquitted or condemned of his own conscience? What, O man, are the contents of these awful books? The words thou art now speaking, the pursuits in which thou art now engaged, the spirit by which thou art now actuated. Thou art every day filling up the record, with thy hand enrolling thine own honor or shame; and the unfolding of that day shall reveal that only which thou thyself hast written. On thyself it rests, whether the last solemn discovery is to cover thee with everlasting contempt, or to crown thee with joy unspeakable, and full of glory: whether the opening of the book of life is to display thy name in golden characters to angels and men, or the register of condemnation consign thee to everlasting punishment. The book that shall be opened is none other than the book of Scripture, the infallible rule of faith and manners, and according as thou art conformed unto, fallest short of, or exceedest that standard, so shall thy doom be.

They were judged every man according to their works. In this mixed and imperfect state, it frequently happens that the guilty escape, and the innocent suffer. “The fathers eat sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” Princes play the madman, and quarrel, and fight, and myriads of unoffending wretches pay the forfeit of that folly. But before yonder tribunal everyone appears to answer for himself; everyone comes to reap the fruit of his own doings. “Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O God, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified” “If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.” “Behold, O God, our Shield, and look upon the face of thine Anointed.” In meditating, on this subject, let us learn to forbear from exercising this dread prerogative of the Eternal, let us refrain from judging. God has challenged this right with emphatic solemnity as his own: “Judgment is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.” “All judgment is committed unto the Son.” “Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever, thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment

of God is according to truth, against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance! But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality; eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath: tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile. But glory, honor, and peace to every man that worketh-good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile. For there is no respect of persons with God."[*]Rom 2:1-11 But while by every serious consideration thou art restrained, ignorant fallible creature, from judging another,--by every serious consideration thou art encouraged, constrained to examine and to judge thyself. It may be the means of preventing, of averting the righteous judgment of God. It will lead thee to the discovery of thy own weakness, and thereby become a source of wisdom and strength. It will unfold the deceitfulness of sin, and the treachery of thine own heart, and lead thee in trembling hope to the blood of sprinkling, which taketh away the sin of the world. It will render thee compassionate and gentle to the infirmities of others, because that thou also hast sinned. It will produce "godly sorrow, which worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of." It will render the promises of "mercy to pardon, and of grace to help in every time of need," precious to thy soul. It will help to regulate thy path through life, and diminish the terrors of death.

Finally, habitual and rooted impressions of a judgment to come, will serve as a support under the rash censures and the unjust decisions of men. From the strife of tongues, from the hatred of a merciless world, you can retire to the silent feast of a conscience void of offence; and with confidence appeal from the angry tribunal of a creature like thyself, to Him who knoweth thy heart, who seeth in secret, and will reward thee openly. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven." "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God, a elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth?" Behold that "great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, and crying with a loud voice, saying, Salvation unto our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the lamb." "What are these which are arrayed in white robes? And whence came they?" "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."[*]Rev 7:9-17

078. Moses--The Brazen Serpent

Moses--The Brazen Serpent

Num 21:4-9. And they journeyed from mount Hor, by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom: an the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God; against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt, to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water, and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people; and they bit the people, and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord that he take away the serpents from us; and Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass that everyone that is bitten, when he looketh upon it shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when, he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived. The restlessness, peevishness, and discontent, which men are continually expressing, prove at once the degeneracy and corruption of human nature, and furnish a strong presumption of the immortality of the soul. To behold one generation after another, of moping, melancholy, sullen, surly beings, in the midst of an overflowing profusion of blessings, charging God foolishly, tormenting themselves unnecessarily, and disturbing others maliciously, clearly demonstrates, that man is alienated from his Maker, at variance with himself, and unkindly disposed towards his brother: in other words, that he is a fallen, corrupted creature. To behold men, whatever they have attained, whatever they seas, forgetting the things which are behind, and eagerly reaching forward to those which are before, the eye never satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing, is a presumption at least, if not a proof, that we are designed of our Creator for something this world has not to bestow; that some principle in our nature is superior to the gross and groveling pursuits in which we are warmly engaged, but in which we find and we take no rest: and thus the very misery we feel is a presentiment of the felicity which we were created to enjoy. But alas! our dissatisfaction with sublunary good things, “the things which are seen and temporal,” is not the result of experience, nor the resignation of a mind humbled to the will of God. No, it is the miserable effect and expression of insatiable desire, of unmortified pride, of disappointed ambition. If we arrive at our object with ease, its value is diminished by the facility of acquisition; if obstacles he in the way, a possession be removed by distance of time and space, we are quickly discouraged, and timidly give up the pursuit. When empty, there is no end of our complaints; when full, we loathe and reject the best things: if we succeed, our prosperity destroys us with folly, insolence, and self-indulgence; if we fail, we are undone through shame, chagrin, and resentment; if we shun the rock of “vanity” on the one side, we are sucked into the whirlpool of “vexation of spirit” upon the other. The history of Israel is, in truth, history of human nature. Did they discover a stubbornness which no calamity could tame, no kindness could mollify: a levity which no steadiness of discipline could fix, a perfidiousness which no plea can excuse, an ingratitude which no partiality can extenuate, a stupidity which no intelligence can account for, a timidity and a rashness which no reason can

explain? Alas, we need not travel deserts of Arabia, nor look back to the days of the golden calf, nor of the waters of Meribah, for the persons who discovered such a spirit. We have but to look into our own hearts, we have but to review our own lives, in order to be satisfied, that such a spirit has existed, that it is shamefully odious in itself, highly offensive in the sight of God, and that we have good reason to abhor ourselves, “and repent in dust and ashes.”

We have pursued the history of Aaron and of Balaam in a continued series, that we might prosecute the remainder of the history of Moses, without any farther interruption we therefore omitted in its proper place that portion of it, which is partly recorded in the verses I have read: but it is of infinitely too great importance to be passed over wholly in silence, and therefore we look back, and bring it into view, as an useful subject of meditation this evening.

Moses had lately descended from mount Hor, whither, he had been summoned to perform the last offices of humanity to Aaron, his brother: with mixed emotions, no doubt, which alternately marked the man and the believer: mourning, and mortified, yet patient, composed, dud; resigned to the will of Heaven. In executing sentence of death upon his brother, he heard the voice, of God again pronouncing his own doom; a doom in which, with the ordinary feelings of Humanity, he acquiesces with reluctance, but must however acquiesce. But though death was before his eyes, and could beat no great distance, it abates nothing of his ardor for the glory of God, and the good of Israel; it breaks in upon no duty of his station, it disturbs not the benevolence, gentleness, and serenity of his temper: he lives, acts, instructs to the very last; and exhibits an instructive example of that happy firmness and equanimity of soul, removed alike from stoical indifference, and contempt of death, and fond, infirm, unreasonable attachment to lift. We find him accordingly, in his 120th year, and the last of his life, not only engaged in employments suitable to age, those of deliberating, advising, and instructing; but exerting all the activity and vigor of youth, in planning and executing sundry military enterprises.

We should be surprised, did we not know the cause of it, to find Israel in the fortieth year from their deliverance out of Egypt, just where we saw them the first month, by the way of the Red Sea, journeying from mount Hor; and even then, though everything seemed to be pressing them forwards to the possession of Canaan, not led of their heavenly Guide directly forwards in the nearest tract, but obliged to fetch a compass round the whole land of Edom, the possession allotted to, and already bestowed upon the posterity of Esau. But Israel, and in them mankind, was thereby instructed to revere the destinations of Providence; to respect the rights, property, and privileges of others: that reason and religion, as well as sympathy and humanity, oblige a man to submit to the inconveniency of a journey somewhat more, tedious and fatiguing, instead of attempting to cut a nearer passage for himself, through the bowels and blood of his brother. The consciousness of having acted well, in taking this circuitous march round the land of Edom, and that they thus acted by the command of God, ought to have reconciled the minds of these Israelites to the little inconveniences of the way; but their historian and leader, with his usual fidelity, informs us, that If the “soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.”

Men frequently do their duty with so ill a grace, that it becomes as offensive as downright disobedience; the manner of compliance has the air of a refusal. God loves cheerfulness in everything; a cheerful, liberal giver; a cheerful, thankful receiver; a cheerful, active doer; a cheerful, patient sufferer. And what an alleviating consideration is it, under the pressure of

whatever calamity! “This burden is imposed on me by the hand of my heavenly Father; this is a sore evil, but God can turn it into good.” “This affliction is not joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it shall yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness.” When we are out of humor at one thing we are dissatisfied with every person, and everything; a harsh spirit and a hasty, tongue spare neither God nor man. “The people spoke against God, and against Moses. Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.”

Objects viewed through the medium of passion, like those strange, uncouth appearances which are seen in glasses of a certain construction, have little or no resemblance to what they are in nature and truth. They are distorted and disfigured; magnified to such a degree as to become hideous, or diminished so as to become imperceptible; and according to the fit of the moment, men turn the one end or the other of the perspective to the eye, and what they contemplate is accordingly removed to a great distance, and reduced to nothing, or brought nigh, enlarged, and brightened up. Employing this false kind of optics, Israel now considers Egypt and all its hardships with desire and regret, and looks forward to Canaan with coldness and distrust. The miraculous stream that followed them from the rock is no water at all, and manna, angel’s food, is accounted light bread. We are too little aware of the sinfulness and folly of discontent, and therefore indulge in it without fear or reserve. We do not reflect that it is to arraign at once the wisdom and goodness of God: to rob him of the right of judgment, and madly to increase the evil which was too heavy before. In general, the righteous Governor of the world permits this evil affection to punish itself; and can there be a greater punishment, than to leave a sullen, dissatisfied wretch to devour his own spleen? But in the instance before us, he was provoked to super-add to this mental plague, a grievous external chastisement. “And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and much people of Israel died.” These might be the natural production of the wilderness, but providentially armed for the occasion with a greater malignancy of poison, or produced in greater abundance, or roused to a higher degree of ferocity. For what are the instruments which God employs to avenge himself of his enemies? He needs not to create a new thing in the earth; the simplest creature can do it. Nature, animate and inanimate, is ready to take up his quarrel; the frost or the fire, continued a little longer, or rendered a little more intense, will soon subdue the proudest of his adversaries. It is not the least of the miracles of divine mercy, that Israel had. been preserved so long from the fury of those noxious insects with which the desert swarmed, as Moses justly remarks in recapitulating the history of God’s goodness’ to that people during a forty years’ pilgrimage. “Lest thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house, of bondage; who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint.”[*]Deu 8:14-15 The rage of these dreadful creatures, which had been during so long a period by a supernatural power suppressed, now freed from that curb, becomes a party too strong for a mighty host, flushed with recent victory. While therefore we adore and admire the goodness which multiplies the necessary and useful part of the vegetable and animal tribes with such astonishing liberality, and limits those which are noxious with such consummate wisdom, and irresistible power, let us tremble to think how easily he can remove the barrier which restrains the wrath of the creature, and arm a fly with force sufficient for our destruction. But the intention of God in punishing is correction, and amendment, not ruin; returning mercy therefore meets the first

symptoms of repentance, and a remedy is pointed out the moment that misery is felt; which sweetly discloses to us the melting of fatherly affection, outrunning and preventing filial wretchedness. But what strange method of cure have we here? The poison of a serpent counteracted, and its malignity destroyed, not by an external application, not by the virtue of an antidote possessed of certain natural qualities, but by a blessing annexed to the use of an instrument in itself inadequate, and an action of the patient himself; flowing from his own will, and called forth by the appointment and command of God. The author of that excellent book, entitled the Wisdom of Solomon, has a beautiful reference to this story, when he says,

“For when the horrible fierceness of wild beasts came upon these, and they perished with the stings of crooked serpents, thy wrath endured not for ever. But they were troubled for a small season, that they might be admonished, having a sign of salvation, to put them in remembrance of the commandment of thy law. For he that turned towards it, was not saved by the thing that he saw, but by thee, that art the Savior of all. And in this thou madest thine enemies confess, that it is thou who deliverest from all evil.”[*]Wisdom 16 But the grand commentary on the history of the fiery serpents is furnished by Christ himself, in his conversation with Nicodemus, the Jewish ruler. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of Man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”[*]John 3:14-15 From this it is evident that many particulars in the Jewish history and political economy, had an interest and importance which extended far beyond the present moment, or the sensible and obvious appearance of things. And in this particular instance our blessed Lord has furnished us with an instructive example, which ought to serve as a rule, for the application and use of figurative, allegorical, and typical subjects. Here he enters into no detail; pursues no parallel or contrast through a multiplicity of particulars; furnishes no wings to the imagination; but fixing on one great, general view of the subject, renders it thereby more powerful and impressive. He was conversing with a ruler of the Jews; was explaining to him the nature and end of his own mission; was deducing the nature and tendency of the gospel dispensation from the established rites of the Mosaic, and the received facts of the Jewish history, with which Nicodemus was perfectly well acquainted. In this case he refers to a noted event, and appeals from it to one which was shortly to take place, betwixt which a striking line of resemblance should be apparent--The elevation of the brazen serpent in the wilderness, for the healing of the Israelites who were perishing by the envenomed stings of the fiery serpents--and the elevation of the Son of Man upon the cross, the propitiation for the sins of the world; that when this last display of the divine justice and mercy should be exhibited, Nicodemus, and every intelligent and honest disciple of Moses might be satisfied that “God had at sundry times and in divers manners,” presented as in a glass to the fathers, the method of redemption by Jesus Christ.

All the application, then, which the words of the Savior himself warrant us to make of this passage to him, is reduced to a few obvious and striking particulars. “Fools,” such as the Israelites in the desert, and transgressors of the divine law in general, “because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses. He sent his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.”[*]Psa 107:17-20 The root of the evil, the cause of the plague, is to be found in human perversity and disobedience. The faithful and obedient sleep safe and secure in the lion’s

den; to the proud and rebellious the innoxious worm is converted into a fiery serpent, full of deadly poison. The remedy for this sore evil is to be traced up to the divine compassion, power, and goodness. The means of cure are not such as human wisdom would have devised, or the reason of man approved; they are the sovereign appointment of Heaven. The effect is preternatural, yet real: and reason rejoices in what it could not have discovered. The sight of a lifeless serpent of metal, working as an antidote to the mortal poison of one alive; incredible, absurd! Such was the doctrine of the cross in the eyes of prejudice, and philosophy, “and science, falsely so called.” “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews, a stumbling block; and unto the Greeks, foolishness: but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”[*]1Co 1:18-24 The virtue flowed from the divine appointment, operating together with the believing act of the patient. To the sufferer who averts his face, or wilfully and contemptuously shuts his eyes, that banner is displayed in vain; no virtue issues from it, he perishes in his unbelief. To the despiser, the impenitent, the careless, Christ has died in vain. In the extension of all God’s acts of grace to men, to produce the full effect, there must of necessity be an unity of design and exertion between the giver and the receiver, between him who acts and, him who is acted upon. Man’s body is “dust of the ground,” mere matter, separated from the spirit, incapable of motion or direction. Even that active, penetrating organ, the eye, is but a little lump of pellucid clay, till the vital principle, the breath of God, kindle its fires, and direct its rays. It is this vital principle which, proceeding from God exists in him, and possesses the power of rising and returning to him. The believing Israelite hears, in dying agonies, the proclamation of deliverance, lifts up his drooping head, looks, and is healed; his will meets the will of God, and the cure is already performed. The perishing sinner hears the voice of the Son of God and lives. Lifted up upon the cross he utters his voice, “Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else.”[*]Isa 14:22 One of his fellow-sufferers hardens his heart and reviles him, turns from the Savior with disdain, and dies impenitent--the other hears with rapture the joyful sound, clings to the hope of salvation, prays in faith, and passes with him into paradise. But the circumstance on which Christ chiefly rests, is Moses “lifting up the serpent in the wilderness.” Moses probably had not a clear apprehension of the extensive meaning and import of the act he was performing, any more than the dying men who were the subjects of the cure. They looked no farther than the present moment, and for relief from a malady which affected the body. But, like the high priest in later times, they were prophesying, without being conscious of it. He was erecting, and the congregation in the wilderness contemplating an anticipated representation of the great medium of salvation, which God had appointed from the foundation of the world; and had, in a variety of other predictions, circumstantially declared and described, at different periods to mankind. These predictions were slumbering, unnoticed, neglected, misunderstood, even by the wise and prudent, in the sacred volume, a dead letter, till Christ, their quickening spirit, gave them life and motion, and a meaning which they had not before. In the scene that passed in the wilderness we behold the shadow of good things to come, a prefiguration of the death which Christ should die. He is

here “evidently set forth crucified before us,” according to his own words, descriptive of “the decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.” “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”[*]John 12:32 This same idea, we have just observed, had been suggested by the evangelical prophet Isaiah, and a similar expression is put into the Savior’s mouth by that harbinger of the Prince of Peace. “Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else” And in another place, speaking of gospel times, “At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel.”[*]Isa 17:7

Thus was Moses, by what he did, and Isaiah, by what he wrote, pointing out to the world one and the same great object, Christ Jesus, “the end of the law for righteousness;” the substance of the types; the accomplishment of prophecy and promise; the bruiser of the serpent’s head; the restorer of defaced, defiled, degraded humanity. And thus we are taught to regard with peculiar respect, an event which Providence has, in so many different ways, rendered illustriously conspicuous; the death of Christ on the accursed tree.

We shall have exhibited to you all that Moses and the prophets, all that the historian and the evangelist have suggested, on the subject of the brazen serpent, when we have led your attention to the impious and idolatrous use made of it in after times. That this illustrious instrument of Israel’s deliverance in the wilderness, should be carefully preserved, as a monument of the divine power and goodness, and by length of time acquire venerability and respect among the other valuable memorials of antiquity, is not to be wondered at. But everything may be perverted; and a corrupt disposition has ever manifested itself in man, to exalt into the place of God, something that is not God. Accordingly we find, about eight centuries from its original fabrication, even in the days of He Hezekiah, the brazen serpent exalted to divine honors, and a besotted people rendering that homage to the mean, which was due only to the hand which employed it. The zeal of that pious prince, therefore, is worthy of commendation, who, in reforming the abuses of religion, which prevailed at the time that he mounted the throne of Judah, abolished this among the rest. Regardless of the purpose for which it was at first framed; of the venerable hand which formed and reared it, and of the lapse of so many years which had stamped respect upon it, “he brake in pieces the brazen serpent which Moses had made; for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it, and he called it Nehushtan,”[*]2Ki 18:4 by way of contempt--a piece of brass. On this part of the history of Moses, pagan antiquity has founded the fabulous history of Esculapius, the pretended god of medicine; whose symbol was a serpent twisted round a rod. The learned have, through a variety of particulars, traced the derivation of the fable from the fact; but to repeat them, would rather minister to curiosity than to instruction and improvement. We dismiss the subject, then, with this general remark, that in more respects than is commonly apprehended, and than it has had the candor to acknowledge, is pagan literature indebted to the sacred volume; that the wisdom of Egypt, of Babylon, of Greece, and of Rome is traceable up to this source; that Moses is, of course, to be considered as the father of profane, as of sacred learning, from whom all subsequent historians, legislators, orators, and poets have derived the lights which directed them in their several pursuits; that to the pure source of all wisdom, the revelation from heaven, in a word the world is indebted for the first principles of science, morality, and religion; which appear to the attentive and discerning eye throw through the mist in which credulous ignorance or bold, fiction have involved them.

Let us hence be encouraged to revere the Scriptures, to search and compare them; to derive our opinions of religious subjects from that sacred source, instead of forcing the truth of God into an awkward supporter of our preconceived opinions. Above all, let it be our concern to regulate our conduct by the laws which Scripture has laid down, and to comfort our hearts by the hope it inspires, and the prospects which it has unfolded. Amen.

079. Moses--Facing Death

Moses--Facing Death

Num 27:12-14. And the Lord said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel. And when thou hast seen it, thou also shall be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered. For ye rebelled against my commandment in the desert Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify me at the water before their eyes. That is the water of Meribah in Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin.

There is something peculiarly interesting in hearing a plain, honest, intelligent man, without vanity, or self-sufficiency, or of affected humility, talking of himself; going into the detail of his own history, with the same fidelity and simplicity as if it were the history of a stranger; unfolding his heart without reserve, disclosing his faults and infirmities without palliation, recording his wise and virtuous actions without ostentation; and relating events, with all their little circumstances, according to the feelings which they excited at the moment.

It is pleasant to see an old man, with his faculties unimpaired, his spirits cheerful, his temper sweet, his conscience clear, his prospects bright; enjoying life without fearing death; blending the modesty and benevolence of youth with the wisdom and dignity of age. There is a double satisfaction in hearing such a one describe persons whom he knew, scenes in which he acted, expeditions which he conducted, schemes which he planned and executed. And such a one was Moses, who having, by divine inspiration made the ages and generations before the flood to pass in review, and unfolded the history of redemption, in its connection with the system of nature and the ways of Providence, during a period of two thousand five hundred years; having admitted us to his familiarity and friendly instruction during an eventful life of one hundred and twenty years, is now, with the same calmness and ease, admitting us to contemplate his behavior in the immediate prospect, and up to the very hour of his death. The idolatrous defection of Israel in the plains of Moab, had been visited with a plague which swept away twenty-four thousand of them. Immediately on the staying of that terrible calamity, Moses is commanded, with the assistance of Eleazer the high priest, to take the number of the people, from twenty years old and upwards, and to compare the muster-roll of the day, with that taken in the wilderness of Sinai, thirty-eight years before. This being done with all possible accuracy, two most singular facts turn up, each singular, considered separately and by itself, and both most singular, taken in connection one with another. In a multitude so great, and at the distance of thirty-eight years, the whole difference is no more than one thousand eight hundred and twenty men: for at the former period, the number of men of a military age was six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty; and at the latter, six hundred and one thousand seven hundred and thirty. But though the strength of the host was nearly the same, the individuals whereof it was composed were totally changed; two names alone of so many myriads stood upon both lists, Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun, for Moses himself was under sentence of condemnation; he was not to be permitted to pass over Jordan; he is already numbered with the dead. The course of nature, it is true, is continually

producing a similar effect on the human race, upon the whole; but there is a degree, of exactness in this instance, not to be accounted for on common principles, and which must be resolved into a special interposition of Providence, which had pronounced the doom of death on the whole body of offenders, in the moment of transgression, and at the same instant, promised the reward of fidelity and obedience to those illustrious two: longevity, and the possession of Canaan. Vain therefore is the hope of so much as one guilty person escaping in a crowd, groundless the fear of singular goodness suffering in the midst of many wicked.

It is related of Xerxes, king of Persia, much to the honor of his humanity, that surveying from an eminence the vast army with which he was advancing to the invasion of Greece, he burst into tears to think that in less than one hundred years they should all be cut off from the land of the living. What then, O Moses, were the emotions of thy soul, to see the event which Xerxes but anticipated, realized before thine eyes? To walk through the ranks of Israel without meeting one man who followed thee out of Egypt, with whom thou couldst mingle the tears of sympathy over so many fallen, or remind of the joy and wonder of that great deliverance? Is not that man already dead, who has survived all his contemporaries? A consideration, among many others, powerfully calculated to reconcile the mind to the thoughts to of dissolution, and to impress on the soul the sentiment of the wise man concerning the world, “I hate it, I would not live always.”

Long life, however, is not the less to be considered as a blessing. The love of it is constitutional law of our nature; and the promise of it is annexed to the sanctions of the written law, as a motive to obedience “Honor thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the thy God giveth thee,”[*]Exo 20:12 and it is here bestowed wed as a reward on the faithful. Premature death, in like manner, is an object of natural horror; is threatened in anger, and inflicted as a punishment. “The wicked shall not live half his days, and his memory shall rot.” In general, a wise and merciful hides from the eyes of men the era of their departure out of the world. The bitterness of death consists in the foretaste, and the forerunners, of that great enemy. That bitterness, in its full proportion, was wrung out, and mingled in the cup of Moses. The death of every Israelite was a death-warning to him. He had lately ascended mount Hor with Aaron his brother, stripped him of his garments, closed his eyes to his last long sleep, and descended without him; and mount Hor is only a few steps distant from mount Abarim, and his own summons comes at length. He is respited, not pardoned, and a reprieve of forty years is now expired.

It is in that awful, trying hour, we are at this time to trace the character and mark the behavior of the man of God. From the moment he fell under the divine displeasure which shortened the date of his life, we observe it lying with an oppressive weight upon his mind. The love of life manifests itself, and we behold, in the prophet, the man of like passions with ourselves. There is no incident of his life on which he dwells so much, and with such earnestness of interest as this. The history of his offence is again and again repeated, not in the view of extenuating the guilt of it, but to vindicate the righteous judgment of God. The excellence of this part of his narrative, is its departing from the direct line of narration. He hastens forward to bring it early into view; he returns again upon his footsteps, and presents it a second time to view. Is he reminding Israel of their rebellion and disobedience? his own transgression, and the punishment of it, arise and stare him in the face. Is he encouraging them in their progress towards the promised land? he sighs to think that he himself shall never enter into it. At one time, he flatters himself with the hope that justice might perhaps relent, and presumes to expostulate and entreat, in terms earnest and pathetic,

such as these; “O Lord God, thou hast begun to show thy servant thy greatness and thy mighty hand; for what god is therein heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might? I pray thee let me go over and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon.”[*]Deu 3:24-25 At another time, he seems quietly to give up the cause as lost, and patiently prepares to meet his fate, and meekly resigns himself to the will of the Most High, which he was unable to alter. In a word, we see him at once the man and the believer, and a pattern well worthy of imitation in both respects.

It is impossible to observe the conflict of Moses’ soul, when this cup of trembling was put into his hands, without thinking of the bitter agony in the garden, of the travail of the Redeemer’s soul, of that passionate address, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me”--of “sweat like great drops of blood falling down to the ground,”[*]Luk 22:42-44--of the triumph of resignation, “nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done”--of “humiliation to death, the death of the cross.” Thus it “behoved him to fulfill all righteousness.” Thus he taught men to obey the law of God; to use all lawful endeavors to preserve life; and thus he inculcated submission to that sovereign will which it is unprofitable and impious to resist.

“Get thee up,” said God to Moses, “into this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel;”[*]Lev 17:12-13 and this is all that the law can do for the guilty; it conducts to an adjoining eminence, it spreads a distant prospect of Canaan, it can display its beauty and fertility, it can inspire the desire of possession: but it cannot divide Jordan, it cannot lead to victory over the last enemy, it cannot make “the comer thereunto perfect,” nor establish the soul in everlasting rest. Neither Moses, the giver of the law, nor Aaron, the high priest, under the law, could “continue by reason of death.” But the Apostle and High Priest of our profession is “entered into the holiest of all,” has opened a passage through the gates of death, to life and immortality; lifted up, first upon the cross, and then to his throne in the heavens, he is drawing all men unto him.

Together with the honest, though fond attachment to life, which characterizes the man, and the pious resignation which marks the child of God, Moses discovers, on this occasion, that excellent spirit which sinks and loses the individual in the public. He cheerfully gives up his personal suit, and the cause of Israel henceforth engrosses him wholly. “And Moses spake unto the Lord, saying, Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd.”[*]Num 27:15-17

Let modern patriots think of this, blush at their pride, and selfishness. But they are lost to all sense of decency, they keep each other in countenance by their multitude and confidence, and “glory in their shame.” This noble conduct of the Jewish legislator was not the affection of virtue and public spirit, the ostentatious boasting of a man who had no prospect, or a distant one of being put to the trial; but the native greatness and superiority of a mind occupied with two grand objects, the glory of God and the good of his country; a mind that could rejoice in the advancement of an inferior, and decrease with inward satisfaction while the other increased ordinary men look with an evil eye upon successors. A prince and his heir, though that heir be his own son, generally live upon indifferent terms; but Moses sees his dignity departing from himself in his life time, departing from

his family given to his servant, with but a murmur, without a sigh. It was enough to him that God had been pleased to adopt Joshua, for the purpose of finishing his work, of introducing Israel into their inheritance. It is no sooner intimated to him; than Joshua becomes his son, his brother, his friend: and he proceeds to his installation with as much alacrity, as he invested Aaron with the pontifical robes. This solemn ceremony consisted of a variety of circumstances, which are well worthy of our attention; from their being of divine appointment, from their great antiquity, from their inexplicable mysteriousness, or their obvious significancy. Joshua was already anointed with the unction of the Spirit: he was a person of singular piety, undaunted resolution, and unshaken fidelity: he had long attended upon Moses as his minister, had accompanied him into the mount, when he ascended to meet God, had traversed the land of Canaan as one of the spies, had brought up its good report, and stood firm with Caleb in resisting the timid and discouraging representations of his colleagues. He possessed all the qualities natural, acquired, and miraculously dispensed, which were requisite to the discharge of the duties of that high and important station to which Providence was now calling him. By the spirit which is said to have been in Joshua, some understand the spirit of prophecy, or supernatural powers of foreseeing and providing for future events. By taking in every circumstance, it seems rather to denote those rare gifts with which nature had so liberally, endowed him; wisdom, and courage, and strength, and which Providence was now calling forth for the general benefit. But though thus amply furnished for his great undertaking, God was pleased to command a solemn and public declaration of his choice, and that the object of it should, before the eyes of the people, be set apart by the imposition of the hands of Moses to the office assigned him.

Forms are necessary, because in are not spiritual; forms are interposed, that the understanding, the heart, and the conscience, may be approached through the channels of sense. And of all forms, recommended, by divine authority, and its own significant simplicity, that of the laying on of hands is one of the most ancient, most frequently in use, and most striking. By this solemn rite, the devoted victim was set apart for death, and the guilt of the offerer transferred, as it were, and laid upon the head of the oblation: and thus were the minister of the sanctuary the general, the statesman, dedicated to the duties of their respective stations; thus new and extraordinary powers were conferred upon Joshua: thus Jesus took leave of his disciples, and left a blessing behind him, more precious than the mantle of Elijah. “He led them out as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them.”[*]Luk 24:50 By laying on of the apostles’ hands, miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost were communicated; and by laying on of the hands of the presbytery, Timothy was solemnly set apart for exercising the office of a bishop; and thus a great part of the Christian world continues to install its ministers in the pastoral office.

Moses was farther commanded “to cause Joshua to stand before Eleazer the priest,” who was probably to offer up sacrifice in behalf of the commander elect, and by this additional solemnity to impress both upon his own mind and upon those of the spectators, the weight and importance of the sacred charge committed unto him. It is added, Num 27:20, “And thou shalt put some of thine honor upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient.” This is interpreted by some commentators, of those rays of glory, which are supposed to have surrounded the head of Moses, ever since his descent from God in the mount, and which so dazzled the eyes of the beholder, that in speaking to the people he was under the necessity of putting a veil over his face. By the imposition of his hands upon the head of Joshua, according to

the commandment, this external, sensible honor, is understood to have been communicated from the one to the other, and that, in consequence of it, Joshua henceforth wore a visible token of the choice of Heaven.

Conjecture and fancy blend too much in this exposition, to procure for it a very high degree of respect. Juster and more sober criticism explain the passage as implying, that Moses should immediately associate Joshua with himself in the executive powers of government, devolve upon him a share both of the respect and the care which pertained to the supreme command; that he might enjoy the satisfaction, while he yet lived, and which he so much desired, of beholding a wise and a good man conducting the Israelitish affairs, in church and state, with discretion, and carrying on the plan of Providence to its consummation.

There is another article in the injunction laid upon Moses, respecting the appointment of his successor, which has greatly exercised and puzzled the critics. “And he shall stand before Eleazer the priest, who shall ask counsel for him, after the judgment of Urim, before the Lord; at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.”[*]Num 27:21 The difficulty is, what was the Urim, and the judgment of Urim, of which Eleazer was to ask counsel in behalf of Joshua and wherein Moses differed from Joshua as to this? Urim, is, in general, in Scripture, found in connection with Thummim. The words import light and perfection; and they appear to have been some part or appendage of the breastplate, that essential article of the high priest’s dress. They were not, it is alleged, the production of human skill, like the other particulars of the sacred clothing, for there is no account of their fabrication by the hands of man; but when the breastplate was finished, Moses, we are told, “put into it the Urim and the Thummim,” whatever they were, immediately from God. The method of consultation has also furnished ample matter of dispute. The most approved tradition is this, for Scripture gives but few, and those very general hints, upon the subject, the person who desired to consult the oracle, (and none but public persons, and on great public occasions, were admitted to that privilege,) intimated his intention to the high priest; who, at the hour of incense, arrayed in his pontifical vestments, entered the holy place, accompanied at a little distance by the magistrate or general, who made the inquiry. The high priest placed himself with his face towards the entrance of the most holy place. The veil which separated the holy place from the holy of holies, was drawn up for the occasion, so that he stood directly fronting the ark of the covenant, overshadowed by the cherubim, where the Shechaniah, or visible glory, resided. The inquirer then standing behind, pronounced the question, or consultation, in a few plain words; such, for example, as these: “Shall I go up against the Philistines, or shall I not go up?” This question was again repeated solemnly and distinctly by the high priest before the Lord: and on looking downwards upon the Urim in the breastplate, the answer of God was seen in characters of reflected light, from the excellent glory, and which the high priest audibly repeated in the ears of the party concerned.--“Go;” or, “Thou shalt not go.” When the oracle refused to give any response, as in the case of Saul, it was considered as a mark of high displeasure. God would not answer that wicked prince “by the judgment of Urim,” but because he had willfully forsaken God, an offended God, in just displeasure, gave him up to ask counsel of hell, and to follow it to his own destruction. “We have also,” Christians, “a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed; as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.”[*]2Pe 1:19

Joshua being referred to this mode of consultation, compared with the history of Moses, points out the difference between these two leaders of Israel. “There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.”[*]Deu 34:10

God manifested himself immediately unto Moses; conversed with him as a man with his friend. Joshua was kept at a greater distance, and enjoyed communion with God through the intervention of appointed means. Just as before Moses was admitted to the very summit of the mount, received within the veil of thick darkness, which at once concealed and revealed the divine glory; while Joshua was confined to a lower region, kept in the place and on the duty of a servant. But we must conclude. The whole scene that has now passed in review, speaks directly to the heart and conscience. It presents a striking and instructive instance of the goodness and severity of God. The faults and infirmities of his dearest children he neither overlooks, nor forgets to punish. For one offence, and seemingly a slight one, Moses is excluded from Canaan. No humiliation, penitence, or entreaty can, of themselves, remove the guilt nor prevent the chastisement of sin. The neglect or insult offered by a child, a brother, a friend, strikes deeper than the most violent outrage from a stranger, or an avowed enemy. The transgression of Moses at the waters of strife was thus aggravated, and he must die for it. O my God, enter not into judgment with me, whose crimes are heightened by every circumstance of aggravation--deliberation, presumption, filial ingratitude, in the face of solemn and repeated engagements. If Moses died the death, for once speaking unadvisedly with his lips, in the moment of passion; “if then, Lord, art strict to mark iniquity, where shall I stand?” how shall I escape? But is death a punishment to a good man? No. As in the death of Moses, therefore, we behold the justice and severity of God, so in its consequences, we behold his goodness and loving kindness. The evil is slight and temporary; the good is unspeakably great, and eternally permanent; exclusion from Canaan is admission into the kingdom of heaven; “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” “Faith, indeed, redeems not from the power of the grave, but it dissipates all the horror of the tomb transforms it into a resting-place for the weary pilgrim; and converts the king of terrors into a minister of joy. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” “The saying that is written is come to pass, death is swallowed up of victory; mortality is swallowed up of life.” “Life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel.” We “know whom we have believed:” we believe in him who hath said, “I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.”[*]John 11:25-26

Chapter 80

080. Moses--Avenges the Midianites

Moses--Avenges the Midianites

Num 31:1-2. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites: afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people. The interest which every reader of taste and sensibility takes in the life and actions of Moses is never permitted to flag, much less totally to sink and expire. His infant cries, from the very first moment, awaken our sympathy; and his departing words, at the age of a hundred and twenty years, continue to excite our esteem and admiration. Whether employed as a minister of vengeance. or of mercy he inspires affection or commands respect. The love of life is not only natural and innocent, but important, and necessary. We are instructed to guard, to preserve, to prolong it, at once by the constitution and frame of our nature, and by manifold examples of the highest authority. And while Providence permits the farther extension of it, the reasons and end of that extension are obviously manifest. Not a single hour is added to the life of any one, merely to make up such a quantity of time. No, every moment is destined to its peculiar purpose, passes to account, calls to its proper use and employment. To dream of premature retirement from the exercise of our faculties and functions, of mere existence without employment, is an attempt to defeat the intention of the Creator in sending us into the world; is a degradation and perversion of the powers of the human mind; is to be dead while we live. The inquiry of a well regulated, spirit, to the last, is, “Lord, what wouldst thou have me do?” While any of my powers remain, however blunted, however impaired, to whom shall I dedicate the poor remains? Enfeebled, exhausted as I am, is there no one respect in which I can yet glorify God, or be useful to my fellow creatures? And to the last, the great Supporter of life, the Ruler of the world, has some command to give, some labor to be performed, some exercise of the hand, the head, or the heart to enjoin, some purpose of justice or of love to accomplish.

Moses has received warning to depart, but the hour of release is not yet come. And though his offence at the waters of Meribah must be punished with death, the tranquillity of his mind is not thereby discomposed, nor his intercourse with Heaven interrupted, nor his zeal in performing the duties of his station abated. The God whom he had so long and faithfully served, continues to converse with him as a man with his friend, communicates to him his designs, and employs him in the execution. Our lives too are forfeited; the sentence of death is upon us; under a respite of unknown, uncertain duration, our days are passing away. Improved ever so well, they cannot indeed redeem from the grave, nor alter the immutable decree; but their improvement may alleviate the bitterness of death and pluck out the sting. The inevitable course of nature, and the righteous decisions of a holy law, destroy not the sacred communications which subsist between a merciful God and a gracious spirit. To receive a command from an offended father, after judgment has been pronounced, partakes of the nature of a pardon; and it is no slender consolation, even under the stroke of justice, to reflect that paternal affection was pleased to regard and accept future obedience and submission, if not as an atonement for offence, at least as a mark of contrition for having transgressed. As if, therefore, we could wipe out the memory of the past; as if persevering labors of gratitude and love could purchase our release; as if death were to be

prevented, disarmed, or destroyed, by the efforts of the passing moment, let us awake and arise to the knowledge, the study, and the practice of our heavenly Father's will. The service prescribed to Moses on this occasion was the execution of justice on a nation of offenders. The nature of the offence has been hinted at in a former Lecture; and we may form a judgment of its enormity, from the vengeance which pursued it. The state of Midian, at the period in question, exhibits the last stage of moral depravity--a corrupted people carrying on a temporary political design, by means the most scandalous and dishonorable--the dearest and most delicate interests of human nature vilely sacrificed to its worst and most disgraceful propensities--husbands countenancing the prostitution of their wives, and parents that of their daughters, in order to gratify ambition, avarice, or revenge. A nation of such a character is necessarily hastening to utter destruction, without fire from heaven, or the sword of a foreign enemy. But what vice was accelerating by its own native energy, Providence hastens to an issue by a special interposition, and "the Lord makes himself known by the judgment which he executes." The force which it was thought proper to employ for the extermination of this debauched race, is indication, sufficient how low its character was rated. Immersed in sensuality, enervated by luxury, a handful of men was deemed enough to destroy them. A thousand out of every tribe of Israel, twelve thousand men in all, Moses considers as fully competent to the execution of this enterprise; and the event fully justified the estimate he had made. It is likewise remarkable, that he neither commands in this expedition, in person, nor commits the conduct of it to Joshua, or any other of military profession; but to "Phinehas, the son of Eleazer the priest," furnished "with the holy instruments, and the trumpets to blow in his hand." We have here, therefore, the idea of a solemn public execution, rather than of regular war. No resistance is made, no blood but that of the criminals is shed; they dare not meet in the field those whom in the secret chambers they could ensnare. In vain their hoary adviser Balaam, urges them to feats of arms, and sets them an example of courage; supported by five kings and their armies, he falls together with them, by the sword of Israel, an awful monument, how certainly, however slowly, eternal justice overtakes the sinner! The immense booty which this easy victory transferred to the Israelites, is a farther demonstration of the feebleness and dissolution of their unwarlike enemy. They had wealth without being rich, luxury without enjoyment, policy without wisdom, kingly power without government, and zeal for religion without an object of worship. Conquered the moment they are attacked, having no resource in public or private virtue; men lost to a sense of what constitutes true female dignity, women precipitating that corruption of which they were the miserable victims--they hold up to mankind a fearful but instructive example of the native, necessary, inevitable consequences of vice. Up to similar causes the downfall of still greater states may be traced; and if sin be the ruin of any kingdom, what individual offender shall dare to flatter himself with the hope of escaping the righteous judgment of God? The severity with which judgment was executed on the Midianites, helps farther to unfold their character. An effeminate, luxurious people, generally excites contempt at most; but here a holy and just indignation is kindled. Heaven itself is up in arms against a degenerate race; and Moses, the meekest of men, accuses the exterminators of the whole race of Midian of weak and excessive lenity. How is this to be accounted for? It will be found on inquiry, that in a very dissolute state of society, vices of the most odious and atrocious kind are necessarily blended with others less offensive. The love of pleasure is the predominant character; but in order to feed and support that passion, arts the most criminal and detestable must be employed. Injustice, violence, perjury, and murder follow in the train of lust. The moral principle is destroyed: all sense of shame is lost. The general depravity

keeps every individual transgressor in countenance. Appearances are no longer attended to or kept up. Men glory in their shame. The very offices of religion are perverted into instruments of debauchery. Such, apparently, was the state of Midian at the period under review; such was that of Israel during the government and priesthood of Eli; and such was that of the Assyrian and Roman empires immediately previous to their subversion. And in such a state, is it any wonder to see heaven and earth combined to root out and overthrow--a holy and righteous God employing the ministration of the gentlest of mankind to cut off the name and memory of such a people from the earth? When punishment so signal is inflicted, we may safely infer, that the guilt which provoked it from such hands was enormous. On reviewing the little army of Israel, after the victory, a fact turns up unequalled in the history of mankind--not so much as one of the twelve thousand has fallen in battle: and that in attacking and destroying a nation so populous as to contain thirty-two thousand females of a particular description.[*]Num 31:35 The hand of God was clearly visible in this, and thankfully acknowledged. The superfluous ornaments which lately published the shame of Midian, now proclaim the piety and gratitude of Israel; and become part of the sacred treasury of the tabernacle. Every creature of God is good in itself, and intended to do good. Use the world so as not to abuse it, and the Creator is glorified. Every day added to our life is as much a miracle of mercy, as the preservation of every individual of the twelve thousand in the day of battle. Let our gratitude declare itself in an habitual devotedness of heart and life, to the God of our life, and the length of our days; let us present our “bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service: and be transformed by the renewing of our mind, that we may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.”[*]Rom 12:1-2 In the punishment inflicted on Midian, we behold a righteous God prosecuting an injury done to Israel as an insult offered to himself. And indeed every offence against society is a direct attack of the divine authority, which has fenced the person, the fame, and the virtue of our neighbor on every side, against all the assaults, whether of Violence or deceit. The character and conduct, in connection with the untimely end of the arch seducer Balaam, are an awful and instructive instance of the justice of God in making signal guilt its own avenger, and furnish a striking illustration of the observations made by the psalmist and his wise son: “Behold he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood. He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate. I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness; and will sing praise to the name of the Lord most high.”[*]Psa 7:14-17 “The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made, in the net which they hid is their own foot taken. The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.”[*]Psa 9:15-16 “For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings. His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins. He shall die without instruction: and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.”[*]Pro 5:21-23 In the faint resistance made by the Midianites to a force so small, we behold the native tendency of vice to enfeeble and enervate. Sunk in effeminacy and sloth, they are overcome as soon as attacked. Strong in cunning, they are destitute of true wisdom, and defective in valor. The foe that assaults, that conquers them, is within. “The wicked flee when no man pursueth, but the righteous is bold as a lion.” Addictedness to the pleasures of sense gradually, though insensibly, encroaches on all the nobler principles of our nature, undermines and subverts them. Every spring of the soul is relaxed through disuse; the bodily powers become languid, and the sluggish giant becomes an easy prey

to the active and vigorous child. Exercise your faculties, and they will increase and improve: neglect them, and they will quickly fall into utter decay. Fear God, maintain “a conscience void of offence,” and bid defiance to what earth and hell can do against you. In the freewill offering of these grateful Israelites for protection and deliverance in the day of battle, behold a laudable example of attention to the ways of Providence, and of thankful acknowledgment of them. Let friends, after the days of separation are at an end, after the hour of danger is past, reckon their numbers. Do they remain entire, not one missing, is no allay mingled with the joy of re-union? It was the hand of God that supported; he “gave his angels charge concerning you.” “He covered you with his feathers; his truth was your shield and buckler; no evil befell you, no plague came nigh your dwelling.” “Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; offer unto him thanksgiving, honor him with your substance;” present “the calves of your lips,” the devotedness of your hearts, the obedience of your lives. Does the punishment of this people appear to any rigorous and excessive? Let them consider that they are very incompetent judges of God’s moral government; that they see but a few scattered fragments of the vast scheme of Providence; that creatures themselves, ignorant, weak, and criminal, must be much disqualified to “hold the balance and the rod;” that every transgression of the divine law merits death; that “fools” only “make a mock at sin.” Let the whole earth tremble before Him “who will by no means clear the guilty:” who has denounced “indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish against every soul of man that doth evil,” while to the humble and contrite in heart, he proclaims his name, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin:”[*]Exo 34:6-7 “visiting the iniquity of a the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them who hate him; but showing mercy to thousands of them that love him and keep his commandments.”[*]Exo 20:5-6 In the leader and commander of Israel behold, once more, a man exalted far above all temporary, all selfish concerns; occupied only with the interests of truth and justice, the duties of his station, the prosperity of his charge, the glory of Him who had conferred it upon him. In this last object his whole soul is absorbed. He walks already on air, and beholds the world under his feet; but forgets not that he is yet in it, and that in every state, and at every period of existence, a rational being may promote, and ought to be studying how he may best promote the honor of his Creator, by administering justice, or extending mercy to his fellow creatures.--Consider him well; and, in your sphere, with the means and ability you enjoy, go and do likewise--and God grant us all wisdom to know and do what is well pleasing in his sight.

081. Moses--Cities of Refuge

Moses--Cities of Refuge

Num 35:9-15. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come over Jordan, into the land of Canaan, then ye shall appoint you cities, to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer may flee thither which killeth any person at unawares. And they shall be unto you cities for refuge from the avenger; that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the congregation in judgment. And of these cities which ye shall give, six cities shall ye have for refuge. Ye shall give three cities on this side Jordan, and three cities shall ye give in the land of Canaan, which shall be cities of refuge. These six cities shall be a refuge, both for the children of Israel, and for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them; that everyone that killeth any person unawares may flee thither.

Human laws are generally the result of experience, not the provision of foresight. Occasion dictates the encouragement to be given, the restraint to be imposed, the punishment to be inflicted. The multiplication of new and extraordinary cases, must of course swell the statute book; through change of circumstances some institutes must sink into disuse and oblivion, and others rise into existence and force. Hence the variety, the opposition, the contradiction of different codes of law, not only in different countries, but in the same country at different periods.

There are, at the same time, certain general and fixed principles of law applicable to every state of society; which founded in eternal, unchangeable truth and justice, are in perpetual force and of universal obligation. Divested of everything arbitrary, local, and temporary, they address themselves to the understanding and conscience of every man, and irresistibly carry conviction with them. The genius, character, and progress of any people, a sagacious observer will be able to trace, with tolerable accuracy, in their legislation, in their institutions, political and religious; for those of a moral tendency never vary. It is easy to discern in the spirit of the laws, what is the spirit of the nation; to discern whether liberty or despotism, moderation or tyranny is predominant. But the constitution of the commonwealth of Israel possesses distinctive features. It was formed by Divine Wisdom long before it had a local residence wherein to act. The laws by which Canaan was to be governed, were enacted in the wilderness. Prescience made provision for cases which could not as yet have arisen. Republican equality was blended with absolute, unlimited theocracy; a liberty and a sovereignty established in perfect harmony, and yet both to their utmost extent. The Levitical part of the constitution was adapted to this state of things. The priesthood, in respect of property and possession, was reduced below the level of their brethren; while by their office and employments, the homage paid and the provision made for them, they were raised above their fellows. They were appointed to minister at the altar of God; and it was his will, and it was reasonable, that they should live by it.

One of the last public services in which Moses was employed, is the settlement of, this branch of the political economy--the establishment of religion, without which no state can long exist; and the appointment of a moderate, but certain and steady provision for its ministers.

Forty and eight cities, in all, with their suburbs, and an extent of territory around everyone, not exceeding two thousand cubits, in all directions, were to be set apart for the tribe of Levi, and distributed by lot. As the lot was specially ordered by Divine Providence, the dispersion of this tribe over the whole land, there is good reason to believe, God in wisdom overruled favorably to the exercise of their sacred function. Of their other privileges and immunities, we are not now led to treat. The words we have read limit our attention to an institution, in many respects singular, and unexampled in the history of mankind--the appointment of six of the Levitical cities as places of refuge for the unintentional, and therefore less criminal manslayer. Respecting this institution, and its reason and design, the following particulars recommend themselves to our notice. The provision here made refers to a case of singular importance to society; on which indeed the very being of society depends the security of human life against violence. To take away the lift of another is the most atrocious offence which man call commit against man. The laws of every well-regulated community have accordingly marked it as the object of just vengeance, saying, in the language of the supreme Legislator, “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed.” But into the commission of this offence, as of every other, circumstances of aggravation or alleviation may enter; and every wise legislator will take these into consideration; adapting the degree of punishment to the degree of criminality, distinguishing the action, as connected with, or separated from the intention. To the willful and deliberate murderer no place was to serve as a sanctuary; to him the altar itself was to afford no protection. But a man may deprive his neighbor of life without incurring the guilt of murder; and it must be imputed to him as a calamity, not a crime. To meet such a case, the provision in question was made; and a refuge was provided for both the citizen and the stranger who might “unawares,” without malice or intention, occasion the death of another. This refuge, however, was not wholly unrestricted, but subject to a variety of regulations, all calculated powerfully to impress on the minds of the people, an awful sense of the value put on the life of man by the great Legislator: and to serve as a caution not only against deliberate violence, but even against carelessness and inattention, where the life of another was concerned. Blood lies heavily, as it ought, on the head of him who sheddeth it, however innocently; and the consciousness of it will ever be felt as a severe punishment by a sensible heart, though no judge arise to avenge it. But punishment to a certain degree was inflicted on the manslayer, by the very statute which appointed the refuge; and to the uneasy reflections arising from having been the unwilling instrument of a man’s death, were superadded alarming apprehensions and painful restraints. The first regulation limited the number of these cities to six, for the whole commonwealth of Israel. Hence, an escape to a place of refuge must, in many instances, have been effected through much danger, exertion, and labor; and the unhappy fugitive must frequently have felt all the bitterness of death in his solicitude to flee from it. Thus, while the finger of mercy pointed to the strong hold of safety, the voice of justice exclaimed, “Flee for thy life, look not behind thee lest thou perish; behold the avenger of blood is at thy heels.” But that the danger, and the anxiety resulting from it, might be diminished as far as the limited number of the cities would admit, it was determined by the lot that these should be dispersed at the most commodious distances, over the country; and it was expressly provided that three of them should be on each side the Jordan, in order to facilitate and secure escape at the seasons when that river overflowed its banks, and rendered a passage tedious, difficult, or impracticable. In the same view, it has been affirmed, and seems probable, that the roads which led to these cities were formed and maintained at the public expense, and that their breadth was very considerable: that every

obstruction was removed out of the way, bridges were thrown over interposing streams, and when roads happened to cross or separate, an index, inscribed with the word Refuge, pointed out the right course. And thus an institution humane in its design, was rendered more so, by the manner in which it was observed. But again--the city was, in the first instance, to serve only as a temporary refuge, and afforded shelter only till inquiry was made into the fact, and judgment was solemnly given between the manslayer and the avenger of blood, upon evidence adduced. If criminal intention was proved, there was no remedy, blood demanded blood, the prisoner must be delivered up to the hands of justice. If otherwise, public protection was granted, and he was restored to his refuge. The ordinance having it in view not to prevent and suppress the truth, but to bring it openly and fully to light. The innocence of the prosecuted party having been made clearly to appear, he was restored indeed to his refuge, but it became, at the same time, his prison. Exiled from his native possession, and from all that rendered it dear; doomed to live among strangers, to subsist on their bounty, perhaps to feel their unkindness or neglect, he must drag out a comfortless existence, to an unknown, uncertain period: or stir abroad under constant apprehension and hazard of his life. And confinement is still confinement, though in a place of safety, a city of refuge and ignorance and uncertainty respecting the termination of our misery, are bitter ingredients in the cup of affliction. “It may outlast life,” sad thought! “or consume the best and most valuable portion of my days. Unhappy that I am, to have introduced mourning into my neighbor’s family, and desolated my own. Though I feel not the pangs of remorse, my heart is torn with those of regret; and blood, though shed without a crime, is a burden too heavy for me to bear.” The last regulation on record respecting this subject, was a permission to the hapless manslayer to “return into the land of his possession,” on the death of the high priest. The reason of this ordinance does not appear; but it contains a circumstance very affecting to the prisoner himself, and affecting to all Israel. His release from confinement could be purchased only by death, the death of another; and that not of an ordinary citizen, but of the most dignified and respectable character in the republic. The weight of blood innocently shed, was at length to be removed, but how? Not by the demise of him who shed it, but of “the high priest which should be in those days.” And may we not suppose a refugee of sensibility looking forward to this event with the mixed emotions of hope and sorrow? The very cause of his enlargement makes it to partake of the nature of a punishment. He dare hardly wish for liberty, for it involved guilt deeper than what already lay upon his head; deliberate devising the death of his neighbor, and taking pleasure in it.

Now, if guiltless homicide subjected the perpetrator of it to such accumulated danger, anxiety, and distress, how atrocious in the sight of God must willful murder be? And how sacred, in the sight of man, ought to be the life of his brother, and everything relating to its preservation and comfort, his health, his peace, his reputation? To attack him in any of these respects, is to level a blow at his head, or, where he feels more sensibly still, at his heart.

Let us review this last of the Mosaic institutions, and mark its reference to a clearer and more explicit dispensation: for it is too evidently “a shadow of good things to come.” The flying “manslayer” is an affecting representation of what every man is by nature and by wicked works; an unhappy creature, who has offended against his brother, violated the laws of society, broken his own peace of mind, and trampled on the divine authority, not only accidentally and unintentionally, but deliberately, presumptuously. His conscience, “like the troubled sea,” cannot rest. What he feels is dreadful, what he fears is infinitely worse. With trembling Cain, he apprehends that

everyone who meeteth him will slay him: his multiplied crimes cry out of the around for vengeance upon his head--while eternal, inflexible justice, like “the avenger of blood,” pursues him to the death. To flee from or endure the wrath of an offended God, is equally impossible. All nature is up in arms against him; he is become a terror to himself; the king of terrors aims his fatal dart, and hell follows after. The “refuge” provided by the statute for the unhappy man who had destroyed his brother, and troubled his own soul, prefigures the remedy prescribed by infinite wisdom for the recovery of a lost, perishing world--that dispensation of Divine Providence in which “mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” Fear not, guilty creature, there is hope concerning thee: thou shalt not die. The God whom thou hast offended, even he, “hath found out a ransom;” he hath “laid help on One who is mighty to save, even to the uttermost, them who come unto God through him.” Cease from the anxious inquiry, “Who shall ascend into heaven, to bring Christ down from above? Who shall descend into the deep, to bring up Christ again from the dead?” “The word is nigh thee,” and in this word the Lord “brings near his righteousness,” and his salvation. The name of Jehovah is as a strong tower, whoso runneth into it is safe. Prophets, apostles, evangelists, with one accord, point to the sanctuary, saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it.” “Turn ye to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope.” Here is “an highway”--“the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.” The Savior himself proclaims, “Look to me, and be saved.” “Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.” The very act of flying from “the avenger of blood,” argued a consciousness of criminality, and an apprehension of danger; and the course directed to a city of refuge, indicated a knowledge of its appointment, and of the privileges pertaining to it. In this we behold the character of the convinced, penitent sinner, condemned of his own conscience, stripped of every plea of self-righteousness, alarmed with the terrors of the “wrath to come,” encouraged by the declarations of the mercy of God in Christ, apprehending “salvation in no other,” perceiving no way to escape but this, he floes “for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before him,” even to “Him who is mighty to save;” to that “blood which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel;” to “the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world:” saying, in the words of the psalmist, “O Lord, thou art my refuge; return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.” “In Jehovah alone have I righteousness and strength;” “he also is become my salvation.” The safety of the manslayer depended, not on having arrived at, but on remaining in the city of his refuge. To leave it prematurely was as fatal as to be overtaken on the way that led to it. The grace of the gospel, in like manner, is extended, not to him who, convinced of sin, and trembling with apprehension of judgment to come, has fled for refuge, to the great Propitiation for sin, but to him who abideth in Christ. As there is a “believing to the saving of the soul;” so there is a “drawing back unto perdition:” and “no man having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” Hence the solemn injunction and warning of Christ himself, “Abide in me, and I in you--if a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered: and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” “He that endureth unto the end, the same shall be saved.” The great Apostle and High Priest of our profession lives for ever; there is therefore “no more going out.” “In returning and rest shall we be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength.” The sanctuary provided and opened, equally for the distressed Israelite and “the stranger,” is a happy prefiguration of the indiscriminating mercy, the unlimited extension of the gospel salvation. “In Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who bath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.” He “came and preached

peace to you which were far off, and to them which were nigh; and through him, we both have an access by one Spirit unto the Father." The gospel of Christ is "the power of God unto salvation, to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." It announces "glory, honor, and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile." "For there is no respect of persons with God." Blessed dispensation, which hath abolished all invidious distinctions! "where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision; barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all, and in all!" Who art thou then, O man, who "judgest thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother?" He is a man like thyself, a criminal as thou art; for him also Christ died, and for his admission, as for thine, the door of mercy stands open, the city of refuge strengthens its walls, expands its gates.

I conclude with suggesting a few hints, which will serve to evince the glorious superiority of the object prefigured, over the figure; of "the very image of the things," above "the shadow of good things to come." The institution under review was a provision for one particular species of offence and distress, and for a case which could occur but in rarer instances. Indeed the whole history of Israel furnishes not a single one. But the provisions of the "better covenant--established upon better promises," extend to every species, and to every instance of guilt and misery. They are made not only for the heedless and the unfortunate, the weak and the helpless, but for the stout-hearted and presumptuous, for deliberate offenders and backsliding children, for the very chief of sinners. Whatever, O man, be thy peculiar "weight, and the sin that doth more easily beset thee;" whatever "the plague of thine heart," or the error of thy life, behold "help laid for thee on One mighty to save." "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." Bear, and accept his kind invitation, "Come to me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Look to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth." "Him that cometh I will in no wise cast out." The cities of Israel served as a temporary reprieve from a sentence of death, which, though the hand of the "avenger" was restrained, the hand of nature was speedily to execute. The manslayer might be overtaken by it, in the very city of his refuge. But the believer's security under the gospel never fails, never terminates. He is "passed from death unto life;" he "shall never perish." "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again." "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand; my Father, which gave them me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Under the law, the death of the high priest, the final era of release to the manslayer, was an event entirely casual, often distant, always uncertain. Under the gospel, that death, which is the sinner's deliverance, the soul's ransom, is an event for ever present, perpetually producing its effect. Christ, "by one offering, hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." "This man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood."

"We ought, therefore, to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip." For if the intentional murderer was to be dragged from God's altar, to suffer the punishment of his crime; and if the manslayer, who despised and neglected his refuge, fell a just sacrifice to the resentment of "the avenger of blood," and to his own presumption and neglect of the merciful ordinance of God; "how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God

and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" "For if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."[*]Heb 10:28-29;Heb 10:26-27;Heb 10:31 "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."[*]Isa 55:6-7 "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."[*]2Co 6:2 "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings; behold we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God. Truly in vain is salvation looked for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel."[*]Jer 3:22-23

082. Moses--Speech to Israel

Moses--Speech to Israel

Deu 1:3. And it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the months that Moses spake unto the children of Israel, according unto all that the Lord had given him in commandment unto them.

“Where is that thrift, that avarice of time,

O glorious avarice! thought of death inspires?”--Young.

Behold this honorable thrift, this glorious avarice, exemplified in that most amiable and excellent of mankind, Moses, the man of God, who has condescended to be so long our instructor and our guide. He is now in the last month of his earthly existence; he is “ready to be offered up; the time of his departure is at hand,” and an illustrious instance his last days exhibits of how much may be done in a little time. Within the compass of that month, that little month, all the words of this book were spoken in the ears of all Israel, and were committed to writing. The decree, the irreversible decree had gone forth, he knew that he must die; he therefore sets himself to redeem the time, seeing his days are now few, not one of them shall be spent in vain. The tide which carried him along to the world of spirits, is hastening to finish our course, to add us to the number of those who were, but are no more. Another month, a little month, must close our review of the life and writings of Moses. A still shorter period may close our worldly career; and when we part, it is to meet no more, till “the dead, small and great, stand before God.” Let us then seize the moments as they fly, and redeem our time. Let us drink into the spirit of Moses, and learn of him how to live, and how to die.

We see here a man living cheerfully, living usefully to the last. Two different and indeed opposite feelings are apt to betray men into the same practical error, that of misspending their time, and neglecting their opportunities--the confidence of living long on the one hand--the near prospect of death on the other. What we imagine it is in our power to do when we please, we are in great danger of never doing at all; and we feel the remorse of occasion for ever lost, ere we are well awake from the dream of a season continually at our disposal; and it is but too common, when thus overtaken, disconcerted, and confused, to give up our work in despair. Having much to do, and the time being short, we sit down and lament our folly, and do nothing. Presumption betrays us today, diffidence and despondency destroy us tomorrow. But in the last weeks of Moses’ life we discover nothing of the indecent hurry of a man conscious of neglect, and eager to repair it. He neither runs nor loiters; but walks with the steadiness and dignity of one whose strength is as his day; who has a labor prescribed, and ability to perform it. In his youth we have a pattern of generosity, and public spirit, and courage, and greatness of mind; in his manhood, of wisdom, of diligence, of perseverance, of fidelity; and now in his old age, of calmness, of devotion, of superiority to the world, of heavenly mindedness.

Observe the excellency of his spirit, at this period, a little more particularly. He set a proper value upon life. He desired its continuance, with the feelings natural to a man, he prized it as the gift of God, as the precious season of acting for God, of observing and improving the ways of his providence, of doing good to men, of preparation for eternity. He prayed for its prolongation, without fearing its end; and he thereby reproves that rashness which exposes life to unnecessary danger, that intemperance which wastes and shortens, that indolence and listlessness which dissipate it; and that vice and impiety which clothe death with terror. In Moses we have a bright example of genuine patriotism. That most respectable quality appeared in him early, and shone most conspicuously at the last. “When he was come to years, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter: choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.”[*]Heb 11:24-25 For Israel’s sake he was willing to encounter a thousand dangers, to endure a thousand hardships. For them he braved the wrath of a king, sacrificed his ease, consented to be blotted out of God’s book. For them he labored, fasted, prayed; in their service was his life spent, and his dying breath was poured out in pronouncing blessings upon them. If it went well with Israel, no matter what became of himself. Their unkindness and ingratitude excited no resentment in his breast. When they rebelled he was grieved, when they were threatened he trembled, when they suffered he bled, when they were healed he rejoiced. O how his temper and conduct reprove that pride, which perpetually aims at aggrandizing itself, which must have everything bend and yield to it, which is ready to sacrifice thousands to its own humor or advantage; that selfishness which grasps all, sets everything to sale, and refuses to be ashamed. The generosity and disinterestedness of Moses eminently adorned the close of his life. He was a father, and had all the feelings of that tender relation. It was natural for him to wish and expect that his sons should be distinguished after his death, should be the heirs of his honor, should succeed to his authority. An ordinary man would have been disposed to employ the power which he possessed to build up, to enrich, to ennoble his own family: but the will of God was declared. Joshua was the choice or Heaven; Joshua, his servant, one of another family, another tribe. In the appointment Moses rejoices, he adopts Joshua as his son, as his associate; sees him rise with complacency, puts his honor upon him: and thereby exposes to shame that littleness of soul which enviously represses rising merit, that vice of age which can discern nothing wise and good in the young; that tenaciousness of power which would communicate no advantage with another.

What anxiety does the good man discover that Israel should act wisely, and go on prosperously after his death! There is no end to his admonitions and instructions. By word, by writing, by insinuation, by authority, in the spirit of meekness, of love, of parental care, he cautions, he warns, he remonstrates. Men naturally love to be missed, to be inquired after, to be longed for; but it was the delight of Moses in his departing moments, that his place was already supplied, that the congregation would not miss their leader, that Joshua should happily accomplish what he had happily begun. Selfish men enjoy the prospect of the disorder and mischief which their departure may occasion. Moses foresaw the revolt of Israel after his decease, and it was the grief and bitterness of his heart. In Moses we have an instructive instance of that continuance in well-doing, that perseverance unto the end, which finds a duty for every day, for every hour; which accounts nothing done so long as any thing remains to be done, which cheerfully spends and is spent for the service of God, and the good of mankind. Age is ready to put in its claim, when honor is expected, and advantage to be reaped; and is as ready to plead its exemption when service is

required, danger is to be encountered, and hardship undergone. But while Moses discovers the utmost readiness to share with another the emolument and the respect of his office, the trouble and fatigue of it he with equal cheerfulness undertakes and supports to the very last. In the whole of his temper and conduct, we have an ensample which at once admonishes, reproves, and encourages us. May we not, after considering the noble and excellent spirit he discovered through the course and at the close of life, contemplate the probable state of his mind in reviewing the past, and surveying the prospect before him: both affording unspeakable comfort, but neither wholly exempted from pain.

Pleasant it must have been to reflect, 1. On his miraculous preservation in infancy. “To what dangers was I then exposed? Doomed to perish by the sword from my mother’s womb. Concealed by fond parents for three months at the peril of their life, as well as my own. Committed at length to the merciless stream, a prey to manifold death--the roaring tide, hunger, the monsters of the river, contending which should destroy me. But I was precious in the sight of God. No plague came nigh me; no evil befell me. The daughter of the tyrant saved the from the rage of the tyrant. The house of Pharaoh became my sanctuary. The munificence of a princess recompensed the offices of maternal tenderness. I knew not then to whom I was indebted for protection, from what source my comforts flowed: let age and consciousness acknowledge with wonder and gratitude the benefits conferred on infant helplessness and infirmity; let my dying breath utter his praise, who preserved me from perishing as soon as I began to breathe.”

2. May we not suppose the holy man of God, by an easy transition, passing on to meditate on deliverance from still greater danger, danger that threatened his moral life--the snares of a court? “Flattered and caressed as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, brought up in all the learning of the Egyptians, having all the treasures in Egypt, at my command, at an age when the passions, which war against the soul, are all afloat--what risk did I run of forgetting myself, of forgetting my people, of forgetting; my God? But the grace of the Most High prevented me. I endured as seeing him who is invisible. I refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. I was not ashamed to be known for a son of Israel. I went out to see the burdens of my brethren, I had compassion on them, and comforted them; not fearing the wrath of a king, I smote him that did the wrong, and saved the oppressed. I chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. I esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. To God I committed myself; and my virtue, my religion, my honor, my inward peace were preserved.”

3. What satisfaction must it have yielded Moses in reviewing his life, to reflect on his having been made the honored instrument, in the hand of Providence, for effecting the deliverance of an oppressed people? “I found Israel laboring, groaning, expiring in the furnace. I beheld the tears of them that were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power, but they had no comforter. Their cry reached heaven. He who made them had mercy upon them. He was pleased to choose me out of all the myriads of Israel, to bring them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. He taught my stammering tongue to speak plainly. He said to my fearful heart, Be strong. He armed me with his potent rod; and subjected the powers of nature to my command. The oppressor was crushed in his turn, and the oppressed went out free, full, and triumphant. And to me, even unto me, it was given to conduct this great, difficult, dangerous, glorious enterprise; and Heaven crowned it with success.”

4. How pleasing to reflect that the Spirit of God had employed him to communicate so much valuable knowledge to mankind! “To me was this grace given, to trace nature up to its source; to ascend from son to father, up to the general parent of the human race; to rescue from oblivion the ages beyond the flood, and to rescue departed worth from the darkness of the grave. By me these venerable men, though dead, speak and instruct the world. By me the being and perfections, the works and ways, the laws and designs of the great Supreme stand unfolded; the plan and progress of his providence, the system of nature, the dispensation of grace. To my writings shall ages and generations resort for the knowledge of events past, and for the promises and predictions of greater events yet to come. The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and his word was in my tongue, and the word of the Lord endureth for ever.

5. What delight must it have afforded, in reviewing the past, to revive the memory of communion with God, of exalted intercourse with the Father of spirits! “Blessed retirement from the noise of the world and the strife of tongues; solitude infinitely more delicious than all society! Wilderness of Horeb, school of wisdom, scene of calm and unmixed joy, in thee I learned to commune with my own heart, forgot the sensual, unsatisfying delights of Egypt, observed the glories of nature, contemplated the wonders of Providence, enjoyed the visions of the Almighty! Happy days, when I tended the flocks of Jethro, obeyed the dictates of inspiration, and conversed with my heavenly Father, as a man with his friend! I saw him in flaming yet unconsuming fire, I heard his voice from the midst of the burning bush, my feet stood upon holy ground. And thou, sacred summit of Sinai, where the Most High imparted to me the counsels of his will; supernaturally sustained the feeble, mortal frame; irradiated my soul with the communications of his love, and my countenance with beams of light; how can I forget thee, and the forty hallowed days past on thee, in converse more sublime than ever before fell to the lot of humanity! To thee, sacred structure, reared accord into the pattern showed me in the mount, to thee I look in rapturous recollection! Thou wert my refuge in the hour of danger. In thee the assurances of divine favour and support, compensated, extinguished the unkindness of man. How often hast thou been to me a heaven upon earth!” But a retrospective view of life must have presented to Moses many objects painful and humiliating; and bitter recollections must have mingled themselves with the sweet. The repeated defections of a stiff necked and gainsaying people, whom no kindness could melt, no threatenings deter, no promise animate, no calamity subdue: a people who had requited the care of Heaven with reiterated, unprovoked rebellions; and his own labors of love, with hatred, insult, and ingratitude. Painful it must have been to think, that he had survived a whole people, endeared to him by every strong, by every tender tie: that he had been gradually dying for forty years together, in a condemned, devoted race, which melted away before his eyes in the wilderness: that with his own hand he had stripped Aaron, his brother, of his pontifical garments, and closed his eyes. Painful to reflect on his own errors and imperfections--his criminal neglect of God’s covenant, which had nearly cost him his life: his sinful delay and reluctance to accept the divine commission appointing him the deliverer of Israel; the hastiness of his spirit in defacing the work of God, by dashing the tables of the law to the ground, and breaking them in pieces; the impatience of his temper, the unadvisedness of his lips, the unguardedness of his conduct, at the waters of strife, which drew down displeasure on his head, and irreversibly doomed it to death. This uneasy retrospect would naturally lead to prospects as uneasy and distressing--The time of his departure is at hand; the body must speedily be dissolved and the dust return to the earth as it was. Against his admission Canaan is fenced as with a wall of fire, and a distant glimpse must supply the room of possession,

and another must finish his work. Besides the natural horror of death, there was mingled in that bitter cup a particular sense of personal offence and fatherly displeasure as inflicting it. Israel too, he foresaw, would after his decease revolt more and more, and call down the judgments of Heaven, and forfeit the promised inheritance--and this was to him the bitterness of death. But by what brighter prospects was this gloom relieved, and the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death illuminated! he saw the promise of God hastening to its accomplishment. The land “flowing with milk and honey” was fully in view. The time, the set time was now come; and what powers of nature could prevent the purpose of Heaven from taking effect? “O Lord, thou art faithful and true; Do now as thou hast said.” Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. My master is dismissing me from painful service; I shall rest from my labors; I shall receive the crown. I am passing from the imperfect, interrupted communion of an earthly sanctuary, to the pure, exalted, uninterrupted, everlasting communications of the heavenly state. I shall see God as he is. I shall be changed into the same image. I shall be ever with the Lord. I shall shine in his likeness. I shall be added, united to the assembly of the faithful; to the venerable men of whom I wrote, to Abel the first martyr to the truth, to Enoch, who walked withGod, to Noah, the preacher of righteousness, to Abraham, who believed, and was called the friend of God, to Joseph, whose bones are now at length to rest in the land of promise, to Aaron, my brother, by nature, by affection, in offence, in hope. With the natural eye I behold the fertile plains of an earthly Canaan but by the eye of faith I descry another country, that is an heavenly; watered with the pure river of the water of life, where grow the trees of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations: where there is no more death. My brethren, I die, but God will surely visit you. There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory. In Abraham’s seed shall all the nations of the earth he blessed. Mortality is swallowed up of life; “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory.”

“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.” “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.”

083. Moses--Joshua Commissioned

Moses--Joshua Commissioned

Deu 31:1-3. And Moses went and spake these words unto all Israel. And he said unto them, I am an hundred and twenty years old this day: I can no more go out and come in: also the Lord hath said unto me, Thou shalt not go over this Jordan. The Lord thy God, he will go over before thee, and he will destroy these nations from before thee, and thou shalt possess them: and Joshua, he shall go over before thee, as the Lord hath said. The last words and the last actions of eminent men are remembered, repeated, recorded with a mournful pleasure. We listen with peculiar attention to those lips, which are to speak to us no more: and the man, and the words, which we neglected, while there was a prospect of their continuing longer with us, we prize, we cleave to, and wish to retain, when they are about to be taken away from us. Indeed we discover the value of nothing, till we are threatened with, or feel the want of it; and we awake to a sense of the happiness which we have possessed, by the bitter reflection that it is gone from us for ever.

Farewell addresses serve to rouse both the speaker and the hearers. He is led to weigh well those words which he is to have no future opportunity of altering or amending. His eyes, his voice, his turn of thought, his expression, all will be influenced, by the solemnity of his situation; and what he feels, he will certainly communicate to others. Wherefore is not every address considered in this light; as a last, farewell, dying speech? It may be so in truth; and if it were known to be so, would our attention be so distracted, our spirit so careless; would our language be thus cold, our zeal thus languid? Attend, my dear friends, and fellow mortals. This is beyond all controversy, to some of us the last opportunity of the kind. The sound of this voice shall never again meet all those ears in one place. It may be for ever silenced; each of them may be for ever closed; and the ordinary tide of human affairs must certainly scatter, this night, persons who are never more to re-assemble, till that day when the whole human race shall be gathered together in one great multitude.

We are come hither to ponder thy dying words, O Moses, and to gird up our loins, and follow thee. This whole book may be considered as a series of powerful, pathetic, and tender addresses, delivered at different times within the compass of the last month of his life, by Moses to Israel, in the near and certain prospect of dissolution. Art has attempted to divide it into so many several distinct heads or branches, forming together a complete body of instruction, wonderfully adapted to the occasion, and powerfully enforced upon the minds of the hearers by the death of their teacher, which immediately followed. The first great branch is a succinct and animated historical detail of the conduct of the Divine Providence towards them and their fathers, during the last forty years, commencing with their departure out of Horeb, and containing an account of their successive movements and encamping. A recapitulation of the recent events of their own lives, and of what had befallen their immediate predecessors, was obviously calculated to excite emotions suitable to their present condition. A complete generation of men had melted away before their eyes under the divine displeasure! Every removal, every encampment was marked by

the death of multitudes, who had fallen not by the sword of the enemy, but were cut off by the flaming sword of divine justice, and were not suffered to enter into the land promised to their fathers, “because of unbelief.”

They saw in this at once the mercy and faithfulness, the justice and severity of God. Israel was still preserved, but every single offender had died the death. The covenant made with Abraham and his seed stood firm, though they were threatened with utter extermination in Egypt, and were actually exterminated in the wilderness. The possession of Canaan was made sure to that chosen race, but not one of the murmurers at Kadesh-Barnea was permitted to survive the threatened destruction. By an example that came so closely home to the breast and bosom of every man, all were admonished of the absolute security, and infallible success of trusting in God, and of following the leadings of his providence; all were warned of the guilt and danger of disobedience and distrust.

We see in this the reason why so great a proportion of the sacred oracles are delivered in the form of history. A fact makes its way directly to the heart, is easily remembered, and readily applied. It requires depth of understanding and closeness of attention to comprehend a doctrine, and to draw the proper inferences from it: but “the wayfaring man, though a fool,” can discern the meaning, and feels the force of a plain tale of truth, and the recollection of yesterday becomes a lesson of conduct for today.

Secondly. This valedictory address of Moses consists of a recapitulation of the laws, moral, ceremonial, political, and military, which he had already delivered to them in the name of God. On this account, the division of the Pentateuch under consideration, has obtained the name of Mischna Thora, translated by the Seventy; Deuteronomy, that is, the second law, or a repetition of the law. The men were dead who heard the voice of God speaking these tremendous words from Sinai. The men of the present generation were unborn, or but emerging from childhood, when that fiery dispensation was given: but its obligation was eternal and unchangeable. Providence therefore directed it to be rehearsed aloud in the ears of the generation following, by the voice of a dying man, and to be by him left recorded in lasting characters, for the instruction of every future age. What was local and temporary of this dispensation has passed away: what was immutable and universal, remains in all its force and importance; and shall continue, though heaven and earth were dissolved.

There is one law which Moses, in the prospect of death, presses with peculiar earnestness, as he knew it to be of special importance, and was but too well acquainted with the violent, the almost irresistible propensity of his auditory to infringe it--the law which prohibited and proscribed idolatry, that crime of complex enormity, against which the voice of the Eternal had uttered so many thunders, and which had brought on Israel so many grievous plagues. Nothing can be more energetic than the expressions he employs to expose the guilt and danger of this offence against God; nothing more dreadful than the judgments which he denounces against those who should contract it themselves, or presume to decoy others into that odious practice. He leaves them destitute of everything like a pretext for following the nations in this impiety and absurdity, by calling to the recollection of those who were witnesses of the awful scene, and urging upon the consciences of those who were since born, “that there was no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb, out of the midst of the fire;”[*]Deu 14:15 that therefore to

pretend to imitate what never was seen, what cannot be seen, was at once ridiculous folly, and daring, impious presumption. He solemnly enjoins, that the tenderest and most respectable ties of nature be disregarded in the case of those who should dare to set the example of violating the divine will in this respect; that the most intimate friends and nearest relations should become strange and hateful, if they presumed, by precept or by practice, to countenance this transgression. His own emphatic language will best express his meaning, and show with what oppressive weight the subject lay upon his heart. “If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, (which thou hast not known, thou nor thy fathers; namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth,) thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him. But thou shaft surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he has sought to thrust thee away from the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is, among you.”[*]Deu 13:6-11 And, again, “If there be found among you, within any of thy gates which the Lord thy God giveth thee, man or woman that hath wrought wickedness in the sight of the Lord thy God, in transgressing his covenant, and hath gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded; and it be told thee, and thou hast heard of it, and inquired diligently, and behold, it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel: then shalt thou bring forth, that man, or that woman, (which have committed that wicked thing) unto thy gates, even that man, or that woman, and shalt stone them with stones, till they die. At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death, be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people: so thou shalt put the evil away from among you.”[*]Deu 17:2-7 Did we not know, that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked:” did we not know, by fatal experience, that there is no absurdity too gross for men to adopt, no impiety too daring for them to commit, we should be astonished to think that the enactment of such laws should ever have been necessary; that having been enacted, there should be occasion to explain and enforce them by so many awful sanctions, and that notwithstanding, in defiance of sanctions so formidable, any should have been found bold enough to transgress.

Thirdly. Moses labors in this, his last discourse, to establish the importance and necessity of knowing the divine law, and for that end, of making it the subject of continual study and meditation. Every son of Israel must daily employ himself in the reading of it. The young must not plead exemption on account of his youth, nor the old plead the privilege of age. No closeness of application to secular business, no eagerness to prosecute a journey, no eminence of rank and station, no, not the state and necessary duties of royalty itself, must pretend to claim a dispensation from the superior obligations of the law of the Most High. “These words,” says he, “which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the

posts of thy house, and on thy gates."[*]Deu 6:6-9 "And it shall be," speaking of the duty and office of the king who might hereafter be chosen to reign over God's people of Israel, "when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the priests the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life; that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law, and these statutes, to do them: that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom; fee, and his children in the midst of Israel."[*]Deu 17:18-20

Some of the Rabbis accordingly pretend, that Moses, with his own hand, transcribed thirteen copies of the Deuteronomy, one for each of the twelve tribes, and one to be laid up till the time of electing a king should arrive, to be given him to transcribe for his private and particular use.

Fourthly. Moses displays, with singular skill and address, the motives suggested from their peculiar circumstances, to make the law of God the object of their veneration, and the rule of their conduct; such as, first--These laws all issue from the love of God as their source, and converge towards it as their center. Their great aim and end is to engage us to love, with supreme affection, a God who is supremely amiable and excellent. "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes which I command thee this day for thy good? Behold, the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, is the Lord's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day."[*]Deu 10:12-15 A second motive to obedience is, that the observance of the laws has a native tendency to procure and to preserve both public and private felicity; to make them respectable in the eyes of the nations, and thereby to ensure their tranquillity. "Behold I have taught you," says he, "statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so, in the lend whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore, and do them, for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous, as all this law which I set before you this day?"[*]Deu 4:5-8

Thirdly--The laws prescribed were imposed on them by a Being who had lavished miracles of mercy and goodness upon them and their fathers, and stood engaged to be a covenant God to their posterity, to the latest generations. "For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched-out arm, and by great, terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? Unto thee it was showed, that thou mightest know that the Lord he is God; there is none else besides him. Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he showed thee his great fire, and thou heardest his words out of the

midst of the fire."[*]Deu 4:32-36 In a word, the laws of God are in themselves just and reasonable, plain and intelligible; accommodated to the nature and faculties of man, and carry their own wisdom and utility engraves on their forehead. "For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it! Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it."[*]Deu 30:11-14

Moses, while he thus forcibly inculcates the motives of obedience, motives inspired and pressed by every tender, by every awful consideration, finds himself under the unpleasant necessity of venting his heart in the keenest reproaches of that highly-favored but rebellious nation, for their perverseness and ingratitude; he deplores in the bitterness of his soul, the instability and transitoriness of their good motions and purposes, their fatal proneness to revolt, the inconceivable rapidity of their vibrations from virtue to vice. That exquisitely beautiful and pathetic song with which he closes his tender expostulation, and which contains a striking abridgement of this whole address, consists in a great measure of just and severe, yet affectionate upbraiding and remonstrances upon their past conduct. "They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children; they are a perverse and crooked generation. Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy Father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?"[*]Deu 32:5-6

Finally, this long, this instructive, this powerful farewell sermon of the man of God, contains predictions clear, pointed, and strong, of the fearful judgments which should overtake that sinful people, and involve them and their posterity in utter destruction. Many learned men, and not without the greatest appearance of reason, have supposed that the spirit of prophecy by the mouth of Moses has foretold the final dissolution of the Jewish government, and their dispersed, reproachful, despised state to this day, until the time of their restoration to the divine favor, and their re-establishment under the bond of the new and everlasting covenant, "a covenant established on better promises, ordered in all things and sure." This idea seems justified by the following and the similar prophetic denunciations. "Of the rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. And when the Lord saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters. And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very forward generation, children in whom is no faith. They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. For a fire is kindled in my anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. I will heap mischiefs upon them, I will spend mine arrows upon them. They shall be burned with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction: I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust. The sword without, and terror within shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also, with the man of gray hairs. I said I would scatter them into corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men."[*]Deu 32:18-26 "Is not this laid up in store with me and sealed up among my treasures? To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for

the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. For the Lord shall judge his people and repent himself for his servants; when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left. And he shall say, Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted, which did eat the fit of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink-offerings? Let them rise up, and help you, and be your protection. See now that I, even I am he, and there is no God with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on ,judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain, and of the captives from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy."[*]Deu 32:34-42 But the time to favor revolted, returning Israel shall come at length; and together with them the time to irradiate and deliver "the nations which were sitting in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death;" and the prophetic soul of Moses hastens forward to conclude the sacred song, with a grand chorus of harmonious voices, the voices of the ransomed of the Lord from every nation, every kindred and tribe, rejoicing together in one common salvation: "Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, to his people."[*]Deu 32:43

How powerfully must all this have been impressed on the hearts of his audience by the sight of their venerable instructer, bending under the weight of "an hundred and twenty years:" exhausted by labors performed in the public service, no longer capable of "going out and coming in;" excluded by the inflexible decree of Heaven from any part or lot in the land of promise; lying under the bitter sentence of impending death; his power and glory departing, and passing before his eyes to the hand of another! Why are not impressions of this sort more lasting, and more efficient? Shall "the righteous perish, and no man lay it to heart?" Is "the merciful man taken away, and will none consider?" "The righteous is taken away from the evil to come." By his departure the earth is impoverished, but heaven is enriched. Remove the veil, and behold him "entering into peace:" "they shall rest an their beds, each one walking in his uprightness." I hear a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them."[*]Rev 14:13

084. Moses--Joshua Commanded

Moses--Joshua Commanded

Deu 31:7-8. And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong, and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the Lord hath sworn unto their fathers to give them: and thou shalt cause them to inherit it. And the Lord, he it is that doth go before thee, he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee; fear not, neither be dismayed. Is it not a presumption and a presentiment of immortality, that men naturally feel, design, and act as if they were immortal? In life we are in the midst of death; but it is equally true, that in the very jaws of death, we live; and fondly dream of living longer. Let the fatal moment come when it will, it comes to break into some scheme we hoped to execute, to interrupt some work we had begun, to disappoint some purpose we had adopted. The warnings of dissolution which are sent to others, we seem to understand and feel better than those which are addressed to ourselves. One man is under sentence of condemnation, another labors under an incurable disease; one is daily exposing his life to jeopardy in the high places of the field, another putting the knife of intemperance to his throat every hour: this man has completed his seventieth year, and his neighbor has lived to see his children's children of the third and fourth generation.

These are all symptoms equally mortal, but none takes the alarm to himself: everyone is concerned for his neighbor's case, and flatters himself his own is not quite so desperate. The wretch condemned to death, soothes his soul to rest with the hope of a pardon, and laments the certain doom of his consumptive acquaintance: the declining man, with his foot in the grave, pities and prays for the unhappy creature who must suffer on Wednesday seven nights. The soldier braves the death that is before his eyes in a thousand dreadful forms, in the presumption of victory; and the voluptuary thanks his kinder stars that he is likely to sleep in a sound skin. The man of seventy reckons upon fourscore; and ten years in prospect are a kind of eternity; and the grandsire amuses himself with the hope of seeing his grandchildren settled in the world. Thus the pleasing illusion goes on: and men are dead, indeed, before they had any apprehension of dying. The thoughtless and impious insensibility with which many advance to their latter end, is not more mournful and distressing, than the steadiness and composure of piety and habitual preparation are pleasing and instructive. Blessed is the state of that man to whom life is not a burden, nor death a terror, who has "a desire to depart and to be with Christ," but is willing "to continue in the flesh," for the glory of God, and the good of men; who neither quits his station and duty in life in sullen discontent, nor cleaves to the enjoyments of this world, as one who has no hope beyond the grave. But the cup of death, to the best of men, contains many bitter ingredients. Even to Moses it was far from being unmixed. To the natural horror of dying was superadded the sense of divine displeasure; a sense of death as a particular punishment. It disappointed a hope long and fondly indulged in, the hope of being himself, and of seeing Israel in possession of the promised and expected inheritance. And, what was the bitterness of death to such a spirit as his? Moses died in the persuasion, and a melancholy one it was, that the people on whom he had bestowed so much labor, whom he had cherished with such tender affection, whom he was so unremittingly anxious

to conduct to wisdom, to virtue, and to happiness, would, after his death, swerve from the right path, provoke God to become their enemy, and thereby bring down certain destruction upon their own head. “I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff-neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the Lord; and how much more after my death! Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them. For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you: and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands.”[*]Deu 31:27-29

It is pleasant to a dying father to entertain the sweet hope that the children of his care, of his love, will remember the lessons which he taught them will follow out his views, will support the credit of his name, will instruct and bless the world by the example of their wisdom, their piety, their virtues, though he is not to be the happy spectator of it: but ah! more cruel than the pangs of dissolving nature, the dreadful conviction of approaching folly and disorder: the sad prospect of discord among brethren; of profligacy and licentiousness, no longer restrained by parental gravity and authority: a fair inheritance, and an honorable name ready to be dissipated by profusion, to be covered with shame, to be disfigured by vice, to be forfeited by treason. It is sweet to a dying pastor to contemplate the success of his ministry, the extent of his usefulness; to cheer his fainting heart with the thought of having been made the, humble instrument of bringing many souls unto God, many sons unto glory: and with the well-rounded belief that his doctrine shall survive him: that though dead he shall continue to speak and to instruct. Sweet the prospect of that day when he shall present himself; and the joyful fruit of all his labors, to his Father and God, saying, “Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me, are for signs, and for wonders in Israel; from the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion.”[*]Isa 8:18 It was this which caused the great “Author and Finisher of our faith” himself to rejoice in spirit, on the very eve of his departure out of the world. “Those that then gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”[*]John 17:12 But O how depressing to reflect, “I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nought and in vain;”[*]Isa 49:4 to look back upon a ministry, not the “savour of life unto life, but of death unto death,” and to look forward to the dreadful progress of degeneracy and corruption, from evil to worse, till “sin, being finished, bringeth forth death;” to look forward to the still more dreadful day of doom and to the prospect of appearing as an accuser and a witness against the despisers of that gospel, which would have saved their souls from death. The faithful servants of God are not all equally successful, and even a Moses has the mortification of knowing assuredly that all his pains and anxieties should prove ineffectual. The tide of corruption sometimes rushes down so impetuously, that no force can stem it; and Providence is often pleased to put honor upon the meaner and feebler instrument, that the glory may redound not “to him that willeth, nor to him that runneth, but to God, who showeth mercy.” But every faithful minister, like Moses, has at least thus consolation: “having kept nothing back, but declared the whole counsel of God, they have delivered their own souls;” they published the truth of God, “whether men would hear or whether they would forbear;” and if they have not been so happy as to persuade, they have at least put to silence wicked and unreasonable men; if they have not prevailed to render them holy, they have at least rendered them inexcusable; if they have been unable to subdue the pride of the creature, they have displayed the holiness and justice of the Creator.

We find Moses taking refuge in this, when the dearer, sweeter hope was at an end--the hope of being the favored, honored minister of life and salvation. “I am fast approaching to the end of my career; I have already passed the limits which God has prescribed to the life of man. Six score of years are fled away and gone, and these hairs, whitened by time, labor, and affliction, feelingly inform me that my last moment is at hand, that no more time remains but what is barely sufficient to give you a few parting admonitions, to breathe over you the blessing of a dying friend, and to bid you a long farewell. After a laborious, anxious, and painful ministry of more than forty years; after being honored of God to perform before your eyes, and those of your fathers, a series of miracles, which shall be the astonishment and instruction of the whole world till time expire, I was looking for the compensation of all my troubles, the reward of all my labors, the accomplishment of all my wishes, in your sincere return to God, in your gratitude to your friend and deliverer, in your fidelity and obedience to God, and in the prosperity and happiness which must infallibly have flowed from them. The paternal solicitude I have felt, that ardent love which emboldened me, at the hazard of my own life, ‘to stand in the breach’ ‘between you and a holy and jealous God, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy you;’ that fervor of zeal which hurried me on to wish myself blotted out of God’s book, if the dearer name of Israel might be permitted to continue written in it; all my discourses, all my emotions, all my efforts; my active days, my sleepless nights; these unceasing sighs which I still breathe to Heaven in your behalf, these last tears which a dying old man sheds over a people still and ever dear to him, and from whom to be torn asunder is the death of deaths; these are the faithful and undoubted proofs of my affection for you, of my unabated, inextinguishable zeal for your salvation. But alas, however earnestly I may desire it, I dare not, cannot hope! I foresee your perfidiousness and rebellion; I know your perverseness and ingratitude. ‘While I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the Lord; and how much more after my death?[*]Deu 31:27 What then is left me, but the mingled and strongly allayed satisfaction of reflecting that I am innocent of your blood, that your salvation is in your own hands, that if you perish your blood must be upon your own heads.” “Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers that I may speak these “words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them.”[*]Deu 31:28 “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.”[*]Deu 31:14-15

Having in terms such as these poured out the anguish of an overflowing heart, Moses addresses himself to his last earthly employment. The last exercise of his authority is to lay down all authority. The concluding act of his administration, is to transfer the right of administration to another; and the legislator, leader, and commander expires, while the man yet lives. Imagination can hardly paint a more affecting scene. Bear the trumpet sounding the proclamation of a solemn assembly, an holy convocation. Behold the thousands of Israel flocking together to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation; every eye straining to catch a departing glance of him whom they were to behold no more; every ear eagerly attentive to drink in the last accent, of that voice which the hand of death was about to silence for ever. Behold the venerable sage, in all the composure of unaffected piety, in all the dignity of wisdom, in all the respectability of age, in all the simplicity of a child, in all the serenity of a celestial spirit, in all the solemnity of death, advancing to his well-known station, presenting to the people him whom they were henceforward to acknowledge and obey as the ruler appointed over them by Heaven. His eyes beam complacency, his tongue drops manna, as he conveys to his noble successor the plenitude of his power, the residue of his

honor, a double portion of his spirit. Behold he lifts up his hands and lays them upon the head of Joshua, with a thousand tender wishes that his burden might sit light upon him, that he might escape the pains he himself had endured, and attain the felicity which was denied to him; with a thousand paternal exhortations to follow Providence, and fear nothing; to love Israel, to seek their good always: with a thousand fervent prayers for his prosperity and success. I see Joshua with modest reluctance shrinking back from a charge so weighty: desirous of being still a subject and a servant: accepting with regret honors of which Moses must be stripped; ready to cry out, as his master was taken away from him, “My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!”[*]2Ki 2:12 I see on every countenance a mixture of sorrow and resignation; of hope clouded with remorse and concern; they could now die for him, whose life they had embittered by unkindness, levity, and ingratitude; they reproach themselves and one another, as having occasioned the death of the wisest and best of men; they cannot bear to think of surviving him. But a voice more awful than that of man is heard: a glory more than human appears. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold, thy days approach that thou must die: call Joshua, and present yourselves in the tabernacle of the congregation, that I may give hire a charge. And Moses and Joshua went, and presented themselves in the tabernacle of the congregation. And the Lord appeared in the tabernacle in a pillar of a cloud, and the pillar of a cloud stood over the door of the tabernacle.”[*]Deu 31:14-15 What solemn moments to the whole congregation, those which Moses and Joshua passed before the Lord, remote from the public eye! How solemn to the parties themselves!--What is a charge from the mouth of a dying man, though that man be a Moses, compared to a charge from the mouth of Jehovah himself, by whom spirits are weighed, and to whom all the dread importance of eternity stands continually revealed? And this God, O my friends, is daily sounding a charge in every ear, “Occupy till I come.” “Arise ye and depart, for this is not your rest.” “Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” “See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” This secret conference being ended, they return to the people, and Moses publicly delivers to the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, a copy of the law which he had transcribed with his own hand, to be laid up in the side of the ark, as a standing witness for God against a sinful people; and the business of this interesting and eventful day concludes with a public recital from the lips of Moses of that tender and pathetic song, which we have in the thirty-second chapter. This sacred song every Israelite was to commit to memory, to repeat frequently, and to teach it every man to his son. It was composed expressly by the command of God, and under his immediate inspiration. “Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel. Moses therefore wrote this song the same day, and taught it the children of Israel. And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song until they were ended.”[*]Deu 31:19-30 And a most wonderful composition it is, whether considered as the production of a lively, lofty, correct imagination; abounding with the boldest images, and conveying the noblest sentiments; adding all the graces of poetry to all the force of truth; as conveying the most useful and necessary moral and religious instruction., in a channel the most pleasing and attractive; as the address of a dying man, a dying father, a dying minister, to his friends, to his family, to the flock; abounding with the tenderest touches of nature flowing immediately from the heart, and rushing with impetuous force to the lips; as the awful witness of the great God against a disobedient and gainsaying race; exhibiting to this hour the proof of the

authenticity of that record where it stands, of the truth and faithfulness, of the mercy and severity of the dread Jehovah, and of the certainty of the things wherein, as Christians, we have been instructed.

What can equal the boldness and sublimity of his exordium or introduction? How is the boasted eloquence of Greece and Rome left at an infinite distance behind! What a coldness in the address of Demosthenes and Cicero, compared to the fervor and elevation of the Israelitish orator! “Ye men of Athens.” “Romans.” “Conscript Fathers.” If ever there was an audience that demanded respect, from numbers, from importance, from situation; if ever there was a speaker prompted by duty, drawn by inclination, urged on by the spur of the occasion, Israel was that audience, Moses that speaker, on this ever-memorable day. But the ardent soul of this heaven-taught orator, with thousands upon thousands before his eyes, grasps, with a noble enthusiasm, an infinitely larger space than the plains of Moab, an audience infinitely more august than the thousands of Israel. “Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.” This was seizing the attention at once; the solid globe, thus summoned, seems to give ear, the celestial spheres stand still to listen, angels hover on the wing to mark and record the last words of the departing prophet; what mortal ear can then be inattentive, what spirit careless? flow sweetly calculated is the next sentence to compose the minds of his hearers, roused and alarmed by the solemnity of his first address. The thunder of heaven seemed ready to burst upon their heads, after an invocation so awful, and though Moses alone spake, they were ready to die; but their fears are gently lulled to rest, the next word he utters; he has only love in his heart, and honey upon his tongue. “My doctrine shall drop as the rain: my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass.”[*]Deu 32:2 The final object of Moses being to warn, to admonish, and to reprove the perverse nation of whom he was taking leave, observe how skilfully he manages this difficult and delicate part of his task. To have come directly and without preparation to it, had been to give certain disgust and offence; for he had to deal with a moody, murmuring, irritable, discontented race: he therefore first fills their minds with great images, leads them to the contemplation of one object surpassingly grand; impresses it in various points of view upon their hearts and consciences, till having lost themselves in its grandeur and immensity, they are prepared to bear, to approve, and to profit by the severe personal attack that follows. “Because I will publish the name of the Lord; ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment; a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he.”[*]Deu 32:3-4

Having thus raised them above every mean, every selfish consideration; and placed them, and made them to feel themselves in the awful presence of the great God, “who is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works,” he descends abruptly, by a transition quick as lightning, to the censure he had in view. But even then, he insinuates it, rather than charges it home: and speaks for some time as of strangers, as of persons absent, and constitutes his auditors judges as it were of the case of others, not their own; and by employing the address of the third persons they and their, leaves them for a moment in uncertainty whom he could mean, and when he comes at length to address them in the second person, and to use the terms thee and thy, how delicately is the application qualified, by the introduction of every tender, every melting, every conciliating circumstance! “They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation. Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? Is

not he thy Father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee and established thee?”[*]Deu 32:5-6

He then goes into a recapitulation, partly historical, partly poetic, partly allegorical, at once to refresh the memory, to fire the imagination, and to exercise the invention, of the divine conduct towards them and their fathers, during many generations, that the conclusion he was about to draw might fall with irresistible weight, upon the minds of all; that their base ingratitude and desperate folly might appear to themselves in a more odious light, when contrasted with the wisdom, goodness, and loving-kindness of the Lord. This occupies a considerable part of the chapter, from the seventh verse to the eighteenth [Deu 31:7-18], and a passage it is of exquisite force and beauty, as I am convinced you will also think upon a careful perusal of it.

Constrained at last to denounce the righteous judgment of God, in order to approve his own fidelity, and if possible to prevent the ruin which he feared, he makes a display of the awful terrors of divine justice, sufficient to awaken the dead, and to confound the living; and to increase its force and vehemence, Moses disappears, and God, the great God himself comes forward, and in the first person utters the seven thunders of his wrath; “For a fire is kindled in my anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. The sword without and terror within shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling, also, with the man of gray hairs.”[*]Deu 32:22;Deu 32:25 The prophet, as it were exhausted with this violent exertion, this formidable denunciation of vengeance, sinks into feeble, hopeless regret, and he reluctantly, despairingly deplores that misery which he can neither prevent nor avert. “They are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them. O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end! How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their rock had sold them, and the Lord had shut them up.”[*]Deu 32:28-30

Finally, a dawn of hope arises, and, wrapped into future time, the sacred bard hails the coming day of deliverance, and exults in the prospect of the junction of the nations with the ancient people of God, in the participation of one and the same great salvation. “Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people; for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land and to his people.”[*]Deu 32:43

Such is the structure, such the general outline of this inimitable piece of sacred poesy. If what has been said shall induce any one to study it more attentively, he will probably discover beauties which have escaped us; and the discovery will bring its own reward. How many fathers, as they afterwards rehearsed the words of this song in the ears of their children, and taught them the knowledge of it, would recollect with a mournful pleasure, that they saw and heard Moses himself recite it aloud, on the very last day of his life; and glory in relating how near him they stood, and in describing to a new generation the form of his countenance, the deportment of his person, the tones of his voice! That very day, the warrant of death arrives. The ministry of even a Moses is accomplished, and Providence hastens to convince the world, that, depart who will, the work of heaven never can stand still. We have seen him hitherto engaged in active labors for Israel and for God. We shall consider him yet once more, dismissed from his service, and concluding a life of eminent usefulness, by a death of charity, benediction, prescience, and resignation. May God impress on our minds a sense of our frailty, mortality, and accountableness, that we may redeem

the time, fulfill the duties of our day and the design of our Creator, work out our salvation, and so die in peace, die in hope, whenever it shall please Him to call us away to the world of spirits. Amen.

085. Moses--Blessing on Israel

Moses--Blessing on Israel Deu 31:1. And this is the blessing wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death.

Seneca, the celebrated Roman moralist, was preceptor to the emperor Nero, and had early and studiously trained him to virtue. But falling under the displeasure of that sanguinary tyrant, he was condemned to lose his life, by being blooded to death. The day of execution being arrived, he prepared to meet his fate with intrepidity, and to die as he had lived, in communicating useful knowledge. His pupils gathered round him, eager to mark his dying deportment, and provided with their writing tables, to record and preserve his last sayings. He was put into the warm bath, the arteries of his legs and arms were opened, and the purple fluid which sustains life, gradually drained off, while his sorrowing, admiring disciples, caught the words as they fell from his parched lips. But a greater than Seneca is here. We are this night gathered round a dying Moses, to listen to the last accents of that tongue which, once excepted, spake its never man spake. We behold him neither impetuously rushing forwards into the mortal conflict, nor timidly shrinking from it; but advancing with a steady, majestic step, to meet the king of terrors. The interests of the God of Israel, and of the Israel of God, had employed his thoughts all his life long; and, blended in one, they glow in and expand his heart to his latest moment. He was speedily to cease from every earthly care, to cease from serving Israel any longer, to he occupied with God only; but even in death he is contriving the means of doing good to that dearly beloved, that fondly cherished people. As if his heart had relented at the harshness of some of the expressions which fidelity and a sense of duty had extorted from him; like one unwilling to part with them under any semblance of unkindness or displeasure, he again assumes the tender father, tunes his tongue to the law of kindness, buries all resentment of the past, and everything unpleasant, in the prospects of futurity, in the gentleness and benevolence of friends, who were separating to meet no more. The soul that is at peace with God desires to be at peace with all men; and it is meet that dying breath be sweetened with mercy, forgiveness, and love. Slowly and solemnly as Moses advanced to meet his latter end, would we accompany his steps in his last progress through the beloved tents of Israel, and in his ascent to the hill, from whence he never should return. With a heart like his, overflowing with charity to the whole church of God, and filled with sentiments of peculiar affection towards you, we behold the approach of that hour which is to disperse us, perhaps too for ever. With a blessing on our lips, like him, and O that his God and ours may make it effectual, we are hastening to bid you farewell. The words which I have read are the beginning of the 54th and last parasha, or great section of the law, into which the whole books of Moses were subdivided, for the convenience of publicly reading them, in conjunction with the prophets every sabbath day: a custom which prevailed in the Jewish church, down to the times of our Savior and his apostles, as we learn from several passages of the gospel history. Thus Christ himself, “when he came, to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, as his custom was, went into the synagogue, on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of

the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor: he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised: to reach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, this day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."[*]Luk 4:16-21 Thus James, in determining the question in the synod of Jerusalem, concerning the necessity of circumcision, says, "Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day."[*]Acts 15:21 And Paul and Barnabas, when they carne to Antioch, in Pisidia, went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent until them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on."[*]Acts 13:14-15 The first section begins with the opening of the book of Genesis, and goes up to the ninth verse of the sixth chapter, and is called Bereshit, the first word in the Hebrew Bible. The second begins at these words in the sixth chapter, "These are the generations of Noah:" and is thence called Noah, and ends at the beginning of chapter twelfth, which sets out with the call of Abraham, and is therefore styled the section Lee Leca, i.e. "Get thee out," and so of the rest. To bring the whole fifty-four divisions within the compass of the year, they joined two of the shortest into one reading. Thus the whole constitution, both as to civil and sacred things, was publicly rehearsed once every year; so that it Was impossible for any decent Israelite to be grossly ignorant of either the laws, the history, or the religion of his country. The first public lecture was on the Sabbath that followed the feast of tabernacles, and went on till the anniversary of that feast returned. I have mentioned these circumstances for several reasons. I am not ill pleased to have so respectable an example for attempting a mode of instruction which reason and experience convince us to be at once the most pleasant and the most useful. I honor human learning, I admire great talents, I am enchanted with eloquence; but I am persuaded, if saving knowledge be communicated, it is by the quick and powerful energy of God's word coming, not with the allurements of man's wisdom, "but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power." This leads us to express a wonder why the reading of the Scriptures by large portions at a time is not universally practised in Christian congregations. Surely there must be a better reason for neglecting it, than that it is enjoined by the canons of the church, and is in general practice in the establishment. The last reason I have at present to render for this digression, if it be thought one, is its affording me an opportunity of earnestly recommending to masters and mistresses of families, the regular and progressive use of the Scriptures, within the precincts of their private households, for the instruction of their children and servants. I am well aware that from a diffidence and humility not too severely to be blamed, some younger heads of families are tempted to neglect family worship altogether, because some parts of it they cannot, dare not undertake; that for example, of addressing God in prayer, as the mouth of their domestic little church. Let them begin with reading aloud the word of God: for this surely they have courage sufficient. They will be brought to pray insensibly; they will soon cease to be ashamed of that which is their highest honor and most glorious privilege. We now return. The idea I have formed to myself of "this blessing, wherewith Moses, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel before his death,"[*]Deu 33:1 how justly I presume not to say, is this: Moses, having received his final summons to prepare the death, feels himself prompted at once by affection and the spirit of prophecy, to take particular leave of every tribe, to bestow a several benediction on everyone by name, and to prepare them one by

one for the conquest of their inheritance, by giving them prophetically a general notion of their future condition, as constituent parts of the commonwealth of Israel, and of the particular lot to be assigned to each, with its corresponding advantages and pursuits. For this purpose I suppose him making a solemn progress through the whole host, going from tribe to tribe, from tent to tent, and pouring out his soul, as a dying parent, in blessings upon his offspring, according to their different characters and conditions. O how unlike these visits of selfishness, pride, ambition, and strife, which the candidates for fame, place, and power, are from time to time, making through a corrupted land! Let us attend his progress, and mark what he says. We find Moses still beginning, proceeding, concluding with God. He sets out on this last awful circuit, with a mind full of the glorious majesty of the great Jehovah. He calls to his own remembrance, and impresses the image of it on the souls of the whole people, that great and dreadful day "when the lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir, unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them."[*]Deu 33:2 The particular mention of Seir and Paran in this exordium, has given birth to a poor conceit in the Jerusalem Targum, to this purpose, "that God first offered his law, and the protection which it afforded, to the Idumeans, the inhabitants of mount Seir, and the posterity of Esau, but that they rejected it, because it contained this precept, "Thou shalt not kill." That afterwards it was tendered to the Ishmaelites, or inhabitants of mount Paran, who rejected it because it said, "Thou shalt not steal." That then it was proposed to the posterity of Jacob, who immediately replied, "All that the Lord hath commanded will we do, and he obedient." Without having recourse to a construction so unsupported, forced, and unnatural, the words of Moses, at the first glance, convey to us an image inconceivably grand and sublime, but at the same time simple, natural, and obvious. Israel was encamped in the plains of Moab, with Jordan and the fertile fields of Canaan directly in view: the prospect on the south terminated by the lofty mountains of Teman or Seir; and on the north by mount Paran, while Sinai raised its awful head, and buried it in the clouds of heaven from behind. Moses accordingly represents, in the bold imagery of oriental poetry, the glory of the Lord arising like the sun in the east, from behind the top of Sinai, and instantly darting his light from hill to hill, and increasing in luster till the whole expanse of heaven is filled with it. The prophet Habakkuk has evidently caught the same celestial fire, is filled with the same animating object, when he exclaims, "God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran, Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light, he had horns coming out of his hand, and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations, and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting."[*]Hab 3:3-6 But what are mountains and hills, and their inhabitants? Moses represents the great God as arising in unclouded majesty amidst ten thousand of his holy ones. "Angels, his ministers, that excel in strength," the least of whom "could wield these elements." His red right hand is extended, presenting to the astonished beholder a law, a fiery law, a fire that purifies, a fire that consumes. But the terror of this dreadful appearance is instantly lost, in a display of the grace and mercy which prompted this splendid visit. "Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand; and they sat down at thy feet; every one shalt receive of thy words."[*]Deu 33:3 Here we behold the legislator lost in the friend, and, instead of distractedly, despairingly calling upon "the mountains to fall upon us, and the hills to cover us," we sit down in tranquillity at the feet of our gracious teacher, and everyone for himself listens to the language of

love.

Moses first approaches the tents of the tribe of Reuben, and having introduced himself by these solemn, striking words, he proceeds to his particular salutation of that tribe. “Let Reuben live, and not die; and let not his men be few.”[*]Deu 33:6 Concerning the head of that tribe, his dying father had prophetically denounced, “Unstable is water, thou shalt not excel;” but the blessing of Moses seems to wipe the blot out of the escutcheon, and Reuben seems restored to his rank in Israel again. Reuben alone of the sons of Jacob pitied Joseph in his distress, and contrived the means of restoring him to his father again. This redeems him and his family from infamy and destruction, and we are disposed to drown the memory of his lewdness, in respect for his tenderness and humanity. Who stands next on the roll of Jacob’s sons? To whom is the second salutation due? Simeon. But ah! we see the curse of a dying father upon him; we see Moses passing by his door without bidding him God speed; we see the blood of the Shechemites, the innocent, credulous Shechemites, lying with an oppressive weight upon his seed; we see a tribe of fifty-nine thousand three hundred in the wilderness of Sinai, melted down and reduced to twenty-two thousand two hundred in the plains of Moab; we see no judge, or magistrate in future times springing from his loins; we see him “divided in Jacob, and scattered in Israel,” and in all this we see the vengeance of a righteous God pursuing a cool and deliberate murderer to utter ruin, and we think of the more dreadful weight of that blood which a hard-hearted race imprecated upon themselves and their children; and which the shame and sufferings of one thousand eight hundred years have not yet expiated. What must the sons of Simeon have felt when their dying leader passed them by; without vouchsafing them a word; to find themselves alone unblessed of all the children of their father’s house! Speak to me, O merciful Father, in whatever language thou wilt: chide, upbraid, chastise me; but O pass me not by in silent neglect: cease not to reprove me: say not, “Let him alone.” The dying prophet passes next to the standard of the tribe of Judah. Judah, destined to empire, increase, and strength, Judah, the father of many princes; the root and offspring of David. “And this is the blessing of Judah and he said, Hear, Lord, the voice of Judah; and bring him unto his people: let his hands be sufficient for him, and be thou an help to him from his enemies.”[*]Deu 33:7 These words of Moses send us again to the dying bed of Jacob, and we find both patriarchs holding the same idea concerning this prerogative tribe, strength invincible, triumph over every foe, supreme authority; and we find ourselves led still farther back, to Leah, his mother, in childbirth, bestowing on this her fourth son a name expressive of her personal exultation and triumph; “Judah, praise the Lord,” and thence to the infinitely glorious design of Providence, which has swallowed up the transient, private feeling of the individual, in the great and comprehensive view of general compassion and favor, and the source of universal gratitude and praise; and, borne on the wings of inspiration, we rise, with the beloved disciple in vision, to contemplate the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, prevailing to open the sealed book, in the right hand of Him that sits on the throne, and loosing the seven seals thereof. “And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb, as it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth.” “And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having everyone of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and

tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God, kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."[*]Rev 5:7-10

Thus we behold all that is great and magnificent among men, bringing its glory and honor, and laying it at the feet of Jesus; and all that is past and present lost in the immensity and importance of that which is to come.

He now approaches the priestly tribe of Levi, his kinsmen and friends according to the flesh, and copiously bestows his valedictory benediction upon them, in these remarkable words, "Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah: who said unto his father, and to his mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word and kept thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar. Bless, Lord, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again."[*]Deu 33:8-11

Levi had been a partaker with Simeon, in shedding the blood of the Shechemites, and had fallen under the same condemnation; but their spirit and zeal in expiating the guilt of the golden calf by the blood of its idolatrous worshippers, has removed the stain, and restored their own blood again, and the dreadful sentence, "I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel," as far as it affects them, is from a curse turned into a blessing. They are divided in Jacob, and scattered in Israel, but it is honorably to themselves, and usefully to others: as the priests of the Lord, and the instructors of the people. Why may we not suppose Eleazer the high priest, arrayed in his sacerdotal vestments, standing at the head of his tribe to receive the salutation of Moses, and that the appearance of this sacred officer in the splendor of his pontifical garb, might suggest to Moses some of the particulars contained in this blessing, especially the beginning of it! "Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one." "Thy Thummim and thy Urim," that is, being interpreted, "thy perfections and thy lights." They were mysteries, of which we have spoken in a former Lecture, put into the high priest's breastplate, and were designed apparently to signify the graces and office of the priesthood, which was committed to Aaron and his seed, till Christ came, who should obtain and exercise an everlasting and unchangeable priesthood, after a more excellent order than that of Aaron.

According to the different ideas of the mystery of the Urim and Thummim, and the connection here established between them, and the temptation at Massah, and the strife at Meribah, various turns and interpretations have been given to the words of Moses.

1. They are supposed to be addressed to God himself, and the sense to run thus, "Thy Thummim and thy Urim" (O God) be with the man, thy gracious saint, (Aaron and his seed) whom thou temptedst with temptation, or contendedst with (for his sin) at the waters of Meribah, of which we have the history. Numbers 20. "And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel; therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. This is the water of Meribah, because the children of Israel strove with the Lord; and he was sanctified in them."[*]Num 20:12-13

Or, 2dly, they may be addressed to the whole tribe, and with this sense, Thy Thummim and thy Urim (O Levi) be with Aaron and his sons! the holy, chosen, anointed one of thy gracious God, whom thou, in common with the rest of Israel, temptedst in Massah and in the strife at Meribah.

Or, 3dly, understanding by the “holy one,” the Christ of God, this will be the sense, Thy Thummim and thy Urim (O Levi) is with (or belongs to) the man thy Holy One, (Messiah, the Christ) the Holy One of God, whom thou temptedst at Massah, and didst strive with at Meribah. In this last interpretation, the weakness, insufficiency, imperfection, and transitoriness of the Levitical priesthood are implied: it retained not long the Urim and Thummim, but lost them in the Babylonish captivity, as we find from Ezr 2:63. “And the Tirshatha said unto them, That they should not eat of the most holy things till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim.” And it does not appear they ever had them more, until by Jesus Christ, our High Priest after the order of Aaron, they were restored in the “light and truth” of the gospel. The blessing upon Levi thus proceeds: “Who said unto his father, and to his mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant.”[*]Deu 33:9 This is generally understood to express the devotedness of that tribe to the worship and service of God, which laid them under a necessity of abstractedness from the world, and constrained them, when employed in the order of their course, to suppress all appearance of secular concern, such as mourning for the dead and the like. Thus when “Nadab and Abihu perished by fire before the Lord,” Aaron and his two surviving sons were expressly forbid to show any signs of sorrow. “Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes, lest ye die.” “And Aaron held his peace.” The words are by many interpreters supposed particularly to refer to the judgment executed through the zeal of this tribe on their offending brethren in the matter of the golden calf, which is thus described: “And Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord’s side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day.”[*]Exo 32:26-29 And it may perhaps be intended as a warning to the Christian priesthood, that though their profession does not call them wholly to renounce the world, to restrain the workings of natural affection, and cease to be men; yet it does call them to a higher degree of heavenly-mindedness, to stricter self-government, to a greater superiority to worldly attachments and pursuits, to have no respect of persons in dispensing the bread of life, to “know no man after the flesh,” to sit looser than others to the things of time. The next article of their prophet’s parting blessing describes their glorious privileges. “They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt-sacrifice upon thine altar.” The priest’s lips should keep knowledge. This then is the first duty of their office; to “teach Jacob the judgments of God, and Israel his law.” Theirs was to be the distinguished honor of training up every succeeding generation as it arose, in the knowledge of the God of their fathers, in what he had done for them, and what he required of them; of pointing out and inculcating upon them the connection between their privileges and their duties, their safety and their obedience, their security and their fidelity. They were still to set before the people “good and evil, the blessing and the curse,” the promises which allured to the one, the threatenings

which deterred from the other. They were under the necessity, of consequence, of studying the law of God, and the history of his providence themselves, in order to the instruction of others; and to exhibit a decent conformity, in their own deportment, to what was written, as, a pattern to their fellow citizens. A task at once painful, dangerous, and honorable. The second duty of their station was, “to put incense before God.” That sacred perfume was emblematical of the prayers, the praises, and thanksgiving of Israel; and on Levi was conferred the glorious privilege of standing between God and the people, of conveying from him to them the dictates of his will, the promises of his grace, the assurance of his favor and protection; and, as the mouth of the people, to reconvey to God the effusions of their gratitude, the acknowledgment of their submission and dependence; their entire confidence in the truth and faithfulness of God, their entire hope in his mercy. These the sons of Levi were to present before the Lord as incense; and with this sacrifice of praise from the people, the incense of their own grateful acknowledgments would naturally mingle and ascend.

