

preach Christ, that men may "look unto him and be saved;" so to lead the sheep, "that they may go in and out, and find pasture;" so to guard the fold that no breach may be made upon it; so to seek, that you may save: and thus, having been "wise to turn many to righteousness," you will wear them as your diadem of honour, and shine in the lustre of their salvation, and in the glory of your own reward, "as the stars for ever and ever."

My brethren, I finish with the topic with which I commenced. This "spirit of courage, love, and of a sound mind," is the "gift" of God. Use, then, every means to attain it. Drink at the fountain of inspiration; "meditate on these things, give yourself wholly to them," set before your minds inciting examples. Think of your solemn final account. Add to all the spirit of prayer, and faith; unchanging faith in the promise of Him who now sends you forth under his commission, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

And now I dismiss you. I give you joy of your office. I congratulate you on your unanimous reception by your brethren. We rejoice to see so many qualified young men before us, the hope of our Churches, some of them the sons of our preachers, endued with good learning, the fruit of our own schools, now sanctified by the call of God. "Instead of the fathers," names honoured by us, "come up the children;" a circumstance at once affecting to our hearts, and inciting to our gratitude. But, whether you are the sons of those who have laboured with us in the word and doctrine, or otherwise, we rejoice to believe as to you all, that you are anxious to be able and successful ministers of the New Testament. Take then the deposit of those precious truths which have given spiritual life to our nation, and are giving life to the world. Take the example of so many venerable men, to whose labours you owe your souls. Gather up the mantle of our ascended Elijahs, and wear it with "a double portion" of their spirit. How many of those whom you now see before you are passing away; stealing into obscurity through infirmity, or tottering with age on the brink of the grave! We must "decrease," but you will "increase." We rejoice in your brightening light, and pray that many years of usefulness may be granted to you. Peace be to you, and peace to the Jerusalem upon whose walls you shall be the watchmen day and night. Receive our blessing in the name of the Lord; and take, above all, "the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of peace;" shed this abroad wherever Providence may direct your labours, and leave it in all its richness to those who shall succeed you, as you are succeeding us.

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#### SERMON VIII.—*God with us.*

*The Substance of a Sermon preached before the Conference, at Sheffield, Aug. 1829.*

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"For in him we live, and move, and have our being," Acts xvii, 28.

THE important sentiment contained in the text stands among many others which would be equally new and wonderful to the philosophers and inquisitive "men of Athens." That they were not without all

knowledge of the true God, is certain. St. Paul quotes a passage in proof of this from one of their own poets; and several of their philosophic sects admitted one supreme God, of whom they sometimes spake eloquently and nobly. Like other idolaters, however, "when they knew God, they glorified him not as God." They confined him chiefly to his own celestial dominion; conceived of him as an inactive spectator of the works of men; parcelled out the management of the universe among inferior deities; and transferred that trust and honour, which ought to have been exclusively reserved for the one God, to beings of their own invention, or to the spirits of departed kings, heroes, and sages of ancient times; and amidst the elaborate and pompous religious services which they rendered to these idols, "they forgot God."

To hear that the very Being, whom they thought so distant and so unconcerned with human affairs, was ever employed in arranging all the events of their lives, and had "fixed the bounds of their habitation;" that he had done this in his mercy, in order "that they should seek after him and find him;" "that he is not far from any one of us;" but is indeed so near, that if any dark and bewildered spirit would but "feel after him," he should find him; so near, that "in him we live, and move, and have our being;"—these indeed were new truths; and, happily, they were not preached to the Athenians in vain. Some indeed "mocked;" others said, "We will hear thee again of this matter;" but the foundation of a Church, never entirely to perish from Athens, was then laid: "Certain men clave unto him, and believed; among whom was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them."

