



SERMON I.—*Ezekiel's Vision of the Dry Bones.*

*Preached in Albion-street Chapel, Leeds, at the formation of the Methodist Missionary Society for the Leeds District, October 6, 1813.*

"Come from the four winds, O breath! and breathe upon these slain, that they may live," Ezekiel xxxvii, 9.

HISTORY acquaints us with the past, and our faculties of observation spread before us the scenes of present time; and these, in the usual course of things, are the only sources of information which are open to man. But it has pleased God, in this book of revelation, to give us access to a third, and to spread the view into the future: not only to enlarge the sphere of knowledge behind us and on each side; but before us, and to "show to his servants what shall be hereafter."

This is done by prophecy,—a large and important part of the sacred volume, which stands, not only as an illustrious demonstration of the prescience of its Author, but a proof of his goodness to us; for our improvement and happiness are thereby equally promoted. An ancient writer remarks, that he who is acquainted with the history of past ages lives twice. With equal truth may it be affirmed, that he whose mind is also enlightened with the views of holy writ lives thrice. His existence is extended beyond its natural bounds, and he is present to future events, the highest and most interesting in the economy of Divine Providence.

We are not, however, to suppose that our view of the future, even after the most attentive study of the prophetic books, will be perfectly distinct and satisfactory. There is a moral necessity that prophecy should be surrounded with a certain haze and indistinctness. Man is to be the instrument of executing the decrees of Heaven; and it is a principle of the Divine government to offer no violence to his moral agency, and a peculiar glory of infinite wisdom to accomplish its purposes by his free volitions. It seems, therefore to be a mistake in many persons to expect to ascertain the exact times and manner in which the predictions of Heaven will be accomplished. Time is the grand expounder of prophecy; and as far as relates to particulars, perhaps time alone. The value of prophecy is not, however, on this account diminished. In this partial form it fully answers the design of God, by supporting the confidence of good men in the ultimate triumphs of their religion, in quickening their exertions, and relieving their anxieties. The outline, the bolder features of the grand plan of the Divine government present so many enlightened points in the darkness of futurity, though the minuter parts retire into shades of various depth. In the vista thus opened into distant ages we perceive truth and righteousness, after long and painful struggles, finally triumphing;

discord subsiding into peace; and a long-rejected Saviour effectually asserting his rights, and bending the world to his dominion in mercy.

The words of the text are connected with a well-known prophecy respecting the restoration of Israel under the sublime idea of the resurrection of the dry bones of a host of dead. If the prediction referred to at all to the restoration of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, it could only be in a very low sense. The terms in which it is expressed plainly indicate an event more glorious in its accomplishment, more permanent in its effects, and more spiritual in its nature. It connects itself with the glory of the latter day. The Jews are now the dry bones in the valley, and their conversion to Christ will be their resurrection. On this principal application of the prophecy we shall not now dwell. Apostasy from God, whether in Jew or Gentile, is followed substantially by the same consequences; the methods of Divine grace in recovering men from ruin are, in all climes and ages, usually the same; and we shall therefore consider the prophecy,

I. As affording us a striking description of the religious state of the heathen world.

II. As directing to the means to be made use of to effect its mystical resurrection.

III. As marking the certain success of its application.

I. 1. The persons made the subject of this prophetic vision are represented as *dead*. The prophet is led by the Spirit to a valley filled with the dishonored relics of the dead. To be dead is to be in a state which excites regret and sympathy. Who can refrain a sigh when the noble human fabric is stretched with the clods of the valley, and the warm pulse of life subsides into the coldness and corruption of death? But a deeper death is here contemplated,—the death of souls. The spirit is here invaded by the destroyer, and the higher part of our nature falls the victim. In this, however, we speak morally. The immortal spirit cannot die; but as in the death of the body, the matter of which it is composed is not annihilated, though the parts are dissolved, so in the moral death of souls the spirit exists, but it exists disorganized and corrupted. In Scripture language, to be without knowledge is to be dead; because it is knowledge which gives activity to the powers of the mind. To lose the image of God is to die; because as death destroys the human form, sin destroys truth, holiness, and love, in which the image of God in man consists. This is the unhappy case of the heathen. They have turned the “truth of God into a lie;” their religious opinions are composed of absurd fables; and the principles of morality being left without support, have been all borne down by the tide of sensual appetite and ungoverned passion. Ignorance the most profound, imagination the most extravagant, and crimes the most daring, have ever characterized “the world which lies in” the power of “the wicked one.” But though all this be awfully true, it is not on these circumstances that we would principally fix our attention. There is another and more alarming truth to be told. The heathen world is *judicially dead*, under the wrath and curse of almighty God. The law which they have violated turns the edge of the sword of justice against them; the conscience which they have abused renders them miserable in their crimes; and as death expels their myriads from this state of being, they appear before that God of judgment who

hath said, "The abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, shall have their part in the burning lake, which is the second death."