Finally, the blessing pronounced on this distinguished tribe, imposed on them the office of offering up “whole burnt sacrifice upon the altar of God.” They not only stood between a gracious God and an indebted people; but a holy and offended God, and a frail, offending people. Hence the necessity of “burnt sacrifice,” hence the idea of atonement, hence the shedding of blood for the remission of sin, hence the institution of the Levitical priesthood--“the shadow of good things to come.” And thus the daily sacrifice, the intercession of the house of Aaron, and the united characters of teacher and priest in the same person, prefigured and pointed out “the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world.”--“The one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus.” The great Teacher sent from God, “who spake as never man spake.” “God’s beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased.” The conclusion of the benediction is prophetic, and descriptive of their reward, their inheritance, and security. “Bless, Lord, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again.”[*]Deu 33:11 This is the perfection of creature happiness; ample provision, and the blessing of the Almighty poured down, and resting upon it--works and labors of love cheerfully performed, and graciously accepted--every foe subdued, and every ground of fear for ever removed. Here may we not apply to this tribe in particular, what Moses, in the close, applies to Israel in general? “Happy art thou, O Levi: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon their high places.”[*]Deu 33:29

Such were the functions, the privileges, the honors, and the emoluments of the Levitical priesthood. They suggest to the Christian ministry, the vigilance, diligence, fidelity, and zeal which become those “who must give account”--the necessity laid upon them “to declare the whole counsel of God”--the assured support on which they may depend, while they conscientiously aim at doing their duty--the glorious “recompense of reward,” which is laid up for “the good and faithful servant,” in that day “when they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.”[*]Dan 12:3 May the power of such motives be felt, and understood by all who bear the sacred and important office, that by them they may be rendered “steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as they know that their labor is not in vain in the Lord.” The farther progress of Moses through the remaining tribes of Israel shall be the subject of the next Lecture.

086. Moses--Blessing on Israel

Moses--Blessing on Israel Deu 31:1. And this is the blessing wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. The rich man in hell is represented[*]Luk 16:27-28 as entertaining the fond belief; that the return of one from the dead would certainly be effectual, to the conviction and amendment of a thoughtless and impenitent generation. And men in general are disposed to ascribe an infallible efficacy to means fabricated in their own imagination, while, at the same tune, they wilfully neglect to use those which God has appointed, whose operation is undoubted, and of which they are in the entire possession. The man of one talent lays it up in a napkin and buries it, because he cannot, with one, do the work of five or of ten. One man is an infidel, because the miraculous powers which once accompanied the preaching of the gospel, accompany it no more; another affects to despise all external evidence whatever, and looks at Christianity with a suspicious eye, because it called in miracles and prophecy to confirm and support it. The Jews rejected the counsel of God against themselves, saying, “He casteth out devils, by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.”[*]Mat 12:24 The Greeks accounted the doctrine of the cross foolishness, because it belied their vain philosophy, and exposed their worldly spirit. Were it possible for the human race to assemble in one general council, in order to settle a mode of religion which should suit the whole, they would speedily be constrained to separate, without coming to any specific, decisive agreement on a point so essential: for pride, and selfishness, and the spirit of contradiction, would instantly raise opposition, and the most salutary idea would be rejected by one party, for no better reason than that it was adopted by another. Were the rich man to come from the dead, commissioned to tell the secrets of his prison-house; were Lazarus permitted to leave the bosom of Abraham, in order to display to men the glories of paradise; what could they say, that has not been repeated a thousand and a thousand times? The one would be esteemed by a busy, careless, unbelieving world, a poor, moping, melancholy wretch, fit for a place in Bedlam; the other would be called an enthusiastic visionary: and they might, for ought the world cared, return to the places from whence they came, and report that mankind was better employed than to listen to their dreams; that it was election time; that the term was coming on, that a packet was expected, or a fleet arrived.

Men amuse themselves with crying up the advantages of those who saw Christ going about doing good, “healing all manner of sickness among the people;” of those who heard Paul preach, and the like; but the faithful and true witness assures us, that Jesus frequently wrought miracles, and Paul preached in vain. Capernaum, Bethsaida, Jerusalem, remained full of unbelievers; and apostolic eloquence was called babbling by one, it made another to shake under a temporary fit of trembling, and only “almost persuaded” a third to be a Christian. The decision of father Abraham then, in the passage already referred to, is founded in truth and experience. “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”[*]Luk 16:31 Moses spake from the brink of the grave, and was forgotten the moment his voice ceased. God himself thundered from Sinai, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water

under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me:"[*]Exo 20:4-5 and within "a little month" we see all Israel dancing round a golden calf, and saying, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."[*]Exo 32:4 The Son of Man came down from heaven, disclosed the secrets of the eternal mind; descended into the grave, and returned to the earth and showed himself openly. But did infidelity stop her mouth? No. "Some of the watch came into the city, and showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye his disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day."[*]Mat 28:11-15 The circumstances in which Moses took his last long farewell of his beloved charge, were such, one would think, as to leave a lasting, an indelible impression on the minds of his hearers; but the sequel shows us, that the impressions of gratitude, sympathy, sorrow, and regret, are "as the morning cloud and the early dew, which passeth away."

Having finished his course, and the time of his departure drawing nigh, we behold the man of God making his final progress through the camp of Israel; going from tribe to tribe, from standard to standard, saluting everyone by his name, and pronouncing over him the cordial benediction of a dying friend. We have accompanied him from Reuben to Judah, and from Judah to Levi, and heard his dying breath confirm the promise of royal dignity to the one, and entail the sacred dignity of the priesthood upon the other. They have heard his last adieu. Their eyes shall behold him no more. He has now arrived at the encampment of Benjamin. Benjamin, the son of his mother's sorrow, the son of his father's right hand; the last of Israel in the course of nature, not the least in the affection of his sole surviving parent, nor in importance as one of the heads of the holy commonwealth. Benjamin, destined of Providence to support the throne of David, when shaken by the revolt of ten tribes. And what is the blessing of Benjamin? "Of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him: and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders."[*]Deu 33:12 The course in which Moses proceeded in pronouncing the blessing, is supposed by some to be prophetically governed, according to the geographical description of Canaan, and the order and course in which each portion was allotted to every several tribe. Benjamin, therefore, is addressed before his elder brother Joseph, because the lot of his inheritance was to lie between the lots of Judah and Joseph, and to border upon each, and this, by consulting the book of Jos 18:11, you will find was the case. And we shall afterwards find many circumstances concurring to give a distinction and a consequence to Benjamin, among the tribes of Israel. Jebus, that is Jerusalem, fell to them. Of course, the seat of empire and of religion, in process of time, was fixed in the midst of them. Imperial Judah administered the affairs of government in a city belonging to another tribe, and from the day that the temple was built, not only the priests, the sons of Levi, were called to minister in the order of their course, within the confines of their brother Benjamin; but all the males of all the tribes were obliged to appear before the Lord in the same place, at the three great stated festivals every year, besides the innumerable occasional visits made to the metropolis of the whole country, as to the center of civil government and of religious worship. On comparing the arrangement of the precious stones in the breastplate of the high priest, with that of the same number and quality of gems which are represented as

constituting the foundation of the New Jerusalem, we find the jasper standing last, with the name of Benjamin engrave upon it, in the breastplate; but the first in the foundation of the holy city, which is the type of the Christian church. With the aid of Benjamin alone, Judah was enabled to support an independent sovereignty, which considerably outlasted the kingdom of the ten tribes. This, and various other circumstances, in the future history and condition of this tribe, explain the blessing of Moses, which describes him as “the beloved of the Lord,” tenderly watched over and protected of Jehovah, as the progenitor of this tribe according to the flesh, was carefully kept at home, and affectionately cherished by his father Jacob; as “dwelling in safety by him,” that is, in confidence, in security, there being “none to make him afraid, to whom God was so nigh.” There is apparently an allusion to this, and a beautiful one, in Psa 48:1-5. “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great king. God is known in her palaces for a refuge. For lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away.” “The Lord shall cover him,” adds Moses, “all day long.” “Cover.” The Seventy translate the word by one that signifies “to overshadow.” The Chaldean paraphrase is, “he shall be a shield over him;” it denotes a security, covering, or protection from evil; and the evangelical prophet, Isaiah, beautifully expands the thought in these remarkable words, descriptive of and applied to the same object. “And the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the day time from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.”[*]Isa 4:5-6 “All day long,” or “every day;” that is continually. “And he shall dwell between his shoulders;” like the head, the glory of the natural body, rearing itself majestically between and upon “the shoulders,” the strength and power of the man. This was the blessing of Benjamin.

Moses seems now to turn to a peculiarly favorite object; he seems to rise above himself; the spirit of dying Jacob seems to revive in him. As if the name of Joseph were the fire put to the train, he kindles, he blazes, he lightens. As if the name of Joseph were the signal to be at once great and sublime, tender and pathetic, approaching his standard, recollecting the history and character of their illustrious progenitor, contemplating their rising greatness and prosperity, he thus breaks out to strains loftier than bard ever sung. “Blessed of the Lord be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dews, for the deep that coucheth beneath; and for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon, and for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills. And for the precious things of the earth, and fulness thereof; and for the good will of him that dwelt in the bush: let the blessing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren. His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh.”[*]Deu 33:13-17 Isaac had but two sons, and found himself exhausted when he had bestowed a blessing upon one of them: Jacob has twelve sons, and yet he has a several blessing for each son. Israel at the death of Moses was increased to an innumerable multitude, and yet there are blessings enough, and to spare, and yet there is room. And when God shall have brought back the captivity of Jacob, when God shall have brought his ancient people within the bond of the gospel covenant, together with the fulness of the Gentile

nations, the tide of benediction shall rise, and rise, and swell to the number and necessity of all the partakers. Thus the sacred stream which Ezekiel saw in vision, issuing from the threshold of the house, was at first but a little bubbling fountain; but after a progress of a thousand cubits, became “a brook of water up to the ankles;” after a thousand more, bad risen to the height of the loins; and after a thousand more, “the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.” To go into a detail of the particulars contained in the blessing of Joseph, instead of occupying the place of an evening, might furnish employment for years. I feel myself perfectly at a loss how to represent it to your view; in what light first to consider it, what particular part of it to bring forward--whether I should at all presume to attempt an illustration of it, or leave it altogether to your private meditation. Never, surely, in the same quantity of words, were exhibited such a multitude and variety of beautiful, striking, and sublime ideas. When Joseph is to be blessed, the prophet for him arrays nature in her gayest, richest attire; for him he digs into the mine, and cleaves the flinty rock, and pours jewels and gold at his feet. “For him the roses blow, for him distils the dew.” For him golden harvests wave in the fragrant air, and rivers of milk and oil flow down the mountains and through the valleys. For him the swelling clusters of the vine assume a purple line, the meadows clothe themselves with verdure, and the cedars of God lift their proud heads to the skies; the sun and moon, and eleven stars, do obeisance to him. Nature is then animated, as it were, to do him honor, to give him protection, to extend his empire, to minister to his delight. The grove becomes vocal, the bullock treads stately through the plain, the unicorn pushes with the horn, nations of enemies melt before him, the ten-thousands of Ephraim, and the thousands of Manasseh, cultivate their fertile, peaceful fields, beautify their pleasant villages, fortify their magnificent cities. With unexhausted strength, with resistless force, the prophet then hurries us out of the sphere of nature, bears us to the awful regions of religion, places our feet on holy ground. It is the blessing of Joseph, and we feel ourselves transported to the wilderness of Horeb, we behold the bush on fire, we hear the voice of God himself from the midst of the flame. But though it speaks from the midst of fire, to the house of Joseph it speaks nothing but love, it is a fire that consumes not, it breathes “good will.” Moses having thus as a poet touched every power of imagination, conducted us from one scene of delight to another, and made all Eden rise to view; having as a prophet, unveiled the world of spirits to our astonished sight, and borne us as on eagle’s wings up to the throne of God, gently deviates into his character of orator and historian, and sweetly redescends with us into the field of Zoan, and calls forth a tender sigh from our bosom over the hapless youth who was torn from his father’s embrace, and sold into slavery. “Let the blessing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren.”[*]Deu 33:16 But “who is thus that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?”[*]Job 33:2 Moses, my friends, seems reluctant to break off his subject, he is lothe to bid Joseph farewell; as he goes he “casts a longing, lingering look behind,” and sighs out another blessing, after his tongue is silent. When Jacob speaks to Joseph, and Moses writes and speaks of him, neither of them knows how to leave off.

We soon find the prediction of Moses verified, and the parting benediction falling down, according to the letter of it, in copious showers upon the head of Joseph. For though half the tribe of Manasseh obtained an inheritance beyond Jordan, and a fair and spacious lot had fallen to the rest of the sons of Joseph in Canaan, they are soon under the necessity of applying to Joshua for an additional lot to enlarge their border. “And the children of Joseph spake unto Joshua, saying, Why hast thou given me but one lot and one portion to inherit, seeing I am a great people,

inasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto? And Joshua answered them, If thou be a great people, then get thee up to the wood-country, and cut down for thyself there in the land of the Perizzites and of the giants, if mount Ephraim be too narrow for thee. And the children of Joseph said, The hill is not enough for us: and all the Canaanites that dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron, both they who are of Bethshean and her towns, and they who are of the valley of Jezreel. And Joshua spake unto the house of Joseph, even to Ephraim and to Manasseh, saying, Thou art a great people, and hast great power: thou shalt not have one lot only. But the mountain shall be thine; for it is a wood, and thou shalt cut it down: and the outgoings of it shall be thine; for thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, and though they be strong."[*]Jos 17:14-18 The Jewish writers take delight in expatiating upon the beauty and fruitfulness of the providentially allotted portion of this tribe. They represent Canaan as a garden, in comparison to the rest of the world, and mount Ephraim with its adjacent plains as the garden of Canaan. But we must hasten from it, and attend our departing prophet, as he bids a shorter adieu to the remaining tribes. As the lots of Zebulun and Issachar were to be contiguous in Canaan; as they were brothers germane, being both sons of Leah, and thereby had a nearer interest and affection among themselves, and their tents were pitched contiguous to each other in the plains of Moab, Moses addresses them as forming one body of people. "And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and Issachar in thy tents."[*]Deu 33:18 This is, with little variation, a repetition and confirmation of the blessing pronounced by dying Jacob. Zebulun, the younger of the two brothers, is in both preferred; and in distributing the lots Zebulun has the third lot, Issachar only the fourth. The inheritance of Zebulun was to be of a peculiar duality, and they were to draw their subsistence and wealth from sources very different from those of the rest of Israel: they were to grow great by navigation and trade. The sea, that unruly element, was to be made tributary to them, and through it, a passage opened to them to the vast populous and wealthy shores of Africa on the south, and of Asia and Europe on the north. "They shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand. They shall call the people unto the mountain, there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness."[*]Deu 33:19 The Chaldean applies these words peculiarly to Issachar, and translates them thus: "Rejoice, Issachar, that is, be thou blessed in thy going to appoint the tithes of the solemn feasts of Israel," which has a reference to what we read of this tribe, 1Ch 12:32 : "And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do: the heads of them were two hundred, and all their brethren were at their commandment." This is generally understood of the times and seasons of the year, of the new moons and other appearances of the heavenly bodies, by which the solemn festivals were regulated, and which they of Issachar, by their astronomical observation and skill, calculated for the use of all Israel. Hence they are represented in the blessing of Moses as calling the people "unto mount Zion, where the temple was." Thus, we see every tribe had some separate and distinct province, some peculiar benefit and privilege, that in the commonwealth of Israel, as in the natural body, there might be no schism, nor the hand be able to say to the eye or to the foot, "I have no need of thee."

Moses advances to the tents of Gad with these words upon his tongue. "Blessed be he that enlargeth Gad: he dwelleth as a lion, and teareth the arm with the crown of the head. And he provided the first part for himself, because there, in a portion of the lawgiver, was he seated: and he came with the heads of the people, he executed the justice of the Lord, and his judgments with Israel."[*]Deu 33:20-21 The enlargement of Gad may refer to his inheritance, which God hereby

promised to extend, as he did that of Israel in general. “I will enlarge thy border;” or it may be understood of his person, and will then imply deliverance out of trouble, in which sense the word is used, Psa 4:1 : “Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress.” If so, the words of Moses refer to the troubles of Gad, prophesied of by his dying father, and the history of the deliverance and enlargement of that tribe, from the hands of their enemies, by Jephthah the Gileadite. We read of Gadites in David’s time, who were “mighty men of valor,” whose faces were like the “faces of lions,” and were “as swift as the roes upon the mountains.” Hence he is said “to dwell as a lion, and to tear the arm with the crown of the head;” the emblems of sovereignty and strength, intimating that none should be so high or powerful, but the might of Gad should bring him down. The blessing in the Deu 33:21 plainly refers to the provision already made for this tribe in conjunction with Reuben, and the half tribe of Manasseh, in the kingdoms of Og and Sihon. “And he provided the first part for himself, because there in a portion of the lawgiver, was he seated: and he came with the heads of the people, he executed the justice of the Lord, and his judgments with Israel.”[*]Deu 33:21 The younger children of a numerous family, are to a stranger so many uninteresting, insignificant names; they have a mere family likeness, they speedily become undistinguishable, we mistake the one for the other. It is not so with the parents; they have distinguished marks for each, they have it particular affection for everyone; they have something to say to, to say of; everyone. Thus Dan and Naphtali and Asher are to us so many words without a meaning; but in the eyes of Moses all have a special importance, each particular blessing has a special meaning, and the last is not the least in his affection. But as strangers we pass by the rest, and distinct ideas of only two or thee, of Judah and Levi, and Benjamin and Joseph, cleave to our memory; these we would know among ten thousand, these we can never forget.

We must now suppose Moses to have finished his round, to have returned to his place; and, closing the solemn scene with taking a general survey of the whole, he rises from the goodly tents of Israel, to the contemplation and acknowledgment of Israel’s God, and he finally desists from speaking and acting, in rapturous admiration of Him in whom he lived, moved, and breathed; he begins heaven on earth, by pouring out his soul in the bosom of the God of heaven and earth. “There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee, and shall say, Destroy them. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone; the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine, also his heavens shall drop down dew. Happy art thou, O Israel, who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon their high places.”[*]Deu 33:26-29

Moses pronounced a blessing which he could not bestow, which has long ago spent itself; the effects of which are no longer visible. Christ led out his disciples as far as to Bethany: “and he lifted up his hands and blessed them.”[*]Luk 24:50 He pronounced a blessing in his power to confer, which has not spent its force, which reaches into eternity: “Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world.”[*]Mat 28:19-20 Heaven and earth shall pass away, but his word will not pass away, till all be fulfilled. “He ever liveth to make intercession for us.” “All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth.” What are the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of then? What is now the

land which once flowed with milk and honey? Where are now “the ten thousands of Ephraim, and the thousands of Manasseh?” The blessing even of Joseph has tailed, and the beauty of mount Ephraim is no more. But we receive from our greater prophet “a kingdom which cannot be moved: an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away.” His benediction embraces a globe; extends from generation to generation; unites his second to his first coming; expands a new creation, new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness;” exalts guilty, fallen men to the dignity of the sons of God. Let him bless me, and I shall be blessed. Lord, lift thou upon me the light of thy countenance, and I shall be saved; breathe upon me, and I shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The blessing of Moses implied succession and change, contention and triumph; exhibited the “confused noise of the warrior, and garments rolled in blood,” the exaltation of one on the depression of another: the blessing of Christ presents stability and permanency, harmony and peace, equality and acquiescence; exhibits only the noble, contention of generous and affectionate spirits, the triumphs of benevolence; the spirit of adoption bursting from every lip, Abba, Father; the spirit of brotherly love glowing in every bosom, tuning the tongue to the law of kindness, beaming from the eye in looks of tenderness. A greater than Moses is with us: we “are not under the law, but under grace.”

087. Moses--Views Promised Land

Moses--Views Promised Land

Deu 34:1-5. And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the laud of Gilead, unto Daniel and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah unto the utmost sea, and the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm-trees, unto Zoar. And the Lord said unto him, This is the land which I swore unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither. So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-Peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day. When strangers accidentally meet to perform together the same voyage or journey, they are apt, at first to regard each other with looks of caution and distrust; they converse sparingly, and with reserve; they conceal their views and purposes in their own breasts; they attempt to dive into the characters and designs of their fellow-travellers. By degrees this auspicious cautiousness wears off; it becomes their mutual desire and endeavor to please and oblige, they feel themselves united by a common interest, their communications become frequent and free, they discover all that is in their hearts, they take a kind concern in each other’s future fortunes, they exchange tokens of affection, they devise the means of coming together again, and part, at length with regret. We seem, my brethren, to have been travelling through a vast country; seem to have been conversing with men of a different age and region; we have contemplated many a fair prospect, we have marked many successive changes, and, at the end of another stage or two, we must separate, and bid each other farewell. Like men acquainted and friendly, who know each other’s meaning and wish each other’s happiness, we look back to our common pilgrimage with some degree of satisfaction, and forward, I trust, with some degree of desire to meet together again. The mutual token which, in the mean time, we shall carry with us to stir up our minds by way of remembrance, is one that touches the heart by more than one spring, the memory of a dear and estimable common friend, who has contributed much to our pleasure and improvement, who was lovely and pleasant in life, and in death fills the soul with admiration and regret: but whom we have the felicity of considering as having only preceded us a little in a journey, on which we too have already entered, and the end of which will bring us to the same home with him. The pen has now dropped from the hand of Moses, and silent is his tongue; and another, not himself, must tell us what he is and how he died. Every scene in the life of this illustrious man is singular, and instructive as singular; and his latter end is not the least interesting and useful. He had now completed his one hundred and twentieth year, without having become subject to the usual infirmities of that advanced age. It is one thing to live long, and another to be old. We frequently see old age commenced by many woeful symptoms, long before the man has begun to live at all: and we sometimes see the wisdom and piety of gray hairs giving luster to the bloom of youth, and tempering the vivacity of the morning of life. We wish to live long, but we weakly associate what never met, except in Moses and a favored few like him, perfect

soundness of faculties and the capacity of enjoying life united to length of days and richness of experience. We wish to live long, but fail to reflect on dimness of eyes, decay of memory, wasting of strength, loss of appetite, the neglect or unkindness of friends, and the other concomitants of that forlorn period. We wish to live long, but if the days come we find them evil; when these wished-for years draw nigh, we are constrained to acknowledge “we have no pleasure in them.” The few, the very few exceptions the history of mankind furnishes, from the general rule, serve only the more grievously to confirm it. Happy would it be for old men, however, happy for themselves, and most happy for others, though they cannot retain at pleasure the clear-sightedness and vigor of Moses, did they cultivate as they ought, and acquire as they might, something of his meekness, and gentleness, and condescension; they would not have such frequent reason to complain of the petulance, self-sufficiency, and presumption of young men, if they themselves would learn to be less peevish and obstinate and overbearing. For, bad as the world is, age will obtain respect, unless it take pains to provoke insult and disrespect. The death of Moses, then, was not in the ordinary course of nature, it was not preceded by its usual harbingers, it was not occasioned by a failure of the radical moisture, by the stroke of violence, or the malignity of disease, but by a simple act of the will of God. Wherefore, then,” should it bethought a thing incredible that God should raise the dead?” When we see the antediluvian patriarchs living to one thousand years, the eye of Moses at one hundred and twenty not dim, nor his natural force abated, and “Christ, the first fruits,” bursting asunder the bars of the grave; have we not so many concurring presumptions and proofs of immortality and the resurrection. And what must be the angelic beauty, the celestial vigor, the undecaying luster and glory of bodies “fashioned like to Christ’s glorious body,” when we see the face of Moses shine, that it could not be steadfastly looked at, and preserving to life’s extremity the morning dew of youth? The honor put on Moses was rare and singular, but the glory to be revealed is a blessedness of which all the redeemed of the Lord shall partake. When the summons arrived for Aaron to prepare for death, Moses, his brother, and Eleazer, his son and successor, were commanded to ascend the mountain with him, and to assist in the solemnities of the awful change: but Moses advances alone to meet death, to meet his God. The holy vestments, with the office to which they appertained, descended from father to son, and were at length done away altogether and lost; but the moral and spiritual parts of the dispensation never waxed old, could not see corruption, but like God, their author, were unchangeable; and like Moses, by whom they were delivered to the world, unenfeebled by length of time, continued till Christ, the restorer of all things, interwove them with the tissue of the gospel, and conferred immortality upon them.

We must now look back to the sentence of death pronounced against Moses, and to the crime which provoked the irreversible doom: “And the Lord spake unto Moses that selfsame day, saying, Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, unto mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is over against Jericho; and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession, and die in the mount whither thou goest up; and be gathered unto thy people; as Aaron thy brother died in mount Hor, and was gathered unto his people: because ye trespassed against me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah-Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin; because ye sanctified me not in the midst of the children of Israel. Yet thou shalt see the land before thee; but thou shalt not go thither unto the land which I give the children of Israel.”[*]Deu 32:48-52 Here many things concur to surprise and instruct us. The offence of Moses seems a venial one; he erred merely through hastiness of spirit; and had he not good cause to be angry. He

was not often so overtaken, he quickly repented, and recovered tranquillity and self-government again. He repeatedly attempted to soften justice by submission and entreaty; he asked for nothing unreasonable or absurd: he wished merely to be a witness of the divine bounty, truth and faithfulness; infinitely greater offenders had at his entreaty been forgiven and restored. But justice relented not, Moses for one offence must die; the grace which he often obtained for others is to himself denied. Let the wretch loaded with a thousand crimes black as hell, and malignant as the spirit that reigns in the children of disobedience, think of this and tremble. That “fool makes a mock of sin.” “Father, forgive him, he knows not what he does.” One transgression excluded Moses from Canaan; and with so many imperfections on his head, loaded with so many crimes of a nature so vile and atrocious, can he think of entering into the kingdom of heaven? When we see such inflexible and unrelenting severity pursuing the dearest and most distinguished of God’s children, who shall dare to think or to call any sin a little one? Who shall presume on mercy, who shall dream of washing away his guilt by the tears of penitence, who shall harden himself against God and hope to prosper? The great crime in the sight of God is, giving that glory to another which belongeth to him. For this Moses died without remedy, from the consequence of this he could not escape, though he sought it carefully and with tears. The character of Moses comes near to perfection, but it is not faultless; he too, with the guiltiest, stands in need of pardon and atonement; and when “righteousness is laid to the line and judgment to the plummet,” his life must pay the forfeit. Moses therefore could not be a savior to others; had his conduct been perfectly pure, it had been still but the righteousness of a man, it could but have delivered his own soul, it could have merited nothing at the hands of a holy God. In order to constitute a savior for the guilty, to unspotted purity of moral character, must be superadded divinity of nature, to give efficacy and virtue to suffering, and value to the shedding of blood. Thus the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; “and what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.”[*]Rom 8:3 We flee to thee, blessed Jesus, to cover us in the day of wrath; thy blood cleanseth from all sin; by the deeds of the law we cannot be justified, we look for redemption from the curse through thy meritorious death and righteousness, for the forgiveness of all our sins, according to the riches of thy grace.” But though death was to Moses a mark of the divine displeasure, and the punishment of sin; like all the chastening of fatherly wisdom, like all the punishments of Heaven, it was in the issue, and upon the whole, a real benefit, it was unspeakably great gain it relieved him of a burden sometimes ready to prove intolerable, it introduced him to communion with God more intimate and endearing than ever he had hitherto enjoyed; it placed him among the spirits of just men made perfect. Moses died in sight of the promised land, was permitted to measure it with his eye, and to judge of its fertility from specimens of its produce; and all that the labors and light of those who are fellowworkers with Moses can do, is to repeat the promise, to point with the finger and to say, “This is the way, walk ye in it.” It belongs to another power to subdue corruption, to divide Jordan, to level the walls of proud Jericho.

We know the offence, we have heard the doom, the reprieve is expired, the warrant of death is signed, the day o! execution is come. But the bitterness of death is over already, the sting of death is plucked out, and even the word that condemns and kills the body, is a word of love. A worldly mind cannot discern the reason why the cross is the way, why death is in the cup, why the entrance into the kingdom of God is through the thorny road of much tribulation; but the child of God, the disciple of Jesus, has ceased from himself and from his own will and understanding: “He

knows whom he has believed," and who has said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten:" he sees death in the list of his privileges and possessions, and is assured that all shall work together for his good.

Moses has fulfilled like a hireling his day, has written, has spoken, has judged, has prayed, has blessed; the business of life is ended; he has glorified God on earth, it only remains that he glorify him, by submission to his sovereign will in dying. Behold him then solitarily and solemnly advancing to encounter the last enemy: he has passed through the plain, and again he begins to climb up into the mount to meet God. The eyes of all Israel are riveted to his footsteps. Who is not ready to cry out, "Would to God I could die for thee." Every step he advances plants a dagger in the heart. The distance begins to render vision indistinct, his person is diminished to a speck, they fondly imagine they see him still, the eyes strain for another and another glimpse, they are suffused with tears, they can behold him no more. But he still beholds their goodly tents, he sees all Israel collected into one point of view: Jehovah dwelling in the midst of his people, the tabernacle with the pillar of cloud resting upon it: his affection with his sight is concentrated on the happy spot, his whole soul goes out in one general departing blessing. As he ascends, the prospect expands and brightens to his ravished eye. He can trace Jordan from its source, till it falls into the sea; he wanders with delight from hill to hill, from plain to plain. He sees on this side mount Lebanon losing its lofty head in the clouds; on that, the ocean and the sky meeting together to terminate his view. Beneath his feet, as it were, the city of palm trees, and the happy fields which the posterity of Joseph were destined to inhabit. The land which Abraham had measured with his foot in the length and in the breadth of it; in which Isaac and Jacob had sojourned as strangers; which God had fenced, and cultivated, and planted, and enriched by the hand of the Canaanite for his beloved people; which the sun irradiated with milder beams, the dew of heaven refreshed with sweeter moisture, and the early and the latter rain fattened in more copious showers. "And the Lord said unto him, This is the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither."[*]Deu 34:4 But what is the glory of this world? It passeth away.--What is the felicity of man, who must die, and of the son of man, who is a worm? It cometh quickly to a period. The eye which age had not made dim, must nevertheless be closed in death at length: the strength which a hundred and twenty years had not been able, to impair, is in it moment, by one touch of the finger of God, dissolved; the heart which God and Israel had so long divided, is now wholly occupied with God. In the midst of a vision so divine, Moses gently falls asleep: and he who falls asleep in the bosom of a father, needs be under no anxiety about his awakening. "So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord."[*]Deu 34:5 Moses died with Canaan full in view, enjoying everything but possession; and the utmost that his dispensation can do, is to ascertain the, existence of the heavenly country; to describe its boundaries, nature, and situation; to conduct to its limits, and to put us under the conduct of the great Captain of salvation. When we see the prophet of the law so far from having power to introduce others into their promised rest, that he himself could not enter in because of unbelief; we are admonished to court the protection and assistance of a more potent arm; to cleave to Him, who, by dying, has overcome death, and Him who has the power of death; "who openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth." But oh, what a blessed transition! from the fairest earthly prospect that eye ever beheld, to the enjoyment of a fairer inheritance, eternal in the heavens; from the tents of Jacob, to the encampment of angels under Michael their prince: from a

glory confined and transitory, to glory unbounded, unchangeable; from the symbol of the divine presence, in a pillar of fire and cloud, to his real presence, where there is “fulness of joy,” and where “there are pleasures for evermore;”[*]Psa 16:11 to see him as he is, and to be transformed into the salve image, from glory to glory. Behold Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, rushing from their thrones to welcome to the realms of light the shepherd of Israel, who had led the chosen seed from strength to strength, from triumph to triumph, while the voice of the Eternal himself proclaims, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of thy Lord.” But we must descend from this exceeding high mountain, and inquire after the breathless day of the servant of the Lord. It is precious in the sight of God; not a particle of it shall be lost in the grave, and it shall be raised up at the last day. In every other instance he leaves the dead to bury their dead; but he charges himself with the body of Moses, performs himself the rites of sepulture, conveys it by the ministration of angels, from the top of Nebo to a tomb of his own providing, “in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-Peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day.”[*]Deu 34:6 The reason commonly assigned for concealing the place where Moses was interred, was to prevent a superstitious use of his tomb and relics, which a people so prone to idolatry might readily have adopted, and with as good a color of reason at least, as the votaries of any hero, prince, or saint that ever was deified, could ever allege for their conduct. The Scripture saith expressly, that at the time this conclusion of the book of Deuteronomy was written, whether by Joshua, his immediate successor, by Samuel, three hundred and fifty years afterwards, or by Ezra, after the dissolution of the monarchy, and the Babylonish captivity, that then the place of Moses’ burial was unknown to any man, and had been so from the beginning; and yet such is the wickedness of imposture on the one hand, and the fondness of credulity on the other, that so late as the year of our Lord 1655, a pretended discovery of the spot was made, and attempted to be imposed upon the world. The outlines of the story are as follows “Certain shepherds who were feeding their goats on the mountains of Nebo and Abarim, observed that some of their charge were in use to disappear, and were absent for several days together; and that upon their return to the flock, their hair was perfumed with something that smelled extremely sweet. This excited their curiosity and determined them to investigate the affair with the utmost accuracy. They accordingly traced their goats, and were led by them through rugged and rocky places to a little vale, where, upon examination, they discovered a kind of cave, out of which proceeded a very, agreeable smell, resembling that which the goats conveyed on their fleeces, and had first suggested the inquiry. In the middle of the cave they build a tomb of stone, on which certain characters were engraven, which, being illiterate, they could not decipher; but they soon perceived that the sweet smell was communicated to their persons and garments. Upon this they went immediately to Mataxat, patriarch of the Maronites, who resided at the monastery of St. Mary, on mount Lebanon, and related to him the particulars of their discovery. The fragrance that still adhered to their clothes confirming their testimony, he sent two of his monks with them; one of them, a man of profound erudition, named Aben-Useph, who found, in the place pointed out to them a monument inscribed with these words in Hebrew, Moses the Servant of the Lord. The patriarch, transported with joy at a discovery so marvellous, besought. Morat, Pacha of Damascus, to constitute him sole guardian of the sepulcher. But the Greeks and Armenians, as well as the Franciscan friars, and after them the Jews, violently opposed it, and unable to agree, tried by dint of interest at court, by presents to the Mufti and Grand Vizier, to appropriate each to themselves the superintendence of this tomb, which they equally believed to be that of Moses, and which the Jews, with peculiar earnestness,

insisted must belong to them. They represented that, among all the possessions of the Grand Seignior, none could be more valuable and illustrious than the property of three sepulchers so renowned as that of Mahomet at Mecca, of Jesus Christ at Jerusalem, and of Moses in mount Nebo. But the Jesuits had the address, by presents happily applied, to defeat the claims of all these pretenders, and to obtain an order for shutting up the sepulcher, and obstructing the road that led to it; nay, for prohibiting all access to it, under pain of death. They were, meanwhile, forming a design of secretly conveying off the body of Moses, which they flattered themselves would prove a considerable accession of respectability, and a new source of wealth to their order. Having however, with much difficulty and danger, penetrated into the sepulcher, it was found entirely empty; nobody, no relics appeared."[*]Hornius, Secul. xvii. Art. xxxii. p. 536. These pleasing chimeras vanished almost as soon as formed; for a learned Rabbi proved that the person interred in this tomb, was not the ancient legislator of the Hebrews, but a modern Jew of the same name. The sacred history says, that Moses died the fortieth year after the deliverance from Egypt, and the most part of the Jewish writers fix the day of his death to the seventh day of the last month of that year, or the month Adar; and our learned and pious countryman, archbishop Usher, calculates it to have happened on the first day of the same month.

There is a passage in the New Testament which refers to this event, and which has greatly exercised the labor and ingenuity of critics and commentators: it is in the general epistle of Jude, where that disciple, in reproving the rashness and licentiousness of certain heretics, "who despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities," quotes an example, of very high authority, as condemning the practice "Yet," says he, "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."[*]Jude 1:9

Now, as many questions almost as words have been started on this subject: what is an archangel; and who is Michael? How came the body of Moses to be a ground of controversy between ham and the devil, what were they severally aiming at, and what was the issue of their quarrel? What authority restrained Michael from preferring a railing accusation against him, how his conduct comes to be adduced as a pattern of self-government, and a reproof of the vices of the tongue? And from what source did Jude derive his knowledge of this transaction? The very mention of so many, some of them, on the first glance, unimportant questions, will, I doubt not, check curiosity altogether, instead of exciting it. It is evident, that the death and burial of Moses interested heaven and earth and hell; that many historical facts of great moment are purposely left unrecorded; that many discoveries are reserved for that great and notable day of the Lord, when God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil; that it becomes not us to be wise above what is written, but to rest in hope, that "what we know not now, we shall know hereafter." This much we know, that, about fifteen hundred years after, Moses appeared in glory ("whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot tell, God knoweth") to do homage to his Savior on the mount of transfiguration, and to lay his glory at the feet of him in whose light he shone; and we know "the hour is coming when all who are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."[*]John 5:28-29

Such was the latter end of, "take him for all in all," the greatest mere man that ever existed. But I check myself. It is impossible to do any thing like justice to such a character in a few moments'

discourse; you will indulge me with another hearing on this subject: I mean, to preach a funeral sermon the only one I ever undertook without pain, over a character and a memory to which no eloquence can rise, no detail do justice; in celebrating which, praise cannot degenerate into panegyric, nor the preacher be suspected of adulation.

Moses died in the year of the world two thousand five hundred and fifty-three--before Christ one thousand four hundred and fifty--after the flood eight hundred and ninety-seven. The most ancient and authentic historians, the most penetrating, dignified, and illuminated of prophets, the profoundest, sagest of legislators, the prince of orators and poets, the most excellent and amiable of men, the firmest and faithfullest of believers. “Whether we live, let us live unto the Lord,” that when we die we may “die in the Lord;” that “living and dying we may be the Lord’s.”

088. Moses--Memorial Service

Moses--Memorial Service

Deu 34:10-12. And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face: in all the signs and the wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants, and to all his land, and in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses showed in the sight of all Israel.

There is in mankind a good-natured disposition to spare the dead. Without very high provocation, indeed, who could think of disturbing the peace and silence of the grave, and of dragging again before the tribunal of man those who have already undergone the more awful judgment of a righteous God? But this generosity does not always proceed from pure benevolence. The dead no longer stand in our way; they are no longer our rivals in the pursuits of fame or of for tune. We can here earn the praise of magnanimity, without any danger of suffering in the interests of our reputation, our consequence, our self-love. From whatever source this lenity and forbearance proceed, we would not be thought altogether to condemn them; but good-nature in this, as in a few other cases, is apt sometimes to be carried too far. Through fear of being thought severe to those who have no power to defend themselves, extravagant and unmerited commendation has been often lavished on the worthless and the wicked. I will cheerfully engage not to violate the ashes of the dead by unjust censure, nor even by merited invective; but, I must not be forced, on the other hand, to commemorate virtues that were never practised; to bring to light worth that never existed, except in the tropes of a funeral oration; to represent as right, what God, and truth, and reason pronounce to be wrong. My tongue shall be silent as the grave over the memory of the proudest, most selfish, hardhearted, unkind, uncomplying wretch that ever lived: but I must not be called in to prostitute my conscience by celebrating his humility, generosity, compassion, or sweetness of temper. I would correct the common adage a little, and then give it all the currency in my power. Instead of rendering it, “of the dead say that only which is good,” I would translate it, “of the dead say that only which is true.”

Indeed, the best thing that can befall most men, when they die, is to be forgotten as soon as possible. Few, very few characters are such as not to suffer by handling; and there is great danger of rousing and provoking slumbering resentments against our departed friends, by an officious zeal to trumpet their praise, and display their good qualities. The praise bestowed on the dead is generally contemptible adulation to the living; adulation, vilely bestowing the rewards of piety and goodness on mere greatness or affluence, and thereby strengthening the hands of vice, by lulling the conscience to rest, and deceiving men into the belief, that a good name may be purchased without possessing a spark of virtue. The liturgy of our established church, in how many other respects soever useful and excellent, is here faulty, and certainly does mischief. The funeral service, one of the noblest, because one of the most scriptural parts of it, with indiscriminating charity dispenses the kingdom of heaven to the evil and the good, to “him that sweareth as to him who feareth an oath.” The wretch whose whole life has been a notorious violation of every law

human and divine, who grew old in hatred and contempt of the gospel, falls asleep in the “sure and certain hope of a resurrection to eternal life.” What is this but to encourage men to continue in sin, that grace may abound; to live profligates, and yet hope to die in peace?

Happily, the character we are this evening to bring under your review will stand the test of the strictest examination, will shine with superior luster from being touched and retouched, will discover new excellencies on every investigation, will furnish to the humble, the penitent, and the believing, perpetual ground of instruction and consolation. After a course of more than fourscore Lectures on the life, character, and writings of Moses, it may perhaps be thought superfluous, to employ the whole of another discourse in attempting to elucidate his character, to recommend his example, to embalm his memory. But it is this very circumstance which determined me to attempt a delineation of this wonderful man’s portrait, to request that you would join me in meditating a few moments over one who has been honored of God, to do more, in order to please and instruct mankind, than any mere man that ever existed. To say truth, I consider the person of Moses as a pledge of affection between you and myself. He brought us together at first, and he has kept us together a considerable part of these three years past; to part with him and his writings seems a kind of presentiment of our final dissolution likewise; and, in losing him, I feel as if I were losing a thousand friends at a stroke. But let us speak and think of Moses, not of ourselves.

It is impossible to think of Moses without first thinking of “his Father and our Father, of his God and our God.” To be a chosen instrument in the hand of Heaven to carry on the plans of Providence, to promote the wisdom and happiness of mankind, is man’s highest glory: as it is his truest felicity to do this voluntarily and from the heart, as an obedient, zealous, and cheerful fellow-worker with God. Now, Moses possessed this distinction and felicity in a very eminent degree. God raised up Pharaoh “in very deed for this cause, to show in him his power, that his great name might be declared throughout all the earth;” and Pharaoh, unhappily for himself, accomplished the designs of Heaven, by his pride, obstinacy, and rebellion. God called “Cyrus his anointed, by name, and surnamed him who had not known him for Jacob his servant’s sake, and Israel his elect” Nebuchadnezzar he employed as the rod of his anger to chastise a disobedient and gainsaying people, and then broke it in pieces and dashed it to the ground. These, and many others, stand upon record, as executing the will of the Eternal without their own consciousness or intention, nay, totally against it; but Moses had the rare felicity of engaging in one of the most generous purposes which can animate a human breast, knowing it to be, at the same time, the leading, commanding purpose of God himself. Every step he moved was supported by the enlivening reflection, that every step he moved was executing the decrees of the Almighty, and promoting the relief and salvation of his wretched countrymen. How delightful the progress, when duty and inclination go hand in hand! The circumstances in which God raised up Moses mark him peculiarly as his own. Everything concurred to prove, that here “the arm of the Lord was revealed.” Another king had arisen, “who knew not Joseph,” the hope of Israel seemed to be perishing; Egypt was alarmed with expectation or rather apprehension, of the appearance of this wonderful child; Israel was awakened to expectation, but abandoned it in despair. To reach the life of one, ten thousand innocents perish by the sword. But, as if in defiance of the precautions of human wisdom, Moses is born in the very rage of that persecution which threatened his life. The daughter of Pharaoh becomes his protector, and Egyptian Magi vie with each other in rearing that genius, whose ascendant threatened the own fall of their country; and Moses is become great, before the world

apprehends that it is he by whose hand God would deliver his people from bondage. This brings us forward to the period when his personal character began plainly to unfold itself; and it discovers to us a mind superior to every mean, every selfish gratification. Men love to adopt the cause that prevails; and the cause of Israel was at that time low indeed. At a certain period of life passion bears unlimited sway. At forty, the calls of ambition and pride are loudest; and they who are themselves at ease are little disposed to embark in the miseries of others. But in Moses behold a man, not sunk into poverty violently obtruded upon him, but poverty deliberately chosen; a man of forty relinquishing, without reluctance or regret, the pleasures, riches, and honors of a court, and exchanging them for the labor and oppression of an Israelitish slave, and glorifying in the reproachful naive of Hebrew, much more than in that of “the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.” Behold the manly indignation of a noble spirit hastening to avenge wretchedness and depression of insolence and cruelty, and in the punishment of one oppressor exhibiting an anticipated view of that great deliverance which, in process of time, God was by him to work in behalf of a whole people. The same spirit which beheld Egyptian oppression with just resentment, beheld discord among brethren with godly sorrow and regret. His boldly exposed his life to repel the one; in the spirit of meekness he tried to heal the other: and he very early experienced the ungracious, and ungrateful, and discouraging requital of services the most kindly intended; the sad presage of that life of mortification unparalleled, and most unmerited, which he was afterwards called to endure. The insolent retort of an unkind brother awakened prudence, and put him for a season to flight; for valor, as the case then stood, valor against such fearful odds, could not have deserved the name of courage, but of rashness.

Providence still directs his path, and conducts him at once to usefulness and happiness. It seems as if the all-wise Jehovah meant to display in Moses an example of the great and of the petty virtues, the virtues of the man, of the citizen, and of the believer united; and in none of his future exploits, perhaps, is he more amiable, more estimable, than in protecting the virgin daughters of Jethro from the violence of their rough and surly neighbors. Here we behold again on what delicate hinges the great God turns round the affairs of men. This piece of natural, honest, commendable gallantry, introduces Moses to the acquaintance of a prince, lays the foundation of an important alliance for life, and influences all his future fortunes, and feelings, as a man.

Hence we are conducted to the delicious, the calm, the contemplative period of our hero’s mortal existence. We behold a simple shepherd tending a flock not his own, but enjoying tranquillity and contentment; secluded from the society of men, but blessed with the visions of the Almighty; losing himself in sweet oblivion of a busy, bustling world, awake only to the innocent joys of domestic life, and the sublimer pleasures of religion. It was in all probability in this delightful retreat, during this blessed interval of retirement from and unconnectedness with what passed on the great theater, that, divinely taught, he sung “how the heavens and earth rose out of chaos.” It was then and there that the divine Spirit disclosed to his astonished, his enraptured eye, the years beyond the flood, the spring season of nature, the first man whom God created upon the earth, the amiableness of pure primeval innocence, the glories of paradise, the unlimited bounty of indulgent heaven. It was then and there, that good Spirit put the pen into his hand, to trace that sacred record, which has descended to us for our delight and instruction, and which shall remain, till time expire, the wonder, the monitor, the guide of mankind unto all manner of truth.

What a happy period for the human race! how happy for himself: Were the will of man to prevail, who would exchange such a retirement as this, for the noise and glare which captivates fools! But men, such as Moses, are not made for themselves alone; and ill would he have improved the blessings of solitude, had he not learned in it, cheerfully to sacrifice his own humor and his own ease to the work and glory of God. The time to favor Israel was now come, and Moses must think of privacy and self-enjoyment no longer. By a vision, such as might appall the boldest, and encourage the most fearful, he is remanded to Egypt with a commission under the seal of Heaven, to haughty Pharaoh, and he fears no more the wrath of a king. But we have insensibly deviated into the history of Moses, instead of delineating his character. Are they not, however, one and the same thing? To know what he was, we have but to consider what he said, and how he acted. But how is it possible to comprise, within the bounds of one discourse, a detail of forty active, busy years, from the day that God appeared to him in a flame of fire in the bush, to the day of his ascending to the top of mount Nebo to die? In general, they contain a display of almost every human shining virtue, brought forward to the eye, and impressed on the heart, by their most lovely foil, modesty, meekness and humility. What magnanimity! united to what coolness and self-government! what firmness and intrepidity! what patience and gentleness! what consummate wisdom! what amiable simplicity in youth, in maturity, in old age; in public and in private life; in every relation and condition, who is like him, who deserves to be compared with him? In forming an idea of human excellence, Moses presents himself immediately to my view; it is no longer an idea, it is a delightful reality. The more attentive part of my hearers will observe that, to complete the proposed plan of this discourse, there is still wanting the general leading idea of all these discourses, the resemblance between the type and the person typified--the analogy of Moses and Christ. This I refer to another Lecture; and beg leave to subjoin as a proper sequel to this, the following eulogium of Moses, translated from the works of an eloquent critic of his writings.[*]Discours Hist. Critique, etc. sur les Evenemens memorable du vieux Testament par Jaques Saurin, Tome I. Discours LXX.

089. Eulogium of Moses

Eulogium of Moses

“This most extraordinary personage was presented to the world in very singular circumstances. He appeared at a period of peculiar affliction to his kindred and nation; and Divine Providence seems to have raised him up expressly for the purpose of exemplifying virtues, which distress and persecution alone are calculated to place in the fairest point of light. By a series of miraculous events he escaped in infancy, the fatal effects of a sanguinary decree, which doomed to death all the male children of the Hebrews from the womb. And, what highly merits consideration, and serves strikingly to display the influence which Sovereign Wisdom exercises over all the affairs of men, he owed his preservation in a great measure, to persons whose interest it was to have destroyed him. These very persons assisted in forming that superior genius, and in cultivating those wonderful talents, which, in time, qualified him to be the deliverer of a nation which it was their intention utterly to extirpate.

“Scarcely arrived at that stage of life when men begin to form plans for the remainder of their existence, he feels himself called to determine between two objects, so incompatible in their nature, that the maturest judgment can with difficulty hold the balance even; religion and worldly interest. Under the necessity of making a choice so difficult, he rises above his age, above his passions, nay, in some sense, above humanity, and nobly sacrifices every worldly prospect to religion. He resolves to partake in the miseries of an oppressed people, in order to secure an interest in the favor of that God who is continually watching over his children, even when he seems to have abandoned them to their persecutors; he values nothing in comparison with that favor; he prizes it infinitely more than that of a great king, nay, more than the prospect itself of being heir to a throne and kingdom; and, according to the expression of St. Paul, Esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.[*]Heb 11:26

“Not satisfied with being a spectator and a partaker of the misery of his wretched brethren, he resolves to meet the torrent; and, of a witness, hastens to become the avenger of the tyranny under which they groaned. Observing one of the merciless tools of oppression abusing an Israelite, he braves the rigor of all the laws of Egypt, kills the oppressor, delivers the sufferer, and, as we have said in another place, performs an anticipated act of the deliverer of his country.

“Prudence constrains him to withdraw from the danger which threatened the stranger who dared to shed the blood of an Egyptian. He retires into the land of Midian, and there experiences repeated proofs of the care of that miraculous Providence which accompanied him through the whole course of a long life. Cut off from every opportunity of displaying the qualities of the hero, he exhibits those of the philosopher. He employs the calmness of that retreat in contemplating the divine perfections; or rather, in this delicious retirement it was, that he enjoyed the intimate communications of the Almighty, who inspired him, and appointed him to the high destination of laying the first foundations of revealed religion, which was to supply the defects of that of nature, already clouded and disfigured by the prejudices and the passions of mankind. He composed the

book of Genesis; and thereby furnished the world with irresistible arms to combat idolatry. He attacks the two most extravagant errors into which the human race had fallen, the plurality of gods, and that which admits imperfection in the Deity. To the one, and the other, he opposes the doctrine of the unity of an all-perfect Being.

“That God whose existence and attributes he thus published, was pleased to manifest himself to him in mount Horeb in a manner altogether singular and miraculous. He confers on this chosen servant, the glorious but formidable commission to take the field against Pharaoh, to stem the current of oppression, to attempt to mollify the tyrant; and, if persuasion failed, to employ force, to support arguments by prodigies, to exact from all Egypt the expiation of those barbarities which she had dared to exercise upon a people distinguished as the object of his tenderest love, and of his most illustrious miracles.

“This appointment Moses presumes to decline: but from a spirit of humility rather than of disobedience. He could not conceive it possible that, at the age of fourscore, and laboring under a defect of speech, he could be the person qualified to address a mighty prince, and overturn a whole kingdom. The appointment is a second time pressed upon him; a second time he refuses it. At length, however, his reluctance is overcome; and, filled with that Spirit which animated him to the conflict, he enters on the career of glory which was presented to him, and his first victory is a victory over himself. He tears himself from the delights of the land of Midian; he quits the house of a father-in-law, by whom he was most tenderly beloved, to encounter a host of enemies and executioners.

“He arrives in Egypt. He presents himself before Pharaoh: he entreats; he threatens; he draws down upon the Egyptians plagues the most tremendous. He departs from that kingdom, at the head of a people which had endured in it cruelties the most unexampled. The tyrant pursues him, gains ground, presses hard upon him. Behold him encompassed on every side, by a vast and invincible army, by a ridge of inaccessible mountains, and by the waters of the Red Sea. He rebukes the roaring billows; they instantly become obedient to the man whom the Deity has made, (if the expression be lawful) the depository of his power. The waters were a wall unto them on their right hand and on their left,[*]Exo 14:29 as the sacred historian expresses himself: Moses advances into the wilderness, and, by a continuation of miraculous interposition, he beholds those very waters which had divided, to favor the passage of Israel, closing again, and swallowing up Pharaoh, his court, and his host.

“Delivered, in appearance, from his most formidable enemies, he soon finds he has to maintain a lasting conflict with foes still more formidable, the very people whom he conducted. He discovers in these degenerate sons of Israel every mean and groveling sentiment which a servile state has a tendency to inspire; all the absurdity of weak and capricious minds; all the cowardice, perfidy, and ingratitude of corrupted hearts. With such a race, Moses found himself under the necessity of living in a waste and parched desert, and of struggling there with all the horrors of hunger and thirst, and a total want of every necessary. Exposed to all the insults of an enraged, ungovernable multitude, he is at the same time constrained to act as their intercessor with an offended God. He feels himself called upon to maintain the interests of the divine glory with a stiffnecked and perverse nation: and to plead the cause of that very nation with Deity, provoked to execute righteous judgment on a race of men who were continually disposed to insult his authority, and to

degrade his perfections, by associating him with the infamous idols of the Pagan world.

“Moses had sometimes the felicity of averting the divine displeasure, and of restraining the madness of the people. But more frequently he endured the mortification of seeing the inefficacy of all his well-meant efforts. The violence of the people bore down all opposition; and offended Heaven turned a deaf ear to the voice of his supplication. Divine justice vindicated its rights; Israel felt its severest strokes, and twenty-four thousand[*]Num 25:9 fall at one stroke.

“The most awful chastisements have proved equally ineffectual with the tenderest expostulations, to bring them back to a sense of their duty. And as if Moses had been responsible for the calamities which they had brought upon themselves, by their reiterated crimes, they talk of stoning him. They propose to appoint a commander to conduct them back to Egypt, from whence God had delivered them by a strong hand and a stretched-out arm: they prefer an inglorious servitude to the miraculous protection afforded them in the wilderness, and to all the prospects of the fair inheritance which God had promised to bestow upon them.

“In a state of such anxiety and distress, Moses passed forty complete years, and conducted, at length, the remains of this people to the borders of the promised land. Was ever life so singularly eventful? Was ever hero signalized by so many extraordinary exploits?

“If we go into a more particular detail of his great actions, we meet with a bright display of every shining virtue.

“What magnanimity! Witness the armies he so successfully commanded; witness the crown and kingdom of Egypt despised, rejected, when put in competition with the obligations and prospects of religion.

“What firmness! Witness his undaunted addresses, and his animated replies to Pharaoh. Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go, that they may serve me.[*]Exo 8:1We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go; there shall not be an hoof left behind. Thou hast spoken well, I will see, thy face again no more.[*]Exo 10:9;Exo 10:26;Exo 10:29

“What fervor! Witness these hands lifted up to heaven, while Israel was lighting against Amalek. Witness these ardent prayers in behalf of the rebellious Israelites: ‘Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt, with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swearest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of, will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever.’[*]Exo 32:11-13

“What charity! Witness these forcible expressions: Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt, forgive their sin: and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou halt written.[*]Exo 32:31-32

“What gentleness! Witness what is said of him, Num 12:3. Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.

“What earnest desire to draw supplies of grace and truth immediately from their source! Witness these ardent aspirations of soul after God: If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. I beseech thee, show me thy glory.[*]Exo 33:15;Exo 33:18

“What zeal for the glory of God! Witness the tables of the law broken in pieces at the sight of a people who had rendered themselves unworthy of receiving marks so tender of the love of God. Witness that rigorous order issued to the sons of Levi: ‘Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.’[*]Exo 32:27 Witness his answer to Joshua, when he expressed an apprehension lest the prophetic gifts bestowed on Eldad and Medad should eclipse the glory of his master: ‘Enviest thou for my sake, would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them!’[*]Num 11:29

“What perseverance! Witness those exhortations; and that sacred song, with which he concluded his ministrations and his life.

“But where was perfect virtue ever to be found? Moses too had his infirmities. In a life so long, however, and so peculiarly circumstanced, who is chargeable with faults so slight and so few? His very errors seem to partake of the nature of virtue. The darker shades of his character become perceptible from the contrast they form with a whole life so bright and luminous. That he should shrink back, at first, from the proposal of an embassy to the king of Egypt; that he should neglect, for a season, from certain domestic considerations, the circumcision of a child; that he should be slow of belief respecting the disposition of a righteous God to extract water miraculously from the rock, to supply the wants of a murmuring generation; that he should strike the rock a second time, rather from indignation against the rebels, than from distrust of God in whom compassions flow.--These undoubtedly are blemishes, nay, offences which God might punish with death, were he strict to mark iniquity; but, when human infirmity is taken into the account, they are faults that excite pity rather than indignation.

“Should any part of the eulogium we have pronounced on Moses seem exaggerated, we shall add, to all the honorable traits under which we have represented him, one infinitely more glorious still, traced by the hand of God himself, who best knows how to appreciate merit and distribute praise, and which exalts our prophet far above all human panegyric: There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face: in all the signs and the wonders which the Lord sent him to doin the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land, and in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses showed in the sight of all Israel.” This truly great man died in the year of the world two thousand five hundred and fifty-three; and before the birth of Jesus Christ one thousand four hundred and fifty-one; eight hundred and ninety-seven years after the flood; and before the building of Solomon’s temple four hundred and forty; in the fortieth year from the Exodus, or departure of Israel from Egypt; and of his own age the one hundred and twentieth. Before his death, he uttered a clear and distinct prediction of the Messiah, which, in “the fulness of time,” was exactly accomplished; and he appeared in person on mount Tabor to lay all his glory and honor at the feet of the Savior of the world. We shall have finished our plan, after we have suggested a few reflections on this prediction of Moses, and on this his appearance, in company with Elias, to do homage to the Son of God,--“the Author and

Finisher of our faith.” To Him “be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

090. Moses--The Model Prophet

Moses--The Model Prophet

Deu 18:15-18. Acts 3:22. The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken. According to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb, in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither lot me see this great fire any more that I die not. And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. In the frame and course of nature, who does not perceive evident marks of wisdom in design, order in execution, energy in operation? All is plan, system, harmony. Everything bespeaks a Being provident, omnipotent, unremittingly attentive: whose works, indeed, infinitely exceed our comprehension; but which by their beauty, simplicity, and usefulness, fill the mind with wonder and delight, while their variety, luster, magnificence, and immensity astonish and overwhelm. The government of the world, it is equally evident, is the result of contrivance; it evinces a constant, superintending care. Event arises out of event, link runs into link. What to the first glance appeared an assemblage of scattered fragments, is found on a more careful and attentive inspection, to be a regular, beautiful, well proportioned fabric, a “body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part.”

It must be pleasing to every serious mind to observe in the work of redemption a similar uniformity of design, progress, and execution. We find patriarchs, prophets, apostles remote from, unknown to one another, at different ages, in different regions, declaring the same purpose, promoting the same plan, aiming at the same end. This affords a presumption, at least, that he who made, upholds, and governs the universe, is likewise the Author of salvation; in all whew works and ways a noble and important end is obviously kept to view; and that end pursued and attained by means the wisest end the best. The Mosaic and Christian are not separate, unconnected, independent dispensations, but corresponding and harmonious members of the same great building of God. Nature and grace have one source, one date; they proceed in a parallel direction, they are hastening to one common consummation. Or to speak more properly, the system of external nature and the scheme of redemption are the well-adjusted, the harmonized parts of the one great plan of eternal Providence, which contains the whole purpose of the glorious Creator concerning man--his first formation, his present state and character, and his final destination.

Turn up the inspired volume at whatever page you will, and you have a person, or an event, or a service, or a prediction unfolding, in one form or another, the merciful “purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, that we should be to the praise of his glory.” Transport yourself in thought to whatever period of the world you will, and you still find the gospel

preached; whether in the sacrifice of righteous Abel, the translation of Enoch, the ark of Noah, the promise made to Abraham, the predictions of dying Jacob; from the seat of Moses, the throne of David, the dungeon of Jeremiah. They all speak an uniform language, all give witness to the same person, all disclose their own peculiar portion of the gospel treasure, for the illumination of an ignorant, the reformation of a corrupted, the salvation of a perishing world. The writings of Moses exhibit a singular display of this grand combined plan. He traces nature up to her birth, and instructs as “how the heavens and earth rose out of chaos.” He conducts us through the mazes of the moral government of the Great Supreme, and there too unfolds wild uproar reduced to order, and “the wrath of man working the righteousness of God.” He draws aside the curtains of the night, and “the dayspring from on high” dawns on fallen humanity. He attends us through the morning of that bright day, and, constrained at length to retire, leaves behind him the assurance, that “the fulness of the time” would come, that “the morning light” would advance with growing splendor unto “the perfect day.” He presents to our astonished eyes the vast, the complicated, the beautiful machine; wheel within wheel put in motion, preserving from age to age its steady majestic tenor, with native, unwearied, undiminished, force; referring us still to its divine Author, who made and upholds all “by the word of his power,” and for whose “pleasure they are and were created.”

Moses not only in what he wrote, but in what he was and acted, illustriously displayed the grace of God in the redemption of the world. Not only did he write and testify concerning the great Deliverer, but his person, his character, his offices, were a pre-figuration of “Him who was to come,” and to whom “all the prophets give witness.” The prediction which has been read, and the pointed application made of it by the apostles to their divine Master, constitute the proof of what we have just advanced. Moses, under the direction of the spirit of prophecy, raises the expectation of mankind to the appearance of a prophet, like, indeed, but far superior to himself; and the apostles point with the finger to Jesus of Nazareth, saying, “We have found him of whom Moses, in the law, and the prophets did write.” A limited creature, of threescore years and ten, is lost in the contemplation of a period of fifteen hundred and eleven years, for such was the distance of this prophecy from its accomplishment. The short-lived creature loses sight of it, feels his interest in it but small, is at little pains to transmit the knowledge of it to those who shall come after him; the next generation it is neglected, overlooked, forgotten; or, if observed and recollected, is misunderstood, misapplied. But during every instant of the extended period, the eternal eye has been watching over it; in solemn silence attending its progress, triumphing over both neglect and opposition; and a slumbering world is roused at length to see and to acknowledge the truth and faithfulness, the power, wisdom, and grace of the, Most High. The day of Moses then, in the eye of God, runs down to that of Christ; as his, in return, ascends to the earliest of the promises and predictions, illuminating, quickening, confirming, fulfilling all that is written. Placed at whatever point of the system of nature, whether on our own planet or on any other, to the north, or to the south, in summer, or winter, the eye is still attracted to the common center of all, the great “Light of the world.” In like manner, at whatever distance we are placed, and in whatever direction we contemplate the system which redeeming love has framed, from under the shade of the tree of life in Eden, from the summit of Ararat, Moriah, or Pisgah, in the plain of Mamre, or from a pinnacle of the temple; with Abraham, viewing the Savior and his day afar off, or with Simeon embracing him, the same “Sun of righteousness” sheds his glory around us; we sec the light, we feel the influence of him who quickeneth and enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world. As we find, Moses plainly and unequivocally referring men to Christ, so the Savior as explicitly refers to Moses for a

testimony concerning himself; thereby plainly insinuating, that if the Jewish prophet deserved any credit, possessed any respectability, this credit, this respectability were ministering servants to the dignity of his own person, the sacredness of his character, the divinity of his mission. And this is accompanied with a severe denunciation of judgment against such as admitted the authority of Moses, but rejected that of Christ; to introduce, recommend, and confirm which was the end for which Moses was raised up. “Do not think I will accuse you to the Father; there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?”

Thus reciprocal testimony, therefore, of the founders of the ancient and new economy, throws light on both, and communicates mutual credibility and importance. Moses satisfies himself with simply delivering the prediction which he had in charge; he forms no plan, enters into no arrangement to bring it into effect, but leaves to Providence the care of leading forward to the accomplishment, in the proper time and method. Christ simply points to what was written, and was generally known, received, and respected as a revelation from heaven, and requires to be believed and obeyed no farther than he bore the characters under which Moses had announced him; particularly that of “the great Prophet which should come into the world.” The proper character of a prophet is to communicate the special will of Heaven to men. God, indeed, writes his will on the mind of every man, as he comes into the world; interweaves it with the very constitution and frame of his being, so that, in truth, every man is a law, is a prophet to himself. But the characters are quickly erased, effaced; education, example, superstition, vicious propensities, obliterate the writing of God; habit and the commerce of the world harden the heart, and lull the conscience asleep, and “the hearts of men are set in them to do evil.” Hence the necessity of a prophet, of a messenger, of a minister from heaven, to republish the original law, to restore the obliterated characters, to call men back to God from whom they have revolted. And such an one was Moses; raised up of God at a period of singular darkness and depravity, divinely commissioned to promulgate the royal law. Not to settle a different, a novel constitution, not to new-model human nature, but to revive and enforce the primitive constitution, to proclaim in the ear what nature whispered from the beginning, to hung up the conspicuous tablet before the eye, whose contents are the exact counterpart of what the finger of, God, in the very formation of man, engraved on “the living tables of the heart.” And when Christ came, the Prophet after his similitude, was it not in like manner to rebuild what was broken down, not to rear a totally different edifice? to magnify the law and make it honorable, to clear it from misinterpretation and perversion, to restore it to its native purity and simplicity, and to extract the spirit out of the letter? “Think not,” says he, “that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”[*]Mat 5:17-18 This confirms the observation we have been all along endeavoring to inculcate respecting the uniformity and perseverance of the divine procedure. Men start from purpose to purpose, from pursuit to pursuit; they lose sight, they the of their object; they waste their strength, they are discouraged by opposition, they began to build before they counted the cost. But “known to God are all his works from the beginning.” He forms his plan, and undeviatingly pursues it. “I am the Lord, I change not.” He lays his foundation, and it standeth sure, and the building rises; “he willeth, and none can let it.” “God made man upright;” and to maintain or restore that uprightness is his great aim and end, under every dispensation of his providence, under the law and the gospel, by Moses and by Christ. A prophet must have the necessary qualifications for his office, must be instructed in the

mind of God, be filled with zeal for his glory, be animated with ardent love to mankind, be fortified against the assaults and opposition of ignorance, and prejudice, and envy. And such an one was Moses, “whom the Lord knew face to face,” with whom he conversed as a man with his friend; his zeal was inextinguishable; for the good of Israel he was ready to make the sacrifice of self; his meekness was unruffled, his patience not to be subdued, his perseverance indefatigable, his resolution undaunted. How much more eminently conspicuous were these characters of a prophet, in the great “Author and Finisher of the Christian faith?” The only begotten Son who is “in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him;” “the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” “I came not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.” “The cup which my Father giveth me, shall I not drink it?” “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”[*]Mat 3:17

Moses conversed forty days with God in the mount; but thus saith untreated Wisdom, “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old: I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning or ever the earth was;” “before Abraham was, I am.” “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”[*]John 1:1;John 1:4 The spirit of Moses was sometimes stirred within him; he dashed the tables of the law to the ground, “he spake unadvisedly with his lips;” he incurred the displeasure of his heavenly Father, he drew down a sentence of just condemnation upon his head; but the spirit of the Christian Leader was in no one instance discomposed. “He did no sin, neither was guile found in his lips.” He suffered indeed and died, but it was without a crime, “the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God.” Moses expressed a willingness to be blotted out of God’s book, to be deprived of his personal right as a son of Israel, provided Israel might receive the remission of sin, have their rights preserved, and the covenant of promise be confirmed. But Christ became “a curse for us,” was “hanged on a tree,” was cut off from the land of the living,” became “a propitiation for sin,” “bare our sins in his own body on the tree,” “became sin for us, though he knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” A prophet must exhibit the signs of his mission. Men will not believe him on his own report, will suspect him of attention to his own fame, or interest, or authority. To prove therefore that he came from God, that he speaks in his name, that he is vested with his authority, he must do the works of God. And thus was Moses commissioned and permitted to prove his mission. By sign upon sign he demonstrated that the Lord had appeared unto him, and spake by him; earth, and water, and air bore their united testimony to his divine legation; and the most enlightened nation of the globe was made to feel his ascendant by arguments addressed at once to the senses and the understanding. Is it needful to say that the great Prophet, “Apostle, and High Priest of our profession,” by similar means, by more irresistible evidence, evinced that he was “a teacher sent from God?” I shall say nothing respecting the greater number, variety, and notoriety of Christ’s miracles; though everyone of these circumstances furnishes ample matter of discussion; I satisfy myself at present with mentioning two particulars which strikingly establish Christ’s prophetic character, and give it a clear and decided superiority to that of Moses. The latter acted by a delegated authority according to a prescribed form; he assumed nothing to himself, but was checked, reproved, condemned, the moment he presumed to arrogate independence, to speak or act for himself. But Jesus Christ wrought miracles in his own name, by his own power, as the Lord of nature, as possessed of independent sovereignty. Again, the signs which Moses exhibited were of a mixed nature, they declared both the mercy and judgment of God, they poured down hail, and

tempest, and pestilence on Egypt, as well as dropped manna on the tents of Israel; whereas the sins which Jesus adduced in support of his mission were all miracles of mercy; the powers of hell alone felt the rod of his anger; and the miracles by which he confirmed his doctrine, breathed its meekness, and gentleness, and charity.

“Of the things which have been spoken this is the sum: we have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man.”[*]Heb 8:1-2 “Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honor than the house. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a sop over his own house: whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.”[*]Heb 3:1-6 “We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that beard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?”[*]Heb 2:1-4 “He that despised Moses’ law, died without mercy, under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?”[*]Heb 10:28-29

Having now, in the course of these exercises, through a series of years, endeavored to trace the history of mankind, in a series of characters, from Adam to Moses, copied from the original portraits which the pencil of inspiration has itself vouchsafed to delineate; the whole in general, and everyone in particular, referring themselves to one great Original, from whom their meaning, use, and importance are derived,--I hasten to conclude my plan, by turning over to the gospel history, which exhibits that same Moses, whom we saw expire on mount Nebo, and “buried in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-Peor;” whose dying benediction yet trembles on our ear, and whose funeral elegy we attempted to sing, alive again on mount Tabor, and giving personal testimony and homage to him whom he prefigured and foretold. The history of Moses is not properly ended till then; and in vanishing from our sight on the mount of transfiguration, he becomes a glorious harbinger of the “life and immortality which are brought to light by the gospel.”

091. Moses--Transfiguration

Moses--Transfiguration

Luk 9:28-35. And it came to pass about eight days after these sayings, he took Peter, and John, and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was while and glistering. And behold there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and they that were with him, were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him. And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said. While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son, hear him. In the narrowness of their conceptions and the presumptuousness of their pride, men are apt to consider themselves as the only, or, at least, the chief inhabitants of the creation of God. A false patriotism, or rather a spirit of insolence and selfishness has gone farther, has ascribed the consequence of a whole universe to some insignificant little region or district of this little globe, and has represented the men who breathe on such a spot, and converse in such a language, as the only persons who are worthy of consideration. We reflect not, what a speck our own country is, compared with the whole earth; what a point the earth is, compared to the vast solar system; and how the solar system itself is lost in the contemplation of infinite space. We reflect not on the myriads of “just men made perfect,” from the death of “righteous Abel,” down to the expiring saint, whose disengaged spirit is just now on the wing to the bosom of his God; of those who, lost to us, yet live to their Creator. We reflect not on the myriads of, probably, more glorious beings, who people the greater and more glorious worlds which surround ours. We reflect not on the myriads of pure spirits who never left their first estate, that innumerable company of angels who “excel in strength,” “the least of whom could wield these elements”

Sound reason and “the wisdom which is from above” correct our narrowness of thought and pride of heart; and teach us to say, in the words which our immortal bard puts in the mouth of Adam, first of men, addressed to his fair consort--

----“Nor think, tho’ men were none,

That heaven would want spectators, God want praise,

Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth,

Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep;

All these with ceaseless praise his works behold,

Both day and night.”

If our ears were not dull and limited as our spirits--

----“How often, from the steep

Or echoing hill or thicket should we hear,

Celestial voices to the midnight air,

Sole, or responsive each to other’s note,

Singing their great Creator? Oft in hands,

While they keep watch, or nightly rounding walk,

With heavenly touch of instrumental sounds,

In full harmonic number join’d, their songs

Divide the night, and lift our thoughts to heaven.”

We foolishly imagine the world of spirits to be at a vast distance, whereas in truth we are upon its very confines. We consider its inhabitants as entire strangers to us, whereas they are constantly about our path and our bed, attending our going out and coming in, our lying down and rising up. If our eyes were not held, we should even now behold them joining in and assisting our praises, rejoicing together, when, by the ministry of the word of divine grace, sinners are converted, and saints edified. Little did the three disciples think, when they ascended mount Tabor, that they were so near to an interview with Moses and Elias. Moses, and Elias, and Christ are not far from us; it is our folly and infirmity to think ourselves far from them. When we look back to the latter end of Moses, the man of God, we attend him up to mount Nebo, and behold him taking from Pisgah a last look and a last farewell of the glory of this world. We see his eyes closing in peace, and breathe a sigh over his tomb, and bid him a long farewell, and think we have lost him for ever. But it is not an everlasting adieu. On Tabor we have found him again, after a lapse of fifteen centuries; we find not only his name, his memory, his writings, his predictions, his spirit, alive and in force, but his very person, still employed in ministering to the salvation of the Israel of God; and hence we look forwards to the lapse of a few years more, at the expiration of which we hope to meet him indeed, not armed with that fiery law which condemns and consumes, but a minister and a fellow-partaker of that grace which redeems and saves.

We cannot consider ourselves therefore as having yet concluded the history of Moses, while that memorable event of it, which is the subject of this evening’s reading, remains unconsidered; and, as the evangelic page has exhibited him to us alive from the dead, let us devoutly attend to the reason and end of this glorious apparition. It naturally suggests to us the following reflections:

I. That Jehovah is, with undeviating, undiverted, undivided attention, carrying on the great plan of his providence, to full maturity, by every order of beings, in every possible state: by those who cheerfully enter into his views, and joyfully submit to his will; and by those who carelessly neglect or proudly oppose it. We have seen him serving himself of this Moses in the court of Pharaoh, in the pastures of Midian, in the wilderness of Sinai; as a prophet, as a legislator, as an historian. And, to fit him for a new field of action, behold him shining in a new and glorious form. The grave seems to have surrendered up its trust, heaven has yielded up one of its inhabitants, and Moses is

now admitted into a land from which he was once shut out. In this world we have still to deplore faculties wasting, impairing, extinguished; usefulness interrupted, cut off in the midst, by the stroke of death, the earth impoverished by the premature departure of wisdom and worth. The history of mankind exhibits projects blasted, schemes abortive, instruments feeble and inadequate, concussions violent, revolutions sudden and unexpected; but far different the view which the Scriptures represent of the kingdom of God. In it, one generation passeth not away that another may succeed, but there is an eternal accumulation of citizens, eternally increasing in wisdom, goodness, and felicity; faculties ever improving, projects advancing in full certainty of success, means fitted to their end, and the one great scheme of the Eternal Mind proceeding in steady, uniform majesty, to its final consummation. Pleasing, awful thought! “The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.”[*]Psa 33:11

II. We observe, from this history, The benevolent interest which celestial beings take in the affairs of men. They are no unconcerned spectators of what passes here below. They who have been raised from earth to heaven, have not lost all recollection of the world they have left, nor dropped all concern about their brethren in the flesh. Moses and Elias with joy revisit an inferior region, if thereby they can be instrumental in promoting the work of redemption; and exchange, for a season, the society of angels, and the delights of the paradise of God, for the company of simple fishermen, and a barren mountain’s top, that we might have strong consolation in contemplating “the sufferings of Christ,” and the glory that preceded and followed. O what an exalted, what a generous spirit does true religion breathe and inspire! It makes angels “ministering spirits to them who are the heirs of salvation;” it brings departed saints back to earth again; it converts Tabor into Heaven, and determines the choice of an apostle, when in a strait betwixt two; and to prefer abiding in the flesh, because more needful to his fellow-creatures, to the selfish joy, though far better, of departing and being with Christ. But Moses, and Elias, and Paul were themselves men, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, were instructed by sympathy to commiserate, and prompted by affection to relieve, human wretchedness. Behold an infinitely greater miracle of generous, disinterested love; “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”[*]John 3:16 Jesus, “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.”[*]Rev 1:5-6 “Verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.”[*]Heb 2:16 “As children are 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.”[*]Heb 2:14-15

III. The history before us suggests, The sweet harmony, the perfect intelligence which subsist between glorified spirits. Moses and Elias, as they co-operated in the same design, though at different periods upon earth, much more concur in sentiment, in exertion, now they see more clearly and comprehend more fully the intentions of a wise and gracious Providence. Through ignorance, through pride, through jealous, through malice, imperfect men on earth will differ, will hate and oppose each other; but in celestial bosoms the dark, malignant, unsocial passions find no place: in them there ever prevails unity of intelligence, unity of design, unity in operation, unity of affection. Prompted by the same motive, aiming at the same end, Gabriel, a multitude of the heavenly host, Moses and Elias--angels single, and in bands, announce to the world the advent of

the Savior, celebrate his birth, witness his transfiguration, relieve his agony, record his death, declare his resurrection from the dead, grace his ascent to heaven, proclaim his second coming. And O what must be that harmony and joy! the harmony and joy of heaven, where angels and archangels, the cherubim and the seraphim, patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, and the whole multitude of the redeemed, animated by one spirit, adore the same object, rejoice in the same grace wherein they stand, and join in the same triumphant song!

Connect with this, the idea of the quick and perfect intelligence which subsists between the children of this kingdom. The happiness of heaven is a social, not a solitary joy. But how can the poverty of our imagination, the coldness of our affections, conceive the intimacy of intercourse, the promptness of communication, the sympathy of feeling, in pure spirits wholly disposed to love, and free from all desire or design to disguise, to deceive, to conceal!

“Where friendship full exerts her softest pow’r,

Perfect esteem enliven’d by desire

Ineffable, and sympathy of soul,

Thought meeting thought, and will preventing will,

With boundless confidence.”--Thomson. With what promptitude and intelligence celestial beings converse, say, ye gentle spirits, who know what it is to soothe and relieve the lazy, lingering hours of absence by the friendly aid of letters; ye, whom the murmur of a sigh, or the tone of a single word can instantly instruct; ye, whose hearts the pressure of a finger can awake to rapture; ye, whose kindred, congenial souls the slightest glance of the impassioned eye, can, in a moment, quick, as the lightning’s flash, penetrate, kindle, inform, assimilate;--

“----Ye whom the sudden tear

Surprises often when you look around,

And nothing strikes your eye but sights of bliss.”--Thomson. But the purest human affection is ever dashed with doubt, with apprehension, with suspicion; its communications are liable to be retarded by dullness, prevented by accident, or checked and blasted by a malignant eye, and therefore can at best convey but an imperfect idea of that “perfect love which casteth out fear,” of that divine sympathy which speeds the holy intercourse from soul to soul, of that mutual understanding which needs not the medium of sense to convey it. Though we cannot conceive, much less describe, in what manner angels and saints in bliss converse one with another, yet from the text we know, what is the one, great, darling theme of their conversation. Moses and Elias descend from their heavenly thrones, from before the fountain of light and life, appear in glory, revisit the earth, associate with men, to do homage at the feet of Jesus, and to “speak of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.” This leads to a

IVth, and the most important remark, on this passage of our Savior’s history, in connection with that of Moses, namely, That under every dispensation, before the giving of the law, and under its reign, when it was restored, and after it is abolished; to righteous men on earth, to just men made perfect, to the angels of God; in the eye of God himself,--there is one object of peculiar magnitude and importance, which is before all, above all, runs through all, and in which all shall finally

terminate. It is surely not without a meaning, that the promises, the predictions, from first to last, point out a Savior that should suffer and die; that all the types, services, sacrifices of the law should represent a salvation that was to be wrought out, to be purchased with blood; that the whole doctrine of the gospel should be compressed into one point, the doctrine of the Cross; that the throne of God eternal in the heavens should exhibit at its right hand, and in the midst of it, “a Lamb as it had been slain;” that the song of the redeemed should celebrate Him who loved the sons of men, and “washed them from their sins in his blood!” O the infatuation of a careless, unbelieving world! That subject which the ransomed of the Lord dwell upon with ever new and increasing delight; that great “mystery of godliness,” which “angels desire to look into;” that object which the great God has marked with special precision as his own; the wonder of Heaven, the joy of the earth, the theme of eternity, was “to the Jews a stumblingblock, and to the Greeks foolishness;” is to a faithless and perverse generation a thing of nought, the song of the drunkard, the jest of fools! If that blood has fallen and lies with such oppressive weight, both as a temporal and a spiritual curse on those who rashly imprecated it on themselves and their children, and then impiously and remorselessly shed it; “of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?”[*]Heb 10:29 May that blood be upon us, and upon our children, to cleanse, not to condemn, to exalt, not to overwhelm us, and be it our determinate resolution, through the grace that is in Christ, to know nothing in comparison of Christ Jesus, and him crucified, “and to glory in nothing but his cross.”

V. Observe, the superiority ascribed, by a voice from the most excellent glory, to Christ the Lord, swallowing up and eclipsing all created excellency and perfection. “This is my beloved Son, hear him,”[*]Luk 9:35 proclaims the voice, and instantly Moses and Elias disappear, that Jesus may be all in all. They have brought their glory and honor and laid it at his feet; they have pointed out to mankind in whose light they shine, in what consists their chief eminence and distinction. They in effect say the same thing with John Baptist; “He that cometh after me is preferred before me, whose shoes’ latchet I am not worthy to unloose.”[*]John 1:27 “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”[*]John 1:29 They in us to look toward them, or to trust in them for salvation. Having given this testimony to their Lord and ours, they retire to that world of bliss into which they found admission through that blood which cleanseth from all sin, through that decease which Christ was ready “to accomplish at Jerusalem.” Let us joyfully bend the knee to Him, who, “for the suffering of death, is crowned with glory and honor, and has obtained a name that is above every name;” whom Moses and Elias acknowledge as their greater; whom all the angels of God are commanded to worship, as “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature,” “by whom were created all things 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.”[*]Col 1:16

Finally, the passage exhibits to our wondering eyes a glimpse of that glory which all the faithful shall finally attain; in the person of one who had never tasted death; whose body, by a miracle of Almighty power, was fitted for heaven and immortality without seeing corruption in the grave; and of one, who, as we must, died and was buried, and by a similar miracle, was either ransomed from the power of the grave, or whose glorified spirit was fitted with a temporary vehicle of transparent

flesh for the present grand occasion; but above all, in the person of the greatest of the three, who was pleased to clothe humanity, which had not yet, but soon was to suffer death, with a transitory glory, the forerunner of that which should quickly follow, and do away all the ignominy of the tomb, and become, the sure pledge of that glory with which he shall invest all them that believe, after "the fashion of his own glorious body." While we contemplate mount Tabor, the immortal spirit looks through the frail tottering fabric of flesh and blood, in which it is inclosed; and while, from its present connection, it surveys with concern the inroads of disease, the wastes of time, the approaches of dissolution; from the visions of God, from the power of free sovereign grace, from the present attainments of the faithful, beholds with rapture the splendor of that vehicle in which it shall ascend "to meet the Lord in the air," when "mortality shall be swallowed up of life," when it shall be united to a body insusceptible of pain, undepressed by its own gravity, unfettered by the laws of dull matter, uncondemned to mortality. Glorious and blessed day, when the meanest of the saints shall resemble Moses, not in that green and lively old age which experienced not dimness of eyes, nor abatement of natural vigor, but in that renovated youth, that unfading beauty, that impassive strength, that immortal luster, wherein on the mount of the Lord he was seen; and shall resemble Elias, not by mounting with the help of a chariot of fire and horses of fire into heaven, but with native force, immediately derived from the great Source of life and motion, shall spontaneously ascend up to his native seat; shall resemble Christ, his divine head, not in that sinless infirmity to which he voluntarily submitted in the days of his flesh, but in that glory which he had with the Father before the world was, and which for a moment burst forth on the mount of transfiguration, when "his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." Glorious and blessed gospel! which first taught the resurrection from the dead, which has "abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light;" whose "exceeding great and precious promises" make men "partakers of a divine nature;" whose hallowed page represents saints and angels quitting their heavenly abode to minister to the necessities of wretched mortals; and wretched mortals rising to the everlasting possession of heavenly thrones. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory!" "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."[*]1Co 15:57 But now the curtain is dropped, Moses and Elias have resumed their places in heaven, and the glory of Tabor is no more. Yet, though unseen, they cease not to instruct us. Though withdrawn, they are in the midst of us still; the distinction of past and future they feel no longer, and separation by space cannot keep celestial beings asunder. Providence brought together into one place the giver and restorer of the law; and the first harbingers of the gospel blending earth and heaven together in homage to the Son of God. And all distance between them too is now for ever done away. Remote as we are, we behold them together in a state of glorious perfection, but permitted to converse with us no more. But He is with us still, their Lord and ours; His voice we can still hear, after they are silenced, and Him we are commanded to hear. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever:" "To Him all the prophets gave witness," and he is "the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth." And thus have we finished our proposed delineation of the lives of the, patriarchs, from Adam, the father of the human race, down to Moses, the great legislator and prophet of the Hebrew nation; with the intermediate illustrious personages, whom the Spirit of God has preserved from oblivion, for our information and use; whom Providence raised up in the earlier ages of the world, to occupy distinguished stations, and to accomplish important designs; who, by their respective characters, offices, and declarations, predicted or prefigured the Messiah; who edified the world, while they

lived, by their doctrine and example; and who, being dead, continue living monitors and instructors of mankind.

While we contemplate the progress of these venerable figures along the plain of existence, we feel ourselves in motion, we are hurrying down the stream, we begin to mingle with the assembly of the departed, we leave our place among men empty. Of those who entered with us on this career of meditation, “some are not;” their course is finished, they have fulfilled their day, they are gone to join the men who lived beyond the flood. The cold hand of death has frozen up some of the streams of friendship; the congelation is gaining upon our own vital powers, and marking us for the tomb, where the endearments of social affection, and the melting of sympathy, and the glow of love, are felt no more. But “we sorrow not” over departed worth “as those who have no hope.” God, and angels, and “the spirits of just men made perfect,” have gained what the world has lost: they move in a higher sphere; they perceive with purer intelligence, act with superior energy, enjoy with more exalted capacity; they die no more, they are as the angels of God in heaven: and Providence charges itself with the care of the forsaken, the helpless and the forlorn whom they have left behind. And we look forward together to that day, when we shall join Moses and Elias, Peter and James, and John, and all who have died before us, or shall die after us in the Lord, not in the glory of Tabor, which was to pass away, but of mount Zion which is above, and which endureth to endless ages--when we shall come together “unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel,”[*]Heb 12:22-24 and dwell in a tabernacle not erected by the hands of man, the habitation of an hour, but in “a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Be ye therefore “followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Purchase for yourselves a deathless name among the “ransomed of the Lord.” Consider yourselves as encompassed, observed, tenderly regarded by those to whom you were dear while they tabernacled among men, and who now love you with the ardor of immortals. Add to the consolation which they enjoy, that of marking your progress in wisdom, your growth in grace. Cultivate acquaintance with the language you are to speak, the spirit you are to breathe, the manners with which you are to conform, the persons with whom you are to converse, eternally. “Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”[*]Heb 12:1-2 “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself; even as he is pure.”[*]1Jn 3:2-3

Chapter 92

092. Deborah to Hannah: Volume VI

Deborah to Hannah

Volume VI

093. The Help Meet for Him

The Help Meet for Him Gen 2:18. And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make him an help meet for him. The holy Scriptures always exhibit the most simple and the justest view of every subject which they treat. And what subject of importance to man do they not treat? The God who made us what we are, formed man after a model, destined him for a special situation, and to fulfill a specific purpose. His faculties, his relations, his duties, his demands, his delights, were all, from the beginning, present to the eye of his Creator: and a corresponding arrangement and provision were made by Him, who seeth the end from the commencement, and who exactly adjusts all, according to number, weight, and measure. The perfection of the works of God, is a beautiful and gradual progress toward perfection: from inanimate to vegetative, from vegetative to animal, from animal to rational nature; each approaching to, bordering upon each, but everyone circumscribed by a boundary which it cannot pass, to disturb, and confound the province of another. The scale of being, as to this globe, was complete when God had “created man in his own image.” But social existence was not perfect till it pleased God to draw man out of solitude, by making him “an help meet for him.” This simply, yet clearly, unfolds woman’s nature, station, duty, use, and end. This raises her to her proper rank and importance, and instructs her how most effectually to support them; this forbids her to aspire after rule, for her Maker designed her as “an helper;” this secures for her affection and respect, for how is it possible to hate or despise what God and nature have rendered essential to our happiness. If the intention of the Creator, therefore, is attended to, the respective claims and duties of the sexes are settled in a moment, and an end is put to all unprofitable discussion of superiority and inferiority, of authority and subjection, in those whose destination, and whose duty it is, to be mutually helpful, attentive, and affectionate. The female character and conduct have frequently presented themselves in the course of the history of the Patriarchs. And indeed how can the life of man be separated from that of woman? Their amiable qualities and praiseworthy actions have been occasionally pointed out, and unreservedly, though without adulation, commended; their faults and follies have been, with equal freedom, exposed and censured. But in the instances referred to, female conduct has undergone only an accidental and transient review, in detached fragments, and as supplementary to, or producing influence on, the conduct of man. The pencil of inspiration, however, having introduced persons of the gentler sex into its inimitable compositions; and these not always thrown into the back-ground or placed in the shade, but sometimes springing forward into the light, and glowing in all the brilliancy of coloring, I have been induced, with trembling steps, to follow the heavenly guide; and to follow up the fainter sketches of a Sarah, a Rebekah, a Rachel, a Miriam, with the more finished portraits of “Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth,” “Ruth, the Moabitess,” and “Hannah,” the mother of Samuel the prophet. In order to introduce these with greater advantage, I mean to employ the present Lecture, in giving a general delineation of the female character, as it is represented in the passage now read, and as being the purpose and act of the great Lord of nature, “an help meet for man.” Every creature was intended to yield help to man: the flower, with its beauty and fragrance; the tree, with its nutritious fruit; the animal tribes, with all their powers of ministering satisfaction to the senses or to the mind. Adam

surveyed them all with delight, saw their several characters in their several forms, gave them names, observed and glorified his Creator's perfections displayed in himself, and in them. But still he was alone amidst all this multitude; the understanding was employed, but the heart wanted its object: the tongue could name all that the eye beheld, but there was no tender, sympathetic ear, to which it could say, "how fair, how lovely, how glorious is all this that we behold!" "For Adam there was not found an help meet for him." The want of nature is no sooner perceived by the great Parent of man, than it is supplied; the wish of reason is no sooner expressed than gratified. Paternal care and tenderness even outran and prevent the calls of filial necessity. Adam has felt no void, uttered no complaint, but "the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone I will make hint an help meet for him." And with God, execution certainly and instantaneously follows design. "And 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. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, 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 his mother and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."[*]Gen 2:21-24 How completely suitable an helper God provided for man in a state of sinless perfection transcends imagination, much more description; all that is lovely in form, all that is graceful in manner, all that is exalted in mind, all that is pure in thought, all that is delicate in sentiment, all that is enchanting in conversation. This felicity was made subject to alteration; this harmony was not to continue perfect; but the original intention of the Creator was not to be defeated, no, but even in a state of degradation, difficulty, and distress, as in a state of purity and peace, it was still the destination of Providence, that woman should be "an help meet" for man. In what important respects we are now to inquire. The first and most obvious is, as his counsellor and coadjutor in bringing up their common offspring. Education, on the part of the mother, commences from the moment she has the prospect of being a mother; and the care of her own health is, thenceforth, the first duty which she owes to her child.[*]The instructions given to the wife of Manoah, and mother of Samson the Nazarite, (Jdg 13:4) "Now, therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing," are not merely arbitrary injunctions adapted to a particular branch of political economy, and intended to serve local and temporary purposes; no, they are constitutions of nature, reason, and experience, which unite in recommending to those who have the prospect of being mothers, a strict attention to diet, to exercise, to temper, to everything which, affecting the frame of their own body or mind, may communicate an important, a lasting, perhaps indelible impression to the body or mind of their offspring. A proper regimen for themselves is, therefore, the first stage of education for their children. The neglect of it is frequently found productive of effects which no future culture is able to alter or rectify. From that moment too she becomes in a peculiar sense "an help meet" for man, as being the depositary and guardian of their most precious joint concern. How greatly is her value now enhanced! Her existence is multiplied, her duration, is extended. A man-child is at length born into the world; and what helper so meet for the glad father in rearing the tender babe, as the mother who bare him. There are offices which she, and only she, can perform; there are affections which she, and only she, can feel; there are difficulties which she, and only she, can surmount. Nature has here so happily blended the duty with the recompence, that they cannot be distinguished or separated. In performing every act of maternal tenderness, while she tends and nourishes the body of her infant, she is gradually and insensibly informing his mind. His very first

expressions of look, voice, and gesture, are expressions of the important lessons which his mother has already taught him, attachment, gratitude, a sense of obligation and dependence. Hitherto she is the sole instructor, and “a stranger intermeddleth not with her joy.” The dawning of reason appears; the solicitude of a father awakes; what a task is imposed upon him! Who is sufficient for it? But he is not left to perform it alone. The Lord God has provided him “an help meet for him,” one prompted by duty, drawn by affection, trained by experience, to assist him in the

Delightful task! To rear the tender thought,

To teach the young idea how to shoot,

To pour the fresh instruction o’er the mind,

To breathe th’ enlivening spirit, and to fix

The generous purpose in the glowing breast.--Thomson. Spring, 1748. In the more advanced stages of education, after the pupil is removed from under the maternal wing, of what assistance to the father, of what importance to the child, are the delicate ideas and the tender counsels of a wise and virtuous woman! Read “the words of king Lemuel, the prophecy which his mother taught him,”[*]Pro 31:1-9 and judge whether a mother may be an useful “help,” in instructing a son, a grown son, and that son a prince. In truth, the mother’s influence over the child, as it begins earlier, so it is of much longer duration than the father’s. The son, having become a man, or approaching to that state, begins to feel uneasy under the restraints of paternal authority; he longs to shake the yoke from off his neck; he pants for independence--he must obtain it. But what ingenuous young man ever felt a mother’s yoke galling, or longed for emancipation from the silken fetters in which her gentle fingers had entangled his soul! In the perfection of understanding, in the plenitude of power, in the self-congratuation of independence, to her milder reason he still submits, her unassuming sway he readily acknowledges, and, independent on all things else, he feels he cannot do without the smiles of maternal approbation, the admonitions of maternal solicitude, the reproofs of maternal tenderness and integrity.

Whatever be the dispositions, whatever the faculties of the child, whether earlier or later in life, the business neither of father nor masters can proceed wisely and well, without the co-operation of the mother. Who knows so well as she, the road to the understanding, the road to the heart? Who has still like her, to encourage the timid and repress the bold? Who has power and address like a mother’s, to subdue the stubborn and confirm the irresolute? Who can with such exquisite art draw out, put in motion, and direct ordinary or superior powers; place goodness in its fairest and most attractive light, and expose vice in its most hideous and forbidding form? In the case of those persons who have unhappily grossly deviated from the path of virtue, how many have been stopped, converted, brought back, by considerations of maternal feelings--shame, and sorrow, and regret; and by the recollection of early lessons, and principles, and resolutions. Having been “trained up, when a child, in the way wherein he should walk,” the man calls it to remembrance in old age, approves it, returns to it, and “departs from it” no more. In educating the children of her own sex, the mother seems to be more than “an help meet” for man. The trust chiefly, if not entirely, devolves on her: and where could it be deposited so well? The knowledge she has of herself, experience of the world, and maternal affection, are all she needs to qualify her for this arduous undertaking. A mother only can enter into the feelings, and weaknesses, and necessities

of a young female, entering on an unknown, varying, tempestuous, dangerous ocean; for she remembers how she herself felt and feared, what she needed, and how she was relieved, and assisted, and carried through. And to a mother only can a young female impart the numberless, nameless anxieties which every step she takes in life necessarily excite. When she converses with her mother, it is only thinking aloud. A mother's conduct is the loveliest pattern of virtue, and the hope of a mother's applause is, next to God's, the most powerful motive to imitate it. The superiority of female to male youth in respect of moral, whatever be the case as to intellectual improvement, is clearly deducible from the larger share which the mother has in the education of the one, than of the other. And the more liberal and enlarged spirit of the times we live in, procuring for the female world a more liberal and rational education, is daily evincing to what an equality of intellectual endowment they are capable of rising, and thereby of, in all respects, fulfilling the design of the Creator, who said in the beginning, "I will make for man an help meet for him."

I now proceed to mention a second most important respect, in which it is the obvious intention of Providence that woman should be "an help meet" for man, namely, the care and management of his worldly estate. In a paradisiacal state man did not, and in, what is improperly called, the state of nature, he could not long continue. In the former, there was labor, imposed not as a burden or a punishment, but bestowed as a privilege and a source of delight. The help of woman enhanced the value of that privilege, and improved that delight: and even in paradise, the attention of Eve to the disposal of the fruits of his labor, must have been to the man, an exquisite accession to the pleasure of enjoying them. The arrangement which her taste and care had made, constituted the charm of the repast. In a state of uncultivated nature, the subsistence of the day is man's object. He has no idea of "much goods laid up for many years." But the society and assistance of his rude companion are necessary to give a relish to "what he took in hunting;" and "the burden and heat of the day," he cheerfully encounters, in the prospect of the refreshment and repose of the evening; and even the hut in the desert exhibits the accomplishment of the Creator's purpose, woman "an help meet" for man, managing his scanty portion with discretion, and doubling it by participation. As the state of society advanced, new ideas of property must have been produced. The labor of today began to look forward; "tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow." The care of posterity arose. Permanency must be given to possession. The earth and its produce are parceled out, men "call their lands by their names," "house is joined to house, and field added to field." But could man do this alone? No. In vain have his labor and skill provided "bread enough, and to spare," unless the woman's prudent attention manage that sufficiency, and lay up that surplus, for the evil day which may come. No man ever prospered in the world, without the consent and cooperation of his wife. Let him be ever so frugal, regular, industrious, intelligent, successful--all goes for nothing, if she is profuse, disorderly, indolent, or unfaithful to her trust. His farm prospers, his barn is filled with plenty, "the floors are full of wheat, the fats overflow with wine and oil," his cattle increase, he is waxing rich. His neighbor's commerce thrives, his plants were well laid; Providence smiles; the wings of every wind are wafting to his door, gold, and silver, and precious things. The talents of a third are procuring for him reputation, and distinction, and honor, and wealth. How came they all to fail? Who opened the door, and let poverty rush in as an armed man? The thing speaks for itself. The design of Heaven is defeated; the parties were "unequally yoked;" the "help" found for these men was not "an help meet" for them. Skill was counteracted by carelessness; the fruits of diligence were scattered about by the hand of dissipation; the labors of a year perished in the

sitting of an evening; “by much slothfulness the building decayed, and through idleness of the hands, the house dropped through.” But “O how good a thing it is, and how pleasant,” when the gracious intentions of God and nature are fulfilled? With what spirit and perseverance does a man labor in his vocation, when he knows that his earnings will be faithfully disposed, and carefully improved! With what confidence will he resort to his farm, to his merchandise, fly over land, over the seas, meet difficulty, meet danger, if he has the assurance, that he is not spending his time and strength for nought and in vain; that all is well and safe at home; that indulgent Heaven has crowned all his other blessings, with that of “an help meet for him,” a discreet manager of his estate, a fellow-laborer with him, from interest, from affection, from a sense of duty, in “doing justly,” in seconding the goodness of Divine Providence, in making fair provision for the tune to come, in “providing things honest in the sight of all men!” I conclude this branch of my subject, with a portrait drawn by the pencil of inspiration; may Heaven propagate the resemblance.

“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil, all the days of her life. She seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants’ ships, she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandize is good: her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry: her clothing is silk and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honor are her clothing: and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellent them all. Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.”[*]Pro 31:10-31 A third respect in which God intended that woman should be “an help meet” for man, is the care of his health, and everything connected with it; his tranquillity of mind, his temper, his character, and reputation without which the greatest bodily vigor will quickly decay and sink, and life will cease to be a blessing.

It is pleasant to have a companion in solitude, an assistant in labor, a fellow-partaker in joy. But human life contains varieties painful, as well as pleasant. Sorrow, and pain, and solicitude, and disappointment enter into the history of man; and he is but half provided for the voyage of life, who has found an associate for his happier days only; while for his months of darkness and distress no sympathizing partner is prepared, no “help meet” is found. The provident care of the Almighty meets every wish and want of man; and in bestowing upon him a companion for youth, a sharer in felicity, a partner in property, he was securing for him, at a distance, a friend in age, a solace in affliction, a partner in want--“a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.”

If a man's worldly estate, whether it be much or little, is wisely managed, one foundation of health and comfort is laid; and she who is thus habitually employed, may be considered as administering a perpetual medicine or cordial to her husband. But no prudence of foresight can ward off the attack of disease, or prevent the stroke of calamity; affluence cannot purchase release from pain, nor tenderness cool the fever in the blood, But the sufferer is not left destitute. There is one ear into which he can pour out all his heart; there is one hand ever ready to relieve him; "one life bound up in his life." And as enjoyment derived all its relish from participation, so misery loses all its anguish in the bosom of sympathy and kindness. The spirit of penitence is inferior only to unsullied innocence: and next to the blessing of unimpaired health, and uninterrupted comfort, is the consolation of sickness alleviated, and comfort restored, by the gentle language and engaging offices of love. What shall I say? Is there not, perhaps, in the restoration of repenting guilt, and in the suspension of woe, by the assiduity of affection, a peculiar satisfaction, and a delight, which perfect innocence and perfect health could not possibly have known? The regular temperature of a man's body is, however, only one ingredient in the cup of health. "An help meet for him" will be anxious to preserve a sound mind in a sound body; will endeavor to prevent or dispel painful reflection; will remove disquieting objects; will present smiling images; will watch the ebbing and flowing of passion, will bear and forbear, and, like the best of beings, "will overcome evil with good."

She will likewise consider herself as entrusted with the care of his good name. His reputation is her brightest ornament; his honor is her joy, and crown of rejoicing. If he is disgraced, she is degraded. Every instance of misconduct in her, she knows, glances at him; and therefore to support his dignity is a powerful motive with her to act wisely and well. She reflects, that not only by gross deviations from duty in the wife, does the husband suffer in character, but that levity, indiscretion, carelessness in her, are an imputation upon his understanding, and, in the opinion of the world, incessantly upbraid him with the choice he has made, of "an help meet for him." As she would therefore compassionately nurse his body in pain and sickness; and prudently study and watch his temper, amidst the conflict of contending passions, so, to approve herself what God and nature meant her to be, she will guard his fame, the life of his life, "as her precious eye," and thus, in everything relating both to mental and bodily health, to private comfort and public estimation, "she will do him good, and not evil all the days of her life." But there is somewhat still dearer, still more sacred to a man than children or property, than health or reputation; somewhat which, neglected, forfeited, lost, it "will profit him nothing to gain even the whole world;" and in the securing and promoting of which, who is so qualified to minister and assist as her, whom the Father of mercies gave him, to be "an help meet for him?" I mean,

IV. The salvation of the immortal soul. This is indeed a personal concern; an interest which cannot be transferred or communicated. The good-will of another cannot impart it; the remissness of another cannot defeat it: to God, his great Master, here, every man standeth or falleth, for "everyone must give account of himself to God." But is it not obvious, that example, that reason, that co-operation, possess a mighty influence toward promoting or obstructing personal piety, growth in grace, meekness for the kingdom of heaven? Is the man impressed with the worth, with the danger of his own soul; does he feel "the powers of a world to come;" is his mind turned to devotion; is the love of God shed abroad in his heart? How will such impressions be fixed and strengthened, by endeavoring to communicate them to a beloved object, and by receiving back

the impression, heightened and improved, from that object? How much more exalted and affecting is a sense of divine goodness, when it is beheld embracing more than one! when it is seen conferring immortality, eternity, on virtuous human affections! what a live coal applied to devotion, when the solitary my Father and my God, is changed into the social our Father and our God! How is the hope of glory ennobled, extended, animated, by the prospect of participation! “Here am I, Holy Father, with her whom thou gavest me, to be an help meet for me. We were one in interest and affection; one in the faith of the gospel, and the practice of piety;. our prayers ascended in one stream of incense, and every gift of thy providence and grace was multiplied and sweetened to each by being bestowed on the other. Sweet were our labors of love to our joint offspring; sweet our united efforts to improve the bounty of our common parent; sweet the sympathies of kindred hearts, in sickness and in health, in sorrow and in joy, in good and in bad report; but sweeter far the consolations of religion, the prospect of life and immortality brought to light by the gospel.” We come together to “receive the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls; as, through grace, we have been made helpers of each other’s faith, let us be, eternally, helpers of each other’s joy.” Is the man, unhappily, dead to all sense of religion; swallowed up of time and sense; is his great or only inquiry, “What shall I eat, what shall I drunk, wherewithal shall I be clothed?” Or, more wretched still, is he delivered over “to commit iniquity with greediness,” “and to glory in his shame?” What are the most likely means of awakening him to reflection, of reaching his conscience, of melting his heart, of changing his conduct? Preaching is vain; he turns. “a deaf ear to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely;” prosperity fosters pride and forgetfulness of God; adversity only hardens him the more; reason is perverted, passion has acquired the ascendant, the power of habit predominates: but the Lord God has provided “an help meet for him.” When public instruction and foreign reproof have failed, the mind is still accessible. The unaffected, unostentatious charm of genuine female piety is felt and understood, and becomes efficacious; the silent unupbraiding regret of conjugal tenderness supplies the place of a thousand arguments, and forces its way to the heart; “the effectual fervent prayer” of a gracious woman “availeth much;” the “believing wife” draws to the Redeemer, with the cords of love, “the unbelieving husband;” she becomes the blessed instrument of “converting the sinner from the error of his way, she saves a soul from death, she hides a multitude of sins,” and, in the noblest sense of the word, approves herself “an help meet” for man. In all these important respects, the original design of Eternal Wisdom, in the formation of woman, is plain and palpable. To have fulfilled one branch of duty, and even to have excelled in it, is no exemption from the obligation of the rest. The duties of life and of religion run in a series, one is linked with another, supposes it, cannot be separated from it. To no purpose are children well educated, if through the indolence, folly, or vice of parents, they are launched into the world in doubtful, dishonorable, embarrassed or distressful circumstances. What is it to me, that my fortune is prudently and frugally managed, if my person is neglected, my temper trifled with, my reputation sacrificed, “my good name filched from me?” And what is the acquisition of a world, at the expense of my soul?

Let it be understood and remembered, that every word which has been said of the obligation laid on woman, as “an help meet” for man, applies with at least equal propriety and force, to man, as the helper and friend of woman. Does he possess superiority of any kind? It is evidently intended not to oppress, but to support. His greater strength is given for her protection; his more vigorous or profound powers of thought are designed to be her instructer and guide. Whatever advantage, real or apparent, each may have above the other, Providence clearly wills to be employed for the

benefit of the other. A contention of mutual affection, beneficence, forbearance, forgiveness, is the only strife which nature, reason, and decency permit to this state and relation.

We proceed to illustrate female utility and importance in social life, by certain noted examples from the sacred record. May God smile on every attempt to communicate useful truth. Amen.

094. Deborah--The Judge

Deborah--The Judge

Jdg 4:4-5. And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm-tree of Deborah, between Ramah and Beth-el, in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. The unremitting attention paid by a wise and gracious Providence to the affairs of men, affords equal matter of wonder and gratitude, with the astonishing power and skill displayed in the first formation of this great universe. Let us suppose the care of that Providence for a little while suspended, and the world left to itself. Who is not shocked in looking forward to the probable, the certain consequences of that remission? Behold instantly the bars of the vast abyss burst asunder, and “hell itself breathing forth destruction to mankind.” Behold the prince of the power of the air reigning and raging without control. Behold chaos and ancient night resuming their murky empire, and darkness covering the face of the deep; earth and air confounded; nature convulsed by the fury of contending elements, unrestrained by law; universal confusion and wild uproar prevailing.

Alas, it is not necessary to state the supposition so high. To conceive the wretchedness of mankind, deprived of the constant, superintending care of heaven, it is needless to let loose the demons of the bottomless pit; it is needless to unbridle the fury, of the ocean, or to assist the roaring winds in blowing up the fire into a hotter flame. Under the slightest alteration of the established order of things, all nature languishes. Remove for a moment the all-ruling, all-supporting hand of the great Father of the universe, and lo, this fair and fertile region is overwhelmed with an inundation, and that is burned to one pumice-stone, by the force of celestial or subterraneous fire. Here arises, a race all males, like the fabled generation of warriors which sprung from the serpent’s teeth, armed at all points for mutual destruction and slaughter: and there, a nation of timid, defenseless females, inviting violence and insult. But under that uninterrupted divine superintendence all goes on well; there is no schism in the body; everything is found in its place, everything performs its function. The exactest proportion between male and female births is preserved; the robuster frame is still found united to the stronger mental faculties; the delicacy of the feminine form indicates, to the very eye, the softer, gentler qualities of the spirit which inhabits it; and nature assigns to each the limits of duty, and the sphere of usefulness and exertion. But the great God is pleased to make himself known, not only by general conformity to established laws, but by occasional deviation from them. That the sons of men may know, it is according to his high will, that all creatures are, and think, and act. The history, which this evening comes under our review, exhibits a new thing in the annals of human nature; asserts the sovereignty of the Most High over all persons and events; places the female character and importance in a new, a striking, and a respectable point of view; and thereby admonishes the one sex to think of their own natural general superiority with deference, affection, and honor to the manly excellencies of the female mind, when cultivated by a proper education, directed to a worthy object, and roused into exertion by a great and worthy occasion. Hitherto we have seen wise and good women, in the retired vale of domestic life, their proper and peculiar sphere; Sarah,

co-operating in the duties of hospitality with her venerable lord; Rebekah, refreshing the weary traveller and the thirsty camel with water from the well, as they went on their way; Rachel and the seven daughters of Jethro tending their father's flocks, and making them to lie down under the shade at noon; Miriam leading the festive dance and song, in celebrating the loving kindness of the Lord, and the triumphs of Israel; and Rahab giving shelter to the persecuted spies, and providing for the safety of her father's house. But we are now to contemplate female genius and talents forcing their way to public observation, and to everlasting renown eclipsing masculine sagacity and fortitude; the inspirer and the example of generous patriotism and martial prowess. We are to contemplate feminine warmth and eagerness, under the influence of prophetic inspiration, and blended with the dignity and integrity of the judgment seat; female spirit, giving breath to the bloody trumpet of war, directing the movements of the embattled host, waking into sacred, poetic rapture, and adapting the joyful strains of victory, to the musical sounds of the living lyre.

Israel had now enjoyed a blessed repose of fourscore years; and are again corrupted by ease and prosperity. Their national character and conduct, are a striking representation of those of many individuals, whom we are daily meeting with in the world; who are capable, of bearing neither prosperity nor adversity; whom it is impossible to serve or to save; who, by their perverseness or folly, are perpetually undoing the kindest designs, and counteracting the most vigorous efforts of their friends in their behalf, and whom, at length, friends are constrained to abandon in despair. Well has Nehemiah, their countryman, described this character, and displayed the patience and long-suffering of God, in that recapitulation of their history, addressed solemnly to Heaven, in the ninth chapter of his book: "And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards, and olive yards, and fruit-trees in abundance. So they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness. Nevertheless, they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations. Therefore thou deliveredst them into the hand of their enemies, who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou heardst them from heaven; and according to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them saviors, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee therefore leftest thou them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them; yet when they returned and cried unto thee, thou heardst them from heaven, and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercies; and testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law; yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, which if a man do, he shall live in them; and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened the neck, and would not hear. Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by the Spirit in thy prophets: yet, would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands. Nevertheless, for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God."[*]Neh 9:25-31

If we are to judge of the atrocity of the offence committed on the occasion before us, from the severity of the punishment, the length of its duration, and the violence of their oppressor, we must conclude it to have been uncommonly grievous; for the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan, part of whose formidable host consisted of nine hundred chariots of iron; and who for

“twenty years together mightily oppressed the children of Israel.” Calamity is peculiarly oppressive, when it is embittered with the reflection, that it might have been prevented; that it is the native fruit of our own doings: and with finding the wretched associates of our guilt the wretched partakers of our woe.

Hope seems quite extinguished in Israel. Not one man of common spirit, in the course of twenty years’ oppression, appears awakened to a sense of his country’s wrongs, and generously prompted to hazard his life in removing, of avenging them. But the cause of the church of God is never to be despaired of. Its emblem is, “the bush burning, but not consumed.” Its motto, “cast down, but not destroyed.” And whither are our eyes, at this time, directed to behold the savior of a sinking country? Behold the residue of the Spirit is upon the head of a woman; the sacred flame of public spirit, smothered and dead in each manly breast, yet glows in a female bosom; and the tribunal of judgment, deserted by masculine virtue and ability, Is honorably and usefully filled by feminine sensibility, discernment, honesty, and zeal. “And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.”[*]Jdg 4:4 She was a wife and a mother in Israel, and such a with is a crown to her husband, such a mother, the glory and pride of her children; but her great, her capacious soul, embraced more than her own family, aimed at the happiness of thousands, sweetly blended public with private virtue. Is it unreasonable to suppose, that the discreet and wise management of her own household, first procured her the public notice and esteem: and that the prudent deportment of the matron, passed by a natural and easy transition into the sanctity of the prophetess, and the gravity and authority of the judge? Certain it is, that the reputation which is not established on the basis of personal goodness, like a house built upon the sand, must speedily sink, and fall to pieces.

Hitherto, we have seen only “holy men of God speaking as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” But the great Jehovah is no respecter of persons or sexes: “the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he sheweth unto them his holy covenant.” The simple dignity of her unadorned, unassuming state, is beautifully represented: “She dwelt under the palm-tree of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel, in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.”[*]Jdg 4:5 Behold a female mind exalted above the pageantry and pride of external appearance; not deriving consequence from the splendor of her attire, the charms of her person, or the number of her retinue, but from the affability of her manners, the purity of her character, the sacredness of her office, the impartiality of her conduct, the importance of her public services; not wandering from place to place, hunting after a little empty applause, but sought unto of all Israel for the eminency, and extensive utility of her talents and her virtues. Her canopy of state was the shade of the palm-tree, her rule of judgment the law and the testimony of the living God; her motive, the inspiration of the Almighty; her aim and end, the glory of God, and the good of her people; her reward, the testimony of a good conscience, the respect of a grateful nation, the admiration of future generations, the smiles of approving Heaven. What are, compared to these, the ermined robe, the ivory scepter, the chair of state, the glittering diadem! But alas! what availeth the most upright and impartial administration of justice, among a people enslaved in the extreme, groaning under a foreign yoke, holding liberty, property, and life, by the wretched tenure of a tyrant’s caprice? The ardent soul of Deborah aspires at nothing short of a total emancipation of her bleeding country from these inglorious chains. And like a true prophetess of the living and true God, she engages in this noble and generous enterprise, not with the zeal of an enthusiast, not in

an idle, inactive reliance on supernatural assistance; but in the honest confidence of a good cause, the diligent use of the most promising means, the ultimate dependence on the blessing of Him “who worketh all things after the counsel of his will.” The character of this illustrious heroine, grows upon us as we proceed; and exhibits a picture of female excellence, to which her own sex may look with emulation and honest pride, and ours, with admiration and esteem, unmixed with envy. An ordinary woman, in her place, and possessed of her advantages, would probably have aimed at the sole reputation of having delivered her country. But when a military operation is to be set on foot, for the attainment of this end, with the modest reserve becoming her sex, she satisfies herself with advising only. When the sword of Israel is to be drawn, let it be wielded by manly hands; let Barak come in for a share of the danger, the labor, and the praise. She is to be the directing head, and he the active hand. But what was the broken strength of two of the least of the tribes of Israel? What were ten thousand men, to carry on offensive war, against a power which could employ nine hundred chariots of iron as part of his force? What must have been the number of infantry that corresponded to this formidable armament? For such a handful of men to appear in arms, was to provoke their own fate, not to serve their bleeding country; it was to rouse their haughty oppressors into more violent rage and cruelty, not to attack them with a probability of success. The force called for by the prophetess, by divine appointment, was thus small, that the glory of all, in the issue, might be ascribed solely to God: and it was thus great, to teach mankind, that, as they hope to prosper, their own exertions must co-operate with the influence of overruling Providence.

Such was either the general despondency that prevailed in Israel, at that dark period, or such the general confidence reposed in Deborah, that Barak accepts the commission given him, and consents to head the forces of his country into the field, under the express condition that their prophetess and judge would be his companion and directress in the warfare. To this she yields a cordial assent, and cheerfully engages to take part in all that regarded the public service, whether counsel or resolution were needful to carry it on. She would not, could it with propriety be avoided, become a leader in arms, but feels no reluctance, is conscious of no fear, when attending the captain of the Lord’s host into “the valley of decision.” It is pleasant to observe how the manly virtues, properly modified and corrected. may be adopted into the female character, not only without giving offence, but so as to communicate the highest satisfaction and win approbation; and how, on the other hand, the softest of the female graces, may, without sinking the manly character, without exciting contempt, become a shade to the boldest, hardiest, masculine qualities. Courage has been reckoned an attribute peculiar to men; but it is easy to conceive it so raised, and so expressed, and so exerted, as to be not only pardonable in, but highly ornamental to, woman. “A hen gathering her chickens under her wings,” is a picture not only of maternal tenderness, but of the most undaunted intrepidity. “A bear bereaved of her whelps,” is not more fierce and more fearless. A mother defying the danger of the pestilential air which she inhales from her smitten child; a mother flying as a lioness on the brutal wretch who dared to crush her little darling; how dignified, what a noble creature she is! A tender virgin stirred up into holy indignation at hearing her absent friend traduced by the tongue of malevolence, forgetting herself for a moment, to repel the barbarous insult. O it is a disorder so lovely, that it almost deserves to be stamped with the name of virtue. To see Deborah quitting her seat under the palm-tree, to attend Barak to the top of mount Tabor, when the enemies of her God and of her country are to be engaged and subdued; what heart does not catch fire from her heroic ardor! what tongue can withhold its tribute of praise!