That such truths, after so great a lapse of time, and even among those professing to receive the doctrine of St. Paul, should still need to be preached, is a problem which will, at first sight, be either questioned or pronounced difficult to solve. Yet, is it so, that in the full and true meaning of these words, all who profess faith in the New Testament believe that God "appoints the bounds of our habitation," and regulates the affairs of men by constant control and guidance? that he is so "near," that a seeking soul shall find a present God, and break out of its natural darkness into the light of his manifested presence? and that in him "we live, and have our being;" that is, are kept in existence, not by a sort of general law, but by incessantly repeated acts of upholding and succour? We meet, I fear, with many sad and affecting proofs of the contrary. We have not, it is true, exchanged Christianity for pagan philosophy; but we have philosophized upon it in a pagan manner; and still holding, with professed reverence, the letter of the truth, we have given to it a Gentile interpretation.

This is one of the errors of the day. In the revelations of this sacred volume, God is brought near to us; so near to us, that we are told that in him "we live, and move, and have our being." In much of the philosophy which wears the garb of Christianity, he is again placed far from us; not so far, indeed, that he is removed quite out of sight, and wholly unacknowledged and forgotten; but so far as to weaken the foundations of our trust in his power and grace; and to chill those warm and lively emotions of the affections toward him, in which our piety has both its joy and its strength.

This is the subject now brought before you; and I shall select some

illustrations of the errors against which we need to be guarded; and by showing their fallacy, endeavour to prepare our minds to receive a stronger impression of those great and comprehensive truths which the text either contains or suggests.

I. Our first illustration may be taken from that arranged and exquisitely ordered material world with which we are surrounded, and of which we form a part.

The philosophy to which I allude is often, with reference to those great and impressive phenomena, far from comporting with the doctrine of the text. It acknowledges indeed God to be the Creator, and also the Upholder and Conservator of all things; but still its theory is but a Christianized paganism. It is continually substituting for the God in whom all things live, and move, and have their being, some invention of its own; and though this should be nothing more than a set of terms and phrases, which, in point of fact, have no meaning, it rests in them, fully satisfied with the discovery. Thus it resorts to its "laws of nature," and to its "second causes;" and these it multiplies again, till it throws back the First and only efficient Cause to an unmeasurable distance; weakens or denies the doctrine of his immediate agency; and, in fact, puts God far from us. If the earth wants rain, it directs my attention to the laws of the atmosphere, the influence of the winds, the process of evaporation from the ocean, or the causes on which that may depend; and then, beyond this vast space, filled by intervening agents, it indeed allows me to see God. If I am sick, or in health, I am forbidden to think immediately upon the hand which smites, or the power which heals me: constitutional peculiarities, medicine, air, diet, and other second causes come in; and, in this case, again put God far from me. These instances are sufficient for illustration; and the fault which is charged upon these philosophizing Christians is not, that secondary causes are investigated, arranged, and exhibited by their industry; but that too frequently they do this in an atheistical manner; and that these second causes are used, not as manifestations of God, but as veils to hide him from the sight of his creatures,—in a word, as criminal contrivances to forget him.

The philosophy of the Scriptures bears a very different character. Does the rain fall? It is "our Father in heaven" who sends it "upon the just and the unjust." Is the earth vested with verdure? It is "God who so clothes the grass of the field." Do day and night succeed each other? It is "he that turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that maketh the seven stars, and Orion." Do the elements rage? "Flames of fire are his messengers," and "stormy winds fulfil his word." Am I sick? His "rod" is upon me. Am I in health? "He healeth all my diseases." So the inspired writer, collecting, as it were, the whole universe of creatures, and all their agencies, into one view, exclaims, "All things serve thee,"—run on thy messages, fulfil thy commands, execute thy counsels.