Were these solemn truths well fixed in our minds, they would stand in the place of a volume of argument to induce us to support missionary institutions. They would burst at once the bands of selfishness, and "draw out our souls" to them who are perishing for lack of knowledge. The contemplation of the imminent danger of so great a portion of our fellow men would melt at once the frigidness of our natures, and cause our affections to flow forth in strong prayers, and still stronger exertions, in behalf of our brethren in distant lands, who have "forgotten the God of their salvation, and have not been mindful of the rock of their strength."

To counteract these generous feelings, and to stop the stream of pity in its very fountain, we are aware that the doctrine of the safety of the heathen has been confidently affirmed; and perhaps we also have too often slumbered over our duty, lulled by the drone of that doating and toothless theology which treats sin with the cruel tenderness of an Eli to his sons, and employs itself rather in drawing extravagant pictures of the mercy of God, than in supporting the just rights of his government. Resting in plausible general principles, which are never pursued to their consequences, there are many who appear to consider the Divine Being under some obligation of justice to throw open the gates of salvation to the whole world of polluted heathen; thus making vice a kind of passport to heaven, and ignorance a better security for the eternal happiness of men than the full display of the glorious doctrines and the impressive motives of our religion. The true question is among such persons often mistaken. It is not, whether it is possible for heathens to be saved,—that we grant: but that circumstance proves the actual state of the heathen world to be more dangerous than if no such possibility could be proved; for the possibility of their salvation indisputably shows them to be the subjects of moral government, and therefore liable to an aggravated punishment in case of disobedience. The true question is, Are the heathens, immoral and idolatrous as they are, actually safe? On this solemn subject we are not left to the decisions of human authority. Inspiration itself has decided it; and when human opinions and Divine revelation come into opposition, you will not hesitate to say, "Let God be true, and every man a liar." The reasoning of St. Paul, in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, is of universal application; it bears no mark of particularity, and there is nothing in the state of the heathen of our day to render it less applicable to them than to the heathen of his own. His conclusion is, that for all their crimes and idolatries "they are without excuse." They are ignorant; but it is because they "do not like to retain God in their knowledge." They have a "law written on their hearts;" but they violate it. They have a conscience which "accuses or excuses them;" but they disregard it, and "therefore they are without excuse." This is the conclusion of an infallible teacher, against which it is vain to reason; and from this it follows that, if the fact of general and perhaps universal depravity of principle and action among the heathens be proved, then another conclusion of the apostle must follow of course, "that the wrath of God is revealed

from heaven" against them; that the valley is full of souls, dead to God, and under the sentence of an everlasting condemnation.

2. But this is not the only melancholy view which the subject exhibits. The number of the dead forms another part of the picture,—“the valley was full of bones.” The prophet “passed by, round about;” he viewed the dreary scene with attention; and, “behold, there were very many.” Such, brethren, is the picture which the world presents to our view. The slain of sin are innumerable. The valley as we trace it seems to sweep to an unlimited extent, and yet every where it is full! The whole earth is that valley. Where is the country where transgression stalks not with daring and destructive activity? where it has not covered and polluted the soil with its victims? In some places, it is true, we behold “the few who are saved;” but in many large and crowded nations we should look even for that few in vain; and the words of the psalmist might, after the most charitable investigation, prove even literally applicable, “They are all gone out of the way; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” Let us pass over Europe, whose population bears but a small proportion to that of the globe, though there chiefly the Christian name is known. Let us not even stop to inquire how many bones lie unburied and dry in that valley; or, if in many instances bone has been united to bone, in the profession of true religion, of how many the prophet would still say, “There is no breath” of vital religion “in them.” Let us take our post of observation elsewhere. If we turn to the east, there the peopled valleys of Asia stretch before us; but peopled with whom? With the dead! That quarter of the earth alone presents five hundred millions of souls, with but few exceptions, without a God, save gods that sanction vice; without a sacrifice, save sacrifices of folly and blood; without a priest, except a race of jugglers, impostors, and murderers; without holy days, except such as debase by their levity, corrupt by their sensuality, or harden by their cruelty. With a little difference as to religious rites, the same description is applicable to the thirty millions of the race of Ham, and to the aborigines of the continent and islands of the new world. This view, it is true, is somewhat relieved by a few rays of light shining here and there amid the gloom; by the cheering sight of a few prophets of the Lord sent forth by the piety of Christians, prophesying to the dry bones, and surrounded by a few living men, the fruits of their mission. But however hopeful this gleam of success is, the affecting fact is, the valley is still full of dead. It is only in a few places on its verge that the prophets of the Lord are seen; only within a small compass that their voice is heard. On the rest of the valley the gloom of despair settles, and sin and death hold undisturbed dominion. No sound of salvation breaks the horrid silence, and no “shaking is heard among the bones.”