While Deborah, without hesitation, agrees to accompany Barak to the high places of the field, by virtue of the spirit of prophecy which was found upon her, she informs him that the glory he should obtain, was to suffer considerable diminution, not only by her participation of it, but also by the communication of it to another woman, for whom Providence had reserved the honor of putting the last hand to this arduous undertaking. Indeed this seems to be a crisis, in the history of human nature, at which Providence intended to exhibit the powers of the female mind in all their farce and all their extent; intended to represent the sex in every situation that can create esteem, inspire love, command respect, or awaken terror. The united spirits and achievements of Deborah, and Jael the wife of Heber, seem to comprehend the whole compass of the feminine character in its more extraordinary feelings and exertions; and in the displaying the conduct of these two individuals, rouse our attention to the whole sex as the most warm, steady, and affectionate of friends, or the most formidable, dangerous, and determined of enemies. But we must not bring forward both at once. We conclude with a reflection or two, on what has been suggested from the history of Deborah.

I. It exposes the folly of despising or undervaluing any description of our follow-creatures in the lump. All national reflections are founded in ignorance and folly; and the despisers have often paid dear for their insolence and presumption. The illiberal abuse so indiscriminately poured upon the gentler sex, is of the same nature. It generally comes from men something worse than the worst part of womankind. The truly sensible, and the truly brave, entertain far better and far more just sentiments of female utility and importance in the scale of being; and are ever disposed to ascribe to female capacity and worth, more than female modesty and wisdom are disposed to assume, or even to receive. No good man ever wished to see the female character undervalued or degraded; and perhaps very few good women have ever violently coveted stations and employments which belong peculiarly to men. But as nature delights in producing variety, as well as uniformity, it is not to be wondered at, if we sometimes meet with men more silly, timid, and frivolous, than the most insignificant of the other sex; and on the other hand, women as daring, as enlightened, as magnanimous, as public spirited as the first among mankind. The rivalry, however, and competition of the sexes, is altogether ridiculous and absurd. Each has its distinct, and both have their conjoined dignity and usefulness--and mutual concession is the truest wisdom in the one and in the other.

But, II. However weak and contemptible the instrument were in itself, from the hand that wields it, it becomes mighty and respectable: and the history before us becomes, and that not darkly, a typical representation of the gospel of Christ, which was “to the Jews a stumblingblock, and to the Greeks foolishness.” Pride and self-sufficiency smile at the idea of a female prophet, a female judge, a female poet, a female politician, a female warrior; and yet, in truth women have filled all these offices, with credit to themselves, and with satisfaction to the public. And “who hath made man’s mouth? or who maketh the dumb or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind?” In the honored list of those, who “through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens,” female names too stand recorded with commendation and renown. And “what hast thou, O man, but what thou hast first received?”--“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."

III. As the great Ruler of the world never can want an instrument to save, so he is always provided with instruments to punish. "He is wise in heart and mighty in strength; who hath hardened himself against him and hath prospered?" The haughtiest of monarchs is at length constrained to "praise, and extol, and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment, and those that walk in pride he is able to abase." "By a strong hand and stretched-out arm," Pharaoh is at length compelled to "let Israel go." "Humble" then "thyself," O man, "under his mighty hand." "Be wise now, O ye kings, be instructed, ye judges of the earth, serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling." The next Lecture will carry on the history of Deborah, in connection with that of Jael. I conclude the present, with calling on the female part of my audience to bless God, that while he has carried some of their sex, through the most arduous employments, most eminent stations, and most hazardous enterprises, not only with safety, but with applause, he is pleased, in general, to put their talents and their virtues to a trial less severe; and let them remember, that after all which has been, or may be said, in praise of the few who have acted wisely and well upon the public theater, to the generality, "the poet of honor is a private station."

095. Deborah--Jael

Deborah--Jael

Jdg 4:21-23. Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a nail of the tent, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: (for he was fast asleep, and weary) so he died. And behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will show thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples. So God subdued on that day, Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel. When we consider how frequent, how violent, and how sudden are the transitions from condition to condition in human life, pride appears to be a mystery of folly, below contempt. To behold a rational being assuming consequence on an empty, unmeaning title; or from the possession of a little wealth, that bird of passage, eternally on the wing; or from beauty and strength, which accident or disease may blast in a moment, and which the lapse of a very few years certainly will impair; to behold a man put, ting confidence in princes, or feeding on the applause of a multitude; to hear him saying to himself, "Soul, take thy rest; thou hast much goods laid up for many years." "My mountain standeth strong; I shall never be moved." All this is calculated to excite derision, not resentment; and when reason and experience ponder what the end may be, anger sinks into pity. Not only is frail man every moment at the mercy of a Being, almighty to save and to destroy; but the proudest and mightiest is every moment in the power of the weakest and meanest of his fellow-creatures. The tongue of the wretch whom thou despisest, may ruin thy reputation for ever. The crawling insect in thy path is armed with deadly poison against thy life. That nodding wall threatens to crush thee to pieces. Arm thee at all points, as well as thou canst, malice or hatred, envy or revenge will still find some part unguarded; and bleeding to death, thou shalt find thou were not invulnerable.

Those who are distinguished by their rank, their abilities, or their virtues, attract the notice of many observers, and create to themselves many open and many more secret enemies. The history of Sisera, the captain of the host of Jabin, king of Canaan, is a striking illustration of most of these remarks. In him, we see a man rendered insolent by success, intoxicated with prosperity, betrayed into disgrace through confidence of victory, the dupe of confidence in his own strength, and then the victim of confidence, equally unwise, in the fidelity and attachment of a stranger. We behold him in the morning, advancing to the unequal conflict at the head of a mighty, and hitherto invincible host; in the evening, a bleeding corpse, fallen ingloriously by the hand of a woman.

Deborah, the prophetess of Israel, having transfused the patriotic ardor of her son into Barak, not only directs him what he should do, but offers herself as the companion of the expedition which she had planned With ten thousand men of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali under his command Barak takes possession of mount Tabor. meaning to act only on the defensive, till Providence should point out an occasion of acting to advantage. The rashness and impetuosity of Sisera soon presented him with such an opportunity. Enraged to think that an enemy so often discomfited, so long oppressed, so broken by calamity, should presume to make head against their lordly masters,

he collects the whole of his vast strength, and invests the mountain, determined to crush the puny insurrection at one blow. The sagacious judge, and divinely inspired prophetess of Israel, observes the season to be favorable, observes that the unwieldy army of the Canaanites was ready to fall in pieces by its own weight, that their vain confidence was destroying them, and that, above all, Heaven was propitious. She gives the signal of attack, and lo, “one chases a thousand, and ten put ten thousand to flight.” The cause was of God, and it prospers: and the mighty hand and outstretched arm of Jehovah, once more asserts Israel into liberty.

Whatever praise is to be ascribed to the conduct of Barak on this occasion, and to the intrepidity of his little array, it is evident, from some expressions in the song of praise, composed in celebration. of the victory, that the defeat of the Canaanites was in part, at least, miraculous. “They fought from heaven.” “The stars in their courses,” it is said, “fought against Sisera.” By “the stars” some interpreters understand “the angels of God,” who are sometimes designed by that name. Josephus takes the words in a different sense, and affirms, that an extraordinary storm of rain, mixed with hail, blinded the eyes of the Canaanites, and drove back the darts upon their own heads. The Rabbis, with still less appearance of probability, allege, that certain constellations of a pestilential influence, consumed the army of Sisera, burnt them up with thirst, and drove them for refreshment to the brook Kishon, where they were met in a languid, enfeebled state, by the troops of Deborah and Barak, and put to the sword. The expedition from first to last, was without controversy conducted and crowned by the hand of Providence. But the narration of the event, oil the sacred page, is too general and concise, to enable us to pronounce with confidence, where the province of human sagacity and valor ended; and where the interposition of Heaven began.

However it were, the victory was complete; the enemy was totally routed and put to the edge of the sword; the commander in chief alone escapes the universal carnage of the field; and he, who a little before had nine hundred chariots of iron at his disposal, sees himself stripped of all, and is constrained to consult his safety by flight. A prince without subjects, and a general without an army, shrink into poor, wretched, solitary individuals, the more to be pitied, from the giddy height whence they have fallen. The history drops the myriads which composed the army of Sisera, into a silent grave; and pursues the sad tale of the unhappy man himself up to his tragic death. Seeing his army slaughtered and put to flight, and himself in danger of falling into the hands of triumphant Israel, he alights from his chariot, and flees away on foot. “How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!” What a sad reverse, within the compass of one short day! And to such reverses, human life is eternally liable. The greatest of uninspired bards has put this passionate exclamation in the mouth of a dethroned monarch of our own country, addressing himself to his few wretched attendants, the poor remains of his departed state:

Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and blood

With solemn reverence; throw away respect,

Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty,

For you have but mistook me all this while:

I live on bread like you, feel want, taste grief,

Need friends:--Subjected thus,

How can you say to me--I am a king?--Shakespeare. King Richard II.

Behold the mighty Sisera weary and faint with thirst, without one, of so many thousands, to assist or comfort his flight, seeking refuge from his pursuers in the tents of an allied power, Heber the Kenite. By looking back to the book of Numbers 10, we find that Hobab, the son of Raguel or Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, had left his native residence, to attend the camp of Israel as their guide through the wilderness, and had been persuaded by Moses, his brother-in-law, to cast in his lot among that people, upon a solemn assurance, that, on their settlement in Canaan, he, and his family, and descendants, should share in the fruits of victory, and obtain a portion in the land promised to the children of Abraham. This accounts for our finding them established, at such a distance of time, in the border of Kedesh Naphtali. On the invasion of the country, however, by Jabin, king of Canaan, we find them observing a strict neutrality. “There was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor, and the house of Heber the Kenite.”[*]Jdg 4:17 In the confidence of this, Sisera betakes himself to the Kenite for protection; and is received by Jael, the wife of Heber, with every mark of humanity and respect, tine to a great man, and a friend, in distress. She brings him milk to quench his thirst, covers hint carefully up in her own tent to repose himself from the vexation and fatigue of that disastrous clay, and to conceal him from the pursuit of Barak. She promises inviolably to keep secret the place of his concealment; and relying on that promise, weary and worn out, he falls into a profound sleep. Jael avails herself of his defenseless situation, and seizing such arms as were at hand, a hammer and one of the pins or nails used in stretching out the tent, site transfixes the head of the-unhappy sleeper as he lay along, and with redoubled blows fastens the bleeding temples to the ground.

Such was the inglorious end of a man, on whom that morning’s sun had risen with a’ smiling aspect; who awoke from sleep in the, possession of all that royal favor could bestow, all that sovereign power could compel, all that flattering hope could promise. Of the motives which could impel Jael to such a deed of horror, we have no information. Her conduct, we know, is celebrated in the song of Deborah in terms of the strongest approbation; which obliges us to conclude, that there are circumstances in the story, which the Spirit of God has not thought proper to disclose. The great Jehovah needs not a vindication of his conduct, from the labor and ingenuity of a wretched, ignorant mortal. He has but to discover it few little particulars, which are as yet hill from our eyes; and then, what now confounds and overwhelms our understanding, becomes clear and intelligible to the meanest capacity. Instead, therefore, of vainly and presumptuously attempting to reconcile this action of Jael with the laws of morality, which, by the glimmering light we have, is impossible, we shall make a few observations on the history, of a general and practical nature. And

I. We repeat, what has been already suggested, “that human reason is a very incompetent judge of divine proceeding.” We know so little, so very little of the system of nature; our own constitution is such an inexplicable mystery to ourselves; we meet every where so many difficulties, contradictions, defects, redundancies; at least we take upon us to think and call them so, as must lead us to this conclusion, that, either the work of God is imperfect; or that we cannot find out him and his work unto perfection. Now the little reason we have cannot hesitate an instant in choosing its side of this alternative. And if we confessedly are unqualified to judge of that which is less, dare we presume to pronounce concerning that which is greater. If the volume of nature, spread open to the perusal at once of our senses and our reason, present many things not only hard, but

impossible to be understood, can we deem ourselves qualified, or entitled to explain, to justify, or to arraign the more dark and mysterious ways of Providence? And which is the greater pride and presumption, that which is forever “charging God foolishly,” or that which sets itself up as the bold interpreter and assistant of eternal wisdom and justice? Observe

II. An obvious reason, why these difficulties are permitted in the frame of nature, the conduct of Providence, and the revelation of the grace of God. It is, to form us to submission, to exercise our patience, to fix our attention, to whet our industry, to repress our boldness, to increase and confirm our confidence in God. It is a mark of respect to superior wisdom and virtue, not always to require an explanation, but to repose implicit trust in known goodness and integrity. A wise man in the consciousness of his own rectitude, disdains to acknowledge the obligation of clearing up his conduct to every prating meddler, who may think proper to call him to account; and who has neither a right, nor a capacity to judge of his motives. And shall we withhold from our Maker that decent respect which we so cheerfully pay to a fallible, imperfect fellow-creature? Shall we refuse to take the God of truth upon his word? Shall we think it much if in some cases he exact belief, without his vouchsafing to assign a reason? “Why dost thou strive against him? He giveth not account of any of his matters.”[*]Job 33:13 Our sacred bard has sublimely expressed this noble sentiment, drawn from the volume of inspiration. Considering the divine providence under the image of a vast sealed-up book, chained to the eternal throne, containing the character, the revolutions, the destination of angels and men, but closed to the inspection of every created eye. We observe,

III. That it is doing the grossest injustice to the wise and righteous Governor of the world, to suppose him in every point approving the person, or the conduct by which he carries on his great designs. Cyrus and Nebuchadnezzar are styled the servants of God, though the one knew him not, and the other openly defied him. The rod which he condescended to use, for the chastisement of disobedient and gainsaying children, when their reformation is accomplished, he often breaks and dashes on the ground. Every instrument he employs must necessarily partake of human imperfection; but it follows not that he is pleased with imperfection. The devices of Satan himself shall in the issue redound to the glory of God, as “the wrath of man must praise him;” but that wrath is hateful to his nature, and those devices his wisdom counteracts, and his justice condemns. We are not therefore to mistake the patriotic ardor of a female Israelitish bard, for the calm, the merited applause of the God of mercy and truth. I can easily conceive the person, whom national partiality, in resentment, or gratitude mould celebrate in strains of admiration, to be regarded with abhorrence by the Father of mercies, the avenger of falsehood, the refuge of the miserable. And while Israelitish Deborah, in the heat of her zeal, makes the eulogium of a woman so unlike herself, and styles Jael, the wife of Heber, who murdered her sleeping guest, “blessed above women,” why may not a Christian Dorcas, a woman of mercy and humanity, “a woman full of good works, and almsdeeds,” under the mild and gentle influence of that religion which she believes, feels, and practices, reprobate the cruel and perfidious act, and its author, in terms of the severest indignation? Indeed, the conduct of Jael, considered by itself, is a horrid complication of all that is base and detestable in human nature; an infamous violation of sacred truth; a daring infringement of the law of nature and nations; a flagrant breach of the laws of hospitality, which the most savage natures and nations have respected as sacred; the vilest degradation of her character as a woman; the most barbarous exhibition of a little mind, enjoying the triumph over

unsuspecting credulity, and defenseless misery. “Cursed be her anger, for it was fierce, and her wrath for it was cruel.” Observe,

IV. Into what dreadful extremes we impetuously rush, when the radical principles of our nature are once subdued. Time must have been, that the idea of shedding the blood of another, would have chilled the blood in Jael’s veins. What must it have cost her, to overcome the timidity, the tenderness, the compassion of her sex! But being overcome, lo, each any feminine passion is lulled asleep; and frantic zeal, or demoniac revenge alone is awake. Ah me, what beast of prey so savage and unrelenting, as a human being destitute of pity! Ah me, how easily the best things degenerate into the worst! Of what importance is it, to guard against the first deviation from the simple and direct path! Who can promise for himself, that he shall stop, return, and regain the right road, when he pleases. Observe,

V. That the rarity of the instances, the peculiarity of the situations, and the singularity of the spirit and conduct, apparent in the female characters here brought into public view, forbid, by more than a positive law, female interference in matters of business and of government. Believe me, my fair friends, it is not stripping you of your just importance, it is increasing and securing it, to say, the shade is your native, your proper station: it is there you shine, it is there you are useful, it is there you are respectable. Your heart and your understanding assent to the truth of it. Is there a woman among you, who would not prefer in obscurity, the affection of her husband, the attachment and gratitude of her children, the estimation and respect of her friends, to all the public splendor of Deborah’s magisterial power, and prophetic spirit; to all the blushing, empurpled honors of Jael’s more than masculine resentment? It is not your want of talents for government we dispute; it is the suitableness of governments to your talents, your natural dispositions, your real honor and happiness. A wise and good woman never can desire to become the object of universal admiration, nor the subject of everyone’s discourse. If you aim at so much, depend upon it, you will lose something of what you have, and what is infinitely better than all the incense of flattery, than all the sonnets of a thousand poetic swains. In the history of our own country, the reigns of two female sovereigns shine with conspicuous luster. They were periods of great national prosperity and glory. But the weakest of women would not surely thence inter, that the scepter ought always to be committed to female hands. With all due deference to the memory of an Elizabeth and an Anne, and the general felicity which their administration diffused over the land, Great Britain can look with pride and exultation to a Queen, whose personal glory and virtues far exceed theirs. Not a sovereign indeed, but a partner of the throne: who shines in reason’s eye, because she affects not to shine; reigns over willing hearts, because she disclaims all rule; is great and blessed among women, because she nobly sinks the princess in the woman, the wife, the mother, and the friend.

We encroach no farther on your patience, by extending our observations on the subject. And the rather, as a review of. the song of Deborah, composed on this memorable occasion, will, if God permit, bring it again before us, and place female genius in our eye, in a new, and not unpleasing point of light; uniting poetic and musical skill to fervent devotion, heroic intrepidity, and prophetic inspiration. A combination how rare, how instructive, how respectable!

096. Deborah--Her Song

Deborah--Her Song

Jdg 5:1-5. Then sang Deborah, and Barak, the son of Abinoam, on that day, saying, Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves. Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes I, even I will sing unto the Lord: I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel. Lord, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water. The mountains melted from before the Lord, even that Sinai from before the Lord God of Israel. To some it is the gift of Heaven, to perform actions worthy of being recorded; to others it is given, to preserve the memory of illustrious actions, in writings worthy of being read. To both, the world is under great obligations, and gratefully permits the historian or the poet, to divide the palm with the hero, or the sage whom they celebrate. To the writer, perhaps, the more ample share of the praise is due. The achievements of valor and strength are local and temporary. They benefit but a few, and quickly spend their force. But the historic and poetic page, more durable, more diffused, and more conspicuous than monuments of brass and marble, is an universal and a perpetual blessing to mankind: conveying to distant nations and latest posterity harmless pleasure blended with wholesome instruction. On a favored few has been conferred the combined glory of acting nobly, and writing well; of serving their own day and generation with credit to themselves and advantage to their country, and of transmitting useful information to regions remote and generations unborn. On the list of those illustrious few, stands with distinguished honor, the name of Deborah, the judge, the prophetess, the sweet singer of Israel; and it is with exultation we observe the most dignified, arduous, and important stations of human life filled with reputation by a woman: a woman, who first, with resolution and intrepidity, saved her country in the hour of danger and distress, and ruled it with wisdom and equity; and then recorded her own achievements in strains which must be held in admiration, so long as good taste and the love of virtue exist in the world.

Having with veneration and respect attended to the equitable decisions, and the oracles of truth which flowed from the lips of the female seer and sage, who sat under the palm-tree in mount Ephraim; and accompanied the undaunted heroine to the top of mount Tabor, and the ensanguined plains washed by the river of Kishon; let us listen with wonder and delight to the lofty strains of the female bard, and join our voices in the burden of her song. This sublime poem is the most ancient that exists, two excepted, namely, that which celebrates the miraculous passage through the Red Sea; and the sweetly swelling notes of the dying swain of Israel. It is two hundred and thirty-four years later than the former, and one hundred and ninety-four years than the latter of these sacred compositions; but it is four hundred and ten years older than Homer, the great father of heathen poesy. From its high antiquity, therefore, were there nothing else to recommend it to notice, it is most respectable; but from its antiquity, and the very nature of poetical composition, it must of necessity be, in some respects, involved in difficulty and obscurity. This we pretend not wholly to clear up or remove. Instead then of making an attempt in which we should probably, perhaps certainly fail, we shall satisfy ourselves with pointing out a few of the more obvious and

striking beauties of a piece, which all will allow to contain many and shining excellencies. The inscription of this hymn of praise, first challenges our notice. “Then sang Deborah, and Barak the son of Abinoam, on that day, saying.”[*]Jdg 5:1 In exhibiting the character and conduct of this truly estimable woman, the feminine delicacy and reserve are never dropped. As a ruler and a prophetess she is introduced, under her relative character of the wife of Lapidoth. As the leader of armies to battle, and leader in the musical choir which celebrated the victories of her country, she is represented as the companion and coadjutor of Barak, the son of Abinoam. She was undoubtedly the first woman of her own, perhaps of any age; but her consequence, in place of being diminished, is increased and supported by the blending of private personal worth and ability, with the relations of social life, those of wife, mother, and friend.

Adam might exist a little while in Paradise, before Eve was formed, but nature, and reason, and religion, all seem to declare, that woman can neither comfortably nor reputably subsist, separated from that side whence she was originally taken. Who will deny that the superiority in point of discretion and understanding is frequently on the side of the female? But a woman forfeits all pretension to that very superiority, the moment she assumes or boasts of it. Whether, therefore, it were Deborah’s own good sense, and female modesty, which preferred appearing in a connected, to appearing in a solitary state, though more flattering to vanity: or whether the Spirit of God, in representing the most elevated of female geniuses in the most elevated of situations, thought proper to point her out as connected and dependent; the same lesson of moderation, diffidence, delicacy, and condescension is powerfully inculcated: and her sex is instructed where their true dignity, safety, honor, and comfort lie. The time is marked, when this triumphant anthem was first composed and sung. “On that day.” It had been a day of danger, anxiety, and fatigue: a day of vengeance upon the insulting foe, a day of mutual congratulation and rejoicing; but ill had Israel deserved such a victory, and shamefully had Deborah improved it, if either the emotions of joy or of revenge had excluded those of gratitude and love. The tongue of Deborah, like the pen of a ready writer, dictates “acceptable words” to the thousands of her people; she cannot think of repose, till the evening sacrifice of praise be offered up, and from the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh. The day which the arm of Omnipotence had distinguished by wonders of mercy, must not be concluded without songs of deliverance. From the “confused noise of the warrior, and garments rolled in blood,” the soul turns with holy joy, to the acknowledgment of that “right hand and holy arm which had gotten them the victory:” and in one solemn “praise ye the Lord” bursting at once from every tongue, every redeemed Israelite calls upon himself and upon his fellow to give unto Jehovah the glory due unto his name.

Here the song naturally begins, by this it must be supported, and in this it must terminate. All creatures, all events point out “Him first, Him last, Him midst, and without end.” “Praise ye the Lord.”

But, religion is “a reasonable service.” The divine essence we do not, we cannot know; “the invisible things of God,” even “his eternal power and deity,” are to be discovered only “by the things which he has made,” and the things which he doth. Here then the spirit of praise immediately fixes, and the recent interposition of a gracious Providence rises instantly into view: his “avenging of Israel,” in which Jehovah is acknowledged as at once just and merciful: just, in recompensing tribulation to them that troubled his covenanted church and people; merciful in giving his troubled people rest.

Vengeance; the vengeance of God! Fearful thought! but oh, it is sweetly relieved, by the reflection, that the right of executing vengeance, is claimed by the God of mercy, with awful. propriety, as his own. This dreadful thunder no arts but his own must presume to wield; “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, with the Lord.” If I must be punished, “let me fall now into the hand of the loan, for his mercies are great: and let, me not fill into the hand of a man.” The only vengeance permitted to man is a vengeance of kindness and forgiveness; the only coals which he must scatter, are the coals of the fire of love. “If thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst, give him drink:”--“Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.” “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you: that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”[*]Mat 5:44-45 The voluntary actions of the people in “offering themselves” to fight their own battles, are with singular beauty ascribed to the wisdom and goodness of God who has “the hearts of all in his hand,” and can “turn them which way soever he will.” He who could have saved by miracles, will save by means. If there be a spirit of concord to resist the common enemy, it is of the Lord. If internal dissension aid the enemy without, we behold a righteous God infatuating those whom he means to destroy.

Having thus simply proposed the glorious subject of her praise, “the sweet enthusiast” prepares to unfold and amplify it. Site throws her eyes over the face of the whole earth: views all nations and their potentates, as interested in the glowing theme: and summons an admiring world to listen to her song. “Hear, O ye kings: give ear, O ye princes: I, even I, will sing unto the Lord; I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel.”[*]Jdg 5:3 What so delightful to a grateful and affectionate heart, as the enumeration of benefits received! What benefactor once to be compared with the Giver of all good, “the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good gift, and every perfect!”

Having proposed her theme and summoned her august audience, the divine poetess seems to pause for a moment, as if awed by the presence of such a splendid audience, and overwhelmed with the magnitude of the task she has undertaken, and with renovated strength aims her flight, like the eagle, up to her native skies. The deliverance of that day brings former wonders of mercy to mind; and “God, the same yesterday, today, and for ever,” is seen and adored in all. Instead of expatiating on the goodness of the Most High in strains addressed to the “kings and princes” whom she had called to attend, she rises at once to “Jehovah’s awful throne,” loses all sense of created majesty, and loses herself in the contemplation of infinite perfection. “Lord, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water. The mountains melted from before the Lord, even that Sinai from before the Lord God of Israel.”[*]Jdg 5:4-5 The former part of this animated address probably refers to that passage in the history of Israel which we have in the book of Numbers 20, relating to the passage of Israel through the land of Idumea, which was humbly and peaceably solicited, and unkindly refused. Of this, some particulars might have been preserved by tradition to the times of Deborah, though riot admitted into the sacred canon, and suggested to her the lofty expressions which site here employs in celebrating the praises of Israel’s God. Though he would riot permit there to force a passage by the sword, through the country given to the posterity of Esau their brother, yet in guiding them round the confines of Idumea, in the majestic symbol of his presence, the pillar of cloud and fire, the great God might by some sensible tokens, make Edom to know, it was not from want of power, but of inclination, that he led his people in a

circuitous course. The language of the prophetess, divested of its bold figurative dress is simply this, “The wonders of this day, O Lord, recall and equal the greatest wonders of ages past. We have seen the stars in their courses fighting against our enemies, as our fathers of old sate mountain and plain, heaven and earth, giving testimony to the presence and favor of the God of Israel. The field of Edom and the vale of Kishon are equally filled with the glory of the Lord. We recognize in the hand which has discomfited the host of Sisera, the same almighty power which restrained the Idumean, and conducted our ancestors, if not the nearest, certainly the best road to Canaan.” The latter part of the address evidently refers to the awful solemnity with which the law was given from mount Sinai; in which all nature, without a figure, bare witness to the presence and power of nature’s God. “The earth trembled, the hills melted like wax,” the face of heaven was covered with blackness of darkness, lightning flashed, the hoarse thunder roared, the louder and more dreadful voice of the Eternal drowned its tremendous sound, men’s hearts fail them for fear, Moses quakes.

What matter of joy to Israel, that he who of old had thus revealed his fiery law, that day, that very day had come riding on the swift wings of the wind for their salvation! To fix these emotions of rising gratitude and wonder, the bard dexterously and imperceptibly slides into a review of the recent distress and misery of her unhappy country; distress yet fresh in everyone’s memory, misery out of which they were just beginning to emerge: and she takes occasion to pay a just tribute of respect to the memory of a great man, whom God had honored to be the instrument of redemption to an oppressed people.

Those who are themselves the most deserving of praise, are ever the most liberal in bestowing it, where it is due. It is a slender and contemptible merit which seeks to shine by obscuring, concealing, or diminishing the worth of another. Deborah is but the more estimable, for the frank and unreserved commendation which she confers on departed or contemporary virtue and talents. “In the days of Shamgar, the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through by-ways. The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel.”[*]Jdg 5:6-7 What a melancholy picture have we here of a ruined, wretched country! By means of oppression, all intercourse is interrupted; commerce is languishing to death; life and property have become insecure: everything dear to man is at the mercy of a haughty tyrant; ever exposed to the ravages of a lawless band of armed ruffians; the scanty and dejected inhabitants tremble at the sound of their own feet, at the sight of their own shadow; behold them skulking from place to place, stealing through by-ways, to carry on a starved and precarious traffic; suffering much, and fearing worse.

Ah, little do we reflect, living at our ease, enjoying the blessings of mild and equitable government, “sitting everyone under his vine and under his fig-tree, while there is none to make us afraid:” little do we reflect on the misery and tears of myriads of our fellow-creatures oppressed, and there is none to help them; whose cry incessantly rises up to heaven, but rises in despair. Think what multitudes of the bold and hardy Africans are yearly driven or trepanned into servitude, through the violence or craft of their own countrymen, or, through the more fierce and unrelenting principle of European avarice, which has reduced slavery to a system, has invented an article of commerce which God and nature abhor, and concur to prohibit; and what is the subject of the infamous, impious traffic? the souls and bodies of men. Who can turn his eyes, without weeping tears of blood, to the fertile soil, element air, and the simple, harmless inhabitants of the eastern world, and

observe the gifts of nature perverted into a curse, the goodness of Providence thwarted by the cursed lust of power, or more cursed lust of wealth, and the patient, uncomplaining Asiatic, perishing for hunger, in his own luxuriant domain: and the Ganges disgorging millions of fetid corpses into the ocean, the corpses of wretches who died for lack of food, to purchase for a still greater wretch an empty title, and a seat among the lawgivers of the wisest, most polished, and humane of the nations of the western world.

Look to the thin and scanty remains of the populous and prosperous nations of the southern hemisphere, and a land whose veins are gold and its mountains silver, of which Spanish cruelty and avarice have been constrained to make a desert, in order to secure the possession of it. Behold the sullen, dejected native trampling under his feet gold and diamonds, which he dare not put forth his hand to touch; and reproaching Heaven with heaping upon him in its anger, treasures which have attracted, not the pious zeal and attention, but the infernal rage, of men who nevertheless dare to call themselves Christians.

Behold yet again--No, I sicken at the horrid prospect--and will no longer encroach upon the feelings of humanity, by exhibiting the more than savage barbarity of systematic cruelty and oppression. God of mercy, put a speedy end to these horrors! assert thy offspring into liberty, the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Let us return to the sweet mistress of Israelitish song; I see her warm, and rise into native, conscious worth and importance: and honor the lovely pride, the honest vanity of the female patriot. “The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel.”[*]Jdg 5:7 If ever there were ability, if ever there were services, if ever there were an occasion, which could warrant self-praise, it was the ability, the public services of Deborah, and the glorious occasion on which she wrote and sung. Show me such exertions for the public good, and let a man, let a woman be as vain as they will, and let affected humility and self-denial say what they will, it is an honorable and laudable ground of glorying that God has made us the means of conveying happiness to others. But occasions of doing justice to eminent, public female worth so seldom occur, that I must reserve to myself the pleasure of accompanying this great woman, this more than princess, through the remainder of her song, in another Lecture.

Men and brethren, we are furnished with a much more noble subject of praise--a subject which angels delight to celebrate in celestial strains--a subject which carries us back into the eternal counsels of peace “before the world was,” which carries us forward to the grand consummation, when “time shall be no longer;” when “the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads:” when “they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” Need I point out the era, Christians, and the spot, and the performers, and the audience, or repeat the words of the lofty theme?--“There were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto thorn, Fear not: for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God, in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.[*]Luk 2:8-14 Here are celebrated, not the transient interests of a petty tribe, the momentary triumph of the

oppressed, and the downfall of the oppressor; not events which have long ago spent all their force, and left no trace behind; but the broad, unbounded, permanent interests of mankind; the triumph of “the love of Christ which passeth knowledge;” of “the peace of God which passeth all understanding;” events which extend their influence into eternity. We celebrate “the praises of Him, who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light”--of God, who “so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”[*]John 3:16--Of “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.”[*]Rev 1:5-6 Of Him “who, through death, has destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil.” The burden of the Christian’s song is, “Salvation,” salvation begun, going on, ready to be accomplished. “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”[*]Rev 11:15 The song of Deborah exhibits awful distinctions between man and man, between nation and nation; presents a mystery of Providence, which human understanding endeavors in vain to trace: in the song of the redeemed of the Lord, all distinction is abolished; it presents a mystery of grace which “angels desire to look into;” it is in full harmony sung, by those who have “come from the east and from the west, from the south and from the north, and, have sat down with Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God:” where the spirit of this word finds no place, and its differences are absorbed of the “spirit of love: whore there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all.” Let these reflections be practically unproved, in conformity to the apostolic exhortation, by our daily earning to put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another--and above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts. Amen.

097. Deborah--Dominion over the Mighty

Deborah--Dominion over the Mighty

Jdg 5:12-13. Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam. Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the Lord made me have dominion over the mighty.

It is natural for man to look forward to futurity; and to derive a part, at least, of his felicity and importance from the estimation in which he is to be held by posterity. He knows that his body must soon die, and his connection with the world be dissolved; but he flatters himself with the fond hope, that his name may survive his ashes, and that his memory may be cherished and respected. though his person be lost in the grave, and sink into oblivion. When this anticipation, and desire of immortality, serve, as a stimulus to virtuous exertion, and call forth wisdom and goodness, honorably to fulfil their day, the love of fame is a respectable principle in the individual, because it becomes a blessing to mankind. But to wade to the temple of fame through a sea of blood; to extract “the bubble reputation” from widow’s tears and the groans of expiring wretches, is worse than contemptible; it is detestable, it is monstrous. And, whatever national partiality and prejudice may have done, reason and humanity will always regard such characters as Alexander and Caesar with abhorrence, strip them of their ill-earned glory, and stigmatize their names to the latest generations, as the enemies of mankind. The spirit of patriotism, in other respects noble and excellent, is here faulty, pernicious, and worthy of the severest censure. It encroaches on the sacred rights of lovingkindness and tender mercy. It encroaches on the more sacred prerogatives of high heaven. It would make the God of the spirits of all flesh, a party in the quarrels of two petty states, and force the great interests of an universe to bend to the caprice, the pride, the ambition or revenge of some paltry prince. Hence, the literary monuments of all nations exhibit a narrow, illiberal, ungenerous, impious spirit. The warlike genius of Rome acquired the ascendant over her rival Carthage. The literary genius of that gallant people assumed the superiority of course; and Punic perfidy, barbarity, and cowardice, became the subject of proverbial apothegms, historical records, and poetical rhapsodies. But suppose, for a moment, the scales changed, and the fate of Carthage, preponderating, and we should have had this whole picture reversed; and Roman, not Punic faithlessness, cruelty, and cowardice had been the burden of the song, and the object of detestation. While our notes of triumph rend the vault of heaven, cross that brook, look forward from the summit of that little hill, where we are celebrating victory with all the insolence of success, and erecting the monumental column to prosperous valor, and nought is to be seen, but sights of woe, no voice is to be heard but that of lamentation and despair; while angels, from yonder sphere, look down with pity and concern, such as angels feel, on both the victor and the vanquished. “The broad eye of one Creator takes in all mankind: his laws expand the heart;” and the “Te Deum,” which angels sing with rapture, is, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.”

We must carry these ideas with us as a corrective to the vehemence of poetical enthusiasm, and learn still to distinguish between the rapturous praise and censure of a female patriot, and the calm, equitable, unbiased applause or condemnation of unerring wisdom and eternal justice. In the picture of human nature here suspended before our eyes, we behold it, as it is, not what it ought, in all respects, to be.

Deborah having proposed her subject, in plain and simple terms, in the second verse, and summoned the princes and potentates of the earth to listen to her song, as if the whole world were interested in the event she was about to celebrate, she presents to them an object supremely worthy of their attention and reverence, namely, the great Jehovah marching in awful state before the armies of his people, and delivering to them his dreadful law from Sinai, while universal nature bears witness to the presence of the Creator and Lord of all. “The earth trembling, the mountains melting, the powers of heaven shaken.” From thence she turns a weeping eye to the recent miseries of her yet bleeding country, and summons her compatriots to gratitude and joy, for the deliverance of that day, from the recollection of the cruel restraints under which they so lately lived, and the calamities which they endured: and she rises into holy rapture at the thought, that. a gracious Providence had not only wrought salvation for his people, but made her the blessed instrument of effecting it. But in recalling the memory of former evils, in order to awaken holy joy, she fails not to trace those evils up to their proper source, in to excite holy sorrow and contrition; “chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there, a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?”[*]Jdg 5:8 The great object of the prophetess is, to impress this everlasting and unchangeable truth, that sin is the ruin of any nation, and that salvation is of the Lord. The moment a new god is set up, behold a new enemy is in the gate. That instant the idol is pulled down, the hope of Israel revives. The poetic question of Deborah, “was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?” expresses the highest degree of political dejection and distress; and represents the insulting foe, as not only filling all their borders with present consternation, but also, undermining all their hope for the time to come; stripping them of every kind of armor both for defence and attack; to such a degree, that not one man, out of forty thousand, was furnished for the field. A Jewish Rabbi[*]Sal. Jarchi, page 64. has given a turn somewhat different to the words of the text, and not an absurd one. “Has Israel chosen new gods? then was war in the gates. Was there shield or spear seen among forty thousand?” that is to say, “From the time that Israel made choice of strange gods, they were under a necessity of maintaining war in their gates; or, of supporting a standing army for defence against the inroads of their enemies. But now that you offer yourselves willingly to the Lord, and put away the strange gods which are among you, see whether you have any need of shield or spear against the most formidable and numerous hosts of foes, against the thousands and forty thousands of Canaan? No, Jehovah himself is your shield and buckler, he fights your battles. Heaven and earth combine to destroy the adversary, the stars in their courses fought against Sisera, the river Kishon swallows them up.”

“My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the Lord, Speak, ye that rule on white asses, ye that sit in judgment and walk by the way. They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water; there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord, even the righteous acts towards the inhabitants of his villages in Israel; then shall the people of the Lord go down to the gates.”(That we may enter into the true spirit of the patriotic bard, let us suppose, what it is apparent she has in view, namely,

severally to address the various orders and descriptions of men, whereof the Israelitish state was composed, and who had each a peculiar, as well as a common interest, in the salvation which they celebrated. She begins with her companions in the warfare, who, roused by her exhortations, and a sense of their country's wrongs, had cheerfully offered themselves to this laborious and hazardous service. "My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the Lord."[*]Jdg 5:9 They best knew how little was due to human skill and valor, how much to the gracious and powerful interposition of Heaven; let them, therefore, lead the band, and ascribe unto Jehovah the glory due unto his name. She next turns to the civil governors and judged of the land, and invites them to continue the song. "Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way."[*]Jdg 5:10 Such was the simple state in which the rulers of Israel travelled from place to place administering justice. The ideas, in her address to them, are tender and pathetic, and maybe thus extended. "Alas? my associates in government, it was but yesterday, that we were rulers without subjects, judges without a tribunal, and without authority: the lives and property of Israel were not secured and protected by law, but were at the disposal of a foreign lawless despot; and your progress through the land in the exercise of your high office, was checked and overawed by a licensed banditti. Let us rejoice together, that government has reverted its channel, the highways are no longer blocked up, and therefore no longer unoccupied. Place your thrones of judgment where you will, in the gate, in the highway, the communication is open, there is none to make you afraid, the enemies whom you have seen, you shall see them no more again for ever." Her next address seems to be made to the shepherds of the lately oppressed country. "They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water; there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord, even the righteous acts towards the inhabitants of his villages in Israel; then shall the people of the Lord go down to the gates."[*]Jdg 5:11 They are represented as trembling at the sound of their own feet among the pebbles of the brook, lest thereby they should awaken the attention of their rapacious masters; they are afraid to drive their flocks to the watering place, lest they should expose themselves and their harmless fleecy charge, to the cruel shafts of the archer, ever on the watch to gall and annoy them. But now, there, even there, in the very scene of their sorrow and misery, where the rustling of a leaf durst not be heard, they shall break out together into singing; there, free from sorrow, free from fear, "shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord, even the righteous acts to the inhabitants of the villages in Israel." Finally, she calls upon the inhabitants of the villages, the husbandmen and vine-dressers, to add their voices to the swelling band, on recovering their tranquillity, on being restored to the felicity of laboring for themselves, and saved from the mortification of seeing lazy, insolent strangers devouring the fruit of their painful toil, and repairing, as before, in happier days, to their own gates, to their own judges for justice and judgment. Thus we hear, as it were, the tuneful choir gradually increasing in number, the peasant taking up the song which the shepherd hall put into his mouth, the shepherd following the magistrate, the magistrate the, soldier, till all Israel becomes one voice, one heart, one soul, to celebrate the high praises of God. Faint representation of that more glorious consummation, that purer triumph, that more auspicious day, that inexpressibly more important salvation, to which the believer in Christ Jesus looks in hope. The voice of this universal chorus having ceased, a solemn pause of some moments seams to ensue; when the divinely-inspired poetess awakes to new rapture; and the harmony of myriads of joyful voices subsides into the melody of one simple strain. "Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive,

thou son of Abinoam."[*]Jdg 5:12 What genuine touches of nature have we here, what simplicity, what pathos, what sublimity! She seems to regret her exhausted powers; her spirit is still willing; she cannot bear to cease so soon from so divine an employ; she starts into fresh enthusiasm. Having put words of praise into the mouths of a whole saved people, she takes up her own peculiar strain; "Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song:" And then, turning to the companion of her victory, excites him to make a public splay of the wonderful trophies of that wondrous day; "Arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam." Exhibit them in chains, who had forged chains for the hands and feet of Israel; lead them captive, who led in captivity the free-born sons of God; show triumphantly the spoils of them that spoiled thee; "the prey taken from the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered;" them that "oppressed thee fed with their own flesh, and drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine;" a righteous "God contending with them, who contended with thee." "Thou son of Abinoam." She rouses her noble colleague to excel in praise, as he had excelled in counsel and courage, by one of the most powerful motives of human conduct, the honor of his father's name and family. Let the names of Barak and Abinoam be transmitted, hand in hand, with respect, to the latest generations; let the world know that on Abinoam a gracious Providence conferred the distinguished honor of being the father of the father of his country.

It is not ancestry, it is not country, that can bestow celebrity on a deedless name, on an idle or worthless character; it is illustrious virtue, it is superior wisdom, it is useful ability that confers nobility, true nobility on families, and celebrity on countries. Contending cities claim the honor of giving birth to Homer. Strip Athens of her renowned sons, and she sinks into a mass of rocks and sand. How would the heart of Abinoam glow with delight, as often as the sound of his name reached his ears, in connection with that of a son whom a grateful country acknowledged, and celebrated with songs, as its savior! In Jdg 5:13 we see the low and reduced state of Israel again brought into view, to prepare for a fresh discovery of the power and goodness of God, and to exhibit in another point of light, the solidity, strength, and security of his church, "out of weakness made strong," "waxing," in a moment, "valiant in fight, turning to flight the armies of the aliens." "Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the Lord made me have dominion over the mighty."[*]Jdg 5:13 In two striking particulars, this gracious interposition of Heaven is emphatically pointed out. "He made him that remaineth to have dominion. It was not the strength of Israel which God employed in crushing the "nobles" and pride of Canaan, it was not by opposing force to force, skill to skill, that Providence decided the contest; but by a scattered, broken remainder; but by a dispirited handful, that durst not trust themselves in the plain against the enemy, but by an unarmed rabble whom Sisera held in contempt, that Jehovah trampled the glory of Jabin in the dust; as by a cake of barley bread rolling down upon a tent, and leveling it with the ground. To set the divine sovereignty in a still stronger light, Deborah suggests, but not in the spirit of self-confidence, that when God did appear for his people, he did it, not by kindling martial ardor and resentment in manly bosoms, by putting the machine in motion in the usual way; but by creating a new thing in the earth; by endowing a woman with more than manly sagacity and resolution; by making a woman the life and soul of a sinking nation; that God himself might have the undivided praise. "The Lord made me have dominion over the mighty." Is it not somewhat remarkable, that Deborah is only onto described as the wife of Lapidoth? whereas Barak is repeatedly, both in history and in song, brought forward as the son of such a father. Is it to mark the base degeneracy of Israel at this period? all masculine virtue extinguished, and

importance sunk; the only trace of the existence of the man, that he was the husband of such a man? The repetition of this relation, therefore, may have been omitted, because it would have reflected reiterated disgrace upon the one, without adding much to, perhaps somewhat detracting from, the glory of the other. Whereas the blazoning of a son's praise, instead of detracting from, is the most gratifying addition to, a father's honor. In the passage which follows, the prophetess goes with a poetical and prophetic enthusiasm into a detail of the distinguishing characters of the several tribes of Israel, according to the part which they had taken, or neglected to take, in the cause of their country, at this trying crisis, which at present I shall simply quote, with a single remark; and then conclude. "And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak; he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Why abodest, thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? for the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the seashore, and abode in his breaches. Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field."[*]Jdg 5:15-18 This is the third time that prophetic inspiration has presented us with the discriminating features of the sons of Israel, and of the tribes which descended from them, at three different periods, and in very different situations--Jacob on his dying bed, Moses on the wing to ascend mount Nebo, and Deborah on the defeat of Sisera. The comparative view of Israel at these distant periods, seems to me a subject of curious, pleasant, and not useless disquisition, and I mean to devote the meditation of a particular evening to it. The season[*]The last day of the year. arrests us now, and demands a series of reflections suited to winter, and change, and decay, and death. The past rushes upon our memory and affections in an impetuous tide. The future still presents the same impenetrable curtain to our eager eyes. We go on fondly planning; and after a thousand proofs of vanity, return to treasure up for ourselves vexation of spirit. But we shall be relieved at length, and ere long land on that shore where fear and hope are no longer. If permitted to enter on the commencement of another year, we shall endeavor to improve that kind indulgence, by endeavoring to suggest reflections suited to the occasion. If permitted to advance to a second sabbath in a new year, we shall attempt to resume our accustomed pursuits: If to any, this be the last opportunity of the kind, the solemn farewell is now taken. And kind is that Providence which does not always let us know when we are saying "finally farewell;" which permits the bitterness of death to pass before we are sensible it is come. Woe, woe, woe, to the man who is punished with the foresight of the evil that is coming upon him. The exploits of a Deborah and a Barak now live only in the page of history: their song is now to be found only in a few measured words, whose rhythm is lost, whose sense is obscure, whose spirit is evaporated. But, my friends, we have this day been commemorating[*]In the participation of the Lord's supper. an event which will never sink in oblivion, never spend its force, never lose its importance. We have this day been carrying on, keeping up the song, which the enraptured shepherds of Bethlehem caught two thousand years ago from a choir of the heavenly host, which is ever pleasing, ever new; let us again resume it, and teach it to our children. "Glory, glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men." "Blessing and honor, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever." Amen. Hallelujah!

098. Deborah--Heaven Fought Sisera

Deborah--Heaven Fought Sisera

Jdg 5:20-21. They fought from heaven: the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon: O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength. In turning over the hallowed page of inspiration, and contemplating the various revolutions of human affairs which it unfolds, we seem transported to a superior region; we behold the earthly ball rolling round beneath our feet; we witness the birth, the progress, the dissolution of nations; we learn to correct the prejudices of education, and our narrowness of conception; we no longer ignorantly admire, nor superciliously despise our fellow-creatures; we adore the great Father and Lord of all, who “has of one blood formed all nations of men to inhabit upon the face of the whole earth,” and whose kingdom ruleth over all.” From that elevation, we observe with humble acquiescence and holy joy, the designs of eternal Providence, maturing, and executing themselves; the individual passing away, but the species permanent; states and kingdoms changing their form, their spirit, their character; but human nature the same under every government, in every climate, under every sky. We behold regions, and periods, and nations rising into notice, into eminence, into importance, by the talents, the virtues, the address of one man, of one woman; and returning again to obscurity and insignificance, through a defect of wisdom, of public spirit, of exertion. The history of perhaps no nation exhibits such striking and instructive variety of character and event, as that of the posterity of Abraham. It is interesting in itself, and it is closely connected with t the general interests of mankind. That people, through a dispersion of near two thousand years, have preserved an existence. Hated, despised, and persecuted by all other nations, they remain unextirpated; a monument at once of the vengeance and of the care of Heaven; and no unequivocal intimations, from the oracles of truth, hold them up as the object: of eternal Providence, in events of superior magnitude, yet to take place.

We have followed the successive changer which they underwent, with successive emotions of astonishment, exultation, indignation and sorrow. And we find them at the defeat of Sisera and his host, in a situation highly critical and interesting. The prophetess Deborah in this celebrated song, goes into a comparative delineation of the respective merit and demerit of the several tribes; and thereby enables us to estimate the particular character of each at different eras of their political existence. Jacob on his death-bed, and Moses on the wing to depart in his valedictory address, present us with a similar opportunity; of which we are now to avail ourselves, in the twofold view of extending a little our pittance of knowledge of human nature, and increasing our admiration of; and dependence upon, the Divine Providence. In the dying benediction of Jacob, Judah, his fourth son, and the tribe which should spring from him make a most conspicuous figure. The spirit of prophecy employs every image expressive of power, greatness, plenteousness, and duration, to represent the future eminence and superiority of that tribe. In all the musters which were made of the people during the forty years, wandering in the wilderness, and in the distribution of place and station according to divine appointment, in their encampments and removals, we still find Judah excelling in number and strength, and occupying the post of honor. But Moses takes leave of that tribe, with

a very slight degree of notice; and in the song of Deborah their name is not so much as mentioned, nor is any allusion made to any exploit of theirs, in celebrating the triumph of that eventful day. Indeed the spirit and pre-eminence of Judah seems to have been gradually on the decline, from the days of Caleb, who conquered and dispossessed the sons of Anak; till they were revived, maintained, and extended under David and Solomon. And for several centuries, we find this prerogative tribe, which was destined to the lasting honors of royalty and rule, sleeping in oblivion rind unimportance, with the insignificant tribe of Simeon, which hardly ever achieved any action, or produced any personage worthy of being remembered. Of so much consequence is one man in a tribe, in a nation, in a world. But the person and tribe the most distinguished in the prophecy of Jacob, and the blessing of Moses, are also the most distinguished in this triumphant anthem. Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph, the beloved son of Jacob, raised by the destination and interposition of high Heaven, to power and precedence over his elder brother. To the exertions of this branch of the house of Joseph, in conjunction with those of Zebulun and Naphtali, the victory now by the blessing of God obtained over the armies of Canaan was chiefly to be ascribed. The spirit of their father Joshua, dead in so many other of the tribes of Israel, is alive in them, and happily is propitious to the common cause. A severe censure of the conduct of the two tribes and a half beyond the river; is more than insinuated; it is brought directly forward. They are represented as totally lost to all public spirit, and wrapped up in cold selfishness and indifference. Jordan was a kind of defence to them from the Canaanitish foe, and the cries of their oppressed brethren beyond the river are drowned in the more interesting bleatings of their own flocks. The same spirit of selfishness is represented as pervading the tribes who inhabited the sea coasts, Dan and Asher, and who, subsisting by trade, and absorbed by the love of gain, steeled their hearts to the feelings of sympathy and humanity. Drawing their supplies from the ocean, they forgot they have a country; and under the influence of one domineering lust, all the better claims of the human heart, are suppressed and silenced. They pursue their merchandize, as the others attended to their sheep-farms, regardless what their wretched countrymen meanwhile endured. “For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Why abodest thou among the sheep-folds, to hear the bleatings of flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the seashore, and abode in his breaches.”[*]Jdg 5:15-17

Such is the general view of the state of Israel at this period, which the words of Deborah convey. The import of many of the expressions which the prophetess employs to convey her feelings on this occasion, we pretend not to understand or to explain. Is it any wonder that in a poetical composition upwards of three thousand years’ old, in a language so little studied, referring to a history which the outline only is drawn, there should be many things difficult to be understood? This much is evident upon the face of it, that Israel at that unhappy period exhibited a spectacle, bearing but too near a resemblance to what our own times[*]Great Britain embroiled with France, Spain, Holland, America, and an armed neutrality. have seen dread fully realized. A whole host of foes, a world in arms, combined to work the downfall of a sinful devoted country. Internal discord, the extinction of public virtue, the dominion of barefaced iniquity--but, the arm of the Lord is revealed, and salvation is wrought. The picture which the poetess draws of the desperate state of Israelitish affairs is truly affecting; and is a happy preparation for a display of that unexpected and astonishing relief, which had just turned their sorrow into gladness. Judah lulled asleep in listless inaction, without exertion, without existence; a fourth part of the national force, on the other side

Jordan, careless, tending their flocks; another fourth devoted to their private traffic; the sword of judgment in the feeble hand of a female; confederated kings threatening their utter extirpation; enemies, numerous, “strong and lively, and hating them with a cruel hatred;” what power call dissipate the gathered storm? That power which says to the roaring ocean, “Hitherto shalt then come, but no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.” “They fought from heaven: the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.”[*]Jdg 5:20 Behold all nature engaged in the cause of Israel’s God. The heavenly host first take up the quarrel; angels, legions of “angels that excel in strength:” the least of whom could wield those elements.” The most powerful and splendid parts of inanimate nature feel the alarm, and join their influence; “the stars in their courses.” The earth quickly hears the heaven; the waters swell and rage; Kishon increased, most probably, by the recent dreadful tempest which had fallen from the air, rises suddenly upon them, and like the Red Sea of old, swallows up, as in a moment, the enemy and the avenger.

There is a singular force and beauty in repetition of the name of the river, with the edition of the epithet “ancient.” It is natural for men to value themselves on the antiquity of their country, and its cities. It is the fond term which, in the honest pride and exultation of our hearts, we affix to our own land; it seems to confer additional dignity and importance; we associate in the idea, the valor and success of former times; we feel our hearts attracted as to a common parent; filial affection and brotherly love revive at the sound. In the enthusiasm of pious and poetical inspiration, she bestows animation and passion on the flood; she represents it as rising in pride and joy, and overflowing its banks, to serve the cause of ancient friends, lying under the rod of insolence and oppression. And the period pathetically closes, with the prophetess, in a single word, apostrophizing herself as the honored, happy instrument of co-operating with intelligent and animated nature in trampling pride and cruelty into the dust. “O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.”

I have already anticipated much of what I had to say, on the subject of the glowing eulogium which Deborah pronounces on the conduct of “Jael the wife of Heber.” Permit me only to repeat, that in order to our fully adopting the sentiments of the Israelitish poetess, we must be acquainted with many circumstances of the case, which the conciseness of the sacred history enables us not to discover; that there is a singularity in the whole conduct and occasion of the business, which forbids it to be drawn into a precedent, and pleaded in ordinary cases as an example or an excuse, that we are to distinguish carefully betwixt the poetic ardor and enthusiasm of a female bard and patriot, and the calm, unimpassioned praise and censure of sound reason, or the deliberate approbation of the God of truth, mercy, and justice. We know certainly that God cannot love nor commend perfidy, cruelty, or revenge. But he justly may, and often does employ the outrageous passions of one great offender to punish those of another. And that through ignorance, prejudice, or willful misconception, the wisest of men are very incompetent judges of the ways and works of the Almighty. The winding up of the sacred poem, suggests the most satisfactory apology for the conduct of Jael, and accounts at the same time for the warmth of the strains in which Deborah celebrates that conduct. It is the horrid use which conquerors usually made of victory, to which I allude. The wretched females of the vanquished people fell a prey to the brutal lust of the victors. This was a case so common that “the mother of Sisera and her wise ladies” are represented as so lost to feminine delicacy and compassion as remorselessly to exult in the thought of portioning out the virgins of Israel to Sisera and his soldiers, as the mere instruments of a brutal pleasure; as an article of horrid booty for the lawless plunderer. “The mother of Sisera

looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots? Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself, Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey, to every man a damsel or two? To Sisera a prey of divers colors, a prey of divers colors of needle-work, of divers colors of needle-work on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?"[*]Jdg 5:28-30 Now, may we not suppose both Jael and Deborah animated with a holy indignation against the intended violators of their sex's modesty and honor, and with a holy joy, on the defeat of their ungracious purpose? May we not innocently suppose a mixture of virtuous female spirit inspiring what the one acted and the other sung? Our pity for the fallen warrior, and his untimely, inglorious hate, must of course abate, when we consider that a righteous and merciful providence, by whatever means, shortened a life, and stopped a career, which threatened the life, the virtue, the happiness of thousands. In personifying the character of Sisera's mother and her attendants, Deborah presents, us with a happy imitation of a passage in the Song of Moses on the triumphant passage of the Red Sea; where the poet insinuates himself, by a bold figure of eloquence, into the councils of Pharaoh, overhears their formidable resolutions, and in the close of the scene. rejoices in seeing their counsels, once so much dreaded, turned into foolishness, by the grace and power of heaven. "The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them; they sank as lead in the mighty waters."[*]Exo 15:9-10 So here, Deborah brings in the matrons of Canaan as anticipating the fruits of victory, prematurely enjoying the triumph of the subjection of the Israelitish damsels to their own pride, and the pleasure of their warriors; and she inspirits the gratitude and joy of her fair country women, by gently hinting at the dreadful hazard which they had run. This too, of course, diminishes our concern for the cruel disappointment which the mother of Sisera endured, looking and looking, from her window, but still looking in vain for him who was never more to return; expecting and expecting that lingering chariot, which the ancient river Kishon had long ere now swept down its stream: flushed with hope, only to make calamity more bitter. And let that hope be for ever blasted, which could be accomplished only by what humanity shudders to think of.

Having thus enjoyed self-congratulation, and called forth the grateful congratulations of her delivered country, and with heroic ardor trampled on disappointed lust, insolence, and ambition, she now aims a nobler flight. The world and its transitory interests and employments disappear. The throne of God meets her enraptured eye. Private, personal, national animosity are no more: all, all is lost in the higher, unlimited, unchanging interests of the divine glory. "So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord." This is but a prophetic enunciation of what needs must be. After one revolution has obliterated another, one mortal interest swallowed another up--after the distinctions of Jew and Gentile, Greek and barbarian, bond and free are lost and forgotten, the honors of the divine justice and mercy shall flourish and prevail. They that are afar from him; of whatever other name or description, shall perish; and the workers of iniquity shall be destroyed. But the pious leader of the heavenly theme, as if unwilling to shut up her song with an idea so gloomy as the awful displeasure of the great God against his adversaries, relieves herself and us, by taking up the more encouraging view of the favor of Jehovah to his friends, and thus she fervently breathes out her soul; "But let them that love him, be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."

Next to the great Lord of nature himself, who is, ----to us invisible,

Or dimly seen, in these his lowest works; Milton. that glorious creature of his power, the sun, is the most striking and impressive of all objects. And poets of every description have enriched and ennobled their compositions by allusions to the glorious orb of day, “of this great world the eye and soul,” as the brightest inanimate image of Deity here below, the fountain of light, the dispenser of vital warmth, the parent of joy. The inspired sacred writers have likewise happily employed it to represent the most glorious animated image of God in our world, a wise and good man “going front strength to strength;” shining as a light in a dark place; silently, without expectation of return, without upbraiding, in an unceasing revolution of diffusing happiness; aiming at resemblance to his Creator by becoming a god to his follow-creatures. It is thus that Deborah concludes her song; with a warm effusion of faith, and hope, and desire, that righteousness might abound and increase, that good men might be in succession raised up, each in his day a light to his country, to mankind; “going forth as the sun in his might,” from luster to still higher luster, from usefulness to usefulness, without diminution, and without end. By the same simple but powerful imagery, the wise man represents the progress of true goodness; “the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” And Wisdom itself by a similar suggestion animates the zeal and supports the industry of those who are to teach his religion to the nations of the earth: “Ye are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” To the whole is affixed an historical note, short indeed, but highly interesting and important; “And the land had rest forty years.” This is the noblest eulogium of Deborah, the most honorable display of her talents and virtues. If there be feelings worthy of envy, they are those of this exalted woman, on reflecting that God had honored her to restore liberty, and peace to her country; and to establish such a system of administration of justice, of civil government, of military discipline, and of religious worship, as preserved the public tranquillity for forty years. How effectually may every individual serve the community! Of what importance, then, is every, the meanest individual! How lasting and how extensive is the influence of real worth! There is one way in which every man may be a public blessing, may become a savior of his country--by cultivating the private virtues of the man, and the Christian.

I proceed to illustrate the female character, its amiableness, usefulness, and importance, in persons and scenes of a very different complexion; in the less glaring, but not less instructive history of Ruth, the Moabitess, and Naomi, her mother-in-law; happy to escape the scenes of horror and blood which are the subject of the remainder of the history of the Israelitish judges.

099. Ruth--A Moabitess

Ruth--A Moabitess

Ruth 1:1-5. Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem-Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem-Judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons, and her husband. The perpetual vicissitude that prevails in the system of the universe, and in the conduct of Providence, is adapted to the nature, and conducive to the happiness of man. The succession of day and night, alternate labor and repose, the variations of the changing seasons lend to each other, as it returns, its peculiar beauty and fitness. We are kept still looking forward, we are ever hovering on the wing of expectation, rising from attainment to attainment, pressing on to some future mark, pursuing some yet unpossessed prize. The hireling, supported by the prospect of receiving the evening's reward, cheerfully fulfills the work of the day. The husbandman, without regret, perceives the glory of summer passing away, because he lifts up his eyes and "beholds the fields white unto the harvest;" and he submits joyfully to the painful toil of autumn, in contemplation of the rest and comfort he shall enjoy, when these same fields shall be white with snow. It is hunger that gives a relish to food; it is pain that recommends ease. The value of abundance is known only to those who have suffered want, and we are little sensible what we owe to God, for the blessing of health, till it is interrupted by sickness. The very plagues which mortality is heir to, have undoubtedly their uses and their ends: and the sword may be as necessary to draw off the gross humors of the moral world, as storm and tempest are to disturb the mortal stagnation, and to chase away the poisonous vapors of the natural. Weak, shortsighted man is assuredly unqualified to decide concerning the ways and works of infinite wisdom; but weak, laboring; wretched man may surely repose unlimited confidence in infinite goodness.

During the dreadful times when there was no king in Israel, the whole head was so sick, the whole heart so faint, the whole mass so corrupted, that an ocean of blood must be drained off, before it can be restored to soundness again. Not only one rotten limb, but the whole body is in danger of perishing, and nothing but a painful operation can save it. The skilful, firm, but gentle hand of Providence takes up the instrument, cuts out the disease, and then tenderly binds up the bleeding wounds. Relieved from the distress of beholding brother lifting up the spear against brother, from hearing the shouts of the victor, and the groans of the dying, we retire to contemplate and to partake of the noiseless scenes of domestic life; to observe the wholesome sorrows and guiltless joys of calmness and obscurity; to join in the triumphs of sensibility, and to solace in the soft effusions of nature; to "smile with the simple, and feed with the poor." The little history on which we are now entering, is one of those which every where, and at all seasons, must afford pleasure and

instruction. It is a most interesting display of ordinary life, of simple manners, of good and honest hearts; of the power of friendship and the rewards of virtue. It forms an important link in the chain of Providence, and the history of redemption. There is perhaps no story that has been wrought into so many different forms, transfused into so many different languages, accommodated to so many different situations, as the history of Ruth. It is felt, from the cottage up to the palace, by the rustic and the courtier, by the orphan gleaner in the field, and the king's daughter. The man of taste delights in it on account of the artless structure, elegant diction, and judicious arrangement of the tender tale. The friend of virtuous sensibility delights in it, for the gentle emotions which it excites, and the useful lessons which it inculcates. The pious soul rejoices in it from the enlarged, the instructive, the consolatory views of the Divine Providence which it unfolds. The inquiring and devout Christian prizes it, as standing in connection with the ground of his faith, and contributing to strengthen the evidence, and explain the nature of "those things wherein he has been instructed," and on which he rests for salvation. Happy the man, who, possessing all these qualities, shall peruse and employ it as a corrector and guide to the imagination, as a support to the spirit, as a light to the understanding, a monitor to the conscience, a guard to the affections, and a faithful instructer to the heart. The particular era of this story is not marked by the sacred penman, neither has he been directed to affix his name to his precious little work. In general it was not in the times of boisterous anarchy and wild uproar, that Boaz cut down his barley, and Ruth gleaned after the reapers. The fruits of the field were protected to the owner by lawful authority, and justice was administered by the elders in the gate.

If we consider that the life of man was now reduced to the common standard, that David was the fourth in order of succession from Boaz, and allow thirty or thirty-five years to be the medium standard of distance from one generation to another, the marriage of Boaz with Ruth will be thrown upon the short administration of his townsman Ibzan, the successor of Jephthah, of which we have only a brief account: "And after him, Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel."[*]Jdg 12:8

Samuel is generally understood to have written both this book and the preceding, and thereby to have preserved the historical series of events from Joshua to himself, almost unbroken; and also the genealogical deduction of succession down to David, in whom the royal line of the house of Judah commenced altogether uninterrupted. And while we behold Rahab the harlot, a woman of Jericho, and Ruth the Moabitess, not only admitted to the rank of mothers in Israel, but mothers of a race of kings, mothers in the line of "Messiah the Prince," we are admonished as Peter was long afterward, on a different occasion, "not to call that common or unclean which God hath purified."

Israel was now enjoying the blessing of good government, but the land is visited with a calamity which no sagacity of government could foresee or prevent, and no human power remove,--with famine. Bethlehem itself, the house of bread, so called from the fertility of the circumjacent fields, sinks under the pressure of this sore evil, and Elimelech, one of the chiefs of his tribe, is, like the most illustrious of his ancestors, driven to seek subsistence in a strange land.

Every land according to its place on the globe has its peculiar climate, soil, production. One is watered by the clouds of heaven, another by an inundation of the waters of the earth. Here the rain descends according to no fixed law, either as to season or quantity, there it is measured to a drop, and timed to a moment. On the regularity or uncertainty of these distributions by the hand of nature, or the intervention of Providence, depend the comfort, the very sustentation of human life;

on them depends all the variation of vegetable produce, as to plenty or scarcity, as to greatness, wholesomeness, pleasantness, and their contraries. Hence the same country is one year as the garden of God, for beauty and abundance, and the next as the waste howling wilderness; Canaan now flows with milk and honey, and gives bread to the full, and anon eats up its inhabitants. We hear an offended and a merciful God, by the mouth of the same prophet, reproving and threatening human thoughtlessness and ingratitude in relation to this interesting subject, in these glowing terms: “She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal; therefore will I return and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax, given to cover her nakedness. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, of which she said, These are my rewards which my lovers have given me: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them.” And thus relents the God of grace towards penitent returning children, “I will betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord. And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine and the oil, and they shall hear Jezreel; and I will sow her unto me in the earth, and I will have mercy on her that had not obtained mercy.” Such is the mysterious scale of both mercy and judgment. Thus universal nature is combined in one firm league to oppress and confound God’s adversary. Thus every creature, every event unites in preserving the existence, and promoting the happiness of his repenting, dutiful, obedient children.

Elimelech seeks and finds refuge in Moab, or “the earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof;” and he has given commandment, “Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab;” and that one word disarms in an instant national animosity, represses the rage of the lion, quenches the violence of fire. The fugitive of Bethlehem-Judah finds kindness and protection among inveterate enemies; Daniel sleeps secure amongst the fiercest of the savage tribes; and the three children of the captivity walk unhurt in the midst of the flaming furnace.

We see, at first, nothing but one of those instances which every day occur, of the sad reverses to which individuals, families, states are liable; the downfall and distress of an ancient and reputable house, struggling with penury, and forced into exile; but we soon discover, that the Eternal eye is fixed on a nobler object, that the hand of omnipotence is preparing the material and laying the foundation of a more magnificent fabric; that infinite window is bringing low the royal house of Bethlehem only to restore it with greater splendor.

We have before us at once the cure of pride and of despair. Behold, O man of an hundred ancestors, and of an hundred thousand acres, behold Elimelech, the son of Abraham, poor and despised; the head of the tribe of Judah, a stranger in a strange land, existing through sufferance, supplied through foreign bounty; and remember by what a brittle tenure thy privileges and possessions are held. Consider, child of adversity, whom no man knows, whom no one regards, consider yonder neglected, reduced, extinguished family, and behold from the ashes of the expiring phoenix, an immortal offspring arising, whose flight neither time nor space can limit, and feel thine own importance, and aim only at high things, and trust in omnipotence for the execution of its own eternal purpose. In a country and among a people where names were not mere arbitrary sounds, but conveyed a meaning connected with character, with history, with expectation, those of Elimelech, “my God is king,” and of his wife Naomi, “the pleasant one,” from their peculiar import, must have a reference to certain circumstances in their history which are not recorded. The former

might be dictated by the spirit of prophecy, and be significant, without the intention of them who imposed, or of him who bore it, of the future greatness to which the family, through the favor of Heaven, should arise, in the person of David, of Solomon, and that long succession of princes which finally centered, and was absorbed, in the person of Christ, David's son; yet David's Lord. The particulars of his own story that have reached us, are too few and too general to admit of our discerning any reference or application of his name to his character, office, or condition but we know enough of the character and history of Naomi to justify the suitableness of the appellation to her person, dispositions, and final attainments. In the disasters which befall, and the successes which attend certain families and individuals, we behold an apparent partiality of distribution that confounds and overwhelms us. Death enters into that house, passes from couch to couch, spares neither root nor branch; the insatiate fiend never says it is enough. Whatever that poor man attempts, be the scheme ever so judiciously formed, ever so diligently prosecuted, uniformly fails; the winds as they change, the stars in their courses fight against him. The very mistakes of his neighbor turn out prosperously, his sails are always full, his children multiply, his wealth increases, his mountain stands strong. Is God therefore unwise, capricious, partial, or unjust? No, but we are blind, contracted, presumptuous. We can discern, can comprehend only here and there a little fragment of his works, we are gone, before the event has explained itself; it requires the capacity, the eternity of God himself to take in the mighty whole of his plan. The house of Elimelech exhibits an affecting instance of the inequality we have been mentioning. The sad account of famine, of banishment, of degradation, of dependence, is at length closed with death. Disease of body, co-operating with distress of mind, probably the effect of it, shortens his days, and terminating his own worldly misery, dreadfully aggravates the woes of the unhappy survivors. Wretched mother, left to struggle alone with poverty, solitude, danger, and neglect: far from friends, encompassed with enemies, loaded with the charge of two fatherless children, not more the objects of affection, than the sources of anxiety and care! While Elimelech lived, penury was hardly felt as a burden; in exile thou wert always at home; secluded from society, the conversation of one still dispelled the gloom. Thy sons afforded only delight, because that delight was participated in, by him who had a common interest with you in them: but all is now changed, every load is accumulated sevenfold, every comfort is embittered, every prospect is clouded: the past presents nothing but regret; the future discloses nothing but despair.

She seems to have given up at this period all thoughts of returning to her native country, and, making a virtue of dire necessity, attempts to naturalize her family in the land of Moab, by allying her sons, through marriage, to the inhabitants of the country. The sense of the loss she has sustained gradually yields to the lenient hand of time, and to the sweet hope of seeing the house of her beloved husband built up, and his name revived in the persons of his grandchildren. Alas! what is the hope of man! the flatterer has been only decoying her into a greater depth of woe; her two remaining props sink, one after another, into the dust; all that the eyes desired is taken away with stroke upon stroke; and to fill up the measure of a mother's wretchedness, both her sons die childless, and hope expires with them. Now she is a widow indeed, and exhausted nature sinks under the pressure.

It is the opinion of many interpreters, that the premature death of the young men was a judgment from heaven to punish their illegal intermarriage with strange and idolatrous women. It becomes not man to judge; and we know that God executeth only righteous judgment; and in wrath still

remembers mercy.

Thus in three short lines the sacred historian has delivered a tragic tale that comes home to the bosom of everyone that possesses a spark of sensibility. It is a domestic story; it represents scenes which may, which do happen every day. It admonishes everyone in how many points he is vulnerable, how defenseless he is against the thunderbolts of Heaven. It awfully displays the evil of sin, and the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man. If such be the temporal effects of his vengeance, how bitter must be the cup which his just displeasure mingles for incorrigible offenders, in a state of final retribution! How pleasing to reflect that trials of this sort do not always flow from anger, that they are the wholesome severity of a father, that they aim at producing real good, that they in the issue really “yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness.” The darkness of night at length yields to the glorious orb of day, the shadow of death is turned into the morning, and the desolate is as she who hath an husband. This makes way for the introduction of the heroine of this eventful history; and we become interested in her from the very first moment. The Jewish writers, to heighten our respect for Ruth, perhaps from a pitiful desire to exalt their own ancestry, make her the daughter of a king of Moab, and as they are never timorous in making assertions, or forming conjectures on such occasions, they tell you her father was Eglon, whom Ehud slew. It is hardly probable that a prince of that country would have given his daughter in marriage to a needy adventurer who had banished himself from his country through necessity. But of little importance is it whether she were born a princess or no. Nature has adorned her with qualities such as are not always to be found in the courts of kings; qualities which best adorn high birth, and which ennoble obscurity and indigence; fidelity and attachment; a soul capable of fond respect for departed worth, and living virtue: magnanimity to sacrifice everything the heart holds dear, to decency; friendship, and religion; magnanimity to encounter, without repining, painful toil, and humiliating dependence, in fulfilling the duties of gratitude, humanity, and piety. How eloquent is she when she speaks, how great when she says nothing, how transcendently exalted in all she thinks, speaks, and acts! With what divine art, shall I say, is she introduced in the sacred drama? After we have been melted into pity by the calamities of Naomi’s family, and seen the widowed mourner sinking under wave upon wave; and the prospect of progeny, the last darling hope of an Israelitish matron, rudely torn from her, to an angel in the form of a damsel of Moab, a mourner and a widow like herself, appears to comfort her, and makes her to know by sweet experience that he, that she, has not lost all, who has found a kind and faithful friend. What is the sound of the trumpet, and a long train of mute and splendid harbingers, compared to the simple preparation of unaffected nature! Let us wait her approach in silent expectation; and muse on what is past.

Behold one generation of men goeth and another cometh; one planet arising as another sets, every human advantage balanced by its corresponding inconveniency, every loss compensated by a comfort that grows out of it.

Behold the purpose of the Eternal mind maintaining its ground amidst all the tossings and tempests of this troubled ocean, triumphing over opposition, serving and promoting itself by the wrath of man and the malice of hell, out of darkness rising into luster, “of weakness made strong,” by the energy of the great first cause, acquiring life, vigor, and prosperity from the extinction of means, from the destruction and death of secondary causes.

Attend to the great leading object of divine revelation, to which all refer, to which all are subservient, in which all are absorbed and lost. I will make mention of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; of Moses and the prophets; of Boaz and Ruth; “I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me; behold Philistia and Tyre with Ethiopia; this man was born there; and of Zion it shall be said, this man was born in her: and the Highest himself shall establish her. The Lord shall count, when he writeth up the people, That this man was born there.” May our names be written in the Lamb’s book of life, among the living in Jerusalem! The introduction of these personages and events, one after another, were remote steps of the preparation of the gospel of peace. And every person now born into the church of Christ, and every event now taking place in the administration of human affairs, is a little space in the great scale of eternal Providence, and a gradual preparation for the final consummation of all things. Let “thy kingdom come,” O God! Let Satan’s kingdom be destroyed; let the kingdom of grace be advanced, ourselves and others brought into and preserved in it, and let the kingdom of glory be hastened! Amen!

100. Ruth--Experienced Sorrows

Ruth--Experienced Sorrows

Ruth 1:14-18. And they lift up their voice and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her. And she said, Behold, thy sister-in-law in gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law. And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me. When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her. The calm, untumultuous, unglaring scenes of private life, afford less abundant mutter for the pen of the historian, than intrigues of state, senatorial contention, or the tremendous operations of the tented field, but they supply the moralist and the teacher of religion with more pleasing, more ample, and more generally interesting topics of useful information, and salutary instruction. What princes are, what statesmen meditate, what heroes achieve, is rather an object of curiosity than of utility. They never can become examples to the bulk of mankind. It is when they have descended from their public eminence, when they have retired to their private and domestic station, when the potentate is lost in the man, that they become objects worthy of attention, patterns for imitation, or beacons set up for admonition and caution. For the same reason the meek, the modest, the noiseless exhibition and exercise of female excellence, occupy a smaller space in the annals of human nature than the noisy, bustling, forensic pursuits and employments of the other sex. But when feminine worth is gently drawn out of the obscurity which it loves, and advantageously placed in the light which it naturally shuns, O how amiable, how irresistible, how attractive it is! A wise and good woman shines, by not seeking to shine; is most eloquent when she is silent, and obtains all her will, by yielding, by submission, by patience, by self-denial.

Scripture as it excels in everything, so it peculiarly excels in delineating and unfolding the female character, both in respect of the quantity exhibited, and of the delicacy, force, and effect of the design. We have already seen this exemplified, in a variety of instances in the dignified, conjugal attachment and respect, in the matron-like conscious, impatient superiority of Sarah--in the maternal partiality, eagerness, and address of Rebekah--in the jealous discontent and impatience of Rachel--in the winning condescension, and the melting commiseration of Pharaoh’s daughter--in the patriotic ardor, the prophetic elevation, the magisterial dignity of Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth--in the unrelenting firmness, and the daring, enterprising spirit of Jael, the wife of Heber.

Female vice and worthlessness are delineated on the sacred page with equal skill, truth, and justice, from the insolence of Hagar, and the treachery of Delilah, down to the implacable vengeance of Herodias, and the insatiate cruelty of her accursed daughter.

Three more female portraits are now presented for our inspection, and our improvement; all expressive of characters essentially different, all possessing features of striking resemblance, all

exhibiting qualities which create and keep alive an interest, all copies from nature, all portrayed by the hand of him who knows what is in man.

We have witnessed the wretchedness and sympathized in the sorrows of Naomi, my pleasant one, reduced from rank and fullness to obscurity and indigence, banished from her country and friends, a stranger in a strange land, robbed of her husband, bereaved of her children; having no protector save Heaven, no hope or refuge but in the peaceful grave. Behold the thrice widowed mourner bowing the head, and hiding the face in silent grief. She is dumb, she opens not her mouth, because the Lord hath done it. The miserable partners of her woe only increase and embitter it. Two young women, like herself widows, childless, comfortless; fondly attached to her, and tenderly beloved by her, because fondly attached to the memory of their husbands; but their mutual affection rendered a punishment, not a pleasure, by the pressure of poverty and the bitterness of neglect. At length she is roused from the stupefaction of grief by tidings from her country, from her dear native city, and a ray of hope dispels the gloom of her soul. She “hears in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread.” In the wisdom and goodness of Providence, there is a healing balm provided for every wound. The lenient hand of time soothes the troubled soul to peace; the agitation of the mind at last wearies it out, and lulls it asleep, and its weakness becomes its strength. Though in misery we cleave to the love of life, and having lost our comforts one after another, we are still enabled to look forward with fond expectation to a new source of joy, and when all temporal hope is extinguished, and reluctantly given up, the spirit asserts its own immortality, and rests in hope beyond the grave. Naomi is reduced to a melancholy, mortifying alternative; of continuing a poor, deserted exile in the land of Moab, or of returning to Bethlehem-Judah, stripped of all her wealth, all her glory; to be an object, at best, of pity, perhaps of contempt. On this however she resolves, flattering herself that change of place and change of objects may alleviate her distress. The two young Moabitesses, in uniting themselves to men of Israel, had renounced their own kindred and country, perhaps their native gods; and therefore listen with joy to the proposal of their mother-in-law, to return to Canaan. It is the more pleasing to observe this union of sentiment and affection, that the relation in question is seldom found favorable to cordiality and harmony. It furnishes a presumptive proof of the goodness of all the three, and they had indeed a most mournful bond of union among themselves--common loss, common misery: and the heart seems to have felt and acknowledged the ties which alliance had formed and the hand of death had riveted.

Behold then the mother and her daughters turning their back on the painfully pleasing scenes of joys and sorrows past, unattended, unprotected, unbefriended, disregarded, as sad a retinue as ever wandered from place to lace. They are hardly in motion from their place, when Naomi, penetrated with a lively sense of gratitude for friendship so generous and disinterested, overwhelmed with the prospect of the still greater misery in which these dutiful young women were about to involve themselves, from their love to her, and unwilling to be outdone in kindness, earnestly entreats them to return home again, urging upon them every consideration that reason, that affection, that prudence could suggest, to induce them to separate from a wretch so friendless and forlorn, so helpless, so hopeless as herself. To suffer alone is now all the consolation she either expects or seems to wish; the destitute condition of these sisters in affliction, is now her heaviest burden. Indeed the situation of these three female pilgrims has in it something wonderfully pathetic and interesting. There they are upon the road, on foot, with all the weakness,

ignorance, timidity, uncertainty, and irresolution of their sex; not knowing which way to bend their course, exposed to the craft, violence, or insult of everyone they met; sinking under the recollection of what they had endured, shrinking from the apprehension of what might yet be before them: attempting to comfort each other, and, in that, everyone seeking some slender consolation for herself. Think on the failure of bread, on the failure of money, on the approaches of night, on the natural terrors and dangers of darkness, on the savageness of wild beasts, and the more formidable savageness of wicked men. Think on the unkindness and indifference of an unfeeling world, and the darker frowns of angry Heaven. We are disposed to weep while we reflect on Jacob, a fugitive from his father's house, composing his head to rest upon a pillow of stone, under the canopy of the open sky; at reflecting on Joseph, torn from his father's embrace, sold into slavery, cast into a dungeon; but I find here something infinitely more deplorable. They were men, flushed with youthful spirits, with youthful hope: the vigor of their minds had not been broken down by the iron hand of affliction, their prospects were enlivened with the promises and visions of the Almighty; but these unhappy wanderers have drunk deep of the cup of adversity; their society is worse than solitude, despair hangs over all their future prospects. Stand still and shed the tear of compassion over them, ye daughters of affluence, prosperity, and ease, who start at a shadow, who scream at the sight of a harmless mouse, who tremble at the rustling of a leaf shaken by the wind; ye who never knew the heart of a stranger, the keen biting of the wind of heaven, the stern aspect of hunger, the surly blow, or scornful look of pride and cruelty. Or rather, weep over them, ye whose wounds are still bleeding, to whom wearisome days and nights have been appointed, who by the experience of misery, have learned to pity and to succor the miserable. May the God of mercy, the friend of the orphan, the judge of the widow, the refuge of the distressed, have mercy upon them, and conduct them in safety to their desired haven. Which shall we most admire, the generosity and disinterestedness of the mother, or the steadiness, spirit, and resolution of the daughters? How pleasurable is strife of a certain kind, the strife of good will, of magnanimity, of gratitude, of piety, of self denial! The language, the sentiments, are the language and sentiments of nature, they flow from the heart, and reach the heart, "And Naomi said unto her too daughters-in-law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you, in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them. And they lift up their voice and wept."[*]Ruth 1:8-9 The good woman herself admits that enough of respect has been paid to filial and conjugal tenderness; she wishes and prays, as a recompence for their kindness to the living, and devotedness to the memory of the dead, more lasting and more auspicious connections with husbands of their own country. She proposes not, recommends not the affected, constrained, involuntary retirement and sequestration of prudish, squeamish virtue; and they, on their part, assume no unnatural airs of immortal grief; they form no flimsy suspicious vows of undeviating, unalterable attachment; make no clamorous, unmeaning, deceptions protestation of love extinguished, and never to be rekindled, the pitiful artifice of little minds to flatter themselves, and catch the admiration of others. How much more emphatic the silent, unprotesting reply of Orpah and Ruth! "She kissed them; and they lift up their voice and wept." What charming eloquence is heard, is seen, is felt in those, tears! Have these lovely damsels less regard for their departed lords, are they more eager to form new alliances, that they say nothing? I cannot believe it. Noisy grief is quickly over, soon spends itself. Sincerity seldom calls in the aid of exclamation, vehemence, and vows; but dubious, staggering fidelity is glad to support itself with the parade of

woe, and the pomp of declamation. Their persevering, determined, unprotesting friendship but endears them the more to their venerable parent, and inclines her the more powerfully to resist their inclination, and prevent the sacrifice which they were disposed to make; and again she has recourse to more earnest and tender expostulation, resolved to offer up a noble sacrifice to maternal tenderness in her turn. “And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will you go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also tonight, and should also bear sons; would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters: for it grieveth me much for your sakes, that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.”[*]Ruth 1:11-13

What sweet touches of unsophisticated nature press upon the heart, in perusing this address! beyond the pomp and power of art to reach. Who is not melted at hearing the undissembled wailing, of a good and honest mind, mourning for others, not itself; calmly surrendering its own interest in the joys of life, but anxiously desirous to procure and preserve them for those whom she loved as her own soul; nobly resigning that cordial of cordials, virtuous friendship, when it could apt be enjoyed but to the detriment of those who felt and expressed it; composed to the prospect and suffering of solitary anguish, provided her amiable children were restored to the rank, affluence, and comfort which they so well deserved. How poor and contemptible are the contentions for precedency and pre-eminence, the emulation of fortune and dress, the rage of admiration and conquest compared to this! How pleasant is it to see an humble fortune dignified and supported by generosity and greatness of mind! The touchstone is now applied to the affection of the two sisters, and their characters and merits are finally disclosed. Orpah suffers herself to be persuaded; with regret we behold her resolution overcome; we behold her separating from her mother-in-law, with the valedictory kiss of peace, and returning to her own country and her gods; and we hear of her no more. But Ruth cleaves to her new choice, unmoved by the example of her sister, or the entreaties of her mother, she persists in her purpose; the desertion of Orpah only knits her heart the faster to her adopted parent, and in words far sweeter than the nightingale’s song, she breathes out her unalterable resolution to live and to die with her. How could Naomi find in her heart to make another attempt to shake off so lovely a companion? How delighted must she have been, in yielding the triumph of kindness to a pleader so irresistible, “And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.”[*]Ruth 1:16-17 The mother is every way outdone, overcome, and contends no longer--to persist farther had been cruelty, not friendship: and thus mutual sympathy and deliberate choice have, under the direction of all-ruling Providence, formed an union dearer than the ties of interest, or even the bonds of nature know: and thus the same breath which extinguishes the fainter spark, blows up the stronger into a purer, brighter flame; and thus the God who has all hearts and all events in his hand, ever rears it refuge for the miserable, provides a remedy against despair, and extracts a precious essence from calamity, which operates its own cure. “When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.”[*]Ruth 1:18 And thus Ruth stands without an equal, without a rival. And how has she gained the glorious superiority over a sister? By a lofty tone and till overbearing spirit, by the poisoned whisper, and the dark insinuation; by smoothness of forehead and malignity of

heart? No, but by perseverance in well-doing, and adherence to rectitude; by modest firmness, and heart-affecting simplicity; by undissembled affection, and unaffected piety. O goodness, how pure, how sincere, how satisfactory are the honors which crown thy head, and dilate thy heart!

It is impossible to tire in contemplating an object so transcendently excellent. In that fair form all the feminine virtues and graces love to reside. We have pointed out some of them; let us meditate for a moment, on that which is the crown and glory of all the rest. Estimable for her conjugal fidelity, and filial attachment; great in her voluntary renunciation of the world, and patient submission to poverty, hardship, and contempt; how superlatively great, how supremely estimable does she appear, arrayed in the robe of unfeigned piety, and triumphant faith in God! The world may perhaps condemn her for preferring the society, country, and prospects of so poor a woman as Naomi to the friendship of own kindred, the possessions of her native home, the allurements of present ease and comfort. Had she conferred with flesh and blood, how very different had the decision been! But the same divine principle which caused Moses to “refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter;” and which taught him “to esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt,” determined this amiable creature to withdraw from the companions of her youth, the protection of her father’s house, and the religious worship of her ancestors; and to follow a destitute forlorn widow from country to country, to cast her subsistence upon the care of Providence, and to look for her reward beyond the grave.

Observe these distinct qualities of the religious principle by which she was actuated.

I. It was deliberate, the result of reflection, comparison, and choice, not the prejudice of education, the determination of self-interest, nor the momentary effect of levity and caprice. Her prejudices, her partialities, her worldly interests were all clearly on the other side. The idolatrous rites of Moab were fascinating to a young mind, not yet beyond a taste for pleasure; the aspect of the religion of Canaan was rather ungainly and forbidding, and to adopt it implied the renunciation of all that the heart naturally holds dear. When she therefore thus solemnly affirms, “Your God shall be my God,” it is in effect saying, “I have counted the cost, I know whom I have believed. I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back. I have subscribed with my hand to the God of Jacob. Blessed be the day that I came into connection with an Israelitish family. It has indeed cost me many tears, pierced through my heart with many sorrows, it is banishing me from dear native clime, from the endearments of parental affection, from ease, honor, and abundance, driving me among strangers, exposing me to struggle with uncertainty, anxiety, necessity, neglect, and scorn; but my resolution is fixed, none of these things move me; every sacrifice, every loss, every disgrace is infinitely more than compensated by having Israel’s God for my God.” Which leads to observe a

Second feature of Ruth’s religious character; it was steady and persevering. It might at first have been mere respect for the opinions and practice of the husband of her youth; the mere decency that suited an adopted daughter of Israel; but this had long ceased to be a motive; had it amounted but to this, it had been buried in the grave of her departed lord; but what was at first complaisance and decency, grows up into inquiry, inquiry produces hesitation, and more serious inquiry, this improves into conviction, and conviction is followed by a determination not to be moved or shaken, and she continues steadfast to the end. Her constancy, it must be allowed, was put to severe trials. Orpah has gone back, Naomi carries her expostulation up to importunity, I had almost said,

to downright violence; the difficulties and hardships of the way were increasing, not diminishing upon her. Had not “the heart been established by grace,” so many, such accumulated discouragements, must have subdued the ardor of her spirit, and sent her back after her sister; but she has put her hand to the plow, and must not look back. Observe, she does not attempt to reason, does not oppose argument to argument, but, “being fully persuaded in her own mind,” adheres firmly to her point, and argues irresistibly by not arguing at all, and prevails by entreaty. See that your cause be good, my fair friend, persist in it, prosecute it thus, and be assured of the victory.

III. Observe finally as Ruth’s religious principle was deliberate, was steady and persevering, so it was lively, efficacious, practical. We hear nothing of the prattle of piety, nothing of the violence of a young and a female proselyte, no question of doubtful disputation introduced, about places and modes of worship, about Jerusalem and this mountain, nothing of the religion that floats merely in the head, and bubbles upon the tongue; no, her religion is seen, not heard, it “works by love, it purifies the heart, it overcomes the world.” It offers up a grand sacrifice unto God, the body and spirit, affection, and substance, youth, beauty, parentage, the pleasures, and the pride of life. Let me see a single instance of this sort, and I will believe the convert more in earnest, than by exhibiting all the wordy zeal of a thousand polemics.

Indeed it is by action that this truly excellent woman expresses all her inward feelings. Her affection to her husband is not heard in loud lamentation over his tomb, but in cleaving to all that remained of him, his mother, his people, his country, and his God. Her affection to his mother is not expressed in the set phrase of condolence and compliment; but in adhering to her when all had forsaken her, in laboring for her subsistence, in submitting to her counsel: and her reverence for his God is manifested not merely in adopting the language, and observing the rites of Canaan, but in relinquishing for ever, and with abhorrence, the gods beyond the flood, and everything connected with their abominable rites.

Every circumstance of the case and character under review, administers plain and important instruction. And, being it case in ordinary life, Ruth stands forth a pattern and instructor to young persons, in particular, whose situation may resemble her own.

Young woman, you may have married into a strange family. You have, of course, adopted the kindred, the pursuits, the friendships, and to a certain degree, the religion of your husband. It is your duty, and you will find it your interest, to let him and his connections know, from your general deportment, that you are satisfied with the choice which you have made. Learn to give up your own prejudices in favor of country, of parentage, of customs, of opinions. Unless where the sacred rights of conscience are concerned, deem no sacrifice too great for the maintenance or restoration of domestic peace. As far as lieth in you, “whither he goeth, go thou; and lodge where he lodgeth; let his people be thy people, and his God thy God.” You will thereby preserve and secure his affection; you will harmonize family interests and intimacies, instead of disturbing them: if yours be the better religion, this is the way to bring over to it the man of no religion, or of an erroneous one; and if it be the worse, your relinquishing it, on conviction, will be at once a token of conjugal affection, a mark of good understanding, and a reasonable service toward God. Have you had, in early life, the calamity of becoming a widow? It is it distressing, a delicate situation. It calls for every maxim of prudence, every counsel of friendship, every caution of experience, every support

of piety. If you are a mourner indeed, you are already guarded against affectation; you will find rational and certain relief in attending to, and performing the duties of your station. You will neither seek a hasty cure of sorrow by precipitately plunging into the world, nor attempt an unnatural prolongation of it by affected retirement and sequestration. The tongue will utter no rash vows; the pang of separation will dictate no ensnaring resolutions; the will of Providence will be respected, obeyed, followed. Respect for the dead is best expressed by dutifulness to the living.

You have before you an useful example of firmness blended with female softness, of resolution heightened and adorned by sensibility. Lately, like Ruth, you had one who thought and acted for you; one who joyfully endured the burden and heat of the day, that your body and mind might enjoy repose. But now necessity is laid upon you. You must awake, and arise to think and act for yourself. And here, as in every case, Nature has annexed the recompense to the duty. The mental powers are enfeebled, and at length destroyed, by disuse and inaction. Exertion invigorates the mind, and composes by directing it. The listlessness of indolence undermines health; the activity of useful employment is the simplest and most infallible medicine for bodily complaints. And the most direct road to an honorable and happy second connection, probably, is, to guard carefully against all vehement expression of either inclination or aversion, on the subject.

All these, however, are merely lessons of prudence, adapted to the life that now is; and, however important in themselves, unless aided and supported by a higher principle, will constitute, at most, the decent kinswoman, or the respectable sufferer. In Ruth we have this higher principle likewise beautifully exemplified--rational, modest, unaffected piety. True religion sits well on persons of either sex, and in all situations; but its aspect is peculiarly amiable in a female form, and in particular situations. Youth, beauty, and sorrow united, present a most interesting object--a daughter weeping at a parent’s tomb; a mother mourning over “the babe that milked her,” and “refusing to be comforted;” a widow embracing the urn which contains the ashes of the husband of her youth--in all their affliction we are afflicted, we cannot refrain from mingling our tears with theirs. Let religion be infused into these lovely forms, and mark how the interest rises, how the frame is embellished, how the deportment is ennobled! The eye of that dutiful child is turned upward, her heart is delivered from oppression, her trembling lips pronounce, “When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.” “My Father who art in Heaven!” The mother withdraws from the breathless clay, reconciled to the stroke which bereaved her, “goes her way, and eats bread, and her countenance is no more sad,” for her Maker has said to her, “Why by weepest thou? and why eatest then not? and why is thy heart grieved? Am not I better to thee than ten sons?” The widowed mourner “gives her mortal interest up; and makes her God her all.” Young woman, whatever thy condition may be; whether thou art in thy father’s house, or married to an husband; at home, or in a strange land; in society or solitude; followed or neglected; be this thy monitor, this thy guide, this thy refuge--“The love of God shed abroad in thy heart;” “the fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom;” “the peace of God which passeth all understanding.” However easy, gentle, flexible, complying, in other respects, where your religious principles, where the testimony of a good conscience, where your duty to your Creator are concerned, be firm and resolute, “be steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Thus shall youth be guarded, and beauty adorned; thus shall society be sweetened, and solitude cheered; thus shall prosperity be sanctified, and adversity soothed; thus shall life, even to old age and decay, be rendered useful and respect, able; and thus shall death and the grave be stripped of all

that is terrible in them.

101. Ruth--Moves to Bethlehem

Ruth--Moves to Bethlehem

Ruth 1:19-22. So they went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them; and they said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, which returned out of the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley-harvest. Of the calamities to which human life is exposed, a few only are to be accounted real evils: the rest are imaginary and fantastical. Want of health is real woe; but what proportion do the hours of pain and sickness bear to the years of ease, and comfort, and joy? Want of bread is real distress, but it is very seldom the work of nature, and therefore ought not, in justice, to be introduced into the list of the unavoidable ills which flesh is heir to. The loss of friends is a sore evil, but even wounds from this sharp pointed weapon are closed at length, by the gentle hand of time, and the tender consolations of religion.

Whence then the unceasing, the universal murmurings of discontent, of desire, of impatience? Men fix their standard of felicity too high; and all they have attained goes for nothing, because one darling object is still out of reach; or they groan and sigh under the weight of some petty disaster, which scarce deserves the name; while ten thousand substantial blessings are daily falling on their heads unnoticed, unacknowledged, unenjoyed. Compare, O man, thy possessions with thy privations, compare thy comforts with thy deserts, compare thy condition with thy neighbor's, consider how far, how very far thy state is on this side worst, and learn to give God thanks. Repine not that some wants are, unsupplied, that same griefs are endured, that some designs have been frustrated, while so many unmerited good things are left, while hope remains, while there is recourse to Heaven. Behold these two forlorn wanderers, widowed, friendless, destitute, and cease from thy complaints, and stretch out thy hand to succor the miserable. In the glorious strife of affection, Ruth has nobly prevailed. Impelled by the fond recollection of endearments past, and now no more--prompted by filial duty and tenderness to the mother of her choice, attracted, animated, upheld by the lowers and prospects of religion, she composedly yields up her worldly all, takes up her cross, and bears it patiently along from Moab to Bethlehem-Judah. The history is silent on the subject of their journey. It is easy to conceive the anxieties, the terrors, the fatigues, the sufferings of female travellers, on a route of at least a hundred and twenty miles across the Arnon, across the Jordan, over mountains, through solitudes, without a protector, without a guide, without money. But that God who is the friend of the destitute, and the refuge of the miserable, that God who was preparing for them infinitely more than they could ask, wish, or think, guides and guards them by the way, and brings them at length to their desired resting place.

These are not the only female pilgrims whom the sacred page has presented to our view, advancing by slow and painful stages to Bethlehem of Judah. Upwards of thirteen hundred years

after this period we behold a still more illustrious traveller, and in circumstances still more delicate, on the road from Nazareth of Galilee, to her native city; but not to take possession of the inheritance of her fathers, not to repose in the lap of ease and indulgence, not to deposit the anxieties of approaching childbirth in the bosom of a fond and sympathizing parent; but to know the heart of a stranger, to feel the bitterness of unkindness and neglect; so friendless that not a door would open to receive her, so poor that she cannot purchase the accommodations of an inn, overtaken by nature's inevitable hour, "she brings forth her first-born son in a stable, and lays him in the manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." But through such humiliating circumstances of meanness and poverty, what a display of glory and magnificence was the arm of Jehovah preparing! What an important station do the simple annals of these poor women hold in the history of mankind! What celebrity, in the eyes of all nations, have they conferred on Bethlehem, on their country! How a thousand years shrink into a point, before that God who "sees the end from the beginning!" How the purposes of Heaven are accomplished to an iota, to one tittle! How places and times are determined of Him who saith, as one having authority, "My counsel shall stand, and I will fulfil all my pleasure."

One of the advantages, and not the least, of travelling abroad, is the joy which the thought of returning home inspires; but this is a consolation which Naomi's return is not permitted to enjoy. She brings back no treasures to purchase attention, to command respect, to excite envy. She is accompanied with no husband, no son, to maintain her cause, or cheer her solitude. She brings back nothing but emptiness, dereliction, and tears. A great part of her ancient acquaintance and friends are gone, as well as her own family. Those who remain hardly know her again, so much are her looks impaired and disfigured with grief. A new generation has arisen, to whom she is an utter stranger, and who are utter strangers to her. But in a little city, a trifling event makes a great noise. The curiosity of the whole town is excited by the appearance of these two insignificant fugitives; and various we may suppose were the inquiries set on foot, the conjectures formed, the remarks made, the censures passed, on their account. This is the never-failing inconveniency of inconsiderable places. Where there is abundance of idleness, abundance of ill-nature, every man is a spy upon his neighbor, everyone is at leisure to attend to the affairs of another, because he is but half occupied by his own. We have here enough of inquiry, enough of wonder, but not a single word of compassion, of kindness, of hospitality; and Naomi might have gone without a roof to shelter her head, or a morsel of bread to sustain sinking nature, but for the industry and attachment of her amiable daughter-in-law!

Base, unfeeling world, that can feast itself on the orphan's tears, and the widow's sorrow! See, there they are, everyone from his own business, or rather his own idleness, to stare and talk a wretched woman out of countenance; the whisper goes round, the finger points, the scandal of ten years standing is revived, and a new coloring is given to it. Affected pity and real indifference wound the heart which God himself has just bruised! whose husband and children he has takes to himself. The wretched mourner seems to feel it; she bursts into an agony of grief, and thus vents the bitterness of her soul, "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?"[*]Ruth 1:20-21 What simple, but what forcible language the heart speaks! She dwells on the minute circumstances of her case, takes up her own name as a theme of we, changes the fond

appellation of parental affection, of parental hope, Naomi, on which Providence had poured out the wormwood and gall of disappointment, into one better adapted to her tragic history. The past presents nothing but happiness passed away as a shadow; rank, and opulence, and importance gone, gone, never to return. The future spreads a gloom unirradiated by a single gleam of hope. She apprehends no change of things, but the oppressive change from evil to worse. But yet her misery admits of alleviation. It comes from God, she sees the hand of a Father in her affliction, she kisses the rod, and commands the soul to peace. To endure distress the fruit of our own folly, to suffer from the pride, cruelty, and carelessness of a man like ourselves, is grievous, is unsupportable, it drinks up our spirits. But the evil that comes immediately from God has its own antidote blended into its substance; we drink the poison and the medicine from the same chalice; and at the same instant; the one destroys the effect of the other; their joint operation is salutary, is life-giving, not deadly. Was that the voice of God which I heard? Spake it not in thunder? Said it not, “Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt offering?” It is well; it was the voice of God, and that is enough. I will offer up the sacrifice, I will surrender my dearest delight, I cannot tell how the promise is to be accomplished, consistently with my obedience and submission, but the command and the promise proceed from the same lips; I leave all to him. From all that we see, Naomi had slender motives, and poor encouragement, to return to her own country; we cannot tell what determined her resolution; it might be a little fit of female impatience, occasioned by some piece of Moabitish insolence or unkindness; it might be the more restlessness of a mind ill at ease, grasping at the shadow of felicity merely from chance of place; it might be the ardent desire of home, of the scenes of childish simplicity, innocence, and joy, which in certain circumstances all men feel, and by which the conduct of all is, to a certain degree, regulated. Whatever it were it came from above, it was overruled of infinite wisdom, it was, unknown to itself, acting in subservience to a most important event: and it is thus, that little, unnoticed, unknown powers, put the great machine in motion, produce effects that astonish, and delight, and bless mankind. The same all-ruling Providence is conspicuous in determining the season of Naomi’s return. On this hinged all the mighty consequences of Ruth’s acquaintance and connection with Boaz--the birth of kings, the transmission of empire, the accomplishment of ancient prophecy, the hopes of the human race. Had this apparently inconsequential journey been accelerated, been retarded, a month, a week, a single day, the parties might never have met. Contingent to men, it was foreseen, fixed, disposed, and matured by Him, “who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.”

Everyone observes and records the great incidents of his life. But would you, O man, have rational pleasure, blended with useful instruction, attend to little things, trace matters of highest moment up to their source; and behold thy fate stand quivering on a needle’s point: and a color given to thy whole future life, thy eternal state fixed, by a reed shaken with the wind, by an accidental concurrence which thou wert neither seeking nor avoiding; and rejoice to think that all things are under the direction of unerring wisdom, of all-subduing mercy; are “working together for good.” Does this teach a lesson of levity and inconsideration? Darest thou to trifle with thy everlasting concerns because there is a God who ruleth and judgeth in the earth, who doth all things after the counsel of his own will? God forbid. Presumptuously to lead the decrees of Providence, impiously to resist them, or timidly to draw back, are equally offensive to a righteous, a holy, and wise God.

We have seen the unhappy Naomi stripped of almost every earthly good; husband, children, friends, means, country, comfort; it is the dark midnight hour with her. No, there is one little lamp left burning, to dissipate the gloom, to prevent despair--the sacred flame of virtuous friendship. No, the sun of righteousness is halting to the brightness of his arising. The name after all was propitious and prophetic; God brings it about in his own way, and it is “wondrous in our eyes.” The continuation of this story will carry us on to the contemplation of scenes of rural simplicity, for the enjoyment of which, grandeur might well relinquish its pride and pomp, its vanity and vexation of spirit, and rejoice in the exchange. Let us meanwhile pause and reflect on the history of Naomi as administering useful instruction.

First. As an admonition never to despair. God frequently brings his people to that mournful spectacle, hope expiring, that he may have the undivided honor of reviving it again, and may be acknowledged as the one pure and perennial fountain of light, and life, and joy. The condition of Jacob, of Joseph, of Naomi, all preach one and the same doctrine; all proclaim that the time of man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.

Secondly. Let us call, let us reckon nothing mean or contemptible which God employs, or may be pleased to employ, in his service. The notice of the King of kings impresses dignity and importance, confers true nobility on the low-born child, the beggar, the outcast, the slave. On them all he has stamped his own image; and their present and ever future condition, is the work of his providence. “It is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish;” and if destined to salvation, to what worldly distinction may they not aspire, may they not arrive? Carefully mark the progress of children: study the bent of their dispositions, of their talents; endeavor to put them in the train which nature and Providence seem to have pointed out: attend to what constitutes their real consequence in life, and leave the issue to Him who governs all events.

Thirdly. Observe how the great Ruler of the universe contrasts and connects great things with small, that he may humble the pride of man, and expose the nothingness of the glory of this world. That forlorn gleaner, and Boaz the wealthy; the exile from Moab, and the resident possessor of the fertile plains of Bethlehem-Judah, seem wonderfully remote from each other. Their condition is as opposite as human life can well present: but in the eye of Heaven they are already one. She is but a single step from being lady of the harvest which she gleans, “an help meet” for its lord, and the sovereign mistress of those servants at whose aspect she now trembles, the meanest of whom she now looks up to as her superior. Childless and a widow, her family, her own children are but three steps from a throne--the throne of Judah and Israel; and in the purpose of the Eternal “the fulness of time” is hastening to exhibit to an astonished world, in the person of this woman’s seed “that Prince of peace, of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this.” The period is approaching, men and brethren, when Bethlehem-Judah shall display greater wonders, contrasts more confounding than these. The time is at hand, when another forlorn damsel of the same race, and her outcast babe shall appear in contrast with all that is stupendous, striking, formidable, venerable in heaven and earth, shall rise above all, give laws to all, eclipse all. Behold that “babe lying in a manger, in a stable, because there is no room for him in the inn,” controlling the counsels of Augustus, the mighty master of the world; behold him drawing princes and wise men from the east, with treasures of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, to his feet. Behold the

face of heaven irradiated, enriched with a new star, to mark the way which led to his cradle: while a multitude of the heavenly host announce in rapturous strains the birth of the lowly infant. Behold “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” “of no reputation;” “in the form of a servant;” “numbered with transgressors;” “obedient to death, even the death of the cross.” Behold him “highly exalted;” “leading captivity captive;” “all the angels of God worshipping him; invested with “a name that is above every name;” “crowned with glory and honor;” “coming in the clouds of heaven!” To him let my knee bow, and my tongue confess. “His mime shall endure forever; his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and amen.”[*]Psa 72:17-19

Fourthly. In the adoption of Ruth into the church of God, and “the commonwealth of Israel,” we have another dawning ray of hope arising upon the Gentile nations. The tide is beginning imperceptibly to rise and swell, which shall at length become an over-flowing ocean. “In that seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” That stranger shall be employed in bringing forward the mighty plan to maturity. “Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands to God.” “They shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.” Verily God is no respecter of persons.

102. Ruth--Providential Direction

Ruth--Providential Direction

Ruth 2:1-3. And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter. And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.

Providence has graciously annexed to honest industry, both respectability and happiness. The purest and most delicious enjoyment that human life admits of, perhaps, is, when a man sits down with those whom he loves, to the temperate indulgence of that refreshment and repose which he has just earned and sweetened with his labor. The greatest, and wisest, and best of men, are ever presented to us, as engaged in virtuous employment and exertion; as deriving health, subsistence, reputation, and comfort from the exercise, not the inactivity of their bodily and mental powers: and happily the scenes, in which every man is conversant, seem to him the most interesting of all, his own station the most eminent or useful, his own pursuits the most important. Hence a certain degree of self-complacency of self-satisfaction pervades the whole; everyone is acting in his own sphere; while infinite wisdom binds all together by invisible or unnoticed bands, and the various members, without knowledge or design, co-operate for the common benefit, and fulfill the great design of Heaven.

Idleness is not more dishonorable, than it is inimical to real felicity. The sluggard at once defeats the purpose of his Maker, and destroys his own pence; and what was denounced against man as a punishment, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," like every other punishment that comes from above, is converted into a blessing; and, as in every other case, the great God is just and merciful at once; just, in imposing on the fallen creature the necessity of laboring; merciful, in rendering the fruit of it so sweet. But call the inhabitants of a great, commercial, polished city find either amusement or instruction in contemplating the rude and simple manners of ancient times; in listening to the history of the inglorious toils of the husbandman; in tracing the operations of an art, the very terms of which they do not understand; in observing the mean employments of poverty and wretchedness which they only pity or despise! Whether they can derive amusement, or instruction, from such things as these, or not, may not courtly pride be admonished in behalf of the lowly, rustic sons of want and industry, in the words of two sweet singing bards of our own country.

"Let not ambition mock their useful toil,

Their homely joys and destiny obscure;

Nor grandeur hear, with a disdainful smile,

The short and simple annals of the poor."

Gray's Church-yard.

----“Nor ye who live

In luxury and ease, in pomp and pride,

Think these lost thanes unworthy of your ear.”

Thomson’s Spring.

We have heard the artless tale of Naomi’s woe, and Ruth’s attachment. We have accompanied the deserted, widowed mother and daughter-in-law from Moab to Bethlehem-Judah, the city of their departed husbands; but alas, all the reception they meet with, is stupid wonder, silly curiosity, or insulting pity. We hear of no kind contention to entertain the stranger and succor the distressed. The season of reaping was come; but for them no golden harvest waved in the wind, for them no mower was preparing his sickle, their poverty was but embittered by the sight of plenty diffused around: and the misery of Naomi’s fall is dreadfully aggravated, by the prosperity which Elimelech’s nearest relations were enjoying. Of these the most distinguished was Boaz, whom the sacred historian introduces to our acquaintance as “a mighty man of wealth.” Riches, like every other gift of God, become a blessing or a curse just according to the use that is made of them. Riches are a solid good, when they are received with thankfulness, enjoyed with moderation, and employed in the service of God and of mankind; but are perverted into a sore evil when they engender pride, and harden the heart, as is too generally the case, when they purchase fuel for the lusts, or are fabricated into a golden image, to become the unworthy object of adoration. Had Boaz been merely a man of wealth, he had not deserved a place in these sacred memoirs; but though a rich man, he was not slothful in business; he was a man of humanity, of intelligence, of discretion, of affability: a man that feared the Lord, that did justly, that loved mercy. He was ennobled by qualities which great possessions cannot confer, and which do not, with fugitive treasures, fly away as an eagle towards heaven.

Behold the mysterious distribution of the gifts of Providence! The family of one “brother is waxen poor and fallen into decay;” that of the other is shining in splendor, affluence, and renown. Hasty and partial views of the divine conduct are always puzzling, and distressful; calm and comprehensive investigation, will ever lead to composure and acquiescence.

What must these helpless women do for daily bread? They sit neglected and forlorn; but despondency will only increase the calamity. Necessity suggests many expedients. While health, virtue, and friendship remain, all is not lost; and Heaven frequently permits the current of human felicity to spend itself to the very lowest ebb, that its own hand may be acknowledged in the means which caused the flood to rise and swell again. The proposal of Ruth to her mother-in-law, discovers in every point of view, a noble and ingenuous spirit, and an excellent heart. She will do nothing without the consent and advice of the venerable matron who was become father and mother, country, friends and everything to her. Begging is the last miserable refuge of age or infirmity, of disease or sloth: she scorns to think of recurring to it, while she has youth, health, and strength to labor, and while there was a field of lawful employment. An ordinary mind in her situation would have vented itself in unavailing, womanish lamentations; perhaps in unkind upbraiding of the ancient woman as the cause of all the distress which she endured; would have been for dispatching Naomi up and down among her wealthy relations and towns-folks, to solicit protection and subsistence. No, it is more honorable in her eyes to earn food by her own labor;

she conceals the anguish which wrung her own heart, for fear of adding affliction to the afflicted. The season of the year was favorable; and happily the law of that God, whom she had deliberately taken for her God, had made provision for persons in her destitute condition. The same bounty which poured the abundance of autumn into the lap of the mighty, had reserved a pittance for the support of the famished and friendless. How the mercy of Jehovah bursts upon us in every dispensation and in every event! In wisdom he has permitted distinctions of rank and fortune to take place; in compassion he has taken care to make provision for the wants of the necessitous. So that while industry and pity remain, no one is reduced to absolute despair.

It is with pleasure we recur to the words of the law, and trace that God who “careth for oxen,” much more solicitous about the support and consolation of the miserable part of the rational creation. “And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God.”[*]Lev 19:9-10 And again, “When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleaning of thy harvest; thou shalt leave them unto the poor and to the stranger: I am the Lord your God.”[*]Lev 23:22 And again, in recapitulating the law in Deuteronomy, “When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in the work of thine hands. When thou beatest thine olive-tree, shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing.”[*]Deu 24:19-22 In this law, several remarkable circumstances, tending to illustrate the law of nature in general, and the spirit of the Mosaic dispensation in particular, press themselves upon our notice.

First. The consideration and recollection of their own and their fathers’ misery in Egypt are urged as the powerful motive to pity, to spare, and to succor. “A Syrian ready to perish” on the road to Padan-Aram “was my father.” “A generation of slaves in Egypt were my pro progenitors, let me therefore commiserate, and receive, and cherish the forlorn traveller; let me treat my own captive, bondman, dependant, with gentleness, and humanity.” Who gives charity? Not un feeling wealth, nor giddy dissipation; but the man who has known want, who once stood in need of a friend, who has been himself succored in the hour of calamity. Who is it that relents and forgives? Not cold-blooded, meritless, constitutional virtue; but restored, recovered frailty; goodness which arose the purer and the stronger from having fallen. Who is liberal and generous? Not the nobly born, the unvaryingly prosperous, but magnanimity nursed on the breast of adversity; the prince whom native worth, whom conscious dignity, whom the experience of human woe have taught to devise liberal things, to do good, and to communicate. But is hereditary greatness, unvarying opulence, unhumbled, unmortified success, always cold, selfish, unfeeling? God forbid. High birth, lineal honors, the accumulating wealth of many generations, sometimes put on their most beautiful garments, borrow luster from condescension, sympathy, and beneficence. Is successful adversity, illuminated obscurity, aggrandized littleness, always merciful, condescending, generous, and humane? O, no: the poor wretch frequently forgets himself; condemns the arts by which he arose,

spurns the ladder on which he climbed to eminence and distinction, and tries to make his upstart greatness bear a mimic resemblance to antique dignity, by aping the viler, not the nobler qualities of traditional importance.

Again, Secondly. Observe, the law inculcates pity to the poor and wretched by the most glorious of all examples. “I am the Lord,” who had compassion upon you in your misery, who delivered you from the furnace, who drove out the nations from before you, who planted you in the land, who fill thy garner, and make thy wine-press to overflow; and who only ask, in return, a mite or two, for the sons and daughters of affliction, these few ears which thy haste has let fall to the ground, that sheaf which has accidentally dropped from thy car; that little corner of thy field which the sickle has spared, and which that starving creature, by nature thy equal, by providence thy inferior, is waiting to pick up and devour. He is an object of tenderness and affection to me, see therefore that thou neglect him not, that thou defraud him not, that thou distress him not.

Thirdly. The law plainly supposes that there may be an over anxiety and solicitude about things in their own nature lawful and innocent; which it therefore aims at repressing: it supposes that there may be an eagerness of accumulation which defeats itself, a scattering abroad that produces increase, a withholding of more than is meet, and it tendeth only to poverty; that diffusing, not hoarding up abundance, is the proper use of it.

Fourthly. The law had a double object in view, the improvement of the affluent, and the relief of the poor. It thus became a mutual benefit, the one was blessed in giving, the other in receiving. The greater blessedness however on the side of the giver, as the blessedness of the Creator is superior to that of the creature. It is as much an ordination of Providence, that “the poor should never cease out of the land,” as that “the earth should yield her increase,” and the spheres perform their stated revolutions: and while they do exist, the great Lord and Preserver of all things, is concerned to make suitable provision for them. The rich are his stewards, and their storekeepers: he that gleans his own field to the last ear, is a thief and a robber as much as he who plunders his neighbor’s granary; he robs God, he plunders the needy and the destitute, he does what he can to subvert the divine government, he would make the law of charity and mercy of none effect, he bars his own plea for pardon at a throne of grace, he mars the possession of all he has, he cankers his own enjoyment, and affixes his seal to his own condemnation.

5thly. The law particularly describes the objects which it meant to relieve, “the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.” Unhappy Ruth! her title to the wretched offal from the hand of the reaper was but too well established. She united in her own person all these characters of woe. Her melancholy claim to pity and support was fearfully multiplied, and a threefold burden presses her down to the ground: nevertheless she entreats, as a boon, what she might have demanded, and taken, as a right. Her trust in, and submission to the direction of Providence sweetly accord with her filial affection and tenderness, and her noble independency of spirit; she is determined to labor, she disdains not to employ the necessary means for supplying herself and aged parent with food, but she leaves the direction of her footsteps to High Heaven; she is in the way of her duty, and deposits all anxiety about the issue in the bosom of her heavenly Father. What a happy mixture of fortitude and resignation! It cannot but prosper.