Where, then, lies the fallacy which, in this plausible philosophy, cheats us out of that sense of the ever-present, ever-working, yet unwearied Power, of which we ought always to be sensible? There is no need, in order to preserve and uphold this doctrine, at once the most pious, and the most noble, to deny any thing that is said of subordinate causes. That they exist, it were absurd to question; and.

indeed, their existence is a part of the grandeur of the doctrine of the text, rightly understood ; for true theology is always true philosophy ; and where the theology is bad, the philosophy will ever be "vain."—That text resolves the whole : "In him we live, and move, and have our being." Life is from him ; motion is from him ; and that which lives and moves, even our very essence, is unceasingly dependent upon him. But then this is not to be taken generally, and in mass ; it is as true of every individual as of the whole race ; as true of every individual particle of which our frame is composed, as of the whole frame itself ; it is true of the first subordinate cause, which the Supreme Power puts into motion, and by which we may be affected for good or for evil ; and it is equally true of the second, which as much "lives, and moves, and has its being" in God as the first ; and the third as the second ; and the fourth as the third. Multiply these as you please, God is in and with that agent which reaches me at last. He is so as immediately as with the distant first. It is thus that we gain the glorious truth, that "he is not far from any one of us." No distance extends itself between me and God ; no creature separates me from him, but is the very instrument by which he comes to me. For if there be a chain of causes and effects, he not only sustains it, but lives and acts along its whole line ; and thus may we "foresee him always before us," "all in all," and all in every thing. The creature derives its whole force from God ; and we, and all that concerns us, are "in his hand."

II. Our second illustration may be taken from what is usually called providence. That branch of his government, so designated, to which I refer, respects the affairs of men ; and where it is allowed that God governs his creatures, this very doctrine itself might be supposed necessarily to imply such a control on his part, and interpositions so marked, as shall make it obvious to reason, that he is "not far from any one of us ;" although, as to sense, the hand which moves every thing should remain without that visible manifestation which took place in "the times of old."

So various, however, are the inventions of this philosophizing Christianity to put God far from us, even in his government of men, that we are in danger of quite forgetting him ; and the whole case is often so cautiously stated, that we are liable to the charge of fanatical presumption if we believe and maintain, in the full sense of the text, that we both "live, and move," as well as "have our being," in him.

Hence we have the law of moral causes and effects. It might be startling language to call the decays and reverses of a nation "Divine judgments," or to attribute national prosperity and strength to God's blessing. We must proceed more philosophically, and remember that, by a moral law of our being, national weakness and decay are linked to national vices, as these naturally spring from wealth, ease, and luxury ; and, on the contrary, that the strength of a country, by the same law, results from its public and private virtues.

We have also the law of circumstances. These call forth, both as to nations and individuals, their good or their bad qualities ; and are more or less favourable and inciting to the full development of both. We thus account for the whole moral phenomena presented by ancient and modern states, and by the individuals who surround us.

But to what does this affected verbiage amount ? What real wisdom

is there in this "vain philosophy," constructed upon "the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ?" We also allow this law of moral causes and effects; but we ask, Who is its author? Who is it that with steady hand so connects the cause and the effect together, that, wrestle with it as men have done in all past, and will do in all future ages, vice shall produce misery, and virtue tend to strength and happiness? We allow, also, the law of circumstances, rightly understood; but who is it that so arranges and varies them as to put nations, as well as individuals, into different conditions of trial and responsibility by the circumstances which surround them? It is He who determines "the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;" and who carries into effect, by various operations, mediate and immediate, extending often from age to age, and embracing immense multitudes of individuals, what he had before designed. Thus he acts as to nations, and thus he shows that he is "not far from" them.

But in the case of individuals, involving as it does the doctrine of a particular providence in all its extent, this philosophy still more fatally stumbles.

The lot of individuals, with the varied circumstances which characterize it, is often seen intimately connected with that of other individuals; and their interests sometimes also appear inseparably linked with the arrangements of providence as to nations, or with those large portions of the community of which they form a part; nay, sometimes with the laws of nature themselves.

These are indeed facts which often occur; and we are therefore asked, whether it is reasonable to expect that God should interpose, with respect to individuals, to the continual interruption and unsettling of his general plans, and the very principles and laws which he has impressed upon all nature?—

"When the loose mountain trembles from on high,  
Shall gravitation cease, if thou go by?"