3. To the number of the dead the prophet adds another circumstance,—“they were unburied:” the destructive effects of sin, the sad ravages of death, lay exposed and open to the sun. So open and exposed have been the unbelief and blasphemies of the Jews, and the idolatry and vices of the Gentiles. We need not dig up the earth to discover the dead: they strew the surface of the ground. This representation strongly marks the dreadful maturity of sin among apostate nations, and the absence of all those checks which in countries better instructed

restrain those evils which are not wholly cured. A great moralist has truly observed, that "where there is shame there may be virtue."—What, then, shall we say where there is no shame? The habits of sin are confirmed; and all virtue is extinct. The pagan world did not; however, arrive at this maturity of vice all at once. Its idolatrous and vicious propensities had to contend with the restraints of remaining truth and goodness probably for many ages. Thus we read in the book of Job, that, notwithstanding the tendency to polytheism in his day, some upright magistrates remained, who punished idolatry by law, justly considering it as a crime against civil society, involving, as it ever has done, the practice of the worst vices, as well as against Heaven. "If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness, and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand, this were an iniquity to be punished by the judge; for I should have denied the God that is above." The influence of truth, even without the aid of the civil magistrate, and though existing in but small remains, to check this degrading and offensive propensity, is also strikingly expressed in a part of the book from which our text is taken: Ezekiel was conducted in vision into a "secret chamber," where "the ancients of the house of Israel" stood "in the dark" before their idols and abominable portraitures, and burned incense to them. The blush of shame still reddened on their cheek, and they performed their abominations "in the dark." Vice shrinks in the presence of purity; the works of darkness hate the light; and this affords a powerful motive to our endeavours to introduce the Gospel into idolatrous countries.—Reproof will, again, excite shame, shame will lead to secrecy, and secrecy of practice will ultimately give place to reformation. At present, however, such restraints do not exist. They have long since been borne down, and error and vice, long triumphant, have grown too bold for privacy. Yes; for ages the dead have lain unburied, presenting nothing but stench and corruption to the pure heavens above them.—They have "worshipped devils," and hallowed crimes, and have not been ashamed. In one place a painted idol usurps the honours of "God, blessed for ever;" and in another the obscene prophet is revered as a Divine messenger. Every where they have refused "to retain God in their knowledge;" they have been "given up to vile affections;" and have reached that climax of all iniquity, not only to do "such things" themselves, but to "take pleasure in them that do them."

4. The prophet closes his description of the state of the dead, by adding, that "the bones were very dry." Under this strong figure the hopelessness of their condition is represented. Thus the Jews, introduced in verse 11, are made to say, "Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost;" and the state of the heathen must, at least, be equally hopeless. As far as mere human means and human probabilities go, "there is no hope." From themselves it is certain there is none. They have wandered too far to find the fold again; and what renders their case still more desperate is, they have no inclination to seek it. It is the nature of sin to infatuate as well as to corrupt; and to pervert, that it may destroy. "They put darkness for light, light for darkness, good for evil, and evil for good;" and "how then shall they be healed?"—If, however, absolutely speaking, there were no hope of their recovery,