Having obtained the consent of her mother, who perhaps might have a presentiment of what was approaching, behold her up with the dawn, pensive, timorous, and slow, advancing to the fields;

the country all before her, where to choose her place of toil, and Providence her guide; with the downcast look of ingenuous modesty; the timidity which our misfortune inspires; the firm step of conscious rectitude, and the flushed cheek of kindling hope. By some nameless, unaccountable circumstance, Heaven-directed, she unknowingly bends her course to the field and reapers of Boaz. She has done her part, has made the sacrifices which conscience and affection demanded, has submitted cheerfully to the hardships which necessity imposed, has put herself in the way of relief which her situation pointed out. God is good, and takes all the rest upon himself. He, who ordered her flight to Canaan at the time of barley-harvest, when nature, and Providence, and the law concurred to find her subsistence, orders her path to that field, where everything, without the knowledge of the parties concerned, was prepared and arranged for the high scenes now ready to be acted. The order of human procedure generally is from blaze to smoke, from noise and bustle to nothing, from mighty preparation, to feebleness of execution. The divine conduct, on the contrary, is a glorious rise from obscurity into light, “from small beginnings to a latter end greatly increased;” from “the mouth of babes and sucklings he ordaineth strength,” and by a concurrence of circumstances which no human sagacity could foresee, and no human power could either bring together or keep asunder, raises a neglected gleaner in the field into the lady of the domain, and a fugitive of Moab into a mother in Israel; a mother of kings, whose name shall never expire but with the dissolution of nature. At this period of the story, let us pause, and meditate. On the power which regulates and controls all the affairs of men, who has all hearts, all events in his hand, “who poureth contempt, upon princes, and bringeth to nought the wisdom of the prudent;” who “raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the needy out of the dunghill, that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people; he maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children.” Is there a God who “doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth?” then let me never “be highminded, but fear” always before him, for I am never out of his reach, never concealed from his eye, never sheltered from his justice. Is there a God who judgeth in the earth, in whom the fatherless findeth mercy, to whom the miserable never look, never cry in vain? then let me never sink into despair. I am not too humble for his notice, my disease is not beyond his skill to cure, my wants are not too numerous for his supplies, nor my transgressions beyond the multitude of his tender mercies. Doth not He deck the lily, and feed the raven? a sparrow riseth not on the wing, falleth not to the ground, without my heavenly Father. “Hitherto hath the Lord helped,” and “his hand is not shortened, nor his ear heavy, nor his bowels of compassion restrained.”

Meditate again, on what ground you have encouragement to ask and to expect the divine protection and favor. Have you given up all for God? Have you good hope through grace that you are reconciled to God through the blood of his Son? Have you a good conscience toward God that you are in the proper use of appointed means? Can you look up with confidence and say, “Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest I have not folded my hands to sleep, have not sat down in sullen discontent, have not charged thee foolishly, have not fled to unjustifiable methods of relief. I have not impiously striven with my Maker, nor presumptuously expected a miracle to be wrought in my behalf. I have in much weakness, but in trembling hope, endeavored to do my duty: and I now, Lord, cast all my care, cast my burden upon thee.” Look into the history of divine interpositions. Were they in compliment to the peevish and capricious, were they extorted by the loud lamentations or the secret murmurings of insolence and ingratitude? were they the pillows smoothed by the hand of weak indulgence, for the drowsy head of sloth and indifference to repose

on? No, but they were the seasonable cordial of parental affection to a fainting child; the reward which wisdom and goodness bestow on diligence and perseverance: the indissoluble union which God has established between human exertion and divine co-operation; they were the recompence of labor and vigilance, the answer of prayer.

Meditate yet again, on the true dignity of human nature, on the true glory of man and of woman also; honest, useful employment. It is not idle, luxurious enjoyment, it is not to do nothing, to be eternally waited upon, and ministered unto, to grow torpid by inaction, to slumber away life in a lethargic dream, and to lose the powers of the soul and body by disuse; but to preserve and promote health by moderate exercise, to earn cheerfulness and self-approbation, by the sweet consciousness that you are not living wholly in vain, and to rise into importance by being somewhat useful to your fellow-creatures. In the eye of sober, unbiased reason, whether of the two is the more pleasing, the more respectable sight; and which is, in her own mind, the happier of the two, Ruth laden with the ears of corn which she has toiled to gather, hastening home to the hut of obscurity, to administer food and comfort to old age and sorrow; or a modern belle, issuing forth under a load of uneasy finery, to imaginary triumphs, and certain disappointment? Who sleeps soundest at night, and who awakes and arises in the best health and spirits next day? I expect not an answer. The thing speaks for itself; and I have purposely forborne to state the case so strongly as I might have done. The virtuous damsel has, in part, received her reward, but a greater and better is preparing for her. The mother and daughter have been arranging their little matters with discretion; and the great God has been preparing his agents, putting his armies in motion; all is made ready, is made to meet, is made to work together, is made to prosper, by Him who sees the perfect man in the embryo, the end from the beginning, the effect in its primary cause, the eternal chain in every series, and in all its extent.

103. Ruth--Industrious Boaz

Ruth--Industrious Boaz

Ruth 2:4. And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you: and they answered him, The Lord bless thee. The short and simple sentence which I have read, might be made the subject of a volume. I intend to make it at least the subject of a Lecture, and entreat your patient attention to a few of the obvious, but neither uninteresting nor unimportant views which it exhibits, of life and manners, of morals and religion.

Men of different characters, from various motives, and for various purposes, might be supposed to assume the plain, unadorned history of the barley-harvest of Boaz, as an useful and instructive topic of address, and, according to the spirit by which they were actuated, and the end which they had in view, might reason upon it in this manner.

I. The prudent careful man, would build upon it a system of attention, diligence, and economy. “Behold,” would he say, “behold Boaz, the wealthy and the wise, in his field, among his servants, seeing every thing with his own eyes, giving his orders in person, taking care that every one be in his own place, and performing his particular duty. The air and exercise connected with the operations of husbandry, are conducive to health, to comfort; they promote his interest; they enliven his spirits; moderate labor makes rest welcome. See, his presence is a check upon idleness, upon carelessness, upon discord; it calls forth industry, it creates honest emulation; it reconciles the peasant to his toil, to see the master participating in it. He has brought himself down to the level of the poor laborer, who seems to have risen in proportion. See, nothing escapes his notice, not even a wretched gleaner behind the reapers; he must be informed of every thing; to the minutest circumstance he will judge for himself.

“Young man, set out in life, and conduct your progress, on such a principle, on such a model as this. It is the certain road to affluence, to respectability: you are thereby at once serving yourself, your dependants, and your country. Whatever be thy station, whatever thy employment, let thy heart be in it; let thy time and thy attention be devoted to it. ‘Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.’ ‘Be not slothful in business. Let everything be done in its season; let everything be done decently and in order.’ ‘The hand of the diligent maketh rich.’ ‘Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.’

“To these might be added innumerable admonitions and arguments, drawn from Scripture, from reason, from history, from experience, all tending to demonstrate the wisdom, the utility, the necessity of doing what thy hand findeth to do, with thy might; and to prove the folly, the danger, the misery of sloth and inattention. But example is beyond all precept. Survey yonder field; from Ruth up to Boaz; all are busy, all are leased and cheerful, all are happy. Be instructed, my son, by the prospect; and learn that God, and nature, and reason, have inseparably connected industry and felicity; have made bodily health and inward peace, prosperity and importance to flow from

virtuous, temperate exertion, as the stream from its source."

II. The moralist would take up the subject in a point of view somewhat different. "Observe," would he say, "the reciprocal duties arising out of the mutual relations of human life. We have them here beautifully exemplified in the relation of master and servant. Besides the more obvious obligations of justice, on the one, in faithfully performing the stipulated labor; on the other, in punctually bestowing the promised wages of the hireling, behold the tacit obligations of mutual affection and benevolence. Obligations founded not indeed upon a written law, but interwoven with the constitution and frame of our nature, and which the man who feels not, acknowledges not; the man who neglects or violates, let his adherence to the letter of the law be ever so close and exact, is a traitor to God and society. Nay, he is a traitor to himself, by cutting off one of the purest sources of his own enjoyment, and at the same time depriving mankind of one of their justest claims.

"Boaz and his reapers meet with mutual cordiality. They give and receive the salutation of peace. He accosts them as a father would his children, not as a taskmaster would the miserable drudges subjected to his authority. They address him with the kindly and humble familiarity of sons, not the distant timidity of slaves trembling for fear of the rod. They exact the price of their service as a debt, but they receive the gentle language and smiles of their employer as a favor. He expects them to be honest and diligent, for conscience' sake; but contentment with their condition, and good-will to him, he thankfully receives, as an unconditioned, extraordinary effort, to promote his interest.

"Suppose, for a moment, the temper and character of both changed; and the force of the example will be more clearly understood, and more powerfully felt. Without supposing any one precept of morality, or dictate of religion infringed, what a different aspect would the field of Boaz wear! Lo, where comes the surly, stately, self-important lord of the manor, surveying, in the pride of his heart, his increasing store, looking down on the humble, hardy sons of toil, as mere beasts of burden, designed to minister to his convenience. He vouchsafes them never a word, except perhaps to complain, to threaten, or to upbraid: and then, in sullen silence and state, retires again. The insulted laborers on the other hand, regard him with terror or disgust. The social compact is dissolved between them. No eye welcomed his approach with a smile, no whisper of congratulation conveyed his name from ear to ear, no tongue pronounced 'God bless him.' The half-smothered execration pursued his withdrawing steps, and he well deserved it.

"What thinkest thou, my young friend, of the picture? Learn from it, that to doing justly, there must be added loving mercy, and walking humbly. Learn, that the duties and felicities of human life consist in numberless, nameless, indefinable little offices, which everyone may learn without a teacher, and which everyone may, if he will, perform. All have it not in their power to supply the poor, to heal the sick, to succor the distressed. Opportunity does not every day offer, nor ability permit to confer material, essential benefits; but it is in the power of all to express sympathy, to breathe a kind wish. Opportunities every hour, every moment present themselves, and ability never fails of looking pleasantly, of speaking gently and affectionately. And he is a wretch indeed who knows that the unbending of an eyebrow, the utterance of a syllable or two, the alteration of half a tone of his voice, the simple extension of his hand would in a moment relieve a heart overwhelmed with sorrow, wrung with anguish, and yet cruelly withholds so slender, so easy, so cheap a consolation.

“Young man, if it be thy misfortune to have to struggle with a harsh, ungainly, unbending disposition, the sooner you set out in quest of victory the better. Remember that thy own comfort is involved, beyond the power of separation, with that of thy fellow-creatures. Take care that the manner of showing mercy, or of conferring obligation, mar not the matter of the benefit. The man who refuses graciously, impresses on the heart a more favorable idea of himself, than he who grants with harshness, insolence, or pride. True goodness considers, together with what is written on tables of stone, what is engraven on the living tables of the heart, and from the heart, communicates itself to the forehead, the eyes, the lips, the hand; impressing on the whole the law of kindness.”

III. The philosopher will cast his eyes along the group scattered over the plains adjoining to Bethlehem-Judah, and will reflect in a different manner; perhaps thus: “What an endless variety do I observe in the ways and works of the great Creator and Ruler of the universe; blended with that variety, what mutual relation and dependence! The head, the hands, the feet; the parts which are more noble, and those which are more dishonorable, forming one regular, harmonious body, where there is nothing redundant, nothing deficient. Every thing has its use, everything has its end. Shade; imperceptibly softens into shade; light imperceptibly brightens into light. The transitions are so sweet and gradual, that the eye is never offended, nor overwhelmed. It is the same thing in the body social and politic. Everyone stands in need of another. The prince and the peasant meet in a certain point. How many things have they in common! How many things to interest and attract each other!

“Look but to that field. The persons are few; and the conditions much fewer. But even there I see the order, the subordination, which Providence has established through the whole extent of the vast universe. There walks the dignified, respectable proprietor of the land, who can trace his title to possession through many generations; exulting in hereditary wealth and honors, without arrogance, vanity, or insensibility. Boaz, a prince in his tribe, but a plain man, who news that he derives his subsistence from the bosom of the earth, who disdains not to mingle with his menial servants, to sit down to a participation of their homely fare, to dip his morsel in the same vinegar, and to lie down to sleep all night in the threshing-floor.

“There the servant who is set over the reapers stirs from ridge to ridge, from company to company, the bond of union between the master and the laborers. Behold him as the trusted humble friend of Boaz, repaying confidence with fidelity; praising the industrious, encouraging the faint, chiding the careless, stimulating the slow. As the sympathizing friend of his less favored fellowservants, recollecting how lately he emerged from the same obscurity and subjection, excusing the frailty of nature, covering the faults of thoughtlessness, administering reproof and chastisement with lenity and moderation, bestowing commendation with cheerfulness and cordiality.

“As we descend, a new station, a new character rises into view, the glory and the strength of every land under heaven, the poor, the honest, the manly, the virtuous, the useful, the important part of the community. Not they who handle the harp and the organ, but they who put their hands to the plow and to the sickle. There they toil, there they sweat, there they sing; there they beguile the fatigues of the day in innocent mirth, and untutored, artless, guileless, unmalignant conversation; and purchase and sweeten the repose of the night, with unoppressive industry, with friendly communication, and pious, transpiring submission to the pains, the privations, the necessities of

their lowly estate.

“These constitute the numerous, the great and good class of our fellow-creatures: who shine in the eye of reason, of patriotism, of philosophy, of religion. They stand not forth the prominent figures in the piece, but their number, their equality, their want of characteristic distinction, confer upon them the greater value.

“But ah, there is beneath them, a subordinate rank, which awakens all that is human in us. They have health and strength and will to labor; their reward is sure; they support the heat and toil of the day, with the sweet assurance that the thickening shades, that the twelfth hour will bring with them the payment of their hire, the means of subsistence, of domestic joy, of regulated gratification. But look into the background of the piece, and observe that female, that stranger, that orphan, and her a widow; to work unable, to beg ashamed. She has seen better days. Time was, the wind of heaven was not permitted to visit her face too roughly; she was waited upon, and ministered unto; now she is become the scorn of clowns; or lower still, their pity. Where is the lowness of condition, from whence it is not possible still to fall! Be what thou wilt, O man, there are some looking up to thee with envy and desire; be what thou wilt, there is still cause to say, ‘God I thank thee, I am not as other men.’

“But observe, my young friend,” continues our philosophical monitor, “all these gradations, and infinitely more than can be pointed out, are links in the great chain of human existence; tear one asunder, and the concussion is felt through the whole. The gleaner, the reaper, the overseer, the master of the household are so many successive steps in the same scale; the most distant not very remote, the near hardly distinguishable; all are reduced to the same level before Him, who says to Gabriel, Go, and he goeth, and to the sparrow hovering on the wing, Fall to the ground, and instantly he drops. And again, young man void of understanding, observe, and observe it well, and lay it up in thine heart, how near the extremes of human condition are to one another! the gleaner after the reapers, is but a step or two from the possession of the whole. Wait but a few days, and she who is liable to be insulted, at best pitied, shall be, in her turn caressed, flattered, submitted to; and learn, from the whole, the folly of being insolent, self-conceited, or unkind, unsocial or uncomplying , when the sun of prosperity shineth upon thy tabernacle; or of being discontented, dejected, careless, or mean, when the common ills of humanity overtake thee. The poor inflated creature, who like another Nebuchadnezzar talks in loud swelling words of vanity, of the great Babylon which he has built, I once knew a cringing minion, ready to lick the dust from the feet of the man whom he now struts by as if he were a stranger. That poor boy whom he disdains to set with the dogs of his flock, is evidently rising into consequence, which is one day to eclipse all the tawdry honors of upstart gentility, and self-assumed importance. My son, derive thy greatness from thyself, from wisdom, from virtue. Take care to adorn thy station, thy possessions, by native goodness. Pitiable indeed is thy condition, if rank, or affluence, or even talents, serve only to render thy folly or profligacy more conspicuous.”

IV. Once more, let me suppose a man of genuine piety contemplating the interesting scene before us, and entering with wonder and delight into the plans of the Eternal Mind. His meditations will flow in still a different channel, he will view the same object through still a different medium. “Behold,” will he say, “how sweet is the smell of a field which Jehovah hath blessed! happy Boaz, rich in lands, and in corn, rich in man-servants and maid-servants, rich in the dutiful and

affectionate attachment of thy people, rich in thine own integrity and composure of spirit but richer far in the favor and approbation of the Almighty: the blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow therewith. Happy family, thus dwelling together in unity; where love is the governing principle, where the fear of God sweetly expresses itself in unfeigned benevolence to man! How can that house but prosper, where religion has established her throne? Look at that happy plain over which the bountiful hand of nature has spread her rich exuberance. The Lord maketh that wealth. Behold the patriarchal master: the meanest slave he treats like a child; hearken, the voice of peace and benediction dwells on his lips, distills like the dew. Behold the way to be loved and respected by inferiors. Be to them an ensample of piety, of purity, of charity; bind them to you with cords of love; sweet and faithful, cheerful and efficient is the service of affection. These men will yield obedience not for wrath only, but for conscience' sake; their heart is in their work; they need no overseer; they will neither be negligent nor dishonest: they know that the eye of God is continually upon them; they know that the interest of the master is their own.

"How happily religion adapts its influence to every relation and condition of life! How it guards the heart alike from foolish pride and impious discontent, at what bounty has bestowed, or wisdom denied! How it humanizes, dignifies, exalts the soul! How it enforces, extends, and refines the maxims of worldly prudence! How it illustrates, binds and enlivens the precepts of morality! How it amplifies, expands, regulates, brightens the views of philosophy; referring everything to God, deriving all from him, carrying all back to him again! O man, till thou hast founded thy domestic economy in religion thou hast not begun to keep house. Let thy possessions be ever so fair, ever so extensive, they want their principal charm, their highest excellence, till the blessing of Heaven be asked and obtained.

"Mark yet again, how a good man's footsteps are all ordered of the Lord. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Boaz came forth with no farther view than to see the progress of his harvest, to salute his servants, and to cheer their labor by his presence and approving smiles; but lo, Providence has been preparing for him a more enlarged view, has enriched his field with a nobler portion than he had any apprehension of. Thyways, my King and my God, thy ways are in the sea, and thy path in the deep waters, and thy judgments are unsearchable. The great God is working unseen, unnoticed. He is preparing his instruments at a distance, arranging his agents in the dark. Unseen to, unknown by one another, without concert or design, they come forth at the moment, they perform the part assigned them; they spew and act in perfect unison, they accomplish the purpose of the Eternal. Boaz and Ruth, behold them together in the field, remote as penury and fullness, as obscurity and celebrity, as dependence and being depended upon. Nevertheless they meet, and Heaven from above, crowns the hallowed union with her olive." But might not the pious spirit annex a caution to his exhortation on this subject. "Beware of taking the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold hint guiltless who taketh his name in vain. Holy and reverend is his name. Even in blessing it is to be used solemnly, piously, sparingly: who then shall dare to employ it wantonly, needlessly, profanely, impiously, blasphemously? Who shall presume to abuse it, in swearing falsely by it, or in imprecating a curse under that dreadful sanction upon the head of his brother? Avert, merciful Heaven, avert from my guilty, heavy-laden country, the heavy, the bitter curse which this sin deserves! O let not profane swearing, let not willful deliberate perjury, prove its ruin!"

Thus have I endeavored, by assuming several supposed characters, to give life and energy to the simple rural scene under consideration. It furnishes copious matter of instruction to every teacher, and to every class of mankind. The careful, prudent man of the world; the moralist; the calm observer; the pious instructor; are all here provided with useful topics of address to their several pupils, according to their several views. The master and the servant, the hireling and his employer, the rich and the poor, here meet together and are together informed, by more than a code of laws, by plain but striking example, of their mutual relation and dependence, and of the duties which arise out of them, and of the comforts which flow from them. Happiness is here represented as built on the sure foundation of kind affections, of useful industry, of reciprocal good offices, and of the fear of the Lord. Where all these unite, that house must stand, that family must prosper. In proportion as all or any of them are wanting, a partial or total ruin must ensue. Let the apostolic injunctions serve practically to enforce the subject. “Servants be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good-will doing service, as to the Lord and not to men: knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.”[*]Eph 6:5-9--“Charge them that are rich in this world that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”[*]1Ti 6:17-19 “Hearken, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?”[*]Jas 2:5--“You yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”[*]Acts 20:34-35 “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.”[*]Eph 4:28

104. Ruth--Generosity of Boaz

Ruth--Generosity of Boaz

Ruth 2:5-17. Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this? And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab: and she said, I pray you let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house. Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens. Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? And when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn. Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger? And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been showed me all thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust. Then she said, Let me find favor in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens. And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left. And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not. And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them that she may glean them, and rebuke her not. So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned; and it was about an ephah of barley. The life of the husbandman is full of labor and anxiety, but it is also sweetened and relieved by many peculiar delights. He must rise early, and often retire late to rest; he is exposed now to the scorching heat of the meridian sun, and now to the unwholesome damps of the night. He has to watch every aspect of the sky, and to guard against the strife of contending elements: and after all his vigilance and foresight, he has frequently the mortification to see the exertions, and the hopes of a whole year destroyed in an hour. But on the other hand, the very variety which his profession admits of, deceives the toils of it; his life is constantly a life of hope; his health and prosperity flow from the same source; he spends not his strength for nought and in vain; the bountiful parent earth restores the precious seed cast into it with large increase, thirty, sixty, an hundred fold. He has the pleasure of observing the hourly progress of vegetation; of seeing his supplies coming immediately from the hand of Providence. Piety and profit are promoted by the same employments and pursuits, and the sublimest truths of religion press upon him in the plainest and most common appearances of nature. Add to all this, the labors of the husbandman are of all others the most essential, the most important to society. Other arts may minister to

wealth, to pleasure, to convenience and comfort, but on this depends the very subsistence of human life; and to the plow and the sickle, the ingenious manufacturer, the pampered citizen and the haughty peer must, of necessity, look for the main ingredient of their daily support.

It was, then, in that happy state of civil society, the scene is laid which is to be the subject of this evening's meditation. It was that joyful season of the year when the ardor of summer was giving place to the milder glory of autumn; when industry was gathering in the produce of hope, when the common occupations of the sunburned plain had leveled the distinctions of master and servant; when all way emulation, cheerfulness, and joy, that Boaz issued forth betimes to superintend his harvest, and Ruth to glean after the reapers. Her sex, her demeanor, her employment, which bespoke her poverty, attract his notice, and excite his compassion. There are persons, there are countenances, there is a deportment, which strike at first sight, and create an interest which it is impossible to account for. The great hand of nature has in many, perhaps in most instances, engraven on the external appearance, no doubtful or equivocal signs of the internal spirit and character. Ruth presented to the eye of Boaz an indescribable somewhat which spoke her immediately to be above the level of those common drudges, whose minds their servile condition has degraded; her native greatness shone through the veil that covered it, and naturally led to an inquiry into her situation and connections. The attention which her figure and occupation at first roused, her history powerfully fixes and confirms. The mournful story of Naomi, and of the Moabitish damsel her daughter-in-law, all Bethlehem-Judah had heard, but not one had stepped forth to acknowledge and relieve them. Boaz himself is faulty here. Had he been informed, as he must, of the return of his nearest relations, and of their wretched plight, he ought to have sought them out, and, unsolicited, to have ministered to their comfort. He is in this respect an instance of what is frequently to be met with in the world; of that calm, unimpassioned goodness which is abundantly disposed to succor distress, when it falls in the way, but is not sufficiently zealous and vigorous, and active, to go abroad in quest of objects to relieve. But let us not pretend to look down on moderate and ordinary beneficence, till the pure and sublime come more into use. The former neglect of Boaz, and his future zeal, shall but the more redound to the glory of God. The short and simple tale awakens a thousand tender emotions in the bosom of the good man. He feels the sad reverses to which families, and states, and all sublunary things are exposed. He sees one branch of his own kindred demolished, extinguished. A woman, a young woman, a widow, a stranger in a strange land, but one step above begging her bread; with a still more wretched mother to sustain by the meager fruits of her feeble industry. He sees women of condition, his equals, fallen far below the estate of the meanest of his servants and handmaids. Self-reproach perhaps mingled with compassion and instantly produced a resolution to compensate past carelessness and unkindness, by all that future sympathy and friendship could bestow. The dialogue that ensues is a beautiful exhibition of the honest simplicity of nature. The characters are supported with a happiness of expression, and displayed with a strength and exactness of coloring, worthy of him who knows what is in man. In Boaz which shall we most admire; his prudent attention to his own affairs, his winning condescension to his inferiors, or his pious acknowledgment of God in everything! In his conduct to the forlorn stranger, we see a heart overflowing with benevolence, attending to minute circumstances, outrunning the expectations, the very wishes of the person whom he means to oblige. Observe his delicacy; he recommends the solitary helpless female to the society and protection of those of her own sex, and by his authority guards her from the incivility and insults of the other. He aims at soothing her soul to peace; he would have her believe

herself at home. The law obliged him to permit her to glean, but he makes a free-will offering of much more; the liquor in the vessels, the food provided for the reapers, all is tendered to her with hearty good-will. Ordinary minds feel ashamed at the sight of poor relations, deny them, turn away from them, hide their faces from their own flesh. True magnanimity thinks meanly of nothing but vice, esteems worth, though clothed in rags, considers the revolutions which affect everything under the sun, despises not the wretch of today, knowing that he may be obliged to change places with him tomorrow. Such an one was the wealthy owner of yonder happy field. The spirit of the master is diffused, it is felt over the whole extended domain. No jarring string mars their rural harmony, no contention reigns, but the strife, the blessed strife, of mutual affection and attachment. The character of Ruth opened upon us with singular grace and beauty: it unfolds itself with equal energy and propriety. She discovers from first to last, a soul susceptible of tender and persevering attachment; ready to yield the sacrifice of ease, of rank, of estimation, of everything, for the sake of enjoying the testimony of a good conscience, and the society that she loved. She discovers a spirit at once sweetly timid and bashful, and nobly resolute and undaunted. She inspires love by her gentleness, meekness, and complacency; she commands respect by her firmness, magnanimity, and patience. In addressing her mother-in-law, she is all amiable warmth and earnestness: in replying to the friendly tenders of Boaz, she is all amiable reserve and modesty. In speaking to Naomi her heart flows to her lips, her words glow, her speech is copious and redundant; in answering a man, and a stranger, her words are few, she speaks by looks and gestures, and is then most eloquent when she says nothing.

I behold the effect which youth, and simplicity, and humbleness of mind, and distress have made upon a generous and sensible heart. The artless simplicity of the Moabitish damsel has made a deeper impression than all that cunning and design could have invented to allure affection, and impose on the understanding. Happily the progress of virtuous love advances without the consciousness of the parties concerned; it is at first a mere intercourse of civility, an attention to trifles, an interchange of kind words and pleasant looks. It grows unperceived, it gathers strength by neglect, it has arrived at maturity before it was known to exist, it gave no warning of its approach, and thereby became irresistible. And has the great Author of nature vouchsafed in his word to delineate, in more than one instance, the nature, progress, and effects of this important and necessary passion, and shall we turn away from it with affected delicacy, or take it up and pursue it with indecent mirth? No, if we adopt and imitate the candid, guileless simplicity, and the modest reserve of Scripture, we cannot greatly err. In the case of Boaz and Ruth, it was enchantingly grateful to the former, as highly honorably to the latter, that the decision of the understanding confirmed the judgment of the eyes. He had known, admired, and approve the conduct, before he had seen and admired the beauty of the person, and the gracefulness of the behavior. The charms of wisdom, virtue, and piety, superadded to personal accomplishments, what a happy combination; what a foundation of felicity! The latter indeed, will and must fade, but their effect is immortal; the company in which they flourished and brought forth fruit, bestows on them a permanency not their own. How wretched is that female all whose consequence is fled with her bloom; who depended on rank or fortune to command respect; who has lost the admiration and applause of others, before she has begun to acquire the dignity of self-approbation, the only genuine source of public esteem. The history before us strikingly displays the transition from pity to love on the one hand, from gratitude to love on the other. Compassion in Boaz, sense of obligation in Ruth, excite the same mutual affection in both. It becomes his pride and joy to raise her to that

distinction and affluence which she so well merited; it is her pride and joy to repay the tenderness of her benefactor by every kind office of compliance and affection. She had hitherto pleased herself with the consciousness of having done her duty; she had not hunted after praise; she had discovered no anxiety, taken no pains to publish abroad her own merits; but honor will follow virtue, as the shadow does the substance, and the flight of the one but accelerates the pursuit of the other. And how grateful must it have been even to the modest ear of Ruth herself, to hear her conduct approved, and her qualities celebrated, by the wise and good man who had taken her under his protection, and admitted her to his friendship. The praise which goodness confers on goodness, the praise which a man's own heart and conscience allow to be merited, praise bestowed by one we love and esteem is a feast indeed; it does equal honor, it communicates equal delight to the giver and the receiver; it is an anticipation of the glorious rewards of the faithful, from Him whose favor is better than life. But save me, merciful Heaven, from the commendation which my own mind rejects. Save me from the approbation, the ill-informed approbation of ignorant erring man, while I have just cause to tremble under the apprehension of condemnation and punishment from a holy and righteous God. The cordial of cordials administered by the hand of Boaz to this truly excellent woman, was his recommendation of her to the care, blessing, and protection of the Almighty. It was much to be permitted to pick up a scanty livelihood among strangers; it was much to meet with notice and encouragement from a mighty man of wealth in a foreign land; it was highly soothing to a spirit broken by calamity to be approved and caressed by a great and a good man; but all this wits nothing compared to the smiles of approving Heaven, in sweet accord with the serenity and composure of a quiet and approving conscience. How cordially could she pronounce "amen" to his affectionate and pious prayer, "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust."[*]Ruth 2:12 The petition contains a piece of sweet imagery, of which interpreters have given different ideas. "Under whose wings thou art come to trust." The expression, according to some, implies an approbation of her resolution in renouncing the religion of her country and fathers, in forsaking the idol worship wherein she had been educated, and in deliberately joining herself to the Israelites and worship of the living and true God. The words, it is alleged, have an allusion to the Shechinah, the visible glory, the symbol of the divine presence which resided between, or under, the wings of the cherubim which were extended over the mercyseat. This is, as it were, the point in which all the parts of the dispensation concentrated, and therefore is employed to denote in brief, all that related to the knowledge, belief, and service of Jehovah, in opposition to idolatry.

Others consider it as merely a tender and significant image, borrowed from nature, and frequently employed in other passages of Scripture, the image of the tender callow brood of the feathered race fleeing, in the moment of danger, for protection, under the shelter of the parental wing. In either case, it marks the providential care, and the sacred security extended to all who seek refuge in the divine wisdom and mercy. No plague shall come nigh the place where they dwell, no evil shall befall them. It unfolds the spirit of a truly good man, disposed to do everything that humanity dictates and ability permits, for the relief of the sons and daughters of affliction; but deeply impressed with the belief that without the blessing and favor of Heaven the interposition of man is vain and unprofitable. He refers not to the divine bounty as an exemption from deeds of charity and mercy, but to render his benevolence effectual, and to crown, promote, and prosper his kind intentions; to fill up the measure of his liberal design, which, after all, was narrowed and contracted

by slenderness of ability. The effect of the whole upon Ruth is the same which a sense of unmerited friendship from man, and the expectation of blessings from on high, will ever produce on a good and honest heart. As she rises in situation, as she rises in hope, she sinks in humility. “Then she said, Let me find favor in thy sight, my Lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thy handmaidens.”[*]Ruth 2:13 This draws from the benevolent lord of the harvest reiterated assurances of regard and sympathy. He again runs over the whole store of the field, lest he should have omitted any particular in his former enumeration; again intimates a cheerful and unaffected welcome to what she could desire, or he had to bestow. In this, if I mistake not, may be seen the farther progress of affection. Ruth gains upon his heart by ever word she utters, by every gesture and attitude; and pleases most, from having formed, from pursuing no design to please. The greater her diffidence and self-denial, the greater is his earnestness to bring her forward, and to support her. She was by the former order permitted to go at pleasure and serve herself with whatever was in the field for the general use; now, she is invited to join the company where Boaz himself presided; she is fed from his own hand, and her portion is not a scanty one, “she did eat, and was sufficed, and left.” It was thus that Joseph expressed the partiality of his affection for Benjamin his own brother, his mess was five times so much as any of theirs; and thus in artless guise, the growing passion of Boaz for the fair Moabitess declared itself; and thus, not in high-flown rhapsodies of unmeaning jargon, but in little attentions, in petty offices of kindness, the genuine effusions of unsophisticated nature, the generous passion of love, always will declare its existence and quality. Happy, thrice happy banquet, far beyond all the luxury and pride of unwieldy, uneasy, unblessed magnificence. There they sit, under the open canopy of heaven, the master, the servants, the stranger, in one group. Their fare is homely, but labor has made it pleasant to sit down, and hunger gives to the food a relish. But what a superior relish did the morsel of Boaz himself possess! Think what a banquet, to see his numerous family around him, all contented and happy; to give bread to so many, and to receive the ample return of it in their honest attachment, and in the fruits of their industry. What a luxury, to feed a hungry, to raise a sinking stranger! to render gentle services to a deserving object, which humanity inspired, the understanding confirmed, the heart directed, and Heaven approved! What a desert, to reflect that all these comforts flowed from a heavenly Father’s beneficence, that thus he was “twice blessed,” blessed in receiving, blessed in giving. The felicity of Ruth was far from being so pure and perfect. She felt the depression of dependence and obligation; obligation which she had no prospect of ever being able to repay. She felt for the anxiety, distress, and want of a venerable aged woman, for whom nothing was provided; who was sitting solitary at home brooding over past calamities, and tormenting herself with apprehensions about futurity. She can hardly swallow her own morsel for grief to think that one more helpless, more feeble, more friendless than herself, wanted the common necessaries of life; that Naomi was perhaps fasting till she returned, and, worse than fasting, tormented with solicitude about her safety. The sweetest part of the repast to Ruth was the portion she had reserved from her own necessities for the sustentation of her ancient, affectionate, starving parent. Their frugal, simple meal being ended, they rise up, not to play, but to work again, and continue their labor until the evening. A fresh charge is given to the reapers on no account to disturb, or insult the lovely gleaner, and the young men the directed to find no fault with her, gather where she would, even among the sheaves before they were bound up; and to drop here and there a handful, as if by accident, to render her toil more pleasant and easy, without hurting her

honest pride. This injunction could proceed only from a delicate and ingenuous mind. To have made her directly a present of the ears of corn, had been an indignity offered to her poverty; to scatter them without any apparent design, was effectually to facilitate her labor, and diminish her fatigue, without rendering the burden of obligation too grievous to be borne. The manner of conferring a benefit, it cannot be too often repeated, infinitely outweighs the matter. The comfort of human life, is a combination of little, minute attentions, which, taken separately, are nothing, but connected with the circumstances of time, place, and manner, as coming from the heart, as tokens of good-will, possess a value and inspire a pleasure beyond the purchase of gold and rubies.

Think of the heart-felt satisfaction of the amiable laborer, when at the going down of the sun, on separating the straw and chaff from the good grain, and measuring the produce of her patience and industry, she found it amount to so considerable a quantity! Would you make a poor man happy, do not encourage him to beg. Idleness and happiness are incompatible. No, render his toil a little easier to him, teach him to draw his subsistence and comfort from, and to build his dependence upon, himself. And now Ruth's comfort was going to begin; it was hitherto mixed and imperfect--it now flows pure and unrestrained. She has it in her power to relieve indigence, to remove anxiety, to dispel sorrow, to make the widowed heart sing for joy. See with what exultation she produces her store, remeasures her corn, details the adventures of the day, and receives, in communicating joy. This, O virtuous friendship, is thy present great reward! Such, if pride and perverseness prevented not, the felicity which Providence has graciously placed within everyone's reach! Let me have some friendly ear, in the calmness of the evening's retreat, to listen to my tale; some sympathetic heart, to participate in my sorrows and my joys, and I care not what hardships I endure, what mortifications I meet with, through the livelong day. Friendship doubles the delights, divides, and thereby diminishes, the cares and miseries of this transitory life.

Think of the composed felicity of the ancient matron, as she surveyed the fruits of her beloved daughter's dutiful exertions, and heard the artless story of a harvest day's employment and recreation. Yes, she is the happier of the two. The joys of age are calm, untumultuous, untempestuous; those of youth have always a mixture of ardor and impetuosity, that allays their purity, and hastens on their dissolution. We sincerely bid them good night, and leave them to the sweet repose of conscious integrity, of acquiescence in the will and thankfulness for the bounty of gracious Heaven, and of budding, blossoming hope of greater blessings yet to come. At what a small expense may a great man a squire respect, esteem, love? How infinitely nature excels art! In how simple and easy a method does Providence bring about the greatest events! "Godliness is" every way "great gain:" it has "the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

105. Ruth--The Kinsman

Ruth--The Kinsman

Ruth 2:19-23;Ruth 3:1. And her mother-in-law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned today? And where wroughtest thou? Blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she showed her mother-in-law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought today is Boaz. And Naomi said unto her daughter-in-law, Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left of his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen. And Ruth the Moabitess said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest. And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter-in-law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field. So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley-harvest, and of wheat-harvest; and dwelt with her mother-in-law. Then Naomi her mother-in-law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?

Nothing is more absurd than to judge of ancient and foreign customs, by the fashion of our own country and of the present day. Language, manners, and dress are incessantly changing their form. Were our ancestors of the last century to arise from the dead, and to appear in the habit of their own times, their great grandchildren and they would be utter strangers to one another. Their speech would be mutually unintelligible, their modes of behavior uncouth, their apparel ridiculous. How much more, after the lapse of many centuries has intervened, and the scene shifted to a distant land, peopled by men of a different complexion, governed by different laws, and communicating thought by means of a different language.

One of the great pleasures arising from the study of ancient history, is to trace these differences, to contemplate the endless variety of the human mind, ever changing, still the same; to compare ago with age, nation with nation, in order to excite admiration of the great Creator's wisdom and goodness, and to inspire love towards our fellow-creatures. In examining the customs described in the context, let it be remembered, that they are the customs of men who lived upwards of three thousand years ago, who inhabited a different quarter of the globe, whose ideas, employments, and pursuits had no manner of resemblance to ours, and who would be equally astonished, shocked, and offended, were modern and European manners made to pass in review before them. And let it be farther remembered, that we speak of customs and manners only, and not of morals; of circumstances which, from their own nature and the current of human affairs are liable to alteration, not of things in themselves eternal and immutable.

We have seen by what easy and natural progress, the providence of God carried on its purpose respecting the posterity of Abraham in general, and the royal line of the house of David in particular, and respecting a much higher object, to which this was a mere ministering servant, an harbinger and preparation, namely, "the manifestation of God in the flesh," for the redemption of a lost world. We have seen the commencement of the temporal rewards of virtue, and the dawning of everlasting joy. We are now to attend the progress of divine beneficence, of providential

interposition, to crown the endeavors, and promote the happiness of the faithful.

Ruth has returned to her mother-in-law, laden with the fruits of honest industry, and provided with a supply for present necessity; cheered and comforted by the benevolence of a respectable stranger, and exulting in the prospect of future employment and success. Sweet are the communications of filial attachment and prosperity to the ear of maternal tenderness. It is not easy to conceive happiness more pure than was enjoyed that evening by these amiable and excellent women. Artless, undesigning Ruth, seems to look no farther than to the remainder of the harvest, the continuation of her labor, and of protection and encouragement from Boaz, and to the pleasure of supporting herself and aged parent by her own exertions. But Naomi, more experienced and intelligent, begins to build on the history of what Providence had done for them that day, a project of recompense to her beloved daughter, which her piety and affection so well merited, even no less than that of uniting her to Boaz in marriage. Was she to be blamed in this? By no means. It is criminal to outrun Providence, it is madness to think of constraining or bending it to our partial, selfish views. But it is wisdom, it is duty to exercise sagacity, to observe the ways of the Almighty, and to follow where he leads. The advice she gives in pursuance of this design, and Ruth's ready compliance, have, according to our ideas, a very extraordinary and questionable appearance, and seem rather calculated to defeat than to forward the end which they had in view; but modern refinement and licentiousness are little competent to judge of rustic simplicity and ancient purity. The proceeding was authorized by custom, was free from every taint of immorality, and had not in the eyes of the world even the semblance of indecency. The parties were all virtuous, they feared the Lord, they conformed to the laws and usages of their country, and Heaven smiled on their honest, unsullied intentions. Had I the happiness, with a mind as pure, to address ears as chaste, imaginations as undefiled, I should, without hesitation or fear, enter on the detail of the transaction as it stands on the record. But regard must be had to the prejudices of the times, to the propriety and decency which custom has established, remarking at the same time, that guilt is the parent of shame, and that an over refined delicacy is too often the proof of a polluted heart. The marriage of Boaz to Ruth is the only instance we have of the application of a civil and political statute of long standing: which runs in these terms, "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land. If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it; then shall he redeem that which his brother sold. And if the man have none to redeem it; and himself be able to redeem it; then let him count the years of the sale thereof, and restore the overplus unto the man to whom he sold it; that he may return unto his possession. But if he be not able to restore it to him, then that which is sold shall remain in the hand of him that hath bought it until the year of jubilee: and in the jubilee it shall go out, and ace shall return unto his possession."[*]Lev 25:23-28 And it stands in connection with another law circumstantially narrated. "If brethren dwell together, and one of them die and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the first-born which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel. And if the man like not to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother. Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and if he stand to it and say, I like not to

take her, then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother's house. And his name shall be called in Israel, The house of him that hath his shoe loosed."[*]Deu 25:5-10 The whole spirit of the Mosaic dispensation considers the great Jehovah as the temporal sovereign of Israel, the land as his, the supremacy his. Every Israelite received his inheritance under the express stipulation that it. should not be alienated from him and from his family for ever. That if, pressed by necessity, he should sell the whole or any part of it, he himself or his nearest of kindred might at any future period redeem it; that at the worst, in the year of jubilee, it should revert unpurchased to the ancient proprietor or his representative; and thereby succession and property be preserved distinct till the purposes of Heaven should be accomplished. To give the law farther and more certain effect, it was enacted, that if the elder branch of the family and the heir of the inheritance should die childless, his next elder brother or nearest male relation should marry the widow; and that tine issue of such marriage should be deemed to belong to the deceased, should assume his name and succeed to his inheritance. Here then was the family of Elimelech ready to be extinguished: he and his two sons were all dead without posterity. Naomi was past childbearing, the lands were ready to pass into the hands of strangers, for want of an heir, the hope of succession existing alone in the person of Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon. The measure therefore recommended by Naomi, and adopted by Ruth, was neither less nor more than a legal call on Boaz, as the supposed nearest kinsman of that branch of the family, to fulfil the duty of that relation: Naomi, not knowing, or having forgotten that there was a kinsman still nearer than him.--Boaz apprised of this, and respecting the laws of God and his country, preferably to his own passions and predilection, refers the whole cause to a fair, open, judicial decision. The conduct of Boaz throughout is exemplary and worthy of commendation: it bespeaks at once a wise and a good man. We have expatiated at considerable length on his character as a man of piety, regularity, and humanity; we have bestowed on him the just tribute of admiration and respect, as a man of sensibility, as susceptible of pity for the miserable, of kindness to the stranger, of love for a deserving object. His character acquires much additional respectability from this last consideration, connected with the delicacy of his situation as a man and a citizen. His partiality to Ruth was clear and decided. In the confidence of virtue she had put herself entirely in his power: and what use did he make of this advantage? Never was father more tender of the reputation and chastity of his daughter. Every selfish consideration is sunk in sense of propriety, in respect to the divine authority, in solicitude about the honor and interest of the woman whom he loved. His partiality to Ruth was decided, but the right of redemption was in another, and he nobly disdains to avail himself of wealth, of power, of prior possession, to the prejudice of that right. What is the victory of the warlike hero compared to this triumph of a man over himself! What are trophies stained with blood, opposed to the silent applause of a good conscience, and the approbation of Almighty God! I see him bringing the cause to the determination of the judges, with the firmness of an honest man, with the anxiety of one in love, and with the resignation of one who feared the Lord, and committed all to the conduct of infinite wisdom. Characters shine by contrast. The nearer kinsman's versatility, disingenuousness, and insensibility to shame, serve as a foil to the firmness, candor, and delicacy of Boaz. When the former hears of a good bargain, when he considers the advantage of his birth as the means of stepping into a vacant inheritance upon easy terms, he is all acquiescence and eagerness; but the moment he hears of the condition under which he is to purchase, of the

assumption of the widow, of the relief of the miserable, of transmitting the name of Elimelech, not his own, to posterity, together with his lands, he instantly cools, submits to the infamy of having “his shoe pulled off,” of being publicly spit upon, of having his house branded with a note of disgrace, and leaves the field open to a much better man than himself.

It is much easier to conceive than to describe the solicitude of the parties, while the cause was yet in dependence. What a blow to the heart of Boaz, when he, on whom the law bestowed the preference, declared his assent to the proposal; what disappointment to the hopes of Naomi, who had evidently set her mind on the match; what a damp thrown on the wishes and expectations of Ruth, on whose susceptible heart the goodness and generosity of Boaz must have made a deep impression! What relief to all, to hear him solemnly retract his assent, resign his right, and submit to the penalty. Those are the genuine delights of human life at which we arrive through danger and difficulty, which are the immediate gift of Heaven, which we have not employed improper arts to acquire, and which we can therefore enjoy without shame or remorse. The felicity which we are in too great haste to grasp, which we pursue independent of God and religion, which by crooked paths we arrive at, proves at best a cloud in the embrace, often a serpent full of deadly poison in the bosom. The very delays which Providence interposes, the sacrifices which a sense of duty offers up, the mortifications to which conscience submits, enhance the value, and heighten the relish of our lawful comforts.

Let us apply this observation to the three leading personages in this interesting tale. Naomi sits down, and thus meditates with herself. “With what fair prospects did I begin the world; the wife of a prince, a mother in Israel, among the first in rank, in wealth, in expectation. But how early were my prospects clouded! Driven by famine from the land of promise, reduced to seek shelter and subsistence among strangers, but supported and refreshed by the company and tenderness of the husband of my tender years, and the presence and improvement of my children: finding a new home in the land of Moab, my family respected in a foreign country, reputably allied, comfortably settled. But the cup of prosperity again dashed from my hand; husband and sons, the desire of mine eyes, taken away with a stroke; Canaan and Moab, rendered equally a place of exile, robbed of that which rendered all places a home, all situations a pleasure; deserted of all but Heaven, and a good young woman, once the partner of my joys, now my sister in affliction: fleeing back for the relief of my anguish to my native soil and city, and mortified at finding myself there more a stranger than among aliens; providentially raised into notice and consequence again, my affectionate daughter nobly allied, the name of Elimelech about to be revived, and his house built up! What a strangely checkered life! Naomi and Mara in perpetual succession! But everything is ordered wisely and well of Him who sees all things at one view; the latter end is better than the beginning; behold good arising out of evil; the designs of the Most High hastening to their accomplishment, All is of the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.” The reflections of the Moabitess may be supposed to run in this channel. “What a blessing for me that I ever became united to an Israelitish family, whatever pangs it may other ways have cost me! But for this I should have been, like my fathers, a worshipper of stocks and stones, the work of men’s hands; a stranger to rational piety, to inward peace! Happy loss, which procured for me this unspeakably great gain: propitious poverty, which sent, which drove me out in quest of treasures inestimable; blessed exile, which conducted me to a habitation under the wings of the Almighty! What real gain is true godliness? It has more than the promise, it has the enjoyment of the life that now is.

Mysterious Providence, that directed my doubtful, trembling steps to glean in that field, that has in a few short weeks made such a change in my condition, that has raised me front the lowest, meanest, most forlorn of dependants, to the highest state of affluence, case, and respectability; and transplanted the from the vast howling deserts of idolatry and ignorance, to the fair and fertile regions of knowledge, of purity, of hope, and joy! To comfort and maintain a mother like Naomi, to find such a friend and husband as Boaz! It is life from the dead. It is of that God who has taught me to know, and to choose him as my God, and who will never fail nor forsake them who put their trust in him."

Boaz, too, finds his situation greatly improved, rejoices and gives God thanks "My wealth was great, my garners full, my man-servants and maidens numerous, dutiful, and affectionate, but I had no one to shard my prosperity with me, I was solitary in the midst of a multitude: like Adam in Paradise, incapable of enjoyment, because destitute of a companion, an help meet for me; but God hath provided for me a virtuous woman, whose price is above rubies. My house has now received its brightest ornament, my family its firmest support, my estate its most prudent and faithful dispenser. I have done my duty. I have respected the majesty of the law. I have followed where Providence led the way, and I have found my reward, in the peace of my own mind, in the possession of a wise and good woman, in the blessing of that God who has done all things for me, and who does all things wisely and well."

Behold a match formed immediately by the hand of Providence, through the happy concurrence of little incidental circumstances; a snatch built, not on the brittle foundation of sordid interest, but on the solid basis of mutual affection, of generosity, of wisdom, of religion; a match pregnant with what consequences to Bethlehem-Judah, to all Israel, to the human race! From this advantage of ground, how pleasant it is to trace the sweetly meandering course of the river of prophecy and promise united, toward the vast, the immeasurable ocean of accomplishment. Now the tribe of Judah is rising into consequence, now the royal scepter is ready to be put into his hand, never to depart thence "till Shiloh come, of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end: to whom the gathering of the people shall be." Now the star of Jacob begins to appear. Now the "tender plant" begins to rear its head, and the "root out of the dry ground to spring up; it buds and blossoms as the rose, and its smell is as the smell of Lebanon." But what eye can discover, what created spirit take in the whole extent of "God's purpose and grace given in Christ Jesus before the world began," and terminating in the final and everlasting redemption of a lost world, through faith in his blood? The veil of eternity is drawn over it; "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God bath prepared for them that love him."[*]1Co 2:9 "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."[*]1Jn 3:2 The history of Ruth, will be brought to a period next Lord's day.

You see, men and brethren, the object which is closely kept in view, through every era of time, under all dispensations, and by whatever instruments. The work of God cannot stand still, his purpose cannot be defeated. One generation of men goeth and another cometh, but every succeeding generation contributes to the furtherance of his design; and, whether knowingly or ignorantly, voluntarily or reluctantly, all fulfill his pleasure.

None are forsaken of Providence, but such as are false to themselves, and till we have done what is incumbent upon us, we have neither warrant nor encouragement to took up and wish, to expect and pray.

Nothing is dishonorable, but what is sinful: poverty that is not the effect of idleness, prodigality, or vice, has nothing shameful in it; the gleaner behind the reapers may be as truly dignified as the lord of the harvest. Let lordly wealth cease from pride, and virtuous obscurity and indigence from dejection and despair.

Waste not time, spirits, and thought in airy speculation about imaginary situations, but try to make the most of that in which infinite wisdom has seen meet to place thee.

Disdain to envy any one, at least until thou hast thoroughly examined into the estate of him whom thou art disposed to envy.

He is destitute of the happiest preparation for the relish and enjoyment of prosperity, who has not arrived at it through the path of adversity. To receive with thankfulness, to enjoy with moderation, to resign with cheerfulness, to endure with patience, is the highest pitch of human virtue.

Men are often fulfilling a plan of Providence, without intending, or even being conscious of it. They are acting a double part at the same instant; the one private and personal, local and transitory, the other public, comprehensive, and permanent; they may be building up at once a private family, and the church of God, carrying on and maintaining the succession to an inheritance, to a throne, and ministering to the extension and progress of a kingdom which shall never be moved or shaken. In the kingdom of nature, there is high and low, mountain and valley, sameness with diversity: in the kingdom of Providence, there is difference of rank and station, of talent and accomplishment, of fortune and success, but a mutual and necessary connection and dependence. In the kingdom of grace, there is diversity of gifts and offices; but the same Spirit; and so in the kingdom of glory, different degrees of luster, as stars differ one from another, but one universal glory, of which all the redeemed are together partakers, all being kings and priests unto God. Throughout the whole, there is a gradation which at once pleases and confounds, that depresses and exalts, that inspires contentment, and teaches to aspire, that now attracts to the pure fountain of untreated light, and now repels the bold inquirer to his native darkness and distance again. Is it pleasant to survey from the exceeding high mountain, where the Christian tabernacle is pitched, the course of that river whose streams make glad the city of our God? What will it be, from the summit of yonder eternal hills, to contemplate the whole extent of Emanuel's land, "watered with the pure river of water of life;" to mingle with the nations of them that are saved, as they expatiate through the blissful groves, planted with the tree of life: to converse with the distinguished personages who shine on this hallowed page, and shall then shine in immortal luster; to reap with Boaz a richer harvest than ever waved on the plains of Bethlehem-Judah; to assist Naomi in raising her triumphant song of praise; and to rejoice with Ruth, and with one another, in our joint reception into God's everlasting kingdom, in our common admission into "the general assembly and church of the first-born." Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of our God. We have heard of them with the hearing of the ear, may our eyes be blessed with the sight of them. May "the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne lead us to living fountains of waters, and God wipe away all tears from our eyes." "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

106. Ruth--Blessed of God

Ruth--Blessed of God

Ruth 4:13-17. So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son. And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age. For thy daughter-in-law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it. And the women her neighbors gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi, and they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

There is an obvious resemblance between the general plan of the divine providence, and the separate and detached parts of it. The life of almost every good man exhibits virtue for a season struggling with difficulty, overwhelmed with distress, but emerging, rising, triumphing at length. Through much tribulation the Christian must enter into the kingdom of God, and on his way be often in heaviness through manifold temptations. It is the wise ordinance of infinite goodness. Opposition rouses, calls forth the latent powers of the soul; success is heightened by the danger to which we were exposed, by the trouble which it cost us, by the pains we took; antecedent labor sweetens rest. Hence, the passages of our own lives which we most fondly recollect and relate, and those in the lives of others which most deeply engage and interest us, are the scenes of depression, mortification, and pain through which we have passed. The perils of a battle, the horrors of a shipwreck, so dreadful at the moment, become the source of lasting joy, when the tempest has ceased to roar, and the confused noise of the warrior is hushed into silence.

Fiction, in order to please, is, accordingly, forced to borrow the garb of truth. The hero’s sufferings, the lover’s solicitude and uncertainty, the parent’s anguish, the patriot’s conflict, are the subject of the drama. When the ship has reached her desired haven, when the cloud disperses, when the contest is decided, the curtain must drop. Periods of prosperity cannot be the theme of history. The vast, general system, in like manner, exhibits “the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain together:” interest clashing with interest, spirit rising up against spirit, one purpose defeating another, universal nature apparently on the verge of confusion; chaos and ancient night threatening to resume their empire: but without knowledge, design, or co-operation, nay, in defiance of concert and co-operation, the whole is making a regular, steady progress; the muddy stream is working itself pure; the discordant mass is bound as in chains of adamant, the wrath of man is praising God; every succeeding era and event is explaining and confirming that which preceded it; all is tending towards one grand consummation which shall collect, adjust, unite, and crown the scattered parts, and demonstrate, to the conviction of every intelligent being, that all was, is, and shall be very good.

Finite capacity can contemplate, and comprehend but a few fragments at most: and Scripture has furnished us with a most delicious one, in the little history of which I have now read the conclusion.

The story of Ruth has been considered, by every reader of taste, as a perfect model in that species of composition. It will stand the test of the most rigid criticism, or rather, is calculated to give instruction and law to criticism. With your patience I will attempt a brief analysis of it.

First. The subject is great and important beyond all that heathen antiquity presents: the foundation and establishment of the regal dignity in the house of David, the type and ancestor of the Messiah. An event in which not one age, one nation, one interest is concerned, but the whole extent of time, the whole human race, the temporal, the spiritual, the everlasting interests of mankind. What is the demolition of Troy, or the settlement of Aeneas in Latium, compared to this? Paradise Lost, itself, must give place to this glorious opening of Paradise Regained.

Second. The story is perfect and complete in itself; or, as the critic would say, has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Elimelech is driven by famine into banishment, dies in the land of Moab, and leaves his family in distress. Here the action commences. Naomi and Ruth, united by propinquity, by affection and by distress, are induced to return to Bethlehem-Judah, in hope of effecting a redemption of the estate which had belonged to the family, but under the pressure of necessity had been alienated. Their reception, deportment, and progress, form the great body of the piece. The marriage of Boaz and Ruth, and the birth of Obed is the conclusion of it.

Third. The conduct of the plot is simple, natural, and easy. No extraneous matter, personage, or event is introduced, from first to last: the incidents follow, and arise out of one another, without force, without effort. No extraordinary, agency appears, because none is requisite; the ordinary powers of nature, and the ordinary course of things, are adequate to the effect intended to be produced. There is no violent or sudden transition, but a calm, rational, progressive change from deep sorrow to moderated affliction, to composed resignation, to budding hope, to dawning prosperity, to solicitous prosecution, to partial success, to final and full attainment. The discovery of Ruth, of her character, of her virtues, of her relation to Boaz, is in the same happy style of natural simplicity and ease. On her part we see no indecent eagerness to bring herself forward, no clamorous publication of her distresses or pretensions, no affected disguise or concealment to attract observation or provoke inquiry: on his, there is no vehemence of exclamation, no hastiness of resolution; but in both, the calmness of good minds, the satisfaction which conscious virtue enjoys, in the unexpected discovery of mutual attractions and kindred worth. The situations are interesting, affecting, governed by the laws of nature and probability, and consonant to every day's experience.

Fourth. The sentiments are just, arising out of the situations, adapted to the characters, guarded equally from apathy and violence. The pathetic expostulation of Ruth with her mother-in-law, when she proposed a separation, is in particular, a masterpiece of native eloquence: at hearing it, the heart is melted into tenderness, the tear of sympathy rushes to the eye, nature feels and acknowledges the triumph of virtue. The sentiment of impassioned sorrow glows with equal vehemence on the lips of Naomi, and excite in the bosom of sensibility, pity mingled with respect. In Boaz we praise and admire unostentatious generosity, dignified condescension, honest, undisguised affection, a sense of impartial, inflexible, undeviating justice.

Fifth. The characters are nicely discriminated, boldly designed, and uniformly supported. The grief of Naomi is verbose, impetuous, and penetrating; that of Ruth calm, silent, melting, modest. The plans of the mother are sagacious, comprehensive; the result of reflection, of experience; they

indicate skill, ability, resolution, perseverance. Those of the daughter are artless, innocent; the suggestion of the moment, the effusion of the heart; indicate candor, sincerity, conscious, unblushing, unsuspecting rectitude. In Boaz the struggle between inclination, propriety, prudence, and justice is happily designed, and forcibly executed: it is a painting from nature, and therefore cannot fail to please. His openness and fair dealing also, as was observed in a former Lecture, are finely contrasted with the selfishness, insincerity, and unsteadiness of the nearer kinsman. The character of the servant who was over the reapers, though we have but a slight sketch of it, discovers the hand of a master, the band of truth and nature. We see in it, the beautiful and interesting portrait of unabashed, unassuming inferiority, of authority, undisfigured by insolence or severity, the happy medium between power and dependence, the link in the scale of society which connects the wealthy lord with the honest laborer, the friend and companion of both. The rest of the characters are classed in groups, but discover a characteristic and decided distinction. We have the inquisitiveness, curiosity, hard-heartedness and indifference of an idle provincial town; the good nature, hospitality, candor, and cheerfulness of the country. The compliments of congratulation presented to Boaz, on his marriage, and those addressed to Naomi, on the birth of her grandson, clearly evince the different train of thought and feeling which dictated them, and mark beyond the possibility of mistake the sex and sentiment of the addressors. In a word, the ideas expressed by the several characters in this sacred drama, are so peculiarly their own, that no reader of ordinary discernment needs to be told, who it is that speaks: the sentiments cannot possibly be transferred from one to another.

Sixth. The manners are delineated with the same felicity of pencil. We have a faithful representation of those that are permanent and founded in nature: and of those which are local and temporary. When I observe these Bethlehemites flocking round the old woman and her outlandish daughter, plying them and one another with questions, circulating the leer and the whisper, I could suppose myself in one of the gossiping villages which surround this metropolis, whose inhabitants feed on rumour, exercise no principle but curiosity, employ no member but the tongue, or the feet, in hunting after the materials for that employment. In the innocent festivity, the uncomplaining toil, the contented simplicity, the unaffected benevolence, the unprofessing piety of that field of reapers, I have mingled a thousand and a thousand times. It was the delight of childhood, it is the unpainful, the undepressing retrospect of age.

We have a representation equally faithful and just of customs and manners which are local and temporary; some of which excite our astonishment, some shock our delicacy, and some provoke our mirth. Such are the modes of courtship here described, the transfer of property, the forms of judicial procedure, the terms of familiar address and friendly communication: and the like. These, having no intrinsic moral excellence or turpitude, are the object of neither praise nor censure. To trace their origin, or explain their nature and design, may be an innocent amusement, but it were unjust to explode them as absurd, or to run them down as ridiculous. The antiquarian will revere them for their age, the philosopher will investigate them as opening a new path to the knowledge of the human heart, the philanthropist will deal with them gently, because they are the harmless peculiarities of his fellow-creatures, and piety will respect them as presenting another view of the endless variety discoverable in all the ways and works of the great Creator. In the permanent manners of mankind we see the eternal sameness of the human mind, which no change of climate, times, government, education, can alter; a sameness as discernible and as fixed as the

number of eyes, arms, and fingers peculiar to the species. In those which are local and transient, we behold the infinite and endless variety of the human powers, which no stability and uniformity of law, instruction, discipline, interest, example, can arrest and fix; a variety as discernible, as unsteady, as unaccountable, as the different shades of complexion, the conformation of feature, the measurements of stature, the fluctuations of thought. Everything satisfies, everything confounds.

Once more, the language of this charming little epic history is plain and perspicuous, elegant yet unadorned, nervous yet chaste, simple yet not mean or vulgar. It consists of narration and dialogue, the former possessing the most exquisite degree of grace and ease, the latter of vivacity and force. There is no obscurity of idea, no redundancy of expression, no appearance of labor, no artful polish, no tinsel of words, no disgusting tediousness, no affected conciseness. Like the general code of Scripture, it is capable of neither increase nor diminution, without sustaining an injury. But the least merit of the piece is its excellency as a composition. It forms a most material member of the great building of God, an important link in the chain of providence, an interesting and instructive chapter in the history of redemption. The union of Boaz and Ruth can never lose its influence, never spend its force. When nature expires, and all these things are dissolved, the offspring of that pair “shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever.” From that root behold a branch has arisen, to which “the nations of them that are saved” continually resort, under whose shadow they repose, whose fruit is the source and support of a divine life, whose “leaves are for the healing of the nations.” Let the Jew read this sacred page, and glory in his ancestry; let the scholar read it, and improve his taste, and extend his knowledge; let the rustic read it, and prize his humble pursuits and innocent delights; let the sons of poverty and the daughters of affliction read it, and cease from despair, let them learn to “trust in the Lord, and to do good; let the Christian read it, and “hold fast the beginning of his confidence,” and “rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” The last obvious remark on the history, sorry I am to say it, is not highly honorable to human nature. While Naomi was poor, and friendless, and forlorn, she met with little sympathy, with little countenance; she was permitted to depend for subsistence on the miserable, unproductive industry of a woman, weak and wretched as herself; but no sooner is she connected with “a mighty man of wealth,” become a mother to Boaz, than the whole city is seeking to her; her own sex, in particular, we see entering into all her feelings, flattering all her natural propensities, accommodating themselves to her little wishes and desires, and trying to compensate their former coldness and neglect by every art of attention, officiousness, and zeal. Base spirit! base world! Behold kindness pressed upon a man, just in proportion as he has no need of it; behold him oppressed with new friends, because he has already got too many, caressed by those who lately knew him not, praised and flattered to his face, by the very tongues which maligned and censured him in his absence. But that man is left to continue poor, because he is poor. He finds no support because he wants it, he stands unbefriended, because he has no friend. Shame on the fawning sycophants that only flutter about in fair weather, that only frequent the mansions of the rich and great, that turn with the tide, that can despise ragged poverty, and offer incense to ermined villany.

Let us turn with contempt from the sight, and take a last parting look of one of the worthiest, best, happiest of human beings--Naomi nursing and cherishing her little grandson in her bosom. If there be bliss on earth, she enjoyed it. Her honest scheme had succeeded, the name of her beloved

husband was revived, and his house begun to be built up; her amiable and beloved daughter was nobly rewarded for her tenderness and attachment; the inheritance of Elimelech is redeemed and reverted to its proper channel; the wisdom and goodness of Providence are fully justified, and a prospect of felicity and honor is opened which knew no bounds. The miseries of a whole life are done away in one hour, converted into blessings, blessings heightened and improved by the memory of past woes; the name of Mara is for ever obliterated, and the original, the suitable, the prophetic name of Naomi restored and confirmed. The sensibilities of a Grandmother are peculiarly pure and delicate respecting infant offspring. All good women are fond of children, to whomsoever they belong, how much more of their own whom they bare with sorrow, and have brought up with solicitude: but “that I should live to see my child’s child, my being multiplied; dropping into the grave, yet reviving in that infant. I feel myself immortal; this babe will live to put his hand upon my eyes, and then I shall not feel the oppression of death; if he survive I cannot all die.” “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.” The Spirit of God has drawn a veil over the feelings of the mother herself, and the expression of them, and left it to the imagination to figure the felicity of Ruth the widow of Mahlon, the daughter of Naomi, the wife of Boaz, the mother of Obed, in surveying the changes of her life, in comparing what she was with what she is. And thus have we finished what was intended, in discoursing on the book of Ruth. We have considered it, as a beautiful, because natural representation of human life; as a curious and interesting detail of important facts; and as an essential, constituent part of the plan of redemption. It happily connects the history of the Israelitish judges with that of their kings, and is obviously blended with both: and while it demonstrates the care of Providence, in fulfilling the promises made to Abraham, the friend of God, in prolonging his race, in multiplying his seed, in making kings to arise out of him, it unfolds the more enlarged and comprehensive purpose of the eternal Mind; it points directly forward to that “seal in whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed;” it show the subservience of all that preceded, to the evangelical dispensation; it breathes good-will to men. The reception of Ruth, a Gentile, within the pale of the church of the living God; her advancement to honor, her participation of the privileges of a mother in Israel, are a happy prefiguration of the admission of the whole Gentile world within the bond of God’s covenant. We see the work of God still going forward and prospering; the work of mercy enlarging, extending its sphere; all bending forward to that grand consummation, when “Israel too shall be saved,” and the ancient people of God brought into a communication of the blessings of the gospel, together with “the fulness of the Gentile nations;” when there shall be “one shepherd and one sheepfold;” when Jew and Gentile shall arise together from the dead, because “Christ doth give them life.” The birth of Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David, brings the history of the world down to the year two thousand six hundred and ninety-seven, from the creation, and before Christ one thousand three hundred and seven, and conducts us to the eve of the establishment of kingly power in Israel.

How many generations of men have passed in review before us, in the course of these few years evening exercises from Adam dawn to Boaz! What changes has the audience undergone, since first it collected in this view! What deep and affecting changes will a few more seasons produce! The turning of the page will present a new preacher, new hearers, a different plan, a different arrangement, different interests, different feelings. The separation of this night may be final and permanent. We bend together, gracious God, with wonder and gratitude before thy throne. Spared together so many years longer, “cumberers of the ground” that we are; our bodies preserved in

health, our minds in tranquillity; blessed with friendship, blest with sufficiency, blest with the means of improvement, blest with hope! Ah, we are unworthy of the least of thy favors, and we have been distinguished by the choicest and best! Make us to feel thy goodness and our own unworthiness; help us to live more to thy glory. As our interest in the world diminishes, as years increase, as gray hairs multiply, as friends depart, as comforts fail, as eternity advances, let our faith strengthen, let our spirits rise to thee, let our prospects brighten, let our ardor after immortality kindle. The nearer we approach to thee, let our resemblance to thee become more apparent; let the spirit of heaven, the spirit of the blessed Jesus, be imparted to us, that living and dying, we may edify the world, be a blessing to all connected with us, and still enjoy inward peace. And as we separate from time to time, may it be in the sweet expectation of meeting together in the regions of everlasting purity, love, and joy. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirits. Amen.”

107. Hannah, the Mother of Samuel--Troubled Yet Polite

Hannah, the Mother of Samuel--Troubled Yet Polite

1Sa 1:1-8. Now there was a certain man of Ramathaimzophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite. And he had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. And this man went up out of his city yearly, to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of floats in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there. And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah, his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions. But unto Hannah he gave a worth portion: for he loved Hannah: but the Lord had shut up her womb. And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret because the Lord had shut up her womb. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord; so she provoked her; therefore she wept and did not eat. Then said Elkanah, her husband, to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? And why eatest thou not? And why is thy heart grieved? Am not I better to thee than ten sons?

Similar causes ever have produced, and ever will produce similar effects. You may shift the scene from one age and country to another, but like beings, the same spirit, the same passions and pursuits arise continually to view. The difference between period and period, nation and nation, city and city, man and man, consists merely in a few arbitrary customs, various forms of speech and modes of behavior; but the great principles of human nature, the great moving springs of human actions are universal and invariable. What then is so absurd as to tax others with absurdity, only because their language, manners, or prejudices do not exactly coincide with our own? As the principles of our nature, so the rules of the divine government are similar and uniform. The views, passions, and interests of men are the hinges on which the mighty engine revolves. Every little individual moves and acts in his own proper sphere, like the stars in the firmament of heaven, but all move and act together under the influence of one great commanding power, which animates and directs the whole. Everyone possesses, and feels, and exercises its separate intelligence, and all are, at the same time, checked, impelled, sustained by one supreme Intelligence which is above all, through all, and in all. The justest and most accurate, the most useful and instructive representations of human life and conduct are to be found in this divine record. The actors in this sacred and interesting drama, are personages of the very highest distinction, patriarchs and prophets, legislators and kings; but we are never permitted, for a single moment, to for get, that they are also men. In their form and features we behold our own image reflected. In the emotions by which they were agitated, in the objects which they pursued, we recognize our own aversions and desires, our own pursuits and attainments, our own mortifications and success.

We are now entering on the history of one of the greatest among the prophets, and that history delineated by his own pencil. He begins it with a description of his father’s family previous to his own birth, and a faithful representation of the different characters of which it was composed. And

this will furnish ample matter for the present Lecture.

Elkanah, the father of Samuel, from the genealogical deduction here presented, was a Levite of the family of the Kohathites, and is denominated a man of Ramathaim-zophim, of mount Ephraim, from his being born or residing at that city.

Men of eminence, as has often been observed, confer celebrity on cities and countries; but poor is that merit which is derived from no other source but a man's parentage, or the place of his birth. The Levitical tribe was scattered over the whole country, and during the disorderly times which succeeded the death of Joshua, their residence and their services seem to have been regulated by no certain and fixed standard. His ancestors for many generations are mere names in the historic page; shadows without a substance; and he himself borrows the fame and luster in which he is transmitted to us, from the reputation, ability, and distinction of his nobler son; whose children, in their turn, sink into infamy, and thence into oblivion. The first article in Elkanah's domestic economy presented to our consideration, is an imputation upon his wisdom, if not upon his piety. "He had two wives." Polygamy, or a plurality of wives, was a practice at that time indeed connived at, but no where, and at no period, sanctioned by a law: a practice not indeed condemned by statutes and punishments, but sufficiently condemned by effects and consequences. It is of very little importance to inquire whether it be forbidden, if it can be proved unreasonable, unwise, inexpedient. And for such proof we have but to recur to the domestic history of Abraham, of Jacob, of Elkanah, and of every family in which it prevailed. Hannah was probably the prior wife, and it is presumable that the disappointment of not having children by her suggested the hazardous experiment of a double marriage; and the issue demonstrated that every deviation from the path of rectitude leads directly to its own chastisement. The mortification of Hannah, already too much to bear, is grievously embittered by. the assumption of a rival in the affection of her husband, and becomes intolerable by the fruitfulness of that rival. And thus, by one ill-advised step, all the parties are rendered unhappy, and that without any high degree of criminality on any side. Elkanah's peace is incessantly disturbed by the mutual jealousy, and bitterness, and strife of those conjoined, who separately might have contributed to soothe and soften the cares of life. The pleasure of having children is marred and unpaired to Peninnah, by the ill-disguised partiality of the father of her children to another. The misery of barrenness is dreadfully aggravated to Hannah, by the cruel mocking and taunts of her merciless adversary. And what became of the children all the while? Were they likely to be well and wisely educated, amidst all these domestic jarrings? Hated and opposed by more than a step-mother's rancor, spoiled by the over indulgence of maternal tenderness, striving to compensate that rancor and hatred; secretly caressed, openly neglected by an embarrassed father, who was now afraid to express, and now to conceal the honest emotions of nature. It is not vice only that destroys human comfort. And if mere imprudence involves a man in so many difficulties and distresses, how dreadful must it be to bear continually in one's bosom the burning coal of an ill conscience.

Happily for Elkanah and his house, family discord did not extinguish family religion; he went up regularly with all his household to worship the Lord at Shiloh, at the great yearly festivals. The law commanded the attendance of the males only, on such occasions; but whether it were a higher sense of piety induced him to appear before Jehovah rejoicing with all that were his, or whether he hoped to allay the ferment of fierce and angry spirits, in the soul-composing exercises of devotion, both his wives attended him to the service of the sanctuary, and sat down together with him at the

sacrifice of peace-offering. It was wisely and well intended, the fire of malignity fades and dies in presence of the pure flame of love divine, as material fire is absorbed and extinguished when exposed to the rays of the glorious orb of day. It was well intended, had he not reason to hope that Hannah would forget her misery, and Peninnah her pride in the presence of God; that the power of religion, and the prospects of immortality might haply unite those whom passion and interest had severed. But if such were his intention, he succeeded not. And that he succeeded not, is to be imputed, in part, to his own weakness. The beloved wife must be distinguished by a “worthy portion,” and to render it more insulting, at a public festival, and before envious, watchful eyes, those of Peninnah, and her sons and daughters. Thus, through some mixture of folly in ourselves, through the craftiness and malignity of another, or through some untowardness of arrangement, over which we had no power, and neither could foresee nor prevent, the best designs miscarry, medicine is converted into poison, and religion is made a minister of wrath and unrighteousness. Who does not here recollect a certain “coat of many colors,” which cost so dear to him who gave, and to him who wore it? Who is not warned to guard against, or at least to conceal partial affections, where claims are equal? Who does not feel the importance of bringing to the altar of God, a spirit elevated above all temporal considerations. Not only was the good natured intention of Elkanah frustrated, but the worship of God was profaned; and wretched indeed must be the state of that family where religion not only fails to conciliate, but tends to alienate, irritate, and inflame. “Elkanah loved Hannah, but the Lord had shut up her womb.”--The absence of one desired blessing renders the possession of a thousand others tasteless and insipid. The moderating hand of eternal Providence rectifies the disorders, and counteracts the violence, of human passion; preserves the balance from a preponderancy too great, or too lasting, on either side; and conducts all to the happiest issue at length. But an evil which comes immediately from heaven is by that very consideration rendered both tolerable and salutary. The Lord can do nothing but what is right; in wrath he remembers love; “he afflicts not willingly nor grieves the children of men, not for his pleasure, but their profit.” But alas, there was mingled in Hannah’s cup, an ingredient which converted the whole into wormwood and gall; “her adversary also provoked her sore to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb.” What relish had now the double portion, though the token of a fond husband’s unabated kindness? The insulting words and looks of her pitiless “adversary” areas vinegar upon niter. How dreadful to have a calamity which was incessantly, though secretly preying upon her vitals, incessantly thrown in her teeth; home rendered a burden; the place of sacrifice, a habitation of discord; fire snatched with unhallowed hands from the altar of Jehovah to kindle the gloomy fire of hell! There needs no tormenting fiend to ascend from the bottomless pit, armed with scorpions, to plague and torture wretched mortals; see, they are armed like furies one against another, they exult in one another’s pain; relentless, remorseless, they “say not it is enough.”

Dreadful to think, this angry vengeful spirit continued to agitate and torment these unhappy women for many years together; and what is hell, but a state of unabating, growing animosity and hatred? “As he went up year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, so she provoked her.” In female bosoms can such malignity dwell? Ah, what so bad as the good corrupted, perverted! Behold a rancor which no time could enfeeble, no sense of shame restrain, and which the sacredness of the sanctuary served only to embitter and inflame! Can it be possible, merciful Father, can it be possible, that such a fell spirit should ever have accompanied any of us to thy house of prayer? Can “the same tongue utter blessing and cursing?” Dare we say “we love God,

whom we have not seen, while we hate" or despise "a brother" a sister "whom we have seen?" "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."[*]Psa 139:23-24

It is greatly to the honor of Hannah, that all this cruel and insulting treatment drew from her no indecent return. Though grieved in spirit, provoked, fretted beyond all enduring, we hear of no furious appeal to the partial tenderness of her husband, no railing for railing, no rash malediction, no furious threatening of revenge. It is not easy to govern the spirit; it is not always possible to command the temper under offence and insult; but the tongue is in everyone's power, improper words admit of no defence, and rage is but a poor apology for abuse and blasphemy. But she pines away in silent sorrow. "She wept and did not eat." These seasons of rejoicing before the Lord, these times of refreshing to every other daughter of Israel, were to her days of heaviness and woe. What signifies a large portion to one who has no appetite? What is the prosperity of her people, to one, who, like a dried branch, is cut from all interest in posterity, who sees the name and honors of her beloved husband passing away to the children of another, the children of one who hated her? Alas, the spirit of devotion itself is checked and repressed by the incessant, unrelenting stings of envy and jealousy; life is become a burden to her. The deep affliction with which she was overwhelmed could not escape the attentive eyes of Elkanah. Though her tongue said nothing, her eyes, her tears, her dejection, her abstinence, her sighs betrayed abundantly the anguish of her soul. "Then said Elkanah, her husband, to her, Hannah, why weepest thou, and why eatest thou not, and why is thy heart grieved? Am not I better to thee than ten sons?" To what distress has the good man reduced himself? Now he severely feels the effect of his own imprudence, and laments his having tried the dangerous experiment, which robbed him of all domestic quiet, disturbed the festivity of the solemn rendezvous at Shiloh, and threatened to produce one day some tragic event in his family.

Sympathy, if it does not wholly dispel our miseries, pours at least a temporary balm into the wound, and "soothes pain for a while." Hannah becomes composed, and the feast is concluded. There is still one refuge left for the miserable, one remedy against despair, one friend able and ready to help in every time of trouble; and our eyes with complacency follow the mourner, not into her secret retirement, to spend her borrow in unavailing tears, or to curse the day in which she was born; not into the round of giddy dissipation to drown reflection and anxiety, in the poisoned chalice of intemperate mirth and jollity; but to the gut of prayer, but to the door of mercy, but to the dawn of hope.

We shall presently find, that what related to the externals of God's worship was at that time but badly conducted in Israel, the "sons of Eli were sons of Belial," they "knew not the Lord." But be the minister who he will, the word and service of God cannot be rendered of none effect. Not only the spirit of piety, but a sense of common decency was now lost in the Levitical priesthood: when it pleased God to make this very afflicted woman, the means in his hand, to restore the dignity, purity, and importance of the sacred function, to revive the decayed interests of religion, and to bring forward the great events which are so intimately connected with the things which belong to our everlasting peace. When we look into human life, whether as exhibited on the hallowed page of inspiration, or by our own observation and experience, we shall find that most of the "ills which flesh is heir to" may easily be traced up to some imprudence, heedlessness, or transgression of the man himself, who, before he was aware, found himself involved in difficulties and distresses,

the native effects of his own misconduct, but which he foresaw not, apprehended not, and which he never could intend. I know how poor a consolation it is, to tell a man, “you have nobody but yourself to blame,” and to upbraid him with the warning which you gave him, and he would not take; but it is not, for that, useless for one to discover the source, cause, and progress of his calamity. The case must be bad indeed, or his eyes must have been opened very late, or his “heart hardened through the deceitfulness of sin,” if he cannot turn to some good account the reflections of maturer judgment, the admonitions and chastisement of experience, the pain and remorse of an ill conscience, or the mistakes and wanderings of a good one.

There are steps in conduct which are irretrievable, and therefore ought not to be tampered with. The excessive use of the most wholesome food, will at length overwhelm the strongest constitution; the occasional application of what is doubtful or unwholesome may undermine or waste it, but poison is certain death; and the sagacity of a brute, the understanding of a child, is sufficient to distinguish between poison and food, perhaps not between poison and medicine. To how many gracious; social, civil, and moral purposes, may not the wise and proper use of religious services be applied? The man who has performed with understanding and feeling the devotions of the closet, will issue from it in a higher state of preparation for every duty of life. Filled with veneration for his heavenly Father, “who seeth,” and with whom he has been conversing “in secret,” he breathes good-will to man. The emotions of every unkind, ungentle, unjust affection are stifled, extinguished, forgotten. The principles of benevolence and benignity have acquired new life and energy. He is disposed to meet the ills of life with more firmness and fortitude, and to enjoy its blessings with a more exquisite relish. Hannah having poured out her soul to God, “went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.” The devotion of the morning will prove the best assistant toward conducting the business of the coming day; and that of the evening, the happiest review and improvement of the past. From him who habitually begins and ends everything with God, you may reasonably expect, the fruits of a good and honest heart, “speech always with grace, seasoned with salt,” and order in conduct, more than from other men more works of mercy, more fair dealing, more steadiness in friendship: and less of the rancor of opposition, less of the self-sufficiency of pride, less of the malignity of envy; for the love of God absorbs all these baleful malignant fires. The devotions of the family, in like manner, produce the happiest effects within that sphere. How soothing, how cementing, how conciliating they are! Does common calamity press? It is alleviated, it is sanctified, it is done away, when the “care is cast upon God,” when the burden is transferred to a Father in heaven, who stands engaged to remove it, or to render it a blessing. Is domestic prosperity abounding, increasing? What an additional luster, value, sweetness does it derive from union, from piety, from a common sense of obligation and dependence? Have offences come? Has peace been disturbed? Are the bonds which united husband and wife, parent and child, brother and brother, master and servant, unhappily broken? The moment that the healing address, “Our Father who art in heaven,” reaches the ear, every soul is peace, the spirit of love pervades the whole, and the voice of discord is heard no more. When pardon is implored from him whom all have offended, the stony heart relents, melts, forgives, for he needs to be forgiven. The influence of public worship likewise, where it has not degenerated into mere form, is the strongest cement of society. It serves to consolidate men of various ranks and conditions, with their several talents and abilities, into one compact, efficient, well organized body, ready to act with one heart and one soul, in the cause of God and their country. Little shades of difference, in men truly good, will unite instead of disjoining. Our great national assemblies are

obliged, by law, to open their sittings for public business, by acts of public devotion. The reason and intention of the law, and of the practice founded upon it, are abundantly obvious. If the effect does not follow to the extent that might be wished--it must be concluded, that the devotional part of the sitting is neglected; that formality has extinguished the flame; or that difference of religious sentiment, or what is still worse, indifference to all religion, mar and weaken, and distract the whole. The prevalence of a worldly spirit must at length prove fatal to piety, and when piety is gone, public spirit is on the decline, and will not long survive. But we have in the history under review, a melancholy instance of what frequently happens to this day, and under a happier dispensation of religion--seasons and places of devotion perverted into the instruments of kindling and exercising the ungracious, the unsocial, the unkind affections. How often is the sanctuary of God profaned, by being made the scene of displaying the rivalry of beauty, dress, equipage, rank, and affluence? The humbling services of the meek and lowly Jesus, are naturally forced into the ministers of pride and vain glory. The tranquillity of the day of sacred rest, and its gentle, peaceful employments, give a birth, which they detest and disclaim, to the whisper of envy, and the noise of slander. The feast of love is disturbed, the sacrifice of peace is defiled by the impure claws of harpies; and “the house of prayer is turned into a den of thieves.” “Surely, my beloved brethren, these things ought not so to be.”

Happily for us, the influence of the gospel, and the laws of our country, and the spirit of the times, prevent, the practice which threw Elkanah’s family into such a flame; and which, wherever it has prevailed, has been productive of confusion and every evil work. May a purer religion, and wiser institutions, and a more enlightened spirit produce a more perfect morality, promote domestic happiness, and extend and secure national prosperity.

We now proceed farther to unfold, from the sacred history, the character and conduct of Hannah: earnestly praying, that with “all” the rest of “Scripture,” which “is given by inspiration of God,” it may “prove profitable for doctrine, and for reproof, and for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.”

108. Hannah, the Mother of Samuel--Quiet Prayer

Hannah, the Mother of Samuel--Quiet Prayer

1Sa 1:9-18. So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest set upon a seat by a post of the temple of the Lord. And she was in bit bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou will indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord, all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head. And it came to pass as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart, only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee. And Hannah answered and said, No, my Lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto. Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him. And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad. The support and the consolations administered by religion, are adapted to the nature and necessities of man. The exercises which it prescribes arise out of the circumstances and events of human life; and the being and perfections of God present themselves to us according as we pass from one condition to another. There are comforts which no one but' God could have bestowed; there is wretchedness which God only can relieve. Hence the soul rises directly to the Giver of all good in transports of gratitude, and cleaves to him when every other refuge fails. Hence, all that is known by the name of prayer, is at once the voice of nature, the result of reason, and a dictate of religion.

What is the confession of the penitent, but the trembling hope of a guilty creature toward the God of mercy, fleeing from the judgment of unrelenting, unforgiving man; from the persecution of an awakened, an accusing conscience, to a proclamation of peace and pardon from Heaven? What is the resignation of the patient, but a devout acknowledgment of unerring wisdom, which does all things well, and afflicts in loving kindness? What is the cry of distress, but an appeal to omnipotence for that assistance which the powers of nature cannot bestow? What is adoration, but the faculties of an intelligent being lest in the contemplation of infinite perfection? Even the rash and impious appeals to Heaven, which are uttered by the thoughtless and profane, demonstrate, that piety and prayer are founded in the very constitution of our nature. Why does that blasphemer take the name of the Lord God in vain? why swears he by the great and terrible name of Jehovah? why is his imprecation sanctioned by that tremendous signature? why are the emotions of anger, of pain, of surprise, of joy, enforced by the names and attributes of Deity? The wretch who thus tramples on his law, insults his authority, defies his power, is in these very acts of horror paying an involuntary homage to the God of truth and justice, and obliquely confesses that divine perfection which he has the boldness to violate.

We turn from the dreadful practice with holy indignation, to contemplate the desponding mourner fleeing for rest and relief in the bosom of a Father and a God; and to learn lessons of piety, and derive nourishment to hope, from the experience of others.

We have seen the disorder of a family in Israel occasioned by the foolishness of man; we are now to consider that disorder rectified, and turned into a source of domestic joy and public felicity through the wisdom and goodness of God. The solemnity of the yearly sacrifice, and the cheerfulness of the feast, had been continually embittered and destroyed to Hannah by reflection on her state of reproach among the daughters of Israel, and the merciless insults of her rival and adversary. The kind attentions, and affectionate remonstrances of a beloved husband, soothe for a moment, but cannot remove the anguish that preyed upon the heart. She looks with impatience through the tediousness of the entertainment, to the hour of retirement; and, as soon as decency permits, she exchanges the house of mirth for the house of prayer.

“If any one is afflicted let him pray.” And who is not ready to give testimony to the salutary influence of this hallowed employment? The suppliant thus disburdens the mind of a load, before intolerable; the effusion of tears cools and refreshes the heart. Prayer does not always bring down the grace that is solicited, but verily it has produced its effect when the spirit is molded into the will of the Most High. Prayer prevails not to obtain that particular blessing, but behold it is crowned with another and a greater benefit. The expected good comes not exactly at the time and in the way it was entreated, but it is conveyed at the most proper season, and in the fittest way; and how much is the enjoyment heightened and sweetened by the delay! Thus, whether the wrestler “as a prince has power with God, and prevails,” or by a touch is made sensible of his weakness and inferiority, God is glorified, and the divine life is promoted in him. The memoirs of this good woman’s life comprehend but a very short period, a few years at most. Herein consists one of the excellencies of the sacred writings. Other biographers drag you with them into dry, uninteresting details of events which had much better been forgotten. You are wearied out with the laborious display of childish prattle, the pretended prognostic of future eminence, or the doting, imperfect, distorted recollections of a wretched old man who has outlived himself. There are in truth very few particulars in any man’s life worthy of being recorded; and of those who really have lived, a very short memoir indeed will serve all the valuable purposes of history.

Ever thing of importance for us to know respecting Hannah is what related to the birth of her son Samuel; and to that accordingly the Scripture account of her is confined. She is the fourth, as far as we recollect, on the face of the sacred history, represented in nearly similar circumstances, and she is not the least respectable of the four. “Sarah laughed,” staggering at the promise of God through unbelief. Rebekah seems to have borne her trial with listlessness and indifference; and Rachel, irritated with her’s, loses all sense of shame and decency, and exclaims, “Give me children, else I die.” Hannah feels her calamity as a woman, deplores it as a woman, and seeks deliverance from it as one who believed in the power and grace of God.

Observe the more delicate shades in her character. She rose not up till “after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk.” She had patience and self-government sufficient to carry her without any apparent disquietude through the formalities of a public assembly, which must have been very painful, irksome, and disgusting to her. She would rather constrain herself, than make others uneasy; and pine in secret, rather than permit her private griefs to spread a gloom over the

innocent communications of society. Tell me, if you will, that the remark is frivolous, and the doctrine unedifying. I shall neither feel mortified nor complain, provided you permit me to think that nothing is frivolous that tends to unfold the excellence and importance of the female character, and nothing unedifying which serves to improve the better part of our species in the knowledge of the means whereby both their respectability and importance may be effectually promoted. I repeat it therefore confidently, that Hannah is here represented as exemplifying a hard lesson, but one of high importance to all her sex. Who does not know, my female friends, that your condition and place in society necessarily subject you to many cruel privations, many mortifying constraints? What heart but sympathizes with you, obliged, as you are, to bear and to forbear, in patience and silence, and to practice painful duty, without so much as the poor reward of notice and approbation. But trust me, you have often, when you little think of it, the admiration and esteem of the more attentive and judicious; you have the sweet consolation of reflecting that you are endeavoring to act well; you can look up in humble hope to that God who seeth in secret; who observes and records what the world overlooks or forgets.

How pitiable, on the other hand, are those unhappy females, who dream of deriving consequence from vexing and disturbing all around them, by perpetually bringing forward their personal vexations, as if the world had nothing to mind but them, and their real or imaginary grievances. But this, as was said, is only a shade in the character; the great striking feature, is a fervid, importunate, aspiring spirit of devotion. Sighs and tears are the language of nature sinking under its own woe, of a “heart that knows its own bitterness;” prayer is the language of faith in, and hope toward God, the exertion of a soul struggling to get free, casting its burden upon the Lord, and acquiring strength from exercise. There is a beautiful and affecting copiousness in her expression. She addresses God as the Lord of universal nature, who “doth according to his will, in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth;” as “the Lord of Hosts,” who has all creatures, all events in his hand and at his disposal. The repetition of the word “handmaid” is emphatic, and powerfully expresses her humility, submission and sense of dependence; and it is humility that lends energy to every other principle of the divine life. “From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,” and accordingly we find her diversifying her petition into all the various modes of address: “If thou wilt indeed look on my affliction, and remember me, and not forget me.” Is this the vain repetition of the hypocrite, who thinks he shall “be heard for his much speaking?” O no, it is the honest effusion of a heart filled with its object, persisting in the pursuit, and rising gradually into confidence of success. It is a happy anticipation of the Savior’s doctrine, “that men ought to pray always and not to faint:” a happy example of clearness and precision in the subject matter of prayer, of confidence in, and reliance on the Hearer of prayer, of holy resolution to make a suitable return to prayer heard, accepted, and answered. But what was here the expression of a devout, a praying spirit? The noise of the Pharisee, the pomp of words, the correctness that courts the applause of men? No, but the ardor of a gracious spirit which neglects forms, which never thinks of appearance, or the opinion of others, which, occupied with God, overlooks man. What need of words, to him who reads the secret recesses of the heart, who hears the half breathed sigh of the prisoner in his dungeon, who collects the falling tears of the mourner, and has already granted the pious request before it is formed in the anxious breast? Strong inward emotion will of necessity imprint itself on the external appearance. The voice may be suppressed, but the features will speak; what bushel will confine the lightning of the eye? The lips will move involuntarily; the hands will raise themselves to heaven, without an admonition from vanity, and the bosom will swell to

make room for the expanding heart, though no eye is present to see it, and regardless whether there be or no.

How equivocal are the signs of human passions, and how liable to mistake is the most discerning human eye? What was in the sight of God an indication of faith believing against hope, of a fervent piety which totally absorbed the senses, of a heavenly mind which wrapped the very body up to the throne of God, is, in the sight of Eli, the disorder of a distempered brain, the effect of excess, the lowest, the most deplorable, the most disgusting exhibition of degraded humanity. Alas, the good man, as we shall presently find, had “a beam in his own eye;” and thereby was led to discern “a mote” in that of another, where there was none. In reflecting on the rash judgments of men, the choice of David, when in a great strait, presses itself upon us with redoubled force; “Let me fall now into the hand of the Lord, for his mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man.” “If God justifieth, who is he that condemneth?” But ah! what signifies the applause of the world to him who is condemned of his own conscience, and who trembles every hour at thought of the righteous judgment of God!

I like the defence of Hannah almost as well as her prayer; it argues conscious innocence and integrity. Not a single particle of gall enters into her reply, not even a particle of honest heat and indignation, at an imputation so odious. A female charged with a breach of decency so gross as excess of wine, and not break out into a flame! Ah, her calmness and temper refute sufficiently the infamous aspersion, infinitely better than a torrent of intemperate abuse would have done. How calm, how beautiful, how lovely, how dignified is innocence! It seeks the light, it shrinks not from the eye of inspection, it defies calumny, and wraps itself up in its own pure mantle; but, distains not, at the same time, to satisfy the honest inquiry, and to remove the hasty suspicion of true goodness; it is always ready to render a reason, always ready to prevent its good from being evil spoken of. The conduct of Eli is estimable in two points of view. Observing, as he thought, the temple of the Lord profaned, and the female character dishonored, he honestly speaks out his suspicion and censure to the party concerned; instead of whispering them in the ear of a third person: and thereby affords an opportunity of explanation, and of coming to a right understanding; and, once satisfied of his having been mistaken, he retracts his hasty judgment, and exchanges reprehension into blessing, and supplicates Heaven in favor of her whom he had rashly condemned. To what a happy serenity is the mind of Hannah now restored! She has poured out her soul before the Lord, and vindicated her innocence to man. The tranquillity and joy of her spirits shine in the whole of her outward deportment; her countenance brightens up, she partakes in the festivity of the season, and “is no more sad.” What a different figure does the same man present to the eyes of the world, inflamed with rage, torn with envy, stung with remorse, distracted with anxiety, degraded with debauchery; or with a visage beaming benevolence, eyes animated with love, a form firm and erect from conscious integrity. Would you wish to appear to advantage before others, take care to cleanse the inside of the cup. Purify thyself “from all filthiness of the spirit.” Let order and peace reign within; no artificial daubing applied on the outside, no splendor or elegance of apparel, no studied arrangement of the features will do it half so well.

Looks and appearance are perhaps of inferior consequence to one sex, but they are of much to the other. With some, appearance is all in all. In that view, it is not easy to imagine the effect which the inward temper and character produce. Beauty becomes perfect ugliness, and inspires nothing but disgust, from the moment that the face begins to wear the traces of pride, contempt, envy, fury,

or insolence. On the other hand, be assured, that a very homely external may be improved into perfect loveliness, by affability, gentleness, benevolence, compassion, and, above all, by a spirit of genuine piety, the parent of every grace. If there be a human being that really deserves the name of angel, a term, for the most part, most vilely prostituted, it is a sensible woman descending from the temple, or issuing from her closet, to enter with composedness, sweetness, and satisfaction on the employments of her humble, but important station in human life.

It was through the disorder of a divided family, it was through the woe of an afflicted woman, it was amidst the corruptions of a degenerate church and a disjointed state, that God was pleased to raise up a prophet, a priest, a judge in Israel to stem the torrent, to restore the lost dignity of religion, to save a sinking nation. When events flow in an even channel, when the powers of nature produce their effect in an uniform tenor, a blind chance, an irresistible fate, or an unintelligent arrangement receives the homage, which is due only to sovereign wisdom, and all-comprehensive beneficence. For this reason, God sometimes permits the great machine as it were to stand still, that men may observe by what hand it is stopped, and by what hand it is put in motion again.

Isaac, Jacob, Samson, Samuel, four of the most eminent, among the types of the great Restorer of fallen man, were introduced into the world through the agonies of desponding nature, through the exercise of undaunted faith, and the unwearied importunity of prayer and supplication. They were the successive lights of the world, each in his day; and having everyone fulfilled his day, were successively extinguished. The great Light of the world has arisen, the stars disappear, the shadows are fled away. Patriarchs and prophets bring their glory, and lay it at his feet, a voice from heaven proclaims; “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear Him.”

Let not the apparently declining state of any interest preach despair; for every evil has its remedy, except despair. That cause must perish, which all agree to give up as lost; a dying cause may revive and flourish by the wisdom and honest exertions of one man. Impaired health often issues in death, embarrassed circumstances in bankruptcy, an irregular life in irretrievable perdition; because the patient, the debtor, the sinner, gave himself up too hastily, and was lost through fear of being lost. While there is “balm in Gilead, and a physician there,” no wound, however grievous, is incurable. While there is friendship, while there is compassion on earth, honest distress will find sympathy and relief. While the throne of grace is accessible, there is hope “for the chief of sinners.” And if no cause of man be desperate, who shall dare to despair of the cause of God and truth? Behold in a posterior period of this sacred history,[*]Est 3:8-15 the utter extirpation of the posterity of Abraham determined, and the plans of Providence threatened, of course, with defeat and disappointment. Behold the bloody warrant signed, and “sealed with the ring” of Ahasuerus, and thereby rendered irreversible. Behold the vengeful Haman, like the exterminating angel, with his sword drawn in his hand really to fall upon his prey. What can save a devoted people front destruction! One obscure Jew; one not admitted to the king’s councils, but who sat unregarded at the king’s gate. He feels as a citizen and a man, he laments the impending doom of his country as a citizen and a man; but he likewise acts, and exerts himself like a citizen and a man, and leaves the issue to Him, in whose hand are the hearts of kings--and it prospered. The remonstrance of Mordecai with the queen at this awful crisis, is a master-piece of intrepidity, piety, and good sense, and furnishes an useful example for the conduct of both public and private life. “Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king’s house,

more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether boldest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"[*]Est 4:13-14 The Roman consul, whose rashness lost the battle of Cannae, and endangered the existence of the state, received the thanks of the senate, "because he had not despaired of the Commonwealth." The gallant prince of Orange, afterwards William III. of England, when urged to submit to the victorious arms of France, which were ravaging the United Provinces, and when the ruin of the republic seemed inevitable, nobly replied, "there is one way to secure me from the sight of my country's destruction; I will die in the last ditch." His resolution prevailed, and his country was saved from the yoke of the invader. And if confidence in a skilful, brave, and fortunate commander, can carry a handful to victory through myriads of foes, what has the Christian to fear, let difficulties and dangers be ever so many, ever so great, while conscious he is engaged in a good cause, and that he is following the good of Salvation!"

We proceed to view the character and behavior of Hannah in the hour of success and prosperity, blessed with the answer of prayer, and exulting in the enjoyment of the purest delights, and to performing the most important duties of life and religion.--May our meditation on these things be sweet and profitable! Amen.

109. Hannah, the Mother of Samuel--Samuel's Birth

Hannah, the Mother of Samuel--Samuel’s Birth

1Sa 1:19-23. And they arose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the Lord, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah; and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her. Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about, after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord. And the man Elkanah, and all his house, went up to offer unto the Lord the yearly sacrifice, and his vow. But Hannah went not up: for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever. And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only the Lord establish his word. So the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned him. The birth of a child is an event of much importance to those who are immediately concerned in it, and of much importance to the world. It is natural for a man to wish that his family should be built up, and his name transmitted. Every child is an accession to national strength, is one more added to the number of rational immortal beings, is a new display of the great Creator’s power, wisdom, and goodness. There lie dormant the precious seeds of faculties which are one day to astonish, instruct, and bless mankind. These infants, a few years hence, are to be the pillars of the state, the bulwarks of their country, the glory of the church of Christ. That young one shall by and by burst through the obscurity of his birth, and the meanness of his condition; shall become eminently useful, and purchase a name which ages to come shall pronounce with respect and esteem. But what is it to be known and distinguished among men? The period approaches, when God himself shall in the face of the universe acknowledge the least of these as his sons, and seat them on heavenly thrones.

It is natural for a man to wish his family built up, and for a good woman to wish the name and virtues of the husband of her youth preserved and propagated, even though she has not the fond desire, the flattering hope, of being a mother in Israel. But the determinations of Providence do not always accord with the innocent propensities of the human heart, much less with the insatiate demands of pride, avarice, and ambition. Even the wise, the amiable, and the virtuous are visited with this sore evil, the want of children. It is sometimes the calamity of those who have no other calamity. It demonstrates the imperfection of human bliss; it spreads a field for the exercise of resignation to the will of God! it furnishes both a motive and a subject for prayer: for we can carry with confidence, to the throne of grace, many a petition which we should be afraid or ashamed of preferring to a man like ourselves. Happy is the man, happy the woman, who can deposit this and every other care in the bosom of a Father in heaven. She may sit down with Hannah, and “eat,” and drink, “and be no more sad.”

We are this evening presented with the history of the birth and infancy of one of those illustrious children whose fame is universally known, and shall be had in everlasting remembrance, namely, of Samuel, the prophet of the Lord, the judge of Israel, the setter up and the terror of kings; the

glory of his own age and country; and the morning-star of a brighter day. The gift of this precious child was long withheld, that it might be more devoutly acknowledged, and more highly prized. Men overlook the ordinary appearances of nature, however stupendous and striking. In order therefore to rouse them to attention, and constrain them to observe the finger of God, the fiery comet is made to glare through the sky, and the earth shakes to the center. The blessing was sweetened to Hannah by every circumstance that can affect the fond maternal heart. A child to one who had long been afflicted with barrenness, and cruelly insulted on that account; a man-child, the answer of prayer; the power of performing for her darling infant the sweetest, and one of the most important maternal duties; and the cordial concurrence of the father in all her prudent, affectionate, and pious purposes; present enjoyment, and blossoming prospects! If there be a pure and perfect bliss on earth, it is the portion of such a woman, in such a situation.

“The Lord remembered her.” Was he ever unmindful or unkind! No, he delayed, and he granted in love. How much it concerns thee, O man, O woman, to know and to believe this! What can reconcile thee to the hardships of thy lot, but the persuasion that the good thou desirest is dented in wisdom, and the load that oppresses thee laid on by the hand of a father? Trust in the Lord, and be of good cheer; the time to favor thee will come; “the Lord will provide,” “the Lord will remember thee.”

“She bare a son, and called his name Samuel.” Gracious is the correspondence between a devout spirit and approving, assenting Heaven. Behold the prayer of faith ascending as on eagle’s wings, and resting on the footstool of yonder radiant throne; behold the good and perfect gift coming down in return from the Father of lights. Thus the vapors exhaled from the briny deep, fall back in copious showers to refresh and fertilize the earth. What a holy contention is here presented to us! The pious soul striving with God in supplication, in praise, in obedience, in faithfulness; the God of mercy striving with the meek and humble one in showing kindness, in heaping favor upon favor. Samuel, “asked and given of God,” shall bear to the last hour of his life the memorial of his mother’s fervent importunity at the throne of grace, and of God’s hearing her in the time of need. It shall serve for ever to remind himself, that he was a gift obtained of God by prayer, and devoted to God in gratitude. Every tongue that pronounces, every ear that hears the sound, shall be admonished of the union which devotion forms and maintains between earth and heaven. The mother names, the father assents, God approves, and time confirms the nomination.

We find Elkanah, and all of his family, who were fit for the journey, again on the road to Shiloh, to celebrate the great yearly festival, after the birth of his son. The bounties of Providence bind more powerfully the duties of the law upon the heart as well as upon the conscience, and thereby render religion not only a reasonable, but a pleasant service. The pleasure of waiting upon God, in the ordinances of his appointment, was greatly heightened to this good man, by the company of those whom nature had endeared to him. The length and inconvenience of the road were relieved, and sweetened, and shortened, by friendly conversation, and mutual offices of attention and kindness. The bitterness of strife is heard no more. The sacrifice is offered up with greater ardor, when one flame of affection meets another in presenting it; and the feast of peace acquires a higher relish from its being eaten in the spirit, and in the bonds of love. Social worship, as has been observed, has a most blessed effect in producing, supporting, and improving social affections. The tie of duty is strengthened between husband and wife; the bond of nature between parent and child, between brother and brother, is fortified and ennobled by going together to the house of God, and returning

in company from thence. The eye of a stranger is caught and pleased with the sight of a decent family on their road to the temple. Your prayers arise with increased ardor from seeing your children around you, in the house of prayer; your hearts glow with a holier gratitude when you hear their voices join in the praises which you sing. Offence has been given, behold it lost, and forgotten for ever, because the parties have bowed their knees together before God, and pronounced together the petition of reconciliation and peace. “Heavenly Father, forgive our trespasses as we forgive them who trespass against us.” Common mercies have been received; see how they increase and multiply, see with what additional satisfaction they are felt and enjoyed, while the notes of thanksgiving ascend from hearts and lips in unison. Common distress presses: lo, the burden is already made light, the mourners have been together before the Father of mercies, the refuge of the miserable; they have poured out their hearts before God, and are lightened; they have cast all their care upon him, and are at rest.

Christians, you have no painful and expensive journey to undertake, in order to present yourselves before the Lord. Your Shiloh is at home. Of you no costly sacrifice is demanded. “Offer unto the Lord thanksgiving, and pay your vows unto the Most high; and call upon him in the day of trouble.” Christian parent, Providence has made thee priest to that little church and congregation; bear them, as Aaron did the twelve tribes of Israel, engraven like jewels upon thy heart to the most holy place; to the altar of incense.

“But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, Not until the child be weaned.” Every duty of life and of religion has its proper place and season. God hath said, and the great Teacher sent from God, hath both by precept and practice established the word, “I will have mercy and not sacrifice.” The religion which makes light of relative duty, which teaches carelessness or neglect in our lawful worldly concerns, and withdraws men from their place and station in society, is mistaken and erroneous; it is not the religion of the Bible; it has neither authority nor example to support it. That man is doing God service, who labors in his vocation, that he may have wherewith to do justly, and to show mercy; not he who is slothful in business, but eager in argument, and who gives himself to speculating, when he ought to be working with his hands. That woman is performing a religious service, who is looking well to her household; giving suck to one child and instruction to another, practicing industry and economy; not she who is for ever rambling after favorite dogmas or favorite teachers; aiming at shining in the church, when she ought to be shining in her most honorable sphere, her own house; and engaging warmly in matters of doubtful disputation, while the food and clothing of her family are neglected. Who can call in question the piety of Hannah? And surely her absenting herself from the feast at Shiloh, on so just an occasion, will not be deemed an impeachment of it. But though the history has led me to make these remarks, perhaps, in our day they might have been spared. Have I not been combating a mistake into which neither the men nor the women of the present age are greatly disposed to fall? Ought I not rather to caution my hearers against the prevalence of a worldly spirit, to the extinction not only of the soul, but to the neglect of the very form of religion? What, warn this generation against “the danger of being religious overmuch?” What, warn them of the importance of attending to, and pursuing their temporal interest? What, caution them against frequenting the temple on working days, when they will not be diverted from the pursuit of business or pleasure on the Lord’s day? I was in the wrong; and I change the object of my exhortation. To you, O men, I call, who, absorbed in frivolous, transitory occupations, forget that “one thing is needful;” to you, who, wallowing in the

bounties of an indulgent Providence, regard not the hand from which all your comforts flow; to you, who, rising into a little wealth, a little hope, a little consequence, have lost the recollection of your having once been needy, and obscure, and unimportant; and what is infinitely worse, have lost the recollection and the practice of that humility, and decency, and piety, which poverty, and obscurity, and dependence taught and enforced. To you, O women, I call, who, without a shadow of reason, who, in the face of decency and propriety, who, in defiance of both feeling and conscience, who, entrusted with the education of children, female children, feel not the importance of the charge, or are not aware of the influence of example; can dispense with the very externals of godliness, can become patterns of sabbath neglect or violation; can trifle with any thing that effects the morals or religion of the rising generation. To you I call, and say, you are treasuring up for yourselves remorse; and for these young ones, whom you dearly love, shame, and sorrow, and distress. What is the lot of a female, without the consolations of religion; and how is a young woman to learn religion if not from her own mother? Let me remind you of what you once thought, felt, and resolved. You carried that child with uneasiness and anxiety in your womb; you formed a thousand fond wishes, you put up a thousand prayers, you came under a thousand engagements. You employed not perhaps the very words of Hannah, but undoubtedly you entered entirely into her views, and the fruit of the womb was to be “holiness to the Lord.” Well, God has been gracious to thee, and remembered thee. Thou hast survived the danger, and been delivered from the pangs of childbirth. You have enjoyed the satisfaction of training the beloved of your soul through the dangers, difficulties, and solicitude of infancy and childhood. God has graciously done his part, and you have so far performed yours. But did your engagements cease, when the infant was weaned? Did you rear that tender plant with so much anxiety, tenderness, and care, only to poison and corrupt it, after it had begun to take root, and bud, and blossom? Know you not, that the inconsideration and folly of a day may destroy the pains and labor of many years; and that the eyes of children are much quicker and more retentive than their ears?

Happy that daughter who is betimes formed to habits of discretion, of purity, of regularity, of piety, by the tender guardian and guide of her early days! Happy that mother whose attention is bent on infusing betimes, in her female offspring at least, the principles of wisdom, virtue, and true godliness. who is honored to exemplify what she teaches, and is blessed with a docile, affectionate, and improving disciple! The manner in which Elkanah and Hannah live and converse together, is exemplary and instructive. They have one common interest; they have one darling object of affection; they express one and the same will, in terms of mutual kindness and endearment. “She said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever. And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good, tarry until thou have weaned him, only the Lord establish his word. So the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she had weaned him.”

There was in all this a commanding principle of religion, of zeal for the will and glory of God, which regulated the spirit, and inspired the tongue; without which, I am afraid there is but a slender security for domestic felicity in the exercise of even good nature and good manners, much less in a mere sense of decency, or regard to the opinion of the world. These may overawe at particular seasons and in particular situations; but the fear and love of God are permanent and unvarying principles; they enforce and assist relative duty till it grows into a habit, and habit renders even difficult things easy and agreeable.

Samuel, who is his own biographer, has most judiciously drawn a veil over his infancy. Childish prognostics of future eminence are generally ridiculous and contemptible; they can impose only on the partiality of parental affection, or the credulity of superstition. The cynic snarls disdain at the relation of these premature prodigies of dawning wisdom, and the sage smiles indulgence and compassion on the fond belief. Let parents, by all means, amuse, delight themselves and each other with the sallies of infant, opening genius, but let, them keep the delight to themselves. It is one of the joys in which “a stranger intermeddleth not.” In the next Lecture we shall be led forward to consider the presentment of Samuel before the Lord in Shiloh; the sacrifice which accompanied that solemn ceremony; the farther discovery of the amiable and excellent spirit by which the mother was actuated; and the infant prophet’s entrance on his important office.

Behold once more, Christians, the spirit of prophecy still pointing to one and the same great object. The persons and circumstances of the prophets were various; but amid that variety, some one striking feature of character, office, or condition announced “Him that was to come,” more clearly or more obscurely reflected his image, and “prepared the way of the Lord.” The tongues of the prophets are many; but they all speak the same language, they all pronounce one name. The periods of their existence and predictions were widely remote; but all meet in one central point of light, in one auspicious instant, “the fulness of time,” in one illustrious personage, “to whom all give witness,” in one commanding “purpose and grace”--the salvation of the world. “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers, by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high.”[*]Heb 1:1-3 Behold all created glory thus absorbed in one glorious, divine person, “who is above all, and through all, and in all.”--“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.”[*]Php 2:9-11

110. Hannah, the Mother of Samuel--Samuel Given to Eli

Hannah, the Mother of Samuel--Samuel Given to Eli

1Sa 1:24-28. And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the Lord in Shiloh. And the child was young. And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, O my lord, as shy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him. Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord as long as he liveth; he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there.

“Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?” Every serious reflection on the nature, and perfections, and works of God, suggests this rapturous meditation of the holy psalmist. Every view of Deity is at once humiliating and encouraging to the soul. We seem to shrink into nothing, while we contemplate the regions of unbounded space; while the eye wanders from orb to orb; and the mind loses itself in calculating their number, distances, magnitude, luster, and harmony; while imagination wings its daring flight to the world of spirits, and surveys myriads of angels adoring before the throne of the Most High: and “the spirits of just men made perfect,” rejoicing “with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” But man rises into greatness and importance, when we reflect that “God created him in his own image;” that eternal Providence exercises an unremitting solicitude about him; and that for his redemption the Son of God suffered and died. The little concerns of individuals, and of private families, acquire value and dignity when we consider them as stamped with the seal of omnipotence, as the operation of infinite wisdom, as links in the great chain of divine administration, and as extending their influence to eternity. But destroy this connection, and we perceive only a strange and unaccountable scene of vanity, folly, and confusion. The holy Scriptures, which exhibit the justest representation, and enable us to form the justest estimate of human life, keep this continual interposition and commanding influence of Divine Providence constantly in view. We meet with domestic feelings and occurrences exactly similar to our own, and we find a proof that the Bible is the word of God, in our own personal daily experience. The transactions which led to the scene represented in the passage now read, have been too recently submitted to your notice, to need repetition. In the spirit and deportment of Elkanah and Hannah to each other, we have an useful example of conjugal complacency and affection. In the character of Hannah, we behold the feelings of the woman sweetly blended with the piety of the saint; and the child of sorrow seeking and finding refuge in the power and mercy of God. We are now to contemplate one of the most pleasing objects that human life presents--a good and honest heart in possession of its wish, and making the proper use of the expected blessing; the spirit of prayer changed into the spirit of praise, and vows formed in the hour of distress faithfully performed.

Let our first meditations turn on the wisdom and goodness of that great Being. who has established human felicity on such a solid foundation; or rather has drawn it from so many

combined sources. How manifold and how tender in particular, are the ties which unite a mother and her son? She carried him in her womb with solicitude and uneasiness, and brought him into the world at the hazard of her life. She sustained his infant days with the blood of her own veins, and slumber was a stranger to her eyes, that he might sleep in tranquillity. The first object which he distinguished was the smiling face of his guardian angel, the first sound that struck his opening ear was the murmur of maternal affection: the first idea he formed was that of seeking refuge from want, and pain, and danger in the fond bosom of a parent. The very anguish and trouble which she endured on his account, but endear him the more to her; a sense of early assured protection, “grows with his growth and strengthens with his strength,” and forms a bond of mutual attachment, which on one side is hardly to be dissolved, and on the other, is one of the most powerful securities against the inroads of vice, and is the last convulsive grasp of expiring virtue.

Nature has laid upon you, mothers, the heaviest and most important part of education. The good or the evil is already done, before the child is taken out of your hands. Happily the weakness of your constitution is strengthened and upheld for the arduous task, by the force of affection, and your very labor thereby is rendered your delight. And, O how glorious is your reward! you desire, you can desire none higher, than to see your son, the son of your womb, the son of your vows, remembering and practicing the early lessons which his mother taught him.

How happy was Eli in having for a pupil a child sucked, and weaned, and instructed in early life, by a Hannah! How great the goodness of the compassionate and merciful Father of all, who by means so simple, so pleasant, so powerful, so effectual, makes constant provision for the comfort, the protection, and improvement of man!

Let us proceed to meditate, for a moment, on the amiable and instructive pattern here set before us, of a faithful and obedient heart. Distress naturally dictates wishes, and prayers, and vows; it makes us sensible of subjection and dependence; but when the blessing is obtained, the load removed, and the hour of performance come, men are as forgetful and as niggardly as once they were attentive and liberal. Ten lepers were cleansed, but “where are the nine?” Has one only returned to give thanks? Ingratitude is one of those crimes which no man is either bold or depraved enough to defend, but with which all men are justly chargeable. How few earthly benefactors but have reason to complain of an ungracious return? How few parents but have that bitterness of bitterness, filial ingratitude, mingled in their cup? How verily guilty is a whole “world lying in wickedness,” before God, in this respect? There is really no merit in gratitude, but what arises from its rarity; and that rarity stamps it one of the highest of moral virtues. Would it be doing injustice to the other sex, to say, that gratitude is a quality more frequently to be found in the female character? I have no hesitation in affirming, that it is one of the most powerful attractions in any character, and that all other attractions whatever are good for nothing without it.

We observed formerly in the conduct of Hannah, a happy mixture of piety and prudence. While the state of her child confined her to mount Ephraim, it would have been the reverse of a religious service to repair to the feast at Shiloh; when he could with safety be removed to the place of God’s presence, to keep him back had been unfaithfulness and impiety. Prudence without piety will quickly degenerate into selfishness and the love of this world; will harden the heart, and lull the conscience asleep. Piety without prudence will inspire pride and intolerance; will lead to idleness and irregularity in conduct; and, out of an affected zeal for the first table of the law, will erase the

characters of the second, or through negligence and disuse, suffer them to be disfigured by filth, or corrupted and impaired by rust, so as to become at length wholly illegible. Where piety and prudence are found united, the love of God and man will perfectly consist; both tables of the law will be equally clear and distinct, and their combined influence will instruct the person by whom it is felt and understood, to “use the world so as not to abuse it.” At length the time of presenting herself before the Lord, and of performing her vow arrives. The precious child must be no longer hers, but God’s. And did he indeed cease to be the parent’s by being dedicated to the Most High? Surely no, he became theirs by a firmer and more sacred tie, they have an interest in him unknown, unfelt before. Their treasure has acquired infinite value from the place in which it is deposited; and attendance at God’s altar has conferred nobility on the little Levite, which all the possessions on mount Ephraim could not countervail.