But what, in fact, do such objections rest upon, except this,—that I cannot see in many cases how general plans can at all consist with interpositions of God in respect of individuals, for judgment or for mercy? The difficulty of the case may indeed be acknowledged; it may often be intricate and inextricable; but are there not previous considerations and first principles to be settled before I can come to a satisfactory conclusion? The God of providence, and the Author of this sacred volume, is the same Being; and, if so, am I not bound, as a professed believer in the Divine authority of the Scriptures, to inquire, whether he has made any revelation on the subject of particular government and his special interpositions as to individuals? For if the God of providence, and the God of the Scriptures, be the same Being, then there must be the most perfect harmony between the principles laid down in the Bible, and God's actual administration of the affairs of men. But it cannot be denied, that we find the doctrine of a particular providence in the Scriptures. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths:" here God is represented as the guide of all good men, personally and individually, who acknowledge him by acts of prayer and trust. "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee:" here God promises the interposition of an immediate

deliverance, dependent upon prayer. "Thou shalt not be afraid of the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon day:" here personal protection in a time of general calamity is promised. So, if we come to the New Testament, its general declarations on these subjects all imply the regard which God pays to the cases of individuals. We are forbidden to be anxiously careful for the morrow, "what we shall eat, or what we shall drink, or wherewithal we shall be clothed," upon the principle that our heavenly Father "knoweth that we have need of such things." So particular, also, does our Saviour represent the notice and care of God to be, that his disciples are encouraged to trust in him, on the assurance, that "a sparrow falls not to the ground without the knowledge of God," and that "the very hairs of their head are all numbered." And, in precisely the same views, St. Paul exhorts the members of the Churches, speaking to them as individuals, "to be careful for nothing, but in every thing," that is, in every case of want and difficulty, to "make their requests known unto God." You argue, then, from your own obscure notions respecting God's general plans of providential administration to the improbability of such special and immediate interpositions in behalf of individuals as have always been held among sound Christians; but we turn, as to a surer ground, to these plain and unequivocal declarations of inspired verity; and, so far from allowing that God is so "far from us," considered in our individual character, as your scheme supposes, we maintain that he is, as another scripture expresses it, "near to all them that call upon him."

Perhaps the objectors say, "We do not deny the truth of these passages of Scripture; but surely we may, and must, interpret them reasonably. We see proofs that God does act upon general plans; that there are established courses of administration, and uniform laws in the government of men, as well as in nature; otherwise we could derive no wisdom from the past, and human experience would be a delusive light; and being so assured of this by experience and observation, we are bound to give to these passages of holy writ a more general interpretation." This, however, is but to say, in fact, that such texts must be made to mean any thing or nothing, in subservience to a human theory. Try the case, for instance, upon the passage before quoted: "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee;" which, upon this "more general interpretation," must mean, "'Call upon me,' by acknowledging me as the general Governor of the affairs of men, and if thou happenest to live at a time when my general plan requires the exercise of mercy and goodness to a whole people, or to that part of a community with which thou art connected, thou shalt be delivered; but, if not, thy trouble must remain; for general plans cannot be dispensed with." The folly and the guilt of such interpretations are equally apparent; and, if indulged in, as they too often are on various subjects beside this, would amount to a proud rejection of the whole revelation of God.

But we may farther observe, that the principle of opposing the general plans of God in his government of the world to the doctrine of his interposition in behalf of individuals, is itself full of misconceptions and errors. For,