our exertions would be superfluous, and our meeting on the present occasion absurd. There is hope, not from man, but from God. Nevertheless, we feel no inclination to conceal the difficulties which lie in the way of that great work which we are met this day to promote.—The “bones are dry, very dry.” Superstition is a power of almost incalculable energy. It grasps both the hopes and fears of our nature; and has its principal seat in the imagination,—a power of the mind the most difficult to purge, when polluted, and to discipline, when it has obtained the mastery. If, therefore, the Gospel again prevail, it must again “cast down high imaginations,” and break up inveterate habits of sin. As of old, interest, and pleasure, and power, will be arrayed against it; and “the kings and judges of the earth will take counsel together against the Lord and against his Anointed.” Perhaps the first effect of the Gospel in some places may again be “not to send peace, but a sword;” and of this we are certain, that no power of earth or hell will be unemployed against its success. All these difficulties must be granted. They argue nothing against the power of God; but they truly prove that more than human power is requisite for the work; that all calculations founded on natural principles forbid our enterprise; and they support the representation of the prophet, “that the bones were very dry.”

Such is the state of the heathen world; but the prophet's vision,

II. Points out the means by which its mystical resurrection is to be effected: “Prophesy upon these dry bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones hear the word of the Lord.”

Who can read this without immediately adverting to that similar command of the Saviour, when, after his resurrection, he looked with compassion upon a world “dead in trespasses and sins;” and said to the prophets of his own dispensation, “Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.” Go, traverse every part of the vale of death, and say, “O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.”

1. This direction intimates, that the ministry of the word is the grand means appointed by God for the salvation of the world.

This is a truth which cannot be impressed too deeply upon our minds. We live in an age of bold speculation; and the speculations of many on this subject have been conducted with too little regard for the authority of God. If, however, we have a plain and full direction from Him who is wisdom itself, what need we more? Why stop to question, when it is our duty to obey? But opinions have conflicted on a subject to which revelation has given certainty, and the recorded judgment of Heaven has been neglected in the passion for theory among men. Some have demurred to missionary efforts, because, in their opinion, heathen nations ought first to be civilized. But where are the apostles of civilization to be found? Who will cross seas, and traverse continents, to teach them arts, and laws, and science? Or are they to be left in their wretchedness till the boundaries of the civilized world, pushed out by the slow process of commerce or conquest, shall at length reach them? But the argument, if good for any thing, is only very partially applicable; for there are but few, very few, perhaps none, of the heathen so completely savage as not to be able to comprehend the main doctrines and duties of Christianity, when once their language is understood by their teachers. When Christianity is introduced, civilization

follows of course; and the desired end is reached by the direct instead of the circuitous road. Religion is the most efficient instrument of civilization. It is that which marks the distinctions between right and wrong with certainty; and therefore gives birth to good laws; it adds to human hopes and fears the solemn sanctions of eternity, and; by giving force to conscience, ensures their better observance; and it is the parent of morality, industry, and public spirit, the foundation and the top-stone, the strength and the sinews, of all well-ordered society.

Others have looked for the amelioration of the human race from the progress of science. But they forget that science affords no cure for moral evil; and that, when unallied with true religion, it must prove a curse, and not a blessing. Knowledge is power; and, like all other great powers, it is injurious and destructive when undirected. It is only by the influence of moral principles that it can receive its proper direction. Without this the enlarged capabilities of the mind become solely the instruments of ungoverned passions. This is not presumption; it is the dictate of experience. Greece and Rome give it their joint testimony. "The world by wisdom knew not God;" and in proportion to the advance of refinement, and the cultivation of science, both Greece and Rome sunk the deeper into the pollutions of superstition and vice.

Another class of speculatists would wait until wars and revolutions have broken up old systems of despotism; and introduced political liberty, before any means are taken to spread the Gospel. Here is another attempt to build the pyramid upon its point. In vain do men expect liberty without virtue; and where that exists, largely diffused through a people, oppression will be no more: It is in the religion of Christ, which ascertains all the relations of man, fixes the duties of all ranks, and enforces them by the highest motives, that we are to look for the principles of good government, as well as of civilization and science. It is "godliness which is profitable for all things; having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

There are still persons of a different character from those just mentioned; whose principles, though not directly opposed to missionary efforts, are, in their practical consequences, somewhat unfavourable to them. Intent upon the study of prophetic times and seasons, they have too much love for the world, not to wish its conversion; but they have little hope of great success in the attempt, until their interpretations of certain prophecies are accomplished, and this or that antichrist shall have been destroyed. To such persons the words of Christ are full of instruction: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." He adds, however, a plain and obvious injunction, which cannot be mistaken: "But ye shall be witnesses unto me to the uttermost part of the earth." The only note of time which the obedient Christian will mark with a distinguishing character in his calendar, the only one he will intensely study, is opportunity: "As ye have opportunity do good unto all men." That opportunity is now before you; many "great and effectual doors are open;" and the command is, "Prophecy," "Preach my Gospel."