Hannah presented herself before the Lord at a former solemnity with bitter crying and tears; she “went forth then weeping, bearing precious seed, she cometh again rejoicing, bringing her sheaves with her; for they that sow in tears shall reap in joy.” She presents herself before the Lord, but neither with a contracted heart nor an empty hand. The law demanded for God the first-born of every creature. The whole tribe of which Samuel was a son, was accepted in place of the first-born of all Israel, and the first-born of her family might be redeemed by the substitution of a victim. Thus clearly was the spirit of the gospel inculcated by the institutions of the law; and the doctrine of the atonement through the blood of the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” was taught unto them as it is taught unto us. Throughout we see the innocent suffering for the guilty; from the sacrifice of Abel down to the sacrifice on mount Calvary, of “the just suffering for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God.” With what mixed emotions must an Israelitish parent of any sensibility, have presented this sacrifice? Behold the darling child, the firstborn led to the altar, but not to bleed and die: no, that innocent lamb, that bullock in the prime of life, is to bleed and die in his stead; and, mournful to reflect, though religion does not now demand such sacrifices, necessity and the appetites of men constantly require them, and we behold the whole brute “creation groaning and travailing in pain together,” to perform the drudgery, minister to the pleasure, or with their flesh to satisfy the need of a creature much more criminal than themselves; and, as if that were too little, subjected to the cruelty and caprice of rational beings, become greater brutes than themselves. With the confidence of true goodness Hannah now addresses Eli, and reminds him of what he had probably forgotten, but was of too much moment to herself ever to be permitted to fall into oblivion. Eli had only seen her lips move, but heard not the words she pronounced; and the violent emotion in which she was, had conveyed very foul suspicions to his mind. These with the dignity and calmness of conscious innocence, she repelled; and assured him in general terms that what he had unkindly mistaken for the effect of wine, was the agitation of an afflicted spirit, pouring out its anguish before God; but the subject of her prayer she still kept within her own breast. There was then no witness of her vow but God and her own conscience; and that was enough; it was recorded in heaven; and an honest mind will find itself equally bound by a resolution formed in secret, as by an oath administered in the face of an assembled world. With what holy exultation does she now declare her engagement, exhibit the sacred pledge of it, and proceed to the public and solemn discharge of it! “She brought the child to Eli, and said, O my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him.”[*]1Sa 1:25-27 How sweetly affecting are the effusions of nature, when aided and animated by devotion! How religion ennobles and dignifies

every character, how it places every other quality in its fairest and most favorable point of view! How well it is adapted to every season and situation of life! It was this which fortified Hannah against the bitter insults and reproaches of her merciless adversary, and preserved her from rendering railing for railing. It was this which taught her self-government, so that she disturbed not the solemnity of the feast with womanish complaints, but covered a sorrowful heart with a serene countenance. It was this which carried her to the house of the Lord, for light, comfort, and relief. It was this which carried her with reputation and advantage through the first duties of a mother; and exhibited, in one, the affectionate wife, the tender parent, the devout worshipper. This filled her heart and inspired her tongue, in presenting her offering, in addressing the high priest, in raising her song of praise. And this will communicate luster, value, and importance on every female character, whether known to the world or overlooked by it; in the secrecy of the family or in the celebrity of the temple. There is a God who “seeth in secret, and will reward openly.”

Eli repeats a cordial Amen to her pious purpose, accepts the precious trust committed unto him, and bends his knees in joyful acknowledgment of that God who had been multiplying his mercy to this family, and building up the house of Israel. And it is not long before he finds that this young Nazarene was provided of God, and instructed of his mother, to rectify the disorders of his own house, and to supply the place of a degenerate race of priests, ripe for destruction and doomed to it, and ready to bring down a “father’s gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.”

Hannah’s song of praise, which follows at length in the opening of the next chapter, merits on many accounts, a separate and particular consideration. It possesses all the majesty, grace, and beauty of ancient oriental poetry. It is one of the happiest effusions of an excellent female heart laboring under a grateful sense of the highest obligations. It presents and impresses some of the justest and most interesting views of the Divine Providence, and what is above all, it discloses one of the clearest and most distinct prospects of the coming, person, and character of Messiah, the Prophet of prophets, King of kings, Lord of lords. Yes, Christians, for this prophetess was reserved the honor of first pronouncing in sacred song, that “name which is as ointment poured forth,” which angels mention with wonder and reverence, and which the whole company of the redeemed shall one day proclaim with “joy unspeakable and full of glory;” Messiah the anointed of the Lord--whom the world so long expected, who in the fulness of time appeared, whom unbelieving Jews refused to acknowledge; whom they despised, rejected, crucified, and put to death: whom “God has exalted a Prince and Savior to give repentance and the remission of sins;” to whose second coming the course of nature, the evolutions of providence, the hopes and fears of every heart of man, the earnest expectation of the creature, and the handwriting of God in Scripture, all, all directly point. The next Lecture will be an attempt to illustrate, and practically to improve Hannah’s song of praise. May we bring to it a portion of that spirit which inspired the lips of her who sung and directed the pen of him who wrote. Let me conclude the present, with calling on everyone present, to recollect personal obligations, and to walk suitably to them. Call to remembrance vows formed on a bed of languishing, in the hour of difficulty, in the instant of danger, at the table of the Lord; and thankfully pay them as knowing that “it is better not to vow than to vow and not to pay.”

Desire more earnestly the best gifts; spiritual, heavenly, eternal blessings. By all means, in your vows, stipulate for your portion of present and temporal good things, saying with Jacob, “If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God;”[*]Gen

28:20-21--and with Hannah, pouring out the bitterness of an oppressed heart before God, and begging relief of the Father of mercies, saying, “O Lord of Hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine hand maid.” But forget not withal, to stipulate, with Solomon, for “an understanding heart,” to prize and to improve mercies already bestowed; and with Jabez calling on the God of Israel, saying, “Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed,--and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil that it may not grieve me.”

Hannah promised to devote to the Lord the child which should be given her; and ye have solemnly engaged to yield yourselves unto God; and “ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price.” “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”[*]Rom 12:1-2

111. Hannah, the Mother of Samuel--Her Song

Hannah, the Mother of Samuel--Her Song

1Sa 2:1-10. And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the Lord: mine horn is exalted in the Lord, my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies: because I rejoice in thy salvation. There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength. They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased; so that the barren hath borne seven: and she that hath many children is waxed feeble. The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness: for by strength shall no man prevail. The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces: out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed. In man, the masterpiece of creation, are discernible various kinds of life, distinct from each other, yet most wonderfully blended and united, so as to form one great and astonishing whole. The animal, the intellectual, the moral life; to which we add, in man as he came from the hands of his Creator, and in man "renewed" by grace "in the spirit of his mind," the spiritual and divine life, the dawning light, the earnest and pledge, the celestial foretaste of everlasting life. The first of these we enjoy in common with the beasts that perish. Like theirs, our bodies grow and decline. Like them we are led by sense and appetite, and are susceptible of pleasure and pain. And, like them, we arose out of the earth, are supported by it, and feel ourselves returning to it again. The second or intellectual life, raises man far above every other animal. He possesses the power of thought, that productive faculty of the Almighty; that image of God in our nature. He contemplates, compares, reflects, reasons, plans, performs. By means of this he exercises dominion over all other creatures. Inferior to many, in some respects, by this he renders himself superior to all and reduces all their powers to the subjection and obedience of himself. The moral life places man in society; connects him with intelligent beings like himself; opens a capacious field of duty and of enjoyment; stamps him an object of approbation or blame, of reward or punishment. The divine life unites man to the Author and supporter of his existence, the source all his comforts, the foundation of all his hopes; the witness and the judge of all his actions; the avenger of all unrighteousness, "the rewarder of them who diligently seek him." To Adam, as an animal, God said, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth; behold I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of the earth; and every tree in which is the fruit of a tree, yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat." In Adam the intellectual life discovered itself, when the Lord God brought unto him "every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, to see what he would call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living

creature, that was the name thereof."

God having implanted a principle of moral life in man, said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him;" he took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it; and 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." In Adam the spiritual and divine life was perfected, when "God created man in his own image." It was extinguished and lost when by transgression he fell; it was revived by the promise of the Messiah and salvation through his blood; and it will be completely recovered when the image of God is restored through the spirit of sanctification.

All these different kinds of life have their several and corresponding expressions; and according as any one prevails, such is the character of the man. When the habitual cry is, "What shall I eat, what shall I drink, and wherewithal shall I be clothed?" it is easy to determine what life is predominant: it is easy to discern when the brute runs away with the man. Solomon may be given as an instance of the prevalence of intellectual life. He looked through nature, and "spoke of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; he spake also of beasts, and of fowls, and of creeping things, and of fishes." "His wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt." The psalmist has presented us with an exquisite representation of the moral life of man, (would to God it were more frequently realized) in the fifteenth Psalm; "He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor; in whose eyes a vile person is contemned: but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against, the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved."[*]Psa 15:2-5 Where shall we look for an example of the highest life of man, the life of God in the soul? Nature stands silent, the whole world lies dead; it presents every kind of life but this. Where is the model to which we refer? Where is the idea of this most exalted excellence of our nature? It is to be found. "I came not to do mine own will but the will of him that sent me." "I seek not mine own glory, but the glory of him who sent me." Read and ponder John 17, and discover the author, the example, the giver of this divine life; and aspire after a participation of it.

We have some of these holy aspirations in the passage now read. We behold a spirit alive unto God; sinking the creature in the Creator; discerning God in every object, and in every event that arises; referring all things to Him "who doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." Let us blend our spirits, with that of pious Hannah, and may God grant us to know and feel the happiness of having fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

"Hannah prayed." In affliction she prayed: and in prosperity she prayed. Tears and smiles are not more the expression of their corresponding emotions, than supplication and thanksgiving are of that life which dictates them, in a suitableness to the various aspects of Divine Providence. Sorrow is no longer sorrow when it is poured out into the bosom of sympathy and tenderness. Every joy is multiplied an hundred fold by every communication of it to the ear and the heart of friendship.

Hannah prays, “and her countenance is no more sad.” She restores her earnestly expected son to God; and is infinitely enriched by the restitution. Whether the child cry for relief, or express its gratitude by caresses and looks with satisfaction, it is equally grateful and soothing to the parental heart. And will the great God in the very deed vouchsafe to make himself known to us by the name of the hearer of prayer? Is he exalted to show mercy? Can he be pleased with the effusions of a thankful heart? Thoughtless, inconsiderate creatures that we are; blind to our highest interest, dead to our purest joy! We see nothing of God in that distress, in that deliverance. We attended to the creature only, and therefore found no comfort. We endured without hope, and we enjoyed without relish. Happy soul that can command itself to peace, and say, I have poured out my anguish before the Lord, I have cast all my care upon him, my burden is no longer mine, but his. “Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. He hath delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.” In the first transports of her joy, Hannah forgets everything but the glorious object of it. The insults of Peninnah, her delight in Samuel, stand for a while suspended; they are lost and forgotten in the contemplation of Him, who had delivered her from the one, and bestowed the other upon her. But God, as he is in himself, cannot long be an object of contemplation to mortals. It is only by what he doth, that he can be known, and loved, and enjoyed by us. The soul springs up to God, is instantly repelled and overwhelmed by “light inaccessible and full of glory,” and seeks relief and employment in surveying the ways and works of God.

“My heart rejoiceth in the Lord.” But “who is this king of glory?” The spirit shrinks with reverence from the inquiry; and the heart sweetly slides into the observation and acknowledgment of what an incomprehensive Jehovah hath done. “Mine horn is exalted in the Lord.” “The horn,” in Scripture language, is the emblem of strength and empire. She was till now undistinguished, unprized, unimportant in Israel; a wife, without the honor of being a mother. But now she has risen into luster, and place, and pre-eminence. Her Samuel is to her “a crown of glory, and a diadem for beauty!” She had power with God and prevailed; she asked, and God granted her request. This is naturally blended in her mind, with the derision and cruel mocking which she had endured. For the very devotions of fallen creatures must savour of the calamities to which they are exposed, and the imperfection in which they are involved. Both nature and piety accordingly concur in dictating the expression of thankfulness which follows; “My mouth is enlarged over mine enemies:” Here the woman speaks; but the saint instantly subjoins, “because I rejoice in thy salvation.” When the life of God is completely formed in the soul, every particle of human corruption shall be purged away. There shall be no feeling, nor recollection of unkindness or enmity. And in proportion as evil affections are rooted out, and kind affections are implanted, cherished, and promoted, so is the image of God impressed, renewed, and preserved. The love of God perfected shall obliterate and efface every trace of resentment against man.

After a short vibration on this string, the heart of the worshipper seems to recur with increased complacency and delight to a worthier subject of meditation, and loses itself in infinite perfection. “There is none holy as the Lord; for there is none beside thee; neither is there any rock like our God.” When we attempt to meditate upon God thought fails. When we attempt to address ourselves to him, language fails. In vain do we look round for a similitude that may enable us to form a clearer perception of his nature. It is his glory to be single and alone; to defy and prevent every idea of resemblance or comparison. When the whole world of nature is explored, when all

the powers of nature are exhausted, the soul falls back upon itself, shrinks into nothing from the daring attempt, and exclaims, “There is none beside thee,” “there is none holy as the Lord.” “Who can find out the Almighty to perfection!”

Hannah awakes from this holy rapture, to contemplate this, incomprehensible Jehovah, as exercising an intelligent uncontrollable, irresistible authority over all the ways of men; as the wise and righteous Governor of the world whom none can successfully oppose, from whose notice none can possibly conceal himself. “Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength.”[*]1Sa 2:3-4 Behold the cure of pride. There is a God on high, from whom descended every advantage which one possesses above another, who carefully notes the use that is made of his benefits, and will demand an account of them; who “seeth the proud afar off, but hath respect unto the lowly.” “By him actions are weighed;” they are judged, not according to their apparent circumstances, nor the maxims of the world, nor the rank of the parties concerned, but according to truth, according to the real merit or demerit of the action, according to the thoughts and intent of the heart. Thus is the mouth of arrogancy effectually shut, and the whole world laid low in the dust before a holy and righteous God. “The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girt with strength.” Even in this world, “the Lord maketh himself known by the judgments which he executes;” and causeth men to change conditions, and turneth the world upside down. The affairs of men, like the frame of nature, are in a state of perpetual revolution, and the history of mankind is simply an account of the rise and depression of wretched mortals by means not of their own contrivance, by events which they could not foresee, and over which they had no power. The victor of today is tomorrow a captive, and he who now lieth “among the pots, shall come forth as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.” The greater part of Hannah’s song of praise is employed in making a more enlarged display of the wisdom and justice of the Divine Providence in the government of the world. “They that were full have hired themselves out for bread.” Some are born to ease and affluence, and through indolence, inattention, or prodigality reduce themselves to want. Some acquire wealth by frugality and industry. But however gotten, it is but an uncertain possession, and we daily see multitudes, not through any apparent fault of their own, “waxing poor and falling into decay.” Others, as unaccountably rise into distinction and opulence. There is an unseen hand which gives and takes away. In prosperity there is no ground of insolence and triumph; in adversity no reason to despair. Her own peculiar felicity again presents itself to view, and the incense of praise ascends to heaven. “The barren hath borne seven, and she that hath many children is waxed feeble.” There is a Jewish legend which saith, that for every child that Hannah bore, one of Peninnah’s died. It is a mere conjecture; Hannah’s triumphant song is rather a proof of the contrary. She discovers a spirit too excellent, in other respects, to permit us to suppose her capable of rejoicing in the devastation which the hand of God had wrought, much less in the destruction of her own husband’s family. That heart must be lost to every feeling of humanity, lost to decency, lost to the fear of God, who can make the calamity of another, especially such a calamity, a ground of self-congratulation and complacency, or a subject of thanksgiving to a holy and merciful God, as if he could become a party to our petty jealousies and contentions. No, a spirit so regulated as hers, so patient under mortification, so long nurtured in the school of affliction, so observant of, and submissive to the will of Providence, could not taste the mortality of even Peninnah’s children as a source of joy. Her

expressions amount to no more than a devout and humble acknowledgment of unerring wisdom of unimpeachable justice in conducting all the affairs of this world; in building up families, and in bringing them low; in exercising an absolute right of sovereignty, which will not be compelled to give account of its matters to any one. The gift of children is not always withheld in anger, nor bestowed in kindness, as the character and history of Eli's family will shortly evince.

She proceeds to pursue the same idea of a divine superintendence in everything, through a variety of particulars strikingly contrasted one with another, all aiming at the same end, all calculated to enforce the same practical lesson. "The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail."[*]1Sa 2:6-9 In the conclusion of her song, Hannah, rapt into futurity, no doubt by the spirit of prophecy, contemplates the final consummation of the great mystery of Providence, as issuing in the establishment of universal order: in the suppression and punishment of vice; and in the unchangeable and permanent glory of a Redeemer's kingdom. The same hand which balances the spheres, which conducts all the affairs of men, which preserves harmony and prevents confusion, in both the natural and moral worlds, shall at length, by another almighty fiat, "make all things new." Then "the adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces: out of heaven shall he thunder upon them." "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire; and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." Chastisement shall, therefore be preceded by righteous judgment, that every mouth may be stopped before God. "The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth." Now these words of the prophetic mother of Samuel, taken in connection with the clearer and fuller display of a judgment to come, in the writings of the New Testament, clearly point out that glorious and divine person, in whose hallowed name the song terminates--God's Anointed. A woman was honored first to announce the Savior of the world, under that description; and a succession of prophets henceforward hold it up to the eyes of succeeding generations, as "all their salvation, and all their desire." Samuel, David, Isaiah, Daniel, Habakkuk, each in his day proclaims the approach of this King of glory, of whom all who were anointed with material oil, whether as priests, or prophets, or kings, were but a shadow; and in whose superior luster they disappear, as the light of the stars is absorbed in the splendor of the sun. The prophetess celebrates Jehovah who "shall judge the ends of the earth," as that "King to whom all authority is committed, to whom all "strength is given," as that "anointed" One, Messiah the prince, whose "horn," should be finally "exalted," and before the brightness of whose coming, all disorder, iniquity, and misery shall flee away; who shall first "judge the ends of the earth," and then reign for ever and ever. And thus is the voice of this holy woman, near twelve hundred years before Messiah's day, in perfect unison with the tongue of Christ himself, and of the apostles of the Lord, after his ascension into heaven, and the descent of the Holy Spirit. "The Father judgeth no man; but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son, honoreth not the Father which hath sent him."[*]John 5:22-23 "God now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained: whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."[*]Acts 17:30-31 "The kingdoms of this

world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."[*]Rev 11:15 And such, in every age, is the native expression of a soul alive to God, the natural aspiration of the spiritual and divine life.

Art thou, O man, through grace a partaker of it? You shall "know it by its fruits." As it increases, corruption dies. "If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness."[*]Rom 8:10 To be destitute of this life, in whatever state of perfection the intellectual life may be, is to be under the power of everlasting death, a death of trespasses and sins. But if its very first breathings are felt, however feebly, it is a new creation begun, it is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Attempts will be made to extinguish it, but in vain. Like its Author it is immortal. It may be oppressed, it may be suspended, it may at seasons, he dormant, but it cannot expire. It doth not always make itself sensible to the eyes and ears of the world; for the believer's "life is hid with Christ in God." But "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."[*]Col 3:4 "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."[*]1Jn 3:2

112. Hannah, the Mother of Samuel--Samuel Grows

Hannah, the Mother of Samuel--Samuel Grows

1Sa 2:18-21. But Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod. Moreover his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wile, and said, The Lord give thee seed of this woman, for the loan which is lent to the Lord. And they went unto their own home. And the Lord visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the Lord. The character of most men is formed and fixed, before it is apprehended that they have, or can have, any character at all. Many vainly and fatally imagine, that the few first years of life may be disposed of as you please: that a little neglect may easily be repaired, that a little irregularity may easily be rectified. This is saying in other words, “never regard the morning; sleep it, trifle it, riot it away; a little closer application at noon will recover the loss.” “The spring returns, the flowers appear upon the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come. No matter; it is soon enough to think of the labors of spring. Sing with the birds, skip with the fawn, the diligence of a more advanced, more propitious season will bring everything round; and the year shall be crowned with the horn of plenty.” A single ray of reason is sufficient to detect and expose such absurdity; yet human conduct exhibits it, in almost universal prevalence. Infancy and childhood are vilely cast away; the morning is lost; the seedtime neglected--And what is the consequence? A life full of confusion, and an old age full of regret; a day of unnecessary toil, and a night of vexation; a hurried summer, a meager autumn, a comfortless winter.

It is the ordinance of Providence that the heaviest and most important part of education should devolve upon the mother. It begins before the child is born; her passions and habits affect the fruit of her womb. From her bosom the infant draws the precious juice of health and virtue, or the baleful poison of vice and disease. The fleeting period he passes under the shadow of her wing, is a season sacred to wisdom and piety. If the mother lead not her son to the hallowed spring, if she fail to disclose to his eager eye and panting heart the loveliness of goodness, the excellency of religion; if she permit the luxuriant soil to be overrun with briars and thorns, in vain will she strive to redeem the lost opportunity, by restraints and punishments, by precepts and masters, by schools and colleges, in a more advance stage of life. The good or the mischief is done by the time he comes out of her hands. That Providence which has imposed this employment on the feebler sex as a task, has most graciously contrived to render it one of the highest and most exquisite of female comforts; as, in truth, all the impositions, nay, the very chastisements of Heaven are really blessings. Let the woman who has given suck tell if she can, “how tender it is to love the babe that milks her.” Ask that mother if there be any joy like the joy of hearing her child repeat the lessons which she taught him. Ask her if she recollects or regards her pain and anguish; her anxious days and sleepless nights. Ask her, if all is not forgotten and lost in the progress which expanding faculties have made, and in the richer harvest which they promise. Ask, if she has not already received more than her reward. If the representation of the case be just, let it procure for dutiful

mothers the respect and gratitude which they merit; let it reconcile their minds to what is painful and laborious in their lot; let it raise them to their due rank and importance in society; and let it stimulate them to perseverance in well-doing, in the full assurance that they shall in no wise lose their reward. The passage of holy writ, on the consideration of which we are now entering, is a very affecting representation of the effects and consequences of a good and a bad education, exemplified in the conduct of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, and Eli, the father of Hophni and Phinehas. Scripture, instead of multiplying precept upon precept, leads us at once into human life, and exhibits the law written in the event it instructs us how to bring up children, by delineating the dreadful consequences of excessive lenity and indulgence on the one hand, and the happy fruits of early piety, regularity, and self-government on the other. This theme, being by far the more pleasing of the two, and coming in more regularly in the order of history, shall obtain the preference, in the course of our inquiry. Though, indeed, attention to the one must, of necessity, bring forward the other; and the good fortify and recommend itself by contrast with the evil. The education of Samuel began in the pious resolution of his mother before he was conceived in the womb. “If thou wilt give unto thine handmaid a man-child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life.” Every parent receives every child under a tacit engagement to the same purpose and the command of God, from the moment of the birth is, “Rear that child for me.” I have watched over him while he lay in darkness, “mine eyes saw his substance yet being unperfect; in my book all his members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. I added the immortal principle to the finished limbs; I stamped my image upon him. There my hand has scattered the seeds of wisdom and happiness; to thy fostering care I commit that tender plant. Cared for, it will abundantly reward thy toil; neglected, it will row into a sharp thorn to tear thy flesh. Every day, every hour is producing a change in it. Grow it will and must; what it grows into, depends upon thyself. Of thy hand will I require it.” As Samuel was to be a Nazarite to God from the womb, the law prescribed to the mother certain ceremonial observances respecting her own conduct, and the treatment of her own person, which corresponded to that high destination. Abstinence, in particular, from certain kinds of meat and drink, which might eventually affect the bodily or mental constitution of the unborn infant. With these prescriptions we have no room to doubt Hannah punctually complied. And here we fix the second stage, or if you will, erect the second pillar of education. The commands of God are none of them arbitrary and capricious, but founded in reason and the nature of things. Whatever strongly affects the mother during the months of pregnancy, beyond all doubt affects her offspring, whether it be violent liquors, or violent passions. It belongs to another profession than mine to account for this, and to determine how far the sympathy goes. But the general belief of it would most certainly have a very happy effect in procuring attention to female health, regularity and tranquillity in that delicate and interesting situation. The comfort of both parent and child, to the end of life; what do I say? through the whole of their existence, may be concerned in it. As soon as Samuel was born, we find Hannah devoting undivided attention to the first and sweetest of maternal offices. “The woman tarried at home, and gave her son suck, until she weaned him.” Nature and inclination concur in pressing this duty upon every mother. The instances of real inability are too few to merit consideration. The performance of it, carries its own recompense in its bosom; the neglect is, first and last, its own punishment. Without considering at present its connection with the health and comfort of both parties, let us attend for a moment to its influence on morals, and as constituting a branch of education. Is not parental and filial affection the first bond of society, and the foundation of all virtue? It is this which

arms a delicate female with patience which no pain nor labor can exhaust, with fortitude which no calamity can subdue, with courage which no difficulty or danger can intimidate. It is this which first inspires the infant purpose to excel, which blows the sacred spark of gratitude into a flame, which first awakens and animates the latent seeds of immortality in the human soul. The first perception of the child, is the sweet sense of obligation and dependence he feels himself far advanced in a commerce of reciprocal affection the moment he becomes conscious of his existence; and finds himself engaged in habits of goodness, long before he understands the meaning of words. And is it fit that these kind affections should be transferred to a stranger? Who can be so well qualified to communicate these earliest and best lessons, as a mother? Can you complain that your child is cold, indifferent or averse to you, when you set the example of coldness, indifference, and aversion, and preferred a little ease or pleasure to his health and comfort, and what is infinitely more, to his early, infant morals? Can you hope from a hireling, who must have renounced nature too, as well as yourself, what God, and nature, and decency, and regard to your own real well-being have pressed upon you in vain? It was so much a primary duty, in the eyes of Hannah, that her attendance on the duties of the sanctuary at Shiloh gave place to it; she revered the ordinance, that God, who says, “I will have mercy and not sacrifice;” and religious service is interrupted for a season, to be resumed with greater ardor and effect, when the duties of life were faithfully discharged. At what age the child was weaned, the history relates not. He remained under the tuition of his mother till he was of a proper age to be presented to the Lord, in the place which he had chosen to put his name there, and to be put under the instruction of Eli, and prepared for the service of the tabernacle. And we shall presently find that he was infinitely more indebted to the solicitous attentions of a pious mother for his progress in divine knowledge, than he afterwards was to the superintendence of the high-priest of Israel, who knew so ill to rule his own house, and to whom, of a pupil, he became a teacher.

I am well aware of the difficulty of forming a plan of religious instruction for children. Scripture suggests the happiest, the most obvious, and the most effectual. It ought to come from the children themselves. They are desirous of information. If left to themselves, they will think and inquire.--Their questions will point out the mode of instruction. Do not be over anxious to take the lead, but carefully follow them. Their ideas will be directed by what they observe and feel; and strong facts and appearances of nature will make a deep and lasting impression upon them. He who knows what is in man, has accordingly given us, in a particular example, a general rule of proceeding in this great article: “And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? That thou shalt say unto him, by strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And it came to pass when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt.” It was probably thus, that Hannah instructed her darling son; stored his memory with interesting events, and touched his heart by affecting representations of the mercy and judgment of God, exemplified in the history of his own forefathers. Milk is the proper food of babes, strong meat belongeth to them who are full of age. A dry precept is but half understood, and is speedily forgotten, but a tale of distress, the triumph of goodness over malevolence and opposition; the merited shame and punishment of wickedness, is easily understood, is long retained, and its impression is not to be effaced.

We advance to the fourth stage of wise and good education, of which we have the pattern before us. The same principle which induced Hannah to keep her son at home for a season, and to abide

with him, constrained her to send him from home, to give up her interest in him, when the service of God, and the greater good of the child demanded the sacrifice. It is just the reverse of what high life, at least with us, daily presents. You shall see a mother who hardly inquired after her child at the time of life when her tenderness was most necessary to him, all at once assuming the parent, exercising an affected tenderness which he no longer needs, reducing him to childhood after he is becoming a man, and endeavoring to compensate by an after-growth of affection, the unkindness and neglect which blighted the early blossoms of the spring. She can suffer him no longer out of her sight. The discipline which her own wickedness has rendered necessary to his improvement, is reprobated as cruel, and the poor youth is frequently ruined, by having at one time no mother at all; at another, one too much. I honor the firmness of Hannah, as much as I love her motherly softness and attachment. To possess with gratitude, to cherish a worthy object with tenderness, and to resign it with steadiness and magnanimity, is equally an object of admiration and esteem. Observe the mixed emotions which animate and correct her countenance as she conducts her well beloved son to the altar. The saint speaks in that eye, sparkling with delight, as she devotes what she holds most dear in the world to Him, from whom she had by holy importunity obtained him; the tear rushes to it, and all the mother stands confessed as she retires. Piety has prevailed, and presented the offering: nature feels, but submits.

It is easier to conceive than to describe what was the state of her mind as she returned from Shiloh to Ramah: the anxiety and regret at leaving her Samuel behind; the satisfaction and delight of reflecting in what hands she had left him, and to what care she had committed him. But we hear of no wild project formed of removing the whole family to reside at Shiloh, in order to indulge a fond mother’s partial affection, with the continual presence of her little minion. No, the same spirit of prudence, the same domestic regards, the same sense of duty which once engaged her to prefer attention to Samuel, to attendance on the sacred festival, now engage her to prefer the unostentatious employments of a wife, and the mistress of a family at Ramah, to the sacredness of the tabernacle, and the care of an only son, a first-born. But the heart of a mother finds, and flies to the innocent refuge which nature pointed out. She employs her mind and her hands during the intervals of the feast, about her absent son; “His mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.” O how pure, how cheap, how satisfying are the pleasures of virtue! No words can express the inward, the incommunicable joy of that mother, as her fingers wove the threads of that little coat, as her eyes saw it grow into shape, and color, and shade, as the increasing stature of the wearer rendered the increase of her labor necessary. You must be converted and become a little child, a dutiful, affectionate, and pious child, like Samuel, to conceive the delight of seeing his parents return, of putting on his new garment, of exhibiting his mother’s present. These nothings are the bond of affection among virtuous minds, and the source of their felicity. This we settle as a more advanced stage of education, as far as it depends upon the mother. To part with the child firmly and unreluctantly, when the proper hour of separation comes; to preserve the commerce of affection by works and messages of kindness; and to subject every feeling and pursuit to the known and declared will of God. Let no one, O woman, usurp thy province, step between thee and thy child, steal his affections from thee. What, suffer him to have a step-mother while thou art yet living! Forbid it nature, forbid it decency, forbid it religion. But the hour of separation is arrived, you have done your duty, he must now pass into other hands; as a mother you retained him, as a mother resign him. You have not labored in vain: you have not spent your strength for nought and in vain.

Be of good cheer, you have trained him up in the way in which he should go, and when old he will not depart from it. Your heart shall rejoice in him many days hence. He shall be to thee a crown of glory when thou art dropping into the grave. The disorderly state of Eli's family, the consequence of a careless and neglected education, will, through the divine permission, be the subject of the next Lecture.

I conclude with addressing myself in a very few words, first, to the parents of the other sex. You see what a heavy burden God and nature have laid upon the weaker of the two. You are bound in justice, in humanity, in gratitude, to alleviate it. To no purpose will the mother watch and toil, unless you co-operate. She has part of her reward in her very employment: her recompense will be complete if she obtain your approbation, and retain your affection. Has offence arisen, does calamity press, is the spirit ruffled, is her person changed? Reflect, she is the mother of thy child; perhaps she lost her looks, her health, it may be her spirits and temper, in doing the duty of a mother: she ought to be the more estimable in your eyes at least.

Let me next speak for a moment to ingenuous youth. Young man, superadded to all the other motives to virtue, if you feel not the force of this, you are lost indeed. There is a worthy woman in the world, who loves you as her own soul, who gave your first nourishment and instruction, who brought you into life at the risk of her own, to whom nothing that affects you can be a matter of indifference. She is jealous over you with a holy jealousy. If you tread in the ways of wisdom, how her heart will be satisfied within her; if you decline from the right path, if you become "a son of Belial," you will rend her with severer pangs than those which she endured in bringing thee into the world. And can your heart permit you to plunge a dagger into the heart of your own mother! Who does not shudder at the thought of a parricide so detestable, so monstrous? For a mother's sake, renounce that "covenant with death" retrace thy wandering steps, resume the reins of self-government, and return to real rest and joy.

Young woman, let thine eyes be still toward the nurse, the guide, the comforter, the refuge of thy early years. Alleviate by partaking of the burdens and labors of her station; dissipate her solicitude; soothe her pains; give her cause to bless the day she bare thee. Trust in her as thy most prudent counsellor, as thy most assured friend, as thy most intelligent instructer. Do her good and not evil, all the days of thy life. Rise into usefulness, into importance, into respectability, by marking her footsteps, imbibing her spirit, following her example. A daughter unkind, undutiful, ungrateful to a mother, is of all monsters the most odious and disgusting. Youthful excellence is never more amiable and attractive, than when it seeks retreat and retirement under the maternal wing, and shrinking from the public eye, seeks its reward in a mother's smile of approbation.

113. Hannah, the Mother of Samuel--The Evil Sons of Eli

Hannah, the Mother of Samuel--The Evil Sons of Eli

1Sa 2:12-17;1Sa 2:23-24. Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial: they knew not the Lord. And the priest's custom with the people was, that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came while the flesh was in seething, with a flesh-hook of three teeth in his hand: and he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot: all that the flesh-hook brought up, the priest took for himself: so they did in Shiloh, unto all the Israelites that came thither. Also before they burned the fat, the priest's servant came and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest: for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw. And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently: and then take as much as thy soul desireth, then he would answer him, Nay, but thou shalt give it me now: and if not, I will take it by force. Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord. Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel. And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear; ye make the Lord's people to transgress.

Perfection consists in the happy medium between the too little and too much. It is eminently conspicuous in everything that comes immediately from God. "He is the rock, his work is perfect, and all his ways are judgment." Contemplate the stupendous whole, or examine the minutest part, and you find no redundancy, no defect. All is good, yea, very good. But man is ever in the extreme. Now, under the power of an indolence which shrinks from every appearance of difficulty or danger, and now hurried on by a zeal which overleaps all the bounds of wisdom and discretion. Now, he cannot be prevailed on to begin, and now nothing can persuade him to stop. He makes his very good to be evil spoken of, by imprudence and excess in the manner of performing it. In nothing is human ignorance and frailty more apparent, than in the important article of education. It is conducted, at one time, with a severity that intimidates and overwhelms; at another, with a lenity that flatters, encourages, and fosters vice. One is driven into an evil course by despair, another drawn into it, and fortified in it, by excessive indulgence. It is, in truth, no easy task to manage this matter aright. The modes of treatment are as various as the character and dispositions of the young ones, who are the subjects of it. The application of a general rule is impracticable and absurd. The discipline which would oppress one child, is hardly sufficient to restrain another within any bounds of decency. It is happy when the child is inured to habits of restraint and submission from the cradle. If the mother has discharged her duty tolerably, the business of the father and master is half executed. Last Lord's day we had the satisfaction of observing the effects of an early good education, in the example of Hannah the mother of Samuel. We saw in her conduct a happy mixture of tenderness and resolution; of attention to domestic employments, and regard to the offices of religion; of moderated anxiety about the safety and comfort of her son's person, and prudent concern about the culture of his mind. We are, this evening, to meditate on a subject much less pleasing, but not less instructive: the ruinous effects of education neglected; youth licentious and unrestrained, sinking gradually into universal depravity, and issuing in accumulated,

wretchedness and untimely death. A father weak and indulgent; sons profligate and abandoned; a God holy, righteous; and just.

Observe, in the entrance, the provision which infinite wisdom has been making to supply the breach which was ready to be made in the priesthood. The measure of the iniquity of Eli's sons was nearly full, their destruction was hastening on; Samuel is already born, instructed in, prepared for, the service of the tabernacle; and the care of a pious mother has been employed in the hand of Providence to counteract the criminal negligence and carelessness of a too easy father. The representation given us of the degeneracy and dissoluteness of the Levitical family, equals, if not exceeds, all that history relates of the irregularity, and impurity of idol worship. The law had made a decent and even an ample provision, for them who ministered at the altar, but had carefully guarded against whatever tended to countenance luxury or excess. But behold everything confounded, The directors of religious worship are become the patterns of impiety. There is no reverence of God, no regard to man. Before the fat of the sacrifice smokes upon the altar of Jehovah, the choicest pieces of the victim are served up on the abominable table of a luxurious priest. The pious worshipper has his offering marred, his spirit discomposed, the festival of his family peace disturbed and defrauded, and indecencies, too shocking to be mentioned, close the scene of riot and intemperance.

All this is easily to be traced up to early habits of indulgence: men could not have become thus wicked all at once. Had the authority of the father, had the sanctity of the high priest, had the severity of the judge interposed, to check and punish the first deviation from propriety, it had never come to this. We may judge of the gentleness with which slighter offences were reproved, when the most atrocious transgressions meet with so mild a rebuke as this, "Nay, my sons, it is no good report that I hear." This is rather an invitation to commit iniquity, than the vengeance of a magistrate to expose and suppress it. To point out the aggravation of Eli's offence, is neither malicious nor useless; it is written, among the other things in this book, for our instruction, and by the blessing of God it may prove salutary, as a beacon pointing out the rock on which others have made shipwreck.

Against his personal virtue no censure is insinuated. He seems to have been one of those quiet, easy, good-natured men, who love not to have their tranquillity disturbed, and are lothe to disturb that of others; who, without being vicious themselves, by a passive tameness, become the undesigned abettors of the sins of other men. The corruption of the times must indeed have been very great, when it was supposed possible for the mistress of a family, during the solemnity of a sacred festival, to be disguised with wine, in the face of the sun, in the court of God's house. But the bare possibility of such a case, grievously enhances his guilt. He had not done his duty as the public guardian of morals and religion, or Hannah had not been suspected of intemperance, and the suspicion reflects the highest dishonor on both his understanding, and his heart; his bitterest enemy could not have devised a severer censure upon his conduct, than that under the priesthood of Eli such enormities were committed and connived at.

Men in power are chargeable not only with the evil which they do, but also with the evil which they might have prevented, but did not. Power is delegated to them, for this very end, that they may be "a terror to evil doers," as well as "a praise to such as do well." The same carelessness runs through the whole of his domestic and public administration; a disorderly family, a polluted church,

a distracted, staggering state; no government, or what was worse than none. The best things are the most liable to abuse and we shall give this faulty, unhappy father all the credit we can. His errors had their origin perhaps in goodness. His natural disposition was mild and gentle; his parental affection was great; he was unwilling to render any one unhappy; he thought of prevailing by love. He began with overlooking trifling faults; he flattered himself that the reason and reflection of riper years would correct and cure the wildness and irregularity of boyish days; “Surely the young men will by and by see their folly, and grow wiser.” Who would not rather attempt to rule by love? But what is the proper conduct and expression of love? What saith the wisest of mankind? “He that spareth the rod, hateth the child.” What saith the great Father and Savior of all men? “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.” There is no such thing as happiness but in habits of order, decency, and subjection. The man, or the child, who knows no law but that of appetite or caprice, must of necessity be miserable. It is cruelty, not kindness, to give a man up to himself; and to dream of changing habits of indolence, dissipation, and criminal indulgence, by remonstrance and reason, is expecting that reason should survive itself, or that it should effect, when enfeebled, disordered, and corrupted, what it could not do when clear, and sound, and vigorous. But, “the grace of God is almighty, and his mercies are very great.” Nay, but who art thou, O man, who darest to expect, or to ask a miracle of grace, with the consciousness of having neglected the means, which, timely employed, might, through the, divine blessing, have proved effectual without a miraculous interposition? The one talent is justly taken away from him who hid it in the earth, and it is given to increase the store of the diligent and faithful servant, who by wisdom and industry, had increased his five talents into ten. The human mind, put under early culture, may be made to produce any thing. It possesses a happy pliancy, which may be molded into any form. But the same plant, which, young and tender, you could with a touch bend into what shape you pleased; when grown into a tree, resists every effort of your strength. Cut it down you may, break it you may, cleave it asunder you may, but bend it you cannot. And alas, how great a portion of human life is spent in useless, unavailing regret for opportunities lost, seasons misspent, mischief done, misery incurred! Yet men will not profit even by experience, that plainest, most faithful, and most powerful of all instructors. Who can view, without pitying him, that wretched old man, deploring the guilt which he himself had occasioned, which he wants resolution to punish, and wisdom to cure; which is proceeding from evil to worse, filling the past with remorse, and overspreading the future with despair? Ah, how heavily he suffers in his age, because these profligate sons bore not the wholesome yoke of discipline and restraint in their youth! Who can conceive the anguish of Jacob’s soul, as he was sinking into the grave under the loss of a gracious son by the stroke of Providence? But what is it, compared to the more dreadful anguish of Eli, looking forward in horror to the utter extinction of all his family, with the insupportable reflection, that all, all was chargeable upon himself? The character and behavior of the unhappy young men is a melancholy and affecting representation of the progress of moral corruption. It begins in their making light of the ordinances of religion, which they were bound, by their office, to venerate themselves, and to recommend by their example, to others. And you may be assured there is something essentially wrong about that man who expresses real or affected con tempt for the worship of God. It is a gross violation of the laws of decency and good breeding. For what title can you have to insult that sober-minded person, who has given you no provocation, by deriding or profaning what he holds sacred? It is a direct defiance to the laws of your country, which have adopted the institutions of religion, to assist, at least, in carrying on and supporting good government, so essential to public

happiness. He that despises, therefore, the ordinances of God, is a friend to anarchy, is making a wicked attempt to dissolve the bands of society, and deserves to be treated as a public enemy. It is an argument of a light and silly mind, aiming to supply the want of consequence, by affected boldness, impiety, and singularity, and which, like every other species of affectation, generally misses its aim. In the example before us, we find irreverence toward God speedily degenerating into violence and injustice to men. And indeed what hold has society of that man who has shaken off the first and strongest obligations of his nature, who has professedly degraded himself, and is become less than a man, in making the silly attempt to be thought something more. He who begins with defrauding God of his due, will not long be scrupulous about invading the rights of his fellow-creature. The same spirit which defers the sacrifice till an unruly appetite be first gratified, will, by and by, proceed to “take by force” the portion of another; and will lose all sense of the just claims and real wants of mankind, in pride and selfishness. The third stage of this humiliating progress, discovers to us men wholly brutalized, plunged into the lowest, grossest sensuality; sinking deeper and deeper in the mire, till nothing remains but the image of the most odious and abominable of animals. Young man, look at the picture, consider it well. If you are so happy as to have preserved your virtue, if you have any savour of piety, you must regard it with a mixture of indignation and pity; if you are not lost to the feelings of humanity, it will fill you with loathing and disgust. The sequel will teach us many important lessons. For in own part, ever since I became a father, I have never been able to read this history without trembling; and my anxiety has not been diminished by reflecting, that the children whom God has given me, neither in their bodies, nor their minds, nor their dispositions, are among the lowest of their species. I have an awful conviction, that if any of them should unhappily turn out ill, a great part of the blame will be imputable to myself. I am frequently tempted to rejoice that none of my grown children have made choice of my own profession, the most dangerous, the most responsible of all; and I am much more alarmed at the apprehension, that when they are become men and women, they may accuse me of over-indulgence, than I am now, of being thought harsh and unkind by children. As the greatest and most respectable part of my audience are parents, I must of necessity apply the great and important subject of my discourse particularly to them. And, as I always flatter myself with the greater hope of success with female parents, I take the liberty of addressing myself first to mothers. Providence, my friends, as I have frequently repeated, has laid the earliest, the heaviest, and the most important part of education, upon you; but it has also alleviated and sweetened the task by many peculiar affections and endearments. Let me suppose you have clone your duty, and carefully reared up infancy and childhood. The charge must then pass into other hands. But surely both your heart and conscience tell you that you have not yet done with them. Female children in particular are an anxious and a lasting burden upon the mother. They love you, they look up to you, they imitate you.You must be therefore what you wish them to become. Will a daughter learn to be industrious from an idle, indolent mother? Will she learn to be sober-minded, by seeing you habitually carried away by the pride of life? Will she catch the spirit of piety from one whose very Sabbaths are devoted to dissipation and pleasure? I will not insult you by supposing that a positively bad example has been set, or that your darling charge may have grossly deviated from the paths of virtue; but let me suppose, for a moment, a case that may, and does happen every day; that your daughter has grown up with a vain, light, worldly mind; has acquired a taste for dress and amusement; has become a perfect mistress of the usual accomplishments of the day and place in which we live; has become an object of attention and admiration. Let me suppose her

attacked with disease, perhaps, the effect of levity and dissipation. See, the roses are fading upon her cheek, her “beauty is wasting like a moth,” all her vivacity is reduced to the sudden glow of the hectic, which is gone, before it is well come; she feels the witness of death at her heart, she looks up to you with clouded, wistful eyes, and says, “Ah, my mother, you was too indulgent to me. You assisted the tongue of the flatterer, and taught me to forget myself. I was made to believe myself an angel, and now feel that I am a worm. Seeking to shine in the eyes of man, I have neglected the means of finding favor in the sight of God. I now wish I had frequented the house of prayer more; I wish I had not frequented the company of the giddy, the thoughtless, and the profane. I do not accuse my dear mother, of designedly misleading me; but would to God she better understood her own duty and my real interest. Life had been more respectable, and death less frightful than I find it to be. “O my God, have mercy, have mercy upon me.”

It had been easy to have added to the strength of this address: but even from this the maternal heart recoils, and deprecates with horror, an hour so dreadful. Well, blessed be God, it is yet a great way off; and what is more, it is in your power to prevent it; I do not mean the stroke of death; but the arrow of death dipped in the poison of remorse. God grant that none here may feel it. The criminality of Eli consisted, my brethren, in the neglect of his duty: and you have seen how fatal that neglect was to himself and to his family. Dare I suppose there is a father here, who has been more than passive in the corruption of his own child; who has been the promoter and the pattern of wickedness; who has with his own hand scattered the seeds of death in that precious soil; and trained up an immortal being to destruction? Pause, and consider. Are you prepared to meet the stings of an awakened conscience, accusing thee of murder, of foul-murder, the murder of thy own son, whom thou lovedst? Are you fortified against the cutting reproaches of that child, laying his eternal ruin to your charge? Have you prepared your defence against that awful day when a righteous God shall demand an account of the sacred trust committed to thee? If to contemplate his punishment at a distance be woe unutterable, what were it, to be at once the cause and the partaker of it? The terrified imagination flees from this hell of hells, and seeks refuge in prayer to a merciful God, that he would graciously save you from it.

Let young ones be persuaded to be patient of restraint, of correction, and of reproof. You are not grieved willingly, you are not afflicted unnecessarily, you are not chastised out of caprice. “My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: for they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck. My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.”[*]Pro 1:8-10--A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.”[*]Pro 10:1 Venerate the name, the day, the house, the worship of God. Remember that want of decency is want of sense: that the immoderate indulgence of appetite is inimical to all true enjoyment that what is renounced, from respect to reason and conscience, is enjoyed: that present comfort, and future happiness, are built on habits of order, self-government, justice, benevolence, and subjection to divine authority.

[I make no apology for giving this discourse from the press, under a title that bears the name of Hannah: the contrast which it presents being her highest encomium, next to the account given of Samuel, in the following Lecture, which, of course, closes her history, and fulfills our design.]

114. Hannah, the Mother of Samuel--Samuel Grows

Hannah, the Mother of Samuel--Samuel Grows 1Sa 2:26. And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favor with the Lord, and also with men. No appearance of nature is more striking, no one affords a more complete demonstration of the great Creator's consummate wisdom and unremitting attention, than the gradual and imperceptible progress of everything in nature, to its perfection, and to its dissolution. The dawning light insensibly advances to the perfect day, and the moment high noon is gained, an approach is made towards night. When the moon has waned, till she is lost in the sun's brighter rays, she begins to emerge into form and luster again; having waxed till her resplendent orb is full, that moment she begins to decay. We are prepared to bear the raging heat of the dog-star by the grateful vicissitudes and advances off spring; and are fortified against winter's stormy blast, by the contracting light and the temperate cold of sober autumn.

Human life too has its morning, noon, and night; its spring and fall; and empires have their infancy, maturity, and old age. Time is the dawning of eternity; earth is the scene of preparation for heaven; and mortality the passage to life and immortality. Everything is beautiful in its season, and every state is a preparation for that which is to succeed it. Nature and providence admit of few sudden and violent transitions; because the human frame, both of body and mind, is little qualified to endure them. The passage before us presents one of the most pleasing objects of contemplation--human life at its happiest period, and in its most smiling aspect--early youth, increasing beauty and strength, gradual and regular improvement. While the family of Eli was exhibiting multiplied instances of the fatal effects of neglected infancy and unrestrained childhood, the son of Elkanah was silently demonstrating the importance of early culture, and modestly reproving gray hairs, by exemplifying the lessons which his pious and prudent mother had taught him. The selfsame ideas are here employed to describe the early progress of Samuel in wisdom, beauty, and goodness, which are afterwards applied to Christ himself, at a similar period of his earthly existence, and they furnish us with many excellent additional hints respecting the important subject of education, which now deserve to be more at large unfolded. "The child Samuel grew on, and was in favor both with the Lord, and also with men;" and "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."

Observe here, first, What is the work of nature, namely, to grow on, to "increase in stature." The moment, O man, thy child begins to breathe, a progress commences which nothing can stop. Grow he will, and must; cease from all solicitude on this score. These feeble limbs will gather strength; by stumbling and falling, he will learn to walk and run; after stammering for a while, he will come to speak plainly, and he who seems at present hardly to possess the faculty of sight, will soon distinguish object from object. Cease from the vain imagination of assisting or improving nature. Assist nature! If you try to mend that shape, trust me, you will spoil it. Every violent attempt to quicken growth will but retard it, and an over solicitude to preserve health, will infallibly scatter the seeds of distemper. Toward the improvement of the bodily faculties, the most anxious and intelligent parent can do just nothing at all; "by taking thought he cannot add one cubit to the stature;" it is by cultivating the mind, only, that the features, shape, and person can be improved.

The reverse of this is the practice of the world. The whole attention is directed to personal accomplishment. Nature is cramped, stretched, distorted, to humor an absurd taste and an erroneous judgment, and she avenges herself for the unwise encroachment on her province, by encroaching, in her turn, on the province of reason and discretion; rendering all their late efforts useless and unprofitable; making education, which is clogged with so many difficulties already, absolutely impracticable. What can the wisest master do, I beseech you, with a temper soured by habits of unnatural restraint, with a mind rendered sickly by petty attentions to punctilio, with a spirit swallowed up in a sense of its own importance? And yet the master is blamed for the fault, which parents themselves have committed. Guard your child as well as you can from accidents. See that his food be simple and wholesome, and administered in due season; let his body be free and unfettered; his clothing light and easy; his exercises, both as to kind and duration, of his own choosing; and he will grow on, and increase in stature, he will acquire vigor, will preserve sweetness of temper, will be happy in himself, and a source of happiness to all around him; he will pass with cheerfulness, like Samuel, into the hands of his instructor, without any prejudices, but such as are on the side of goodness, and, through the blessing of Heaven, will day by day fulfill a parent's hope, and constitute a parent's joy.

There is a fruitless, perhaps a sinful anxiety, of another kind, which parents sometimes express, and which often becomes a source of distress to themselves, and of partiality and injustice to their children. I mean the sex of their offspring. The expectation of pride, avarice, ignorance, or caprice, presumes to usurp the prerogative of omniscience, and, in the event of disappointment, cruelty and injustice to an innocent babe are superadded to impiety toward a wise and righteous God. It is dangerous, as well as criminal, to assume the incommunicable attributes of Deity. The man is equally unhappy in attaining or missing his object, if he pursue it, neglecting, defying, or accusing the interposition of Providence. There is an instance of goodness in the divine administration which is too generally overlooked, too little prized and acknowledged; namely, the perfect and exact conformation of children, both in body and mind. Among the myriads which are daily born in the world, how rare are the exceptions from the general rule! Everyone bears the marks of sovereign wisdom, is the production of omnipotence, has the image of God impressed upon him. How few exceed or fall short of the just standard in respect of stature! How few are born deprived of the use of reason, how few deficient or redundant in their bodily organs! And, may not even these few deviations from the general rule, these acts of divine sovereignty in the government of the world, serve in a future economy, more gloriously to illustrate the perfections of Him who has formed all things to the honor of his own great name. Is thy child, O man, born complete in all his members, is he endued with the ordinary intellectual powers, is he like the children of thy neighbor? How much art thou indebted to the goodness of Heaven! Are his faculties, corporeal or mental, as parental partiality is frequently disposed to believe, superior to those of others? Remember, it is a great addition to thy charge: see that thou mar not the work of God, disfigure not that fair fabric, pervert not talents peculiarly precious and rare, let not thy glory be turned into shame. Has Providence, O woman, wounded thee there where thy sensibility is greatest, in the fruit of thy womb? Be of good comfort, he in whom thou trustest, on whom thou hast believed, saith, "Behold I make all things new." Then "the eye of the blind shall be opened, and the ear of the deaf unstopped, then the lame man shall leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing." "The vile body shall be changed and fashioned like to Christ's glorious body." Then the soul which scarcely awoke to reason, shall discern judgment, and the wandering spirit shall be brought back

to composure and tranquillity. Young man, young woman, hast thou received from the bountiful hand of nature, a sound mind in a sound and well proportioned body? Defile not, destroy not that fair temple; let it be “an habitation of God through the Spirit;” let the image of the divine inhabitant shine serenely on that forehead, beam benevolence from that eye, distil in accents of kindness from those lips. Force not upon the beholder the humiliating contrast between a lovely form and a hateful disposition; be all of a piece.

Observe, secondly, The work of education, the influence of virtuous habits and example. Samuel not only grew on but grew gracious, grew in favor. There is naturally a prejudice, in the first instance, in favor of youth and beauty, independent of other qualities; but that prejudice quickly dies away, where personal comeliness is unsupported by corresponding goodness. But if it be found disfigured by vice, not only is the favorable impression effaced, but exchanged for a counter impression of detestation and contempt. As, on the contrary, the prejudice against ordinary looks is also momentary, when we find them allied to sense and talents, piety and modesty; and our esteem and veneration of the character are highly increased from our expecting less.

Poor indeed is that virtue which lives only in the estimation of the world, which aims only at the approbation and praise of men; but on the other hand, true virtue will always be concerned to preserve reputation, will ever prefer a good name to great riches, and unaffectedly rejoice in the esteem of the wise and good, as part of its reward. What a motive was it to a youth like Samuel to persevere in well doing, to grow in grace, to have his decency of behavior, his filial affection, his docility and submission to Eli, his unassuming piety, his growing wisdom, his expanding faculties, observed and commended by all who came to attend the ser vice of the tabernacle! This is not pride, it is the honest consciousness of a worthy mind, loving and seeking what is good, not for the sake of fame, but its own; yet rejoicing in fame as one of the fruits of goodness. That boy, that youth, that man, that woman, is lost, who is, or who professes to be, indifferent about the opinion of the world. The love of reputation is one of the trees of nature’s planting, and none of her plants are easily rooted up; it often survives the hope of life itself; and the man discovers an earnest concern about his memory, after he has resigned his head to the executioner, and his body to the grave.

I recommend not to you, my young friend, that servility of deportment, that fawningness of submission and compliance which aims at the applause of everyone alike, which is continually fearful of giving offence, which shrinks from doing good, lest by some it might be misconstrued; but that steadiness and perseverance in rectitude, which looks, and goes straight on, which neither courts nor shuns the public eye, which can rejoice in the addition of the praise of men to the testimony of a good conscience, but trembles to think of purchasing the one with the loss of the other. It generally happens, in this case, as it did to Solomon in another. Young men who pursue virtue on its own account, and ask wisdom of God in the first place, certainly obtain what they seek and pray for, and they also obtain what they neither asked nor sought; the love of their fellow-creatures: the favor of man comes unsolicited to him, while he was pursuing a much higher object, peace with God, and peace with himself; while he who aimed at the inferior object alone, misses even that little, and thus becomes poor indeed. The foundation of Samuel’s future eminence and usefulness, was thus laid in the early and tender care of a wise and pious mother. The youth had never been respected in the temple, had never been the object of general favor abroad, had the child learned to be froward, petulant, or peevish in his father’s house. O woman,

would you have the world to think of your darling son as you do, put yourselves betimes in the place of an unconcerned spectator, view hum as an entire stranger would do, and let discretion regulate the over-flowing of your heart. Ah, had Hannah favored her child more, Israel had favored him less! How ample and how sweet, even in this world, are the rewards of self-government, of self-denial, of moderation! Men literally, in many instances, enjoy what they reject, and lose what they gain. He who lendeth to the Lord, lays out his property on the best security, and to the greatest advantage. Samuel is infinitely more his mother's at Shiloh than at Ramah; his worth is multiplied in proportion as it is communicated, and enriches the public fund without impoverishing the private stock. The eyes of a whole people are already to him, the expectation of man keeps pace with the destination of Providence; and the child, ministering in a linen ephod, becomes more gracious, from comparison with the polluted ministrations of ungracious and ungodly men.

Observe, thirdly, Youth's highest praise, the most glorious reward of goodness, the happiest effect of good education, Samuel was "in favor with God." To obtain this most honorable distinction, much more was requisite than a regular and modest deportment, much more than promising talents and childish innocence, and the other qualities which attract and captivate the eyes of men. The love of God has been betimes shed abroad in that heart; Hannah has been mindful of her vow, and taught her son to remember his Creator in the days of his youth; and how grateful is early piety to Him who saith, "My son, give me thine heart!" Lo, God has impressed his own image on that tender mind, and sees, and loves, and approves his own work. The great Jehovah has designed this wonderful child for high things, from the very womb, has raised him up to be the "rising again of many in Israel," to purify a polluted church, to save a sinking state, and is fitting him, from the cradle, for his high destination. The eye of the Lord observes with delight the progress of this plant of renown. He is hastening his own work in righteousness, is ready to perfect, by heavenly visions, the instructions of a pious mother, is preparing to crown the gracious with more grace. The favor of man is frequently the child of ignorance or caprice. They love and hate they know not why. Sometimes they hate where they ought to love, and love where they ought to hate; but the favor of God is ever founded in knowledge, is undirected by partial affection or personal regards, is the result of reason, the applause which perfect wisdom bestows on distinguished excellence. Samuel must have merited praise, else this praise had not been conferred on him. And singular must that merit have been, which could unite judgments so different, interests which so frequently clash. He who makes it his study to please man, can hardly be the servant of God; and to aim at pleasing God is not always the road to the favor of men. Nothing but genuine, unaffected goodness could have procured this joint approbation of God and man; and there is a charm in true goodness, which is irresistible. It may be overlooked for a season, it may be borne down, it may be obscured, it may be misrepresented, it may be hated and opposed; but it will prevail at length, will force itself into notice, will arise and shine, will command respect, silence envy, triumph over opposition; rejoice the wise and good, and keep the wicked in awe.

What mode of address shall I employ, to engage, for a moment, the attention of young ones; and to impress upon their hearts the importance of my subject? Would to God I could again become a little child, that, with the lessons of experience, I might regulate my own future conduct, and be an useful monitor to the simple and inexperienced. I would in that case say, My little friend, God and nature have made you lovely. The candor, and frankness, and benevolence of your heart shine

upon your countenance. Every day discloses some new grace. You are increasing in stature: you are growing in favor with all who behold you. Everyone thinks well, speaks well, hopes well of you. Grow on. Preserve that amiable simplicity. Let it be the charm of advancing years, of expanding faculties. Let that blooming face be still raised to Heaven with modest confidence; and those gracious eyes still beam good-will to men. May I never see that open forehead clouded and contracted. What, shall the horrid traces of vice disfigure that form? Shall everyone that passeth by be constrained to turn away with loathing and aversion? Shall the mother who bare thee, have her face covered with a blush when thou art named? Must she be made to mourn the day which was once her joy? Angels will behold your progress with delight; they will rejoice in ministering unto you: they are ready to receive you into their number, when your course is finished. God himself regards you with smiles of complacency; he is ever ready to assist, to counsel, to protect, to receive you. Let there be joy in heaven concerning you. Now, now is the season for laying the foundation of useful life, respectable age, comfortable death. But what do I see? That youthful face already degraded by vice! so young, and so horrid! Unhappy youth, the depravity of thy heart is painted on thy forehead. The sight of thy own countenance filleth thee with horror. Shame and remorse are preying on the marrow in thy bones. In the hours of solitude and retirement, stretched on thy bed to which sleep is a stranger, thou art constrained to reflect on the wretchedness of thy condition; thou feelest thyself unworthy of the praises bestowed upon thee, by the partiality of those who know thee not; thou blushest in secret, and art filled with indignation against thyself, on calling to remembrance the innocence and simplicity of happier days. Thou givest up thyself as lost. No, young man, do not abandon thyself to despair: add not this to thy offences; there is help for thee, let it reanimate thy courage. Though “cast down” thou art “not destroyed.” However debased that face, it is in thy power to amend, to ennoble it. Thou wart not destined always to remain an innocent child, nor couldest thou: by stumbling and falling thou wast to be instructed how to walk and run. Wert thou wounded and bruised; wast thou plunged into the abyss? There is an arm nigh thee, which is able to raise thee up, to strengthen and to heal thee. Multitudes like thyself have been recovered, restored, established. “As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord” will have mercy upon thee, and forgive and receive thee. The impure, the profane, the blasphemer, the chief of sinners, have repented, have returned, have found favor; there is hope also concerning thee. Only for the Lord’s sake, and for thy soul’s sake, proceed no farther, persevere no longer in an evil course. One step forward may be fatal; tomorrow may find thee in the place where there is no hope. “Behold now is the accepted time, behold now isthe day of salvation.” “Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.” “The wind is boisterous,” the sea rages, thou art “beginning to sink,” thou art ready to perish; but shalt not, whilst thou art able to exclaim, “Lord save me:” for behold “a very present help in trouble;” that helping hand which snatched Peter from the roaring gulf. “And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”(

I conclude with calling upon parents, and guardians, and instructors of youth, seriously to consider the importance of the trust committed unto them; and to discharge it under a sense of responsibility to God, to their pupils, to their country. The history under review presses one point upon you, as of singular moment, and closely connected with every article of education and consequent improvement; I mean the study of the happy, but difficult medium, between excessive indulgence, and oppressive severity. The steady firmness of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, furnishes an useful example. If ever there was a child in danger of being corrupted by indulgence,

it was he. But no symptom of it appears. He is treated as a mere ordinary lad, and from his earliest years, to old age, evinces, by his conduct, the excellence of the precepts, and the steadiness of the discipline which formed his character, and laid the foundation of his eminence. He leaves home, and parts with his parents, while yet u child, with manly fortitude. Already under habits of submission to parental authority, he cheerfully transfers that submission to a stranger, to Eli. Untainted by imaginary terrors, the darkness of the night, the solemnity of the house of the Lord, silence and solitude, and sleep disturbed by extra, ordinary and unseasonable voices, excite in him no silly apprehension, draw from him no childish complaint, deter him from the performance of no duty. In all this we cannot, but recognize the wisdom, the constancy, the fortitude of his excellent mother. Had she been foolishly fond, he had been peevish, and petulant, and timid, and discontented. Take a lesson from her, ye mothers of young children. If you would have these children happy, they must betimes be inured to subjection, to privation, to restraint. To multiply their desires by unbounded gratification, is the sure way to multiply their future pains and mortifications. Reduce their wants and wishes to the standard of nature, and you proportionately enlarge their sphere of enjoyment. Let them contract no fear but that of offending God, and of committing sin. Let them learn to consider all places, all seasons, all situations as equal, when duty calls. Impress on their opening minds the two great precepts on which “hang all the law and the prophets,” to love the Lord their God, and their fellow-creatures. Lead their infant, steps to the Friend of little children, to the Savior of mankind; to the knowledge, the belief, the love, the hope, the consolations of the gospel, and thereby preserve them ,from paths wherein destroyers go.” The profligate character and untimely end of Eli’s sons, on the other hand, afford a solemn admonition of the inevitably ruinous effects of unbounded indulgence to the passions and caprices of youth. Had they been early habituated to the wholesome restraints, of piety, decency, and justice, they could not have become thus criminal, nor would have perished thus miserably. In the excesses which they committed, we clearly see the relaxed government, the careless inspection, the unbounded licentiousness of their father’s house. Neglect, in this case, occasioned the mischief. And the neglected field will soon be overrun with noxious weeds, though you sow, designedly, no poison in it. Fathers, see to it that your instructions be sound, that your deportment be regular, that your discipline be exact. Account nothing unimportant that affects the moral and religious character of your son. Precept will go so far, example will go farther; but authority must support and enforce both the one and the other. You cannot, indeed, communicate the spirit of grace, but you can certainly form youth to habits of decency and order: and habitual decency is nearly allied to virtue, and may imperceptibly improve into it. Do your part, and then you may with confidence “cast all your care” on God. May it not be necessary to throw in a short word of caution against the opposite extreme, that of excessive severity to offending youth? This indeed is not so common as corruptive indulgence; but this too exists. How many promising young men have been forced into a continuance in an evil course, have been driven to desperation, have become “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin,” because the first deviation could find no mercy, because a father armed himself with inflexible, unrelenting sternness, for a slighter offence? Alas, how many amiable, excellent, promising young women have been lost to God, to their families, to society; have been dragged into the jaws of prostitution, and infamy, and disease, and premature death, because a father’s door was shut, and a mother’s heart hardened against the penitent: because her native refuge was no refuge to the miserable? She returned to her own, but her own received her not. Instances, however, might be produced of wiser conduct, and happier

consequences; of mercy extended, and the wanderer reclaimed; of human parents working together with “the Father of mercies,” and succeeding in rekindling the sacred flame of virtue, in restoring peace to the troubled breast, in recovering the fallen, to reputation, to piety, to comfort, to usefulness. So long as God “waiteth to be gracious,” surely it well becomes man to “put on bowels of mercies, kindness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness, and charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”

Thus have I finished what I proposed, in attempting to delineate the female character, by instances taken from the sacred record. In these, and in the case of every virtuous woman, we see the great Creator’s design fully justified, in making for man “an help meet for him.” That which is necessary cannot be despised; that which is useful ought to be valued; that which is excellent commands respect; that which is improvable calls for cultivation. Bad men only revile and undervalue the other sex: the weak and ignorant idolize and worship it. The man of sense and virtue considers woman as his equal, his companion, his friend, and treats her accordingly; for friendship excludes equally invective and flattery. In the education and treatment of females, too much attention has, perhaps, been paid to sex. Whys should they be for ever reminded that they are females, while it is of so much more importance to impress upon their minds, that they are reasonable beings, endowed with human faculties, faculties capable of perversion or of improvement, and that they are accountable to God for them? Wherefore obstruct to them one path to useful knowledge, one source of rational improvement, or of harmless enjoyment? If they are despised they will become despicable. Treated either as slaves or as angels, they cease to be companions. Prize them and they will become estimable; call forth their intellectual powers, and the empire of science will be extended and improved. And let them learn wherein their real value, importance, and respectability consist. Not in receiving homage, but in meriting approbation; not in shining, but in useful employment; not in public eminence, but irk domestic dignity; in acquiring and maintaining influence, not by pretension, vehemence, or trick, which are easily seen through, and always fail, but by good temper, perseverance in well-doing, and the practice of unfeigned piety.

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116. Jesus Christ--The Word

Jesus Christ--The Word

John 1:1-14. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness: and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the word, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God; even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. The idea of a beginning involves that of antecedent existence, from which that beginning originated. The beginning of a man's life implies parentage; the being of a tower of a city, necessarily supposes a preexistent head to plan, and a hand to execute. The vast frame of Nature must have had its commencement from a preceding skill to contrive, and a power to perform. The Mosaic account of the Creation is the only one that sound reason can admit. If God created the heavens and the earth, God was before the heavens and the earth. Moses the historian, and John the evangelist carry us back to one and the same era, carry us up to one and the same all-wise, all-powerful Being. Nature and Grace issue from the same source, and tend toward the same grand consummation. The prophet and the apostle employ the selfsame terms to describe the same objects. "He that built all things is God."

It has been remarked that the four Evangelists introduce their great subject in a retrogade series of representation. Matthew's gospel opens with a display of the Savior's humanity, and presents us with his descent as a man. Mark conveys us back to the age of prophecy, and "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God" is traced up to the predictions of Malachi and Isaiah. Luke the beloved physician refers us to the Levitical priesthood, to the altar of incense, and the services of an earthly sanctuary, "a shadow of good things to come." But John soars above all height; he recurs to the birth of nature, and ascribes that birth to a pre-existent, omnific Word, which in "the fulness of time was made flesh, and dwelt among us." We have beheld his glory displayed in the ages before the flood, in the persons and predictions of patriarchs and prophets, by whom "God at sundry times and in divers manners spake unto the fathers." But Moses and Elias have disappeared; the "voice crying in the wilderness" is heard no more; it is lost in a "voice from heaven," saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him."

We are now therefore to contemplate "him, to whom all the prophets gave witness," in his own person, doctrine, and mighty works; and, as the order of things prescribes, our contemplation must

commence in what he was in the beginning, prior to the lapse of time, for “he is before all things, and by him all things consist.” John, “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” long survived the rest of his fellow-disciples. He knew what some of them had written. He lived to see the progress of the truth as it is in Christ. He saw the divine origin of Christianity demonstrated by its success, and he became a joyful martyr to the truth which he published to the world. A “brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ,” in common with other saints, he retired into exile in “the isle that is called Patmos,” a cheerful victim to “the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ.” In that sacred retirement, more to be prized than all the blessings of society, he is visited with the visions of the Almighty, and becomes the highly honored minister of unfolding the character, offices, and work of his divine and beloved Master, from the days of eternity to the final consummation, when He who sitteth upon the throne shall say, “Behold I make all things new.” The Gospel, according to St John, and the Revelation of St. John, may therefore be considered as together forming an abstract of the plan of Providence from the first dawning of light upon the world of nature to the perfect day of “the restitution of all things.” And one and the same Agent is represented as the animating principle which is before all, and through all, and in all. In the beginning. The mind, with all its powers, loses itself in surveying the works and the ways of God. I have a dark, indistinct recollection of my first emersion into thought. I can remember some of the impressions made, of the sorrows and joys felt, when I was a little child. Soon after I began to exist, I began to perceive that I did exist, but for the knowledge of all that preceded I stand indebted to a father’s intelligence, to a mother’s tenderness. They were to me the beginning of days and the oracles of truth. Their own pittance of illumination flowed in the same channel. But there must have been a point when thought began. There must have been an intelligence which could communicate the power of comprehension; there must have been a spirit which could breathe into man’s nostrils the breath of life; there must have been one without a beginning to make a beginning. And who He was the evangelist unfolds. In the beginning was the Word. Let us not contend about the import of a Greek term. If our evangelist has not an intention to mislead, but one idea can be affixed to that term. He is evidently describing God the creator, in the view of leading us to know and to acknowledge the Redeemer of mankind as one and the same with him. Who “was made flesh and dwelt among us?” Who “came to his own and his own received him not?” Who was despised and rejected of men?” The Word that was in the beginning, and who has revealed himself by a display of so many glorious attributes. “Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.” Is this proposition to be rejected because it is mysterious? For the same reason the system of nature, in whole, and in all its parts, is to be rejected. All is mystery; and all is revelation and discovery, from the insect too small for sight swimming in a drop of water, up to yonder flaming orb which revolves at an immeasurable distance over our heads. Is not man a great mystery to himself? But is he to renounce his being because he is unable to explain it? Is he to call the union of matter with mind an absurdity, because their mutual influence escapes his penetration? How many combinations actually exist of which we have no perception, and which we would pronounce to be impossible! In all the ways and works of the Most High there is a wonderful mixture of luminousness and obscurity, of minuteness and magnitude, of complexness end simplicity. And Scripture exhibits the connection of extremes similar to that which is apparent in the world of nature and in the ways of Providence. This is a presumption at least, if not a proof that they have all one original; and who can that I original be but the divine person emphatically, called the Word, which existed in the plenitude of

power, wisdom, and goodness “before the world was,” but of whose pre-existent state very general ideas only are communicated. Indeed none other can be communicated, for when the mind launches into infinity it is overwhelmed and lost. If the wisdom which cries, and the understanding which puts forth her voice in the writings of Solomon, be the same with the Word which was in the beginning, as a comparison of the two passages will render highly probable, we shall have a sublime and interesting idea of this pre-existent state. The evangelist says, The word was with God, as the deliberative, active, determining principle of the Eternal mind. The wise man expands the thought, and represents the plans of eternal Wisdom as digesting; the framing, arranging, supporting, governing, redeeming of a world, as in contemplation. As if admitted into the counsels of peace, he thus unfolds the purpose of Him who worketh all things after his own will, that all should be to the praise of his glory: “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled; before the hills was I brought forth; while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens I was there; when he set a compass upon the face of the depth; when he established the clouds above; when he strengthened the fountains of the deep; when he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment; when he appointed the foundations of the earth; 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 part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.”[*][Pro 8:22-31] Thus was the Word with God from eternity taking pleasure in the prospect of the fabric which he was about to rear; of the creature whom he was going to frame, and whose nature he was in due time to assume; that he might make the children of men “partakers of the divine nature,” an union as mysterious and incomprehensible as that of soul and body, as that of the persons in the Deity, and as evidently matter of truth and revelation as these are. And the Word was God. Here “the disciple whom Jesus loved” recognizes in his Master, on whose bosom he leaned at supper, “all the fulness of the godhead dwelling bodily.” Lest the expression, the Word was with God might be supposed to imply separation, difference, as a man who sojourns with his friend is nevertheless a different being from that friend, the evangelist speaks out fairly, fully, unequivocally, the truth which he himself believed, and which he was divinely inspired to deliver to mankind, that they also might believe. If St. John be not in these words delivering the doctrine of the real and proper Deity of Jesus Christ, he is either, himself laboring under a delusion, or he intentionally means to deceive, or there is, no meaning in language, and consequently no distinct and safe channel of communication between man and man. The same was in the beginning with God. John speaks as a prophet as well as an evangelist. Foreseeing that “false teachers” should arise, “even denying the Lord that bought them,” he employs a clearness, a copiousness, a force of expression on this momentous point, not to be misunderstood, not to be slighted, not to be explained away. When a master charges his servant with a message of peculiar importance, he repeats it again and again, he puts it into every different form, in order to avoid ambiguity and to prevent mistake. This is evidently the case here. It must not be made a question. “Of whom speaketh” the evangelist thus? “of himself, or of some other man?” The identity of the person is ascertained beyond the reach of doubt. He is the same before time began its race; the same who set time a flowing; the same through every period of duration; the same under every character and in every condition. Where is the proof that the Word

was God? All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. Behold the execution of the eternal plan. The design is copied to an iota. It is the incommunicable prerogative of Deity to create. He who creates cannot be himself a creature. By the Word were all things made, the Word therefore could not have been made. What God did by the Word of his power, he did by himself; and “through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God.” Mark the universality of this creative energy; All things were made by Him, The apostle makes a splendid enumeration of those all things, in his epistle to the Col 1:16. “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.” Wherever therefore there is created existence, there is omnipotent, omnipresent, creating, and sustaining virtue, and there can be but One Omnipotent, Omnipresent. “Angels” are said to “excel in strength,” but that strength is imparted, and it is exerted or restrained by a will not their own; they “do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.” Man is capable of doing great things, but his power is limited to the modification of materials provided to his hand. Christians are indeed said to be “laborers together with God,” and “workers together with him;” it is the highest glory of human nature: but this laboring and working is not in aid to feebleness, it goes not to the production of what had no previous being; it simply implies the adoption of the same views with God, and the imitation of his works of goodness and mercy. The united powers of angels and men are unequal to the formation of a single atom, for, to the ascription of the creation of universal nature to the Word, John subjoins his exclusive title to the character of Creator: it is a glory which he will not give to any other; “without him was not any thing made that was made.” “He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.” “God said, Let there be light, and there was light.” And who but God could thus speak, thus produce? In Him was life. In the vegetable world life is a state of expansion, a progress of fructification, a power of reproduction, but all issuing in the decay and dissolution of the parent germ. A gram of wheat in order to vitality must itself consume. “That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die.” It has not therefore life in itself. It was the divine mandate which first generated, and which still supports the wonderful process. “God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself upon the earth, after his kind: and it was so: and God saw that it was good.” From the same fountain of life proceeded animal nature “All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.” A higher species of life issues from the selfsame source. “The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” In all these gradations we behold a vital principle, but that principle derived, standing in need of continual supplies, and hastening to extinction. Here we are presented with life underived, needing no external support, inextinguishable. “In Him” super-eminently “was life;” a life of which man is in a peculiar sense partaker: and the life was the light of men.

“The light of the body is the eye;” and a precious gift it is. “Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.” But the faculty of vision, as well as some others, is bestowed in a higher degree of acuteness on certain of the animal creation than upon man. He however possesses a light denied to the beasts that perish. “There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.” “The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord,” by which he is distinguished from, and exalted far above the beasts of the earth and the

fowls of heaven. And this “light of men” is the gift of Him who “has life in himself.” “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?” And the light shineth in darkness. Material light necessarily dispels darkness; when the sun rises the shadows flee away. But mental darkness resists the clearest light. The great source of intellectual day has shined through every age and upon every land; but every age and every land have exhibited men groveling in the dark, wilfully shutting their eyes, and then denying the existence of light. The history of mankind is a melancholy demonstration of this, “and this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil, for everyone that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.” It is a corrupted heart that disturbs and misleads the intellect. “If, therefore,” O man, “the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” On whom does this censure fall? On the ruder nations, and the grosser periods of ignorance and barbarism? Yes, and likewise on periods of illumination and refinement, on nations who, in the pride of their heart, appropriated all wisdom to themselves, and stigmatized the rest of mankind with the name of Barbarian: it falls on the boasted ages of Alexander and of Augustus, on learned Athens and imperial Rome. Of them it is that the apostle Paul thus writes “When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools: and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.” This accounts for that earnestness of exhortation employed by the same apostle in his epistle to the Ephesians: “This I say, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who, being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” Thus though the Light of the world shone, and still shineth, the darkness comprehended it not. On whom does the censure fall? On pagans of ages past, and on pagans now “walking in darkness, and dwelling in the land of the shadow of death;” on unbelieving Jews and the blinded posterity of Ishmael? Alas! “darkness still covers the earth,” of lands denominated Christian, “and gross darkness the people” who bear that venerable name. What grievous ignorance have we to deplore! what impudent infidelity, what abounding iniquity, what horrid profanation of the name, of the day, of the book of God! “Sun of righteousness, arise” on these sinful lands “with healing in thy wings,” “deliver us from the power of darkness,” that we maybe “light in the Lord.” The evangelist having displayed the glory of the Word, as the source of all being, whether material, animal, or intelligent, adverts to the mission of John Baptist, his immediate forerunner, “the voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God;” the finger pointing to “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” Paying all due honor to that “burning and shining light” which came in the spirit and power of Elias, he represents him as merely the harbinger of the Light, the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. John Baptist came for a witness, and he faithfully delivered his testimony: “He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me--whose shoes’ latchet I am not worthy to unloose: He must increase, but I must decrease,” as the morning star “hides his diminished head” when the great orb of day appears.

“Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God,” but “the world by wisdom knew not God.” He was in the world through the whole extent of its duration, as the all-upholding Word, the all-regulating power, but the men of the world, even “the wise and prudent” discerned him not, acknowledged him not, adored him not “The fulness of time” at length came. The Scriptures were fulfilled: the day which “Abraham rejoiced to see” began to dawn; the “Star out of Jacob” arose. Surely man will fall down and worship him. They surely, at least, “to whom pertaineth the adoption and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises, whose are the fathers and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came,” they surely will flock to “the brightness of his rising.” This is a reasonable expectation, but it was not realized. The melancholy fact is, He came unto his own, and his own received him not, and the prediction is verified by the event; “When we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him: He is despised and rejected of men”--they “hid their faces from him; he was despised, and they esteemed him not.” This carries us forward, with our evangelist, to the great, the eventful day when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. The Scripture term, flesh, it is well known means man, human nature, the human race. Thus in describing the universality of human degeneracy it is said, “All flesh had corrupted their ways.” Thus, in confidence of divine protection, the Psalmist exultingly exclaims, “I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.” And the Prophet, viewing the redemption of mankind as co-extensive with mortality, while he declares that “all flesh is grass,” triumphs in the thought that “all flesh should see the salvation of God.” To these, innumerable instances might be adduced to prove that the evangelist, when he says “the Word was made flesh” means to convey this idea, that the Word, all-creating, all-vivifying, all-illuminating, assumed humanity, “was in the world,” tabernacled among men, emitted a sensible glory, “as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” “Verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham”--“as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same”--“in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren”--“for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.” And thus, men and brethren we perceive one and the same animating principle calling worlds into existence, peopling them with angels and men, communicating intelligence, exercising unbounded empire--and making himself of no reputation, in the form of a servant, in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, humbling himself to a mean estate, to the suffering of reproach and contempt, becoming “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” To what meanness of condition ought not we his disciples, therefore, cheerfully to submit? “For our sakes he became poor,” and shall we be ashamed of honest poverty? Did he go by the name of “the carpenter’s son,” and dare a Christian ostentatiously to display the heraldry of his ancestors, or to blush at what the world calls low birth? “He hath not despised, nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, nor hid his face from him when he cried,” and can one called by his name turn a deaf ear to the cry of distress, or hide his face from a poor brother? We cannot like him say “Let there be light”--“Lazarus, come forth;” we cannot like him walk on water or silence the wind: we cannot like him give eyes to the blind, or speech to the dumb. But we may with him be “meek and lowly in heart,” merciful and compassionate, forbearing and forgiving: we can go about doing good, and ministering to the necessitous. We cannot attain to the height of his divine excellence and perfection, but we may with him descend to the lowliest offices of beneficence and condescension! we many learn of him to “overcome evil with good.” On the other hand, to what height of elevation may not the Christian aspire? Let not the idea of temporal elevation seduce you. Think not of “the

kingdoms of this world and the glory of them," which perish with the using. Christ's "kingdom is not of this world." Let not the blind ambition of the sons of Zebedee suggest a dream of right and left hand places by the side of an earthly throne. Be it your study and ambition to "have this mind in you which also was in Christ Jesus." Let the avarice of the worldly mind accumulate bag upon bag, add house to house, field to field, but let a nobler avarice excite you, the disciples of the blessed Jesus, to "add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity." These are the titles, the stars, and the ribbands in the kingdom of heaven, and "if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Let the spirit of adventure and science discover unknown regions and nations on the globe, and new planets in the firmament of heaven; be it your concern, Christian, your study, your employment, to contemplate, through the glass of promise, "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." Suffer the man of the world to enjoy his triumph; suffer him to outstrip his rival, to run down his enemy; be thine the more glorious triumph to promote a rival, to spare an adversary, as knowing that "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city."

Such, disciple of Jesus, be thy holy aspirations, such thy pride and ambition; and may such be thy blessed attainments even in time: thought is lost in contemplating "the glory that is to follow." The beloved disciple shall declare it, in the sublimity of his own conception and expression, or rather in the idea and diction with which the Holy Spirit supplied his pen: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

117. Jesus Christ--His Generation

Jesus Christ--His Generation Isa 53:8. Who shall declare his generation? The history of countries generally commences with a geographical account of their situation and extent; of the climate and soil; of the names and the reason of imposing such names; of the era and the means of discovery; of the original inhabitants, and of outer circumstances tending either to communicate useful information or to gratify curiosity. The biographer, in like manner, in delineating the life of his prince, statesman, hero, or philosopher, usually begins with tracing his pedigree and parentage, and enables the reader to form some acquaintance with his ancestors, in order to introduce the personage himself with greater advantage and effect. But both the general historian and the biographer quickly lose themselves in research. The origin of no nation or individual can be traced up to its source. The light becomes fainter and fainter as we proceed, the object is rendered more obscure and uncertain, till time at length spreads his sable mantle over it, and we behold it no more. Who then shall declare his generation, who “was in the beginning with God, by whom all things were made and without whom was not any thing made that is made.”

We are advancing, men and brethren, upon holy ground, ground sacred as Eden’s blissful plains, as the region which surrounded the bush that burned with fire, as Sinai’s awful summit. Borne aloft on the pinions of the celestial dove, we are aiming a bold, adventurous flight into the heaven of heavens, to expatiate through the boundless regions of eternity, to contemplate objects which “angels desire to look into,” to search into the “great mystery of godliness,” to lose ourselves in seeking “to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.”

We are going to attempt a delineation of the Life and History of Jesus Christ, the Savior of Men. My heart fails at the thought of the task which I have undertaken; my tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth. Spirit of Grace, establish thou my heart-- --“O then my voice inspire,

Who touch’d Isaiah’s hallow’d lips with fire!” The question of the prophet which has now been read, and which suggested the idea that we mean to pursue through this Lecture, is interwoven with a variety of pointed and striking predictions which, whether taken separately or in their combination, can apply only to one person; and who that person is, no doubt can possibly be entertained, when we consider, that this is the very passage of Scripture to which Philip the evangelist was providentially directed, as a text for “preaching Jesus,” to the Ethiopian eunuch. I shall not employ any part of your time in detailing the various opinions which have been entertained respecting the meaning of the passage in general, or the precise import of the term “generation” in particular. The question appears simply to be a bold defiance given to all-created wisdom to investigate, to unfold the generations, the origin, the essence of that wonderful Person concerning whom such singular circumstances and events are predicted; it amounts to a strong and positive affirmation, that it is impossible to declare Him as he is, to trace his existence through the successive periods of duration up to its commencement, as you may do that of a mere man from the moment of his birth, or, through a series of ancestors. What in this view is the obvious doctrine of the text? That the generation of Him who the Spirit of prophecy, and the corresponding history represent as an

innocent, patient, vicarious sufferer, extends beyond the sphere of created nature, eludes pursuit, spreads the glory of eternity around it, and conceals it from mortal eyes. It is worthy of remark, that the genealogy of our blessed Lord's humanity is more clear and distinct, and extended, than that of any other person. Two several evangelists have declared it, pursuing it, through two different but parallel channels, up to Abraham, and from him up to the common Father of the human race. In this respect, therefore, "the Spirit himself helpeth our infirmity;" and he who by the mouth of Isaiah seems to forbid and defy all inquiry, by the pen of Matthew and Luke, makes a clear and full discovery, and enables us to trace the pedigree of Jesus Christ, like that of any other man. It is the peculiar privilege of the sacred volume to unfold the real history of human nature, of the globe, of the universe, to follow nature up to the hour of her birth, to declare "the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created; in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens;" to exhibit the first man Adam in the plastic bands of the Creator springing out of the dust of the ground, and, inspired with the breath of life, becoming "a living soul." The same inspired volume represents to our attention one person, and one event, as of peculiar importance; as pervading, influencing, and affecting the whole course of Nature and Providence; as contemporary with every generation of men, as looked unto, and longed for by successive ages. In order that the truth of God might be fully justified and have its complete effect, the relation, in which this illustrious person stood to those who had received the promises of his corning, is distinctly ascertained and minutely described; so that at every period of the world we can say, to He is here, and to He is there. But the inspired volume likewise represents him as before all and above all.--If therefore this book be a Revelation from Heaven, it must contain real and important truth, and that truth clothed in plain, simple, and intelligible language; we must perceive, of consequence, in the "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" a person whose generation no one is able to declare, who is "before all and by whom all things do consist:" whom all the angels of God are commanded to worship, "the heir of all things," by whom the worlds were made and are upheld, whose "throne is for ever and ever:" in one word Christ Jesus, "who is over all, God blessed for ever."

You are well aware that the doctrine, which we wish to establish, is in the present day violently opposed; and while it is maintained in this place, it may be perhaps in the next street the subject of profane mirth, or of serious argumentation. Thinking as we do, we will not enter the lists of controversy. We will not employ your time, nor endeavor to enlist your passions, by running down one name, party, or opinion, and exalting another; but will simply and humbly, though at the same time, firmly and unreservedly, propose for your instruction and improvement, what appears to be the meaning and object of Scripture; and, considering the divinity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as the first leading object of all Revelation, we will uniformly bring it forward in every discourse. If therefore these exercises are at all frequented, or attended unto, it will be by such as expect, and are well pleased, to hear of the great Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, in his original, everlasting, unchanging glory, and in his humiliation, as the son of man, to the form of a servant, to the death of the cross, a propitiation for sin. To this, we trust, notunknown God, our altar is erected, and dedicated, and on it we would again present our whole selves a living sacrifice unto the one true God, and "our Savior Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever."

"Who shall declare his generation?" Incapable thou art, O man, to trace back the short and slender thread of thy own existence and descent. Thou mayest have some faint recollection of weak and

dependent childhood; of a father's early care, and of a mother's tenderness; of the amusements, the companions, the solicitudes, the sorrows and joys of thy boyish days. But all beyond is a blank; to thee creation began a few years ago; the second or third, at most, of thy own immediate progenitors, is blended with the men who lived beyond the flood. We are ignorant of and unknown to each other. How much more so are the men of distant nations and of times more remote? But family tradition, national record, the inspired page can supply the want of personal knowledge, can carry us back to departed forefathers, and bring them down to us. But what recollection, what tradition, what record, can carry us beyond the birth of nature, can convey us to a state of existence previous to the lapse of time? Now the person of whom the prophet speaks, as we saw in the preceding Lecture, is the Word who spoke all things into existence, who built the world, who spread the flood, who set time a flowing, who "breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life." Who then of the sons of men, which of the angels of God shall declare the generation of Him who made them what they are, who placed them in their stations, who prescribed to them bounds which they cannot pass? The slightest detail of nature, O man, presents a mystery which thou cannot solve, a world which thou cannot comprehend unto perfection. That seed cast into the ground cannot be "quickened except it die;" canst thou declare the generation of this insect, today a butterfly, yesterday a moth, the third day a mere lifeless incrustation, and presumest thou to explain the great mystery of godliness, "God made manifest in the flesh;" at so many different times, in such divers manners made known unto the Fathers by the prophets; and in these last days unveiled to us in the person of the Son, the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person? We repeat the question, understandest thou, and art thou able to unfold, the union that exists in thy own frame, between the clay tabernacle and the immortal mind; earth and heaven blended in thine own person? And shall "it be thought a thing incredible," that He who, in the uninterrupted course of his Providence, produces this union which everyone is conscious of existing, though no one is capable of explaining, should form other combinations, unite other natures, to declare his power and manifest his glory? Wherefore should "it be thought a thing incredible," that He who unites himself to everyone of us, through the medium of reason and conscience, for carrying on the plan of nature, should have united humanity to himself in the person of the Redeemer, in a manner still more incomprehensible, for perfecting the plan of redemption? Shall I reject as untrue or absurd whatever I do not clearly understand or am unable perfectly to explain? The consciousness which I have of my own being must be renounced them among the first, and everything within and around us must be reduced to darkness, doubt, and uncertainty.

Blessed Jesus, we cannot declare thy generation, and would not be wise above what is written, but we adore in silent wonder, we rejoice that, "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," and that men "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." We rejoice that what we know not now we shall know hereafter. Suffice it now that "we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man:" that "it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." We can form no conception of a state pre-existent to this frame of nature, for imagination itself must draw its ideas from reality; and to give scope to a faculty so fantastical, in treating a subject of such high moment, were presumptuous and profane. Let us reply then to the prophet's challenge, with the modesty and

humility becoming creatures so ignorant, so limited, and so imperfect. We presume not to explore the records of eternity, to pry into the counsels of peace, to measure the infinite Jehovah, his nature, his decrees, his operations, by the contracted line of our finite understanding; but, taking Scripture for our instructer and guide, we will with reverence and joy contemplate the manifestation of the Son of God in the likeness of man, the mystery of the incarnation, his generation as one of our brethren. In the next Lecture, therefore, if God permit, we will endeavor to lead your attention to some of the remarkable circumstances which immediately preceded the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and which give celebrity and notoriety to that illustrious event, and mark the interest which eternal Providence took in it, and the importance thereby, stamped upon it to every serious and reflecting mind.

We conclude at present, with suggesting, from what has been said, and from every view which is given us in Scripture of the person of the Savior, that there is spread around it at once an effulgence that dazzles and repels, and a mildness and simplicity which composes and attracts. Is he spoken of as a man, we are sent to Bethlehem to behold a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, to Nazareth to converse with the carpenter's son, to Cana of Galilee to join with him in the innocent festivity of a marriage solemnity, to Bethany to witness the endearments of private friendship, to Gethsemane to sympathize with the agonizing mourner, to scenes such as daily occur in human life; but we are never left long to consider a mere man in situations and employments like our own, a man of like passions with ourselves; the glory of the Lord arises, the Son of God stands confessed, a generation not to be declared, a power that nothing can resist, at which devils tremble, which winds and seas obey, to which death and the grave are, subservient. He speaks as never man spake, legions of angels are continually on the wing to minister unto him.--Prophecy and history represent him in the self-same lights, in alternate humiliation, and majesty, obscurity, and splendor. What a contrast does the description of our prophet present? "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this." The progress of his history, in every particular stage of it, will elucidate the same observation, and therefore it shall not now be farther prosecuted.

Again, this subject seems much calculated to correct the prejudices which prevail among men in the matter of pedigree. There is in reality no such thing as mean and high birth: or if there be a distinction, to be born perfect in every limb and feature, with a sound and vigorous constitution, with a mind complete in all its faculties, this is to be nobly born; as, on the contrary, to come into the world diseased and debilitated, with a constitution undermined and destroyed by the vice of parents, is to have the disadvantage of being meanly born; a distinction which, if founded in reason, truth, and justice, leaves the great, in general, little to glory in, and the poor little at which to repine. Have we not all one father? What genealogy is pure from every stain of infirmity, folly, or vice? Is it any diminution of our Savior's dignity, any impeachment of his perfect purity, or any imputation on his great public character, that in the roll of his ancestry after the flesh, we find the name of Rahab the harlot, and of her who had been the wife of Uriah, and that he was brought up under the roof, perhaps to the occupation, of an obscure craftsman? Virtue and vice are personal

not hereditary, and nothing but vice is a just round of shame. Shall I call myself a disciple of Jesus then, and think it a reproach to be called a carpenter's son, despised because I am a Galilean, lightly esteemed because my parents were poor and ignoble, because a paltry monosyllable introduces not my name? Real worth ennobles itself independent of the breath of kings, it draws obscure progenitors into light, and leaves a fair and honorable inheritance to posterity--in a bright example, and a respectable name.

Once more, whatever may be our pretensions or our want of pretension as citizens of this world, we have all equal right and encouragement to aspire after the title, and the spirit, and the privileges of the sons of God. He whose generation cannot be declared, is not ashamed to call the humblest of you, brethren. The end of his coming into the world, of his humbling himself to death, of shedding his blood, was to make you "kings and priests unto God and his Father." What he is by eternal generation, that he is making you by redemption, by the spirit of adoption, by the hope of glory to be revealed. Support the honor of your heavenly Father's name, prove your relation, preserve unclouded your prospects. You are now in a state of depression, "in heaviness through manifold temptations," your title lies dormant, your possession is at a distance, but "your life is hid with Christ in God, and when he shall appear, you shall appear with him in glory. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but when He shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." "Fear not," then, "little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

118. Jesus Christ--His Divinity

Jesus Christ--His Divinity

Hag 2:6-9. For thus saith the Lord of hosts. Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: And I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of Hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts; And in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts. The great Lord of Nature demonstrates his existence and divine perfection, in the original formation, and in the constant preservation of all things. “He spake and it was done, he commanded and it stood fast.” He upholdeth all “by the word of his power.” The continual support of the universe has accordingly, with the utmost propriety, been represented as creation every instant repeated. In a system which is all life and motion, power almighty, and attention unintermitting, must ever be exerted to maintain life, to carry on motion, to preserve harmony. Every being is subjected to the peculiar law of its own nature; and the great whole is governed by general laws. Unity, simplicity, multitude, variety, strike the eye of every attentive beholder; every individual presents a little world apart, and the vast combination of individuals forms but one world, animated by one vital principle. But Jehovah makes himself known to his intelligent creatures not only in the stated order and harmony of his works, but in the occasional and temporary interruption of that order, and in deviation from that harmony. The powers of earth and heaven are shaken; the sun is turned into darkness and the stars withdraw their light; the barrier which restrained the ocean is removed, the windows of heaven are opened, and the earth is overflowed. The rain that falls on Sodom becomes a fiery tide; the flame of Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace is rendered harmless air; the hungry lion licks the prophet’s feet. The glaring eccentric comet, the wandering planet, and the fixed star, all, all refer us to one original, to one moving, restraining, directing, supporting cause.

Neither, however, the regular observance, nor the occasional suspension of the laws of nature are mere wanton displays of power, to amuse the curious, to alarm the fearful, or to confound the proud. Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, and every act of omnipotence have an important meaning and design. The end at which the Ruler of the world still aims, is the manifestation of his own glory in promoting the wisdom and happiness of his creatures. The prophet, in the passage of the sacred volume which has now been read, is evidently referring to some signal display of the divine glory. We behold universal commotion raised and settled by the same power; heaven and earth, the sea and the dry land, and all the kindreds of the nations shaken together. Universal attention is excited, universal expectation is raised, and that expectation is completely gratified, by the appearance of “the desire of all nations;” by the restoration of peace to a troubled world; by a luster bestowed on the second temple which should eclipse the glory of the first. Now, the expression, “the glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former, saith the Lord of hosts,” enables us to fix the period, and to discover the person here described. Haggai lived and prophesied after the Babylonish captivity, and the immediate

object of his prophecy was to urge his restored countrymen to industry and perseverance, in the work of rebuilding the temple of the Lord. And as the most powerful and encouraging of all motives ire is commissioned to assure them, that the period fast approached when the fabric which they were their rearing should be invested with much greater honor, than that of Solomon in all his glory ever possessed. But if this were meant of temporal splendor merely, the fact contradicts it; for from Ezra we learn, that in this respect, the former temple was far superior to the latter; “many of the priests and levites, and chief of the fathers who were ancient men that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice;” so mortifying was the comparison. Our prophet himself holds the same language, Hag 2:3. “Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory! and how do you see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?” We must look therefore for a different kind of glory, to explain and confirm the prediction: and it is impossible to be at a loss about an interpretation, when we consider wherein the real glory of the second temple consisted. Not in being filled, and overlaid with silver and gold, for these are spoken of as comparatively vile and contemptible. “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts,” a claim exactly in the same spirit with that made in Psalms 50. “Hear, O my people, and I will speak: O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices, or thy burnt-offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds: for every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High.” “Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt-offering.” But when “sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire, when burnt-offering and sin-offering were not required, then said I, Lo, I come, I delight to do thy will, O my God.” This, Christians, like the star which conducted the wise men of the East, leads us directly to the Savior of the world. Would you behold the superior glory of the latter temple, look to Simeon visiting it, looking and longing for the consolation of Israel: behold him with the babe in his arms, exulting with joy unspeakable and full of glory, in having seen the salvation of God. Look to Jesus at the age of twelve years “sitting in the temple in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions,” displaying at that tender age, a wisdom, and dignity far superior to that of Solomon in his zenith. Look to that same Jesus, in his zeal for the honor of the sacred edifice, purging it of those impurities which a worldly spirit had introduced into it. Listen to the divine eloquence which there flowed from the lips of him who spake as never man spake. Hear him predicting its destruction, and establishing the truth of his own mission in denouncing against it, and devoting it to total and irrecoverable ruin. Behold him on those ruins, rearing an everlasting and a spiritual building, on a rock against which the gates of hell shall never prevail; and in all this, behold as in a glass the glory here spoken of, the advent of “the desire of all nations,” the “star of Jacob” arisen, Shiloh come, to whom the gathering of the nations shall be, “the Prince of Peace,” by whom peace is proclaimed, and through whom peace is given to “him that is afar off and him that is nigh.” In order still further to justify the application of this prophecy to the person and character of the Redeemer, we may inquire into the import of the other expressions here employed, to describe the appearances of nature and providence, which signalized the era of his manifestation in the flesh. “Yet once, it is a little while.” The reign of prophecy was hastening to a conclusion. Haggai was one of the last on whom that spirit rested;

with Malachi, who lived probably somewhat later, it entirely ceased; and a dark period of five hundred years without a vision, intervened, till it was revived in one who came in the spirit and power of Elias, the forerunner of the Messiah, “the voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God,” Isa 40:3, and it shone in all its luster in the Messiah himself, “the great prophet that should come into the world.” By him it is here intimated that God should speak “once” for all; that he should be the full and final declarer of the will of God to mankind; “yet once,” but no more.

“It is a little while.” With God, what is purposed, is begun to be executed, his agents are already at work, time is lost with him who sees the end from the beginning. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness;” “beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” The interval between the prediction and the accomplishment, though a period of five centuries, is, in the sight of God, “a little while;” and five centuries, when they are past, are but “a little while” in the eyes of man also. But to what circumstances attending the coming of our Savior refers the prophet, when he represents the great God as “shaking the heavens and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and all nations?” It is well known that the sacred writers frequently employ, by a bold figure, the appearances of the natural world to represent and explain moral objects. In the case before us, it will be found that both the literal and figurative sense of the words are strictly applicable to the subject. Everyone, who is at all acquainted with the history of mankind, knows that the whole course of things has been a constant and successive concussion and convulsion, a shaking of the nations, struggle for dominion, the progress of empire from east to west; and an aspect of the heavenly bodies and influence, analogous to the state of the moral world. The observer of nature endeavors to trace all these up to their native causes in the great system of the universe; the moralist: looks for them in the nature and constitution of man, and the politician, in the combinations and exertions of passion and interest. The Believer, the Christian, refers all to God, sees him in the cloud, in the sky; hears him in the wind, in the thunder, in the songster of the grove and he sees the swelling tide of nature and providence laboring with one object of peculiar importance; all things are shaken and composed in subordination to the preparation of the gospel of peace.

Let me compress what I mean to say within a narrow compass; and I shall do it nearly in the words of an elegant preacher whom I have oftener than once had the honor to quote in this place. The eastern part of the world was, in the wisdom of Providence, first peopled, great and extensive empires were first formed there, and there learning and the arts were first brought to perfection. But while science and empire flourished in the east, a power was rising by degrees in the western world, which was one clay to surpass all that had gone before it. Unknown to the proud empires of the eastern hemisphere, which vainly flattered themselves that they divided the world amongst them, this power was then silently advancing from conquest to conquest, and the Roman eagle was by degrees strengthening her wing, and preparing to take her flight round half the globe. The succession of those great monarchies, those shakings of the heavens and the earth, this shaking of all nations, led gradually and imperceptibly to that happy conjuncture, that fulness of time, that maturity of divine counsel which suited the introduction of Christianity. They arose one after another, they enlarged one upon another, till at length the genius of Rome, under the permission of Heaven, triumphed over and swallowed up all others, and expanded, opened, united,

consolidated, that wide-extended, well-informed, civilized empire, through which the gospel of Christ was destined to make a progress so rapid and so successful. To favor this great event, to procure attention to the Author and finisher of our faith, and to render the first appearance of our holy religion at once more august and more secure, the struggles of ambition which had so long shaken the world, those restless contests for superiority, subsided at last, suddenly and unexpectedly, into universal peace. That stormy ocean, which had been for ages and generations in continual agitation, now all at once sank into a surprising calm; the bloody portal of Janus, which had so long emitted unrelenting destruction to mankind, was shut, and the globe was instantly overspread with tranquillity, relieved from the din of arms, from the confused noise of the warrior, and the horrid sight of garments rolled in blood, in order to receive the Prince of Peace. The shaking of the nations, as paving the way for the desire of all nations, is striking to the contemplative mind in another point of view. Philosophy rode triumphant, every question relating to physics, morals, politics, science, religion, was freely canvassed; and the noise of the schools in many instances drowned that of the ensanguined plain. The introduction of Christianity was preceded by a remarkable diffusion of knowledge, and the radiance of science ushered in the gospel day, as Aurora announces the approach of the sun, and prepares the world for it. Egypt, Persia, Greece, and Rome, poured from their separate urns, those distinct rills of science, which meeting in one great channel, became a mighty flood, and overspread the vast Roman empire. And thus was revelation enabled to give a most illustrious proof of its coming down from above, by diffusing over the world, all at once, a light superior to all collected human wisdom in its brightest glory. And need we ask who it was that thus shook and settled the sea and the dry land, who regulated the vast engine, who conducted all these great events, and brought them to one issue, concurrence, and conclusion? At the same period of time the promised Messiah came; the greatest empire that ever existed was at the height of its glory: learning flourished beyond what it had done in any former age: and the world was blessed with universal peace. A coincidence of facts, everyone of which is in itself so extraordinary that it cannot be paralleled by any other times, clearly points out the hand of that supreme, overruling Power, who from eternity beheld the great plan of hid providence through its whole extent, who alone “can declare the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things which are not yet done,” saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” To put this beyond all doubt, let it be observed, that these events took their rise in remotest ages, and were prepared in times and countries far distant from and unknown to each other. Empire which sprang up amidst the seven hills of Rome; science nursed in the academic; groves of Greece; and religion from the obscure vales of Judea, all met at one grand crisis. To one another unknown, they must have been conducted by the hand of Providence. But meet they did, and peace from heaven crowned them with her olive. And thus were the nations shaken to prepare the way of the Lord; thus “the valleys were exalted, and the mountains and hills laid low, the crooked made straight, and the rough places plain,” and the high and aspiring thoughts of men were brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. But the heavens and the earth were literally shaken, at the coming of “the desire of all nations.” Witness that new created star which conducted the eastern Magi to the place where the Savior was born; witness the descent of Gabriel and a multitude of the heavenly host, to announce his arrival; and witness the other appearances of celestial spirits to minister to the Lord of Glory in his temptation and agony, at his resurrection and ascension into heaven; witness the descent of Moses and Elias to the mount of transfiguration; witness too the eclipse of the sun beyond the course of nature,

which marked the hour of his death, the quaking of the earth, the rending of the rocks, the rising of the dead: witness the voice from heaven which, like thunder, oftener than once, shook the echoing air, while God himself declared his well beloved Son, and demanded attention for him. All these confirm the testimony of the prophet, they point it to the Lord Jesus, and inspire joy unspeakable and full of glory, on discovering the perfect coincidence between prediction and event. To this auspicious, this all important era we are now brought; and the next Lecture, with the divine permission, will detail the remarkable circumstances which immediately preceded, or which accompanied the birth of Christ. And was all this mighty preparation made to introduce a mere man of like passions with ourselves? Were the heavens from above and the earth beneath stirred to meet him at his coming? Did flaming ministers descend singly and in bands, did departed prophets revisit the earth and the dead bodies of saints arise, to do homage to a creature, their equal, their fellow? It is not to be believed. But surely this is the Son of God; and to receive him, coming for our salvation, what solemnity of preparation was too great, what homage of angels and men too submissive, what testimony of created Nature too ample? “Hosanna to the son of David, blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest.” Is his name and description “the desire of all nations?” how fitly applied! Is light desirable to the benighted, bewildered traveller in a land of snares and of the shadow of death? Is pardon desirable to a wretch condemned? Is the cooling stream desirable to the parched pilgrim, and bread to the hungry perishing wretch? Is the friendly haven desirable to the tempest-tossed mariner, and liberty to the languishing captive? What then to an ignorant, guilty, perishing world, must that wonderful man be whom Providence has raised up to be “a hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” But what if when he shall appear, desirable as he is, a blind world shall see “no form or comeliness in him, no beauty why he should be desired?” Afflicting thought! “He was despised and rejected of men!” “He came to his own and his own received him not.” They “denied the holy one, and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto them.” The cry was, “away with him, crucify him;” his “blood be upon us and upon our children!” O Lord, remove the film from the eyes of those prejudiced Jews; dispose them to receive “The Prince of Peace,” let him be all their salvation and all their desire. Lord, remove the film from my eyes that I may see in him, whom God the Father hath sent and sealed, one “fairer than the children of men; into whose lips grace is poured:” that though he may be “unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness, He may he unto us who believe, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” Amen.

119. Jesus Christ--John's Birth

Jesus Christ--John’s Birth

Luk 1:11-20. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering, said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shall be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

“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.” Being determined through the course of these exercises to avoid everything that has the appearance of controversy, I take it for granted that you believe and receive the history of our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as delivered in the four gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, as of divine inspiration and authority. Of the four evangelists two were of the number of the twelve whom Christ called to the office of apostleship, and who recorded events of which they were witnesses and partakers, and transcribed discourses which they heard and well remembered. The other two derived their information immediately from those “who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.” Their harmony, in every particular of any importance, is a proof of the truth and certainty of each individually, and of the whole. John, as one borne aloft on the wings of an eagle, ascends into the heaven of heavens, and begins his account of his beloved Master with a sublime and interesting representation of his divine nature; for which we refer you to Lecture cviii. Mark introduces “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God,” with the voice of a lion “crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” Luke ushers in the great Prophet, “the desire of all nations,” with an account of the conception and birth of his forerunner John the Baptist, and is of course led to extract the commencement of the evangelical, out of the legal dispensation: and he sets out with exhibiting Zacharias in the exercise of the priest’s office. Matthew commences at once with the history of Christ’s humanity, as the son of David, the son of Abraham. For these reasons, the four sacred historians of the New Testament dispensation have been distinguished by corresponding symbolical representations, analogous to the vision of the prophet Ezekiel, Matthew by the face of a man, Mark by that of a lion, Luke by that of an ox, and John by that of an eagle.

St. Luke was by profession a physician; he became early a proselyte to the Jewish religion, and he is generally supposed to have been one of Christ's first disciples, and of the number of the seventy whom "He sent out two and two into every city and place, whither he himself would come." After he had concluded the history of our Lord himself, at the period of his ascension into heaven, he undertook that of the Acts of the Apostles, and he addresses both his books to a person of amiable character and exalted rank, named Theophilus, and in him, to every lover of God, in every age of the Church, who is desirous to know "the certainty of the things wherein he has been instructed." On the conversion of St. Paul to the Christian faith, he seems to have attached himself with much zeal and affection to that great Apostle of the Gentiles, he became voluntarily the companion of his travels and afflictions, and brought down his history to his arrival at Rome as a prisoner, on an appeal to the emperor Nero. His gospel and history of the acts were probably submitted to the inspection of his illustrious fellow-traveller, and received the seal of his approbation. In the preface to the gospel inscribed with his name, he modestly, yet with firmness, lays claim to the great, the essential qualification of a historian, namely, accurate and complete information respecting his subject, "having" says he, "had perfect understanding of all things, from the very first:" and the professed end which he had in view is no less worthy of a great and enlightened mind, that a respected friend might be established in the knowledge, faith, and hope of the gospel. The tongue of prophecy had now been silent for more than four hundred years. The last word which it had spoken announced the sending of Elijah the prophet, to precede the great and notable day of the Lord, to work a remarkable change in the temper and character of mankind, to prevent the earth from being "smitten with a curse." A period of darkness and disorder succeeded. The land which had been for ages so renowned in history seems as if blotted out of the globe; the people, which had been hung up as a sign before the eyes of so many successive generations, seems to be extinguished and lost; the predictions and promises which conferred upon them such high importance, and duration so extended, seem to have been defeated and rendered of no effect. The throne of David, whose permanency was so often, and so solemnly declared, has sunk into the earth and disappeared. The representative of the royal line of Judah is sunk into a humble carpenter: and all hope of revival is at an end. But the Lord hath spoken and shall he not do it, he hath promised and shall he not bring it to pass? Yes, but not at the season, nor in the way which human wisdom would have prescribed, nor by means which human wisdom would have employed. Behold light once more, and suddenly, shines out of darkness: the land of Israel rises once more into importance; Jerusalem rears her head among the nations, the star of Jacob arises, "a rod springs out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots;" and the glory of the latter temple eclipses that of the former. The evangelist informs us that at this eventful period Herod was king of Judea. Princes are often among the inferior actors in the great drama of Providence. Their will shakes the nations of the earth, but the hearts and arms of kings themselves are in the hands of the Lord, to be by him turned which way soever he will. This man has by some been dignified with the addition of "the great:" an appellation more frequently bestowed as a reward to splendid vice, than as a tribute to modest merit. Herod the great! and yet a paltry substitute of a Roman emperor, an habitual slave to the vilest of human passions, envy, lust, jealousy, cruelty, revenge. The inspired penman gives him no names, either good or bad, but simply, tells his story as far as it is connected with that of Him by whom "kings reign and princes decree judgment." The reign of Herod to us serves merely as a prologue to introduce the more important name and history of an ancient, obscure priest called Zacharias, and our attention is

instantly called away from the splendor, noise, and intrigue of a busy, vainglorious, debauched court, to contemplate the humble concerns of a private family, and the noiseless performance of a religious service.

How different are the ideas affixed to the terms great and little by sober reason and popular opinion, by the wisdom of God and the folly of man! Weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, Herod fawning on Augustus, or on one of his favorites, dissolved in luxury, stained with blood, inflamed with resentment, is little and contemptible; while the aged priest, reconciled to the will of God, who had written him childless, pursuing the calm tenor of his way, fulfilling the unostentatious duties of his place and station, “righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless,” commands affection, esteem, and respect. This venerable pair, Zacharias and Elisabeth, were both of the tribe of Levi, on which the office of priesthood was entailed. Both nature and religion taught them to consider the gift of children as a blessing; but the hope of that blessing they seem now calmly to have resigned, and they are quietly sinking into the decline of life, if not with the consolation of leaving their name and office to their children, possessing nevertheless that of mutual affection, of a devout spirit, and a conscience void of offence. The midnight of nature is the dawning of the day of grace; and he who in wisdom and justice brings to nought the wisdom of the worldly prudent, “raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people. He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children.” The Prince of Peace is ready to make his public entrance on the grand theater, and it is time for his harbinger to prepare the way, and for the herald to announce his approach. And where shall we look for him? Turn your eyes to Judea, to Jerusalem, to the temple. See, the lot is prepared, to determine whose turn it should be to burn incense before the Lord in the holy place. Providence presides over it, and Zacharias is taken. Behold him, with joy accepting the sacred task of paying a grateful tribute of praise to God, and of assisting the prayers of the people without, with the commanded perfume of the altar of incense. Behold him entering within the veil, under the mixed emotions of godly fear, and exalted delight, to worship that God who once resided there in sensible glory, but from which the glory had long departed. All is solitude and silence; the unextinguished light that burnt continually before Jehovah lends its flame to set on fire the incense, when lo, the luster of material fire is lost in the brighter glory of the great Archangel, and the solemn silence is broken by the melodious accents of a celestial voice. Gabriel, who five hundred and forty years before announced to the prophet Daniel the commencement of the determined weeks which should precede the Messiah’s day, now announces to Zachariah their consummation. He opens the sealed book of prophecy, and to his astonishment informs him that the promised coming of Elias, with which the ancient canon closed, was near at hand; that this great prophet should appear in the person of a son of his own, whom God by a special dispensation of his Providence was raising up to fulfill the Scriptures, to turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, to go before the Savior in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” How is the pride of kings leveled to the dust before an appearance like this! How many princes and potentates have arisen, and fallen, and sunk into oblivion since Gabriel last visited the earth! How have the kingdoms of this world been shaken during the course of five centuries! How often has the seat of empire changed, and the globe changed its inhabitants! but the heavenly messenger enjoys unfading luster and undiminished strength. The

purpose of the Eternal has been proceeding all the while, and the convulsions and contention of the nations have been working the righteousness of God, and preparing the way for the kingdom of peace and love. The appearance of an angel, however, though sent on an errand of mercy, though delivering a message of grace from on high, is an object of terror to frail mortality. “When Zacharias saw him he was troubled, and fear fell upon him; and if the upright and blameless man tremble at the presence of an angel, “where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear,” when “the Lord himself shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on all them that know not God and obey not the gospel!” The triumph of goodness is the glory of a really superior being. The angel that “stands in the presence of God,” exults not in the confusion of a frail mortal, but said to him “fear not, Zacharias.” The insolence of superiority, and the delight of outshining, of dazzling, of distressing an inferior, are the characteristics of a little soul, of some angels falsely so called; those who are truly such condescendingly sink to the level of those who are beneath them, or affectionately raise the humble up to their own. In the presence of God all distinctions vanish; Gabriel and Zacharias are fellow-creatures, fellow-servants, fellow-dependants; the inferior being makes himself known by his timidity, the superior by his benevolence and love: this marks the difference, the affecting difference which purity and guilt have made. The flaming minister addresses the attendant on the earthly sanctuary, with all the familiarity and ease of ancient friendship; the desires of his heart, the subject of his prayers are well known to him; he has all along been the sympathizing, though unseen, unknown witness of his anxieties and distresses, and he esteems it an honor and a happiness to be employed as the messenger of glad tidings to a pious, suffering human being. Zacharias had long ago ceased from expecting, had ceased from praying for the building up of his own house, but he waited for the consolation of Israel, he continued instant in prayer for the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David which was fallen down, and lo, God at length bestows, as he did upon Solomon, not only the blessing which he asked, but that also which he asked not: namely, a son to support the honor of his own name, and the promise of the Son that should be born, the Child that should be given, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. The injunctions of the law respecting Nazarites are repeated and applied to the present case, and the future greatness and importance of this miraculous child, in the scale of Providence, are foretold; and Zacharias has the satisfaction of hearing that he was to be the father of him who should be the accomplishment of ancient prophecies, “The voice crying in the wilderness,” the finger to point out to mankind “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

Terror gives way by degrees to feelings of a different kind, and, with the glory of the heavenly vision before his eyes, with the faith of father Abraham, in similar circumstances, as an encouragement to his own, and with the manifold instances which the history of his own country afforded of similar interposition, he converses with flesh and blood, he staggers at the promise through unbelief, and for a moment forgets that with God all things are possible. The angel vouchsafes to explain himself to the unbeliever; his incredulity shall not frustrate the purpose of heaven, nor even divert into a different channel the mercy which he doubted; but his frailty shall not go wholly unpunished, he shall be wounded in those faculties which he had so ill employed as the avenues to his mind, the tongue which dared to express the language of doubt and suspicion must undergo a temporary silence, the ear which would not admit the communications of an archangel, shall be shut for a season against the delights of social intercourse, and the sign which he unwisely demanded shall bear upon it a mark of displeasure. Striking mixture of goodness and

severity, of goodness unbounded, and severity restrained! Striking view of the supreme power possessed and exercised by the great Lord of Nature, over all our powers and possessions. He who bestowed the gift of speech on man can withdraw it in a moment, or confound it so as to be no longer a medium of communication between mankind; He can confer it on the dumb ass to reprove “the madness of the prophet;” or instantaneously communicate it, in all its different forms, to the ignorant and illiterate, for the instruction and salvation of the various nations of the earth. Let a gift so precious never be vilely profaned as an organ of falsehood, pride, lust, or profanity. The words of the angel all meet their accomplishment in their season. The pretended oracles of paganism were constrained to veil their prophetic enunciations in towns of mystery and obscurity; they spake with timidity and caution; they clothed their responses and mandates in general and ambiguous expressions, which superstition might interpret what way soever it would; and which any event might be wrested to justify and support; but the lively oracles of God are minute, distinct, intelligible, and pointed; he who runs may read them; they clothe predictions with such an exactness of circumstance: they appeal to events so near at hand, so obvious to investigation, that it is impossible to mistake one thing for another, to confound one with another. Zacharias’ dumbness, the season of his being attacked with it, the unexpected, miraculous pregnancy of Elisabeth, the birth of the child according to the time of life, the sudden restoration of the Father’s hearing and speech, at the very moment predicted, were all matters of public notoriety; everyone singular in itself, the whole taken in connection so singular, as to mark the interest which eternal Providence took in an event, at first sight, of no great general importance, but in its effects and consequences involving the fate of nations, the everlasting destination of worlds.