1. It assumes, that God's general plans as to nations or large portions

of communities comprehend all individual cases, and all the circumstances which may affect them. This is absurd, and obviously contrary to the fact. By a dispensation of mercy to a nation, general prosperity may be vouchsafed; but does it follow, that every individual partakes of the blessing; or that the stream of bounty may not, consistently with the general design, be dammed up, and diverted from its course, as to particular persons, without affecting the general condition of the community? Suppose, for instance, the head of a family, upon whose personal exertions the interests of many others depend, be visited by protracted sickness, and laid aside from his business or profession; how shall he avail himself of the general prosperity around him, and turn it to his own and his family's advantage? Or how shall his widow and orphan children escape depression and poverty, should the husband and the father be removed by death before their worldly interests are provided for? A pestilence sweeping through a country is a general judgment; but, in the worst instances, all do not die, nor even all sicken. Here the general visitation has manifestly a thousand modifications, subject to no obvious law; and it submits to circumstances which must often be of a personal, and, apparently to us, an accidental, kind. If, then, there are innumerable circumstances which the general plan does not infallibly control, but which so often modify it, and alter its course as to individual cases; if beside the general wheel, there are "wheels within that wheel," and often without it too, turning on their own centres, and impelled even into contrary motions; we may fully admit the doctrine of general plans and laws of administration, and yet find in these loose and free circumstances, which operate independently of, or greatly modify, the general range of events, an ample field for the manifestation of that particular providence of which we speak; and which can make as many exceptions as that Divine wisdom sees fit which directs the whole. After all, it will often be found that it is not "well," even as to external things, "with the wicked," when all is well with the general state of affairs; nor ill "with the righteous," when various judgments are abroad, avenging God's cause upon a sinful people. Often shall those words be realized by the former: "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked:" and as to the righteous, the Divine hand shall be laid upon the general visitation; and God shall make "a hedge about him, and about all that he hath."

2. A second fallacy involved in this theory is, that it assumes that interpositions in favour of individuals must necessarily interfere with some general plan of Providence, or some general law of nature. But, when it is said, "When he giveth quietness, who then shall make trouble? And when he hideth his face, who then can behold him, whether it be done to a nation, or to a man only?" this text manifestly distinguishes between a government of nations, and a government of individuals: and it certainly supposes that "quietness" may be given to an individual, when it is not given to a nation; and that the face of God may be hidden from a particular person, when it is not hidden from a whole community. And then, as to the laws of nature, was any thing more trifling ever put into infidel verse than we find in the couplet of Pope before quoted?—

"When the loose mountain trembles from on high,  
Shall gravitation cease, if thou go by?"

Shall the general law of gravitation be suspended to preserve a man who has "committed his way unto the Lord," and prays to him for protection from all evil during the day? Perhaps not; and for this reason, that there may be no necessity for it. God is not confined to one mode of saving. Suppose a strong impulse, or a trifling accident, urges him to put off his journey; or suppose something to occur to hasten his passing the mountain some moments before it falls, or to retard it till the moment after; or suppose that, instead of saving him from the danger, his great Protector should save him in it; and that the man whom He makes his care should sustain the apparent accident in such a way, that the falling ruin should arch him over, instead of crushing him; and that he should be dug out alive, and unhurt. There are a thousand ways known to God, and many conceivable even by us, by which, without interfering with general laws at all, he may honour the man who has honoured him, by acknowledging and trusting in him "in all his ways." "Lo, these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to keep back his soul from the pit; that he may be enlightened with the light of the living."

3. The third fallacy lies in assuming that God's general plans are something which he has commissioned to act out of himself, and independent of his own immediate agency; wholly forgetful of the principle of the text, that in him we and all things "live, and move, and have our being." For what are God's general plans, but himself in operation?—now spreading the impulses of his power to a wider, now restraining them to a narrower, extent; now working in judgment, then in mercy, and again singularly commingling both; attempting the severity of vengeance with compassion, and guarding mercy from abuse by the majesty of righteousness; assigning longer or shorter periods to his dispensations of vengeance or goodness, as it pleases him; and thus working onward to the fulfilment of all those purposes which he has fixed in his own eternal counsels as the final results of his government of human beings? But if this be so, if all be God in operation, to what general laws is he so bound, as that this should interfere with his manifestations of severity or grace toward individuals? The blind, impetuous ocean must roll whither winds and tides may impel it: it has no intelligence, no feeling: it cannot select the victim vessels which it may hurl upon the rocks, or the favoured sails which it may bear buoyant and safe into the harbour; and your theory dishonours God, by likening his general operations to some such mighty but blindly impelled and impelling element. The Divine administration is Divine intelligence, will, feeling, and wisdom, in action; and when his arm is made bare, and his judgments sweep, or his mercies expand, over a nation, he can never be at a loss in his general march to turn aside to visit an individual sinner secure in his trespasses; or to make it "light in the dwellings" of his Israel, when the clouds of his judgments darken through the abodes of the ungodly. The destroying angel had a fearful general commission in Egypt; but his sword gleamed harmlessly as he passed the door sprinkled with that sign of faith, the blood of the appointed atonement. God is then "not far from any one of us;" and we may take the full comfort of the declaration, "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth, that he may show himself strong in the behalf of those whose hearts are perfect toward him." And how