2. The words may be considered as an injunction on the ministers of the Gospel: "Prophecy unto these dry bones." But to whom is the message directed? To missionaries only? Nay; but to all who

are called "to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." We are not sent only to this place, or to that congregation. Our commission is expressed in larger terms: "Go into all the world." Every minister is by virtue of this commission to him, this charter to the human race, made a minister of man,—a minister of the whole world. Providence may mark out for us a particular sphere of labour, but our general obligation to the world continues; and were we called by certain indications of duty to the "farthest verge of the green earth," our obligation to go is irreversible. This was the view which the great apostle took of the obligations of his ministry. "I am a debtor both to the Greeks and the barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise."—It was thus that our venerable founder conceived of the intent of the Christian ministry, when, in answer to a complaint of the irregularity of his preaching, he replied, "I look upon the whole world as my parish;" and it is thus I am persuaded that my brethren present on this occasion conceive of it. We may not, however, be called directly to the work of evangelizing the heathen; but by virtue of our mission to all the world we are called to further it; and this would be our apology, did we need one, for calling this assembly together this day to co-operate with us. It is in discharge of a solemn duty, and in obedience to our Master's command to diffuse the knowledge of his truth to the "ends of the earth." But,

3. The injunction, "Prophecy," respects not only ministers, but you also who have a private station in the Church.

Ministers and people cannot be separated in that which was ever intended to be the result of a common effort. Even the Apostle Paul, though under a more than ordinary direction, led from place to place by the immediate conduct of the Divine hand, working miracles himself, and the subject of frequent miraculous interpositions, never thought himself independent of the aids of the great body of Christians. He connected himself with their prayers: "Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified." "Pray for me, that utterance may be given me, to make known the mystery of the Gospel." He not only solicited their prayers, but received their gifts. They "ministered to his necessities" when employed in his work, "prophesying to the dry bones," and calling the dead to life.

This union between ministers and people in the establishment of the kingdom of Christ arises out of the very constitution of the Church. In that, as in every other association, there is a common as well as a special object. In the society of Christians the particular work of every member is his own salvation; but he owes a duty to the whole body, which is to promote, by all the means in his power, the common end of the association. That common object is to bring "the wickedness of the wicked to an end, and to establish the just." The Church is an association against error, against sin, against the powers of darkness throughout the whole earth. The duty of contributing to these ends devolves, therefore, upon all. It is not the business of ministers, of missionaries only; it is the work of the whole community. This public spirit, this expansion of influence and action, St. Paul endeavoured to excite among the Christians in his day. "No man," he observes, no Christian man, "liveth to himself." In this he only echoed the sentiment of his Divine Master: "Ye are the light of the world:"

not a candle under a bushel, to scatter a feeble light through the contracted space of a family or a neighbourhood, but a sun, to give light to the world. In perfect accordance with these views, not only apostles and teachers, but the whole body of disciples are called to be "perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect;" "for he maketh his sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sendeth his rain upon the just and unjust." Delightful picture of the benevolent character intended to distinguish a Christian! He cannot be a selfish man; he cannot say, "My sphere of usefulness is at home only; the heathen have no claims upon me." His sun shines not upon his own habitation only; "its circuit is to the ends of heaven, and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." His rain falls not exclusively upon his own fields; but, like the rich clouds of heaven wafted by the wind, he scatters the heavenly fulness with which he is replenished over every land to which Providence directs him.

Into this true spirit of your calling, you, my hearers, are invited to enter this day. "Prophesy to the dry bones;" not personally, but by sending forth men of God, with your blessing, your prayers, your liberalities. Behold, they are ready to leave their "country and their father's house;" to rend the ties of kindred and of friendship; to endure "weariness, and painfulness, and watchings, and hunger, and thirst, and cold, and nakedness," "not counting their lives dear to them," for the love of souls. Hasten them away, that they may go to the most distant valleys of the dead, and cry, "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord."