What! all this state and magnificence; the trumpet of prophecy resounding, the prince of angels descending, to proclaim the advent of merely a man with raiment of camels’ hair, with a leathern girdle about his loins! The Ruler of the universe, be assured, is not so lavish of extraordinary displays of his power and wisdom. If the true God appear, it is on an occasion worthy of a God. And if this be the preparation made for the appearance of the servant, what state shall precede the entrance of the Sovereign? Gabriel, I foresee, has another message to bring, a multitude of the heavenly host is on the wing, to announce a greater than John Baptist, even him of whom John Baptist himself says, “There standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoes’ latchet I am not worthy to unloose.” This solemn preparation for the manifestation of God in the flesh, if God permit, will be the subject of the next Lecture. I now conclude with the following reflections:

1. Angels, we perceive, take a lively, an affectionate, and a compassionate interest in the affairs of men. “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” The “little ones” of Christ’s family, the little in age and stature, the little in condition, must not be despised, “for I say unto you,” are his emphatic words, “that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven:” and “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” What condescension on the part of beings so highly exalted! What a protection provided for the feeble! What encouragement proposed to the penitent! “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” Pleasing, awful thought! The host of heaven guards my path and my bed, watches over my lying down and rising up; but their eyes are continually upon me, I am “compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses,” they bear testimony to what I am, whither I go, how I am employed. Is the eye of a

child a guard to virtue? What holy circumspection and watchfulness, then, what earnestness and perseverance in well doing, what abhorrence of that which is evil, ought the inspection of an angel, ought the all-seeing eye of God to produce? “He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways;” “keep,” therefore, “thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”

2. From a preparation thus solemn and magnificent what are we not to expect? Four thousand years have been employed in making it; a procession of patriarchs, of prophets, of sages, of priest’s, of potentates, has passed on before in uninterrupted succession; angels have descended from heaven: surely He who thus cometh is the Son of God. “When he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, He saith, “And let all the angels of God worship Him:” And “unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom:” for “Thou, Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands.” “His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doth wondrous things: And blessed be his glorious name for ever and ever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory, Amen, and amen.”

3. Though predicted events are strictly conformable to the word of prophecy, they nevertheless, in many cases, contradict, disappoint, and far exceed human expectation. The prophets themselves had not always a distinct and complete perception of the object which they were commissioned to hold up to the eyes of the world. Those “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” The agents employed in the accomplishment of promise and prediction, little understood the part which they acted. They thought of nothing less; they intended nothing less. They were unconscious instruments in the hand of God to execute a purpose, which had they known they would have striven to defeat. “The heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing. The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed--He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: The Lord shall have them in derision.” Were “Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, gathered together” to promote the cause of Christianity? No, they meant to destroy it. But “of a truth,” Lord, they were constrained “to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.” Happy are they who, with Gabriel and the other flaming ministers who stand before God, are the conscious, the voluntary, the joyful agents under, and together with God, in promoting the great work of Salvation.

4. Let not man, then, presume to make his own understanding the measure of revealed truth, or of divine conduct. “Who hath directed the spirit of the Lord, or, Who being his counsellor hath taught him?” It ill becomes a creature conscious to himself of so much weakness, or so much ignorance, of such liableness to error, to erect himself into an infallible judge. “Search the Scriptures,” but with reverence, with humility, with a desire to be instructed, not censoriously, self-sufficiently, not to wrest Scriptures in favor of a preconceived opinion, or long-established dogma. Study the ways of Providence; but dare not to interpret them according as passion or prejudice may dictate. “Thy way,” O God, “is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known.” Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture, and Providence of Providence; and “if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.” Practical conformity to the divine will is preferable to the highest attainments in knowledge, and it is the most direct road to farther

discovery.

5. Superior beings are now an object of terror, and it is conscious guilt in man which clothes them with that terror. They are our friends, they take delight in ministering to our necessities, they cherish the gracious affections of elder to younger brethren, yet the apparition is formidable even to a Zacharias. But “there is no fear in love; for perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” To that glorious perfection the Christian is encouraged to aspire. We shrink from the idea of a visit from a departed friend arising out of the grave, but we look with hope and desire to the day when we shall be added “to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven--and to the spirits of just men made perfect.” The vision of one angel, in our present state of depression, strikes the mind with awe; but we hope to come “to an innumerable company of angels;” nay “to God the judge of all,” for we come through “Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

120. Jesus Christ--The Virgin Mary

Jesus Christ--The Virgin Mary

Luk 1:26-33. And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man, whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Everything in nature, we have observed, is revelation and discovery, and yet all is mystery inexplicable. Every flower of the field, every pebble in the brook, every leaf on the tree, every grain of sand on the sea shore, is a world in miniature; possessed of qualities which a little child is capable of observing and of comprehending; yet at the same time containing hidden treasures which no Solomon can find out unto perfection. One object overwhelms us with its magnitude, the minuteness of another mocks our research. The Creator here, involving himself in clouds and darkness, eludes our pursuit; there, arrayed in "light inaccessible, and full of glory," He forbids our approach. In all the ways and works of God there is a simplicity level to the meanest understanding, and a complexness which confounds the most acute and enlarged. If all nature and Providence present this strange mixture, is it any wonder if we find it in the work of redemption? That grand era, called in Scripture "the fulness of time," was now come; even the time for accomplishing ancient predictions and promises; for displaying and fulfilling the purpose of the Eternal in the salvation of mankind, by him to whom all the prophets give witness, and in whom all the promises are yea and amen. In order to introduce him with more than royal state, God shook the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land; the Gentiles pressed toward the appearing of this great light of the world, and kings to the brightness of his rising. To prepare the way of the Lord, throne was shaken after throne, empire swallowed up empire. Alexander carried his all-conquering arms into the remotest regions of the east; Caesar extended his conquests as far as to France and Britain in the west; and Augustus gave peace to a troubled world. We are now led to attend to the minuter circumstances of this all-important event.

We perceive from the beginning what we are never permitted to lose sight of to the end, a magnificence that dazzles, connected with a plainness and simplicity which interest and attract the heart; declaring at once the Son of God, and the Son of man; Him whom angels worship, and whom the poorest of mankind consider as one of their kinsmen. Observe the exactness of arrangement in every part of the plan of Providence. Time is settled to a moment, place to a point. No design of heaven can be accelerated or retarded, changed or frustrated. God said unto the

serpent, in the day that man by transgression fell, “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;” and it is not an unmeaning, lifeless sentence, filling up space in the sacred page. Lo, it awakens into animation and energy, not one tittle of it shall fail. To accomplish it behold Gabriel is again on the wing; but not armed with a flaming sword to guard the way of the tree of life, but bearing the olive branch, and the message of peace, announcing a new and living way into the holiest of all, into the paradise of God. If there be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, what was the joy of heaven on that day when the great archangel received his commission to revisit the earth, to convey the glad tidings of great joy. The celestial bands adoring prostrate themselves before the eternal throne: contemplating this new creation of God, the morning stars sing together, and all the sons of God shout for joy. These things they have for ages and generations been looking into, the great mystery of godliness, God made manifest in the flesh: they enjoy the exalted delight of beholding it unfolded, and the time, the set time, to favor a perishing world arrived. Gabriel has received his instructions; he flies with transport, such as angels feel, to execute the will supreme; the flaming portal flies open; myriads of pure spirits celebrate his descent with songs of praise. And whither does he bend his flight! To learned Athens or imperial Rome? To give understanding to the prudent, or to hold the balance of power! No: but to bring to nought the understanding of the prudent, to humble the mighty and confound the proud. He is sent to a country favored indeed of nature and renowned in story, but sunk in the scale of nations, the skeleton of ancient grandeur, and to a district of that despised country proverbially contemptible, and to one of the least of the cities of that region, and to one of the poorest and meanest of the inhabitants of that city--to a virgin indeed of royal extraction, but fallen into indigence, betrothed to an obscure mechanic, a stranger in a strange place. It is thus that God chooseth “the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things which are.” The destinations of the Almighty stamp a dignity and importance on persons, places, and things which they possessed not before; to be employed of Him is the highest dignity which the creature can acquire; to minister to him, in ministering to the objects of his compassion or of his love, is the glory and joy of angels and archangels. Galilee and Nazareth now possess an eminence unknown to the most illustrious kingdoms and the proudest capitals. He maketh his angels Spirits, but we discern, and reason, and converse through the medium of sense. Men cannot rise to the level of angels, but angels are permitted, for wise and gracious purposes, to descend to the level of men, to assume an organized body to convey their ideas in the accents of the human voice. But can this be a degradation of their superior nature? No: it is its glory and perfection. To descend to those who are below us, to aspire after greater resemblance to those who are above us, in this consists the real excellency of a created being. We cannot imitate angels in their intelligence and elevation, but in their condescension and humility we may, and we ought.

What a contrast have we here, between the rank of the messenger and of the person to whom the message is addressed! But the presence and purpose of God level all distinctions. Mary, the mother of our Lord, rises, and Gabriel sinks, for the Son of God himself, the Lord of angels, is about to “take upon him the form of a servant.” The evangelists are minutely particular in detailing the circumstances which concurred to impress the characters of truth and importance on this event. This spirit of prophecy had lately and unexpectedly been revived in the persons of Simeon

and of Anna, and of others who were waiting for the consolation of Israel. The extraordinary case of Zacharias and Elisabeth, which was well known to all who attended the worship of the temple, must have excited the public attention and expectation. This is followed, six months after, by a case still more extraordinary, more out of the course of nature, and of still higher moment, and of equal notoriety. Opportunity was thereby afforded to the suspicious and incredulous to inquire and examine: that inquiry must lead to the discovery of a cloud of witnesses, lying dormant in books universally held sacred, but neglected, misunderstood, and misapplied: life and substance, meaning and luster, are in a moment given to them by well known and undeniable facts. No appearance of art or industry is discernible, but a simple, easy, natural transition from one thing to another. The appearances, indeed, are out of the ordinary course of nature; but they are narrated as mere ordinary things; and the descent of an archangel, and his speech and demeanor are described with no more parade of words, no more labor of thought, than the springing of an ear of corn, or the fall of a sparrow to the ground. This majestic, dignified ease marks the presence of a God, with whom nothing can be extraordinary or miraculous; who exhibits persons and events as they really are, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. The angel represents none but objects of the highest interest and importance. He announces the approach of a great prince, who should ascend the throne of David, who was to exercise unbounded authority, and enjoy everlasting dominion; who should be distinguished by the state and title of the Son of the highest; and that this extraordinary personage should be introduced upon the grand theater by the Almighty's creating a new thing upon the earth. "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." The singularity of this wonderful conception and birth was greatly heightened by having been prefigured and foretold at sundry times, and in divers manners; such as the preternatural birth of Isaac, of Jacob, of Samson, of John Baptist, and the express and pointed prediction of Isaiah, "the Lord himself shall give you a sign, behold, a virgin stall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emanuel," God with us. All these hold up to us, through a succession of ages, the substance of the first threatening to the serpent, which was at the same time the first promise of grace to mankind was made, that He, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed, and who should bruise the serpent's head, should be in a proper and peculiar sense the seed of the woman. Astonishing and instructive view of the undeviating steadiness of the divine counsels! He willeth and none can let it; heaven and earth may pass away, but his word shall not pass away, but everyone come to pass in his season.

Mary having been referred to her cousin Elisabeth, whose advanced state of pregnancy was to be an additional confirmation of her own faith in the promises of God, as soon as the angel departed from her, retired from Nazareth into the hill country of Judah to salute her kinswoman, and to confer with her on the several manifestations of divine favor to them. This interview produced another declaration of the interest that providence took in the event which was pressing to its accomplishment; Elisabeth is not only destined to be a mother in Israel, a mother of John the Baptist, but she becomes already a prophetess; she has a sign given her in her own person equivalent to the declaration, of the archangel. "And it came to pass, that when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: and she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me! For lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

And blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord." This fills the virgin's mouth with a song of praise dictated by faith, piety, humility, and gratitude; and these are the rapturous strains which flow from her lips, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him, from generation to generation. He hath showed strength with his arm: he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever." The course of nature now takes place, and he who made man, the first man Adam, perfect at once, from dust of the ground, and who is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham, raises up first John and then Jesus in a way at once miraculous, and natural, according to the way of sovereign, irresistible power, and according to the time of life. Glorious in establishing and supporting the laws or nature, glorious in suspending and dispensing with them, we behold thee, O God, subduing all things to the counsel of thy will, that all should be to the praise of thy glory. At the end of three months more, Elisabeth, as it was predicted of the angel, is delivered of a son; the name of John, as the heavenly messenger directed, was imposed on him, the father's speech was suddenly restored, and the first use which he makes of it is to celebrate the high praises of that God, who had made him such an illustrious example of both mercy and judgment. He "was filled with the Holy Ghost and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people. And hath raised up an hour of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began; that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he sware to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. And thou, child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people, by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God: whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." And now the way is prepared, the voice is heard crying in the wilderness; the forerunner of the Lord has begun his course, the Savior comes. But other messengers, of whom we have not yet heard, precede him. Behold yonder comet glare in the eastern sky, it performs a track untrodden before, the wise men of distant lands are summoned to meet him at his coming, to lay their gifts at his feet; Augustus Caesar, the sole regent of half the globe, is pressed into the ministering train, an unconscious, unintentional servant to the Prince of the kings of the earth. But here we must once more pause and inquire, is this a cunningly devised fable, or a real history? Is it a fanciful representation, or the simple truth? If it be a fine tissue woven by a luxuriant imagination, say so at once, unbeliever, and renounce the fiction in whole, as a rule of faith, or as a ground of hope. Say unreservedly that the mission and message of the angel is merely a bold eastern metaphor: and the whole mere ordinary facts, related with somewhat more than the usual pomp of diction, but to set forth only a man of like passions with ourselves, whom the credulous, prejudiced, and illiterate are disposed to receive as

a superior being--in a word, give up the evangelists as plain men conveying, to plain men like themselves, simple matters of fact, and recur at once to unmixed, undisguised deism. But are these things indeed so? Were angels sent from God to declare the approach of what prophets had of old predicted? Did the Son of the Highest vouchsafe to be born of a woman, and thereby become partaker of flesh and blood? David's son, yet David's Lord, then let earth prepare to receive its king. Lo, the angels of God worship him. He is the Son of God, he is our Lord, and let us worship him. This history assists us in correcting the false scale of human greatness. Here we behold the princes and the potentates of this world sinking to their proper level; Herod, Augustus Caesar, and persons of their character and station are thrown into the background, of the piece, while Zacharias, Elisabeth, and Mary are brought forward with honor, and to fill a higher destination than that of kings. Respect, by all means, the powers that are, at the ordinance of God, but respect with higher, with supreme veneration, Him who ordained them, to carry on the purposes of his wisdom and his love.

Learn, Christian, to make a just estimate of thy own importance in the scale of being. Thou art a creature of God, formed after his image, a partaker of immortality, destined to glory and honor. An origin so dignified confers true nobility; faculties so superior, prospects so extended, denote a being of high estimation in the sight of God, and who ought to be of high estimation in his own eyes. Defile not that fair temple, discredit not that illustrious descent, dishonor not a father's name. But well does it become a creature so dependent, so frail, so fallen, so lost, to be clothed with humility. O man, thou standest in need of every thing; what possessest thou that thou didst not first receive? Thou hast been forgiven all; by the grace of God thou art what thou art. The religion of Jesus Christ alone effectually teaches a man to descend without degradation, and to rise without pride; reduces him to the level of his natural guilt and misery, and exalts him to the glorious liberty, and the heavenly inheritance of the sons of God.

We have here a preternatural, a miraculous conception. It reminds us of our common origin, of our common feebleness, of our mutual connection and dependence. God hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth." Every man therefore is a brother, and bound to entertain the affections, and to perform the part of a near kinsman to every man. This consideration I press upon you in the words and the spirit of the Apostle of the Gentiles: "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For, as we are many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we being many are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another. Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another!"--"Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one towards another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate"--"if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." The subject of the next Lecture will be the history of the nativity of our blessed Lord, and of the more remarkable circumstances which

accompanied that all-important event. May what has been spoken become “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.” Amen.

121. Jesus Christ--Nativity

Jesus Christ--Nativity

Luk 2:1-14. And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, (because he was of the house and lineage of David,) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. From the first instant of time until now, every instant has been displaying some new wonder, unfolding some new design of the Eternal mind. God gives the word. Light arises, the earth emerges out of ocean, the firmament is expanded, sun, moon, and stars appear, nature teems with life, man starts up out of the dust, rears his erect form to heaven, shines in his Maker’s likeness; the Creator contemplates the progressive glories of his power, and pronounces everything good. The Lord gives the word, and ocean again covers the earth, chaos and ancient night resume their empire, the breath of every living thing expires. Again he sends forth his word, the windows of heaven are stopped, the seas retire to their appointed bed, the dry land appears, the bow is seen in the cloud, the sign of God’s covenant of peace. The period of every event is settled to a moment, the instrument is provided, the hand is prepared. But of all the events which have taken place since the beginning of the world, the most illustrious and important surely is that recorded in the words now read. The moment of every child’s birth, is highly interesting, at least to the mother.--The birth of an heir, to a title, to an estate, to a crown, is felt by thousands, by regions, by empires.

Here we have the birth of the “first among many brethren,” of “the heir of all things,” of “the Prince of the kings of the earth.” Toward this eventful hour, time, from the first dawn of light, began to flow in one rising, swelling tide, here it came to its fulness, and hence it began to bend its awful course to lose itself in eternity again. Toward this, as to their common central point, all the powers of nature are attracted; from this, as from the sun, the central light of the universe, glory is in all directions diffused. In the birth of this wonderful child; all the children of men who lived before, or who arose after it, have a serious, an everlasting concern. Is it any wonder, then, that by so many signs in heaven and signs on earth, that by the tongues of prophets, the decrees of princes, the

revolution of empires, the descent of angels, the finger of God should have pointed it out to mankind? The evangelist, at the beginning of the chapter, conveys us to Rome, the proud and puissant mistress of the world; the enslaver of the nations, sinking, sunk herself into slavery. From what particular motive we are not informed, nor is it of much importance to determine, Augustus Caesar thought proper to issue a decree for making an exact enrollment of all the subjects of his vast empire. A vainglorious monarch, who could exultingly call a subjugated hemisphere his own, might be prompted by pride to ascertain the number of slaves destined to obey him. As it was the boast of this magnificent prince that he had found Rome a city of bricks, and was leaving it a city of marble, the splendor of the capital was no doubt extracted out of the ruins of the provinces, and enrollment probably was intended to precede taxation. However it was, and on whomsoever beside the decree of the emperor fell, it affected one little, poor family in circumstances of singular delicacy, and fell upon it with uncommon severity. Behold the messenger of Caesar at the door of an obscure carpenter at Nazareth of Galilee, summoning him with all his family to repair to his native city, to be enrolled in their proper district: and as the commandments of kings require haste, and do not always stoop to consult the feelings of the humble and the miserable, he must depart on a moment's warning, with his companion, now in the last week of pregnancy, poor and unprovided, to a home from which be had been long exiled, and to visit kinsmen to whom he had become a stranger. But this removal was wholly ordered by the supreme will of Heaven. The Son of David, who was to re-establish his throne, could be born nowhere but in Bethlehem the city of David. Thus the great Ruler of the world had willed, and thus prophecy had declared. And thus Caesar was merely the unconscious, unintentional minister of the Son of Mary; furnishing a link to the chain of evidence respecting the truth and divine original of Christianity, and exhibiting an illustrious instance of the sovereign control which the great Jehovah possesses and exercises over the counsels of princes, the convulsion of nations, the fate of worlds.

We hasten from proud Rome to humble Nazareth, from a haughty despot to uncomplaining sufferers, from unfeeling power to patient submission. Behold that delicate woman, in the most delicate and interesting of all female situations, forced from home, constrained to undertake a painful and anxious journey in a condition which rendered ease, and attention, and tenderness, and the accommodations of sympathy, peculiarly desirable. See her advancing by slow and distressing stages towards the residence of her forefathers, once illustrious, but now fallen into decay; to the city of her ancestors, but not to receive the attendance of royal state, not to usher into the world the heir of David's throne, amidst the prayers, and expectations, and kind wishes of the myriads of Israel: no, not so much as to enjoy the consolation and support which even the poor enjoy in such a case, to deposit the solicitude of approaching child-birth in the bosom of a fond mother, or sympathizing friend; alas, not even to partake of the ordinary conveniences which a traveller has reason to expect, the general hospitality, and mercenary comforts of an inn:--but to know the heart of a stranger, to swallow down the bitterness of neglect, to feel the insult of the proud, and the merciless pity of the mean. "There was no room for them in the inn." Bethlehem was crowded with guests, but lo, the lineal heirs of the royal house of Judah, in the city of David, are so unconnected, so forlorn, so friendless, that not a door will open to let them in, not a tongue say, "God relieve you" as they pass by; and so poor that an apartment in the stable is all the accommodation which, by intreaty, or promise, or by presenting the face of misery, they are able to purchase. The inevitable hour, to which nature at once looks with hope and shrinks from with horror, overtakes her; and unsupported, unassisted, as it should seem, she brings forth her

first-born son; and is able at once to perform the earliest duties of a mother, “she wrapped him in swaddling clothes,” and with the humility and resignation becoming that destitute condition, “laid him in the manger,” leaving it to Providence to unveil its own secret counsels and accomplish its own gracious purposes. And thus the Savior of the world entered upon that state of depression, poverty, and suffering, which terminated only with his life. But the affectingly humiliating scene in the stable at Bethlehem of Judah is relieved by the glory of the Lord shining round about it. That Babe neglected, unknown, despised, outcast of men, is declared, by the concurring testimony of patriarchs and prophets, of angels and men, by the shaking of the heavens and the earth, of the sea and the dry land, to be “the Son of the Highest.” His parentage, his name, the time and place of his birth, the condition of his infant hours have all the seal of heaven upon them. For what end did Isaiah prophesy, Alexander conquer, and Augustus give laws, but to point out to the world the instant, the spot, the descent, the estate in which the Son of God assumed our nature, in order to enter on the work of our redemption?

Preparation is making in another quarter of the globe, to bring a tribute of praise to the Redeemer of mankind. The East is ready to contribute its gifts, is preparing its gold and frankincense and myrrh to lay them at his feet. The wise men of distant nations, occupied in the study of nature, and attentive to the signs of the times, are awaked to inquiry by a silent but shining monitor. The appearance of the starry heavens was well known to them, they can calculate the distances and revolutions of each little star that sparkles in the expanse of heaven; but in a moment all their science is confounded, all their experience is overthrown, by the appearance of a new created light, in motion and at rest by a law peculiar to itself, to fulfill a transitory indeed, but a most important purpose, and which having pointed to “the place where the young child lay,” is blotted out of nature, and disappears for ever.

Now none of “these things were done in a corner.” Christianity did not steal in upon the world, without warning; all characters and descriptions of men were called in to give testimony to it, and without acquaintance, concurrence, or co-operation they establish the same truth. The eastern Magi on their arrival at Jerusalem, and on explaining the reason of their journey thither, are not treated as visionaries, who dreamed of things that never existed, but are listened to and respected as reasonable men inquiring after important truth. The attention of Herod, and of all Jerusalem with him, is roused; that jealous and sanguinary tyrant, takes every precaution, sets on foot every inquiry that his reigning passions could suggest, to elucidate the case; to secure possession to himself, and to crush every rival.--He summons the chief priests and scribes of the people, consults them respecting the determinations of prophecy, as to the birth-place of the expected King of the Jews, he compares their opinion with the report of the wise men, and acts upon the result of that comparison. A coincidence of persons and circumstances so striking, and all relating to one person and one point, must lead to the acknowledgment and adoration of that God, in whose hand are the hearts of princes, the deliberations of councils, the number and motions of all the host of heaven. “He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names; great is our Lord and of great power; his understanding is infinite.” Augustus Caesar, Herod, the Magi, the Jewish Sanhedrim, the inhabitants of Bethlehem, of Jerusalem, all concur to give witness to yonder Babe laid in a manger, and they involuntarily assist in demonstrating the certainty of those things wherein ye have been instructed: that ye might have strong consolation in having fled for refuge to the hope set before you. But higher testimony still than that of the potentates of the earth

is given to the Lord of glory. Angels descend with songs to meet him at his coming: the gloom of night is dispelled by celestial radiance; silence, well-pleased, hears the sweet melody of angelic notes chanting the glad tidings of great joy, “unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” The harmony of a thousand heavenly voices in chorus join to celebrate the advent of the Prince of Peace; to announce to a slumbering world Him in whose light they shine, by whose power they are supported, in whose praise they unite, to whose will they are devoted. What a wonderful contrast! A deserted, friendless mother, a helpless infant, a stable, a manger! What humiliation like this humiliation! A throne above the heavens, the homage of princes, the effulgence of a star to mark the way to his cradle, the adoration of the glorious host of heaven, the arm of the Lord revealed! What design but the salvation of a lost world, what event but the birth of a Savior, what person but the Son of God, could warrant all this display of majesty and might? Christian, keep these astonishing extremes continually in sight. This is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; “as children are partakers of flesh and blood, he likewise himself also took part of the same; verily, he took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham. In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people; for in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.” The subject teaches us,

1. How incompetent judges we are of the ways and works of God. Few events if any, correspond to our preconceived opinions of them. From the glimmering that we have, without any light at all save the sparks of our own kindling, we take upon us to arrange and decide, and to limit the holy one of Israel. Like Naaman the Syrian, we have settled the mode of cure in our own mind, dressed it in proper parade and ceremony, and fall out with the prophet because the simplicity of the process confounds the airy vision with which our imagination had amused itself. Not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God, the carnal Jews had dressed out, for Messiah the prince, a throne like Solomon’s, of ivory overlaid with gold, had placed him at the head of armies, had surrounded him with guards, had crowned him with laurels. When the event belied their groundless expectations, with Naaman they turned away in a rage, saying,” Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?” “Away with this man, crucify him, not this man but Barabbas.”

2. Observe here in how many instances God writeth vanity on all the glory of man. In the pride of their hearts, the princes and potentates here mentioned, vainly imagined a prostrate world to be all their own. Every will must bend to theirs; to their pleasure every power and possession must minister; all the while they are the mere attendants on the royal state of the real Prince. Their names are indeed some of them still had in remembrance but their power is annihilated, their consequence is swallowed up, or if any remain, it is derived from the relation which it bears to the superior, the commanding, the undiminished importance of Him to whom they gave witness, and whose state, in spite of themselves, they continue to support. The empire of Augustus speedily fell under its own weight, and the downfall of Rome quickly followed that of Jerusalem, and both approved the truth, and power, and justice of God: while that child born, that Savior given, holds undivided empire, and exercises unbounded sway. Eighteen centuries have confirmed, not shaken his authority, and time has discovered another hemisphere, far more extensive than the former, and added it to his dominion. Let us again sing, “His name shall endure for ever. His name shall be

continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doth wondrous things; and blessed be his glorious name for ever, and let the whole earth be filled with his glory." Amen and amen.

Augustus, in the pride of his heart, and an abject world in flattery to him, prefixed his name to the age in which he lived--and let this piece of vanity have its scope. With the classical, philosophic scholar, let the Augustan age boast of a Cicero, a Virgil, a Livy, a Maecenas; the humble Christian will rather glory in its having produced light from heaven, which eclipsed all human eloquence and wisdom in their highest splendor, and, resigning to the schools their favorite historians, orators, and poets, will rejoice in revolving in their place the hallowed page of Luke, the beloved physician, and in listening to the fervid, native, inartificial eloquence of Paul of Tarsus, and above all, in attending to the dignified wisdom which flowed from the lips of Him who "spake as never man spake."

3. Finally, this wonderful child born teaches us the value and importance of little children. What human sagacity could penetrate the thick cloud which shrouded his nativity? What but the spirit of prophecy could draw aside the veil which concealed his future eminence? Who but a Simeon could discern in him the salvation of God, and foretell that this child was set for the tall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which should be spoken against?" And who but He who "declareth 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; who but He knows what the infant, now drawing its first breath, is one day to become? What dormant powers may there he hid! What a germ of wisdom ready to expand! What godlike faculties, which are at length to astonish, to delight, to bless mankind! Watch over the expansion. The precious seed is sown by the hand of the Creator. Mark its springing: mark its progress. God has done his part, parent, master, minister, see that thou dost thine. "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." The next Lecture will have for its subject the history of the infancy and childhood of Jesus Christ. May he who condescended to become a little child for our sakes; who, as He "went about doing good," encouraged the approach of little children, saying, "suffer them and forbid them not to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of God:" may he bless us with the spirit of adoption, and endow us with the lovely simplicity, the docility, the submissiveness of little children, that we may enter into the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

122. Jesus Christ--Childhood

Jesus Christ--Childhood And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. Luk 2:40. Of all the wonders presented to us in the world of nature, man is the greatest wonder to himself. His body dust of the ground, and moldering back to dust; reduced to the level of the beasts of the field; but that dust animated with the breath of life, a living soul, exalted to the rank of angels, an emanation from God himself. In him are blended, in a most wonderful manner, three distinct kinds of life, forming one glorious individual formed “after the image of Him who created him.” As the tree in the forest imperceptibly rises, increases from lowness and feebleness to stateliness and strength, and having attained full maturity imperceptibly decays, so the feeble infant gradually increases in stature, changes the groveling into the erect form, rears his head to the vault of heaven, exulting in the greatness of his strength; he begins to verge towards decay, he bends to the ground from whence he was taken, and at length sinks into it again. But he is not like the plant riveted to one spot, unconscious of existence, incapable of self-motion. With the other animals around him he feels himself among his fellows, he rejoices in society, he possesses consciousness, he is directed by motives, he aims at a determinate end. But he is not, like the beasts that perish, impelled by instinct merely, the slave of appetite and sense. To the animal, the goodness of the Creator has superadded the rational life, the faculty of contemplating that great universe of which he constitutes a part so essential, the capacity of rising from the effect to the cause, from the work to the Author: Man enjoys the gift of speech, whereby he is rendered capable of communicating his reflections and reasonings, of forming combinations of power which awe, control, and direct the subject world. To mark the progress of a human being is an interesting and delightful employment; to observe how the limbs acquire firmness and strength, how the mental powers unfold themselves, and all the passions of the man, in succession, stand confessed. See the fond mother bending with delight over her infant, at first a little pliant lump of animated clay, every power lying dormant save one, that of drawing its nourishment from her breast. By and by the eye begins to feel and follow the light, the slender neck strengthens and sustains the reclining head; the babe smiles, and the parent’s heart is overwhelmed with joy. Now he can distinguish the face of her that suckles him from that of a stranger, at least she flatters herself he can, while the soft murmur of infantine satisfaction expresses his gratitude. The figure by degrees becomes erect, every limb is in motion, the uncertain tongue attempts to imitate the sounds which strike the opening ear, and the feet press downward to the supporting earth; tremblingly he totters into walking, and stammers into speech. The powers of recollection and comparing appear, the symptoms of passion become visible, love and aversion, desire and gratitude. The moral sense at length begins to dawn, and the man in miniature finds himself a limited, dependent, subject, accountable being; hence hope and fear, self-complacency and remorse.

We are this evening to contemplate infancy and childhood in their loveliest and most attractive form, and in their most interesting and affecting circumstances. Look yet again to Bethlehem of Judea, and behold the nothingness of human greatness; the offspring of kings a stranger in his

paternal city, the heir of David without a place where to lay his head, a Sovereign destitute of all things. When God, at the fulness of time, sent forth his own Son, as he was made of a woman, so was he “made under the law,” subjected to all its rites and restraints however painful and humiliating, and the Savior of mankind, that he might fulfill all righteousness, and become a perfect pattern of obedience, first passively submitted to every ordinance of religion, and then by an active and exact conformity, magnified the law and made it honorable. The minuter circumstances of this period of our blessed Lord’s life are not left on record; those excepted which relate to his public character and divine mission, for as to these Scripture is most exact and particular. Of the progress of his infant mind no traces remain; not a word is said even of the beauty of his person; though the general terms which the evangelists employ warrant us in thinking, that never in child born of a woman did such early dawning of superior wisdom appear, that never was human form so perfect. The modest reserve of the historians of Jesus Christ, in this respect, seems to minister a severe reproof of the ridiculous details to be found, in modern biography, of infantine actions and sayings, the supposed prognostics of future eminence and distinction. We can forgive a fond mother, nay love her the more for the amiable weakness, when we hear her repeat the pretty sayings, interpret the significant looks, and describe the wonderful deeds of her soul’s darling; but it excites pity, if not an ungentler feeling, to be told gravely, from the press, of the insipid nothings which a great man said and did, when he was an ignorant and silly, perhaps a pert and petulant boy, who probably merited correction where he obtained praise. Of our divine Master we are told what was done to him, not what he did; what was said by others concerning him, not what he said concerning either himself or others. And thus was he early an instructer of parents to abstain from partial and excessive admiration of their children; and to little children to cultivate that modesty, docility, and humbleness of mind, which are the real ornament and honor of their tender age. Behold in him then, parents, children, a helpless infant at the disposal of others. It is of importance to the world to know that, at the appointed period, the terms of the Abrahamic covenant were complied with; that the name of Jesus was given him, according to the direction of the angel; that as the first-born of his mother, being sacred to God, he was solemnly presented to the Lord in the temple at Jerusalem; for these things admonish us of the divine truth and faithfulness in keeping covenant and promise with his people, and of the right which he has to expect and require faithfulness and obedience on their part; of the character and offices annexed to that sacred, precious, and venerable name, and of the self-dedication which not the first-born only, but even all owe unto God. On the eighth day, then, he was circumcised, and named, according to the commandment, and on the fortieth day he was presented with the accustomed offering in the temple.

Providence lays hold of this latter occasion to procure a noble testimony to the high rank and character of the Son of God. The spirit of prophecy had lately revived, and many in Jerusalem were “waiting for the consolation of Israel,” and considered it as near at hand. Of this number was a just and devout man named Simeon, to whom it was communicated by a special revelation, that, old as he was, his eyes should not be closed in death, till he had seen the Lord’s Christ. Heaven-directed he goes up to the temple, probably to entreat the speedy accomplishment of this gracious promise at the very instant when the ceremony of the law was performing, and the spirit that was upon him instantly points to Jesus as the fulfilling of the word in which God had caused him to hope. Filled with holy joy he takes the expected child into his arms, and lifting up his eyes to heaven, blesses God, saying, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy

word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel." He then points him out to the bystanders as the person spoken of by ancient prophecy, "who should be set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which should be spoken against;" a prediction descriptive of the reception the Messiah should meet with from that world which he came to redeem. The same important truth is immediately confirmed by an ancient prophetess, who, coming in the instant Simeon had done speaking, gave public thanks likewise unto the Lord, and "spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem."

Thus He, whose birthplace was determined many ages before, by prophetic illumination, whose natal hour was announced by one angel, and celebrated by a multitude of the heavenly host: to whose feet a company of shepherds is led, with their simple offering, by a voice from heaven, and to whom eastern seas are conducted by an extraordinary star, is in the most public place of resort in the Jewish metropolis, declared aloud, a few weeks after his birth, at a public religious service, by testimony on testimony, the accomplishment of God s great purpose of mercy to mankind.

While so many illustrious personages were producing their concurring evidence to the truth as it is in Jesus, exalting him to endless honors and universal dominion, one is cruelly plotting his destruction. Agitated by jealousy as groundless, as it was barbarously pursued, Herod determines to crush at once this pretender to a throne, whom so many signal and splendid appearances in heaven and earth were striving to display in superior glory. To make sure of his blow, his dark remorseless mind enlarges the circle of suspicion from a few days to two years, and from a single feared, hated individual, to all the male children of a great city. Humanity sickens at the thought of the dreadful tragedy of that day, when "in Rama a voice was heard, lamentation and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted, because they are not." By aiming at too much, the tyrant misses his aim altogether. The vigor of his pursuit exerted in one direction, confined to one object, might have overtaken it; but extending the sphere, dividing the pursuit, "the captive of the mighty is taken away, and the prey of the terrible is delivered, for thus saith the Lord, I will contend with him that contendeth with thee." And how was this deliverance effected? Providence employs not extraordinary means, to fulfill its designs, wantonly and unnecessarily, but makes ordinary instruments to produce mighty events. The bloody intention of Herod is hardly conceived in the gloomy hell of his own breast than it is seen of that eye which nothing can escape, and no sooner is it seen than prevented. In a dream, in a vision of the night when deep sleep falleth on men Joseph is admonished of the danger which threatened the child's life, and warned to shun it, by fleeing into Egypt. Thus at every stage of his life was the Savior of mankind hated and persecuted of men; thus the all-wise Ruler of the universe knows how to deliver, and finds a way to escape; thus He "confounds the wisdom of the wise, and brings to nought the understanding of the prudent." By a strange, perhaps unaccountable direction of the supreme will, the land of Egypt frequently serves as an asylum to persecuted goodness, protects and cherishes the precious seed of the church. Thither Abraham flees from the pressure of famine, and is thence dismissed with riches and honor. Here Joseph finds refuge from the malice of jealous and cruel brothers; from hence Jacob and his starving family are repeatedly fed. Here sprung up Moses, in times of extreme danger and distress; here he was miraculously preserved, and reared to unexampled eminence and usefulness. Here Israel miraculously increases into a great nation, and from hence triumphantly departs; and here, finally, he whom all the rest

prefigured, and in whom their several glory united as in their center, sought and found protection from the rage of an incensed king. This too was ordered of Him who seeth the end from the beginning. He went down into Egypt that in his return the Scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, “out of Egypt have I called my Son.” Surely, O Lord, the wrath of man shall praise thee, and the remainder of wrath thou “shalt restrain.” A vail is drawn over the sojourn in Egypt, and it were presumption to attempt to draw it aside: neither is it possible exactly to ascertain its duration. The infamous Herod meanwhile paid the debt of Nature, leaving behind him a name loaded with the execrations of the age in which he lived, and with the detestation of every future generation to which the history of his enormities shall descend. His death was the signal of return to the land of Israel; but prudence suggested the retirement of the poor and despised town of Nazareth, as a residence more suitable to the circumstances of the times than the noise and hurry of a metropolis, the seat of fiction and intrigue, or the suspiciously observed city of David, to which the jealous eyes of successive tyrants had been attracted by well known prophecies and by recent portents. As the place of Christ’s birth, so that of his up-bringing was prophetically marked, not indeed by any particular text that appears in the sacred code, but by its whole spirit and tenor, which represent him as voluntarily submitting to every species of reproach and indignity; the carpenter’s son, a Galilean, a Nazarene, can any good come out of Nazareth! It was in this obscure village, of a region of a conquered country, proverbially contemptible, that the childhood of Christ passed unseen, unnoticed of the great world; but carefully observed of an attentive mother, who, to the tender solicitudes of that relation, was inspired with hopes, and animated with prospects, and torn with anxieties which no mother before or since ever could know; there this wonderful “child grew and waxed strong inspirit, filled with wisdom,” exhibiting unequivocal signs of a superior nature, without courting the public notice, or attracting premature homage; and thus humility, from the beginning and throughout, marked the character of the condescending friend of mankind, who became of no reputation, sought not glory of man, took on him the form of a servant; he “strives not, nor cries, neither doth he lift up his voice in the streets;” and from the return out of Egypt, which was probably not beyond his second year, up to the twelfth, history is entirely silent as to the particulars--but O how much is conveyed in the strong general terms employed by inspiration, to impress on our hearts the discovery and progress of these veiled ten years. May not the history of them be one of the precious mysterious secrets. which “the Father hath kept in his own power,” and reserved for the information, wonder, and joy of an improved state of existence, when things hard to be understood shall be fully explained; and things known in part shall be unfolded in all their connections and dependencies; and infinite intelligence shall supply all the deficiencies of human understanding.

It was in that fameless village, and in those trackless years that the foundation was laid of a greatness which should eclipse all created glory; of a kingdom that should swallow up every other; of an enterprise which should extend its influence to the remotest ages of eternity. The next Lecture will, if God permit, take up the next recorded period of our Savior’s history, his assuming for a moment a public character at the age of twelve years, and his sliding away from it again into silence and retirement, till his thirtieth year, the time of his final manifestation unto Israel, as the great “Prophet that should come into the world.” Shall I degrade my subject, by saying it suggests to parents many useful hints respecting the early treatment of their children? Be as tender and attentive as you will; listen to the voice of nature and learn your duty; but dream not of making a stranger bend the knee to your idol, perhaps he has an idol of his own, weak, silly, and ridiculous

as yours; perhaps he sees nothing but impertinence and imperfection, where you behold only grace and loveliness, and the more you force your Dagon upon his attention, the more hideousness and deformity he will discover in it. Be not eager to bring forward the accomplishments of your child. If they are worthy of being seen, your reserve and the child's modesty will give a glow to the coloring which will strike every eye and please every heart. If they be trivial, why will you force a good-natured looker-on, to flatter your vanity at the expense of his own judgment; or provoke a stern and severe one, to approve his sincerity and truth at the expense of your feeling and of your idol's fancied importance? In private let the person most dear to you, be most dear to you; in society, the darling object, the first in consideration and affection, ought to be the last in respect of attention. Be not over anxious about an early crop from your offspring. You may have the fruit, it is true, by means of vehement cultivation, a little earlier in the season, but it savours of the artificial heat that hurried it forward; the tree is wasted and fades before the time; and at the proper season, when nature is clothing the vigorous plant with its golden harvest, the languid child of art stands lifeless and leafless, expiring before its time. There is always danger from a premature spring, though it be in the course of nature. Happy is the man who can hit the temperate mean betwixt indecent haste and indolent delay. I would address a few words, to the same effect, to advanced childhood and early youth. But childhood and youth are not disposed to attend serious Lectures, or do not understand, or disbelieve, and therefore do not attend to them. They must be left to the forcible, the irresistible lessons of experience. I earnestly recommend them to the teaching of God's good spirit. May the Son of God, who vouchsafed for our sake to pass through infancy and childhood poor, neglected, unknown, guard our helpless infants, direct our thoughtless, wayward children, counsel and instruct manly, matured reason, and smile with complacency on the hoary head, and make it a crown of righteousness. And to God in Christ be ascribed immortal praise. Amen.

123. Jesus Christ--Adolescence

Jesus Christ--Adolescence

Luk 2:41-52. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem, after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

Universal Nature is progress, succession, and change. We observe it in everything around us, we feel it in every particle of our own frame. But obvious as this progression is, in its larger portions, the minuter details defy the closest attention of the acutest eye. Darkness has evidently given place to light; but what vigilance of inspection could ascertain the precise instant when night ceased and light began to dawn! That plant is palpably increased in strength and size, but let me hang over it the livelong day, with the unremitting penetration of an eagle's eye, and I am incapable of catching a single step of the progress. Shade melts imperceptibly into shade; the transition is made, but we were not aware of it; whether we be asleep or awake, careless or attentive, the great complex machine keeps in motion, performs its revolution, produces its effect.--The progress of man, the most perfect of all creatures that we are acquainted with, is the most interesting of all objects to man. If it be delightful to behold the trees of the forest burst into verdure, and those of the garden putting on their beautiful garments, and changing that beauty into fruitfulness; if it be pleasant to behold the springing corn multiply thirty, sixty, a hundred fold; to behold the flocks and herds increase--what must it be to behold the image of God multiplied on the earth, the human form divine rear itself toward heaven, the powers of thought and reason expand.

----By degrees,

The human blossom blows; and every day,

Soft as it rolls along, shows some new charm,

Then infant reason grows apace, and calls

For the kind hand of an assiduous care.

Delightful task! to rear the tender thought,

To teach the young idea how to shoot,

To pour the fresh instructions o’er the mind,

To breathe th’ enlivening spirit, and to fix

The generous purpose in the glowing breast.

Thomson’s Spring, l. 1143. But this, like every other human delight, is blended with pain. Even the partiality of parental affection is constrained to observe rank and noisome weeds springing up with the delicate seeds of goodness; the dawning of reason is obscured by the clouds of folly and vice, and the promise of a golden harvest is blighted in early spring, by late frost or premature heat. Before we are well awake to the joy of some newly discovered excellency, we are overwhelmed with the distress of perceiving some glaring imperfection, or ungracious propensity: and where we love and rejoice, there also we find cause to lament and condemn. The spirit of God has seen meet to present the world with one perfect model, for the instruction of every age of human life. We have held it up in a state of infantine beauty, simplicity, and gentleness, a passive example of subjection to poverty, and danger, and persecution; but we have seen the meanness and obscurity of that state relieved by the decided attention of eternal Providence, and by the voluntary homage of angels and men. On returning from Egypt, Jesus was carried to the obscure village of Nazareth, and the vail is drawn over him till his twelfth year, when he was pleased to clothe himself for a little while with majesty, and then disappeared, till the time of his final manifestation to the world, as the Savior of it. The law obliged every male of Israel to appear before the Lord in the place which he had chosen to put his name there, three times every year, at the three great feasts of passover, pentecost, and tabernacles. This was evidently intended to maintain a good correspondence between all the members of the commonwealth, by the social intercourse, the innocent festivity, and the devotional exercises which these solemnities promoted.

Joseph and the mother of Jesus, though the injunction extended not to females, were in the habit of regularly attending the service of the temple on those occasions; and Jesus, another “Nazarite to God from his mother’s womb,” accompanied them to the holy place. Self-evident marks of the favor of heaven were already upon him. “He grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom.” Expressions importing uncommon comeliness of person, and superior powers of understanding; but in Him, as in other children, we behold a gradual progression from knowledge to knowledge, as from stature to stature. For as nature conceals from us at what moment she unites the immortal mind to the mortal frame, so the Holy Spirit has thought proper to conceal at what season, and in what measure, Deity was pleased to unite himself to the human nature of the Redeemer; and let us not over-curiously seek, “to know the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power.” Neither the lovely form, nor the attractive goodness, nor the excellent wisdom, however, of this wonderful child, seem to have roused much attention, or commanded uncommon respect. The world is captivated not by real and solid worth, but by the gaudy outside of showy, superficial qualities. Rank and riches spread a glare over the person of their possessor, that makes it known and remembered: they add weight to his most ordinary sayings, which gives them currency and importance; while poverty, like a bushel put over a candle, prevents it, however clear it may be, from giving its light. What carnal mind can reconcile the idea of great and distinguished

qualities with that of the carpenter's son! No, "He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." In those stated journeys to Jerusalem, it was customary for many families of the same neighborhood, or of the same kindred, to travel in company. The road was sweetened and shortened by friendly communication, and religion strengthened the bands of friendship and the ties of blood. Were there no other reason but this to press upon the heart the importance of attendance on the ordinances of God's house, that it serves to strengthen the bond of nature between husband and wife, parent and child, one neighbor and another, it were enough to recommend it to everyone who prizes the comfort of the life that now is; how much more, when there are involved in it, all the infinitely more important interests of that which is to come! Happy are those societies in which the powers of a world to come are so felt, as to shed a sweetening, cheering, enlivening influence over present connections, enjoyments, and pursuits. The solemnities of the feast being ended, all prepare to return to their respective homes and their usual employments. Thus wisely and mercifully, He who knows what is in man makes devotion, labor, and rest; alternately to recommend, to relieve, and to support each other. A perpetual sabbath would soon prove the death of religion; under uninterrupted labor the man would quickly sink; rest protracted beyond a certain bound would prove destructive of all repose. But to the heart in which the love of God is shed abroad, the painful toil of the week is mitigated and diminished by the prospect of the day of sacred intermission, of heavenly communication; and the calm, satisfying delights of the Lord's day, bestowing ease on the body, and composure on the mind, serve as a restorative toward undertaking and undergoing the fatigues of another week. The numerousness of the company which travelled back to Nazareth prevented its being observed that one was wanting, and a complete day's journey is performed, before the eager, attentive eye of even a mother, misses its darling object. How is this to be accounted for? The whole train was a band of brothers, of one heart and of one soul; in whatever part of it the child was, behind or before, he was encompassed with friends: other children of twelve years old need attention, protection, and support, but he has given many unequivocal proofs of a wisdom capable of conducting himself. The time is now come that his mother herself must learn with whom she had to do, and to revere in her own son, the Son of the Highest. All was of God, who thus prepared the way for another public declaration of the great Prophet who should come into the world, and that not by the tongue of an archangel, nor by a multitude of the heavenly host, but by the mouth of Jesus himself; into whose lips grace was poured and praise perfected. It is easier to conceive than to describe the sorrow and anxiety occasioned by the discovery that, Jesus was not in the train. The shades of night spread over the soul of a mother the terror of evil beasts, of evil men; of hunger and cold, of missing the road, and of all the nameless apprehensions which solicitous parents feel for unprotected youth and innocence. Nothing remains but to tread back their weary, anxious steps, and the close of the second day sees them enter Jerusalem, with the mixed emotions of hope and despondency; and another sleepless night succeeds the painful day. The third day, well knowing the zeal which he had for God's house, they repair betimes to the temple: they find him; think, O mothers, with what astonishment and delight, in health, safety, and composure; and, gracious heaven! how employed? "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions." Painters and commentators seem to have entirely mistaken this passage of our Savior's history. They place him in the center, in the chief seat, assuming authority, instructing gray hairs. The evangelist places him in the modest seat of a pupil, a pattern to children of twelve, of docility, of humility, of meekness; carefully listening to the

questions proposed to him by the public teachers, and answering with deference and submission, though with intelligence and decision; and proposing, in his turn, questions that led to important truth and really useful knowledge, not such as displayed the acuteness of him who interrogated, or that aimed at exposing him of whom the answer was demanded. In truth, ever since I could read and understand the words of the historian, I have considered this little anecdote of our blessed Lord, as of singular importance in his character, as the great teacher of mankind. The age of twelve is an interesting crisis in human life. The rational soul is then shaking off the child, and emerging into the man. There is about that period, knowledge enough to minister fuel to vanity and self-conceit, but not enough to discern ignorance and folly; there is learning sufficient to tease and perplex, but not to attract and conciliate affection. And did it please thee, meek and condescending Jesus, to instruct that wayward season of existence, when youth begins to feel the force of example, to blush at petulance, to be influenced by honest shame and honest praise, that season when the heart is awake, alive all over to the bitterness of censure, or to the sweets of approbation? Yes, and we see in thee with wonder and joy the happy medium between the firmness of conscious wisdom, and the forwardness of assumed superiority between the meekness and gentleness which are the inseparable concomitants of real ability, and the self-sufficiency which betrays want of talents, supporting itself by extravagance of claim. That this is the just view of our blessed Lord's conduct is evident from the effect which it produced. You need not be told of the jealousy of aged and professional men. Not a doctor in the temple but would have felt and resented the mortifying superiority of a child, had that superiority been ostentatiously displayed; but his whole deportment excited only admiration and love; his understanding was equaled only by his affability and condescension; he at once instructs his teachers and gains their goodwill; "all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers."

If strangers were thus moved by a mild display of early, unaffected wisdom, what must a parent have felt, whose heart but a moment before was throbbing with anguish unutterable? How happy is she to acknowledge such a son, the delight of every eye, the theme of every tongue. But even Mary, the mother of Jesus, is weak and imperfect, she speaks unadvisedly with her lips, she presumes to mingle upbraiding and reproach with expressions of endearment and exultation; she has forgotten from whence she received him, the character given him of the angel before he was conceived in the womb, the sacred names which he bore, the testimony which God had so repeatedly given to his beloved Son; she addresses him, all-wonderful as he was, as if he had been merely an ordinary child, who had thoughtlessly and wantonly rambled away from his parents, and had given them unnecessary trouble and pain, He whose every word, every action had an important meaning and design.--"Son," says she, "why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." And now the answer of Christ to this question unfolds the great end which he had in view, through the whole transaction. It was time for him to assert his divine original; and the meekest and most submissive of all children stands, invested with divine majesty, "how is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business!" or, as it might perhaps with greater propriety have been rendered, "in my Father's house."

What a lesson is conveyed to the world in this reply! Sacred is the authority of a mother over a son of twelve years of age, but there is an authority still more sacred, of which a child even of that age

may be sensible. When the honor of God is concerned, the voice of nature must be suppressed. When the voice of Heaven calls, the decencies and civilities of life must give place, and all secondary obligations and considerations must be swallowed up of the first. He silently endured the reproach of being called the carpenter's son by strangers, but his own mother must denominate him what he is, and what she knew him to be. But reproof of a parent must be insinuated, not brought directly forward; and here again the pattern is perfect; delicacy and firmness unite to spare the mother, yet reprove the offence; and whatever were the other questions and answers of this celebrated conference, those which are on record will remain an everlasting monument of the perfect union of wisdom and harmlessness, which distinguished the Son of God from every other. The Sun, having shone forth in this temporary effulgence, again hid its face in clouds, and submitted to an eclipse of eighteen years longer; He divested himself of all authority; He sought not glory from man; He became of no reputation; glory took on him the form of a servant. "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them;" and by this voluntary humiliation of himself, by this retreat into the shade, more than by ten thousand precepts and arguments, He has inculcated the practice of humility on his disciples. A few short words contain the history of many years, even so, holy Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight; "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." Let us not presume to draw aside the vail which infinite wisdom has spread, nor seek to be wise above what is written, these things the angels desire to look into, and some of these things, though now they are hidden from us, we may be permitted to know hereafter.

About the period of this passover, when Christ was showing himself in the temple after this extraordinary manner, as the Son of God, Augustus Caesar, the emperor of Rome, dies, and is succeeded in the throne by Tiberius. About six years after, Josephus, called Caiaphas, was made high priest of the Jews, through the partial favor of Valerius Gratus, the Roman governor. Towards the end of the twelfth year from that period, Pontius Pilate was sent into Palestine as procurator of Judea, in the room of Valerius Gratus, and John Baptist entered on the exercise of his public ministry. Those names are now stripped of all their glory; those stations are now fallen into disuse, those events are now stripped of all their importance, save what they derive from the relation which they bear to yonder Babe in the stable, that child in the midst of the doctors, that gentle, obscure, unassuming youth of Nazareth of Galilee. So differently do objects weigh when examined by the scale of the word, and tried by the balance of the sanctuary. In the next Lecture we will proceed, if God permit, to the history of Christ's baptism, and of the illustrious testimony then given from the most excellent glory to Jesus Christ, as God's well-beloved Son.

"Let us with Mary keep all these sayings in our heart." Let us, from the example of this pious pair, regularly attend the worship of God's house, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves as the manner of some is;" and thus shall we "go from strength to strength" till we appear before God in Zion. Let us carefully attend to the proper mode of treatment of children, suited to age, to capacity, to temper, and disposition. The discipline adapted to childhood is by no means suited to a more advanced state; and when the youth has become a man, and "put away childish things," he must be treated as a man. It is of importance to know when the stimulus, when the bridle is to be employed. What would overwhelm the timid, may prove hardly a curb to the headstrong; the slow of speech and understanding must not be urged into the speed of the acute and impetuous. Parents rejoice in a forward display of faculties in their children; they encourage it, and they not

seldom repent it. The opposite error is not common, and is therefore less an object of caution. The difficulties which daily present themselves, in managing the progress of the human mind, are frequently insurmountable by the ordinary powers of man, which therefore stand in need of the illumination of “wisdom from above;” “if any of you,” then, “lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”

Let the young be instructed how to rise into eminence and distinction. Covet not, pursue not premature honor and applause. Extorted praise is gratifying neither to the giver nor the receiver; a free-will offering of approbation is “twice blest; it blesseth him that gives, and him that takes.” Meditate on the familiar image, which, no doubt, has frequently been suggested to you: honor, like the shadow, pursues the flier, and flies from the pursuer. Demand less than your due, and men will be disposed to give you the more. My young friends, “be not children in understanding: howbeit, in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.”

124. Jesus Christ--His Baptism

Jesus Christ--His Baptism

Luk 3:21-23. Now, when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape, like a dove, upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased. And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Eli. The declared purpose of our evangelist, in undertaking to write this history, is that his most excellent friend Theophilus, and with him every lover of God and truth, “might know the certainty of those things wherein he had been instructed.” This “certainty” is demonstrable from the spirit which Christianity breathes, and from the external evidence by which its divine original was confirmed. The religion of Jesus Christ proves that it came down from heaven, from the Father of lights, by the character of the great Author and Finisher of our faith, by the example of all righteousness which he set, by the purity and heavenly-mindedness which he displayed and recommended, by the labors of mercy and love which he performed, by the sufferings which he patiently underwent, and by “the glory that followed.” To these Providence was pleased to super-add proofs that reach the understanding through the medium of sense; namely signal, supernatural, and frequently-repeated testimonies, exhibited in the presence of a cloud of witnesses, who produced a clear, concurring, consistent mass of evidence, respecting facts which fell under the personal observation of their own eyes and ears, and which were never contradicted nor even called in question. At this distance of time and place, the last mentioned species of evidence, that of external circumstances, must of necessity be transmitted to us through the channel of history, and its validity must rest on the veracity of the historian. The other sort of evidence is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever. This counsel approves itself to be of God, to the conviction of everyone who seriously examines it, at whatever distance of time and place, from its indelible characters, from the universality of the field which it embraces, and from the glorious and godlike end at which it aims: in a word, from its congeniality to the feelings, to the wishes, and to the wants of human nature. Had no prediction taught the world to expect a Deliverer; had no miracle declared Him the great Lord of the Universe; had no voice from Heaven proclaimed Him the beloved Son of God, He must have stood confessed, the predicted Emanuel, God with us, in his compassion to the miserable, in his patience with the froward, in his forbearance toward the evil and unthankful, in his clemency to the guilty. The gospel breathes “peace on earth and good will to men;” its unbounded liberality diffuses its influence over the whole world of mankind; its professed aim and end are to confer all possibly attainable happiness on every human being in the life which now is, and perfect and everlasting felicity in that which is to come. The object which Christianity proposes to itself is to reform, to purify, to exalt our fallen nature, by making us partakers of a divine nature; it is to rear the fabric of present and everlasting blessedness on the solid foundation of wisdom, truth, and virtue. It penetrates and pervades every principle of our nature, and enters completely into the detail of human life and conduct: it informs the understanding, melts the heart, overawes the conscience,

and brings the trembling, guilty, helpless, desponding creature unto God. If these are not the characters of a Revelation from the God and Father of all men, what characters are sufficient to produce belief? If the spirit and tendency of the Gospel work not conviction, the descent of an angel from heaven, or the return of one from the regions of the dead would be equally inefficacious. In this “doctrine according to godliness,” men and brethren, we behold genuine philosophy, not carelessly slumbering over fancied plans of improvement, not coldly suggesting ideas of reform, not bewildering herself in the peradventures of doubtful disputation, but philosophy alive, awake, and in action: philosophy doing good and diffusing happiness, the divine philosophy which brings God down to dwell with men upon earth, and which raises men from earth to heaven. In its great Author we behold not the sullen, supercilious recluse, looking with affected contempt on the weakness and ignorance of mankind, talking and arguing sagely, and effecting nothing; but the beneficent friend of man, mixing with society, looking with complacency on harmless enjoyment, stretching forth the hand to relieve distress, with patience and condescension instructing the ignorant, outrunning the expectations and even the desires of the humble, and over coming evil with good. At every period and in every condition of life, we behold Him, a perfect pattern of every possible excellence.

We have already contemplated the blessed Jesus in his original glory, before the world was, and in all the wonders of his humiliation to the level of humanity: we have beheld Him in all the affecting interest of infancy and childhood, born in a stable, laid in a manger, aimed at by the dagger of a ruffian, driven into exile, meekly retiring into obscurity, silently increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. From the age of twelve to thirty years, that is for more than half the period which He tabernacled among men, Providence has seen meet to withhold all traces of his history. Within the short space of about three years is comprised the detail of all the things which Jesus did, and taught, and suffered as the Savior of mankind. To this eventful era we are now brought forward, and we enter on the contemplation of it with mixed emotions of wonder, reverence, and joy.

Stand by, ye princes and potentates of the earth; the king of kings is about to make his public entry. What is the consecration of a prelate, the coronation of an emperor, the voice of a trumpet, the anointing with oil, compared to the majesty, solemnity, and importance of the scene displayed on the banks of the Jordan! Bend your heads and cover your faces, “ye angels that excel in strength,” He whom you are all commanded to worship is here. Behold he cometh from Nazareth of Galilee, to the baptism of John; the greater to be baptized by the less. Eighteen years hast thou now passed, Jesus of Nazareth! unseen, unknown, unregarded; under the humble appellation of the carpenter’s son, partaking perhaps of the labors of his occupation, faring simply, submitting to authority, unmortified by subjection to poverty, neglect, and reproach; and thus hast thou become a gentle and silent, but a severe reprover of the restlessness of ambition, of the thirst of distinction, of the impetuosity of appetite, of impatience of restraint. The Savior of the world, my friends, was pleased to pass through the successive stages of human life, that he might sanctify and instruct every age of man. He became an infant of days, that he might sanctify infancy, and stamp importance and respect upon it; he showed himself in the temple at the age of twelve, that he might sanctify, and instruct that more advanced period of life in the duty of frequenting the house of God, and of resorting to age, office, and experience for the lessons of wisdom. He advanced to maturity to sanctify, and instruct grown men to practice self-denial, self-government, to be content

with their lot, to repress inordinate desire, to aim at eminence by learning to become useful. “He that believeth shall not make haste.” He remained thus long in the shade, that He might teach his disciples to bear obscurity and retirement, and to cease from premature aspiring. He emerges at length into the light, the season of open and beneficial exertion being come, that he might correct a spirit of indolence, irresolution, and affected humility; and to tell every man, that he is sent into the world to act an important part, that he is entrusted with talents for the employment of which he is accountable, that God and his fellow-creatures have claims upon him which he must satisfy at his peril. The approach of Jesus to Jordan is perceived and announced by the Baptist. The spirit which enabled Simeon to discern the Savior in the person of a little child, when presented in the temple, now discloses to the eye of the Prophet, who came in the spirit and power of Elias, the same divine Person on the eve of entering upon his public ministry. He suspends for a moment the employment of teaching and baptizing the multitude, in which he was engaged, to point out to them “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” “As the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not; John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.”

John, at first, modestly declines the exercise of his office in a case so very extraordinary. Hitherto he had taught only the ignorant and vicious, and baptized only the impure, in the view of preparing them to receive the blessings of the approaching kingdom of heaven; self-righteous Pharisees, unbelieving, profligate Sadducees, rapacious publicans, seditious, violent, and discontented soldiers, such were the men who came to his baptism. But here the application is made by Him “who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his lips.” This, prophet as he was, confounds all the Baptist’s ideas of propriety, and he exclaims: “I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?” The reply of Christ unfolds his spirit, and conveys to us many a useful lesson: “Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.” Perfect purity can suffer no contamination from intercourse with the unclean; the impure pollute each other, and the contagion spreads. Conformity in things innocent and lawful is a duty imposed by things kindness, and regard to peace; dissent merely for the sake of dissent is a mixture of pride and bigotry, That may be admitted under peculiar circumstances, which is not to be drawn into a precedent, nor established as a general rule. A public character is concerned to study his own dignity and the propriety and consistency of his conduct. The question is not what he may do, but what it becomes him to do. “Things lovely and of good report” must be thought of together with things that are “true, honest, just, and pure.” It became Him to give public testimony to the baptism of John, the baptism of repentance, because it led directly to his own mission, and to the kingdom which he was about to establish in the world. It became him to put respect on every institution, ceremonial as well as moral, that had the sanction of divine authority, of general use, or of obvious utility. The ceremonial law required “divers washings,” and the immersion of the body in water was by no means a novel practice introduced by John, but transmitted through the succeeding ages of the legal dispensation, and compliance with it our Lord considers as part of “the fulfilling of all righteousness,” and therefore as incumbent on himself, being the great pattern of propriety. We find him, on another occasion, submitting to an arbitrary imposition, that he might not seem to give offence, in the matter of the tribute money, and performing a miracle rather than show disrespect to government. “Lest we should offend them,” says he to Peter, “go thou to the

sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee." Thus he not only "fulfilled," to an iota, "all righteousness," prescribed by the law, but submitted himself to the "ordinance of man, forthe Lord's sake." But there was a farther view in this solemn transaction. The Messiah must be publicly set apart to the execution of his high prophetic office, and He prefers the baptism of John as the mode of performing that august ceremony. He passes through the water into the reign of Grace; the kingdom of heaven was now come, and such was his humble entry into it. But this voluntary descent is to be immediately followed by a rise into glory which eclipses all the glory of this world. Samuel anointed Saul with a vial, and afterwards David with a horn of material oil: the Prince "upon the throne of David, of the increase of whose government and peace there should be no end," is anointed with the Holy Spirit. The numerous and sounding titles of earthly potentates are at their inauguration, proclaimed by sound of trumpet; the simple title of the King of kings, and Lord of lords is proclaimed by a voice from heaven. The eyes and ears of the spectators at once bear witness to the declaration of the Son of God. "It came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape, like a dove, upon him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." Painters have presumed to represent this descent of the Holy Ghost under the form of a material dove. The descending, hovering motion, not the bodily shape of that bird, is surely all that the expression in the evangelists conveys to the mind. As well might art attempt to paint the dazzling luster of flaming fire, or the sound of the voice that spake, or the motion of the splendid appearance which then filled the sky, as pretend to give precise and permanent form to an apparition of Deity, which, having fulfilled its purpose, passed away.

Thus, Christians, was consecrated to the noblest work-ever undertaken, the great "Prophet that should come into the world,"--"The Prince of the kings of the earth,"--"The Apostle and High Priest of our profession." God "also bearing witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost according to his own will." And thus was fulfilled the Scripture which saith: "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots: and 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; and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteous ness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins." And thus is the church of Christ founded upon a rock, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Is it unworthy of remark, that this testimony to the Son of God, from "the excellent glory," was given while he was praying? "As He prayed" also, on the mount of transfiguration, a similar testimony was exhibited, "There came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and there came a voice out of the cloud saying, This is my beloved Son; hear Him." Again, while Jesus prayed, "Father, glorify thy name;" the testimony from on high was repeated. "Then came there a voice from heaven saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." Such is the promptitude of intercommunication between earth and heaven. So rapidly ascend the breathings of a devout spirit to the throne of God; so swiftly descend the tokens of "good-will to men." "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." And if the

earnest prayer of an Elias had power to bind up the clouds of heaven for years together, and to smite a guilty land with thirst and famine; how much more powerful must be the prayer of the great Intercessor, that “in the wilderness waters may break out, and streams in the desert;” that “the parched ground may become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water!” Therefore also “men ought always to pray and not to faint.”

Here are the “Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.” “Who can by searching find out God: who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?” “Who is able to comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge?”

We have made no remark on the mode of baptism which John employed, because it might lead to controversy, which is unprofitable, to the neglect of practical “goodness,” which “is profitable unto all things.” “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” “Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother?” “Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth.” Let the spirit of the ordinance be chiefly attended to: wise and good men may very innocently differ about the form. “It is the spirit that quickeneth,” the outward form is of secondary importance.

Parents, have ye devoted your infant offspring to God, by the sprinkling with water? Remember the solemn engagements which you then voluntarily undertook to bring them up in the fear, “nurture, and admonition of the Lord.” Meditate frequently and seriously on the responsibility under which you are laid, to God, to your children, to the world. Your fellow-worshippers will witness against you, if you trifle with, if you neglect, if you corrupt your sacred charge. These young ones look up to you for protection, for instruction, for an example; they call upon you to fulfill your promise in their behalf. They ask bread of you; will you give them a stone? They ask a fish; will you give them a serpent? They look to you for the portion of goods that falleth to their share; not only “the meat which perisheth, but the meat which endureth unto everlasting life.” If you are unfaithful they are undone. On the other hand, “great is your reward” on earth, and still greater “your reward in heaven,” if you are honored to become their spiritual parents, as you are parents after the flesh ; if, after having introduced them into this world of nature, you are made the happy instruments of introducing them into the kingdom of God; if you and they together are at length added “to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,” through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and the “blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”

Young man, thou wert in early infancy, by the piety of affectionate parents, baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. The birth of nature bestowed on thee the name of thy Father after the flesh; when thou wert sprinkled with water, another name was prefixed to it, which continues to be thy distinctive appellation. Both were indeed imposed without thy consciousness or consent, but in both thou hast cheerfully acquiesced, perhaps they are a source of pride to thee. Even the acquisition of an estate will hardly induce a man of spirit to forego his parental designation, but the Christian name is indelible.--Every time thou writest it then, every time thou hearest it addressed to thee, thou art admonished of thy dedication to God. Baptismal engagements rise into view. “I am not my own, for I am bought with a price. What, deny my name! What, sell it for a painted bauble! No, I glory in it; I will not permit it to be dishonored. What my pa-

rents did in my behalf when I was a little child, I now openly avow. They have done their part, through the help of God I will do mine. The name of Christ shall not be blasphemed through my unworthiness. My brothers bear with me the common name of our ancestors, but I will render my own distinguished among many brethren. I will never blush at being called a Christian." My friend, thou hast passed through the water at the age of puberty. Baptism was thy own act and deed. Thou hast entered into the kingdom of God, consciously, deliberately. The vows of God are upon thee. That young person, made a Christian by the act of parents, when come to years may disallow that act, may renounce the name, but thou hast subscribed with thy hand unto the Lord.

Thou hast put the yoke of Christ upon thy own neck, and hast assumed his burden. Thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, and must not look, must not go back. Thou standest pledged to God and to the world to support the honor of the Christian name, "to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things." You feel and acknowledge the obligation; no temptation, no compulsion can induce thee to retract it. Next sacramental solemnity the vow shall be renewed, repeated. The language of thy heart is: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth:" "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

If the spirit and power of the institution, we repeat it, are thus understood and felt, let a man pass through water into the pale of the church of Christ, or procure that privilege for his child, by the rite of aspersion as conscience may prescribe, and let us be "kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another." The evangelist, at this interval, presents us with the genealogical table of Christ's descent from Adam downward. It brings us all to the common level of brethren. Through endless and intricate ramifications every man finds himself derived from one and the same root, "the son of Adam, the son of God." And the Christian is "born again," he is "a new creature," being "begotten again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." The law of nature binds us to each other as men, the law of the gospel doubles and strengthens the cord of love. This is Christ's "new commandment," the badge of discipleship, "the fulfilling of the law," "the bond of perfectness." "A new commandment," says our blessed Lord, "I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Has God vouchsafed to give such testimony to the son of his love? Receive it, rest upon it, improve it as a rule of life, as a source of consolation. Ye "have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we have made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ;" for though you were not "eye-witnesses of his majesty," you have "a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the daystar arise in your hearts."

Ye call Christ "Master and Lord;" and ye say well, for so He is. "It became him to fulfill all righteousness;" He put respect on the ordinances, on the house, on the word of God; "leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." "Let the name, the day, the temple, the word of the Lord be hallowed in your eyes." "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead, by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

“The Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape, like a dove, upon Him:” when he was leaving the world, and going unto the Father, he promised his disciples to “give them another Comforter, to abide with them for ever; even the Spirit of truth.” That Comforter was to teach them all things and bring all things to their remembrance. “He showed himself” to them “alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs:” He repeated his promise; “He commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wart for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence.” It was accordingly fulfilled: “When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house were they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them: and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Thus were they comforted for their Master’s departure; thus they received “an unction from the Holy One,” whereby they were set apart unto, and fitted for their great work; thus were they strengthened to begin and pursue a career which will be felt till time expire. The same Spirit is promised, and is given to us to “help our infirmities,” to “guide us into all truth,” to take what is Christ’s and show it unto us, to “comfort us in all our tribulation,” to show us things to come. We look not for a miraculous effusion, to enable us to speak with tongues, to prophecy, to work miracles, but we have good ground to ask and to hope that God will give us “the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” “O send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me, let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles; then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy.” Our blessed Lord entered on his public ministry at the age of thirty, and it was accomplished within the space of little more three years. Think how much was done in that short space. Were the things which Jesus did, as they stand on this record, and the “many other things” not recorded therein, to be “written everyone,” such would be their number and their luster, that they would to the world appear to be absolutely incredible, and therefore the world would not be disposed to receive them. Here we have an illustrious pattern of the employment, of the improvement of time. “I must work,” says he, “the works of Him that sent me, while it is day;” the duty of the season in its season. How ought we to blush at our laborious idleness, at our pompous nothings! What have we, to show for our thirty, forty, fifty, threescore years? Hardly enough to furnish a decent inscription for a tomb-stone. Were the history of the most industrious and useful life to be fairly delineated, the world would have cause to wonder at the frequent and. hideous chasms, the wild confusion, the indecent rapidity, the causeless delay which the detail would present. What a picture then must the life of the professedly idle and dissipated, of the profligate and vicious exhibit! All enters into the book of God’s remembrance, and must all come into judgment. What precious time, what invaluable opportunities of doing and of receiving good, have been shamefully neglected, have been vilely cast away!

What moment granted man without account?

What years are squander’d Wisdom’s debt unpaid?

Night Thoughts, 11. 30.

Much is irretrievably lost. Who knows how little may remain? “Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: the night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and

let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day," and "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See that ye walk circumspectly not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

125. Jesus Christ--Temptation

Jesus Christ--Temptation

Mat 4:1-11. Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered. And when the tempter came to him he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. And the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, he shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shalt bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and saith unto him, all these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

Wonderful is the influence which external objects possess over the mind of man wonderful it is to reflect how body and spirit set upon each other. On a simple determination of the will, every limb is in motion, every nerve is exerted; and the man is burning under the line, or freezing at the pole. Let the blood be transmitted with a little more than usual rapidity, or move a little more sluggishly, and all the mental faculties are deranged, a new world arises, every former idea is blotted out. The glance of that eye, at one time, chills me with terror; had at another it melts me into love. This note rouses me to the battle; and that soothes me into melancholy. Internal serenity and depression are produced by a clearer or grosser state of the air. And if we are thus liable to be affected by objects merely material, what must be the influence of mind upon mind! How powerful must be the sympathy, how prompt the communication of kindred spirits, intuitively perceiving and interchanging mutual sentiments of kindness, gratitude, or esteem! Who can conceive or explain the influence which beings wholly spiritual may exercise over the human species, creatures composed of matter and spirit, whose senses, whose imagination, whose memory, whose understanding, all are so easily impressible? Of all the faculties which spiritual beings possess; that of rendering themselves the objects of sense most of all exceeds our comprehension. They present a form, they utter, and receive, and return articulate sounds, and anon they are vanished into air, thin air. The appearance of Gabriel to Zacharias and to Mary, and of the multitude of the heavenly host to the shepherds, is a striking demonstration of it. We have before us another instance of this astonishing faculty, in a spirit of a very different character, and for a very different purpose--Satan, the destroyer, “foe to God and man,” tempting Christ in the wilderness. The two evangelists, who have given us the history of this temptation in detail, differ only in respect of the order of the facts related, that which is placed second in St. Matthew’s Gospel, is the third in Luke’s, and that which is the second in Luke is the third in Matthew. We have chosen to follow the latter, because, as he was shortly after called to the office of apostleship, he probably received the

history from Christ's own mouth; and because the words which He addresses to the wicked one, in the close of the third temptation, according to Matthew's statement of it, "Get thee behind me, Satan," seem to have concluded the scene. This slight difference, however, serves only to confirm the authenticity of both historians, as it is a proof that the one did not copy from the other. We now proceed to the temptation itself.

"And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread," Attend to the season which he laid hold of. It was at the moment that he saw Jesus ready to faint with hunger. Attend to the place; it was in the wilderness, which produced nothing fit for food. Attend to the suggestion; it presents nothing apparently offensive. He only wishes a little seasonable relief to one under the pressure of the greatest distress, and that relief procured by means at once simple and innocent. The law had relaxed somewhat of its severity in favor of cases like the present, by exempting from the punishment of theft, the person who had committed it only to satisfy his hunger. But here there was not the shadow of a crime; He had but to employ the power which he certainly possessed, and which he lawfully might exercise. It would be a demonstration of his immediate reliance on his heavenly Father; it would remove all doubt respecting the divinity of his mission. Who could refuse to acknowledge Him who was thus declared to be the Son of God? He himself wants only this proof, to induce him, like another Herod, to fall down and worship him.

It is clear that the tempter, when be used the expression "the Son of God," did not fully apprehend the import of what he said, that he did not mean by it to acknowledge the divinity of the Savior. Had he known with whom he had to do, durst he have undertaken to tempt and seduce him? By "the Son of God," therefore, he understands only a prophet of distinguished rank, superior to all others, of pre-eminent virtue and merit, endowed with higher gifts and powers, chosen and commissioned of Providence for the conversion and salvation of the world, and of consequence infinitely dear to God. In this persuasion his object is an attempt to defeat the plan of Providence, to counteract the measures of Heaven, and, as he had succeeded in the seduction of the representative head of the human race, he entertained the infernal hope of prevailing also over its Restorer and Redeemer. He would dive, therefore, to the bottom of the character of Him, for whose appearance in the world such mighty preparation had been made, and whom a series of circumstances the most extraordinary had pointed out as the peculiar care of Heaven. The operation of a miracle will one way or another serve to clear this up, The conversion of stones into bread appearing to him an impossibility, if Christ refuses to perform it, an imputation lies against his power; if he undertake without effecting it, his divine mission is rendered questionable. Can he be God's beloved Son, if he withhold the concurrence of omnipotence in a situation where it is of such high importance to determine what he in truth is? And again, on the other hand, if Jesus pay any attention whatever to the suggestions of Satan, he cannot be the Son of God, for that were to betray ignorance of the person who accosts him, and of the design which he entertained.

Mark still farther "the depths of Satan." He too, unhappily, knows what is in man and he well knew what a stimulus it is to a mind ever so slightly tinctured with pride or vainglory, when placed, especially in eminence of station, to have the power and authority of that station called in question. The temptation has, in this view, the air of a challenge to Christ, to support his high pretensions by corresponding actions, and thus he would draw Him into a rash, imprudent, vainglorious, display of his power, without a reason and without an end. Miracles are intended, and performed for the

conversion of the incredulous, at least for their conviction, and to render them inexcusable. Unless this be in view, power ceases to be under the direction of wisdom. Accordingly we find, that whenever haughty, determined unbelievers expected or demanded a sign, it was constantly denied them. What, has the Father entrusted him with his authority, to satisfy a malignant curiosity: and shall that power be lavished away, in humoring the obstinate and incorrigible, which is designed for the instruction and confirmation of such as love and seek the truth? How, Satan call on Christ to work a miracle? and for what end? that he might believe in him? Was the object of his mission to restore “angels who had left their first estate?” Had Christ, then, at the requisition of Satan, performed a miracle, he could have nothing in view but an ostentatious exhibition of the gifts committed to him, which was all that the tempter wanted. This leads to a general observation on the wisdom and moderation which ever governed our Lord’s conduct, in this respect. As he never employed his power for the purposes of his own glory, because he sought only that of his heavenly Father, so he never exercised it to promote his own advantage; charity, not self-love, dictated all his words, all his actions. He withdraws, he retires, when he meant to provide for his own safety; and He remains upon the cross when infidelity defied him to come down. An amiable view of the Son of God! In Him all power appears enthroned, with wisdom standing on the right hand, and charity on the left; and it is acting continually in conformity to their advice. How then does he escape the snare laid for him by the devil with such dexterity and artifice? By an answer artlessly simple, but at the same time exactly pointed, and directly to the purpose. The Israelites, when pressed by famine, bread failing them in the wilderness, were sustained for forty years by manna falling day by day from heaven; God substituting in place of bread, the common aliment of man, a celestial food, denominated in Scripture “angel’s bread,” probably, because it was prepared and dispensed by the ministration of angels. This gives occasion to Moses to observe, in recapitulating the conduct of Providence toward that people, “the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know, that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.”

Jesus was now in a situation exactly similar to that of the Israelites, in the barren wilderness, conducted thither by the Spirit of God, following the destination of divine Providence: hunger presses, and the demon urges him to find a supply by converting stones into bread. “There is no occasion to have recourse to this, or to any other extraordinary, uncommanded means,” is the Savior’s reply, “the unlimited power of my Father in heaven is not subjected to the necessity of supporting those who are following the leadings of his Spirit and Providence, by bread alone; it has an infinity of other methods to supply their wants, to provide for their subsistence. Knowest thou not what he did to the fathers in the desert, as I now am, and what the Scripture saith upon, the subject, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God;” that is, through any other medium, “and by any other substance which he shall please to appoint, and to which he shall affix his blessing.” It is thus that Jesus instructs his disciples to wield “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;” thus he confounds the tempter, and, without calling himself the Son of God, or proving that he was so by working a miracle, he satisfies himself with making the adversary feel it by the wisdom of his answer, by his confidence in God, and by a patient and profound submission to his will.

How mortifying is the contrast between the perseverance of wickedness in the worst of causes, and the faintness and languor of human virtue in pursuing the best! We are easily discouraged, we are soon weary of well-doing, but the enemy of our salvation is indefatigable, he goeth about continually, he returns still to the charge. He has failed in his first attempt, but he is determined to make another. He goes on a principle but too strongly verified by melancholy experience, that every man, and in Christ he sees nothing yet but a man, that every man has his weak side, some sin that doth more easily beset him, some leading propensity that rules him at pleasure, and which makes interest, and reason, and conscience, and everything bend to it. Let the tempter but find this out, and the whole man is his own. He finds Jesus invulnerable on the side of sense and vainglory; he has escaped the snare by the wise and seasonable application of Scripture; but may not a net be woven to entangle him, whose cords shall be drawn from Scripture itself? Here, in my apprehension, lies the force of the second temptation. It is of a piece with the temptation which prevailed over “the man of God” who exclaimed against the altar which Jeroboam had erected, “I am a Prophet also as thou art, and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord,” and the tempter flattered himself it would be as readily believed, and therein the deceiver deceived himself.

“Then the devil taketh him,” says the evangelist, “up into the holy city, that is, Jerusalem, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,” probably the summit of one of the porticos, which terminated in a platform, and were surrounded by a battlement, for the pinnacle of the temple properly so called, was inaccessible, being finished in the form of a dome, stuck full of sharp points gilded over to prevent the birds from perching upon it. Josephus represents these porticos, especially that on the south, as of a height so prodigious, from the depth of the valley below, that no head could look downward without becoming giddy. It was to this awful eminence that Satan was permitted to transport from the wilderness the Son of God, and there to propose to him to make experiment of the power, truth, and faithfulness of God, saying, “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.” The proposal was wild and extravagant in the extreme: but not less artful than extravagant. The import of it is plainly this, if Jesus Christ be the Son of God, must he not repose confidence in the promises which he has made, and rest assured of his constant care and protection? If he does not, it must he from a secret distrust of his power and goodness, from a disbelief of Scripture promises, which were in effect to renounce his character as the Son of God. The design of the tempter is apparent: he means to destroy, if he can, the object of his fear and envy. Persuaded that a fall from such a height must prove fatal, and feeling his power limited to art and insinuation, he tries to inspire a presumptuous confidence in heaven, and thus to bring to an open test what he really was, the beloved of God, concerning whom he had given his angels charge, and thereby terminate his own hopes, or ruin a rash and fallible man, like every other whom he had so successfully tried, and thus complete his triumph over frail humanity.

How plausible! No miracle is so likely to make an impression in his favor on the multitude below; and what security is equal to the promise of that God who cannot lie? Who can sufficiently admire the calmness and wisdom with which the insinuation is repelled? the promise is admitted, the security which it bestows is acknowledged, and the authority of Scripture is established. But Scripture is not inconsistent with itself, otherwise it were not the word of God: spiritual things must

therefore be compared with spiritual, and it is written, “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” A man is said to tempt God, when he calls for extraordinary and unnecessary proofs of his providential care, through diffidence, or to satisfy curiosity.

Thus Israel is said to have tempted the Lord, when pressed by the want of water in Rephidim; the supply was granted, but the place was marked by a name which expressed displeasure: “he called the name of the place Meribah, strife, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us, or not?” The same offence was again committed in the wilderness of Sin, under the pressure of hunger: “Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?” The miracle of relief was again interposed. “He commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven--he rained down manna upon them to eat, and gave them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angels’ food. He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls as the sand of the sea.” But it is dangerous to put the goodness and power of God to trial, and by impatience and importunity to extort the indulgence of a man’s own desire. God often withholds in love, and grants from just disapprobation. “They were not estranged from their lusts; but while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them.”--And for all this they sinned still.”

We have another noted instance of a man’s tempting his Maker, in the case of Gideon, the son of Joash the Abi-ezrite. He had been called from the threshing floor to fight the battles of his country; “the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?” Gideon hesitates, argues, excuses himself. “And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.” This does not yet overcome his diffidence; he must have a sign to cure his unbelief. “And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.” The sign is granted. The offering is presented upon the rock; “then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight.” Gideon perceives that he has presumed too far, and begins to tremble for his life, but is instantly relieved from that terror: “And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee, fear not, thou shalt not die.” Who would not have deemed this proof satisfactory? Is not incredulity now completely disarmed? The champion of Israel must have sign upon sign. “And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, behold I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and, wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl-full of water.” Surely the contention is at length come to an end, and the patience of God will be put to no further trial. Wonder, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth, at the presumption of man, and at the condescension of God! “And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: Let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece; and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.” But though Deity is thus pleased to yield to the unreasonable demands of man, it ill becomes man to encroach and to prescribe. In our Lord’s

repulsion of this temptation, mark the happy union which he recommends to his disciples; “Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” Harmlessness brings no “railing accusation,” storms not, threatens not; even the adversary is not borne down by the weight of authority, but craft is confounded by wisdom. Scripture mutilated, perverted, misapplied, is explained by Scripture in its purity and simplicity; and the tempter is again made to feel his inferiority. With a perseverance, however, worthy of a better cause, he returns to the charge. He has been able to make no impression on the side of sense, appetite, or vanity. But ambition is the passion of great souls; and the mighty Julius had lately furnished him with an example of the irresistible power of that lust. “If,” said the mighty conqueror, “justice is to be violated, the pleasure of domineering must plead the excuse.” This “prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience,” employs his permitted energies, accordingly, to expand a delightful prospect of the pomp and glory of this world, rendered still more alluring by contrast with the real horrors of the waste howling wilderness, from the summit of one of whose sterile mountains the vision was displayed. Over all this glory Satan claims absolute and unbounded dominion, and the sole right of disposal: a claim, alas, but too well supported by reality; and of the whole he tenders an immediate transfer, on the easy condition of receiving homage for it. “Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” was the temptation addressed to the first Adam, and it fatally prevailed, and mankind was undone. “All this power will I give, and the glory of them; for that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it: If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine.” By this temptation was the second Adam assailed; but it was resisted, repelled, and mankind was restored. “Jesus answered and said to him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” In Christ’s rejection of the former temptation we had occasion to remark the lovely mixture of wisdom and innocence; here we have an equally interesting union of wisdom and zeal: of wisdom, in wielding “the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God;” of zeal in repressing with holy indignation the insolent assumption of the empire of the world, and the no less insolent demand of the homage and worship which are due to Deity alone. There is a point beyond which patience ceases to be a virtue; and degenerates into weakness. It is particularly so, when the name, the day, the house, the word, the worship of the great Jehovah are impiously invaded and profaned. The cloven foot is then so apparently uncovered, that nothing is left but an instantaneous and abhorrent dissent, “Get, thee hence, Satan.” Thus when “the prince of this world” came, he found nothing in Christ; no weak part, no unguarded moment, no subjection to the frailties of that nature which he had assumed. The demon hears his own name, Satan, the adversary, pronounced by the lips of truth, and feels himself detected:

Abash’d the devil stood,

And felt how awful goodness is, and saw

Virtue in her shape how lovely: saw, and pin’d

His loss.

Paradise Lost, iv. 846.

Thus our Lord’s public ministry commenced in unparalleled trials. Thus “the Captain of our Salvation” began his glorious career, and was at length made “perfect through suffering.” But

these things were spoken, and done, and suffered for our sakes. “Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps.”--“Forasmuch as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind.”--“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” Draw your supplies, in “the evil day,” from the same sacred treasury. “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on 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 armor of God; that you 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 breastplate 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 to the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”

Good soldier of Jesus Christ, thy chief danger is from within. There is a traitor in the fortress, carrying on a correspondence with the foe without. Let him be watched night and day; let him be sacrificed without remorse. The moment he is subdued, the external enemy is stripped of his power. “Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.” “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith.” Thou hast a weak side; there is “a sin that doth easily beset” thee, and that the tempter knoweth full well, though it may have escaped thy own penetration. Oppose to his cunning the wisdom which is from above. In a state of warfare, remember that no danger is slight, and no foe contemptible. “Be faithful unto death,” and thou shalt receive “a crown of life.” “To him that overcometh, saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne.”

Men and brethren, we take encouragement to resist temptation not only from the example, but from the intercession of Jesus Christ, Peter was to pass through a fiery trial, and to be singed at least, if not scorched in the flame. It was foreseen and foretold by his compassionate Master; but he would not take warning; he rushed into the snare and was taken, but was not left in it. He was delivered, raised up again, restored, and his fall was blessed to the consolation and recovery of thousands: “And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” And let him that has fallen, and hath been lifted up again, “learn to walk circumspectly:” let him “not be high-minded, but fear;” let him no longer trust in himself, but let him “trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God;” let him be merciful, as he hath obtained mercy. The grand tempter forced his way into a terrestrial paradise, into the holy city, scaled the pinnacle of the temple, mingled with the sons of God, has “transformed himself into an angel of light and ever with, a design to waste and to destroy.” But into “the paradise of God,” “that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth,

neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie." Blessed state! when there shall be no inward corruption, and no fear of assault from without. Fear not, "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." "If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved as. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

126. Jesus Christ--Rejected by Home-Town

Jesus Christ--Rejected by Home-Town

Luk 4:13-32. And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season. And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias: and, when he had opened, the book, he found the place where it was written, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, be cause, he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, is not this Joseph's son? and he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. And he said, Verily, I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land: but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill, whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he, passing through the midst of them, went his way, and came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the Sabbath-days. And they were astonished at his doctrine; for his word was with power. When the Son of God came for the salvation of a lost world, "verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham;" he assumed not royal state, but, "the form of a servant;" his progress was marked, not by the blood of those who opposed themselves, but by the benefits which he conferred on the evil and unthankful. Subject himself to the sinless infirmities of human nature, he was experimentally taught to sympathize with the weak; "in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted." The wilderness exhibited a wonderful display of the divine nature united to humanity, of the humiliation of the "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" and of the majesty of the mighty God, who has all creatures at his disposal, and tinder his control. The "man was an hungered," and exposed to temptation, and arbitrarily disposed of by an insolent foe: He was humbled to the hearing of blasphemous suggestions, and the bearing of cruel and unmerited insults.--The Divinity miraculously sustained the infirmity of nature, quenched the fiery darts of the devil, put Satan to flight, received the homage and service of angels. In all he presented an object

of admiration and love, and in every display of human excellence he exhibited a pattern for imitation.

Jesus had now attained his thirtieth year. The Spirit of God and of glory rested on him; and a voice from heaven had declared, his generation. In the solemnity and solitude of a forty days' retirement from all human converse, the order of his future procedure is settled, according to the plan of the eternal mind. Behold him then in the power of the Spirit, in the greatness of his strength, in the travail of his soul, returning from the desert into Galilee, to enter on his arduous and important undertaking. The public attention was fixed, and expectation excited by the singular circumstances attending his birth and baptism. The discerning eye of the Baptist saw in him "The great Prophet who should come into the world," and with the finger he pointed him out as "the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." His sudden disappearance after his baptism, and after the testimony then borne to him from above, must have been an occasion of some wonder, and a subject of much conversation, for on his return, at the end of the forty days, we find his fame already spread abroad, and a general disposition to receive and to hear him manifested. And where does he begin his career, and what character does he assume, and what arms does he employ? At Rome, the seat of empire, in the triumphant state of a conqueror, with his sword died in the blood of his enemies? No, in Galilee, the proverbially reproachful residence of almost his whole life, in the humble character of a teacher of religion, and employing only the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. In this we behold him teaching us a generous superiority to the little invidious distinctions, of country and kindred, a noble contempt of the glory of this world, an ardent zeal for the glory of God, a benevolent concern for the happiness of men, and a just discernment of the means best adapted to the attainment of these ends.

What a silent instructer had his childhood and youth been of subjection to parental authority, of contentment with a poor and mean condition, of holiness in all manner of conversation? What an interesting object was presented to the eye in a form so fair, mated by a mind so pure and exalted!--With what delight must the ear have hung upon those lips which wisdom inspired, and into which grace was poured! How commanding, how attractive that goodness which was incessantly aiming at communicating good to others! Is it any wonder that when He became the public and active instructor of his countrymen, he should be "glorified of all?" It was probably about this period, that "the beginning of his miracles" he performed at Cana of Galilee, "and manifested forth his glory," by turning water into wine, at the marriage solemnity of one of his relations or friends. By this he approved himself the affectionate, condescending, brother of mankind, and, at the same time, the great Lord of nature, to whom all elements are subject; and whereby he reproves the unbending pride of affected wisdom, the uncomplying preciseness which refuses to partake of the harmless intercourse and enjoyments of human life, and the coldness and indifference with which selfishness endeavors to stifle the voice of blood, of friendship, and of natural affection. How greatly must his public ministrations have been enhanced and endeared by the meekness and gentleness of his private deportment? What force must divine truth, delivered in the synagogue, have derived from the utterance of that tongue which in domestic and social communication was governed by "the law of kindness." In the mere human teacher, the professional appearance must frequently be at variance with the personal; a heart torn with a thousand anxieties, must try to conceal its bitterness under a serene forehead, and calmness of speech; and the unhappy man may be administering to others that consolation to which he himself

is a stranger, or, what is infinitely worse, may be called by public duty to declare that truth which is his secret reproach and condemnation. But O how delightful the entertainment, when the hand which dispenses to others can with holy confidence take its own appropriated share! How dignified is the character which, in the closet, in the parlor, in the market place, in the synagogue, in the pulpit, presents but one and the same person, the servant of God, the friend of man; the respectable and amiable member of society, the kind relation, the agreeable neighbor, the gentle master, the patriotic citizen, the faithful pastor! What a model, in all these respects, is presented to the Christian minister, in the person, the character, and the conduct of his divine Master! What must have been the ineffable charm of that divine eloquence which captivated every ear, every heart; which commanded universal admiration and applause; and which, alas, such is the enmity of the carnal mind, so soon roused the vilest and worst of human passions in the breast of his neighbors and acquaintance, envy, and jealousy, and malice, and hatred! O how pleasant it is to accompany, in thought, the blessed Jesus from house to house; from devotional retirement, to useful and necessary employment; from honorable employment to social endearment: from the pure and innocent delights of virtuous friendship, to the solemn and sublime exercises of public worship; and to observe in all the changing scenes, the same lovely simplicity, the same unassuming dignity, the same unvarying charity and good-will! But the evangelist leads us from general to particular ideas; and gives vivacity and effect to our meditations, by bringing them to one point of time, of place, and of expression. Behold him then at Nazareth, where he had been brought up, in the synagogue, on the sabbath-day, according to his usual custom, standing up to read, unfolding the prophecy, the prophecy of Isaias, a remarkable prediction, and himself the subject of it; then closing the book, delivering it again to the minister, sitting down to explain and apply what he had read; and how pleasant it is to mark the emotion which every word, every action produced in an astonished and delighted audience! Everyone of these circumstances seems to merit a few moments' meditation.

He came to Nazareth. Having visited other parts of Galilee, and taught in their synagogues, and received the cheerful homage which heartfelt gratitude pays to real worth; having performed the duties of a benevolent neighbor and kind relation at Cana, rejoicing with them that rejoiced, and putting respect on the ordinance of God, the idea of home suggests itself, the kind affections become concentrated, the calls of nature are felt and obeyed. At Nazareth his mother dwelt; he was well aware of her maternal tenderness and solicitude: his forty days absence about his "Father's business" must have filled her with pain inexpressible; her soul was about to be pierced through with many a sword, whose keen point could not be averted; but filial affection will not suffer her to feel the stroke before the time; and what moments of ecstasy to a mother those must have been which passed at Nazareth, in the house and in the synagogue, during this blessed interval! And what delight must it have been to that Son to minister to the consolation of his mother!

He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. The scenes in which early life was passed, are painted in lively colors on the imagination. Memory frequently recalls, and the heart fondly cherishes them. They are blended with the ideas of gaiety, and want of care and innocence. I think with rapture on the tree from which my childish hand plucked the golden fruit; on the cooling stream which refreshed the tongue, parched with juvenile exercise; on the flower-enameled turf whereon I cast my weary limbs; on the ascent to the house of God along which my yet

unconfirmed footsteps accompanied my venerable grandsire at the hour of prayer; the note of the summoning bell is even now in mine ears. The feeling is natural, it is harmless, perhaps it may be virtuous. And is it a degradation of our subject to say that we see in the history before us, the ingenuous, generous Nazarene, thinking with complacency on the particular spots consecrated by the recollections of early piety, of friendship, and of enjoyment; thinking with affection, such as only the Son of God could feel, on the associates of tender years; on the relations which the hand of nature, on those which the wisdom of Providence had formed; striving in the maturity of thirty, to communicate to grown men that wisdom and happiness, which the unsuspecting, unenvious generosity of twelve delights to convey to its equal. The Savior of the world is here held up in the honorable, engaging, and attractive character of a liberal and generous townsman; rejoicing in the exertion of his ripened talents, his improved powers, his enlarged abilities, for the information, improvement, and comfort of the friends of his youth.

Attend to the place which he chose for this purpose--the place of public assembly, devoted to the service of God, to the conveyance of useful knowledge, and to the devout association of kindred spirits, the synagogue. There is indeed no real difference of place, in respect of sanctity. Wherever God is worshipped “in spirit and in truth,” there is holy ground. But man, swallowed up as he is of sense, must have the devout affections raised by an appeal to the lower faculties of his nature: and the form and situation of the spot where he worships, must be called in to assist the mind, to promote the love of his fellow-worshippers, to give energy to kind affections, and to elevate the soul to the Creator; on the wings of love to the creature whom he has formed after his own image. To thee, blessed Jesus! the city and the wilderness, the mountain and the seashore, the temple and the upper chamber were one and the same thing; but it pleased thee to be a pattern of “decency and order,” to exemplify submission to the ordinance of God, to walk before thy kindred and acquaintance in “things which are lovely and of good report.” The service of the synagogue was not at that time perfectly pure; many corruptions both in doctrine and practice had been introduced, but still God was worshipped there, and Scripture still flowed pure and uncontaminated; and he will not seem to pour contempt on what savored of human imperfection, lest that which was genuine and divine should fall into disrepute. A virtuous state of society, and a pure Church are highly desirable; but in order to enjoy such a happy order of things, a man “must needs go out of the world.” All that wisdom and piety united can achieve, is gradually and temperately to ameliorate the public morals, and to rectify disorders which may have crept into the Church. No vigilance nor sagacity can prevent the enemy from sowing tares among the wheat; but though they may be ever so distinguishable, they are not rudely and prematurely to be rooted up, “lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.” They must “both grow together until the harvest.” The holy Jesus derived no taint from a disorderly synagogue and a profaned temple; but he restored the order of the synagogue, and the sanctity of the temple. He could contract no impurity by sitting down to meat with publicans and sinners; and learn no hypocrisy by communication with Pharisees; but by the wisdom and purity of his conversation publicans and sinners were reproved, instructed and reformed, and hypocrisy stood detected. There is a mean, dishonorable, and criminal “becoming all things to all men,” for the sordid purposes of self-interest, or the gratification of a vainglorious spirit; but there is likewise an honorable, manly, and praiseworthy accommodation to the wants and wishes of our fellow-creatures, which disinterestedly aims at their good. This lesson “Paul, the servant of Jesus Christ,” and the most independent in spirit of all mankind, had been taught in the school of his

divine Master. “For though,” says he, “I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant to all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the Gospel’s sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.”

Time permits not at present to proceed on the consideration of the other particular circumstances attending this sacred Lecture of the great Teacher; such as the time when it was delivered--the Sabbath-day; the uniformity and constancy of the practice, as his custom was; the attitude and exercise, he stood up for to read; the subject, a prediction concerning himself from the book of the prophet Esaias; his commentary upon it, this day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears; and finally, the effect produced on his audience, the eyes of all them that were inthe synagogue were fastened on him; and all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. These particulars, therefore, will constitute the subject of our next exercise of this kind. We conclude the present with a few practical reflections.

1. Meditate on the venerability of the Sabbath, the day of sacred rest. It is the ordinance of God himself, who is represented in Scripture, not only as the Author of the institution, but as setting the example of its devout observance. “On the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his, work which he had made.” He made it a season of solemn contemplation: “God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good.” He pronounced a benediction upon it, and set it apart to holy purposes: “And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.” It is one of the natural measurements of time, though modern infidelity has made an attempt to efface it. It wears a benevolent and merciful aspect toward man and beast. It is intimately and indissolubly connected with religion. The violation of the sabbath was considered, under the Mosaic dispensation, as a flagrant contempt of the divine authority, and subjected the offender to the punishment of death. To the regular and spiritual observance of it; on the other hand, were annexed many and gracious promises. I quote only the following: “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day: and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” The substitution of the first, in place of the seventh day of the week, under the evangelical dispensation, binds more closely, not relaxes the obligation; and the honor which God has been pleased to put upon it is a sufficient recommendation, independent of the authority of human laws. As, on the contrary, the character of the persons who live in the open and habitual neglect or profanation of it, is the reverse of a recommendation to every man of sense, decency, and virtue. But,

2. Take care not to sink the spirit in the letter of the ordinance. It is a day of rest, but idleness and rest are very different things. The mental composure and repose of the man infinitely transcend the listless inaction of the brute. The body of the man indeed rests from the painful toil of the week, and his mind from its perplexing cares. But this is perfectly consistent with vigorous bodily

exertion, and with intenseness of mental application, The feet, the hands, the eye, the tongue, may all be actively employed in rendering; unto God a “reasonable service.” The superior powers of the soul may be in an ascending motion, up to “the Father of lights;” and in a progressive motion, toward the “rest which remaineth to the people of God.” The lips of the wise and good may be devoted to the diffusion of useful knowledge, and the ear of the willing and obedient may drink in the doctrines of truth, and the obligations of duty. This mutual interchange of kind offices will produce an interchange of kind affections. Good-will among men will be preserved and promoted. The bands of Nature will be strengthened by those of religion. To worship in one temple will become a bond of union among brethren, and will extinguish the coal of animosity; and thus “godliness will be found profitable unto all things,” and will exert a happy influence over “the life which now is,” while it embraces “the promise of that which is to come.”

3. Conformity in things of inferior or of no moment, is a duty which we owe both to ourselves and to others; to ourselves, because it is the mark of a gracious and condescending character; to others, because every man has a title to deference and respect, in matters where another man’s conscience is not concerned. Sourness and incompliance are no part of the Spirit of Christ. Nevertheless, many who bear that name discover a tenaciousness of trifles, a bigotry of self-opinion, inconsistent not only with the Christian temper, but with good sense and good manners. This moroseness of disposition levels all distinctions, and affixes the same idea of criminality to an enormous offence and adherence to a harmless form of ceremony. With a man of this description, “He that killeth an ox, is as if he slew a man: he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cutoff a dog’s neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine’s blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol.” Difference of opinion among men is part of the plan of a wise Providence. It affords exercise to human faculties; it expands a field for the display of mutual forbearance; it is a striking manifestation of the variety of the works of God. He who will yield no point, however insignificant, has no reason to expect that his punctilio should be regarded. Were the whole world of this ungainly, untractable, uncomplying nature, society would present a perpetual and universal strife of contradictory feelings, humors and interests. The rule ofthe Gospel is in this case, as in every other, absolute: “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” Indeed the great prophet carries the spirit of his religion much farther: “I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.”

4. Watch and seize every promising opportunity of doing good; and such occur every day that we live. Have we not the poor always with us? Might not the crumbs which fall from that table be given to feed many starving mouths? Do we not live in contact with ignorance and vice, with misery and disease? And is it in our power to grant no relief, not so much as “a cup of cold water?” It is truly humbling to reflect how means and occasions of being useful to the bodies and to the souls of men, and of promoting our own highest interests, have been carelessly neglected, or deliberately abused. Judgment to come; however, sets the matter in a very serious light: “I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.” “Verily, I say unto

you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me." But this direction too must be accompanied with a caution. "Let not your good be evil spoken of." "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." There is an officiousness of perhaps well-meaning goodness, which sometimes disdains to weigh the circumstances of times, places, and persons; which will introduce certain topics out of, as well as in season, to the grief of the more prudently serious, the disgust of the lukewarm, and the mirth of the profane. "A word spoken in due season, how good is it!" "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear." Finally,

5. Bring forth "things new and old," from the inexhaustible stores of Scripture. From this sacred repository our blessed Lord derived arguments to silence and confound the adversary, and a subject of instruction for the men of Nazareth. From the same precious treasury, from those "wells of salvation," the faithful of every age have drawn the waters of consolation, to support and refresh them under every pressure of distress, to counteract the bitterness of death, and to enjoy a foretaste of the "pure river of water of life, proceeding out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb." "Jesus answered and said," to the woman of Samaria, at Jacob's well, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life;" and "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 all good works." Therefore, "search the Scriptures;" as Christ hath commanded, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." Ye "have Moses and the prophets;" ye have Christ and his apostles; hear them. If men reject their testimony, "neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

127. Jesus Christ--Healer

Jesus Christ--Healer

Luk 4:16-22. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath-day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias: and when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord And he closed the book, and gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.

We read, in the history of the patriarchal ages, of an illustrious personage who exercised at once the functions of a priest and of a sovereign; Melchizedec, “King of Salem, and priest of the Most High God.” He, whom this venerable person thus early represented to the world, united to these two characters, a third, less splendid indeed, but not less important, that of a teacher and instructer of mankind; and thus He became all that a guilty, enslaved, ignorant world stood in need of. In the blessed Jesus, O wretched man, thou beholdest the great High Priest of thy profession, who hath, by one offering, one victim, one blood, procured the remission of all thy offences; the Prince of the kings of the earth, who has broken asunder the bands of thy yoke, and asserted thee into the “glorious liberty of the sons of God;” and the great, the unerring Teacher sent from God, who spake as never man spake, whose lessons make men wise unto salvation. As the Sovereign and Lord of Nature we have seen him exercising dominion over the powers of the worlds visible and, invisible, putting Satan to flight by a word, receiving the homage and ministrations of angels. As an High Priest, “after the order of Melchisedec,” we shall in the progress of this history behold him offering himself, once for all, “a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour unto God.” We are this evening to sit at his feet, and to listen to him in his humbler and more familiar character of the meek, patient, and condescending instructor of the weak, the ignorant, and the prejudiced. And, O may the gracious words which proceed from his mouth not only excite our wonder, but penetrate and melt our hearts, kindle our repentings together, and put all that remains of our existence under the dominion of love. His first labors of affection were bestowed upon his kindred and acquaintance, they were consecrated to the improvement of the companions and friends of early life. He had hitherto taught them by example, he now teaches them out of the written word. Had he been covetous of fame or of honor, he would surely have chosen another theater on which to display his superior powers, for he well knew that no prophet is accepted in his own country. He well knew that eminent excellency excites envy, that envy produces malignity, and that malice prompts to evil speaking. But regard to his own interest and ease is lost in compassion to others, and the love of reputation with men reverently bends to zeal for the glory of Gad. Every circumstance of the scene before us is interesting and instructive.

We have in the preceding Lecture adverted to those of place, it was “in Galilee at Nazareth where He had been brought up,” and “in the synagogue.” Attend now to the season, it was on the Sabbath-day. As to the pure all places, so all times are pure, yet to man, weak and imperfect as he is, distinction of both time and place is important and necessary. Show me a man who is habitually and uniformly that in the world, which decency obliges him to appear to be in the house of God, and I shall not presume to condemn him, though he frequent not the temple; although such an one is of all others the least likely to desert it. Show me the man whose every day is a day of order, of piety, of mercy, and of good works, and such an one shall, for me, spend the seventh day, in what manner he will; though such an one is of all others the most likely to put respect on the ordinance of God. Who of all those, who are born of a woman, stood least in need of the influence and assistance of sacred edifices and seasons? He whose conversation was continually in heaven, whose “meat and drink it was to do the will of his heavenly Father,” who never lost sight, for a moment, of the great end of his mission. And who was so regular in his attendance on the exercises of religious worship; who was so exact in the observance of every institution that was stamped with marks of divine authority? The sabbath is an ordinance of mercy, designed by Him who “preserveth man and beast,” to be an interruption of painful toil, a restorer of exhausted nature, a season of repose; but in perfect consistency with this, it is a season of mental exertion of beneficence; of devout contemplation, of virtuous, social intercourse. But the observance of the sabbath had, when our Savior came into the world, degenerated into a narrow and groveling superstition, which separated from it every idea of mercy and good-will to men, and the spirit was sunk in the letter. It therefore became this great Teacher, to restore the institution to its primitive design and use, and to guard mankind equally against the extremes of superstition, on the one hand, and of profanity on the other: and this he does with a wisdom, a delicacy, and a dignity peculiar to himself. Who can think slightly of what he treated with respect? Who dares to violate what he observed as “the holy of the Lord and honorable?” And who again can think he is doing honor to God by expressing indifference, unkindness, and want of sympathy to men? He who attended the synagogue, who read and expounded the Scriptures on the Sabbath; on the Sabbath also restored the withered hand, defended his disciples from the charge of profanation, displayed the character of the sovereign Lord of the sabbath, as preferring mercy to sacrifice, and as having instituted “the Sabbath for man, and not man for the sabbath.”

Observe farther, the evangelist takes care to inform us that Christ’s attendance on the services of the synagogue and the sabbath was not merely accidental or occasional, but habitual and stated: ashis custom was. What we do according to no fixed rule, we do feebly and confusedly. What we do seldom, we do with reluctance and dislike; and from dislike the natural transition is to total omission. On the contrary, what is subjected to rule is done accurately and efficiently; what we do habitually, we do with ease and delight; for custom, says the proverb, and with much truth, is a second nature. The Savior of the world, accordingly, vouchsafed to become an example here also, as of everything else that is wise and good; He was a pattern of regular, orderly conduct; from his childhood, and upward. He was a silent instructer, of the successive stages of rising existence, in docility, in contentment, in submission in regularity.

Let no one tell me that it is useless to habituate children betimes to the forms of devotion; to the observance of institutions whose meaning and intention they do not fully comprehend: to restraints which to them appear harsh and unreasonable. It is a great thing, indeed it is everything, to be

under the government of innocent or praiseworthy customs: to be inured to the laws of order; to be prepared for thinking for themselves, and for having their sentiments heard and attended to, by learning to pay respect to the understanding, to the opinions, and to the experience of others. Think with what holy indignation, He, whose name we bear, would have listened to a proposal to violate his custom, and to make the hour of the devotions of the synagogue, the hour of walking into the cornfields! The historian is here singularly minute, and gives wonderful vivacity to his representation, by going into a detail of particulars. Among these, we must advert to his posture and attitude, when employed in reading to the people the word of God. He stood up for to read. Nature seems to point this out as an attitude of reverence and respect. Since the days of Abraham, who stood up and bowed himself before the people of the land wherein he dwelt, the wise, the benevolent, and the courteous have employed it as an expression of regard to superior sanctity, power, majesty, or multitude. Posture is, in itself, still more indifferent than time or place; but nothing is indifferent in the eyes of true wisdom, by which the interests of either human virtue or felicity can be affected. Truth is the same whether delivered in an erect or a recumbent posture. But in matters of this sort, what says common practice? Will my compliance conciliate affection, procure attention, give force to what is said? Then I will cheerfully conform. Will my singularity give offence, will it awaken prejudice, will it in the cause I mean to promote? Then I will not affect singularity; I will not be uncomplying nor unkind; and I will dissent only where conscience is concerned, and where compliance would be criminal.

How melancholy it is to reflect, on the talents which have been perverted, on the time which has been wasted, but that is comparatively nothing, on the angry spirits which have been excited, on the oceans of blood which have been spilt, in determining whether standing, sitting, or kneeling whether this or the other unessential circum stance were most adapted to the nature o things, or most conformable to the will, or conductive to the glory, of the Creator. In this too, therefore, I consider the example of Christ as intelligible, decided, and instructive.

He “stood up to read.” Happily for the world, its information, and instruction in matters of everlasting moment were not entrusted to the uncertainty, the changeableness, and the corruptibility of oral tradition. He who bestowed on man the gift of speech, for the mutual, communication of thought, gave likewise the pattern of permanent speech, by means of writing; by which thought is transmitted from region to region, from generation to generation, unsophisticated, unimpaired. Hence the events which Mosesrecorded, and which Isaiah predicted, the precepts of the Law and the promises of the Gospel, descend from age to age in equal purity, weight, and measure: and the son sees, reads, and apprehends the selfsame truth which was the light and joy of his progenitors. And what must it have been to hear the sublime and pathetic strains of Isaiah pronounced by the tongue of Him who formed the ear for the perception of melodious sounds, the mouth to otter them, and the heart to receive the impression of sacred and interesting truth! We may judge of it from the mute attention with which he was heard, and from the wonder expressed, after he had finished, “at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.”

It would appear that it was not only “his custom” to attend the synagogue, but to perform the office of public reader to the assembly. For the proper minister delivers to Him, as to the acknowledged conductor of this part of the service, that portion of the Sacred Code which either order prescribed, or which his selection called for, or to which Providence specially directed; and he received it from Him again to be deposited in its place. And whether indeed did Providence, independent of human

design or foresight, by a special interposition unfold the particular passage from ancient prophecy; or did his own choice select it as peculiarly applicable to the occasion? In either case, what portion of the Old Testament Scriptures is more emphatically descriptive of his person, character, and divine mission? And what can be so worthy of our most deep and serious attention, whether, we consider the infinite and everlasting moment of the subject, the interest which we have in it, or the affecting correspondence of the event with the prediction, of the prophet with his object. The prophecy holds up to view a person of the most distinguished eminence, consecrated in the most extraordinary manner, to the execution of the most merciful, land benevolent purposes, and in language the most powerful and pathetic. It is the anointed of the Lord God, his Holy One, who alone could without presumption undertake, and triumphantly accomplish, the work of redemption, and could unfold that “great mystery of Godliness” which angels desire to look into: who was set apart from everlasting to this high destination, who was gradually revealed, and in the fulness of time, sent to be the salvation of God to all the ends of the earth. Who was anointed, not as Aaron to the priesthood, and David to the sovereignty, by a material oil of exquisite odor and costly price, but by the effusion of the Spirit, the Spirit of power, of wisdom, of holiness, which rested upon him without measure; and which was bestowed upon him, for what purpose? with Moses to humble the pride, and crush the power of Egypt? or with Cyrus, “to subdue nations, to loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two-leaved gates, to make the crooked places straight, to break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron;” to execute the righteous judgment of the Eternal on rebellion, presumption, and disobedience; to condemn and to destroy? No, when this mighty One cometh, armed with power, anointed with the Spirit, it is to dispense grace, to diffuse happiness, to relieve the miserable.

“He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.” The poor are, with the great of the earth, the objects of neglect, and contempt, and oppression. In the dictionary of the world, rich means respectable, powerful, and important: and poverty is equivalent to wretchedness, meanness, despicability. But the dispensation of grace by the gospel inverts this order; it affixes a different, indeed an opposite meaning to words, it raises into consequence what was lightly esteemed, and it hurls pride down to the ground. It “puts down the mighty from their seats, and exalteth them of low degree.” Is it poverty of condition? That is no bar against the admission of the consolations of Christianity; that is no disqualification for enjoying the rights of citizenship of the kingdom of heaven; that implies no exclusion from the glorious “privileges of the sons of God;” that implies neither sin nor shame. Is it poverty of spirit? It is the creature’s highest glory; it is the Redeemer’s brightest and most perfect image; it is the soul’s preparation for the kingdom of heaven. To the one and to the other is the anointed of the Lord sent to preach the gospel; to the poor in this world, that they may learn to be sober-minded, patient and content; not envying nor grieving at the good of others, but laying up for themselves “treasures in heaven;” looking for “another country,” for “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God:”--to the poor in spirit, that they may “grow in grace,” that they may “contemplate and follow their pattern more closely, learning of him daily to be “meek and lowly in heart, that they may find rest to their souls.”