many instances are on record, resting upon evidence the most indisputable, to confirm the doctrine! A "vain philosophy" may attempt to account for them; but the absurdities into which it falls are its own refutation. During the late struggle of the Greeks to regain their liberty, a body of Turks were, in 1824, encamped in a part of Greece, and committed every kind of excess upon the inhabitants. One of these barbarians, an officer, had pursued a Greek girl, who took refuge in the house of a widow. The widow met him at the door, and mildly attempted to dissuade him from forcing his way in to seize the girl.—Enraged, he drew his sabre; but when in the act of attempting to cut down the widow, it snapped in two pieces before it reached the victim. The wretch paused; but drew a pistol, to accomplish his purpose in that manner; but it missed fire: and when in the act of drawing a second, he was forcibly dragged away by one of his companions, who exclaimed, "Let her alone. Do not you see that her time is not yet come?" Resolved, however, on taking some revenge, he carried off her infant child to the camp; but, as though Providence designed to complete its work on this occasion, while the officer was asleep, the child was carried back to the widow by one of his own men.\* I know how a heartless skeptic would quibble here; but the affecting story bears its own comment: and I would take the grateful tears of the preserved widow, who saw the hand of God in her deliverance, not only for the best feeling, but for the best philosophy. "All his saints are in his hand;" and where is the saint whom he has not "encompassed about with songs of deliverance?"

### III. We find a third illustration in religious opinions.

The opinions we form on religious subjects are of the first importance; for the other powers of the soul follow in the train of the understanding, and are influenced by it. How, for instance, shall we will any thing, but as we see in it reasons of choice? How shall we love, but as we see reasons of preference and desire? If this our great intellectual eye be "sound," then shall we be "full of light;" but if it be diseased, "how great must be our darkness!"

The question, whether we are left to ourselves to form religious opinions, is settled by the fact, that God has granted us a revelation from himself on all the subjects connected with our moral state and relations. He has, however, done more than this; he condescends to become the secret teacher of the meaning of his own revealed word; and not only to present it to our attention, but to "open our understandings," that we may know the Scriptures. It is thus that he visits us as "the day spring from on high, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, and to guide their feet into the way of peace."

But as this view supposes a secret influence of God upon the mind, it cannot be tolerated by those who boast themselves to be rational Christians. It is bringing God too near to man for their philosophy. But in their case the doctrine of direct Divine influence is rejected, not, I fear, from humility, which is often the pretence, but from self sufficiency. So near, indeed, will such persons allow that God has been to man, that he has spoken to us by "holy men of old;" so near,

\* This anecdote is verified by the Rev. Mr. Arundel, author of "A Visit to the Seven Churches of Asia," who was in the village at the time.

that he authenticated their inspiration by "signs, and miracles, and divers gifts of the Holy Ghost;" but when this extraordinary work of the Spirit was accomplished, it is contended, nothing more was necessary; and that man, left to himself, is as competent to collect the sense of holy Scripture, as that of any common and uninspired writing on any subject within the comprehension of an ordinary intellect. This theory is often exhibited in plausible guise; but it will be sufficient for its refutation, if we can show that it leaves the case of man wholly unprovided for; and that if God were to stand thus "far from us" in our inquiries into the mysteries of his religion, not one of us could ever come to the effectual knowledge of the truth. For,