III. The prophecy also expresses the certain success which should follow the application of the appointed means.

The prophet prophesied; he called for the vital breath of heaven; the same which at the creation of man was "breathed into his nostrils;" and the result was, "the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army." Not less certain shall be the success of the Gospel among the heathen; and from this confidence we derive the life and spirit of our exertions. Despair destroys action; doubt chills it; but certainty carries it forth to the loftiest enterprises. This certainty is ours. We are engaged in no doubtful cause: the kingdom of Christ must prevail; and the word which has given him the heathen for his inheritance is "for ever settled in heaven." Our confidence rests,

1. On the power of the Gospel. Wherever the Gospel is preached, it is accompanied by a dispensation of the Spirit. "A day of visitation" is vouchsafed, and all to whom it is sent are put into a capacity to understand and obey it. We are not to consider the Gospel as a mere system of doctrines, and duties, and hopes, offered coldly to the reason of mankind. It is this system, but it is more; it is the source of a Divine influence which exerts itself upon the faculties of those who hear it. Its authorized emblem is fire; and, like that, it has its active energy as well as its light and splendour. The word is never sent without its Author. "Go, and preach my Gospel, and lo, I am with you;" not only for personal support, but, as the connection clearly indicates, to give success to your labours. The same union subsists between the Spirit and the word. He is sent "to convince the world of sin." "The words which I speak unto you they are spirit and they

are life." Here is our hope of success. The prophet's words were attended with the vital breathings of heaven. "God hath made us ministers of the Spirit." He goes forth with his servants as the cloud of glory before the Israelites, every where preparing their way, and shedding a secret but active energy upon the world; putting all men into a state of incipient salvation, assisting their minds to know and their wills to choose. If this power be used, they will be saved; if resisted, their condemnation is just. But the employment of means so adequate affords a moral certainty of great success. Merely to send the Gospel by faithful men to the heathen, is in one sense, to give life to the dead.

To this, which may be called the ordinary power of the Gospel, are to be added those extraordinary effusions of the Spirit upon certain places and people, at different times, which are usually granted in answer to earnest prayer. Thus the prophet is represented as calling for the breath of heaven: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." And let ministers go forth, either at home or among the heathens, in the strong spirit of prayer; let the people of God every where join them in supplicating those displays of "power and glory" which have been so often "seen in the sanctuary;" and it will be again proved whether He who holds the gales of heavenly life, as well as the natural "winds, in his fists," will not answer to the call of his "elect who cry day and night unto him," and make his word

"Like mighty winds and torrents fierce;"

subduing all opposition, and bearing down the strongest barriers of the empire of sin. Thus the Christian dispensation was introduced; thus every great revival of religion has been distinguished; and thus may we expect that God will frequently signalize his own future work in the conversion of heathen nations.

2. Our confidence in the certain success of the Gospel rests also upon experience.

Christianity is not a novelty; and its efficacy is not now to be put, for the first time, to the test of experiment. It is that powerful and Divine instrument which has for ages been wielded with glorious success in the cause of God and truth. Every part of the civilized world, has, at different times, felt its energy, and in every nation it has erected trophies of honour and victory. It is worthy of remark with what confidence in the efficiency of the Gospel, even in a very early period of Christianity, the apostle of the Gentiles prosecuted his mission. No expressions of doubt as to the success of his labours ever escaped his lips; his hand never hesitated in directing the blow, through fear that it might be struck in vain against the enemies of the cross. "So fight I, not as one that beateth the air." "Now thanks be to God which causeth us always to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place." "I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also: for I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Emboldened by the experience of its power, all the principal agents in those revivals of religion which have distinguished different ages of the Church have imbibed