“He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted.” Gracious office! divide Physician! Thou only art equal to the task. “The heart knoweth its own bitterness;” the ill admits of no cure; the officious consolation of the creature only irritates the wound; time itself brings no relief. But behold, here, not a temporary relief, but a lasting cure; not the transient spirit and calm of a stupefying opiate,

but the solid support of wholesome food, and the refreshing balm of wholesome rest. An ensnaring, persecuting world, mourner in Zion, disturbs thy peace and breaks thy heart; but He hath said “be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” “In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in me ye shall have peace.” In the bitterness of thy soul thou criest out, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”--Trembling, sinking creature, speak peace to thy soul, “return to thy rest,” “there is no condemnation to them but are in Christ Jesus; it is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?” To preach deliverance to the captives. Bondage, slavery, captivity are happily known to us only by the name, or in idea. We are more than Abraham’s children; our father’s contended for liberty, Heaven granted it, and we enjoy it. But ah! our country is but a speck on the globe; our population is but a handful of men. And alas, even in our own country there is captivity. How many among us “wax poor and fall into decay,” and that not from profligacy and prodigality alone? The creditor cometh, and there is nothing to give him. The loss of liberty is the consequence: the evil becomes worse and worse. He who entered within the walls of a prison unfortunate only, continues there under a total incapacity of shaking off calamity. What was at first the pressure of debt, imperceptibly changes into an intolerable load of vice, from which a miracle of grace alone, can deliver. How many thousands of our fellow-subjects are in this unhappy, this almost hopeless condition! But liberty may exist even in a dungeon. If the prisoner carries with him into confinement the “spirit of adoption,” he is already delivered from bondage. No bolts, nor bars, nor fetters of iron can restrain the heaven-born mind; he can look up and “cry, Abba, Father!” “He that is called in the Lord, being a slave, is the Lord’s freeman.” “If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” Paul in bonds, a prisoner in the cause of Jesus Christ, possesses a nobly free and independent spirit. Galled with “many stripes;” “thrust into the inner prison” at Philippi, with Silas his companion in tribulation “their feet made fast to the stocks,” they enjoy liberty of access to the throne of Grace. “At midnight they prayed, and sang praises unto God.” Thus “the Lord looseth the prisoners,” and thus the Anointed is “sent to preach,” and to give “deliverance to the captives.” But what, in respect either of multitude or of misery, are imprisoned debtors, or even felons lying under the rod of the law, compared to the voluntarily enslaved? “Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin.” And what blindness is like willful blindness, and what servitude so hopeless, so inglorious as that into which a man degrades himself? It is some alleviation of the depression of a servile estate, that the master is honorable, and that the service required is neither humiliating nor severe: but O how mortifying the refection of being in subjection to an unfeeling monster, to a capricious tyrant, to a contemptible groundling! And such is every slave to irregular appetite, whether it be “the lust of the flesh, or the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life.” Such dream that they are following their own will, but in truth they “are led captive by Satan at his will:” and “the wages of sin is death.” To deliver from this most inglorious, this fatal thralldom, then, is the object of Christ’s mission. What, Britons, glory, and well you may, in your civil liberties! and willingly assume the yoke of a paltry interest, of a groveling propensity which you are ashamed to avow! What, make it your boast that the moment the ill-fated African breathes British air he becomes free; and continue deliberately to “fulfill the desires of the flesh and of the mind,” which “war against the soul!” Great Deliverer, exert thy power, display thy grace; “open their eyes, turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified.”

“He hath sent me--for the recovering of sight to the blind.” On what numberless, and what delicate binges does human comfort turn! Who can describe “the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir

to?” Were the kindness of Nature or the care of Providence to be suspended but for a day, into what a quarantine hospital for infectious patients would the world be instantly transformed! The defect of a pail of a little finger is a blemish in organization, but a blemish which nature seldom permits; how much less a deficiency of one of the nobler parts, or a disarrangement of the whole system! “But that the works of God should be made manifest,” a “man is blind from his birth;” and another loses “the precious treasure of his eyesight.” Of the two, the latter surely is the greater evil. We cannot regret What we have hardly an idea of, what we, never possessed, and to which we become perfectly reconciled before we are conscious of existence. But to recollect the pleasures of vision after the organ is destroyed; but to be reduced to mourn with the poet in these affecting strains: With the year

Seasons return; but not to me returns

Day, or the sweet approach of ev’n or morn,

Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer’s rose,

Or flocks or herds, or human face divine

But cloud instead, and ever during dark

Surrounds me! from the cheerful ways of men

Cut off; and for the book of knowledge fair,

Presented with a universal blank

Of nature’s works, to me expung’d and ras’d,

And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out!

Paradise Lost iii. 40, etc. This is “darkness which may be felt.” In representing, accordingly, the deplorable state of the world under the image of blindness, a state of ignorance, guilt, and wretchedness; and in representing the correspondent office and work of the Redeemer, that blindness is not described as an original and radical defect of sight, but as the casual deprivation of a blessing once in possession and he is considered as sent, not to confer a benefit unknown, unenjoyed before, but to restore that which was lost, to illumine the extinguished orb. The truth is men had wilfully shut their eyes, because they could not bear the light. This was the condemnation of the unbelieving Jews, with all their superior advantages: “Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world; that they who see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.” And this was the condemnation of the self-conceited Gentiles, with all their affectation of wisdom “professing themselves to be wise, they became fools:” “they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” They are in another place thus described, and under the same image; “The Gentiles, walk in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” And this mental darkness is represented as necessarily blended with moral corruption of the grossest kind. Thus are both Jews and

Gentiles involved in thick darkness, and both under the dominion of sin; “God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.” The promises of Messiah are of equal extent; as “a salvation prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and, the glory of his people Israel.”

“He is sent, to set at liberty them that are bruised.” We have here a representation of human misery in every circumstance of aggravation; poverty, mental depression, captivity, blindness, fetters of iron. There is in this gradation, perhaps, an allusion to the horrid treatment of unhappy prisoners on falling into the hands of their enemies. They were shut up in prison, their eyes were thrust out, they were loaded with chains. Thus was Samson treated, the moment his strength failed, and his cruel adversaries had obtained power over him: “The Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison-house.” And the sight of his wretchedness they called sport. In this manner could one king act by another. “So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.” Such are the dreadful abuses which a man commits against his brother! such is the dreadful malignity of the human heart; such the detestable working of “the carnal mind,” which “is enmity against God,” and an unrelenting foe to man! This enumeration of human woes, is equivalent to a declaration, that whatever may be the nature, and whatever the extent of the malady, the promised deliverer should come provided with a suitable remedy. And when he did come, he not only exercised this gracious power himself; for “they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them;” but he communicated the same salutary virtue to his disciples also; “He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease.” And thus was the Scripture fulfilled. The prophecy contains one important article more The Anointed is sent to preach the accept able year of the Lord. “The law had a shadow of good things to come.” With its severity was blended a powerful infusion of mercy and mildness, the particulars of which had a direct reference to the times and the spirit of the Gospel. Of these, the year of jubilee was one of the most distinguished. It was ushered in with the sound of the trumpet, “proclaiming liberty throughout all the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof.” On the return of this hallowed fiftieth year, debts were remitted; alienated lands reverted to the original proprietor; the Hebrew bond-servant to a Hebrew, “he and his children with him” were to be set free, and restored to their rank in Israel; the poor Hebrew, who had been reduced to the sad necessity of selling himself as a slave to a stronger, was to be redeemed by his next of kin. In a word, at the expiration of every seven times seven years, all the disorders which had crept into the commonwealth, from the period of the preceding jubilee, were to be rectified, and all reinstated on the original basis. It is easy to conceive how such an era would be looked unto and longed for, what a happy tendency it had to ameliorate the condition of myriads, and to check the progress of oppression. In contemplating it, the Psalmist exclaims: “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound!” It was a figure of that “acceptable year of the Lord” which it was predicted the Messiah should be sent to proclaim, the perpetual jubilee of the Gospel, for the remission of sins; for the restoration of the forfeited inheritance of the saints; for the manumission of the slave; for the redemption of the captive; for releasing and bringing back the exile: in a word, “to destroy the works of the devil,” to repair the ravages of sin and death, to

introduce universal and everlasting liberty, and peace, and joy. The sequel of this service of the synagogue, and the effect which it produced, will be the subject of the next Lecture.

Learn, Christian, to compare Scripture with Scripture, and predictions with their corresponding events. Search diligently for him to whom all the prophets give witness, and in whom “all the promises of God are yea, and in Him amen, unto the glory of God.” Much is clearly manifested, and pointedly applied; but much still remains to be brought to light. Truth will not obtrude itself on the careless, superficial reader or observer, but discloses its hidden charms to the diligent, the devout, and the inquisitive. It is the injunction of Christ himself: “Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.” Search then in this particular view, and you will have to tell to others what Philip said to Nathaniel; “We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth.” “With joy shall ye draw water out of these wells of salvation:” and having tasted how sweet and refreshing it is, you will be disposed to impart it to others, for in this, if in any case, the saying of the wise man is verified: “There is that scattereth and yet increaseth:” and “it is more blessed to give than to receive.”

128. Jesus Christ--Survives Assassination Attempt

Jesus Christ--Survives Assassination Attempt

Luk 4:20-32. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land: but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill, whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he, passing through the midst of them, went his way, and came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath-days. And they ware astonished at his doctrine; for his word was with power.

It is truly affecting to think on what a slippery foundation men attempt to rear the fabric of happiness. They dream of deriving it from their own stores. In the pride of his heart a man imagines himself to be equal to everything. What can elude his penetration; what can resist his force; what can fatigue his industry? Nevertheless, the stammering of a child betrays his purpose; the rustling of a leaf melts his resolution; a stone cut out of the mountain, and hurled at him by an invisible hand, crushes in a moment all his powers into the dust. Are they more secure, or more successful, who defend on foreign aid; who build their felicity on the ability, the constancy, or the affection of others? Alas, it is an attempt to erect a house upon the sand; the washing of the next tide levels it to the ground. Friendship, in a flush of zeal, promised you all encouragement and support. The hour of need comes, and you have recourse to the heart which fondly cherished you; it has waxed cold, it is alienated, it acknowledges no longer. Your mountain stood strong in a prince's favor. What shall hot "be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" Ah, his breath is in his nostrils, he died yesterday, he has returned to his dust. Applauding multitudes hang upon your lips, the public finger points you out with approbation: but "you have heard" of the sufferings, as well as of the patience of Job. "When I went out to the gate through the city, when I prepared my seat in the street, the young men saw me and hid themselves: and the aged arose and stood up. When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me. Unto me men gave ear, and waited, and kept silence at my counsel. They waited for me as for the rain, and they opened their mouth as for the latter rain; I chose out their way, and sat chief, and dwelt as a king in the army.--But," O sad reverse! "they that are younger than I, have me in derision. And now I am their song, yea I am their by-word. They abhor me, they flee far from

me, and spare not to spit in my face. Upon my right hand rise the youth, they push away my feet: they mar my path, they set forward my calamity." And such is everyone who trusteth in popular favor; he feedeth on the wind, and graspeth the east wind in his arms. But a more illustrious and more instructive instance, to this purpose, than that of Job, is before us. Now the eyes of the admiring multitude in the synagogue are fastened with wonder and delight on the face of Jesus, anon they are filled with wrath against him: now all bear him witness, and dwell upon the gracious words which proceed out of his mouth;" next moment they are up in arms, they thrust him out of the city, they hurry him to the brow of the hill, with an intention to cast him down headlong. The cry today is, "let us take him and make him a king; never man spake like this man;" tomorrow it is, "away with him, crucify him; not this man but Barabbas." Let us trace the progress of the scene, and observe what produced the sudden change, and learn to cease from man, and to draw consolation and support from the approbation of God, and from the testimony of a conscience void of offence. The passage which he had read from the prophet was deeply interesting and affecting. It held up to view a most illustrious personage, supporting a dignified and important character, and singularly qualified for the exercise of it, employed in rendering the most seasonable and the most essential services to mankind; evangelizing the poor, healing the broken-hearted, redeeming the captive, enlightening the blind, setting the prisoner free, proclaiming the jubilee year, the era of universal joy. The value and weight of the subject were greatly enhanced by the manner in which he rehearsed it. Into his lips grace was poured: what majesty sat enthroned on his brow! what mild glory beamed from his eyes! what dignity and race in his attitude as he rose and sat down, in receiving the book and delivering it again to the minister! Behold every eye is fixed upon him, every ear is attention, while in these few but emphatic words, he explains and applies the prediction of the prophet, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." "I am He to whom the prophet gives witness; I am come into the world on this benevolent design; I, your bone and your flesh, your brother, your neighbor, your fellow-citizen, your friend." "Come to me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." On this admiration gradually, gives way to a feeling less gentle. Familiarity lowers the object with which it converses; self-love cannot brook to acknowledge a superior in an equal; envy seeks to indemnify itself under the oppression of eminent worth and excellence, by discovering and fixing upon some humiliating, mortifying circumstance, that reduces the hated greatness nearer to its own level. This explains the change which so quickly appeared in our Savior's auditory. Dazzled at first, by both the matter and manner of his address, they crown him with applause. But perceiving themselves eclipsed in the luster of his graces and virtues, sinking as he rose, they strive to tumble him from his excellency, as if by degrading him, they were themselves to mount. His parentage is his only vulnerable part; that was poor, and mean, and despised, and that, accordingly, envy brings forward with affected surprise. "Is not this Joseph's son?" And when once this baleful, malignant passion has taken possession of the breast, every claim of justice, every plea of worth, every call of gratitude, every emotion of mercy, is disregarded, stifled, trampled under foot.

Christ observes it with pity, not with indignation; for he came not only to relieve the miserable, but to bear with and overcome the forward, to convince, subdue, and melt the obstinate, to cure prejudice, and to instruct indocility. Their uncivil, invidious inquiry excites in him no resentment; it can do him no hurt; but grieved at the hardness of their heart, and at the same time, compassionating their weakness, he at once reproves the one and makes an apology for the other. The apology he draws from the common, and well known principles of human nature. No

prophet is accepted in his own country. Among strangers, a man is esteemed according to his talents and virtues. His ancestry and kindred are a matter of no moment. It is even a degree of merit to have emerged out of obscurity; but at home, among kindred and acquaintance, eminent qualities are regarded with a jealous eye. The reputation, ability, and wisdom of exalted goodness are considered by the less deserving as a reproach to themselves: What is every day within our reach we every day neglect. What costs us little we lightly esteem. Difficulty, and danger, and distance enhance the value of every object of pursuit. But the very apology implies a censure of human nature, as wicked, unjust, and absurd, in undervaluing worth merely because it is allied to us, and neglecting good for no better reason than that it is known. Our blessed Lord, accordingly, blends mild and gentle reproof with the excuse which he makes for the unkind return that his countrymen and kinsfolk had made to his affectionate endeavors to serve and to instruct them. And this seems to be the force of his reasoning.--“You have heard, my dear friends, of my going about doing good, at Capernaum and elsewhere; and you will naturally and with justice say to me, in the language of the common proverb, Physician, heal thyself: look at home; in attention to objects more remote, overlook not such as are equally pressing, and still more nearly interesting; let thy own country, if not in preference, at least in common with strangers, reap the benefit of these thy extraordinary, supernatural powers. Well, my beloved countrymen, here I am for this very purpose: ready to instruct you in the way of salvation, ready to heal all your plagues, to perform all the offices of mercy and loving-kindness which the prophet, in the passage which I now read, predicted concerning me: but I know the meaning of these ungracious looks, of these malignant whispers, of that envious inquiry into my pedigree, and occupation, and connections in life. You are under the power of prejudice, you are too well acquainted with me to reap benefit from my ministrations: my labors will be more acceptable where I am less known.

“It happeneth to me as it did to the prophets of old; they were neglected, hated, persecuted of their own countrymen; and you inherit the spirit of your fathers, whom no calamity could subdue, no arguments convince, no goodness charm. I appeal to the history of our own nation. The times of Elijah’s prophecy were marked with many signal interpositions of Divine Providence, particularly with a grievous famine, occasioned by a drought of uncommon duration, three years and six months. It was universally felt, particularly by the poorer and more unprotected part of the community, the widow, and the fatherless; and the extraordinary powers of the prophet were equally well known and acknowledged. But what is the fact? Was the prophet sought unto? Did the general distress drive the sufferers to seek relief in the piety and miraculous powers of the man of God? No, he was the Tishbite, the son of somebody whom they knew, he was at home, among his own, and therefore his person was despised, his office slighted, and even the widow and the fatherless unsubdued by the strong hand of necessity, perished from want, because they scorned the humane and compassionate interposition of a neighbor and kinsman. But O how acceptable was his visit to a stranger, a pagan, a woman of Sidon? She felt with others the pressure of the common calamity; the law of self-preservation, and compassion for the son of her womb, were strong in her, as in any widow or mother in Israel: but more faithful and believing than they, she cheerfully made the sacrifice of her last earthly provision; at the word of the prophet, she gave up her own and her son’s subsistence; she reposed confidence in heaven, she acknowledged the ensigns of Deity, she cast herself upon a miracle, and her hope made her not ashamed.

“Take another example, my friends, from your own history, and let it admonish and reprove you. Elisha inherited a double portion of the spirit of his master Elijah; he performed many notable miracles, he divided the waters of the river, he made iron to swim, he raised the dead to life, he employed the supernatural powers which were conferred upon him, in removing the miseries of his fellow-creatures. Among these the leprosy was one, a disease which baffles the skill of the physician, which not medicine, but the immediate power of God alone can cure. Now, what saith the record? What Israelitish lepers applied to the prophet, of the multitudes who were affected with this loathsome distemper? Not so much as one. He was at home, among those of his own house; the wretched patient, loathsome to himself, and a burden offensive to everyone about him, chooses rather to continue an abomination, than to be beholden to an acquaintance, to an equal, to a prophet of his own country, for the miracle of cleansing. Not so the son of the stranger: Naaman, the Syrian, the commander of armies, the favorite of a prince a worshipper of strange gods. He believes the report, he flies to the physician; he follows the prescription, he washes in Jordan and becomes clean.” The conscience of his audience makes the application of our Savior’s doctrine; and what ensues? What always did, and always will, when the principle of conscience is awakened, either humble and contrite submission to the reproof and an honest endeavor to profit by it: or else a rancorous animosity against the reprover, the confirmation of prejudice, a willful exclusion of light, or a determined perseverance in what is known to be wrong. Unhappily the frequenters of the synagogue at Nazareth were of this last description. Their indignation falls, not as it ought to have done, on their own mean, unworthy, ungenerous, unmanly spirit, but on their kind, affectionate, gentle monitor. And what follows? Is it the cynical representation of some surly traducer of mankind a or is it truth and history? Merciful Father of mankind! must I believe that the very persons who just now gazed with delight on that super-angelic face, who listened with rapture to the accents of that celestial voice, who justly gloried in their townsman, companion, and friend, are instantaneously, converted into demons of hell? What, meditate, digest murder! the murder of innocence, truth; and wisdom! What, all of them! not one calm, moderate spirit to suggest milder counsels, to plead the cause of goodness, to arrest the hand of violence! No, not one. O human nature, what wert thou; and what art thou become! I tremble to think that I am a partaker of thee; of a “heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” “They rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill, whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.” And shall not fire come down from heaven, as it did once, and a second time, to avenge a lighter insult offered to a much inferior prophet? O no! “the Son of man came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” Behold a more glorious triumph, a miracle of grace and condescension, a triumph worthy of the Son of God, and the Savior of men. “He, passing through the midst of them, went his way.” Behold power and mercy united. Were they, like the men of Sodom, stricken with blindness? Were their hands, like Jeroboam’s, dried up and rendered immoveable? Were their eyes, like the disciples going to Emmaus, holden, that they should not know him? I stop not to inquire. Suffice it to say, his “hour was not yet come,” and they had no power at all over him but what was permitted of God. And vain is the contention of man against God: it is hard for thee, O persecutor, to “kick against the pricks.” In the history referred to by our Lord, and in the instance of a miraculous supply of food to the widow of Sarepta, in a season ofextreme scarcity, as well as in the other equally noted instance of a miraculous cure of leprosy performed on the body of Naaman the Syrian, we perceive the dawning of the gospel day upon the Gentile world. They believed and obeyed the word of the prophet, and they obtained relief, while

“the seed of Abraham after the flesh” remained unbelieving and impenitent. “Of a truth, God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation, he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” “The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance, unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” How God will deal in the judgment with those who never enjoyed the benefit of either the law or the gospel, it is not for us to determine. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” But “we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation; which, at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?”

Among other evidences that the Christian dispensation is from heaven, the universality of it is not the least. This act of grace contains no unkind exceptions. There is no proscribed region, or family, or individual. The proclamation is, “peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord.” This dawning light was now in a progress “unto the perfect day.” Though Christ’s personal ministry was, in the first instance, addressed “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” its influence quickly spread far beyond the confines of Judea. “His fame went throughout all Syria;” a woman of Canaan believed on him, and her daughter was healed: the Roman centurion, who had been made partaker of the same precious faith, in like manner had power with God, and prevailed in behalf of his palsied servant. Some of our Lord’s immediate attendants lived to see “the kingdom of God come with power.” “The centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus” on the cross, “when they saw the earthquake, and those things that were done,” though unaccustomed to fear, “they feared greatly,” and made this open confession; “Truly this was the Son of God.” The miraculous effusion of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, in the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost, opened a passage in all directions for the speedy diffusion of the truth as it is in Jesus, over all lands. Peter no longer trembles and denies his master, but stands boldly up to plead his cause, and precious souls by thousands are added unto the Lord. Cured of his Jewish prejudices, by a vision from heaven, he descends to Caesarea, preaches the word of life to the centurion, Cornelius and “his kinsmen and near friends.” It is accompanied with power, and “with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.” That same apostle was spared to address epistles “to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” Philippians the evangelist, “went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which be did.” That evangelist finds a proselyte in the desert of Gaza, in a person of “great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure.” he, too, gladly receives the word, is baptized, and goes on his way rejoicing, to carry into those dark regions the light of divine truth, and the Scripture is fulfilled which saith, “Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.”

Time would fail in tracing the progress, and marking the success, of him, who is emphatically denominated the Apostle of the Gentiles, through the islands of the Mediterranean, over the states of Greece, in Italy, at Rome. John the beloved disciple, had the pleasure of dispatching particular letters, dictated by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, to the seven churches of Asia. He was one of those, then, concerning whom Christ said, in the passage already quoted, “verily I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.” His life was prolonged to extreme old age. He saw the kingdom of his divine Master established in Europe, in Asia, in Africa. The great Western World was still unknown; but, in the wisdom of God, it too has emerged out of the bosom of the vast ocean, to swell the Redeemer’s empire. To embrace the whole globe is its generous design. The period approaches, when “great voices in heaven” shall proclaim, saying: “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” “Though Israel,” therefore, “be not gathered,” Messiah “shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord:” for be saith of him; “it is a light thin 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.” And as the ancient dispensation contained many intimations of favor to the Gentile world, so the Gospel contains and discloses a dawn of hope to the Jewish nation. “Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” “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?”

Some interpreters of note have remarked a coincidence between the duration of the great famine which afflicted Israel, in the days of Elias, and that of our Savior’s ministry from his baptism to his death, namely three years and six months. As during the former period, at the word of the prophet, heaven was shut up, and all elementary influence suspended, to the inexpressible distress of the whole land; so during the latter, through the mediation of a greater than Elias, full communication was opened. In the one we have displayed the severity of the Law, in the other the grace of the Gospel; in Elias, the minister of wrath and condemnation: in Jesus, the minister of mercy and reconciliation; the one inflicting a temporary curse, the other calling down an everlasting benediction; there the clouds bound up, and the dew restrained; here a “doctrine dropping as the rain, and speech distilling as the dew; as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass.” The prophet represents, in beautiful language, the blessedness of an open communication between earth and heaven: “It shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel. And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.” But the contrast is dreadful! “She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax; and I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees.” The prayer of faith is the channel of this interesting communication.

It is humiliating to observe, and to reflect on the uniform and unrelenting malignity of the human heart. That greatness, power, wealth should be envied, and the possessor hated and thrust at, is not so much an object of surprise; but that simplicity, innocence, kindness, beneficence should provoke hostility, would exceed belief, were not the proofs too numerous and too stubborn to be resisted. We justly detest the wickedness, injustice, and ingratitude of the Nazarenes, in attempting to destroy their unassuming, unoffending townsman: but is the angry, the lofty spirit of man now subdued to the obedience and love of Christ? Has not a daring attempt lately been made by a great nation, once denominated Christian, to obliterate the name, and overwhelm the cause of Christ? Wherefore change the ancient measurements of time? It was in the hope of swallowing up the distinction of days, and thereby of sinking the observance of the Lord's day in the mass. With the abolition of the sabbath the service of the sanctuary is swept away; and the spirit of Christianity, it was presumed, would not long survive its forms and rites. Are there none among ourselves who express rancorous animosity against the worthy name which they so unworthily bear? Is not the Lord's day profaned and the temple deserted; and, in defiance of the law of the land, to say nothing of the obligations of decency and religion, are not efforts made by persons high in place and station, to discredit and disuse the ordinances of the Gospel, and thereby to bring the Gospel itself into disrepute? We say, however, concerning such men, in the spirit and words of the wise Gamaliel: "Refrain from these men and let them alone: for if this counsel, or this work, be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, they cannot overthrow it; lest haply they be found even to fight against God." To this fell spirit in man, what a striking, what an amiable contrast have we in the temper and conduct of our blessed Lord! To withdraw himself from among these ingrates is the only mark of displeasure expressed by him. He desisted from teaching persons who were determined not to learn; "He did not many mighty works there," because they were liable to misapprehension, to misrepresentation. "He, passing through the midst of them, went his way." Thus men grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and he departs from them. And thus the Apostles of the Lord, Paul and Barnabas, when "the Jews, filled with envy, spake against them, contradicting and blaspheming," they said; "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo we turn to the Gentiles." And is it no punishment to be forsaken of a friend; a friend whom we have grieved and offended, who feels himself constrained to retire, but retires silently, slowly, reluctantly? Little do men reflect what sorrow, what remorse they are treasuring up to themselves, in slighting, in neglecting a day of merciful visitation. It drew tears from the eyes of the compassionate friend of mankind: "And when he was come near he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."

We conclude with pointing out the Savior as a pattern of perseverance in well-doing. Nazareth is no longer a theatre of teaching and working. Does he therefore sullenly, resentfully cease from discharging the duties of his high office? No, other cities will gladly receive him. "He came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath-days." And what a course of active, unwearied beneficence did the remainder of his earthly pilgrimage exhibit! through evil report and good report, through opposition and discouragement, through sorrow and suffering, by night and by day, till, bowing his head, he could say, "It is finished." "Arm yourselves," therefore, Christians,

“with the same mind:” “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith:--consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” “And let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.” “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

129. Jesus Christ--Preacher and Teacher

Jesus Christ--Preacher and Teacher

Mat 4:12-22. Now, when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee: and leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea-coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nepthalim: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nepthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: the people which sat in darkness saw great light: and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And Jesus. walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

Among the other means of arriving at certainty, respecting “the things wherein we have been instructed,” it may be of importance to compare the present state of Christianity with its origin; to contrast the smallness of its beginnings with the greatness of its success; to consider the real influence which a cause so unpromising has had on human affairs, and the changes which it actually has produced on the face of the globe. Who is its Author? A mighty potentate, armed with sovereign power and authority? An invincible conqueror travelling in the greatness of his strength, at the head of triumphant legions, from victory to victory? An experienced statesman skilled in every art of intrigue, and amply furnished with all-commanding gold, toga in over credulous, or to purchase the suffrages of corruptible multitudes? The reverse of all this is the fact. The Author of our faith, Christians, as has frequently been repeated, was the reputed son of a carpenter; he was brought up in an obscure village of a region proverbially contemptible, of a conquered country; he was destitute of means, of friends, of worldly wisdom; he was a pensioner on the bounty of others, and frequently without a place where to lay his head. Will any one presume to allege that he associated with the great of this world, that he insinuated himself into the favor and counsels of the princes of the earth, that he went forth armed with their commission, and advanced in their name conquering and to conquer? No, history contradicts all this. He lived up to the age of thirty in the very depth of obscurity; his associates and coadjutors were few in number, men of mean parentage and parts, in the very lowest ranks of society, fishermen, the sons of fishermen. Did he employ, then, the arts of insinuation, address, and flattery to captivate the vulgar? Did he teach an easy, palatable, pliant morality, and attract the countenance and support of the million, by gratifying their passions, by conniving at their vices, or by humoring their prejudices? No such thing. His life and doctrine were quite the reverse. He preached and exemplified mortification, and self-denial, and patient submission to painful and unmerited suffering, and renunciation of the world. Undoubtedly then his followers could not be numerous, nor his reputation extensive; nor his

power of long duration. This too is contradicted by matter of fact. No teacher can boast of so many disciples; no name is so widely diffused; and after a lapse of eighteen centuries, the field of his triumph is extended and extending, and his outstretched arms are expanded to embrace a globe.

How is all this to be accounted for? Who shall explain this accumulation of mystery? Consult, on the subject, the learned Jewish doctor of laws, whom we formerly quoted with respect. His reasoning upon it is as sound, and as conclusive now, as it was near two thousand years ago. “If this counsel or this work were of men, it must have come to nought; but because it is. of God, it cannot be overthrown.” Christianity is the cause of heaven, and therefore it hath prospered, and shall continue to prosper.

We have hitherto beheld our blessed Lord single and unconnected; gradually showing himself to the world as a Teacher sent from God. In the passage which has now been read, we find him laying the foundation of his church, forming and modeling his household, beginning to provide a succession of public teachers of his religion, who should carry on to the end of time, the instruction of an ignorant, the reformation of a corrupted, the salvation of a perishing world. The career of John Baptist, his kinsman and fore-runner, was now come to an end. That rigid moralist and honest reformer had, by speaking truth and acting faithfully, incurred the displeasure of an arbitrary despot, who cast him into prison, where he soon after fell a victim to the resentment of an abandoned woman. But this John had already given a repeated and public testimony to Jesus Christ, as the Messiah, promised to the fathers, and as “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.” And, at his baptism by John, God had confirmed that testimony by a voice from heaven. As the Baptist’s public labors drew towards a conclusion, those of Jesus Christ were advancing to their commencement; and, as we have seen, they were first employed for the instruction and relief of his kindred and townsmen of Nazareth, where he had been brought up. His benevolent services there, however, were most ungratefully requited, the minds of his auditors being poisoned with envy, and, as a necessary consequence, their hearts hardened through unbelief. Disappointed of success there, where it might have been so reasonably expected, he gives not up, in sullen dissatisfaction, the work which was given him to do, but leaving Nazareth, to the manner related in the preceding Lecture, he proceeds to Capernaum, a town of Galilee, on the sea-coast, on the confines of the inheritance of the two tribes Zabulon and Nephthalim, denominated “Galilee of the Gentiles,” from its proximity to the regions of Tyre and Sidon. But what step of our Savior’s progress, was unmarked by the finger of ancient prophecy, and consequently directed by a special interposition of Divine Providence? Isaiah, who had so clearly and fully described his character and offices, in the passage which he read and applied to himself, in the synagogue at Nazareth, has also clearly and decidedly announced his visit to Capernaum, and the light and glory which his preaching and mighty works should diffuse over a region which lay buried in heathenish ignorance and idolatry. How runs the prophecy? “Nevertheless, the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulon, and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.” And what saith the history? “Leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the seacoast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond

Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region on and shadow of death light is sprung up. In this too is not “the arm of the Lord revealed?” Thus clearly does infinite wisdom foresee whatsoever shall come to pass: thus confidently doth unchangeable, unerring truth declare the end from the beginning, and thus irresistibly doth the mighty power of God bring it to pass. And thus by a series of “immutable things,” that “God who cannot lie” is affording “a strong consolation” to those “who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.”

Jesus takes up the same theme which constituted the subject of John’s preaching, namely the doctrine of repentance; that humbling doctrine, which regards a world lying in wickedness, ignorance, and misery so deplorable, as to be fitly represented by the powerful and expressive imagery of “darkness” and “the region and shadow of death;” that compassionate doctrine which stretches out a friendly hand to the guilty and the wretched; that reviving doctrine which gently draws the trembling sinner to the God of mercy, and which forbids the vilest to despair. And by what argument is this salutary doctrine recommended and enforced, by both the forerunner, and by the greater who followed after him? “The King of heaven is at hand:” the reign of grace, the dominion of love; a new display of divine perfection, even God descending to dwell with men upon earth, that he might prepare men to “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” What a fulness of time was now come when “the Prophet of the Highest,” like the sun, “rejoicing as a strong man to run a race,” began to “go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace!” The great Sovereign in this heavenly kingdom, in a manner peculiar to himself, announces his own public entry on the exercise of his authority; the Prince of Peace cries aloud, and proclaims “the acceptable year of the Lord!”

We said, in a manner peculiar to himself: for it looks as if he were meaning to court neglect, to excite compassion, or to provoke contempt, not to engage attention or to command respect. When we behold the carpenter’s son forming an humble alliance with three or four simple, illiterate, unconnected fishermen, the inhabitants of a little town on the coast of the sea of Galilee, Who is so timid as to take the alarm? Who is so sanguine as to expect any thing from such a confederacy? Who is such a visionary as to prognosticate from it the downfall of idolatry, and the revolution of empires? But this proved indeed the grand crisis in human affairs. It produced an universal and everlasting change in the state of the world. It was the establishment of a kingdom destined to control, and, at length to swallow up every other; nay, which was to outlast the sun, and survive the system of nature; which was to prove the foundation whereon to rear a new and more glorious fabric of creation, to serve as a theater whereon to display wonders which shall leave the pride of kings at an infinite distance behind. “All these things shall be dissolved: nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” On the day that Jesus called “Simon and Andrew his brother, James and John his brother” from their boats and fishing-nets, imperial Rome shook to the foundation; the Jewish hierarchy expired: Satan’s empire fell; and on their ruins began to arise “a kingdom which cannot be moved;” the predicted throne and kingdom of David’s Lord, which the zeal of the Lord of hosts was “to order, and to establish with judgment and with justice, even for ever.”

These simple men with simple names, then obscure, unnoticed, unknown, were hastening to acquire a celebrity which speedily eclipsed the titles of royalty, and the glare of imperial purple. “Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ;” John, “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” are held in lasting and grateful remembrance by the nations of the earth, while the memory of their mighty contemporaries, a Tiberius, a Nero, and a Domitian, is rotting in the dust, or preserved from oblivion by a note of infamy, and a sentiment of detestation. In the former we revere the benefactors of the human race; from the latter we turn away with abhorrence, as from so many monsters. The despised Galileans became “fishers of men,” converted myriads to the faith and hope of the Gospel, and, to this day, by their writings, continue to minister to the edification and comfort of the Christian world; and now that the papal throne is sinking after the imperial into utter annihilation, the throne of those humble followers of the Lamb is like that of their divine Master, built upon a rock, against which the gates of hell shall never prevail. The power of persuasion accompanied the call of Jesus: “Walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brethren; and he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets and followed him.” Presently after, he saw another pair of brothers, pursuing the accustomed labors of their humble occupation; “and he called them. And they immediately left the ship, and their father, and followed him.” It will be said that they had very little to lose, and therefore merit not the praise of having made a very costly sacrifice. No man can make a greater sacrifice than that of his all, whether it be much or little. When a person deliberately resigns the means of earning his bread, he casts him self entirely on Providence. The woman of Sarepta who, at the word of the prophet, brought her last morsel of bread to satisfy his hunger, exhibited a most illustrious display of confidence in God; as did likewise that other poor widow, whom Jesus beheld casting her two mites into the treasury, and whose liberality he so highly extols: “he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all. For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had.” It is not the quantity given, but the spirit in which it is bestowed, that stamps value on the gift. Peter indeed, on a certain occasion, seems to have highly rated the surrender which he made, and to have deemed himself fully entitled to a compensation: “Then answered Peter, and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?” Jesus I admits the claim: he undervalues not the sacrifice which affection has offered up, and ports out the glorious compensation which he was ready to make: “And Jesus said unto them, Verily, I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.” Such is the unbounded generosity of him who with in another place: “Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward.” But there must have been an inconceivable something in the manner and address of Jesus Christ, which could induce men in circumstances such as those of the disciples, to forego the very means of subsistence, and to follow him at all hazards. They feel the attraction of true goodness, but have not as yet any apprehension of the person, nature, and mission of the Master whom they were preferring to all worldly relations, possessions, and prospects. But their choice was shortly justified, as they attended his footsteps through the cities of Galilee: and it is highly grateful to find a first favorable impression, completely confirmed, or far

exceeded by knowledge and experience. They were to be made witnesses for Christ to all nations, every opportunity is therefore afforded them of the most intimate communication with him, “all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them:” that they might declare to the world “that which was from the beginning, which they heard, which they saw with their eyes, which they looked upon, and which their hands did handle of the word of life.” Through a channel, and on the testimony of witnesses, so little liable to suspicion, “the truth as it is in Jesus” has been transmitted to us. The mode of conveying to the minds of men “the gospel of the kingdom,” next arrests our attention. He went teaching in their synagogues. This consisted, if we may judge from his practice at Nazareth, in rehearsing aloud, before worshipping assemblies, the Scriptures of the Old Testament, either in their order, or passages selected for special occasions, and particularly applied. And this in every age and state of the church, ever since a revelation came down from heaven, was and is the groundwork of public instruction and devotion: even the word of the living God, the standard of truth, the foundation of faith, the rule of life. The second mode of instruction employed by our Lord, was “preaching the gospel of the kingdom.” This seems to have been something more than a simple reading of the Scriptures, followed by an equally simple application of the word read to its appropriate object, as in the instance which has already been under review: “This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.” The word translated to preach is derived from a noun which signifies herald, public crier, the messenger of prince to prince, of nation to nation. Thus the prophet Isaiah might be said to preach to the men of his day, when, by the command of God, he executed the office of a herald; “Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.” And thus, in strictness of speech, Christ himself might be said to preach, when “in the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” In a greater latitude, to preach is from a given topic, to argue, to exhort, to reprove, to encourage; to assail the heart, in the view of producing conviction, and of regulating the life through every avenue of the soul, the intellect, the passions, the very senses. Thus Paul on Mars’-hill at Athens, “preached Jesus and the resurrection.” Thus also at Troas, after breaking of bread, “he preached, and continued his speech until midnight.” And as Christ himself thus preached, “he sent out his twelve disciples to preach, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand;” and with this solemn charge he left them, when he ascended into heaven: “Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” And thus until now, through the operation of his mighty power, “the foolishness of preaching,” the preaching of “Christ crucified” is “to them that are called, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”

Teaching and preaching were accompanied, and supported by the display of miraculous powers, all employed in doing good. “He healed all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease, among the people.” This general description of human wretchedness, to which the promised Messiah was to apply a remedy, is followed by a sad enumeration of the several particulars which compose this depressing aggregate; some of them were more common, and in many cases removable by human skill and the use of ordinary means; some were more obstinate and hopeless, as the palsy, lunacy, which in general bid defiance to the healing art, and terminate at length the one in the dissolution of the body, the other in a total derangement of the mental powers. This catalogue is

closed by an extraordinary malady, seemingly peculiar to that period and spot of the world, diabolical possession. Attempts have been made to explain away this terrible affliction into a species of madness or epilepsy, to which the human frame has in all ages been deplorably subjected, but which can with no propriety be ascribed to the operation of malignant spirits. The instances, however, both of the existence of the disease, and of the cure, are too numerous, and too specific, to be confounded with mental disorder or bodily infirmity; and every attempt of the kind ought to be resisted, as a blow aimed at all historical evidence, as an insidious design to limit the agency of spiritual beings, and to measure all existing powers by those of man. The influence of “the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” has no need to be demonstrated. And wherefore should it be thought a thing incredible that, for a season, and for purposes by as inscrutable, this evil spirit might be permitted to harass and convulse the bodies of men, that the superior power of the Son of God might be manifested in recovering, both in body and inspirit, “out of the snare of the devil, them who are taken captive by him at his will?” The whole taken together, the teaching, the preaching, and the miraculous cures performed by Christ, in their combined effect, amount to this: there is not an evil which man is liable to, in his body, his mind, his estate, of yesterday or of many years standing, but what must yield to the wisdom, the power, the grace of Christ. It was the union of those several methods of conducting his divine mission that gave weight to each separately, and to the combined whole. Miracles without instruction might have accused, might have excited admiration and astonishment. But we know how very transient and inefficient impressions of this sort are. The wonder ceases, it is driven out by a new prodigy, and this, in its turn, gives place to a third and so on in succession, till extraordinary become mere common things, and no salutary effect is produced. But when the person who has been trying to instruct me, and whose lessons I found wearisome, and treated with neglect, takes a kindly interest in me and my concerns, makes my health and comfort his own; when he interposes seasonably, condescendingly, in behalf of myself, my child, my friend, my neighbor; and not only seasonably, but powerfully, effectually, in a way that far transcends the usual course of things; when I behold my teacher and my benefactor to be one and the same, the same man who vouchsafed to point out truth and tell me my duty, giving sight to a man that was born blind, and raising the dead to life, then the lesson comes with force to the heart and conscience. Nicodemus, the Jewish ruler, felt and acknowledged the irresistible power of this combination. He said to Jesus, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest; except God be with him.” Thus the simplicity of doctrine is dignified and impressed by the luster of miracle, and the effect of miracle; on the other hand, acquires permanency from the stability, importance, and usefulness of the doctrine. The preaching of the Gospel is no longer supported and confirmed by miracles. Granted. It is no longer necessary that it should. While supernatural, external aid was necessary, such aid was communicated. In Jesus Christ, and in what he did, taught, and suffered, the Scriptures were fulfilled. He authenticated his commission by the seal of miracles. Under that seal he executed it; and that seal he transmitted to his immediate disciples. Under it they acted, and the world was christianized. Miracles have effected all that they were intended to effect, and the Gospel now rests on its own unmoveable basis. What need of the formality of a seal to a writing which bears the impress of Deity on every line, on every letter? You call for miraculous proof of its divine original. That very call, in the nineteenth century from its first establishment, is the proof. Had it not been the cause of God and truth, it must long ere now have ceased to be a subject of discussion. When the opposition of avowed enemies; and the treachery

of pretended friends; are taken into the account, that Christianity should at all exist, is the greatest wonder that ever was presented to the world. You call for proof; it is at hand. What political, philosophical, moral system ever lasted so long, or could boast so many proselytes? What system is so favorable to science, to intellectual, civil, moral improvement? Introduce the spirit of Christ, and despotism and slavery expire together; man is settled on a basis of equality which disturbs not the order of society, and a prospect is opened of a state of being in which all the disorders now prevalent shall be completely rectified. You call for proof; it is at hand. Go to hamlets and huts; look to empty scripts and exhausted penury, to the field of painful, unproductive toil, and to the bed of languishing; see Rachel weeping for her children, because they are not: and David mourning over living, ungracious children. The sufferers repine not; they charge not God foolishly; they commit themselves to Him who clotheth the lily and feedeth the raven; labor makes rest sweet; and hope puts a pillow under the drooping head; the heart is poured out before God, and the countenance is no more sad. Is this no miracle? In what school of the philosophers are such lessons taught? And let it be observed that these, and such as these, are not the glaring, splendid triumphs of Christianity, but its daily, noiseless, unobtruding, unostentatious operation.

“Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.” Is miraculous proof of the divinity of the Gospel still demanded? It is at hand. By what instruments does the great Jehovah still support and extend the mediator’s kingdom? By men themselves feeble, ignorant, forlorn like those to whom they minister: men standing in need of the self-same instruction, consolation, and support which they are called to administer to others: men, in general, as little qualified by natural endowments, or by the acquisitions of literature, to subvert the kingdom of Satan, and to build up that of Messiah, as the fishermen of Galilee were to shake the throne of the Caesars, and to restore that of David which was fallen down. It is in every age the same. “Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.” “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”

Still call for proof! What kind and degree of proof will satisfy or silence infidelity? Shall the sun stand still and the moon be stayed? Are not the constant and uniform motions and appearances of those great luminaries an equal, or a superior demonstration of sovereign power and wisdom? Shall the shadow upon the sun-dial of Ahaz be accelerated or retarded ten degrees? What can it prove more than is done by a steady and regular progression? Thousands are fed miraculously, at once, by a few loaves and fishes. Is the miracle less which day by day feeds the innumerable tribes of the human race, by a process of vegetation, and of animal increase? The producing hand is the same in both cases, the manner of production makes all the difference. Should one rise from the dead, will ye believe and repent? One has arisen from the dead: but infidelity still holds out. And we must leave it to its consequences: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.” As the evidence, so the doctrine of Christianity is the same that it was from the beginning. Whether to the Jew or to the Greek; the preaching of John or of Christ himself, of the primitive disciples, or of the ministers of today, it is a

“testifying of repentance toward God, and of faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” From the beginning to the end of the world, the call is, “Turn ye, turn ye, Why will ye die?”--“bring forth fruits meet for repentance.” The command and the premise are blended together: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,” and they are addressed equally to the jailor at Philippi, and to the multitudes at Jerusalem: “Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” The universality of guilt demands universality of contrition and reformation; and there is but one “blood” that “cleanseth from all sin;” “neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

What other teacher, what other legislator did not find himself under the necessity of suspending, of relaxing, of mitigating the severity of the law; of accommodating himself to times, tempers, and circumstances? Even Moses himself was obliged to temporize, and to connive at the breach of the law, in favor of the hardness of the people’s hearts. But the great Christian Legislator has but one unvarying, inflexible code, for the prince and the peasant, for the noble and the ignoble, for the slave and his master. It alone suits all nations, all seasons, all situations. Among the other marks of Deity this is not the least. Christianity is a religion, not for this district or for that, but for the globe; not for the Jew or the Greek, but for mankind; and thus approves itself to be of Him who “hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth,” Nay more, Christianity is a religion for both earth and heaven, for time and for eternity. Its spirit is the spirit of love, and perfect love is the fulfilling of the Law and the perfection of felicity. “Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity. Wherefore? Faith and hope are adapted to a state of trial and suffering; they imply doubt, difficulty, imperfection: “but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.” But after the exercise of faith and hope has ceased, charity is arrived at its maturity; a maturity that knows no decay. Thus are “the spirits of just men made perfect.”

Once more we ask: Is the history which we have been reviewing the history of a mere man? Is there nothing superior, nothing divine in this mode of teaching and acting? What mortal could have engaged in such an enterprise, with such support, and have prospered? What human power and skill reach to the paralytic, the lunatic, the leper? What arm of flesh can control “the prince of the power of the air?” What eloquence of man can persuade the rich, or the poor to give up everything? What tongue can say, with effect, to the wind and the sea, “Peace, be still?” If these are not proofs of a present Deity, what proof can be demanded, what proof can be given? Our knees bow, our tongues confess “that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” Amen.

130. Jesus Christ--Omnipotent

Jesus Christ--Omnipotent

131. Before the Administration of the Lord's Supper.

Before the Administration of the Lord’s Supper.

Luk 10:17-22. And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven. In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said. I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy eight. All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.

Wise and good men have attempted to present an artificial arrangement of the several events recorded in the history of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, or what they call a Harmony of the Gospels. It is both a pleasing and an useful amusement to ascertain the dates and to settle the order of events; and labors of this kind merit high commendation. But the native majesty and simplicity of Scripture stand in no need of artificial arrangement. The whole spiritual building is august and venerable, and each particular part has its peculiar beauty and excellency. To be assured that such things were done, is of infinitely higher importance than to determine the exact series of succession. Every line of the history of Christ is a radiant splay of divine perfection; every step he takes leaves an impress of benignity behind it. It was predicted concerning him, that he should be “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” But it was likewise predicted that he should “see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.” . The words which have been read contain the accomplishment of this last prophecy. In all our affliction he was afflicted; let us weep with him: and when he “rejoices in spirit,” let us also “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; receiving the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls.” The followers of Christ had now increased to a great multitude. And need we wonder, if such doctrine, supported by such purity and dignity of character, and by such mighty works, had the power of attracting attention and respect wherever he went? “There followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan.” Out of those multitudes he selected first twelve, with the peculiar designation of disciples and apostles, to whom he imparted a portion of his spirit and power: “He gave them authority over all devils, and to cure diseases, to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick.” Afterwards “he appointed other seventy, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place whither he himself would come.” It was on occasion of the return of those seventy, after having fulfilled their mission, and upon the report which they made of their success, that Jesus broke out into this holy rapture: “In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.” Let us trace the process. The evangelist records, at full length, the

commission granted to those seventy, but gives us no particulars respecting their progress. These must be collected from the account which they themselves give of it. The seventy returned again with joy. Every thinking man enters on a difficult or a hazardous enterprise with very mixed emotions. He feels the consequence attached to an arduous and important station; he feels the pressure of responsibility, and the solicitude of general expectation pointed towards him. The animating stimulus of hope is repressed by the dread of miscarriage. It is a terrible thing to return toiled, disappointed, discomfited. The eve of a battle is a season of solicitude. But when the conflict is over, when success is no longer doubtful the soul enters into a state of perfect composure. Mournful is the reflection, “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain;” but how complete is the triumph of an apostle reviewing a successful ministry, and looking forward to the glorious recompense of reward. “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me in that day.” Such was the triumph of the seventy, having finished their circuit of the cities of Galilee.

They express peculiar satisfaction in reporting to their divine Master, that “even the devils were subject to them, through his name.” It was matter of great joy to them, that their preaching, had been acceptable and useful; that they had been the honored instruments in his hand to “heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease;” to predispose the minds of men to receive the kingdom of God, by healing their bodies: but to prevail against the great adversary who had so long tyrannized over the nations, leading them “captive at his will,” this filled up the measure of their joy. At the same time, they modestly disclaim all personal merit. They humbly ascribe the glory of all this wonderful success to the potent name of their almighty Lord. Jesus himself exercises underived power over universal nature, “What a word is this!” exclaimed the astonished multitudes, “for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out:” but the disciples have power, and prevail only through virtue communicated to them. “Without me,” says he “ye can do nothing:” and then is the believer most strong when he rests on imparted strength. Now those disciples were speedily to be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth, carrying with them the doctrine and the name, that is the wonderworking power of their Master. Wherever, therefore, virtue accompanied that name, there was Christ himself present; and of whom but of Deity can it be affirmed that he is in more than one place, in many places, in all space at once? God challenges omnipresence as his own: “Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord: do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord,” “Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will, search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent and he shall bite them.” The great Author and Finisher of our faith asserts to himself the same divine attribute, and connects with it perpetuity of duration, in the charge which he gave to his disciples before he ascended up into heaven: “Go ye and teach all nations;” there is a claim of universal power and presence; and he adds the gracious assurance; “and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” Here are omnipresence, and endless, unchanging united. When the viper dropped harmlessly from the apostle’s hand, in the island of Melita, there was the name, the presence, and the power of Christ. When Philippians in the desert of Gaza, “preached Jesus” to the Ethiopian eunuch, and converted him to the Christian faith, there was the name, the presence, and the

power of Christ. When John, in the isle that is called Patmos, “heard a great voice, saying, I am Alpha and Omega,” there was the name, the presence, and the power of Christ. That presence, my brethren, we hope and trust, is in the midst of this worshipping assembly, and presiding over it; is to consecrate that table and those elements of bread and wine; is to sanctify and ennoble our communion and fellowship. But it is not confined to this place. It is at this moment diffusing light, and life, and joy over myriads of worshippers in the east, in the west, in the south, in the north. It is “the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea:” “in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee and bless thee.” “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” This subjection of the devils to the disciples, through the name of Christ, Jesus in his reply contemplates as the beginning of Satan’s complete and final overthrow, as a step toward the total subversion of his kingdom, “He said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven;” “when I sent you forth armed with my commission, and furnished you with power to execute it, I saw swift destruction overtaking the destroyer. You have begun a conquest which I am proceeding to accomplish. You have subjected his mischievous agents. I shall bruise Satan himself under your feet shortly.” “His usurped dominion,” as “the God of this world,” as “the prince of the power of the air,” as “the ruler of the darkness of this world,” is hastening “to expire. Rooted, established as it may seem to be, it shall vanish in a moment, rapid as a flash of lightning, which disappears before it is well seen.” The expression is in use with both the sacred and profane authors. The downfall of the king of Babylon is, by the prophet, represented under this bold imagery; “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground!” The Roman orator says of Anthony, “thou hast dragged down thy colleague from heaven;” and when Pompey the Great was hurled from his proud preeminence, Cicero represents him as having “fallen from the stars.” The time to favor a darkened, enslaved world was now come, and Jesus triumphs, in the near prospect of the conversion of the Gentile nations “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” The former mission of the seventy was limited to “the cities and places, whither he himself would come;” now their sphere is enlarged, and with an extended commission fresh assurances are given of divine protection wherever they went. “Behold I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you.” After the resurrection from the dead, an unbounded career is set before them, the vast globe is spread out as the scene of action, the whole human race, through all ages and generations is the grand object of the gospel ministry, and powers adequate to the undertaking are granted. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”--“and these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them: they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” Here every obstruction is removed, all opposition dies, every enemy is subdued, and the Scriptures are fulfilled, which say: “Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:” “Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day.” “Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.” Thus was the serpent’s head bruised, and the triumph of the Redeemer completed. Compare spiritual things with spiritual, the commission of the great Head of the Church with the execution of it, the promised support of the apostles with what they were enabled actually to

achieve, as the facts stand recorded in the book of their acts. But Jesus points out to his disciples a purer source of joy than even a grant of miraculous powers could bestow. It was highly honorable and unspeakably grateful to be invested with authority to control evil spirits, to cure inveterate distemper, and quicken the dead, and to enjoy perfect personal security amidst snares, and dangers, and the shadow of death, to speak with tongues and instruct the ignorant. But these and other choice gifts of God have been conferred on the unworthy. Great talents are not always sanctified to the possessor. Beneficial to others they may be unprofitable or even pernicious to the man himself. He may speak with the tongues of men and of angels: he may have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge: he may have all faith so as to be able to remove mountains; he may lay out his whole estate in works of charity, and even submit to suffer martyrdom, and after all remain destitute of that principle which alone admits into the kingdom of heaven. The magicians of Egypt performed wonders, but they served only to harden the heart against God. Balaam was a true prophet; but “he loved the wages of unrighteousness:” he knew and approved the better course, but he deliberately persevered in the worse. Simon had the art of bewitching the people of Samaria with sorceries; “to him they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, this man is the great power of God.” “He himself believed also, and was baptized,” but his “heart was not right in the sight of God;” he was still “in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.” “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” Where God has bestowed much, he will expect much, and in proportion to the number and value of the gifts received is the account that must be given. Who was equally honored with the apostle of the Gentiles, by extraordinary communications from heaven? but “it is not expedient for me,” says he, “to glory:” “of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.” In what then does a Paul, in what does every believer chiefly rejoice and glory? In the composing reflection, “my name is written in the book of life.” “I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” Compared to this, what a poor trifle it is for a man to know that his name is in an opulent testator’s will for a splendid bequest, were it even the reversion of a kingdom? This is that “peace of God which passeth all understanding, which shall keep the heart and mind through Christ Jesus, and which the world can neither give nor take away.” This is “the hour,” the eventful hour when “Jesus rejoiced in spirit:” the hour when the great Sovereign of the universe was subjecting spiritual wickedness to human agents, and perfecting praise out of the mouths of babes and sucklings; when all the glories of the kingdom of heaven unveiled themselves to his view, and the nations of the earth hastened into it. The scenes of sorrow and suffering which must intervene are absorbed in contemplating, the blessed effects which they were to produce. “In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.” Here we behold our great pattern setting us the example of referring everything to God, as the first cause and the last end of all; who acts by his own uncontrollable, inexplicable supremacy, and with a view to his own glory. But we are not; to

understand our Lord as giving thanks that “the wise and prudent” were kept in a state of ignorance respecting the things of God, but that while they were so, while they remained under the power of willful blindness, it had graciously pleased God to manifest these things to the comparatively simple and illiterate. We have a similar mode of expression, and which falls under the same mode of interpretation, in the epistle to the Rom 6:17, where the apostle says: “But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin;” meaning obviously, “that although, that whereas ye were the servants of sin, ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you:” So here, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that while the wise in their own conceits, and the prudent in the estimation of the world, neglect and despise the things which belong to their peace, their all-importance is discerned, felt, prized, and improved by persons, lowly in their own sight, contemptible in the eyes of men, but estimable in the eyes of Him who “resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”

Jesus ascribes to the Father universality of dominion, under the title of “Lord of heaven and earth;” and he resolves all creatures and all events into divine sovereignty: “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.” “He giveth not account of any of his matters.” “He doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” That which is good in the eyes of man is frequently a sore evil; but that which is good in the sight of God must be good in itself; and when Deity shall have executed the whole plan of his providence, the myriads of his saints and angels shall with one voice proclaim “all is good.” “Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne; and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

Having made this ascription of universal power, authority, and property to the Father, he represents himself as invested in an equal extent of dominion, as sole and sovereign administrator of the world which he made, which he upholds, and which he came to redeem. “All things are delivered to me of my Father.” God is “Lord of heaven and earth.” Now these two words imply all space, with all the beings which inhabit the worlds “visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities; or powers,” To the utmost extent of the words, therefore, and of their import, the sovereignty of God, Redeemer extends, and it is asserted and ascribed neither in a single passage, nor in doubtful terms. “All power,” says he, in another place, “is given unto me in heaven and in earth;” “authority to execute judgment also;” “power over all flesh, to give eternal life.” “The Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them: even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man; but hath committed all judgment unto the Son; that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father.” Now this is either mere pretension, unfounded as that of the devil over “all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them,” or it is a claim of right: and who but God can support such a claim? Who but God can possess and exercise the power of quickening the dead, of executing judgment upon all, not only according to their works, but according to their most secret thoughts, and of bestowing eternal life? Is a creature, a mere man like ourselves, to be entrusted with, is he capable of managing such an empire? No; Where all power, then, is lodged, there is Deity; “in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him.” Behold, Christian, and rejoice in spirit, the powers of darkness prostrate under the feet of the Prince of Peace: He “maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flaming fire,” and “are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” Behold the heathen given him for his inheritance, and the uttermost

parts of the earth for a possession; “He must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet.” We, my beloved brethren, are part of the all things which are delivered by the Father unto the Son; and the precious deposit is securely placed: Thine they were and thou gavest them me:--those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is “lost:” and you are going this day solemnly to deliver up yourselves to him, to be taught by his spirit, to be governed by his laws, to be protected by his arm, to be supplied by his providential care; therefore “ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

It is added, “and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.” That is, the nature, excellency, and dignity of the Godhead can be known only by Deity. God is infinite in all his perfections, but in contemplating infinity all created understanding is lost. This reciprocal knowledge of the Father and of the Son is itself a mystery inscrutable, or it presents at once plurality and unity; which human reason sinks under. “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” If man has been enabled to form any right notion of God, he is indebted for it to the revelation of Jesus Christ the Son of God. That revelation has unfolded God’s purpose and grace, before the world began. That revelation has explained the history of Providence through ages and generations past. That revelation has disclosed an eternal duration to come, for unfolding, in endless succession, the inexhaustible treasure of the knowledge of “the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.” Every past, every present, every future discovery of the divine counsels, and of their execution, is the operation of the great light of the world; “for God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory if God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

If such were the honor and the power conferred on the twelve and on the seventy simple Galileans; if through the grace of Christ they not only exceeded the attainments of science, and the operations of art, but exercised authority over the devil and his angels, then what may not man become? What bounds shall be set to the progress of an immortal being, “the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness?” The eye of sense discerns a frail child of dust, sinking under a load of growing infirmity; “in heaviness through manifold temptations;” “through fear of death subjected to bondage.” The eye of faith beholds in that same forlorn creature, one hastening unto the resurrection of the dead, about to assume a glorious body fashioned after the similitude of that of a risen and glorified Redeemer, arising “to meet the Lord in the air,” triumphing over death, and “him who has the power of death,” “with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, and changing into the same image from glory to glory.”

Christ has taught us, my brethren, to resort to the radical source of consolation; “rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.” It is a pleasant and an honorable feeling to take complacency in an illustrious or even reputable descent; to reflect on the attainment of eminence of station by eminence in talent; to contemplate wealth earned by industry and fair dealing. But these, and such advantages as these are transient. They may be marred and embittered by untoward circumstances. But to meditate on an unalienable, unalterable good, running through the whole progress of duration, increasing continually in luster and value; to think that all is the free gift of a Father, whose love is not liable to change, whose bounty is inexhaustible, whose power sustains the worlds visible and invisible, and whose existence is from everlasting to everlasting; this soothes the soul to peace, this sweetens the bitterest morsel, this quenches the flame of the fiery

trial, this disarms the king of terrors. “These things saith he that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars.” “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father and before him angels.” The highest privileges which Christianity confers, and the fairest prospect which it opens, powerfully recommend the spirit of humility. Is thy name written in heaven? What hand wrote it there? Might not the hand that wrote blot it out again? Has not thy own right hand made many a dreadful attempt to erase the signature? If it has found a place on that hallowed page, if it has been permitted to remain there, if it has not in fatherly displeasure been for ever obliterated, it is all of free sovereign grace. Art thou an heir of “a kingdom which cannot be moved?” “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom,” have grace, whereby you may “serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.” The highest and holiest are also the humblest of beings. With whom does “the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy,” delight to dwell? “With him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” He who is most humble has the greatest similitude to his divine Master, and to be like Christ is to possess the highest glory which the creature is capable of attaining. “Learn of me,” says he, not to walk upon the water, or rebuke the wind, not to open the eyes of the blind or quicken the dead, but “Learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye hall find rest unto your souls.”

“Jesus rejoiced in spirit,” as he contemplated the rise, the progress, the consummation of his kingdom, and the correspondent downfall of the empire of sin and Satan. He is the same who wept over the rave of Lazarus, “who groaned in the spirit and was troubled,” in sympathy with the woe of others; the same who beheld the devoted city, “and wept over it;” the same who in the agony of Gethsemane, exclaimed, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” Let our sorrows and joys flow from the same sources with his. Are the ravages of time and death presented to our view, or the still more dreadful ravages, which issue in death committed by “the carnal mind which is enmity against God,” and hatred to man? Are we the spectators of the progress of moral corruption from evil to worse, till all is lost? Can we behold it unmoved? “Fool’s make a mock at sin,” but every serious spirit is very differently affected. “I beheld the transgressors;” says the Psalmist, “and was grieved because they kept not thy word. Rivers of waters run down mine eyes; because they keep not thy law.” On the other hand, how delightful is it, to mark the progress of goodness; “the path of the just as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the prefect day;” to behold “a brand plucked out of the fire,” a soul saved from death, an heir born into the kingdom of God! This causes “joy in heaven, in the presence of the angels of God.” This is that “travail of his soul,” which the Redeemer “shall see, and shall be satisfied.” This is the dawning of that eternal day when “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.” That we all may be found in that company, partake of that joy, assist in raising those songs, may God of his infinite mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

132. Prayer in consecrating the Elements.

Prayer in consecrating the Elements.

We thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for all thy inexpressible, all thy inconceivable goodness to the children of men. Thou didst form the first human body of “dust of the ground,” and thou didst breathe into man the breath of life, and he became a living soul, capable of knowing, of admiring, of loving, and of enjoying the glorious excellencies of the Divine Nature. Under thy creative benediction he increased, and multiplied, and replenished the earth. But man that was in honor continued not. Sin entered into the world, and death by sin has passed upon all men. Nevertheless, God who is rich in mercy, pitied and spared and said, “Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom.” To guilty man, driven out from paradise, a door of grace opened, a dawn of hope arose. That dawning light, that day-spring from on high, through thy favor, waxed brighter and brighter, till it reached meridian splendor. The fulness of time came, when “God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets,” was pleased to speak “unto us by his Son, the heir of all things;” who “made the worlds, being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power.” But he “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:” He was “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief:” and “being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the, death of the cross,” and “when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” “Which things the angels desire to look into;” let our souls rejoice and adore. To thee, voluntarily humbled, to thee, highly exalted Savior, our knees shall bow: that name which is above every name out tongue shall confess: “the love of Christ constraineth us:” “we love him: because he first loved us.” And what proof, blessed Lord, what proof of love art thou this day demanding of thine infinitely indebted creatures? Not to suffer the loss of all things, not to go to prison and to death for thee, not to give our body to be burnt, not to give but to receive: “Take and eat, Take and drink, Do this in remembrance of Me.” Of a truth thy commandments are not grievous; thy yoke is easy, and thy burden is light. Draw us, we will run after thee; these are cords of a man, these are bands of love. We hear the command and we obey. We present our bodies a living sacrifice, which is our reasonable service. We devote the superior powers of our immortal spirits to the contemplation of the great mystery of godliness, that we “may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and that we may “be filled with all the fulness of God.”

We employ, risen and exalted Redeemer, we employ these elements of bread and wine as a memorial of thy dying love, because, in the near prospect of death, thou wert pleased, by giving thanks over them, to set them apart to this sacred purpose. We would, after thy example, look up to our Father in heaven, and give thanks for all the blessings which they commemorate, for redemption through the blood of Christ, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of free sovereign grace; for the abolishing of death, and for all the exceedingly great and precious

promises, and the glorious prospects of life and immortality brought to light by the gospel. In thy name we solemnly separate, from a common to a hallowed use, so much of this bread and of this wine as we are now to employ in commemorating the death of Christ, his body broken, and his blood shed as a propitiation for the sin of the world.--And over these sacred symbols we again solemnly dedicate ourselves unto thee, to be disposed of by thy providence, to be governed by thy laws, to be guided by thy spirit, to be accepted through thy intercession. Thee having not seen we love; in thee, though now we see thee not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory; receiving the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls. In thy presence we become witnesses to each other, and we call angels and men to witness that we subscribe with our hand unto the Lord, in trembling hope that our names are written in the Lamb’s book of life, among the living in the heavenly Jerusalem. And in this blessed hope we would, with one heart and voice, ascribe to God in Christ the kingdom, and the power and the glory, now, and for evermore. Amen.

133. Address to Communicants at the Sacramental Table.

Address to Communicants at the Sacramental Table. To sit down at one table, to partake of the same fare, is the happiest view of domestic comfort and of friendly intercourse. The body and the mind are refreshed at once. The bond of union is strengthened and sweetened between the father and mother, between the parents and their children, among brothers and sisters, among kindred and friends. To the enjoyment of that pure and exalted felicity, my brethren, we are now invited; and with the prospects of immortality blend the endearing charities of human life. The great Master of our Gospel repast is not now indeed the object of sense, but he is assuredly with us, he contemplates with complacency our common faith and hope, our mutual affection. He rejoices in spirit while he beholds those for whom he died remembering his death, obeying his commandments, living under the influence of his spirit, advancing in his strength toward the kingdom of heaven. Him not having seen ye love, and ye look forward to the day when ye shall be like him, for ye shall see him as he is.

Communicants, ye are elevated to the summit of an exceeding high mountain, but not by the spirit of delusion, to survey airy or earthly kingdoms, and a glory unsubstantial and transient: but by the spirit of power and of love, and of a sound mind, to contemplate a kingdom which cannot be moved, a kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. You survey an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away; not with the feelings of a Balaam, who beheld from the high places of Baal, the goodly tents of Jacob, and the tabernacles of Israel, in which he had neither part nor lot; nor with the emotions of a Moses, who from Pisgah viewed the land flowing with milk and honey, into which he must not enter; but with the confidence and composure of an Abraham, to whom God said “Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward arise, walk through the land, in the length of it, and in the breadth of it: for I will give it unto thee;” but with the rapture of a Stephen, who expiring exclaimed, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.” That ye Christians, may through grace be made partakers of the same divine consolation, we administer unto you, and partake with you, the commanded memorial of the sufferings and death of the Redeemer of mankind.

“The Lord in the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread: and, when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.”

How powerfully emphatic every word is! the bread of nature, in order to become the aliment of the body, is bruised, and broken, and passes through the fire: “The bread of life, which came down from heaven,” says Christ in his doctrine, “is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” “It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief:” behold him buffeted of wicked men, scourged, his head crowned with thorns, his hands and his feet pierced, his soul poured out unto death. And for what end? His body, my sinful fellow-creature, was “broken for you.” “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace

was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." And what does he demand in return? Do this in remembrance of me. Blessed Jesus! if thou hadst bidden us do some great thing, would we not have cheerfully complied? How much rather then, when the yoke of love is imposed? We come at thy call: "We will remember the name of the Lord our God;" "O Lord our God, other lords besides thee have had dominion over us; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name."

"After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." In drinking together, my Christian friends, from this cup, we joyfully acquiesce in the new, and better, and well-ordered covenant, "ordained by angels in the hand of a Mediator," and "established upon better, promises;" a covenant which makes provision not only for human infirmity, but for the deepest and most malignant guilt, and which affords not merely a temporary relief, but confers an unchangeable and everlasting security. "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 neighbor, and every an 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." And what is the seal of this better covenant? It is before you. "This cup," says the Savior, "is the new Testament in my blood:" the wine in the cup is a symbolical representation of my blood shed for the remission of sin. "Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold: but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot;" "slain from the foundation of the world," and which "cleanseth us from all sin." In celebrating this holy ordinance, we are not only more closely cementing the ties of nature and the hands of friendship among ourselves, but we are extending our communion to the church of Christ universal, in the east and west, in the south and north; we are stretching out the right hand of fellowship over continents, over oceans, to give the salutation of brotherly-love to all who love our Lord Jesus; and to invite men of all colors and of all languages, to cast in their lot among us, and to take shelter with us under the shadow of this "great rock in a weary land," to repose with us amidst "the trees of life," whose "leaves are for the healing of the nations." But is not "our fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ?" Is it not, then, with them who are drinking new wine in our Father's kingdom; with the spirits of just men made perfect; with those whom on earth we loved; with those who have often eaten and drank with us at this table, and with whom we hope to eat and to drink at the table that is above, sitting down with them, and "with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven?" Delightful reflection! The employments of earth and heaven are the same; the animating principle, the spirit of, love is the same; the subject of their praise and the source of their joy are the same. "Unto Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth: 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." The solemnity concludes with an intimation of Christ's second appearance. "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." "Why trouble ye the woman?" said Christ to the indignant disciples, who grudged the waste of the ointment which she poured on

his feet, for she hath wrought a good work upon me; for in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial." Her pious act embalmed the body for the grave: ours contemplates Jesus, and the resurrection; ours looks forward to the day when "the Son of man shall come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." "Yet a little while and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." "He which testifieth these things saith, surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

134. Jesus Christ--The Marriage Feast

Jesus Christ--The Marriage Feast

John 2:1-11. And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee: and the mother of Jesus was there. And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. And there were set there six water-pots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins a piece. Jesus saith unto them, fill the water pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was, (but the servants which drew the water knew) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

It requires no common degree of wisdom to make the transition from various situations one to another, with dignity and propriety. The gravity and seriousness of deportment that suits the temple do not suddenly melt away into the familiarity and ease of private life. Men are called to act various parts, but often lack the skill to discriminate between character and character. At other times the scene changes too rapidly, and the habit of the public personage is scarcely laid aside, when the spirit of it is likewise shifted, and the man discovers that he is merely an actor. Difference of behavior may undoubtedly be assumed with change of place and of company, without incurring the imputation of hypocrisy: but there is a radical character which the honest man never lays aside, whatever be the season, whatever the situation. He cannot indeed be gay and serious at the same moment: but in the house of mourning he may be sad without sinking into depression, and in the house of feasting he may be cheerful without rising into levity. He can “rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep,” without losing the firmness of his mind, or betraying inconsistency of spirit and temper. In truth, if you would be useful to men, you must accommodate yourself, where the rights of conscience do not interfere, to their circumstances, and to the laws of decency and prudence. But where, alas! shall we find the man who is continually on his guard, who in ever situation possesses his soul, and governs his spirit, and keeps the door of his lips? In vain we look for such a one among men of like passions with ourselves. But it is not for want of a perfect pattern, in the person of him who in all plates, at all seasons, and in every situation approved himself the Son of God and the friend of men. Let this mind be in you which also was in Christ Jesus. He hath left us an example that we should follow his steps. Blessed Lord, we will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

We have attended the great Teacher sent from God to the synagogue at Nazareth, and have heard him fulfilling the duties of that gracious office by reading and opening up the Scriptures, and

thus producing one species of evidence to the truth of his divine mission, the accomplishment of ancient, well known, and acknowledged prophecies concerning himself, his person, his consecration to the great work which he should come to execute, and the wonderful success with which it should be crowned. We have seen him with complacency receiving his disciples on their return from a progress of preaching and healing, and of casting out devils; and rejoicing in spirit, as he contemplated the sudden and utter destruction of Satan's kingdom, and, on its ruins, the universal and everlasting establishment of his own. We are now to behold him exhibiting a different kind of evidence, but calculated to produce the same effect, that is, a full conviction that Jesus Christ was the Son of God; and the Savior of the world, namely, the display of miraculous powers, to support the truth of the doctrines which he taught. This "Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews," felt and admitted. "Rabbi," says he, "we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." As on the two great commandments, love to God and love to man, "hang all the law and the prophets," so on these two unmoveable pillars rest the whole fabric of Christianity. The fulfilling of prediction, is a demonstration of the foreknowledge of Deity, "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:" and of his truth and faithfulness in bringing it to pass, to an iota, to a tittle: the working of miracles evinces the presence and concurrence of almighty power, which is able to support and to suspend, to control and alter the laws of nature, by a word, by an "I will." If the spirit and native tendency of the gospel be taken into the account, we shall find it to possess every character of Divinity that the heart of man could desire, or reason demand, or imagination figure. The period, and the place, and the occasion of Christ's first public miracle are all specified. It was the third day after the noted conversation that passed between Christ and Nathanael, which is recorded in the conclusion of the preceding chapter. There Jesus gave proof not merely of superior sagacity, but of a knowledge that discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart. Nathanael, with all his guileless integrity, labored under the common prejudice of the day, and had the vulgar proverb in his mouth, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" He soon received conviction that there could, and that too the best of all things; for while he was yet speaking to Philippians Christ himself drew nigh to meet them, and instantly, in the hearing of Nathanael, pronounced a character of him which the searcher of hearts only could have unfolded; "Bold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." Nathaniel, justly conscious of inward rectitude, finds himself at once reproved and detected. His sarcasm respecting Nazareth not retorted but disarmed, by receiving in return the honorable appellation of "an Israelite indeed," was a keen reproof to an ingenuous mind; and to find himself minutely known to a stranger, must have inspired high respect for that stranger, not unmixed with awe. With astonishment he exclaims, "Whence knowest thou me?" The answer completely displays the character of the Nazarene: "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee." Here is an eye which at once penetrates into the heart, and marks minute, external contingent circumstances even to the species of plant under the shadow of which Nathanael, at a certain moment, happened to repose. The "Israelite indeed" now resigns his prejudices and dismisses his doubts; wonder changes into veneration, "Nathaniel answered, and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel:" and thus another respectable disciple is added to the school of Christ.

Let not this be considered as foreign to the subject of the present Lecture. Nathanael was, of course, one of the invited guests to celebrate the marriage at Cana of Galilee. He was there, within

three days, to behold another species of demonstration of his Master's divinity, that he might bear witness to it. And it was fit that a man so candid and upright should be furnished with every kind of evidence, which could remove prejudice or subdue infidelity. He is not indeed hereafter mentioned in the gospel history, but it seems highly probable that a person of his description, was specially called to take an active part in propagating the truth as it is in Jesus. Some commentators have supposed him to be the same with Bartholomew, one of the twelve. The place, where the miracle exhibited the glory of the Redeemer, was "Cana of Galilee," perhaps to distinguish it from another city of that name in Celosyria, mentioned by Josephus in his Jewish Antiquities. It was situated in that part of the Holy Land, which in the partition under Joshua, fell by lot to the tribe of Asher; and stood on a river of the same name, which flowed through part of the inheritance of the tribe of Ephraim, into the Great Sea. It was hitherto a mere name, or a speck which might casually catch the eye as it wandered over the map of Palestine; but Cana now acquired a celebrity which makes her to rank with the proudest of capitals, from an event which will transmit her name to the latest posterity. The occasion was a marriage solemnity. It is an institution of Heaven nearly as old as the creation: it was first celebrated in Paradise; God himself formed the union, presided over and witnessed the contract, and pronounced the nuptial benediction. This stamps a purity, a dignity, a permanency on the ordinance, which man is bound highly to respect. The great Interpreter and Restorer of the Law, accordingly, puts honor upon the institution by his presence and countenance, and by contributing to the comfort of the assembly convened on this happy occasion, by the charms of his conversation, and by a seasonable supply of one ingredient in a feast: and he afterwards vindicated the primitive sanctity of marriage from the irregularity and impurity which the hardness of the human heart had constrained even a Moses to permit, at least to connive at. "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning, made them male and female; and said, for this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What, therefore, God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."

John the Baptist incurred the imputation of being possessed with a devil, because he was a man of more austere manners, and of a more sequestered mode of living; because he "came neither eating bread nor drinking wine." His divine Master, more gentle in deportment, more affable, accessible, and condescending, because he mixed with society, because he "came eating and drinking," is by the self-same persons represented as "a gluttonous man, and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." Where there is a disposition to censure, no purity nor prudence can escape. Nothing can please the peevish children in the market-place. If their fellows excite them to dance by the sound of the pipe, they are disposed to look grave and mourn: if their companions are in a serious mood, it is with them a time to dance. You cannot tell where to find them. It is not, at the same time, a mark of wisdom to brave the opinion of the world; but woe be to that man whose conduct has no better regulator than either popular opinion, or the decisions of a self-constituted censor. Christ has by example taught his disciples to seek, and to take opportunities of being useful, whatever construction may be put upon it by malignant observers.

"The mother of Jesus was there," apparently, as one of the family, who took an interest in the credit of her relations, and to assist in attending to the comfort and accommodation of the guests; for we find her watching over the expenditure of the provision, and devising the means of supply when it should fail. But Jesus and his disciples were among the persons specially invited. As the

aim of the evangelist is simply to detail the circumstances relating to the miracle, everything foreign to this is suppressed. This remark is applicable to the sacred writers in general. They present the leading object in its strongest features, leave it to make its native impression, and pass from it without exclaiming, without parade, without a commentary. On the other hand, where minuteness of description and enumeration is necessary or of importance, all is examined with a microscopic eye, and beauties disclose themselves to closeness of investigation which the careless glance had overlooked.

Whether the company had proved more numerous than was expected, or whether a provision too scanty had been made, but in the middle of the banquet wine failed. Things which are in themselves, and as far as man is concerned, merely contingent, are predisposed and produced by a special interposition of divine Providence, to fulfill some valuable purpose. This little awkwardness of domestic arrangement furnished occasion for a grand display of almighty power. The deficiency was observed by the mother of Jesus, who communicated it to him as simply a remark of her own. But did not the communication partake of the nature of request, of expectation, of suggestion? “They have no wine.” Is not this saying, can nothing be done to save the credit of the family? They will suffer in the estimation of their friends, as too parsimonious at a season of festivity like the present. Canst thou find no supply? There must, undoubtedly, have been something offensive in her meaning or mode of expression, for she meets with a reproof. And the mildest censure from such lips is a mark of displeasure. As to Nathanael before, so to Mary now he gives proof that he could read in the heart, what had not yet fallen from the tongue: “Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.” “Woman:” we are not to estimate the spirit and import of this term of address by the refinement of our modern ideas and manners. A British female of very middling rank would consider herself as very highly insulted to be thus abruptly accosted by an equal, from an inferior it would be intolerable, and even in a superior it would be resented. But it was the appellation by which princes addressed themselves to ladies of the highest rank, and which even slaves employed in speaking to their mistresses, for it marks respect, not familiarity. And we have a demonstration, in the present case, that it could imply nothing harsh or unkind, for it is Jesus who uses the word in speaking to his mother: On an occasion still more tender and interesting, when sovereign love was in its triumph, and dictated every expression; when his cross was surrounded by some of the persons who witnessed the miracle of Cana of Galilee; this conversation took place: “When Jesus, therefore, saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.” Here was the dying effusion of filial affection: “Woman, behold thy son.”

“What have I to do with thee.” This has an air of severity, and probably was intended to check encroachment. There is a point beyond which parental authority itself must not presume to go. At the age of twelve, excess of maternal solicitude received a mild rebuke: “How is it that ye sought me? wilt ye not that I must be about, my Father’s business?” Nevertheless “he went down with them” from the temple, “and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.” But to the man of thirty even a mother must not presume to dictate, or so much as insinuate. The words of the original have by some been differently translated; and Jesus is made to say, in reply to his mother’s observation, “they have no wine.” “What is that to me and thee?” What does it concern us whether there be wine or not? Such a question is little in the spirit of Christ, who took a

condescending and an affectionate interest in all the infirmities and distresses incident to humanity, and to whom nothing could be indifferent which tended to promote the comfort of others; and the sequel plainly shows, that he actually cherished those kind affections, and expressed them in a manner peculiar to himself. It is more natural to adopt our common version, consistent as it is with the same sense of the phrase in a variety of other passages. “The devils coming out of the tombs exceeding fierce,” in the country of the Gergesenes, exclaim, “What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?” Meaning evidently; “We are afraid of thee; let us alone; we desire no acquaintance with thee; art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” The seventy interpreters translate the Hebrew idiom in the same phraseology and spirit, in a great many passages. Thus Jephthah addressed the king of Ammon, “What hast thou to do with me?” saying plainly, “I wish no intercourse; we can have nothing in common; wherefore should we go to war together?” And thus, not to multiply instances; David said to Abishai, when he proposed to go over, and, in cold blood, to cut off Shimei’s head, “What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah?” “I like not your spirit; I want no such triumph; let God’s will be done: you are taking his work out of his hand, and are deciding hastily when you ought to wait patiently.” This is entirely in the spirit of the passage before us. “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” “Intrude not; prescribe not; I know what is fit for me to do; all my movements are already settled.” In this view all is of a piece; all breathes the spirit of meekness; there is the majesty of Deity, and there is the united firmness and mildness of the man.

If there be any thing like sternness in the question, “What have I, to do with thee?” it is sunk in the solemn asseveration concerning himself: “mine hour is not yet come.” The hour of a man’s birth, of his baptism, of his majority, of his marriage, of his death, is an epoch of singular importance both to himself and others. We measure time, we know its value, and we trifle with it. With an experience of its necessary lapse, and with the certain knowledge that no moment can be responsible for the debt of its predecessor, having enough to do with itself, the thoughtless sons of men will be drawing on a day which they are never to see, and they sport with borrowed property as if it were their own. The wise man, in the face of this reckoning of folly and madness, states the just account of the expenditure and use of time: “There is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” But we look up to Him who is wiser than the wisest, that we may learn to measure time, to understand the value of a day, and to improve the flying hour, which is gone before we are sensible that it has come.

“Mine hour is not yet come.” It is an expression applied to various events of Christ’s life and ministry. When his unbelieving brethren urged him, by way of defiance, to go up to Jerusalem at the feast of tabernacles, and there make an open display of his miraculous powers, this was his reply: “My time is not yet come--Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come;” intimating that all his movements and operations were regulated to a moment, and therefore could neither be hurried forward nor retarded. When he did go up to Jerusalem, and taught openly in the temple, though his plainness and fidelity gave much offence, it is remarked that “no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come:” that is, the hour of his apprehension, trial, and condemnation. When the devout Greeks who had come to worship in the temple, desired an interview with him, Jesus said to his disciples; “The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified;” meaning the dawn of the gospel day upon the Gentile world. But while he rejoiced in spirit, as he contemplated that auspicious hour, he saw it leading to another and a

darker hour, the hour of suffering and death. The prospect spreads a transient cloud over the serenity of his mind, and he said: “Now is my soul troubled: and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour.” Thus far the man of sinless infirmity. But the cloud passes away, serenity is restored, and the hour of sorrow is lost in contemplating the glory that should follow, the accomplishment of his heavenly Father’s purpose of mercy, in the redemption of a lost world: “but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name.’’ When his “time was full come” that he should glorify God by his death, with heavenly composure “Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.” Thus every step of the Redeemer’s progress was weighed, measured, established by an antecedent counsel incapable of being overthrown or of failing. His mother, though reproved, is not wholly discouraged. She perceives that whatsoever he did must be done at his own time and in his own way, and therefore enjoins the servants carefully to attend to whatever he should say unto them. The ablutions, at this period, practised among the Jews, were carried to an absurd and superstitious excess. The law had indeed prescribed certain washings, which nature herself points out as conducive to health, cleanliness, and comfort; but tradition had multiplied these without end; they had acquired an authority paramount to that of law, and the primary duties of life were sunk in an affected attention to external purity. “The Pharisees,” says St. Mark, “and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash they eat not. And many other things there be which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.” This drew upon them a severe censure from the lips of Jesus Christ. He charges them with the vilest hypocrisy, in “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” “For,” says he, “laying aside, the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.” “Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.” He then produces, as an instance, their open and avowed violation of the fifth precept of the Decalogue, engraven by nature on the heart of man, and proclaimed from Sinai by the mouth of God. The unnatural child had but by a vow to devote his substance to a pretendedly sacred purpose, in order to be for ever released from all obligation to assist aged or decayed parents. Thus a punctilious attention to washing the body could be reconciled to a deliberate purpose of hardening the heart. These copious and frequent ablutions account for the large provision of water made for the marriage feast. “There were set six water-pots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.” To pretend to ascertain the quantity, by the names of ancient measurement, would be nugatory and absurd. If the thing could be done, what profit would arise from it? Is it not well known that all the wisdom of the British legislature, though frequently exerted, has hitherto been unable to establish a standard of weights and measures for the southern division of this little island? The precise quantity is left in intentional obscurity, by the use of the indefinite expression two or three, it is sufficient for us to know that the supply was very considerable. The expenditure of water, at this advanced period of the feast, must have been great. Jesus determined to make those partially exhausted vessels the medium of his intended miracle. To have replenished the empty wine vessels might excite suspicion of collusion; but into water-cisterns for purifying, wine never entered, and therefore no doubt could arise. He, then, who could have transformed the bottom of a dry cistern into a fountain of water, or of wine, at his pleasure, commands the servants to “fill the water-pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.” The miracle is already performed. By an unseen, unperceived energy; without a word

spoken, without a gesture, by a simple act of the will, plain water is instantaneously converted into wine of the finest quality. What dignified simplicity! what unaffected majesty! A fact so very extraordinary is narrated with no more pomp of language than the most common process of nature. He now desires the attendants, hitherto the only witnesses of this wonderful change, to draw off some of the wine, and bear it to the governor of the feast, at the moment when the deficiency began to be felt. Thus every supply which comes immediately from the hand of Providence is at once seasonable, salutary, and excellent in its kind. What comes through the channel of men like ourselves must of necessity have a mixture of their impurity and imperfection. With us the master of the house is also the governor of the feast. It is his concern to see that his friends be properly accommodated and supplied. But among the Jews an officer of this description was appointed to preside, whether elected by the company, named by the bridegroom, or constituted by public authority, whose business it was to pronounce a benediction on what was provided, and who, when the cup was blessed, first drank of it himself, and then passed it round the table. In compliance with this custom, Jesus directed the first-fruits of this miracle to be carried to him to pass judgment. He instantly perceives the difference, though ignorant of the process; and in surprise addresses himself to the bridegroom, whose it was to prepare the entertainment, and to defray the expense, in these words; “Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.” Though this too may not perfectly coincide with modern manners, it exhibits a picture of the common practice in that country and in that age; and it led to a discovery of the whole mystery, and Jesus stood confessed the Son of God, the Lord of universal nature, the searcher of hearts, the ruler of elements, the friend and brother of mankind. “This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.”

Many and useful are the practical reflections which flow from this subject. Permit me to suggest some of them.

1. The religion of Jesus Christ embraces the whole circle of duty. Duties are of various orders and importance. Some are essential and indispensable, others are agreeable and ornamental; as in a well-constructed edifice there are parts absolutely necessary to its existence, and there are parts which might be removed indeed without affecting the solidity and durableness of the fabric, but the removal would greatly impair its elegance and beauty. So in the scale of morals there are the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; and there are obligations of an inferior order; though highly important in the commerce of human life; such as gentleness, courtesy, affability, sympathy. Of both ranks of duty our blessed Lord set the happiest example. He mixed with mankind, he partook of their griefs and their joys, he sat down at their tables, he assisted at their nuptial festivity, he indulged in the mutual endearments of friendship, he paid attention to little children, took them to his arms and blessed them. Disciple of Jesus, go thou and do likewise. Ill does it become thee to be stately, and distant, and reserved, and ungracious, when he was so meek and condescending. There are certain austere Christians who will on no occasion, and on no account, descend from the pinnacle of their dignity, and who render religion disgusting to others by the. harshness of their manners, and a severe, morose, ungainly deportment. This they cannot have learned of Christ, nor at his old school. Will they vouchsafe to take a lesson from the apostle Paul, who understood his own real dignity as well as any man? “Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.” And I beg leave to add, from him: “Be not wise in your own

conceits."

2. Jesus himself was all purity and perfection, but the mother of Jesus was subject to culpable infirmity. She incurred censure oftener than once, and therefore is not to be looked up to as a perfect model, much less to receive the adoration which is due to Deity alone. It is one of the most humiliating views of human understanding, to behold it so far degraded as to think of approaching the great intercessor and friend of mankind, through the intercession of another. "There is one God," saith the Scripture, and one "Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." No, says popery, you must have a mediatrix between you and that Mediator; nay, one armed with authority to control and command him. The mind turns away with horror from the blasphemous suggestion. The rights of parents have a boundary, both as to extent and duration, the authority of God knows no limit, and never can expire. When his voice is heard, that of nature must be suppressed. The duties of the public character must absorb the feelings of the private individual. We may warrantably lay before our compassionate Redeemer our most secret thoughts, and pour out our hearts before him in prayer and supplication, in perfect submission to his will; but we must not presume either to prescribe to his providence, or to arraign his conduct. He doeth all things wisely and well.

3. Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for "it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." Whether therefore God supplies the good things of life in the ordinary course of nature, or by a special interposition of his almighty power, they are liberally bestowed, they are the bounty of a Father, to be used, to be enjoyed. When God placed our grand progenitor in the terrestrial paradise, the parental grant was large: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat;" but with one single reservation: "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." We are still on the same footing, in a world which has indeed ceased to be a paradise, but which, nevertheless, is still abundantly stored with everything necessary, convenient and comfortable for man. The grant is still as liberal: "The good of the land is before you:" take, thou mayest freely eat, freely drink. But, mark the reservation, still indispensable as ever, eat, drink, in moderation, to the support and refreshment of the body, not its depression and derangement. To a certain bound this is cordial, salutary, nutritive: beyond, its nature changes, it becomes a deadly poison. Satisfy thyself with knowing its good, and venture not to make trial of its evil. Did Jesus convert water into wine that he might minister fuel to excess? The thought is impious. As well might a bountiful Providence be charged with the gluttony, the drunkenness, and all the other sensual lusts in which men indulge themselves, because it "gives us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." The miracle of Cana of Galilee, as all those which our Lord wrought, was a miracle of goodness; it provided a supply of a necessary of life, to a family in moderate circumstances, and which lasted them, I doubt not, for many days: it was the repayment of a debt of friendship and hospitality, in a manner peculiar to himself; and it was a manifestation of his glory in the eyes of his disciples, who had far other thoughts than that of abusing their Master's bounty; "they believed on him."

4. We have said that this and all our Savior's other miracles were miracles of goodness: we now add, they were all disinterested, he here gave proof of sovereignty uncontrollable. It was exercised to supply the temporal wants of a few, and to minister to the everlasting consolation of myriads. But "Christ pleased not himself." What might not his power have commanded, of all that is

exquisite on the earth, in the air, through the paths of the sea? But though an hungered, he will not command stones to be made bread for his own use; if he miraculously multiply a few loaves and fishes, it is to feed a starving, fainting multitude. If he makes the sea tributary, it is at one time to compensate the painful labor of poor men, who had “toiled all night and taken nothing,” at another, to prevent offence by paying his tribute money. Fish broiled on a fire of coals, and a morsel of bread, are the simple fare on which he and his disciples dine, even “after that he was risen from the dead.” “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” “They that wear soft clothing are in king’s houses;” His clothing was not worth dividing among a few of the basest of mankind: His raiment, his lodging, his fare were all of a piece. And is the servant greater than his Lord? To the poor the Gospel is preached, and to the poor the example is set, the example of contentment with a low condition, of meek submission to hardship, of superiority to the vanities and luxuries of this world, of self-government, and self-denial. His modern disciples have been accused of love of ease and indulgence! of fondness for dainties and delicacies, of aiming at power and pre-eminence. If the imputation be just, it is to be lamented: and Christians of every rank and denomination are concerned, as far as in them lies, to do it away. If it be ill-founded, it must be borne, as part of the reproach of Christ; and his disciple must bear in mind that he is bound by the law and by the practice of his divine Master, not only to abstain from all evil, but from all appearance of evil.

135. Jesus Christ--Healing in Galilee

Jesus Christ--Healing in Galilee

Luk 4:38-44. And he arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house and Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her. And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose, and ministered unto them. Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he, rebuking them, suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ. And when it was day he departed, and went into a desert place; and the people sought him, and came unto him, find stayed him, that he should not depart from there. And he said, unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also; for therefore am I sent. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee. The religion of the Gospel is adapted to every possible condition of life, for it is adapted to the nature of man, who, with the variation of a few circumstances, is the same universally, and in every age. There is the difference of color and speech, the difference of climate and soil, the difference of high and low, of rich and poor; but still it is man, with all his excellencies, and imperfections, with all his capability of degradation and of improvement, with all his propensities to evil and to good. Christianity takes him up as he is, and undertakes to make him what he ought to be. "Can the Ethiopian change his color, or the leopard his spots?" No, replies nature, I gave that color, I painted those spots; but I cannot undo my own work. He that is black must, for me, continue black still, that which is spotted must be spotted still. But the grace of the Gospel unfolds a in mystery which it is beyond the reach of nature to solve. It transforms that which was as scarlet into the whiteness of snow, what was red like crimson into the color of wool. "Can these dry bones live?" Yes, at the word, and by the spirit of the Lord.

Miracles like these the Spirit of Christ is exhibiting every day. Do we not see: O that the spectacle were more common! Do we not see loftiness of station united to lowliness of mind; a hard lot to a contented spirit; the fulness of this world to the exceeding riches of the grace of God? When the Son of God came for the salvation of a lost world, "verily he took not on him the nature of angels." But more wonderful still! he united the divine nature to the human, and thereby became at once an object of supreme adoration, and a familiar instructor. What he said and did as the Lord, "wise in heart and mighty in strength," we must ever contemplate at an awful distance, admiring, venerating what we cannot find out unto perfection, and which we are still more incapable of imitating. But in what he said and did as a man, we behold a pattern most amiably simple, most powerfully impressive, most consummately perfect. In vain do we look anywhere else for that steadiness and uniformity of character which alone can merit the distinction of being proposed as an example. Whom else can we with safety follow in everything? In the most perfect of mere men, while there is much to respect and to commend, there is ever a something to blame and to regret; some fault of temper, some inconsiderateness of expression, some inconsistency of conduct. But in our divine Master all is estimable, uniform, and consistent. He presents one and the same

character in solitude and in society, in the synagogue and in domestic retirement, at a marriage feast and before the tribunal; displaying a native dignity undebased by an infusion of insolence, condescension pure from servility, fortitude without ferociousness, sensibility without affectation, the sublimity of devotion with the perfect ease of friendship. In the last Lecture we attended this friend of mankind to the celebration of a marriage solemnity, and beheld him partaking of the pure delights of friendly and domestic intercourse, mingling with his kindred, and with the disciples whom he had chosen; and while he miraculously ministered to their wants; as the great Ruler and Lord of nature, we observe him, as bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh, sympathizing in their joys, adopting their solicitudes, their wants, and expectations, and joining in their conversation. Thus he tacitly and obliquely reproves that haughty reserve, that unbending; stateliness, that ungracious distance from men which frequently attempts to pass for superior wisdom, sanctity, and importance. We pretend not to arrange the several events of our Lord's history in the exact order of time. The evangelists display them in an energetic simplicity far beyond the reach of art. There is in the word of God, if it be lawful to say so, a majestic irregularity that transcends the control of rule; just as the surface of our globe, with its mountains and valleys, its precipices and plains, its rivers and oceans, defies the application of the straight' line and of the compasses; and as the face of the starry heavens present to the eye a magnificent assemblage of worlds scattered about by a hand that rejects all measurement by any standard but its own. Science has indeed contrived artificial combinations and arrangements both pf the heavenly bodies, and of Scripture truths, but their native glory and magnitude are not reducible to systems of human invention. It may be pleasant, and far from unprofitable, to ascertain dates, to unravel the chain; but it is surely of secondary moment. The actions and events themselves; and the evidence that they existed, are the great concern of the Christian world; but above all, the practical influence of those great truths on the hearts, the consciences, and the lives of men.

Precluded from opportunities of being eminently useful at Nazareth, through the envy and unbelief of his townsmen, Jesus withdraws from that city, not in anger but in sorrow, though a most cruel, ungrateful, and atrocious attempt upon his life had been made by its unworthy inhabitants; and he proceeds to prosecute his labors of love at Capernaum, a city situated on the sea of Galilee. From this place, it would appear, he was called to the adjacent town of Cana, to the celebration of the marriage; and that solemnity being ended, he returns to Capernaum accompanied by the disciples whom he had already chosen. Here we find this Teacher sent from God still indefatigably pursuing the great object of his mission, and still putting respect on the word and ordinances of God. Behold him devoting the day of sacred rest to useful purposes; employing the leisure and retirement from temporal concerns which it afforded, in executing the benevolent office of instructing the ignorant and guilty, in the way of life and salvation. We know from the general strain of his public ministrations, and particularly from the portion of Scripture, which he rehearsed and applied in the synagogue at Nazareth, that the things written concerning himself constituted the great burden of his preaching; Scripture the source, Christ Jesus the subject, the sabbath the season, the synagogue the scene. "Never man spake like this man." But the services of an earthly sanctuary must close. There is a season of retirement and repose as there is of labor and exertion. The duties of private friendship, of domestic devotion, the rights of hospitality, the care of the body, put in their several claims, which must be answered. Christ accordingly "arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house." The accommodations of a poor fisherman's hovel, on the shore of the lake of Gennesaret, could not be very elegant. The fare provided by a hard-working

plebeian, doomed frequently to toil all night long, without taking anything, could not be very luxurious or delicate. But when a man gives you the shelter of his roof, however mean, and a place at his board, however homely, he does all that a prince can do; and the difference is a paltry circumstance or two, beneath the consideration of a rational being. But the house of Peter was, at this time, not only the abode of penury, but likewise the house of mourning, for “Simon’s wife’s mother was taken with a great fever.” The sabbath had not been to her a day of rest, but of agitation and pain; and the distress of a sick-bed might probably be aggravated by reflecting on absence from the house of prayer, and from the comforts of the public worship of God. The value and importance of objects vary strangely, in our estimation, as they are viewed through the medium of health, or of sickness, of pain, or ease. The illusion of the world disappears, when the fever in the blood forms in the distempered imagination, whirling orbs of perturbation, and perplexity, and despair; or when, in cold blood, conscience darts an anxious look into the world of spirits. Very different is the aspect of the sabbath in the eye; and the hour, of thoughtless dissipation, and when the son of dissipation is stretched on a bed of languishing. Then he “snuffed at it, and said, Behold, what a weariness is it? When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn, and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?” But how very different are the reflections of “the days of darkness,” of the “months of vanity,” of the “wearisome nights,” appointed, when the sleepless patient is constrained to cry out, “When shall I arise and the night be gone.” “What fruit had I then in those things, whereof I am now ashamed, for the end of those things is death.” The visit of Jesus to Peter’s family had more than one object in view. The friend of man retired to converse with men, the master to instruct his disciples, the poor to feed with the poor, the weary to repose with the weary. The Son of God entered into the house to manifest his glory, to display his power, to exercise his benevolence in the miraculous relief of distress. Thus amply does he repay every token of affection bestowed on himself, or on one of the least of his brethren. Distress awakens sympathy. The children of: the family cannot think of sitting down to eat bread, while the mother of it lay in extremity. Filial tenderness had undoubtedly exerted itself to the uttermost. The poor scrip of the Galilean had, perhaps, been drained in purchasing medicine and cordial for his afflicted mother-in-law: though this be none of the least of the evils which attend poverty, to behold the person whom we love perish for want of advice and medicine, for want of a cordial beyond the reach of our means. As a last resource they lay her case before Jesus: “and they besought him for her.” Did he need to be importuned? Was he difficult of access? Did his goodness flow reluctantly? No, but the intercourse between heaven and earth, between the Creator and the creature is the confidence, the prayer of distress meeting the benignity, the unremitting attention of the Father of mercies, who will be sought unto, that he may show himself gracious.

“And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever, and it left her.” The miracle of turning water into wine was effected by a simple act of the will, without either gesture or speech, and the evidence of it rested, in part, on the testimony of the servants who had filled the pots with water. Here we have both gesture and speech, and the immediate and personal conviction of all who were in the house. In nothing is the sovereignty of Deity more conspicuously displayed than in the manner of his acting. It is so unlike human conjecture, that the pride of man is apt to be offended that Providence did not observe the mode which his sagacity had prescribed. Naaman the Syrian had settled, in his own mind, the whole process of the cure of his own leprosy. “Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.” Not one iota of his conjecture was realized. The prophet did not

come out, nor assume the supposed attitude, nor pronounce the supposed invocation, but “sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times:” and pride is hurrying him away in a rage, to think that the rivers of Damascus should be postponed to the waters of Israel. Thus while prophecy has been successively fulfilling, the event so ill accorded with prevailing opinion and expectation, that while the prediction was admitted, the accomplishment, however coincident and exact, has been rejected. This divine sovereignty our blessed Lord exercises in performing all his mighty works. He wills water into wine. Now he rebukes the disease, and now speaks to the patient. He heals the feverous son of ‘the nobleman, at the distance of Cana from Capernaum, and the feverous mother of Simon’s wife standing by her bed-side. He anoints the blind man’s eyes with clay, and sends him to wash in the pool of Siloam; he cries with s loud voice over the grave of his departed friend, “Lazarus, come forth.” All demonstrates the underived and independent, as well as the almighty power of God, whose will is the sole and the supreme law, as to the time, the manner, and the matter of the work.

There is a wonderful vivacity in the unaffected conciseness and simplicity of the narration, He stood, he spake, he prevailed. “He rebuked the fever.” Disease is here personified, as susceptible of reprehension, and of voluntary subjection to authority, “and it left her,” as one who has encroached and intruded, and who feels and acknowledges the power of a superior repelling and casting him out. The transitions of nature are gradual, slow, imperceptible in their progress. When the ocean is roused into fury by the raging wind, it continues in a state of agitation long after the tempest has ceased to roar; but when Christ speaks the word, the effect is instantaneous and complete. “He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace; be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.” When the fever has spent its force, and the crisis of convalescence has taken place, it leaves the patient feeble and languid, and it frequently requires a considerable length of time to restore both the body and the mind to the full exercise of their several functions; but when Jesus rebukes the fever, it not only in a moment departs, but the sufferer is at the same moment made perfectly whole: “And immediately she arose, and ministered unto them.” As in creation so in Providence, he speaks and it is done, he gives commandment and it stands fast. “He is the Rock; his work is perfect.” The circumstance of her ministering to her physician and the family, is striking and instructive. It teaches us the proper use of prolonged life, of restored faculties. They are to be devoted to the honor of God, and to the service of our fellow-creatures. They were deeply affected by her danger, they looked in anxious expectation to the return of her health, and they besought the Lord for it; she employs that precious gift in contributing her best endeavors to promote their ease and comfort. What debt is so sacred as that of gratitude? and what benefactor has laid us under so many and such unspeakable obligations as He who gave us life, and who sustains it, as He who died to redeem us? We have here a beautiful and interesting view of human life. Every relation has its corresponding sphere of duty. The happiness of domestic society consists not in the interchange of great benefits, on signal occasions, but in the hourly reciprocation of the little offices of love, in kind looks, in kind affections, in mutual forbearance and forgiveness, in the balm of sympathy, whether we sorrow or rejoice; in a word, according to the apostolic injunction, in being of the same mind one towards another. The religion of the Gospel wears an aspect peculiarly favorable to families. The infancy and childhood of Jesus Christ were passed in the bosom of his family. His first public miracle was performed in putting honor upon a family party, at Cana of Galilee. He made one in the family of Simon, at Capernaum. The house of Lazarus and his sisters at Bethany, he made his home, and

there he cultivated all the endearing charities of exalted friendship. To find a home for his mother was his last earthly care; and, as the head of his own family, he presided at the Paschal solemnity, and instituted the memorial of his dying love. Thus are domestic relations strengthened, sweetened, sanctified, ennobled. A Christian kingdom or state never existed. But a family of Christians, all of one heart and of one soul, we trust, is not a rarity. And to christianize families is the direct road to the christianizing of nations. In the contracted sphere of a family, however numerous, everyone knows everyone; everyone cares for everyone. The master's influence is felt and acknowledged by all. A common interest, both temporal and eternal, unites the individuals to each other, and heaven descends to dwell with' men upon earth. So propitious is Christianity to the dearest and best interests of civil society. The scene which we have been reviewing passed on the evening of the sabbath. Nor could the sanctity of the day be profaned by a work of mercy, or by the pious and friendly intercourse of kindred spirits, whose religion was seated in the heart, not chilled into lifeless forms. But the superstitious observance of the sabbath operated powerfully, on the multitude. Though prompted by natural affection to apply for relief to their afflicted friends, they defer it till the going down of the sun, that is till the sabbath was over; for they had yet to learn "what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice;" and "the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath-day;" and "the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." "Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him." A sense of the weakness of those good people is lost in respect for their humanity. They are not chidden away from Peter's door as unseasonable intruders; they are not referred to another day. It is the cry of misery entering into the ear of mercy, and it cries not in vain: "and he laid his hands on everyone of them, and healed them." Here the mode of cure is the imposition of hands. Even so, blessed Jesus, for so it seemed good in thy sight. Let me be the subject of thy miraculous grace, and convey thou the healing power through whatsoever channel thou wilt. The service of the synagogue, in the morning of the sabbath, had been disturbed by a wretched demoniac, who "cried out with a loud voice, saying, let us alone: what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art: the holy one of God." Jesus by a word, dispossessed the impure spirit, and restored the unhappy man to himself, in the presence of the whole assembly, who were justly filled with astonishment at such a display of power and goodness. It is affecting to think that this dreadful species of malady was far from being uncommon at that period; for we, find the fame of the morning's miracle spread abroad, and it attracts to the place where Jesus was, in the evening, many persons in the same deplorable condition. One of the depths of Satan, in these cases, was to pay affected homage to Jesus of Nazareth, in the view of infusing a suspicion that there might be a secret combination and collusion between him and them, and of thereby diminishing his dignity and authority in the eyes of the people. To be praised by the wicked, is offensive and dishonorable to the good: and the adversary is never more dangerous than when he "is transformed into an angel of light." But when the prince of this world came, he found nothing in Christ; no weak part to attack, no foundation whereon to erect his engines; but wisdom ever prepared to meet cunning, purity to resist every evil suggestion, and authority to silence the tempter whenever his encroachment became too daring. He disdained the testimony of a demon in his favor, and rejected the insidious praise of an enemy. "And he rebuking them, suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ:" that is, he permitted them not to declare, though they spake the truth, that they knew him to be the Christ.

Having thus fulfilled the public duties of the sanctuary, and the more private offices of friendship; having employed the greater part of the night in receiving and relieving the numerous objects who came, or who were brought to him, he withdrew, toward the dawning of the day, into a still closer retirement; and, for a season, shut the world entirely out. “And when it was day he departed, and went into a desert place.” Sacred were those hours of solitude to heavenly meditation, to devotional intercourse with Him that sent Him, whose glory he ever sought, and whose will it was his delight to execute. “Ye shall leave me alone;” says he to his disciples, “and yet,” adds he, “I am not alone, because the Father is with me.” When some great arrangement is to be made toward the establishment and extension of his kingdom, preparation for it passes in solemn abstraction from all sublunary things. Thus his own public ministry was preceded by a “forty days retreat into the wilderness.” “And it came to pass in those days,” when he was about to consecrate the twelve to the office of apostleship, “that he went up into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God;" thus also was the glorious scene of his transfiguration introduced; and thus he exemplified the practice which he so powerfully recommends to his disciples: “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.” The admiring and delighted multitude trace him into his place of retirement, and, sensible of the value of such a visit, they entreat him to prolong it. Various motives might suggest this request. In some, it might be the attraction of novelty, in others the love of the truth: here the sense of gratitude for benefits received, there the principle of curiosity gaping after a farther display of wonders. In one it might be the full conviction of an honest and enlightened mind, and in another a malignant disposition to discover a blemish. We know from the sequel that the success of our Lord’s miracles and preaching at Capernaum, was woefully similar to what it had been at Nazareth, for this is the dismal account which he himself gives of it, “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee.” Whatever were their motives for wishing his longer continuance among them, they are for the present resisted, and a reason is assigned. “I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, for therefore am I sent.” Every word here is significant and powerful. “I must preach.” What imposed the necessity? The commission which he had undertaken to execute; his own sovereign will and pleasure; his own unerring understanding; his own unbounded benevolence; the extensive demands of perishing humanity. “I must preach the kingdom of God:” its descent to earth; its adaptation to the nature and condition of ignorant and guilty men; its divine object, to raise fallen man from earth, from hell, to heaven; its present operation and effect, “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;” its stability, “a kingdom that cannot be moved;” the sovereign grace which confers it, “fear not little flock: for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Such was the glorious subject of Christ’s preaching: a subject, compared to which the pursuits of avarice, of ambition, and the pride of kings are less than nothing and vanity: a subject that interests not Nazareth, and Capernaum, and the cities of Galilee only, where it was first proclaimed, but the men, the cities, the nations of all ages and generations. On such a narrow and seemingly slender foundation, what a fabric has arisen? “This is the Lord’s doing, it is marvellous in our eyes.” Let the great object of Christ’s mission direct and control our pursuit of every object. He was sent to bring men under the dominion of the kingdom of God; and he has taught us when we pray to say: “Thy kingdom come.”

If we enter into the spirit of that petition, it will be our concern that the empire of sin and Satan in our own hearts be completely subverted; “that peace on earth, and good-will among men be promoted; that the kingdoms of this world, become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and that he may reign forever and ever.”--Let us review this portion of our blessed Lord’s history, and thus reflect:

1. The duties of religion, then, and those of ordinary life are intimately united and interwoven; they are perfectly consistent, and yield mutual support. The service of the sanctuary must not be unnecessarily protracted, to the wearying of the flesh, and to become an encroachment on the just, prudent, or necessary concerns of the family, and no domestic regards must preclude works of charity and mercy, even to strangers. On the other hand, no attention to civil and domestic affairs, except in cases of urgent necessity, and no works of mercy must plead a dispensation for the non-observance of the ordinance of God. Under the governance of a well regulated spirit, daily lawful employments become not only a reasonable but a religious service, and the functions necessary to the support of mere animal life, may be performed to the glory of God. And neither the public offices of the temple, nor family order and devotion must be alleged as an exemption from the obligations of private and personal religion. Indeed all must begin here. For families are composed of individuals, and the churches of Christ of families. To the perfect health of the natural body, the soundness of every member is essential: a perfection, however, rarely to be found, and seldom of long continuance. But the present feebleness, imperfection, and disorder of the particular members of that body whereof Christ is the head, are relieved by the prospect of “the perfecting of the saints, of the edifying of the body of Christ,” when “we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, note a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

2. Can the father of lies speak truth?--Yes, when it promises to answer his purpose; and truth itself partakes of the nature of a lie, when it is employed for the purpose of deception. Do devils believe? Yes, to their sorrow; “they believe and tremble.” Does Satan give a just testimony to the Son of God? Yes, in hope of bringing it into discredit. Let no one, then, value himself on the mere truth and soundness of his principles, on the exact orthodoxy of his faith. A principle, however excellent, that remains inactive, is of no value, like a mathematical proposition, demonstrably certain, but applied to no use; or a wholesome stream frozen up and stagnating at the very source. “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” “This is the victory that overcometh the world even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.”

3. Who has not known disease, and danger, and manifold affliction? And who has not experienced frequent and merciful deliverance? The distress came from an unseen hand, and so did the relief. The agent, the instrument was human, was sensible. It was the skill of the physician, it was the power of medicine, it was the sympathy of friendship. But who taught the physician to comprehend my malady, and to reach it? Who gave virtue to the prescribed medicine? Who excited compassion in the bosom of my friend? He who rebuked the fever, and it fled; he who laid his hands on the sick, and they were made whole; he who took the dead daughter of the ruler of the synagogue by the hand, and said, “Damsel, arise;” and “straightway she arose and walked.” Whether, therefore, health remain unimpaired, or be restored, by natural or extraordinary means; whether deliverance come immediately from God, or be wrought through the instrumentality of

second causes, the hand of Deity is equally to be acknowledged; and prolonged life and renewed strength are to be devoted to Him who “giveth to all life and breath, and all things; for in Him we live, and move, and have our being.”

136. Jesus Christ--Cleansing the Temple

Jesus Christ--Cleansing the Temple

John 2:13-17. And the Jews' passover was at hand; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and the changers of money, sitting: and when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

Besides the usual, universal, and fixed measurements of time, all men have a particular and personal standard of calculation and reference, namely, certain incidents of their own lives, to themselves inexpressibly momentous, however uninteresting to the rest of mankind. Thus a mother with much accuracy and distinctness, refers every other event, of whatever magnitude and importance, to the respective dates of the birth of her children. The expiration of his time, as it is called, that is of his clerkship, or apprenticeship, forms an important epoch in the existence of a young man; and the fate of princes, and the revolutions of empire acquire, to his eyes, a peculiar consequence from their relation, in point of time, to that grand revolution in his own little state. The consecration of prelates and the inauguration of kings are, at once, public and private measures of duration. Every act of the state is dated by the year of the sovereign's reign. But human life admits not of a repetition of those more distinguished periods. They are remembered and referred to because they are rare. Were every day to exhibit a state-trial, hardly any, except the parties and their connections, would care to attend it, or think of setting a mark upon it.

There is one life, however, of which every hour is an epoch, of which every act is decisive, of which every event is highly and universally interesting, and of which ever period is a "fulness of time." Of this life each instant, each incident, every progressive step furnishes a theme for the tongues, for the pens, of thousands of thousands of men and angels, and, when their stores are exhausted, it presents a subject as new, as important, as unbounded as it was at the beginning. The beloved disciple, having thrown his mite of information into the public treasury, concludes his gospel with declaring his belief, his deliberate conviction that the history of the life and actions of his divine Master was a subject infinite and inexhaustible. "There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written everyone, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written;" meaning undoubtedly, that the things which Jesus said and did were so many, so extraordinary, so significant, so efficient, as infinitely to exceed human comprehension and belief. But wherefore should the expression of the evangelist be considered as hyperbolical, when we are told that these are the "things which the angels desire to look into;" and when we reflect on the burden of the eternal song of the redeemed in heaven, "I heard," says John "the voice of many angels roundabout 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 honor, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." From the marriage in Cana of Galilee, Jesus again "went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days." How those days were employed we have seen in the preceding Lecture: in conducting the service of the synagogue, in cultivating the charities of private life, in secret devotion, in healing the sick, in casting out devils, in preaching the kingdom of God. Having made a progress of teaching and preaching over the cities and synagogues of Galilee, He now, for the first time since he assumed a public character, went up to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of passover. Preserving the order of events as accurately as an attentive comparison of evangelist with evangelist enables us, we are now to contemplate an incident in our Lord's history marked with very peculiar features, and presenting a new and instructive opening into his character, namely his purgation of the temple from the impurities with which it was profaned by an impious and infamous traffic. From his earliest years the commanded solemnities of that sacred place were punctually observed. Whatever the law enjoined was to his infant state duly performed. While under parental authority, particularly when it led to the house and worship of God, He respectfully submitted to it. In the maturity of age, voluntary and cheerful obedience to the ordinances of heaven distinguished the great exemplar of decency and order. Through the goodness of God, we are delivered from all burdensome and costly attendance on the service of the temple. We are not called to wait upon God with rams and calves of a year old. Our husbandmen, manufacturers, and merchants are not summoned, under severe penalties, several times in the year, to join in the worship of the metropolitan church, at a great expense of time and substance. Is therefore the service of the Christian sanctuary worthless and contemptible? Do we therefore requite the Lord of the sabbath with neglect and ingratitude? Do we therefore snuff at his bloodless sacrifices, and say, "Behold, what, a weariness is it? and bring that which is torn, and the lame, and the sick for an offering?" Dare Christian parents set the example to their children and dependants of irreligion and profanity, and, because they are set free from a costly ceremonial, and a superstitious observance of the sabbath, will they claim and assume an exemption from the offices and the spirit of piety, devotion, and gratitude? Liberated from an intolerable yoke of iron, disdain they to wear the honorable, the golden chains of love? The Jewish ritual was at this period vilely profaned, and was rapidly hastening to dissolution. But so long as it is in force, our blessed Lord condescends to be the pattern of attention and respect to it. And yet, what a scene did the house of God then present! The forms of religion remained, but the power and glory had departed. The letter of the law was still held in affectedveneration, but the spirit was completely evaporated. The sacrifices of the living and true God were shamefully prostituted to gratify the most sordid of human passions, godliness was perverted into a mere instrument of filthy lucre, and the house of prayer was degraded into a den of thieves. And such is the fearful progress of moral corruption. Fervor gradually subsides into luke-warmness, and luke-warmness into cold. Indifference soon becomes mere formality, and formality is but a step from total neglect. Neglect degenerates into hatred and aversion, and an unhallowed zeal at length attempts to destroy what a zeal according to godliness once endeavored to buildup. What can be more opposite and unlike than devout worshippers engaged in a holy contention of gratitude, praise, and love, striving who should present the most acceptable sacrifice to the Father of Spirits; and carnal, worldly minded formalists trying to

overreach one another; the one eager to purchase the ox or the sheep for his offering at as cheap a rate as possible, and the other to sell it at the highest price. And the very court of the temple is made the open theatre of this abominable commerce.

Before thou liftest up thy hand, O man, to scourge out those impious, sordid, profane Jews, pause, and look into thine own heart. Is no unholy traffic going on there? Knowest thou not that thine own body is the temple of the living God? Whose altar, then, is reared up in that sacred edifice of God's own building; and what incense smokes upon it? Say, is the name of Mammon inscribed there? Does sensuality there celebrate no nocturnal revels? What, shall the palace of the great King be transformed into "a cage of every unclean and hateful bird." Or, with the superstitious Athenian, art thou ignorantly bowing down before an "unknown God?" Thou regularly observest the hour, and frequentest the house of prayer; but is there no table of "the money-changer" lurking is some obscure corner? Didst thou leave the world at the door on coming in? Why wander these eyes abroad over thy neighbor's garb and appearance? They ought to be fixed on "thy Father who is in secret," and who "seeth in secret." Dost thou too "offer the sacrifice of fools?"--Darest thou approach the altar of God, conscious that thou art not yet reconciled to thy brother? The gift in thy hand is polluted; presume not to offer it. "Leave it before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

It was the court of the Gentiles which this scandalous trade thus shamefully profaned, by the buying and selling of sheep, and oxen, and doves; and by the exchange of foreign for current coin, and of money of a higher for that of a lower denomination. And thus not only was the worship of the great Jehovah debased and perverted, but the minds of decent and devout strangers, who "had come to Jerusalem for to worship," must have been grievously shocked and scandalized, to the utter extinction of every serious and devotional impression. This it was which excited a holy and just indignation in the Son on of God; in beholding the temple violated, the sacrifices of God defiled, and a stumbling block laid in the way of proselytes, by men invested with a sacred character.

"And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise." This discloses a new and singular exhibition of our blessed Lord's spirit and temper. No personal injury or insult could provoke one expression of resentment. He "gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: he hid not his face from shame and spitting:" you have heard of the meekness of Moses, and of the patience of Job. But what are they to the patience, meekness, and gentleness of Christ? Nevertheless these gracious qualities have a boundary. There are occasions where the exercise of them would cease to be virtue, and where a man would "do well to be angry." Wanton, deliberate profanation of the name, the day, the house of the Lord, is one of those occasions which justify severity. A commanding dignity, an irresistible glory must have occasionally bearded from the person of our Lord, which overawed and intimidated the beholder. How is it possible otherwise to account for the quiet submission of those men to corporal chastisement. They were many in number; they had a common interest to bind them to each other; they were in hitherto unquestioned possession of the ground; their property was concerned; they had the connivance at least, if not the permission of the higher powers. He was alone, unknown, unconnected, unsupported. But they cannot stand the

lightning of his eye, his voice strikes horror into their guilty consciences. They presume not to reason or to resist, but tamely give up their painful traffic abashed and confounded. Thus the multitude that came with Judas to take Jesus, though furnished “with lanterns, and torches, and weapons,” were so overwhelmed by the majesty of his appearance, that “as soon as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward and fell to the ground.” And if such were the glory with which he sometimes invested himself, in his state of humiliation, what must be the glory of his second coming, “with clouds,” when “every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him?”

What a severe reproof was this action of our Lord, of the carelessness and indifference of the high-priest, and of the other ministers of religion? To them it belonged to guard the sanctity of the temple and of its worship. The dignity of their own station and character suffered, when the house of God was violated. Is it doing them injustice to suspect that they partook of the profits of this illicit trade? If this suspicion be well founded, the grossest enormity is immediately accounted for. When the love of money has once taken possession of the heart, no tie of religion or morality is binding. Conscience, sense of honor, sense of decency, sense of duty, all, all is sacrificed at the shrine of this insatiate demon, which never says “it is enough.” At those seasons the demand for cattle to be offered in sacrifice must have been very great. Josephus, in his Wars of the Jews, informs us, that no less than two hundred and fifty-six thousand and five hundred victims were presented at one passover. A small share of the gains upon such an extensive consumption, must therefore have amounted to a very large sum. What a confederacy, then, had the zeal and intrepidity of Christ to encounter! a whole host of inhuman, unfeeling dealers in flesh, actuated by the basest and most unrelenting of human passions, and leagued with a time-serving priesthood who put everything up to sale.

We have before us a striking and an encouraging instance of the power and influence of one person of inflexible integrity, in a corrupted state of society. He may singly and successfully oppose a torrent of iniquity. Vice is timid when directly attacked. “The wicked flee,” saith the wise man, “when no one pursueth, but the righteous are bold as a lion.” Irresistible is the three of truth and conscience. “Is not my word like as fire? saith the Lord: and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces!” “The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” This is the weapon which our Master wielded, together with the “scourge of small cords.” Smitten at once in their persons and in their consciences, they retreat with shame from the field, acknowledging, feeling the superiority of real goodness. Thus then learn, O man, to arm thyself, and say, “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.” From the inexhaustible stores of Scripture draw thy resources for the warfare, and thou shalt find thyself invincible. What has he to fear, who is conscious of the goodness of his cause, who employs “the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God,” and who goes forth conquering and to conquer in full confidence of divine conduct and support.

It is evident from the censure pronounced upon the violators of the temple, that their trade was every way unlawful. This transaction is recorded by all the four evangelists with little if any variation. And by comparing them together we shall find, that the abuse exposed and condemned was a horrid mixture of impiety and dishonesty, of contempt of God, and robbery of man. Not only was “the house of prayer for all nations” abominably polluted by what fell from the flocks and herds

for sacrifice, but it was literally perverted into “a den of thieves,” who had entered into a wicked combination to prey upon the public, by enhancing the price of an article which was at once a necessary of life and of religion. These two enormities, however, generally go hand in hand. If there is no fear of God before a man’s eyes, his neighbor has but a slender hold upon either his veracity or integrity, when the falsehood may be uttered, or the fraud committed without danger of detection. And, on the other hand, he who deliberately practices deceit upon “his brother whom he hath seen,” cannot have a very high degree of reverence for “God whom he hath not seen.”

While we contemplate with shame and sorrow the corruptions which disgraced the Jewish Church, is it possible to refrain from lamenting the equally deplorable corruptions which have disfigured the hallowed form of Christianity! Did not all history attest the truth of it, who would believe that there was a long period, not yet quite expired in some parts of Christendom, and that there was a succession of priests, called Christians, who presumed, for a piece of money, to grant a man indulgence to commit every species of wickedness, which his corrupt heart might suggest, and for any given period, with complete impunity? Who could believe that this priest, in consideration of something cast into his treasury, would take upon him to issue a pardon of the most atrocious offences, and thereby screen the vilest of offenders from punishment; nay, confer the power of pardoning on stone walls and lifeless altars? The murderer who smote his brother to death in the open street, in broad day, had but to step into the next church, and it stood always open on purpose, to be protected from the vengeance of the law. Who could believe that a present or bequest to the Church was considered as a full compensation for all the crimes of a life of violence, and rapine, and blood, and as a fair passport to the kingdom of heaven? That such things should ever have existed is most wonderful; that they should have maintained their ground over all Europe for many centuries together is most wonderful. But the scandalous usurpation is hastening to a close. And with the downfall of popery, may every remaining error in the doctrine, discipline, and practice of the churches of the Reformation finally terminate. The disciples of our Lord possessed one great preparatory qualification for the exercise of their future ministry, acquaintance with the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Struck with this display of their Master’s zeal for the honor of God, and for the purity of temple-worship, they call to remembrance a text from the Psalms of David, which appeared to them a prefiguration of what had just passed. “And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” We pretend not to affirm that the words of the Psalmist amount to a prediction of what Christ felt, and said, and did upon this occasion. David unquestionably uttered his own feelings, though there was as yet no temple at Jerusalem dedicated to the most High God. But the expression amounts to this: Whatever affects the character and worship of Deity, I make my personal concern. “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up:” ardent regard for the honor of thy sanctuary, like a secret flame pent up in my breast, must either have vent or consume me: and the sequel is in the same spirit, “and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.” But though we may not have here a direct prophecy of a future event, we have a powerful assimilation between two most eminent personages, at very distant periods, breathing one and the same spirit, aiming at one and the same end: and this similitude partakes of the nature of prophecy. And the whole leads us to this conclusion, that there may be predictions, resemblances, analogies in Scripture, hitherto concealed even from the wise and prudent, to be hereafter unfolded, or perhaps reserved for the instruction and delight of the kingdom of heaven, when there shall be in Scripture nothing obscure, or hard to be understood. What a motive is this, now to listen to the command of Christ. “Search

the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." In this passage of our Lord's history, as in all Scripture, we have many things "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

1. We have a humiliating view of the treachery and deceitfulness of the human heart. The very persons who considered it as a crime to "eat bread with unwashen hands," could quietly digest the profanation of the temple and of the worship of God. Such self-elusion do men practise every day. They treat their own infirmities as some mothers do very homely, wayward, or even deformed children, who not only show them all possible indulgence themselves, but are offended if others adopt not their fond ness and partiality. At the same time, the slightest blemish to the character of another is quickly seen and severely censured. The deception is frequently carried much farther. A man shall actually discern and rigidly condemn in his neighbor, the very fault to which he himself is notoriously addicted. The proud person can endure no one's pride but his own; the passionate stand astonished at the transports of those who are hasty like themselves: and who are so severe upon hypocrisy as the hypocritical? Every lesson taught by the great Teacher has a foundation in human corruption, and has a tendency to correct it, and this is an important one "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye: and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shale thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." To which I subjoin the prayer of the Psalmist: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

2. If such were the dignity which the Son of God assumed, and the authority which he exercised, while he tabernacled with men upon earth, attended by a few simple Galileans, is it not a matter of very serious concern to meditate on the majesty and importance of his coming to judge the quick and the dead? If his presence was thus awful and tremendous when armed with only "a scourge of small cords," what must it be, when "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." In this judgment to come we are all equally interested, and we are furnished with a present rule of judgment in the decisions of conscience and the dictates of the word of God. Happy is that man who understands, believes, and improves the testimony of those faithful and true witnesses; who, knowing the terrors of the Lord, is persuaded to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life. "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already; because ho hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." These last words open a brighter prospect, and disclose to us "the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, and sending 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." Then shall he be "glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe." Thus are good and evil, death and life, the blessing and the curse set before us. Thus all that is terrible in justice, armed with almighty power, addresses itself to our fear, and all that is amiable and alluring in unbounded goodness and love, expands to our hope, "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." May we this day know him as a Savior whom we must in that day meet as a judge. May we have wisdom to comply with the counsel of him, as a friend, whom it is certain and utter ruin to encounter as an adversary. "Behold, now is the accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation."

3. Take care, frail, ignorant, erring man, how thou proposest to thyself the purifier of the temple as a pattern of zeal. "It is good," saith the apostle, "to be zealously affected always in a good thing;" but unless zeal be directed by prudence and knowledge, it may produce incredible mischief. There is a zeal about trifles, which diverts the mind from objects of serious importance. Battles have been fought, and volumes written to determine the posture in which the sacrament ought to be received, and the habit to be worn by the priest in reading the service of the church. While contention about such non-essentials waxed hot, the spirit of piety and prayer grew cold. There is a zeal which is the offspring of prejudice and habit. It actuated Saul of Tarsus, when "he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and hailing men and women, committed them to prison;" and while he "yet breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord:" and when, speaking of himself; he says: "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem; and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests: and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities." There is a vainglorious, ostentatious zeal, which cannot bear to pass unobserved, which must be fed with public attention and admiration. Such is that which inspired Jehu, when he exultingly challenged applause: "Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord." There is a malignant, intolerant zeal, which pities not, spares not. Even the disciples James and John were under its influence, when a village of the Samaritans refused to receive their Master, "Lord," say they, "wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" and it received a just and severe reprehension from the mouth of Christ: "He turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." The disciples themselves became the victims of this fiery, exterminating zeal, as Christ predicted concerning them. "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." Thus the hard measure which they would have meted to others, was measured out unto themselves. But there is a zeal, as well as a doctrine, "which is according to godliness:" a pure and lambent flame of love to God, which admits of no mixture of human passion, which views every object through the medium of Deity, and aims but at one end, that God may be glorified. This excellent spirit will never think of doing God service, by showing unkindness or cruelty to man. But it is so rare and so easily counterfeited, that even its emotions are to be regarded with a jealous eye, for there is no small danger of a man's mistaking the ebullitions of his own mind, for the impulse of God's spirit, especially in cases where guilt is to be condemned and vengeance executed. David made a wise and happy choice, when constrained to

submit to one of three great evils. “I am in a great strait;” said he, “Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord, (for his mercies are great) and let me not fall into the hand of man.” I like not to see the scourge, the sword, the torch voluntarily assumed by one of like passions with myself. In vehement attempts to reform abuse, I should tremble to think of their degenerating into a rage to destroy. The tremendous attribute of vengeance, God will confide to no hands but his own, but he permits man to carry the imitation of divine mercy as far as he can. “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shall heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”

4. Mark the power of conscience, and learn to secure its testimony in your favor. What made cowards of those gross and brutal men? An ill conscience. What chased away a multitude before one man? An ill conscience. What overawed a rapacious priesthood and a licentious populace? An ill conscience. Conscience drove our guilty progenitors to seek concealment “from the presence of the Lord God, amongst the trees of the garden.” Conscience sent out murderous Cain “a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth,” under the dire apprehension that everyone who found him would slay him. It is conscience that dictates the unavailing cry to despairing wretches, who in, bitterness exclaim “to the mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” But what, in opposition to this, is the source of a Christian’s composure and satisfaction? “Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.” Herein consisted the triumph of the apostle over the fear of the Roman governor, and over the oratory of Tertullus: “Herein do I exercise myself; to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.” And this constitutes the triumph and the security of every believer in Christ Jesus: “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.”

Though the buyers and sellers were abashed and put to flight, some of the consequential cavilers, who are to be found in every age, and in every society, maintain the ground, and call for the commission under which Jesus acted. “Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, what sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?” This furnished him with a fair occasion of bringing forward the peculiar and distinguishing doctrine of his religion, the resurrection of the body, which was soon to be exemplified in his own resurrection from the dead, as “the first fruits of them that sleep.” This will accordingly constitute the subject of the next Lecture. “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection, on such the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ.”

137. Jesus Christ--Resurrection

Jesus Christ--Resurrection

John 2:18-25. Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six yours was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? but he spake of the temple of his body When, therefore, he was risen, from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had said. Now, when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast-day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men: and needed not thus any should testify of man: for he know what was in man. The actions and events of Christ's life are the basis on which the truth and importance of his doctrine rest, and the solidity of the foundation must be estimated from the structure which it supports. The foundation of a building lies buried under ground, and cannot be examined by the eye; but when we behold a stately, lofty, and venerable pile, which has withstood the attack of ages, and which still presents undiminished beauty and strength, we justly reason from what we do see to what we do not; and we feel ourselves constrained to applaud the excellency of the design, from the perfectness and durability of the execution. "Behold," saith the Lord God, by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, more than seven centuries before the fabric began to appear, "behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet." Here is the design of the sovereign Architect, not sleeping like many a beautiful human plan in the portfolio of the artist, never to be realized, but quick with the spirit of life, already executed "in the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will," and to arise, in due time, the wonder of angels and of men. This building of God at length began to appear and to ascend. But it accorded not with human ideas of grandeur and magnificence. The very depositaries of the original design, were the first to resist the completion of it, because it justified not their prejudices and prepossessions. Their opposition, however, served only more illustriously to display the manifold wisdom and goodness of God, to expose the weakness and folly of man. Had the edifice been of man's devising and rearing, it could not have stood "the washing of a tide," for the "foolish man built his house upon the sand: and the rain descend, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." But infinite Wisdom founded the fabric of Christianity upon a rock. The rains have descended, the floods have come, the winds have blown and beaten upon this house, but it has not fallen; for it is founded upon a rock. In the gospel history we behold the ground floor or platform of the Christian religion. It principally consists in a narration of plain, unadorned facts, well authenticated indeed, but recommended by no artificial polish, and deriving all their importance and effect from their own native truth and excellence; serving, nevertheless, as a solid support to the precepts, the promises, the predictions, the doctrines, the consolations of our most holy faith. Take, for instance, the event which our blessed Lord, in the passage which has

now been read, foretold concerning himself, namely, that the temple of his body should be destroyed, and in three days raised up again. Now when this event actually did take place, not only was the veracity of Jesus, as a prophet, completely established, but a foundation was laid of sufficient strength to sustain the whole weight of the Christian's hope, of a resurrection to life and immortality. We shall, therefore, first consider this all-important doctrine, in the history which is the foundation of it, and then in the superstructure reared. In purifying the temple from the abominations practised in it, Jesus had undoubtedly assumed the authority of one invested in the office of magistracy, or with the character of a prophet. That he was no magistrate all men knew, and he never pretended to it. To have acted in this capacity might have been considered an usurpation. As a prophet, then, and oily as a prophet, could he appear in the character of a public reformer. But it is requisite that a prophet should produce his credentials. This suggested the demand: "What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?" which plainly implied, that one acting under a commission from heaven, was obliged to support his claim by a sign from heaven. But is there need to produce supernatural testimony to a right to reform known, public, flagrant abuse? Did not their own history furnish a noted instance of a private person's assuming the sword of justice, and acting at once as judge and executioner, in the case of open and gross violation of the divine law; that of Phinehas, who was but the grandson of Aaron the priest? He not only became liable to no censure, but obtained a deathless name, and an honorable office for his seasonable interposition. "Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment: and so the plague was stayed. And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore." Did not the sign, in the present instance, appear in the act? Did not the great Reformer authenticate his powers by the manner in which he exercised them, and by the effect which they produced? Did the guilty resist? Did they call in question his authority? Did they drag him, in their turn, to the tribunal? No, they feel his ascendant, and shrink from his rebuke. Who, then, call for a sign? Not the offenders; they had received sufficient evidence: not the populace, for they must have been equally overawed and confounded. The rulers of the Jews hearing of this singular transaction, some of them, perhaps, being on the spot, and eye-witnesses of what passed, jealous of their honor, and considering their prerogative as invaded; they, as men having authority, demanded a sign. From their general character, and from the inefficacy of this and other signs afterwards given, we know from what motive the present demand was made; not in the spirit of meekness, not from the love of truth, not to obtain conviction; but in the hope of finding occasion to censure, or of putting the assumed authority of Christ to a test which it could not stand. A sign is given them, and a most remarkable one it is. "Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Whatever construction the Jews might put on these words, what Jesus intended to convey is obvious, and it was in every point justified by the corresponding event. He who is simplicity and truth itself could have no design to mislead. The action and emphasis with which he spake, clearly pointed out the object. The general attention had just been directed to a temple made with hands, a temple wickedly profaned by an abominable traffic, which was connived at by its professed conservators, and whose honor had been so nobly vindicated by a stranger. That stranger had already attracted general notice by the singularity of his speech and deportment; every eye was fixed upon him, his every attitude and gesture were observed, and these plainly indicated that the temple to be destroyed, and raised up in three days, could not be the venerable pile in the court of which this conversation passed. When he afterwards foretold the approaching destruction of that temple, he expressed himself in terms

not liable to misapprehension. “As he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! And Jesus answering, said unto him; Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” Now he points to an edifice infinitely more sacred. From both the first and second houses built on mount Zion the glory had long since departed. The sensible tokens of the divine presence were withdrawn. The holy oracle was no longer consulted by Urim and Thummim. But in Him, who was the only glory of the second house, “dwelled all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,” and the destruction of this temple he thus predicts as a sign not to the men of that generation only, but to all ages, even to the end of the world. From the very nature of prophecy, a vail must be drawn between the prediction and the event. “Hope that is seen is not hope,” and “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Christ indulges not those unbelievers with an immediate display of his miraculous power, in support of his pretensions to the character of a prophet, which they could easily have explained away, or misinterpreted; but he refers them to a sign shortly to be exhibited, which should be at once the exact accomplishment of a well-known prediction, and the greatest miracle that can possibly exist. That the misconception of the Jews was perverse and affected is evident from this, that when they had actually fulfilled the part of the prediction which depended on themselves, by destroying that sacred temple, we find them laboring under the most dreadful apprehension that Jesus would accomplish the other part, which depended on him, and they employ every precaution which terror could suggest, to prevent and defeat it. “The chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command, therefore, that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.” And when the astonished watch came into the city, and made report to their employers of “all the things that were done,” did it produce conviction? No, it only filled them with mortification, and kindled rage. “The chief priests, when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor’s ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.” To what purpose then, ask for a sign? They resist and reject the most illustrious, which, with reverence be it spoken, God himself could give, thereby approving the truth of what Jesus on another occasion said, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

“Destroy this temple.” Let it be observed, that this is simply a prediction or supposition, and not a precept, equivalent to, ye will destroy this temple, or though ye should destroy this temple. It is a mode of expression that frequently occurs in Scripture. Thus in the Old Testament, Joseph says to his brethren, “this do; and live,” that is, do this and ye shall live. Thus God speaks to Moses, “Get thee up into this mountain, and die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people,” meaning evidently, thou shalt die in the mount, and shalt be gathered unto thy people. Thus, Isa 8:10, “Take counsel together, and it shall come to naught; speak the word, and it shall not stand:” that is, though ye take counsel together, and though ye speak the word. And in the New Testament, the word of Christ to Judas, “that thou dost, do quickly,” cannot be considered as a command to accomplish his plan of treachery, but merely as an intimation that he was seen through, and that under the impulse of a diabolic spirit, he was hurrying on to commit that dreadful enormity. Thus Paul exhorts, “Be angry and sin not;” surely not as if he meant to encourage violent

transports of wrath, but in the event of a man's giving way to a fit of passion, the apostle means to guard him against excessive indulgence in it, by restricting its duration to the going down of the sun. This early notice did Jesus give, not to his disciples only, but to all who came to worship in the temple, "of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem;" that it should be effected by the hand of violence, not by decay, but by destruction, and that his own countrymen should be the perpetrators of it. This declaration was frequently repeated, and became plainer and plainer, till the fact justified every particular of the prediction.

"This temple." Our blessed Lord in this place and elsewhere denominates his body a temple, as declaratory of his superiority to the lofty pile on mount Zion, even in its greatest glory, much more in its then degraded, defiled state. ''I say unto you," addressing himself to the Pharisees, "that in this place is one greater than the temple," because Deity resided continually and inseparably in him, as the Jews believed he did in that which was built by Solomon, in answer to that petition; "O Lord my God, hearken unto the cry and to the prayer which thy servant prayeth before thee today: that thine eyes may be opened toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there;" according as it was foretold by Moses near five centuries before: "Then there shall be a plane which the Lord your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there." Josephus informs us that not only did the answer to Solomon's prayer imply a real and sensible residence of Deity, but that it was the universal belief of the Jews and of the strangers who visited Jerusalem, that there was an ingress of God into the temple, and a habitation in it; and, in another place, that God descended and pitched his tabernacle there. The Jews themselves, however, admitted, that whatever glory these expressions might signify was now departed. To restore that glory, and to bestow it on the second temple in more abundant measure than the first ever possessed, was the end of Christ's mission; and in him was the prediction fulfilled: "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts." He was that oracle by whose answers all light and truth were emitted; the true Shechinah who had the spirit without measure; he was anointed with the "oil of gladness above his fellows," and thus in all respects greater than the temple. That temple, says he, which you have defiled I have cleansed: and this temple of my body which you are going to destroy, I will raise up again. When this prediction was verified by the matter of fact, that fact became the foundation of one of the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel, the resurrection of the dead. Jesus early taught and frequently repeated it, that it might be clearly understood and carefully remembered. The impostor is at pains to conceal his purpose till it is ripe for execution. He fears prevention, and therefore endeavors to take you by surprise. The thief gives no warning of his approach, but comes upon men while they sleep. The true prophet discloses his design, prepares, forewarns, puts the person who doubts or disbelieves upon his guard, bids defiance to prevention. His own resurrection, and the doctrine of a general resurrection which is founded upon it, were not barely hinted at, or declared in obscure and equivocal terms. They were not the casual topic, and for once only, of private conversation with his disciples. No, this was a leading, a commanding object, presented continually to view, placed in the strongest light, announced with equal fairness and simplicity to friends and to enemies. "And Jesus going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him; and the third day he shall rise again." He declares the same truth thus openly in the court of the temple. He repeats it in

the presence and hearing of the multitude, “when the people were gathered thick together, then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” The Sadducees, opponents still more virulent than the Pharisees, perfectly understood him as meaning on the basis of his own, to establish the belief of a resurrection of the body; for they argue with him on the subject, and frame a case which they supposed would reduce the author of the doctrine to an absurdity. This afforded our Lord an opportunity of showing that the doctrine in dispute was actually an article in their own creed, as being the disciples of Moses. Thus it runs through the whole of divine Revelation. The fathers beyond the flood lived and died in this faith. The dust of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob thus rested and rests in hope. It is indeed more clearly stated under the Gospel dispensation, and the ground of it is more fully demonstrated, that is, the dawning light of the morning gradually brightened into the perfect day.

“In three days I will raise it up.” This is an explicit declaration of his own inherent Deity, for God alone has the right and the power over life and death. An angel may be the delegated instrument in executing the sentence of divine justice, by taking away life; us in the case of the first-born of Egypt, of those who fell by the pestilence, to the number of seventy thousand, for the offence of David in numbering the people, and of the hundred, fourscore, and five thousand smitten in one night, in the camp of the Assyrians. But we no where find the power of quickening the dead delegated to a created being. Man has the desperate power of destroying his own body, but there it ends, and the disembodied spirit ceases from all power to repair the awful violence which it has committed. Man cannot by a mere act of his will even lay down his life, any more than he can reanimate the breathless clay. It is the incommunicable prerogative of him who has life in himself, to dispose of it at pleasure. This prerogative Jesus Christ claims and exercises. “For as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them: even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.” In the case of his own death, it was an act of sovereign, almighty power. “Jesus said, It is finished and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost,” while as yet the principle of natural life was strong within him, thus demonstrating that his assertion concerning himself was founded in truth: “I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.” And on this power over his own life, he founds his right of dispensing life and death to others. “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that everyone which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day. Whether therefore it is said that “Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father,” or that he himself raised up the temple of his body, one and the same source of life, one controlling, irresistible will, and one supreme efficient power are displayed.

“Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? It has been already shown that this was a willful misapprehension: and it exhibits a humiliating view of the power of prejudice. Something may be made of a stupid child, if he be disposed to exert the poor faculties which he possesses, but obstinacy sets discipline at defiance.

It is possible to assist weak eyes, but what can be done for the man who wilfully shuts them, or who madly plucks them out! To enter with commentators, into discussion respecting the period of the temple's rebuilding, is foreign to our purpose. What is it to us how long time was employed in the work, by what prince or princes it was carried on, and what was its comparative magnificence, with relation to the first temple, and to other structures of a similar kind! But it is of high importance to know, that the prediction of Christ concerning it, already quoted, was exactly fulfilled, about forty years afterward; when Jerusalem was besieged and taken by the emperor Titus, was pillaged and burnt, the temple completely destroyed, upwards of one million and one hundred thousand of the Jews destroyed by famine and the sword, ninety-seven thousand taken prisoners, the whole nation expatriated and dispersed; and that the state of the temple from the year of Christ 70, down to the present 1802, and of this scattered, degraded, yet providentially supported and distinguished people, at this day, are a standing evidence of the truth and certainty of the things wherein we have been instructed. He is faithful and true who promises and who threatens. "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

"When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them." Words as they are spoken, and events as they pass, frequently make a slight impression, but when recalled and fixed by some striking correspondent circumstance, they rush on the mind like a torrent, and we wonder at our own preceding carelessness and inattention. Had the disciples been men quick of apprehension, and of easy belief, the fabrication of a cunningly devised fable might have been suspected but they were persons of a simplicity of character that sometimes bordered on stupidity; they were "slow of heart to believe;" they often misunderstood their master; they were of all mankind the most unfit to plan and to support imposture. When Jesus spake of destroying and of raising up again the temple of his body, the Jews wilfully perverted his meaning, and his disciples seem hardly to have marked his words. The greatest of miracles must be performed to subdue the incredulity of the one, and to muse the attention of the other. In both we contemplate the wrath and the weakness of man ministering to the glory of God. It was meet that the mouth of malignity should be stopped, and that the truth, as it is in Jesus, should he taught to the world by men whose own ignorance had been instructed, whose doubts had been removed, whose faith had been established. "We still have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power, may be of God, and not of us." The resurrection of Christ from the dead, therefore, so clearly predicted, and so exactly accomplished, supplies the Christian world, in every age, with the firmest basis of faith, and with the purest source of hope and joy. The apostle of the Gentiles, once the most violent opposer of the fact, and of the doctrine founded upon it, thus collects the evidence: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that

Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures; and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also as of one born out of due time." Paul's reasoning upon the subject is conclusive and satisfactory; it meets the human heart in all its desires and expectations. We resign ourselves to the stroke of death with composure. We bury our dead out of our sight, without bidding them a final farewell, because "the flesh also shall rest in hope." "For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again. even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory." The importance of this doctrine, in the scale of Christianity, will warrant our following up the article of our Lord's history which we have been reviewing, to its more remote effects and consequences. This will accordingly form the substance of the following Lecture. This passover afforded occasion of working various other public miracles, which are not enumerated in the sacred record, but which attracted attention, and produced conviction in the minds of many who saw and heard hips. He was now at the metropolis of the country, and at the season of universal resort to Jerusalem. Of the multitudes who flocked thither to celebrate the feast of Passover, very many must have been in the habit of searching the Scriptures, and were, with Simeon, "waiting for the consolation of Israel," and with Anna the prophetess, "looking for redemption in Jerusalem." Persons of this description must have been forcibly impressed with the personal appearance of Jesus Christ, with the singularity of his manner and address, with the gravity and dignity of his deportment, with the authority which he exercised in teaching and reproving. His zeal in the purgation of the temple, and the sign which he proposed as the evidence of his mission, must have been noticed and felt. When these proofs of an extraordinary character were accompanied and supported by a display of miraculous powers, the effect must have been what the evangelist relates: "When he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast-day, many believed in his name when they saw the miracles which he did." Nor was this impression confined to vulgar minds, for we presently find a man high in rank and office bearing testimony to Christ's prophetic character, and to the foundation on which it rested. "Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." But the sacred historian subjoins a reflection most humiliating to human nature; for it implies that the understanding may be enlightened, and the conscience perfectly convinced, and yet the heart remain corrupted and malignant. "Many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did." But the Searcher of hearts discerned under a sound belief, a dangerous, an unsubdued perversity of disposition in which he could not confide. "But Jesus did not commit himself unto them." In this Christ acted as a pattern to his disciples, and conformed himself to the doctrine which he taught them. "Beware of men: be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." There is all excess of caution unworthy of a noble and generous mind, which damps exertion and poisons society. But there is also an excess of confidence which puts the candid and sincere in the power of the crafty and designing. True wisdom safely conducts its possessor through the channel which divides them. "A prudent man," says Solomon, "foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself, but the simple pass

on, and are punished." The chapter concludes with an ascription to Christ of one of the incommunicable attributes of Deity, the knowledge of the thoughts of men: "He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." Of this he had given an illustrious instance in the case of Nathanael, whose character he clearly discerned before any personal intercourse had taken place: "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee." Here it is reduced to a general proposition of high moment. "The Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son" and he is qualified for the discharge of this all-important office, by a perfect knowledge not only of the actions of a man's life, but of the motives from which he acted, and of the end at which he aimed. May it be engraved on the living table of our heart, that God "hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

138. Jesus Christ--The Resurrection of the Saints

Jesus Christ--The Resurrection of the Saints After Administering the Lord's Supper

1Co 15:34-44. But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die. And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat or of some other grain: but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead: it is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness, it is raised in lower: it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. To him who believes in the life and immortality which are brought to light by the gospel; to him who has the witness of death every day presented to his eyes, and who feels it continually in his own frame, can it ever be unseasonable or unprofitable to hear of the ground of his holy faith, of his glorious privileges, of his exalted hope? Does the worldling ever tire in calculating his gains, and of reckoning over his hoard? Is the eager heir ever cloyed in contemplating his fair and ample expected inheritance? When were the praises, the reported successes, wisdom, and virtue of a darling child, a burden on the listening ear of parental affection? When was the eye fatigued in surveying the beautiful and majestic fabric of nature, or turned away from it with disgust? Wherefore, then, should it be apprehended that the disciple of Jesus, who has fled for refuge to the hope set before him, whose brightest prospects open beyond the grave, who is rejoicing in the promise of his Master's coming "the second time, without sin, unto salvation;" wherefore suppose that such a person could say, "What a weariness is it!" when the preacher's theme is the complete restoration of man's fallen nature, the resurrection of the body, the perfect resemblance of all the members of Christ to the glorious head, the final and unfading triumph of redeeming love? No, well-pleased you withdraw from the pursuit of temporal pleasure and profit, from surveying the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them, from contemplating even the more glorious wonders of the starry heavens, to expatiate over the blissful regions of Emanuel's land, to drink of "the pure river of the water of life," to eat of the fruit of the tree of life, to feast on the promise of "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," where there is no more death, where the curse is not known. where God himself shall wipe away all tears from all eyes.

Previous to the breaking of bread, in commemoration of our Savior's dying love to perishing sinners, we were led to meditate on the final consummation which the ordinance has directly in view. "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come;" an event which involves in itself the fate of angels and of men; an event which shall exhibit the grandest display of the divine power and wisdom, of justice, goodness, and truth; an event which is at once the object of just terror, and the purest source of joy. One, and that not the least

interesting, consideration connected with the prospect of that “great and notable day of the Lord,” is that which constitutes the subject of the apostle’s reasoning in the passage which has been now read, namely, the resurrection of the dead. The ground of belief respecting this is the truth and certainty of Christ’s resurrection, on the third day after his passion, conformably to frequently repeated, well-known, and minutely particular predictions respecting this illustrious event. These were the subject of the preceding Lecture. “Jesus and the resurrection,” were the great theme of Paul’s preaching at learned Athens, and of his epistles to the churches, particularly to the Corinthians, in this chapter. This is the sure foundation which God hath laid in Zion, and lo, What a structure is Providence rearing upon it! The apostle introduces an unbeliever caviling at the doctrine of the resurrection, and triumphantly demanding, as one defying all possibility of reply, “How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?” Grasping at mere phantoms of worldly hope, credulous as children in admitting “the unreal mockery” of a heated imagination, men doubt and disbelieve only when the God of truth speaks; they are careless only where their spiritual and everlasting interests are concerned: they reject that which reason end religion concur to prove, which the constitution and frame of nature, in her unceasing reproductions, stamp with striking marks of probability, and which a revelation from heaven has rendered infallible. The objection of infidelity proceeds on the supposition that there is nothing apparent in the system of the universe which is analogous to the resurrection of the body; that it is inconsistent with all knowledge and experience. The apostle goes on to demonstrate that this change, wonderful as it is, has its counterpart in nature, and is perfectly consistent with appearances which fall every day under every man’s observation, and which are level to every human capacity. He refers the infidel to the universally known and understood progress of vegetation, which is a constant representation of death and the resurrection, of corruptibility and incorruption. One of the most obvious and ordinary operations in husbandry daily presents the image of this great mystery of godliness. The seed, O man, which thou castest into the ground, is surrendered to loss, to putrefaction, to death. It disappears, it seems for ever gone, its form and substance, all, all is dissolved. No, sir, it dies but to be quickened. Indeed it could not have been quickened, unless it had died. What dropped into the earth, a single, solitary grain, springs up out of it, increased thirty, sixty, a hundredfold. Had the little seed never known corruption, where would have been that goodly tree laden with golden fruit? It fell naked into the ground, it rises thence clothed with a new, verdant, transparent covering. It every day unfolds some latent beauty, it assumes a more majestic form, it expands an unknown excellence. Its temporary destruction is its perennial establishment.

“So also is the resurrection of the dead.” The body was emaciated by disease, it withered by reason of age, it was lost in the grave, it became a mass of corruption. But does it follow that it shall remain for ever a prey to corruption? Does it follow, that it shall rise again with the selfsame qualities which it formerly possessed? No, it is the glory of God not to raise up again weakness, mortality, corruption, but out of weakness to raise power, to clothe corruption with incorruption, to swallow up mortality of life. But how is this done? I cannot tell. O man “thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.” Who is able to trace and to describe the common process of vegetable nature? Where is the man that presumes to explain that which is least? Is it any wonder, then, that limited faculties are lost in the investigation of that which is greatest? Can the clown tell how the handful of “bare grain” which he scattered along the surface of the ground,

has been transformed into a multitude of stately, fair and fragrant plants? No, and neither can the philosopher. But the simplest clown is a philosopher too enlightened to doubt, or to disbelieve what uniform observation and experience have confirmed to him. He is too wise to suspend the operations of his useful and necessary art, till he has discovered the how and the wherefore of it. Can the philosopher then arrogate to himself the praise of wisdom, who refuses the information, and denies himself the consolations of Christianity, because he cannot penetrate into every mystery, resolve every difficulty, and dispel all the obscurity which it presents! What one art or science has been carried to its highest possible perfection? Do men therefore neglect to avail themselves of the progress which has been made in science? And shall the most profound of all sciences, but which has, of all others, been most successfully investigated, whose discoveries are far more in number, and in their nature infinitely more important than all the rest, be laughed to scorn, be despised and rejected, because it presents “some things hard to be understood,” because some of its grander discoveries are reserved to a future exhibition, because there are “times and seasons,” interpositions, relations, and dependencies “which the Father hath put in his own power.”

Again, “God,” it is said, “giveth to every seed his own body.” “Thou fool,” argues St. Paul, “that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die. And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.” This implies, that the change produced by the resurrection is not arbitrary or contingent, but established by a certain law, conformably to the nature and qualities of each distinct species. What was wheat, continues to be wheat, after it has risen again. What was any other kind of grain, when cast into the earth, rises up that selfsame kind of grain, and no other. The individual substance is indeed changed, but the essential properties, the specific and distinguishing qualities remain. The same vital principle animates it in every state; when it sprung up in the germ of the parent seed; when it became naked, dry grain; when it lay buried under the clod; when it moldered away and died, and when it started up again in all the vigor and freshness of a new life. Doth not man, in like manner in his body, in his mind, in his condition, undergo revolutions equally obvious, equally impressive, and yet continue always the same? He possesses life and motion long before he begins to breathe; he lives, moves, and breathes long before he begins to reflect and reason. The dawnings of his reason are not greatly superior to the instincts of some of the brute creation. Arrived, at length, at fulness of stature and of understanding, his faculties, like the tide at full, are instantly on the decline. Accident destroys them, vice deranges, disease impairs, age wastes them. All the while it was one and the same being who struggled in the womb, who crawled in infancy, who tottered in childhood, who flew on the wings of the wind in youth, who stately walked in the majesty of manhood, who again stooped, bended, tottered, crept under the pressure of old age, who sunk in death. It was the self-same individual who now blazed in all the luster of talents, station, and success, who strutted the envy and wonder of mankind, and who now moped and blinked in premature second childish ness, the pity and scorn of the world. Explain to me wherein consisted the sameness which ran through all the successive changes of a short and transitory life of threescore years and ten, and you will teach yourself to conceive what it is that constitutes the identity of that which was sown “a natural body,” and which shall be raised “a spiritual body.”

Instead of vainly attempting to account for the sameness, is it not rather the part of wisdom to contemplate, and endeavor to improve the difference of the one from the other, as it stands displayed in the person of Christ the first-fruits, on the hallowed page of inspiration? The temple of his body was both before and after his passion free from stain and blemish; but every other human frame had in it radical pollution and corruption. It is earthly, a mass of clay, taken from the earth, dependant upon it, chained down to it, and ready to be swallowed up of it again. It shall be heavenly, spiritual, impassive; endowed with the capacity of moving with the expedition of thought, the celestial vehicle of an immortal spirit adapted to the vigor and activity of that spirit, subservient to its will, on the wing at pleasure up to its native seat, with the velocity of lightning in the east, at the west., according as the command of the Most High, or the desire of surveying his ways and his works may determine the choice. Roused by that voice which awakens the dead, behold the human body arrayed in light; it attempts a region, it mingles with elements untried before; it spurns the tomb, it mounts on high, it springs up “to meet the Lord in the air,” it mixes with angels, it checks the aspiring flight, and presents the first-fruits of eternal bliss before the throne, it joins with adoration, love, and joy in the song of the Lamb: “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests; worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing:” “blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever.”

It is now a vile body; composed of gross elements, subsisting on gross aliment, subjected to the same laws which govern the beasts that perish. It may be rendered loathsome by sloth, by infirmity, by disease, by vice, by death. The loveliest form is in one hour so altered, so disfigured, that we are obliged to turn from it with horror and aversion. Abraham must hasten to bury his Sarah out of his sight. Remove that transparent veil of skin which the hand of nature has so curiously spread over the sinews and the flesh, and what a frightful specter instantly appears! Imagination shrinks from the hideous apparition. It shall rise a glorious body composed of the purer elements which fly upward, living on incorruptible food, a pellucid wall of fire through which every emotion of the soul is distinctly visible, but which no sword of the adversary can penetrate, unsusceptible of wound, unsusceptible of depression, of weariness, of pain, of decay. In this world of woe the body has a glory not belonging to it, a glory that is its disgrace, its misery; the unnatural, ruinous glory of holding the immortal spirit in thralldom, of leading its sovereign, captive at its will, of bending the heaven-born mind to the ignominious drudgery of the flesh. In the world of bliss, the real order of nature shall be restored, the spirit shall resume its just empire, the body shall be invested with its proper glory, shall descend into its subordinate station; shall feel its highest gratification in becoming the ministering servant of intelligence, of rectitude, of benignity. That we may not seem all this while to have been retailing a fond man’s dream, we recur to the history of the wonderful changes which the bodies of some men have already undergone, and from which we may conclude what future changes, through the almighty power of God, the human frame is capable of undergoing. “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death and was not found, because God hath translated him:” his body, without being resolved into its principles, without tasting death, was quickened into newness of life, and entered into the kingdom of heaven without passing through the grave. Moses subsisted for forty days together in the mount with God, and neither did eat nor drink. On his descent, the skin of his face shone, so as to dazzle the eyes of the beholder, and to render the interposition of a veil necessary. At the age of one hundred and

twenty years, his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." After a lapse of fifteen centuries he revisited our earth in a glorious form, to do homage on the mount of transfiguration. Elijah undismayed mounts on fiery wheels to meet his God. His body, in an instant of time, acquires the power of resisting, of repelling the flame, or becomes assimilated to it, and burns unconsumed. The three children of the captivity fall down bound in the midst of the burning fiery furnace, but arise and walk through the flames uninjured. Paul is "caught up to the third heaven," carried out of himself, transported into Paradise, and made to hear "unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." But even those illustrious instances "have no glory, by reason of the glory that excelleth." The glory to be conferred on every believer's vile body is, that it "shall be fashioned like unto his glorious body according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Let us, therefore, take our ideas of the future "exceeding and eternal weight of glory," from what we know it was in him. What must have been the majesty of his person, and the dignity of his deportment when he expelled the profaners of the temple, and they answered him never a word? With what energy and eloquence must he have expressed himself, when a multitude under the influence of violent prejudice against him, overcome by force of truth, exclaimed, "Never man spake like this man." Behold him in the midst of the sea; the yielding waves become a pavement of adamant under his feet. He speaks the word, and the wind ceases to rage, and the tempest subsides into a calm. Moses endured, supported a fast of forty days and forty nights in communion with God; Jesus underwent a similar period of abstinence in the wilderness, being tempted of the devil. Mark that band of ruffians, assembled to apprehend him in the garden they are lost to decency, lost to shame; they are ready to rush upon their prey: He arrays himself in mildness, he simply demands, "Whom seek ye?" They instantly feel how awful goodness is, they shrink from the luster of his eye. When with native, irresistible majesty he meets the inquiry, "I am he," they went backward, and fell to the ground.

Such was the glory of that sacred body while as yet it had not invested itself with immortality; while as yet it was liable to pain, and sorrow, and death. But he displayed an anticipated view, even in a state of humiliation, of that splendor which he could assume and lay down at pleasure. On Tabor his whole form was altered; "his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." This however was to undergo an eclipse. The Scripture must be fulfilled which saith, "His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." But after the resurrection from the dead, this occasional and transient glory became permanent and immutable. Behold, he bursts asunder the bars of the grave. On the third day he raises up again the temple which the hands of wicked men had destroyed. Earth and heaven feel and acknowledge a present Deity. The sons of light descend from their thrones to announce his revival, to minister at his feet. The solid globe is thrown into convulsions. "There was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men." Early in the morning of the first day, he appears unto Mary, but "her eyes were holden that she should not know him;" she supposes him to be the gardener, and in the bitterness of her soul exclaims: "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." In the twinkling of an eye, his voice, his appearance changes, and as his lips pronounce, in their well-known accent, the name of Mary, he stands confessed to the astonished mourner as her Lord and her God. At a more advanced period of that same day, we behold him on the road which leadeth from Jerusalem to Emmaus, on which he

found two of his disciples, “talking together of all these things which had happened.” He joins himself to them, as they walked on their way in sadness. He enters into conversation with them; he expounds to them the Scriptures concerning himself. They are deeply affected, they are edified, their hearts burn within them, as he talks with them by the way, and while he opens to them the Scriptures. But all the while his body is concealed under a veil through which their eyes cannot pierce. In a moment the veil is withdrawn, as he blesses the bread, breaks it, and gives it to them; they recognize their much-lamented, greatly-beloved Master, he has resumed his form, and, in an instant disappears: their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. In the evening of that same memorable first day of the week, the eleven and their companions being assembled to worship, and the doors carefully shut for fear of the Jews, lo, he is in the midst of them speaking and dispensing peace. And yet it is the same body which was crucified. It bears the print of the nails which pierced his hands and his feet. His side presents the scar of the wound inflicted by the soldier’s spear. But that celestial body is no longer subject to the laws of matter. Walls of stone can neither exclude nor confine a spiritual substance.--Gates and bars have no power of coercion, they are passed without being opened. Behold the first-fruits of them that sleep. Behold the proof, the pledge, the model of the resurrection from the dead. Behold the glory which awaits all the redeemed of the Lord, in that day when he maketh up his jewels.

Let us take one glimpse more of the Savior’s glorified body. See, he leads out his wondering, delighted train as far as to Bethany, “seen of above five hundred brethren at once;” “he lifts up his hands and blesses them:” and it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.” Into this blessed image, believer in Christ Jesus, thou art going to be transformed. That feeble body which sometimes can with difficulty creep to the house of prayer, to a communion table, “shall mount up with wings as eagles,” shall behold the stars under its feet, shall range through unbounded space, shall ascend into the heaven of heavens, shall associate with the Cherubim and with the Seraphim, with the bodies and spirits of just men made perfect, “shall with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” Such, Christian, is the end of thy faith, the salvation of the soul, the redemption of the body from the grave. Such is the fruit of the love of God, the effect of Christ’s death, the operation of the Holy Spirit. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” The apostle suggests another very interesting idea on the subject of the resurrection. The children of the resurrection shall all be glorious, but the glory of all is not the same for as in the natural world, “there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds;” as there are bodies celestial and bodies terrestrial, each invested with its peculiar and appropriate glory and excellency, as “there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory: so also is the resurrection of the dead.” Next to the uniformity and regularity which pervade the system of the universe, the diversity and variety of the productions of nature, and of the ways of Providence, claim our attention and excite our admiration. To this diversity the field and the forest, the fragrant earth and the starry heavens are indebted for all their beauty. Hence the brute creation derives utility and importance, and human society its being and comfort. Under the addition of another orb similar to that which illumines and animates the world, nature would be oppressed, and mourn, and expire. Withdraw that single, little moon, that speck in creation, that mere attendant minister on our globe, and what a blank is left in the system, what myriads are

rendered comfortless, how the harmony is destroyed. Countless as various are the stars in the firmament; but the subtraction, the transposition, the accelerated or retarded motion of one of the least of them would unhinge the general frame, unsettle the balance, and introduce confusion. But arranged as they are, counterpoised, sustained by the arm of Omnipotence, everyone lends its portion of strength, beauty, and stability, to the whole. Each orb reflects luster on its opposite; and harmonious discord becomes productive of perfect union; everything differs, and yet every thing agrees. In the present imperfect state of the moral world, we must not look for the harmonious variety which reigns in the kingdom of nature. Society presents not only variety of rank, of talents, of possessions, but differences of opinion, oppositions of interest, the fermentation of passions. Offences will come, peace must be disturbed, blood must flow. But in the resurrection of the dead the harmonies of grace shall correspond to those of nature, for universal nature shall be under the dominion of love. “Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish.” From what has been said, let us,

1. Bless God for the clear light in which this all-important doctrine is placed. The evidence of it pours into the eye, rushes into the heart every step we take. As often as we walk out into the corn-field, we have the image of death and of the resurrection of the dead. The husbandman casts in the seed that it might die, that it might see corruption. The sight of the springing grain assures us that he sowed in hope, and that his hope maketh him not ashamed. “So also is the resurrection of the dead.” Every time the epicure sits down to a feast, he has in the dainties of his table a representation of the varieties which the day of the renovation of all things shall display. Every time that the contemplative man “considers the heavens, the work of God’s fingers, the moon and the stars which he hath ordained,” he perceives an image of the future glory of the redeemed. “As one star differeth from another star in glory, so also is the resurrection of the dead.” The weariness and wasting of the bodily vigor throws the human frame night by night into the semblance of death; the freshness of the dawn restores it to newness of life; “so also is the resurrection of the dead,” “them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.” “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?” Was not that stately oak once a dry acorn? Was not that gorgeous bird of a thousand radiant colors enclosed in a putrid shell? Did not that wonder of every eye, of every ear, once crawl a poor helpless reptile? How grievously do men err, “not knowing the Scriptures and the power of God.”

2. The doctrine has a happy tendency to reconcile the mind to the prospect of our own dissolution. The body, the object of so much anxiety and attention, is after all but a flimsy garment, of feeble texture, and of perishable materials. And is it indeed such a mortification to lay down an old, rusty, galling armor, and go to rest at ease, when the labors and dangers of a hard warfare are at an end? Is it so very humiliating to part with worn out raiment, with filthy rags, to exchange them for robes of immortality? This is the prospect which the resurrection opens to the Christian’s hope. This is the change which passed upon Joshua the high-priest in prophetic vision, the emblem of final deliverance, of unfading glory. “Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him, he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, let them set a fair mitre upon

his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the Lord stood by." These are words which deserve to be written, to be printed in a book, to be graven with an iron pen and lead, in the rock for ever: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."

3. "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." You have been called, it may be, to bury out of your sight what was once youth and beauty, talents and virtue, wisdom and piety. But these were, on earth, necessarily blended with weakness and imperfection. That weakness and imperfection remain in the grave, never to rise again. What are the transient youth and fading beauty of this world? What are the talents and the virtues of the wisest and the best of men, compared to the celestial radiance, the immortal vigor, the unsullied purity, the sublime wisdom of beings shining in their Redeemer's likeness! Were it in your power, could you find in your heart, to bring back a beloved child, a friend dear to you as your own soul, to a state of depression, and pain, and sorrow? No, the bitterness of death is past. The last enemy hath done his worst. They were first ready; they have reached home before us. Therefore,

4. "Be ye not slothful, but followers of them who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises." Be constantly aiming at higher degrees of moral and intellectual excellence; at those qualities which, though of little estimation in the eyes of men, are in the sight of God of great price, and constitute the glory of the kingdom of heaven. Be silently, unostentatiously adding, "with all diligence, to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things;" seeing that in the resurrection, those "who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, and they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

139. Jesus Christ--Heals Nobleman's Son

Jesus Christ--Heals Nobleman’s Son

John 4:46-54. So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum, when he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way, thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday, at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth; and himself believed, and his whole house. This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judea into Galilee. The most serious businesses of human life make but a sorry figure when they come to be recorded. Interesting to the individual, and for the moment, they awaken no general concern, and become to the parties themselves, when the moment is past, “trifles light as air.” The avidity with which fresh journals are read, is a perfect contrast to the indifference with which they are treated on the second or the third day. Let a man sit down to write the history of his own life; let him be the busiest and most important of personages, and what has he got to relate? A meager account of the miles he travelled, of the bargains he drove, of the spectacles he beheld, of the viands which covered his table, and of the guests who surrounded it. Into this little measure shrink the achievements of the great, the splendor, pomp, and pride of kings, as well as the short and “simple annals of the poor.” When the pageant has passed by, it is as a vision of the night, it vanishes into air, it leaves no track behind. In vain is the monumental column reared. The hand of time erases the inscription, shakes the fabric, crumbles it into dust. In vain does history promise to save from oblivion, and to confer immortality. The author, his work, his subject, the very language in which he wrote, all perish.

Nevertheless there are illustrious exceptions. There have been persons whose names are dear to every succeeding generation, and who shall be had in everlasting remembrance; who were engaged in pursuits of endless utility, and producing events which shall never spend their force. And there is a record which survives the lapse of ages, the ravages of barbarism, the revolutions of empire, and which shall outlive the dissolution of worlds. There we contemplate the deathless glory of the venerable benefactors of mankind, who “being dead, yet speak,” who were and are the light of the world. All those scattered rays of light are collected into one focal point, in the person of Jesus Christ. “To him give all the prophets witness;” “all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God;”--“the nations of them which are saved walk in his light, and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it.” In the busiest and most active life there are long and frequent intervals of repose. Much must be allowed to human infirmity, both of body and mind; the spirit may be willing, but the flesh is, weak. One life alone displays an incessant progress

in doing good; no word idly spoken, no moment unprofitably spent, no step unnecessarily taken. The night itself is made a season of devotion, the hour of social refreshment becomes an occasion of communicating useful knowledge, a walk into the corn-fields or by the shore of the sea, a journey from city to city, an ascent into the mountain, all are sacred to one commanding object, the glory of God and the good of mankind, the instruction of the ignorant, the pardon of the guilty, the relief of the miserable. The solemnities of the passover being finished, Jesus, according to the wisdom which directed all his proceedings, thought it proper to retire from Jerusalem, and to return into Galilee. The road lay through Samaria. The inhabitants of that country, though descended from the same stock with the Jews, and once members together with them of the commonwealth of Israel, were now cordially hated and despised by them. But they possessed the same “lively oracles of God,” they looked for the same Messiah promised to their common fathers, and they gladly received the word when it came unto them. The great Prophet whom they expected takes this opportunity of paying them a visit; they acknowledge him, and believe on his name. Having continued with them two days, sowing the precious seed, expounding from Moses and all the prophets, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself, and thus extending the boundaries of the kingdom of God, he pursued his journey to Galilee, and returned “to Cana, where he made the water wine.” Beside his general and leading object, to preach the gospel of the kingdom, he might intend, by revisiting that city, to express the affection of a kind relation to the new-married pair who resided there, to strengthen their union by his benediction, by his counsel, by participating in their domestic cares and comforts, and to confirm them and the other inhabitants of the place in the faith which they had professed.

It was so ordered of Providence that at the time of his return a distinguished family in the neighboring town of Capernaum was visited with a sore affliction. “There was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.” The word translated nobleman signifies courtier, one employed near the person, or in the service of a king. Herod was but a delegated and limited sovereign: “Tetrarch of Galilee,” that is governor, under the Roman emperor, of the fourth part of a province. But he was permitted to assume the title and state of king, because it swelled the pride of the imperial despot to lord it over many subordinate and dependant thrones. Capernaum being within the limits of Herod’s government, he no doubt occasionally resided in that city, and there probably at this time held his court; and the nobleman in question might either officially or from affection be in attendance upon his master. But the vicinity of a court, and the rank of nobility, are no security against the inroads of disease and death, for they too are tainted with sin. The danger of losing a child excites a thousand anxieties in the bosom of a parent, whatever be the station or condition. There are innumerable circumstances which level all distinctions. The honorable feelings of humanity are of this description, parental and filial affection, with the kindred charities of the human heart, sympathy with the distressed, and a desire to assist and relieve them: these constitute a dignity, a nobility which God alone can bestow, and which the air of a court tends rather to blight than to cherish. This good man however has not sunk the father in the courtier. Anxiety about the life of his child suspends the pride of rank, the duties of office, the etiquette of nobility. “When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down and heal his son: for he was at the point of death.”

“A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.” The fame of Jesus was now spread over the whole land. When he came back from Jerusalem to Galilee, “the Galileans received him, having seen all the

things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast." The report which they made at home, of his mighty works, as well as of his condescension and benevolence, had reached the ears of the great, and excited attention. We fondly listen to what promises ease; we grasp the very shadows of probability, and frequently make experiments with little hope of success. All that medical skill could effect had, in this case undoubtedly been attempted, but attempted in vain. It is one, and not the least of the evils attendant on poverty, to know of a remedy without the means of procuring it. The rich have at least this consolation in extremity, that everything was done which influence could command or money purchase. But the nobleman of Capernaum is not to be taxed with credulity for believing the report concerning Christ, or for building upon it the hope of a cure which medicine had been unable to effect. Instead of sending for him, as in the case of ordinary physicians, "he went to him." The distance between Capernaum and Cana was about a day's journey, as we may gather from John 4:52. He was met on his way homeward, rejoicing in the belief of the power and grace of Christ, the day after he had received the assurance: "Yesterday," said the servants, "at the seventh hour the fever left him." Here then we have nobility descending from its stateliness, waving ceremony, assuming the form of a supplicant. Was it thereby degraded? No, to follow the honest impulse of nature, to submit to the obligations of propriety and decorum, to employ fair means to obtain a desirable end, is no degradation, even to a prince. Vice alone degrades, and exposes a man to shame, and lowers his dignity in the eyes of God, and of his fellow-creatures.

Calamity brings down the loftiness of the human spirit. We have a noted instance of this in the history of Ben-hadad the king, of Syria. In the pride of his heart, in girding on his harness, in the confidence of superiority, he sends this insulting message to the king of Israel; "Thus saith Ben-hadad, thy silver and thy gold is mine, thy wives also and thy children, even the goodliest are mine." Unmollified by submission, he assumes a still haughtier tone, and proceeds to take by violence what had been quietly yielded to him. But brought to himself by a total defeat of his formidable army, he lowers his tone and humbles himself to the man whom he had insulted: servants with sackcloth girded on their loins, and ropes upon their heads, "came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Ben-hadad saith, I pray thee, let me live," a confirmation of the truth of the wise man's observation: "Pride goeth before destruction: and an haughty spirit before a fall." We would not be thought to insinuate that pride is an inseparable concomitant of greatness, or insolence of a prosperous condition. But the flattery of inferiors, and the constant means of self-gratification, acting habitually on a principle radically corrupt, have, without doubt, a very dangerous tendency to mislead the understanding, and to corrupt the heart: adversity dispels the illusion, and tells a man feelingly what he is. But for the indisposition of his son, the father might have remained a slave to the world, and died a martyr to the pride of life, and a stranger to the Savior of mankind. Blessed is that dispensation, be it ever so severe, which loosens a man from the things of time, which empties him of self, which leads him to God. The faith of this nobleman, as in every case, was blended with much infirmity. He reposed confidence in the goodness of Christ, in the power of Christ to heal the sick; but he weakly imagined that this power could operate only on the spot. Under this impression he travels from Capernaum to Cana in hope of being able to persuade Jesus to accompany him to the former city, and stand over the patient, and rebuke the fever, and restore him to health: "he besought him, that he would come down, and heal his son, for he was at the point of death." He urges the importance of dispatch, lest death should interpose and extinguish hope for ever; for his faith carried him no farther than to the brink of the

grave, and there gave up all for lost. It was meet that one who thought, who felt, who acted so well, should be taught to think, to feel, to act better. It was meet he should be taught not to dictate to divine sovereignty, but to adore, and submit to it; taught to enlarge his ideas of the power and grace of the Redeemer, as extending to universal space, and to every possible state of things. This seems to be the only rational interpretation which can be given of the apparent coldness of the reception given him by our Lord. Instead of his usual promptitude to fly to the relief of distress, the importunate and solicitous father meets, from the lips of Christ, with a seemingly ungracious reflection which had nearly chilled his heart. “Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe.” In his progress through Samaria Christ had found greater faith than in Judea. The Samaritans exacted no sign, expressed no suspicion, insisted on no condition. Many more believed because of his own word, and said unto the woman, “Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” But his countrymen of Galilee, though they had been witnesses of his miracles, were “slow of heart to believe.” They demand further evidence, and in the true spirit of Thomas, one of the twelve, who, after all the signs and wonders of which he had been a spectator, resisted the clearest testimony; “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.” The nobleman of Capernaum had probably expressed himself in similar terms, and thereby incurred this reproof of his incredulity, which seemed to convey a denial of his suit.

Parental affection perseveres in following up his request. He tacitly admits the justice of Christ’s censure, but waves discussion, and in the anguish of his soul renews his supplication to him, to whom misery never applied in vain: “Sir, come down ere my child die.” Where the heart is deeply interested, the “words are few,” but O how forcible! The feelings of a parent are seen with approbation by the friend of mankind, who knows what is in man, and to whom nothing that affects humanity can be a matter of indifference. “Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way: thy son liveth” That word, that one little word, has in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, reached Capernaum, has expelled a mortal distemper, has relieved a wretched father from a pressure under which he was sinking, and has inspired him with a confidence never more to be shaken. He receives his son as one alive from the dead; he learns to correct his false ideas of the power of Christ, and to submit implicitly to his decisions. “And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.” The sequel unfolds an amiable, interesting, and instructive view of domestic life. When the master left his home to go in quest of relief to his child, the servants of the family, some of them actually slaves, entering into their lord’s feelings, tend the sick bed of the young man with all the attention and solicitude, of humble friends, not with the eye-service of mercenary or compelled drudges. They observe every symptom of the disorder, they watch over every motion of the patient, they outrun his wants and wishes, they tremble for the issue, they mark with transport the moment of convalescence, and, to spare the tender parent every unnecessary pang of painful apprehension, instead of waiting for his return, they send off a deputation of their number, the instant that the fever came to a crisis, to announce the welcome tidings to their beloved master. What honor does this reflect on all the parties! Human life consists of a reciprocation of kind affections, expressions, and actions, or their contraries. In vain does the unfeeling, insolent, tyrannical despot expect dutiful, cheerful, cordial attachment and submission from domestics and dependants. By failure in his own duty, he has set them the example of harshness, want of sympathy, and disrespect. The inferior almost always takes the tone from his superior. If you see

obsequious, faithful, diligent servants, or attentive dutiful, affectionate children, rest assured that the master and mistress of the family, that the parents of the children are wise, gentle, and good. Most families in the metropolis, especially those of high rank, are uncomfortable, because mutual attachment subsists not between the rulers and the ruled. It is a mere intercourse of accommodation and interest, in which neither the heart nor conscience hath any part. The paltry consideration of a month's wages settles the account on either side. In the remoter parts of the kingdom, the relation of master and servant is a tacit compact of unlimited duration. The servant is adopted into the family, and looks up to the heads of it with filial respect, gratitude, and confidence. No separate interest, no divided or contradictory views and pursuits disturb domestic tranquillity. The family of this nobleman was not far from the kingdom of God, for the spirit of love was its governing principle, and God is love. "And as he was now going down his servants met him, and told him, saying, thy son liveth. Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him."

One of our highest mental pleasures consists in comparing object with object, in order to discover coincidence, similitude, difference, or contrast. This pleasure must have been enjoyed in singular purity on this joyful occasion. The distance of the two cities was well known. It employed a whole day, and the exertions of a man of rank and fortune, furnished with all the means of expeditious travelling, and under the stimulus of paternal affection, to go from Capernaum to Cana. How pleasant was it to compare that distance, and the usual rate of journeying, with the inconceivably rapid transition of the word of Christ! what a contrast! Here then was a demonstration of the controlling power of Christ over space; it was not needful that he should go up or come down, that he should be on the same spot with the object of his beneficence, for the purpose of effecting a cure. The divine attribute of omnipresence was accordingly displayed. The measurements of time are equally well-known and understood; and there was a peculiarly powerful motive on both sides to mark the precise moment. Here an opportunity was afforded of instituting a second comparison, and lo, what a coincidence between the time of the father's observation and that of the servants, that is, when Jesus spake the word to the one, and when the others perceived a sensible change to the better, in their young master's health! If ever the relation of cause and effect existed, it was in this case. And here was a display of another divine attribute, time as well as space subdued to the will of him who filleth all space; whose existence was before time began to flow, and runneth through the whole extent of its duration; with whom a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years; who measures the lapse of moments and of ages by a standard unalterable as the ordinances of heaven, and by a standard still more intelligible, sensible, interesting, and endearing, uninterrupted, unwearied acts of loving kindness and tender mercy.

It would be ungenerous and unjust to ascribe the nobleman's minuteness of inquiry to doubt, or slowness of belief, for the history expressly with, "the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and went his way," confiding entirely in the truth and faithfulness of that word, long before the evidence of it met him on the road. But that Jesus in whom he trusted graciously, gave him this confirmation of his faith, that he might feel the solidity of the rock on which all his hope rested. Faith is faith, though but as a grain of mustard-seed; for that grain contains an immortal germ, pregnant with all the beauty and richness of a future harvest. The apostles themselves were sometimes weak, at other times strong in the faith: sensible of this, they prayed unto the Lord that he would "increase" it. The principle is sound, it is vital; it may lie dormant, it may

suffer depression, but it cannot expire. “So the father knew that it was at the same hour in the which Jesus said unto him, thy son liveth; and himself believed, and his whole house.” The miracles of Christ always look farther than to their immediate object. Application is made for the removal of a bodily infirmity; the diseases of the mind are at the same time reached by the healing power of the Redeemer, and the spectators are made sensible of a divine energy. The blind man comes in hope of having his sight restored, he goes away seeing, and with the unspeakably greater blessing, the eyes of his understanding are opened. Behold that helpless paralytic, “borne of four,” stretched motionless on his conch. At the word of Christ he recovers strength, arises, takes up his bed, goes forth before them all, and departs to his house, not only with a body every whit whole, but with a soul relieved from the dreadful pressure of the guilt of sin: “Jesus said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.” Mark these ten lepers, outcasts from society, loathsome to themselves, an abomination to others, laboring under a malady which medicine could not reach; they stand afar off, they lift up their voices, they cry for mercy. As they went, at the command of Christ, to show themselves to the priests, they were cleansed. To nine of the ten it proved a mere temporary relief, a corporal purgation; the fatal leprosy of sin remained to defile the conscience. To the tenth, a stranger, a Samaritan, it proved at once the cure of bodily disease, and of mental pollution; “and one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering, said, were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, arise, go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole.”

Illustrious to the same purpose is the history of the miracle under review. The nearer and more immediate object is a sick child at Capernaum, restored instantaneously from threatening indisposition to perfect soundness. But consider how many momentous circumstances are involved in that one object. The father was a person of the very first distinction, connected with the higher powers of this world, at the head of a numerous and well-ordered household, a man of urbanity, understanding, and address. Converted himself to the faith of the gospel, behold him disposed to employ the whole weight of his influence, of his authority, of his example, in promoting the cause which he himself had from conviction embraced. Incalculable is the effect which one man of character, talents, and virtue may produce in a court, a city, a kingdom, a world. No one can be solitary either good or wicked. The contagion whether of virtue or vice is quickly caught and communicated, with this difference, that in the one case there is a repulsive faculty that guards the system against the admission of the gracious principle, and which therefore needs to be corrected; whereas in the other there is a predisposition to absorb the poison, which it requires no common skill and attention to prevent. Whatever might be the more remote, or more extensive influence of this good man’s faith and piety, the evangelist informs us that it embraced at least the whole of his own family “and himself believed and his whole house.” Here was another province, by a strong hand rent from the empire of Satan, and added to the kingdom of the Messiah; “for he must reign till he hath put all his enemies under his feet”

We conclude with a few practical reflections suggested by this portion of our blessed Lord’s history.

1. Events, to our apprehension, casual, ordinary, merely things of course, are, in the purpose of the Eternal Mind, order, connection, mutual dependence. Our eyes are too feeble to discern how

delicately fine the hinges are on which the mighty machinery of heaven moves. The enterprises of man exhibit the noise and bustle of preparation, and violence of exertion, and lo, they come to nothing; they commence in a blaze, and presently issue in smoke. The designs of the Most High have, from imperceptible beginnings, made a silent, unnoticed progress, and have acquired strength irresistible before attention was excited; they issue from a dark cloud, and advance with growing luster unto the perfect day. What more common than sickness in a numerous family? Uniform health, not occasional disease, is the wonder. The malady of a beloved child spreads a sable veil over an honorable house; it threatens to embitter the future days of survivors; the hand of death is lifted up to strike the decisive blow. It is a critical moment. The Lord gives the word. The child lives, the parent believes, the whole house is converted unto the Lord, an impression favorable to Christianity is made on the public mind, the dominion of grace is extended, and the kingdom of glory opens to view. From such a hidden source, inaccessible as that of the Nile, issues the majestic river, destined to adorn and fertilize distant regions and the nations which inhabit them. This day salvation came to the house of that nobleman. It wore a lowering aspect, but it brightened as it went.

2. Mark the impartial regards of the great Lord of all to his creatures of every order and condition. With some men there is a strong prejudice in favor of nobility and affluence, as if they implied greatness, generosity, capacity. Others are actuated by a prejudice equally violent and unreasonable against them. Wisdom says, look to the man, and not to his circumstances. Goodness is the object of commendation and esteem, whether in the high or the low, the rich or the poor; and vice is odious whatever be the condition of life. A righteous judge considereth the cause, not the rank and character of the parties. And lest there should be an improper bias to the side of poverty, as there sometimes is to the side of wealth, the law very wisely throws in this caution: “Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause.” Our Lord sets the example of this impartiality. Nobility could be no recommendation to his favor, neither was it any bar in the way. The distress, the importunity, the parental affection of the man moved his compassion, the current of which could not be impeded by the consideration of his being a courtier. It is a melancholy reflection, “that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called;” but it is pleasing to reflect that the rule is not absolute and universal. The history of the Christian church and the state of the world at this day, exhibit many glorious instances of the triumph of divine grace over the fascination of high rank, the deceitfulness of riches, and the pride of life. As such persons had more to combat and to overcome than others, the combat and the conquest redound the more to the glory of God, in whose strength they overcome.

3. We have before us an example of high moral virtue, existing without a principle of saving faith. This nobleman adorned his exalted station He qualities estimable in whatever rank. He ruled well his own house. He was an affectionate parent, and a kind master. And when we behold a man fulfilling the duties of one relation reputably to himself and usefully to others, we are bound in charity to believe, that he acts worthily in the other relations of life. When an instance of this kind presents itself, it excites regret, that such a one though “not far from the kingdom of God,” should nevertheless come short. It is religion that confers dignity on high birth, and that gives energy to virtue. If then this man were respectable and exemplary by his virtuous conduct, how much more so is he, when faith is added to virtue, now that a divine principle sanctifies, animates, ennobles every action, and renders ordinary employments not only a reasonable but a religious service.

Morality, then, may exist without religion, but there can be no religion without morality. “Faith, if it hath not works is dead, being alone:” “for as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” If in his mere civil and moral capacity the nobleman of Capernaum administered his affairs so wisely and so well, what must have been the ardor of natural affection, his discretion in the management of his household, the propriety of his personal deportment, now that his understanding is illuminated, and his heart warmed, and the path of his feet guided by the sacred flame of religion! now that “the grace of God, that bringeth salvation had appeared to him, teaching” him, as it does all its subjects, “that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

4. Do we feel parental solicitude about the bodily health, and the mental improvement, and the worldly prosperity of our children? What then ought to be the fervor of our spirits at a throne of grace, to obtain for them an interest in the favor of God, the knowledge that maketh wise unto salvation, the Spirit of sanctification, a right to “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away!” From their relation to us they derive pollution, guilt, condemnation, and death; and shall we not be stimulated to repair the injury we have done them; and, by nurture, by example, by prayer, and supplication, become the instruments of making them “partakers of the divine nature,” and of raising them to the rank of “heirs of God, and ,joint-heirs with Christ.” Woe unto them, and unto us, unless they are adopted into a nobler family, and exalted to higher privileges than those to which the birth of nature entitles them; and unless they “receive the Spirit of adoption, whereby they may cry, Abba, Father.” What will it be to present ourselves, at length, and our offspring, whether after the flesh, or after the spirit, or both in one, with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, saying, “Behold I, and the children which God hath given me!” Let this prospect direct our wishes, dictate our prayers, animate our exertions, till, with Israel, we have power with God, and with men, and prevail.

5. Finally, In the presence of that God with whom we have to do, and of Jesus, “who is God over all, and blessed for ever,” all space shrinks into a span, all duration into a moment. “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?” Realize that awful omnipresence as a guard upon the heart, upon the tongue, upon the life; as a ground of hope and a source of joy in every dark and trying hour. “God is a very present help in trouble.” “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” He is faithful who hath promised, to his Israel whom he hath created, whom he hath formed, whom he hath redeemed, whom he hath called by name. “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.” Are “a thousand years in his sight but as yesterday, when it is past, and as a watch in the night?” And do “we spend our years as a tale that is told!” “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” There is no commodity which men trifle with so sadly, when they have it at command, as time; and no one the loss of which they so bitterly deplore, when it is in their power no longer. Account every instant critical and decisive, for undoubtedly many are so. Remember that you are the disciples of

him who saith of himself; “I must work the work of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.”

140. Jesus Christ--Centurion's Faith

Jesus Christ--Centurion’s Faith

Mat 8:5-12; Luk 7:1-10. And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saving, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented; and Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me, and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self-same hour.--Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion’s servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself; for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee; but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers; and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth: and in another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard these things he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel. And they that were sent returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick. The various orders of men which exist in society are a demonstration that society is in a very imperfect and corrupt state. Restore everlasting and universal peace to a troubled world, and the profession of a soldier is at an end. There were then no “battle of the warrior with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood.” While injustice, violence, and cruelty are in the world, there must be tribunals, and prisons, and scaffolds. The ravages of disease, and the thousand accidents to which human life is exposed, render necessary the interposition of the healing art. When the time of the restitution of all things shall come, the office of public instructor shall cease. “They shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.” To this blessed consummation we are encouraged to look forward, when the spirit of love shall absorb the flame of discord, and make the sword drop from the hand of the man of war; when the courts shall be shut and the prison-doors thrown open, because fraud and violence are no more; when, in the beautifully figurative language of the

prophet, “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

Certain professions, it has been alleged, have in their very nature a corruptive quality. That of the military man is supposed to be of this number. The vulgar associate with it the ideas of insolence, ferocity, licentiousness, and of other hateful qualities. Like every other general censure, this too must be taken with many grains of allowance, and candor must admit that there are excellent men of every profession; and, in the case of illustrious exceptions from the generality of the stigmatized orders, higher praise is undoubtedly due to those who have the courage to resist, and strength to overcome the temptations to which their manner of life, and the very means of earning their subsistence expose them, than to persons who had no such difficulties to encounter. Of this description are the nobleman, and the Roman centurion of Capernaum. The history of the former, as far as connected with that of our blessed Lord, was the subject of the last Lecture, that of the latter is now to be the ground of our meditation. The two personages present a striking resemblance to each other, in their personal character, in their condition of life, in the circumstances which brought them acquainted with the Savior of the world. They dwelt in the same city, perhaps in habits of intimacy, for the good naturally attract and associate with the good; the one a courtier, the other an officer of very considerable rank; both men of humanity, of gentle manners, of amiable, of noble deportment; the one a suppliant in behalf of a darling child, laboring under an attack of the fever, the other in behalf of a favorite servant, attacked by a violent paralytic affection; both successful in their application, and both deeply impressed with the character of their great Benefactor. With so many marks of resemblance the two little histories display a lovely, affecting, and instructive variety, tending to unfold the various shades of the human mind, in the changing scenes of human life, and equally tending to illustrate the grace and power of Christ, ever ready to meet every case, adapted alike to the relief of the bodies and of the souls of men. The person who applied to Jesus Christ on this occasion was a centurion, that is, as the word imports, an officer in the Roman army who had a hundred men under his command. It corresponded nearly to the rank of captain in our military establishment. Judea was at this time a conquered province, in subjection to the authority of a Roman governor, and kept in awe by Roman soldiery. The Jews vainly boasted that they were “Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man;” whereas it was notorious to the whole world, that from the days of Egyptian bondage, down to the despotism of Tiberius Cesar, their intervals of liberty had been few, transient, and interrupted; and at that very moment they were murmuring under the pressure of a galling yoke, imposed on their neck, and kept there by the strong hand of power; and Jesus Christ convicts them of being in subjection to a yoke still more galling and disgraceful: “whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.” But such are the self delusions which men practise. Every Roman soldier who was seen, every Roman coin that circulated through the land, demonstrated that they were not a free people. Indeed they were not worthy to be so, for they never enjoyed liberty without abusing it. Happy was it for the district of Capernaum to be under a government so mild and moderate as that of this good centurion. The two evangelists who have recorded this fact, differ in some circumstances of their narration. In reading St. Matthew’s account, we are led to

suppose that the centurion made personal application to Christ, for the cure of his servant, whereas in the more circumstantial account of the transaction, transmitted to us by St. Luke, we find that the application was made in the first instance, through the medium of “the elder of the Jews.” But there is no real difference between the two historians. It was a maxim among the Jews, “a man’s proxy is the man himself,” and it is still a rule among civilians, “What we do by another we are adjudged to have done ourselves.” In a process of law, a party is said to come into court, and to have made such a representation, though he appeared only by his counsel or solicitor. Thus Jethro came to Moses first by a messenger, with these words in his mouth: “I, thy father-in-law, Jethro, am come unto thee, and thy wife, and her two children.” On receiving this message, Moses went out to enjoy a personal interview with his family. Thus Solomon sent ambassadors to Hiram, who were to address him not in the plural number, but in the first person singular, as if Solomon himself had spoken the words face to face: “behold, I purpose to build a house unto the name of the Lord my God;” and Hiram fairly considers himself as “hearing the words of Solomon.” Thus the two sons of Zebedee came to Christ, with a petition, through the medium of their mother; and thus John Baptist, now shut up in a prison, addressed himself to Jesus by two of his disciples, saying, “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another.” Matthew, in conformity to this mode of speech and thought, represents the centurion as coming in person to Christ, though at first, through modesty and humility, he thought proper to employ the intercession of others.

We have here a singularly pleasant opening into a good mind. This man was accustomed to command, not to supplicate: to dictate, not to bend. But such is his veneration for the person and character of Christ, that he is awed at the thought of appearing in his presence; instead of resorting to the exercise of authority, he has recourse to entreaty, and hopes from the interposition of men better than himself what he dared not to ask on his own account. Does this bring his courage under suspicion? Is it likely that such a man would turn his back in the day of battle? No, surely. It is the coward that struts, and boasts, and threatens; the truly brave are modest, gentle, and unassuming; they speak by their actions, not by high swelling words of vanity. And yet this centurion had more than one plea of merit to advance. He had borne his faculties most meekly in his great office. He had not oppressed, he had not been guilty of extortion; and even this negative virtue merits some degree of commendation. On the contrary he cherished, encouraged, protected the people whom he was sent to rule. Instead of restricting their religious liberty, or permitting their worship to be disturbed, he liberally contributed toward the maintenance of public worship, and most probably assisted at it. In a word, he was a public blessing. Men generally set the full value on the good actions which they perform, and are frequently at pains to make an ostentatious display of them. He puts in no claim, exacts no acknowledgment, expects no return.--The elders of the Jews feel themselves so much the more called upon to celebrate his good qualities, and to enumerate his benefits. “They came to Jesus, and besought him instantly, saying, that he was worthy for whom he should do this; for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.” If indeed he had become a proselyte to the Jewish religion, that is, a worshipper of the one living and true God, as, from the whole history taken together, there is little reason to doubt a still higher degree of respectability attaches to his character. What obstacles had he not to surmount, what prejudices to overcome! The prejudice of education in the religion of polytheism, or a plurality of gods; the prejudice of profession, which sometimes makes it a point of honor to be of no religion, sometimes to adhere to the first adopted; political prejudice, which would have tied him down to the religion of the imperial court, the source of all civil and military preferment: and more than all

these, he had to encounter the formidable laugh of the world, the raillery of his fellow-officers, the sneer of witlings. The courage that could meet and overcome such discouragements is indeed the courage of a hero.

It is now time to inquire into the object of this circuitous expostulation. What point is to be carried? what interest is at stake to warrant such earnestness and importunity? a servant sick of the palsy and ready to die. The word translated servant, through the whole of St. Matthew's narration, signifies boy, a term of ambiguous meaning, being employed to denote either child or servant, and it determines the age only, not the quality of the patient. But the Greek word used by St. Luke, except in one clause, is of unequivocal import, and indeed reduces the young man's condition lower than that of servant, for it means slave, and expresses the lowest condition of human wretchedness. This young person might have been either a prisoner of war, or purchased with money; and slaves of both descriptions were frequently endowed with rare accomplishments. As Providence permitted the boy to sink into this degraded state, it was some compensation, that he fell into the hands of a kind and affectionate master, a man of principle, a man of humanity. Where is now the ferociousness, the insensibility, the indifference of the soldier? All melts into sympathy with distress, and into a sense of mutual obligation. Thus it is that the God who made us, who "knoweth our frame, and who remembereth that we are dust," balances evil with good, and either finds a way to escape, or administers strength to support the calamity. Thus necessary to each other are the members in both the social and the natural body. "If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" "And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." The case of the little slave was dangerous if not desperate. The palsy is a partial death of the limbs affected. Here it was a privation of motion, while acute sensibility remained; he was "grievously tormented;" and this combination of pain and interrupted circulation threatened approaching dissolution. But the maxim is excellent both in medicine and in morals. "While there is life there is hope," and religion advances a step farther, and says, "Even in death there is hope." Many a promising case has been lost through impatience and despair. Till Providence has decided, man is bound to persevere in the use of means. It is evident that the centurion expected everything from the sovereign power, and not from the personal presence of Christ; and herein his faith soared much higher than that of the nobleman, who had no idea of a cure effected at a distance from the object. But how shall we account for the cold, repulsive reception given to the personal solicitation of the nobleman; "except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe:" and for the frank and cheerful compliance with the centurion's message, "will come and heal him?" Jesus will have his sovereignty felt and acknowledged in all things. Humility and self-abasement are the most powerful claims of a suppliant, and the sublimer faith has the superior power with God and prevails.

Instead of being transported with joy at the thought of this proffered visit, the centurion shrinks from the approach of Christ. A sense of guilt and unworthiness stares him in the face. The presence of a personage so pure, so exalted, he feels himself unable to support, and deputes other friends to meet Jesus, to renew his suit, but to deprecate the degradation of his dignified character, by conversing with one so mean as himself, and by coming under a roof so unworthy to receive such a guest. Finding however that Jesus drew nigher and nigher, he at length assumes

resolution, and goes forth himself to meet him, with a heart overwhelmed, overflowing, and a mouth filled with arguments. Never did imagination conceive, never did heart feel, never did tongue express a strain of reasoning more forcible, more affecting, more sublime. “The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me, and I say to this man, go, and he goeth, and to another, come, and he cometh; and to my servant, do this, and he doeth it.” The knowledge which he had of his own profession is the foundation of his argument. In a military establishment, all must be cheerful subordination and prompt obedience. He himself was at once under authority, and in authority. He had not the idea of disputing the commands of his superior, and he knew that his word, that his nod was a law to his inferiors. Under this notion of military discipline he contemplates the supreme authority of Christ as extending to all persons, elements, and events. His own orders were obeyed, though his person were at a distance and unseen. What then should retard the execution of a will which all the powers of nature are unable to resist? “Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.”

“When Jesus heard it, he marvelled,” not as an ordinary man wonders at something new, striking, and uncommon. He knew what was in man. The marvellous faith which he graciously pleased to approve and to reward was the operation of his own spirit; but he holds it up as a matter of wonder to all who were present, and as a subject of reproof to those of the house of Israel, who, with all their superior advantages, possessing as they did, “the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came:” nevertheless received their promised, their expected Messiah coldly, doubtingly, reluctantly; and at length utterly rejected him, and put him to death. This leads our blessed Lord to unfold the approaching admission of the Gentile nations into the church of God, by believing and embracing his gospel, and the rejection of the posterity of Abraham after the flesh, because of their unbelief: “And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east, and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Jesus delivers this all-important doctrine under the solemnity of an “I, say unto you;” “mark me well; my words are true and faithful, they are serious and interesting, they concern everyone among you, they shall all have their accomplishment” The assembly to whom this was addressed, consisted of a great variety of persons. It was composed of the elders of the Jews, who had come to intercede in behalf of their benefactor, and who were waiting the issue; of the centurion himself, originally a Gentile and an idolater; of the friends whom he had dispatched to meet Jesus, who were likewise, in all probability, Roman soldiers, and of course heathens and idolaters; and of a mixed multitude who followed Christ wherever he went. The highest privilege which proselyted Gentiles could obtain from Jewish bigotry was permission to worship the true God in the outer court of the temple, which was appropriated to them, and called by their name. To them how grateful must have been the intimation of being made partakers of all the privileges of the sons of God! of rising to their full and equal rank in the great family of the common Father of all, of being admitted into the society, and of enjoying the felicity of the venerable founders of the Jewish church, a branch only of “the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven!” The like precious faith which exalted the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to a place in the kingdom of God, was to be diffused in every direction, and to raise men “of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,” to the “inheritance of a kingdom prepared,” for all

the faithful, “from the foundation of the world.” The Jews, on the other hand, valued themselves on their exclusive privileges. They scorned to have any dealings with even their neighbors and brethren the Samaritans. They held themselves contaminated by coming into contact with the impure heathen! they appropriated to themselves a right to the favor of God. To persons laboring under such prejudices, which had been instilled into them with their mother’s milk, what an awful denunciation was it, that not only should the Gentile nations be received within the pale of the church, but received to their own exclusion? “Behold,” exclaims the apostle, in contemplating this very object, “Behold the goodness and severity of God.”--“Of a truth we perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” But the singular imagery, and the very language by which this view of the Redeemer’s kingdom is conveyed, deserve a particular consideration. May they be deeply impressed upon our hearts and minds.

“Many shall come,” says Christ, as he surveyed the gradual progress, and the unlimited extent of his empire. The narrow spirit of Judaism is not peculiar to that people. It seems to be a general character of human nature. Abraham and Lot were under the necessity of separating, because “the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together.” How often has a well of water kindled a flame among brethren? Whence come pride and envy? whence come fraud and cunning? whence come wars and fightings? whence come monopolies and exclusions, but from the selfishness of an individual, or of a few, to appropriate to themselves what belongs to many? Were the operation of this spirit confined to the things of time, it might be accounted for. The desires of the human mind are unbounded, and the objects of pursuits are few and small. What another acquires seems to be so much taken away from me. Though in truth there is provision sufficiently ample for all; bread enough and to spare, room enough and to spare, were the real wants and the reasonable wishes of nature to settle the distribution. But that the kingdom of heaven should be subjected to a monopoly; that its keys should be seized by the bold hand of an usurping individual or of an arrogant party, would exceed belief, did not the history even of the Christian Church establish the fact. The disciples of Christ themselves brought into his school all the contractedness of their Jewish education. Even the mild and affectionate John was tainted with it. “Master,” said he, “we saw one casting out devils in thy name: and we forbade hum, because he followeth not with us.” They are for calling down fire from heaven to consume a whole village of Samaritans, in resentment of a mere piece of incivility. They must have the highest places when their Master should come to the throne. The kingdom must be restored to Israel, whatever might become of the rest of the world. This spirit, though frequently and severely reprobated by their benevolent Master has unhappily been transmitted, and mutual anathemas and excommunications have been thundered by furious sectaries, who have one after another desolated the earth, to secure to themselves the undivided possession of a heaven which they are incapable of enjoying. If the Savior of men says, “many shall come,” who dares to limit the Holy One of Israel, and to say, “few shall be saved?”

“Many shall come from the east and west.” The other two cardinal points are specified in a corresponding passage of the gospel according, to St. Luk 13:29. The import of the expression is obvious. It denotes the attractive influence of Christianity over men of every region under heaven, and the universal paternal care and love of Him who “hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth.” The day of Pentecost exhibited the first fruits of this

glorious harvest. When the apostles, “filled with the Holy Ghost, spake with other tongues as the spirit gave them utterance,” “there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now, when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed, and marvelled, saying one to another, behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? and how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and Proselytes”--“and the same day there was added unto them about, three thousand souls.” Since that period what have been the triumphs of the Prince of Peace! What myriads are now prostrate before Him who sitteth upon the throne, and before the Lamb, adoring the wonders of redeeming grace, looking, with angels, into the great mystery of godliness, if haply they “may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge!” And what still more glorious triumphs remain to be displayed, when “the fulness of the Gentiles shall be come in, and all Israel shall be saved,” when “great voices in heaven” shall say, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever!” The multitudes who shall thus flock to the Savior, as doves to their windows, from the east and from the west, from the south and from the north, as they are partakers of the faith of the patriarchs, so they shall at length be made partakers of their joy: “they shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God.” What an assemblage of delicious images! What prospects has the Gospel opened to the children of men! Those travellers into a far country have returned to their Father’s house. They pursued various tracks, but all led homeward. They were strangers to each other in a strange land, but the prevailing family likeness now lets them see that they are brothers. They sometimes fell out by the way, but now there is perfect love. They had heard of the names of their venerable ancestors and respectable kindred, now they see, and know, and rejoice in them. Their pilgrimage is ended, their “warfare is accomplished.”

“They shall sit down.” They were laid in the grave, they fell asleep, they saw corruption. Now they are children of the resurrection; refreshed by the sleep of death, they have acquired immortal vigor, they have put on incorruption. Sitting is the posture assumed for the enjoyment of social intercourse, and that is the idea here conveyed. The family is assembled, the banquet is prepared, perfect harmony reigns. When men return to the bosom of their friends from tedious and painful journeys, from perilous voyages, from destructive warfare, affection suggests many an inquiry, many a communication. Alas, how often do we fondly anticipate the communications of distant friends who are never to return! But of the expected guests, of the innumerable company invited to “the marriage of the Lamb,” not one shall be missing, no bitter recollection shall intrude, no painful apprehension shall arise. And with what subjects of conversation are they eternally supplied! With what enlarged views of those subjects do they discourse! The glories of nature are contemplated with new eyes, and excite emotions before unfelt. The mystery of Providence, once so intricate and inscrutable is unraveled; the mighty plan, the minute parts, the universal and the individual interest are found in perfect unison. The wonders of redeeming love, intermingling with the glories of creation and the mystery of Providence, communicating to them all their beauty, all their importance. What a theme for the whole company of the redeemed, for interchange of personal experience, for mutual congratulation and delight! What exalted employment, what inexhaustible

source of joy for the endless days of eternity!

“They shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob.” There is a natural desire in man to be in the company of the eminently great, and wise, and good. But this desire is tempered by a consciousness of our own inferiority. We shrink from the penetrating eye of wisdom, we feel “how awful goodness is,” we blush inwardly at the thought of our own littleness. But those ingathered outcasts from the east and west feel no uneasy apprehensions on being introduced to society so dignified, for “there is no fear in love.” They indeed feel their inferiority, but it excites no mortification. They are in their proper place, and they have their proper measure of glory. While time was they pronounced those venerable names with awe, they accounted those persons happy who could claim kindred to men so highly distinguished, admission to the court of the Gentiles terminated their ambition, birth had excluded them for ever from the commonwealth of Israel. Now they find that they are the real posterity of Abraham, “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” If any man hath not the spirit of Abraham, he is none of his. By the spirit they are related to the father of the faithful, and he joyfully acknowledges them as his children, and heirs with him of the promises.

“They shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.” This implies a participation of all the privileges of saints on earth, communion and fellowship with one another, as members together of that body whereof Christ is the head, and joint “fellowship with the Father, and with the Son Jesus Christ.” Such is the kingdom of God in this world, and such the preparation for the inheritance of saints in light, for the kingdom which cannot be moved. Let us not presume to “darken counsel by words without knowledge.” Let us not presume to draw aside the veil which separates a material world from the world of spirits, which interposes between time and eternity. Scripture itself; after exhausting every image, every idea of negative and of positive glory and felicity, as descriptive of “the kingdom of heaven,” refers us to a future revelation of that glory. Paul, “caught up to the third heaven, caught up into paradise,” admitted to the intercourse of celestial beings, and sent back to earth, finds himself incapable of describing the heavenly vision. The words which he heard were unspeakable, which it is not lawful, which it is not possible for a man to utter. In this blessed, undefined, undescribed state we leave it: “It is written, 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.” The contrast is dreadful: “But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” By “the children of the kingdom,” our Lord undoubtedly means to denote the posterity of Abraham after the flesh, the original heirs of the promises, the depositaries of the covenants, who, with all the advantages of birth, of education, of a revelation which they acknowledged to be divine, and of which they made their boast, obstinately rejected the promised Messiah, to whom all their prophets give witness; who, valuing themselves upon, and vainly resting in a mere natural descent from illustrious ancestors, without inheriting a particle of their spirit, wilfully excluded themselves from the kingdom of heaven. Their means of knowledge, their peculiar privileges were a horrid aggravation of their guilt, and a full justification of their tremendous punishment. The blessedness of the righteous in the heavenly world, is, in the preceding verse, represented under the well-known and familiar image of the banquet, or marriage feast, and various passages of the gospel history throw light upon the allusion, particularly the parable of the ten virgins. Those solemnities were usually celebrated in the night season. The apartments destined to the entertainment of the guests were

superbly illuminated. The bridegroom and his train came to the banqueting house in magnificent procession, by lamp or torch light. The invited guests were admitted through the wicket, to prevent promiscuous intrusion. As soon as the nuptial band had entered the doors were shut. The careless and the tardy were of course excluded, and no after expostulation or entreaty could procure admittance; they were left in outer darkness, rendered more hideous by comparison with the splendor which reigned within; left, in the cold and damps of the night, to their own bitter reflections, dreadfully aggravated by the idea of a felicity to them for ever inaccessible. By a representation so powerfully impressive, so easily understood, so awfully alarming, were the elders of the Jews admonished of the guilt, danger, and misery of rejecting the counsel of God against themselves, of refusing the testimony which God had given to his Son Christ Jesus.

After this very solemn digression, Jesus returns to the subject which had given rise to it, the servant's malady, and the master's marvellous faith. He bestows a present reward on the one, by instantly relieving the other. "And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour." Here the Savior condescends to be dictated to. He yields to the prayer of a faith so very extraordinary, he proceeds no farther on his way to the centurion's house. The petition runs, "speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed;" he speaks the word, he wills the cure, and virtue goes out of him to perform it.

Neither of the evangelists pursue the history of the centurion farther. But we have everything to hope, everything to believe of a man who so eminently distinguished himself as an excellent soldier, a kind master, a moderate ruler, a pious worshipper of God, and an humble but firm believer in Jesus Christ. In his history the Christian world has to boast of another of the triumphs of the Captain of salvation, of another successful invasion of Satan's kingdom, of another display of divine perfection in the person of Jesus Christ. It is not unworthy of remark, that various persons of the same rank and profession, that of centurion, stand with high marks of approbation on the sacred page. Next to this most respectable character, we find another employed on a very trying occasion. He, with the company under his command, was appointed to see the sentence of crucifixion executed, for soldiers are put upon many a painful service, and he was not an unconcerned spectator of that awful scene. "Now when the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, saw the earthquake and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, truly this was the Son of God." The name of Cornelius of Caesarea, the centurion of the Italian hand, is renowned in all the churches of Christ, as "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway." He is further honorably reported of by those of his own household, as a "just man, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews." The centurion who had charge of Paul and the other prisoners, on the disastrous voyage which terminated in ship-wreck on the island of Melita, paid singular attention to the apostle, followed his advice, and spared the rest of the prisoners, that he might preserve Paul's life. And upon their arrival at Rome, when this generous officer delivered over the rest of his charge to the captain of the guard, he had sufficient credit and ability to express his friendship for our apostle, by procuring for him a greater enlargement of liberty "Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him." From this interesting story let us learn,

1. To despise no man's person, feelings, opinions, profession, or country. His person is what God made it, and he makes nothing that is in itself contemptible. You are bound in equity to respect the

feelings of another, for you wish that your own should not be handled rudely. It ill becomes one who has himself formed so many erroneous opinions, and veered about so frequently with the flitting gale, to prescribe a standard of opinion to other men. Unless a profession be radically, and in its own nature sinful, those who follow it ought riot to be condemned in the lump: if it expose to peculiar temptations to act amiss, he who resists the temptation and overcomes himself is the more estimable. Over the place of his birth a man had no more power than over the height of his stature, or the color of his skin. It is an object of neither praise nor blame. The apostle Peter received a severe and just rebuke on this head by a vision from heaven. He was prepared, and he needed to be prepared, for the exercise of his ministry at Caesarea, and to the family and friends of the excellent Roman centurion already mentioned, and, whom his Jewish pride had taught him to hold in contempt, by a thrice repeated mandate which he dared not to disobey: “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.” Let us consider it as addressed to ourselves. “Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.”

2. The fearful doom denounced against unbelieving Jews ought to operate as a warning to still more highly privileged Christians, lest any man “fall after the same example of unbelief.” “For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?” We sometimes express contempt for the pagan world, sometimes affect to pity the blinded nations, and without hesitation presume to pass a sentence of final condemnation upon them. The unhappy tribes of Africa, in particular, Christian Europe calmly reduces to the condition of beasts of burden in this world, with hardly an effort to ameliorate it in the next. And yet they are men, they possess many virtues which ought to put, their tyrants to the blush, and which will one day rise up in judgment against them. We despise the miserable Jews, and stigmatize them as infidels, as if all those who bear the name of Christ actually believed in him. “Boast not against the broken-off branches;”--thou wilt say: The “branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief, they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.” I conclude with the solemn denunciation of Christ himself, respecting the men of his generation, and which is still in equal force. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.”

141. Jesus Christ--Feeding the Multitude

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John 6:1-14. After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philippians Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? (and this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.) Philip answered him, Two hundred penny-worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that everyone of them may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, Them is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes, but what are they among so many? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the face. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves; and when he ad given thanks he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and like-wise of the fishes as much as they would. When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them to ether, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and move unto them that had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world. The course of nature is a standing miracle. To be an atheist is to cease from being a man. To think of arguing with such a one is to undertake a labor as fruitless as attempting to reason the lunatic into a sound mind. A case like this ought to excite no emotion but compassion, mixed with gratitude to God that he has not reduced us to a condition so deplorable. Refinement in reasoning is, in general, both unprofitable and inconclusive. The man of plain common sense may advantageously observe and devoutly acknowledge the wisdom and goodness of the Great Supreme in the regular ebbing and flowing of the tide, though he cannot trace the process of the sun's action on the waters of the ocean; or of the wind, in conveying the fluid to the mountain's top; or of gravity, sending it down to water the plains beneath; or the supposed influence of the moon, or of the melting of the polar ices, producing an alternate and regular flux and reflux on our shores, or in our rivers. Of what importance is the theory of vegetation, compared to the simple but valuable labor and experience of the gardener and husbandman? The same observation applies to the religion of the Gospel. Here the learned have no advantage whatever over the illiterate. It consists of a few plain, unadorned facts, authenticated by the testimony of a cloud of unsuspected witnesses; of a few simple, practical truths, level to the most ordinary capacity; and of a few precepts of self-evident importance, which it highly concerns every man to observe. Should it be alleged that these are blended with things hard to be understood, it is admitted. And here again the wise and prudent have no superiority over the vulgar, but both meet the God of grace as well as the God of nature exercising his divine prerogative, in ministering to the necessities, while he checks the pride and presumption of man. The miracles of our blessed Lord which have hitherto passed in review, had a more limited object.

Their design was to relieve individual, or domestic distress; they were an appeal, public indeed, to the understanding and senses of all who witnessed them, but slightly felt, imperfectly understood, and little improved, except by the parties more immediately interested in them. They were granted to importunity, and as a reward to the prayer of faith. That which is the subject of the passage now read, embraces a much wider range than any of these, and is the spontaneous effusion of his own divine benevolence and compassion. Ten thousand persons, at a moderate calculation, were at once the witnesses and the subjects of the miracle, and in a case wherein it was impossible they should be mistaken, for they had every sense, every faculty exercised in ascertaining the truth. And here he waits not, as in other cases, till the cry of misery reaches his ear, but advances to meet it, to prevent it; he outruns expectation, and has a supply in readiness, before the pressure of want is felt. The duration of Christ's public ministry, from his baptism to his passion, has been calculated from the number of passovers which he frequented. This, as may be supposed, has occasioned considerable variety of opinion. The attentive reader will probably adopt that of our illustrious countryman, Sir Isaac Newton, who reckons five of these annual festivals within the period. The first, that recorded in the St. John 2, at which he purged the temple, predicted his own death and resurrection, and performed sundry miracles. The second, according to that great chronologist, took place a few months after our Lord's conversation with the woman of Samaria, which he founds on that text, John 4:35--"Say not ye, there are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." The third, a few days prior to the sabbath, on which the disciples walked out into the fields, and plucked the ears of corn, when he cured the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda. The fourth, that which was now approaching at the era of this miracle; and the fifth, that at which he suffered. The people were now therefore flocking from all parts of Galilee, on their way to Jerusalem to keep the passover: and this accounts for the very extraordinary number who at this time attended his preaching and miracles.

"After these things," says John. The other three evangelists connect this scene, in respect of time, with a most memorable event in the history of Christianity, the decapitation of John Baptist in the prison.--When these melancholy tidings were told to Jesus, Matthew informs us, that "he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof they followed him on foot out of the cities. And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them; and he healed their sick;" and then immediately follows the miracle of feeding the multitude, recorded with exactly the same circumstances in all the four evangelists. Mark affixes an additional date. It was at the time when the disciples returned from the execution of their first commission, with an account of their success: "And, the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught." On this Jesus proposed a temporary retirement from the public eye, for the convenience of private conversation, of repose, and of the necessary refreshment of the body: "And he said unto them, come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately;" and this, as before, prepared for the miracle of the loaves and fishes. The self same circumstances are minutely narrated in Luke's gospel. These mark the precise epoch when Christ went over the sea of Galilee, and retired with the twelve to a mountain in the desert of Bethsaida. But though he went by water, to escape for a season the multitudes which thronged after him, the place of his destination is discovered, and thousands, filled with impatience, admiration, gratitude,

hope, outstrip the speed of the vessel, by a circuitous journey along the shore of the lake. Their motives were various. The powerful principle of curiosity attracted many. A thirst of the word of life impelled others. “A great multitude followed him, because they saw the miracles which he did on them that were diseased,” and many had themselves “need of healing.” An affecting view is exhibited of Christ’s benevolent character. As from the elevation of the mountain he beheld the people pressing forward by thousands to the spot where he was, all thoughts of food, of rest, of accommodation lost in an appetite more dignified and pure, his bowels, melted: “And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and, was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd and he began to teach them many things.” The sight of a great assembly of men, women, and children, must ever create a lively interest in every bosom alive to the feelings of humanity. The view of his mighty host melted Xerxes into tears, merely from reflection on their natural mortality.--What then are the “bowels and mercies” of the compassionate friend of mankind, on surveying innumerable myriads ready to perish everlastingly for lack of knowledge, dying in their sins! He feels even for their bodily wants, which, in the ardor of their spirits, they seem to have themselves forgotten, and a supply is provided before the cravings of nature have found out that it was necessary. And thus a gracious Providence, in things both temporal and spiritual, outruns not only the supplications of the miserable, but their very hopes and desires.

“The day began to wear away,” they were in a desert place, the multitude was prodigiously increased, they had fasted long, no provision of either victuals or lodging had been made, and the adjacent villages promised but a slender accommodation of either, even had there been money to purchase them. A case of truly aggravated distress! The forethought and sympathy of the disciples went no farther than to suggest the propriety of an immediate dismission of the assembly, while sufficient light remained to procure what was needful for exhausted nature. “When the day began to wear away then came the twelve, and said unto him, send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals: for we are here in a desert place.” But their gracious Master looked much farther, and felt more tenderly. He addresses himself particularly to Philippians who was of the city of Bethsaida, and might be supposed to know the state of the country, and how much it could produce in an emergency of this kind, on the supposition that their stock of money was equal to the demand: “he saith unto Philippians Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?” Why the appeal was personally made to Philippians may be accounted for from some peculiarity in that disciple’s character. He appears to have been one of those who slowly, suspiciously, reluctantly admitted the evidence of their Master’s divine mission; for we find him, long after this, discovering a diffident, scrupulous incredulous disposition; and his kind Master administering a just and seasonable rebuke “Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou, then, show us the Father?” Thus was it needful that the witnesses of the truth to others should have their own doubts completely removed. And, thus, He, who knew what was in man, will bring out of the man himself what is in him; not with the insidious design of deceiving and exposing him, as men often act by each other, but of making him feel his own weight; of enabling him to form a just estimate of his wisdom and strength; of affording him a fresh and irresistible proof of his Master’s supreme power, and divine intelligence. “This he said to prove him: for he knew what he would do.”

We have here a most sublime representation of the Redeemer's foreknowledge of the natural reasoning of the human mind, and of the existence and effect of second causes. That a thousand persons, of as many different inclinations, pursuing as many different interests, with as many different capacities, should be brought to one point, should co-operate in promoting the same purpose, should, unknown to each other, involuntarily enter into exactly one and the same pursuit, is not to be explained on the common principles of human sagacity, and can proceed only "from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." Philip immediately has recourse to arithmetical calculation; he estimates the multitude at so many, he examines into the state of their finances, and finds them deplorably deficient: "two hundred pennyworth, of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little." No, the difficulty was not to be thus resolved. Neither was the matter much mended to human apprehension, when Andrew, Simon's brother, brought information that there was a lad present who had five barley loaves and two small fishes to dispose of. He himself sets no great store by his intelligence; a single loaf to a thousand men appeared to him a mere nothing, an aggravation rather than an alleviation of the distress: "but what," says he, despondingly, "are they among so many?" The case is thus brought to an extreme point. Five thousand men, beside a multitude of women and children, probably to an equal, if not a greater number, feel the pressure of hunger, and of no one of our natural appetites are we more acutely sensible than of this; everyone of this myriad, therefore, down to the youngest child, was a distinct and a competent witness upon the occasion, of the individual and of the general calamity, and of the total want of an adequate supply. Providence thus frequently permits things to come to the very verge of woe, that man may feel his own weakness and insufficiency, feel his entire dependence, and learn to acknowledge and to adore the seasonable interposition of heaven; that God may be seen as "our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble." As if every preparation of human sagacity had been made, Jesus with dignified composure, commands, saying, "Make the men sit down." The attention and sympathy of Christ are observable in minute circumstances. His guests had passed a day of uncommon fatigue; they were now overtaken with two great infirmities, want of food and want of rest. A standing meal, weary as they were, would have been, an unspeakable benefit; or to have stretched out their exhausted limbs to repose, even with a slender provision, for "the sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much." He who careth for oxen, who feedeth the raven, who sustaineth the sparrow on the wing, "shall he not much more" hear the cry of human wretchedness? Both the precious gifts of bread and rest are bestowed at once, and both unhoped for, both unasked. "Make the men sit down:" and it is remarked, "Now there was much grass in the place." What a delicious assemblage of natural and interesting beauties! It was the still evening of a day in spring; the fragrant fertile earth had spread an ample carpet, at once delightful to behold, pleasant to the smell, and softened to the pressure of the faint. Twenty thousand eyes are turned in silent expectation to their common friend and benefactor. The very order of their arrangement embellishes the scene, and the subdivisions and straight lines of art set off the majestic irregularity of nature: a hundred rows of fifty each. What, compared to this, was the men royal "feast which the king Ahasuerus made unto all his princes, and his servants: the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces!" What, compared to this, was the great, but impious tenet, which "Belshazzar the king made to a thousand of his lords!" These noisy and profane revels were quickly disturbed, and issued in sorrow. What a different spectacle did the mountain in the desert of Bethsaida present! All is calmness and harmony, all is peace and joy. The great Master of the feast surveys his vast family

with complacency and delight! they behold in him their condescending teacher, their merciful physician, their liberal provider, their almighty Lord, in whom all fulness was pleased to dwell.

“And Jesus took the loaves.” He miraculously supported his own body for forty days in the wilderness, without eating or drinking; and the same divine power could undoubtedly have refreshed and sustained this great multitude, for a night, without bread, as easily as by a supernatural multiplication of it. But this would have been less sensible and convincing; and natural vigor of constitution might have been supposed equal to the load. In the method of relief which our Lord was pleased to employ, every man had the witness within himself, and could bear a clear testimony concerning all around him, that not the powers of nature, but the God of grace had ministered to their common necessities. “And, when he had given thanks:” two different words are employed by the evangelists to describe this action of our Savior. The first three say, “he blessed” the loaves, pronounced upon them a solemn and powerful benediction, in virtue of which they became prolific, and multiplied far beyond the extent of the demand. Our evangelist represents him as “giving thanks,” ascribing to God his heavenly Father the glory of every gift of an indulgent Providence, whether bestowed in the order of natural increase, or produced by an extraordinary interposition. The form of words, employed by Christ on this occasion, most probably blended both ideas, as indeed they cannot be easily separated. To give thanks for what God has given is a devout acknowledgment of dependence upon him, a tacit expression of hope in his goodness for the time to come, and the most likely means of increasing our store. He acted as the great pattern of his disciples, teaching them in difficulty to look up to heaven for direction and assistance, to improve the blessings of Providence by referring them to their great Author, and to cast every future care on him who hath helped hitherto. Man cannot pronounce a benediction capable of communicating efficacious virtue, but, what is equivalent to it, he can “in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let his requests be made known unto God;” and time employed in devotion is not loss, but unspeakably great gain.

“He distributed to the disciples and the disciples to them that were set down: and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.” The fare was ordinary, barley bread and dried fish. “The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry every bitter thing is sweet.” Mark, the quality of the food is not changed, the quantity only is increased, for the object of the miracle was not to pamper luxury, but to satisfy hunger. The disciples had nothing to give but what they first received. And what must have been their astonishment, their satisfaction, as they walked from rank to rank, to behold the food not diminish, but multiply to the mouth of the eater! No murmuring could arise on account of a partial distribution, for all had enough and to spare. No doubt could arise respecting the fountain of supply, for every ear heard the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth; every eye beheld his face lifted up to heaven, and his bands extended to diffuse plenty. The body and the mind were refreshed together, with food convenient for them. Thus seasonable, thus suitable, thus satisfying are the good and perfect gifts which come down immediately from the Father of lights. The selfsame miracle, my friends, is repeated day by day, through a different process, and we observe it not, we feel it not. An unseen hand “causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man:” it “bringeth forth food out of the earth; and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man’s heart.” “O that man would praise. the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!”

“When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.” There is a criminal forethought about tomorrow which the Gospel condemns, because it implies distrust of the care, wisdom, and goodness of Providence, and because it mars the enjoyment, and encroaches upon the duties of today. But there is likewise a prudent and pious forethought, which both reason and religion highly approve and powerfully recommend, because it is the co-operation of human sagacity with the benignity of Providence; and the happiest and most honorable condition of man is exertion, as if no supernatural aid were to be expected, and reliance on God, as if human efforts amounted to nothing. “Gather up the fragments;” was the command of Him who had the power of multiplying without end, but who would lay himself under no obligation to exert a miraculous energy to repair the profusion, or supply the negligence of thoughtless man. What occasions the present dearth of every necessary of life? Not the unkindness of heaven, for the earth has yielded her increase, and our garners are full; but cruel oppression on the one hand, and abominable waste on the other. The precious fruits of the ground are, contrary to nature, hoarded up in expectation of glutting avarice with a higher return, till they corrupt; or they are vilely cast away by the minions of opulence and grandeur, who care not what they destroy, because the master’s fortune is able to support the expenditure. It is one, and not the least of the evils of war, that of the provision necessary to the maintenance of fleets and armies, one half at least goes to loss, through dishonesty, carelessness, and willful prodigality. This profusion is often found in company with a hard and stony heart. It appears to have constituted great part of the criminality of the rich man in the Gospel. He “was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.” But this was not in itself sinful, nor is it charged upon him as guilt. The offal of his table was not wisely used. While detestable luxury reigned within doors, the cry of misery at the gate was disregarded. The beggar Lazarus desired, but desired in vain, “to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table.” It is in every man’s power to reduce the price of provisions. Let him purchase no more than what is needful, and let him be careful to look after the fragments which remain. The opulent man is responsible for the inhumanity, the extravagance, the criminal neglect of his domestics, and to no purpose does he exclaim against the rapacity of combinations to engross and enhance, while he is fostering the mischief by the wretched economy of his own household. “Let nothing be lost” is the economy of nature, the maxim of true wisdom, and a precept of Christianity.

“Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that bad eaten.” Thus the miracle was complete: ample provision was made for the moment, and a lesson of prudence given for all generations. The bodies of thousands were refreshed by homely but wholesome food, and the sacred impress of divine truth was applied to the human heart. Thus transitory things are rendered permanent, and provision made for supporting the body is converted into food for the immortal soul. The conviction produced was perfectly natural, and it operated uniformly on the minds of the whole assembly: “Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, this is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world.” There was, therefore, it is evident, a generally prevailing expectation of the appearance of the august personage, whom the prophets had announced; and what proof of a divine mission more illustrious could be displayed, than that which had just reached the understanding through all the avenues of sense? But it is truly humbling to observe the perpetual intrusion of a worldly spirit. That prophet whom all ranks looked unto and waited for, all ranks thought proper to invest with temporal power and splendor. The idea

of raising him to kingly supremacy is immediately entertained. What quality could a prince possess that led more certainly to success than that of subsisting his armies, without the expense and encumbrance of magazines? Under this impulse the multitude are disposed instantly to rear his standard, and to enlist in his service. And when a man faithfully examines himself, he will find that the world, in some form or another, is lurking in his heart. He will find time, and sense, and self blending with his purest, most generous, most exalted views, and directing his most seemingly disinterested exertions. Jesus demonstrates that he is much more than a king, by withdrawing from popular applause and proffered royalty. “When he perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.” He meets and relieves their real necessities, but retires from their projects of power and ambition. To the demand of Pilate, “Art thou the king of the Jews?” this was his modest reply: “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.”

We conclude with a few practical reflections.

1. The law of man’s nature is a stated religious monitor to him. Every day he hungers, he thirsts, he waxes faint, he must lie down and go to sleep. He is as often admonished of his frailty, of his dependence, of his obligations. Let the animal functions be eve too little deranged or suspended, and the whole man, spit as well as body, pines and languishes. An eye which never slumbers nor sleeps watches him by night and by day. An unseen hand spreads his board, fills his cup, feedeth him with food convenient for him. A careless spirit overlooks common mercies, lightly esteems them, wastes, perverts, abuses them. And where the hand of God is not seen, felt, and acknowledged, there can be no enjoyment superior to that which the beasts of the field have in common with the rational creation. The devout spirit refers all to Deity, and thereby a relish is communicated to the simplest and most ordinary things. “A dinner of herbs where love is, a dry morsel, and quietness therewith,” far exceed the luxury of the “stalled ox,” and of “a house full of sacrifices.” Herein the poor have infinitely the superiority over the rich and great. Hunger seasons the poor man’s food, thirst sweetens his cup, labor softens his couch. He beholds his daily supply coming from the bounty of a Father in heaven, he gives God thanks. Thus meditates the Psalmist in contemplating the providential care exercised over all creatures, especially those of the human race: “Man goeth forth unto his work, and to his labor, until the evening.” “O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches: so 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. These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy s spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth. The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever: the Lord shall rejoice in his works.” Thus is the eye of man, from day to day, alternately directed to the ground out of which he himself was taken, to behold the support of his life likewise springing up out of it, and to heaven, toward “the Father of lights,” for, “every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above.” God, in his great mercy, has not entrusted to human reason the preservation of the body, but constantly warns him by an animal instinct of what his frame requires, and renders that savoury to sense which he knows to be necessary to life; and thus pleasure and duty, as they ever ought, go

hand in hand. “O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men; for he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.”

2. If God is pleased to humble man, and to suffer him to hunger, it is to “make him know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.” In the animal art of his nature he is reduced to the level of the beasts that perish; in his spirit he rises to the rank of angel, he draws supplies immediately from the Father of spirits, he feeds on immortal food, he drinks of the “pure river of water of life, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” The Christian, like his divine Master, has meat to eat which the world knows, not of. “My meat,” says he, “is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work:” and, speaking of his doctrine, in contrast to the support and refreshment of the natural life, “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life;” and again, under the same image of necessary food: “My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God, is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Most.” The believer’s feast is thus described by one who was a liberal partaker of it: “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us;” and in another place, “I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a goal fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

3. “In proportion as this spiritual appetite increases, attachment to the world will diminish. Nature, says the proverb, is satisfied with little, and grace with still less. The disciple of Jesus knows and feels that he has here no continuing city, and therefore seeks one to come. He “coveteth no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel.” While the rich worldling is pulling down his barns and building greater, in which to bestow his fruits and his goods, laying up treasure for himself, without being rich towards God, the follower of Christ is employed in laying up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.” He desires “a better country, that is, an heavenly:” he looks for “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” His master has taught him, when he prays, to say not, “give me much goods to be laid up for many years,” but “give us this day our daily bread;” “my heavenly Father knoweth what things I really need.” He knows that the day of the Lord cometh, “in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.” He, according to the promise of God, who cannot lie, “looks for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” Hence he learns “in

whatever state," Providence may be pleased to put him, "therewith to be content." "I know," says Paul, "both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where, and in all things, I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." "Brethren, the time is short, it remaineth, that they who weep be as they who weep not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away."

4. Let the ministers of Christ remember that they are "stewards of the mysteries of God," and that "it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." That which they deliver to others, they themselves received from the Lord. There is one and the same fare provided for them, and for their fellow-servants, and the provision is at once excellent and abundant. Everyone is entitled to the portion most suitable to him, and in the proper season. "New born babes," in Christ, "desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby." "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." In various ways may a steward be found unfaithful to his trust. He may be negligent, and then the household runs into confusion and every evil work; everyone does that which is tight in his own eyes, and of consequence everything goes wrong. He may withhold what is due, and the family starves. The food may be improperly mixed, and thereby changed into poison. He may be injudicious, and the aliment of the healthy and vigorous is administered to the puny and feeble, while the delicate nourishment that suits sickliness and imbecility is presented to maturity and strength. He may be deliberately wicked, and betray the trust which he was appointed to guard. As a contrast to this melancholy picture, turn your eyes to the portrait of that faithful steward, and able minister of the New Testament, the apostle of the Gentiles, in the solemn appeal which he makes to the elders of Ephesus, on bidding them a final farewell: "Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews; and how I kept beck nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me; but none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." "I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God--remember, that, by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears.--I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak; and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, it is more blessed to give than to receive." But there is an appeal still more solemn and affecting, and in circumstances infinitely more interesting, that of the chief Shepherd himself, addressed to his heavenly Father, in the near prospect of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them me: and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things,

whatsoever thou hast given me, are of thee: for I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me: and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me." "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are."

5. Let not the constant and regular operations of Deity, in the course of nature and providence be overlooked. Like the people who "did eat of the loaves and were filled," we take and enjoy the repast, but discern not the miracle which produced it. The naturalist traces the progress of vegetation as an amusement, as a branch of science. The husbandman pursues it as his destined occupation, he casts seed into the ground, leaves it there and goes to sleep, observes it day after day springing and growing up, he knoweth not how; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear, but his eye and his heart are all the while set on the time of putting in the sickle, when the harvest is come. The eager merchant too watches the process, as a commercial speculation, as favorable or unfavorable to his plans of buying, and selling, and getting gain. With what a different eye does a devotional spirit contemplate Deity spreading a table for everything that lives! The Christian considers the fare upon his own board, whether simple or sumptuous, flowing in whatever channel, coming from the east or from the west, from the south or from the north, as a supply immediately furnished by the hand of his heavenly Father, as children's bread, as a foretaste of the rich provision of his Father's house above. This communicates to ordinary things a relish unknown to the banquets of the luxurious and the proud. With the five thousand he beholds his God in person feeding him. He passes from the table which he calls his own, and at which his divine Master sat as a guest, though invisible, to that which Jesus emphatically calls his, and he finds it replenished "with all the fulness of God." He eats and is satisfied, he goes on his way rejoicing, he advances from strength to strength, he mounts up as on eagles' wings, he runs and is not weary, he walks and faints not. Thus may everyone of us in the Zion that is above appear before God. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen."

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