the same spirit, and entered upon their mission with a courage which nothing but a firm confidence in its final triumphs could inspire. Perhaps our success, as ministers, depends greatly upon this confidence in the efficacy of the Gospel, which is, in truth, confidence in the promised co-operation of God. With the evidence of the experience of ages, descending in an accumulating stream down to the present moment, it would be most perverse to despair. Primitive Christianity gives us its evidence on this subject. Ancient false opinions dissipated; inveterate habits of vice-broken; the vast empire of idolatrous Rome Christianized;—all attest the “weapons of our warfare” to be mighty in the hands of God. The reformation yields its testimony. Then Christianity, throwing off in her rising might that superincumbent load of superstition and error which more than a thousand years had heaped upon her, appeared again before the world with simple and commanding majesty, and proclaimed her energies to be unbroken and unimpaired. The present day gives its evidence to the efficacy of the Gospel, nor need we travel beyond the walls of this structure to collect it. You, my hearers, are witnesses of its power. Were we to speak of souls dead to God, defiled with sin, “without God and without hope,” we might add also, “And such once were some of you; but ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” To you, therefore, has the preaching of the Gospel proved “the power of God.” And will it ever lose its power? Never, if the promise of God “standeth for evermore.” If the dragons of Greece and Rome could not stand before the ark, but “fell and were broken,” neither shall the gods of China and Hindostan. If we worship Thor and Woden no longer; if, in these islands, the light has penetrated the gloom of druidical forests, and put to shame the abominations of our forefathers, the crude mythology of Africa and the Southern Isles shall not resist its penetrating beams and consuming energy.

“The world cannot withstand  
Its ancient Conqueror.”

Once conquered, it already trembles before the second attack. “The arm of God is awake;” that arm which of old shook the gates of hell, and bowed down the pillars of the throne of Satan.

3. Prophecy confirms the certainty of success:

Take, my brethren, this glass, and look into the profound of the future: Is the prospect encouraging? Of old an interesting question was put to one of the watchmen of Israel: “Watchman! what of the night?” and the reply was, “The morning cometh, and also the night.” Thus the day of primitive Christianity was succeeded by a night of error. But if we now “come again and inquire,” we shall receive a more cheering answer. The watchman of Christianity cries, “The shadows flee away;” an everlasting day dawns upon the world, which, though it may be sometimes overcast, shall never be succeeded by a night. Let us, then, “turn aside and see this great sight.” “The morning is spread on the mountains;” and “kings come to its light, and the Gentiles to the brightness of its rising.” The gods of earth tremble and fly; for “in that day a man shall cast his idols to the moles and to the bats.” The standard of Christ waves upon the hills, and “all nations flow

unto it," saying, "Our fathers inherited lies and vanity, and things wherein is no profit." Famines and pestilences desolate no more; wars "cease to the ends of the earth." The destroying angel passes over the habitations of men and finds no victim; for there is "light in all their dwellings," and every "door post is sprinkled with the blood." "The glory of the Lord is revealed, and all flesh behold it together." Then shall follow the great Sabbath of the world, in which heaven and earth, reconciled by Christ and inspired by grace and love, shall jointly offer the grateful sacrifice of adoring praise: "For every creature which is in heaven and earth heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

If, then, so glorious a certainty of present partial success, and of ultimate complete success, be established, what remains but that we apply to the great work of sending the blessed Gospel to the heathen with the utmost zeal? Duty demands it. We owe a debt of love to every man. God hath "blessed us that we may be a blessing." Sympathy demands it. "Now we are converted let us strengthen our brethren." Interest demands it. "He that watereth shall be watered himself." Our hatred of sin demands it. Let us haste to banish from the earth those abominations which offend the pure eyes of heaven. Pity to souls demands it. Shall myriads of immortal spirits sink into the gulf of perdition without an effort on our part to save them? Lastly; gratitude to God for past success demands it. The particular state of our missions will be explained to you at the public meeting in the afternoon of this day; and we shall therefore, only state generally, that God hath blessed us with great and distinguished success. The prophets have prophesied, and the bones have been shaken; the breath of God has entered them, and already they stand up by their thousands. God be praised! If you faint not, if, in common with your brethren throughout the Christian world, you still prosecute the good work, they shall be increased to "an exceeding great army." If, in the earnest fervour of your spirits, you pray, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live," the whole valley shall soon heave with returning life. The holy influence shall sweep the desolate earth, and in every land the "dry bones" shall stand up, "the living, the living to praise God, as we do this day." Amen

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### SERMON II.—*National Peace the Gift of God.*

*Preached at the Methodist Chapel, Wakefield, on Thursday, July 7, 1814, being the Day appointed for a General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the Restoration of Peace.*

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"Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us," Isaiah xxvi, 12.

WE are assembled on an occasion more joyful than our most sanguine wishes, but a little time ago, could anticipate; and the object of our meeting is to perform a duty not more obligatory than delightful.