1. Man is not only indifferent, but even averse and hostile, to that very truth which he is urged to study, and which his unassisted powers are said to be adequate fully to apprehend. Here is the first difficulty which presents itself. We may not, indeed, be averse to every part of revealed truth. The Bible has a history, a poetry, a charm in the style of its narrative, a power in its exhibition of character, and a sublimity of doctrine, which shall often engage the attention, and gratify the taste, of even worldly and unregenerate men. But the test lies not here. Do they love the truth which reproves and condemns them? the truth which faithfully lays open their soul's danger, and presses it upon their fears? the truth which strips them of all plea of worthiness and merit, and brings down the most virtuous among them to the common level of all sinners, as to merit, in the sight of God, to be "justified freely by his grace," "through faith?" We daily see the contrary; and as to every such truth, when presented to them, so far are they from having the disposition calmly and with interest to investigate its evidence and its import, they exclaim, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" What, then, shall bring the minds of such men—supposing them even to be able, without assistance from the teaching Spirit, to enter fully into their meaning—to study such truths, so necessary to their salvation, with an intense anxiety not to be mistaken in them, and with perfect sincerity? A power independent of man's heart must be supposed. No man of his own accord ever took the Scriptures, and read himself into self knowledge, penitence, alarm, and abasement; no man ever persuaded another to do this; and, in the nature of the case, a visitation from on high must be supposed, to conquer the natural aversion of the heart to truths of this class, and to make a man willing to take the gauge of his own wretchedness and danger, and to offer up all his pride and false hope "to be hewn in pieces before the Lord," by the sword which proceedeth out of his mouth.

2. We are to consider that the love of sin, in some form or other, is found in every man while in his natural and unregenerate state. But wherever this is found, it infallibly darkens the judgment on all subjects of vital importance in religion. This was exhibited among the Pharisees of our Lord's time. I grant the case is an extreme one; and that it presents an awful picture of men so blinded by their passions, as to be impenetrable to the force of the most stupendous evidence, and to persecute unto death the incarnate Son of God, notwithstanding that obvious stamp of divinity which his "mighty works" had impressed upon him. But this dark picture is drawn, that, by seeing

the full effect of the principle, we may be made aware of its malignant character. A principle which could produce such effects in them cannot exist in any degree without perverting the judgment as to all those truths of religion, on which it is of the first importance that we should have the clearest conceptions. But if this same principle—the love of sin and the world—is found in all unregenerate persons, how is the meaning of the word of God to be attained fully by them, as the meaning of any other writing against which no such passion, and its darkening influence, operates? If you say that man must first conquer his evil propensities, and then come to the study of truth, you set him upon doing this without a right knowledge of that Divine revelation which alone fully describes his case, and teaches its remedy. If you bid him apply to God in prayer for the previous cure of his evil nature, in order to prepare him to receive the truth, then you suppose that God renews the heart of man independent of his word, which is expressly declared to be the instrument of our regeneration, and of sanctifying the Church; and farther, if you are obliged, in order to meet the case, to admit a direct Divine influence upon the will and affections, why should you hesitate to admit it as operating upon the understanding also? My brethren, we are not left without full information on this important point. There are two grand offices of the Holy Spirit which answer to each other, and which bring us fully out of the difficulty. He is the Teacher of men; but he is first the Spirit who “convinces” or reprove of sin; and when he thus fulfils his office by that power which he exerts through the word preached, read, or brought to mind, he strikes life into the soul which was before dead in trespasses and sins, and by awakening the fears makes truth the object of desire, however painful and reproving, if it may lead to salvation. The love of error is cured by this flash upon the conscience, and the soul stands prepared to be led by the teaching of God into all truth. Thus we see that we could never come to the knowledge of the truth, if God were far from us; and if we admit this, we cannot stagger at the next step, that he is the constant guide of the humbled spirit. Yes, the words of our Saviour are eternally true,—“I am the light of the world; if any man follow me,” with a docile mind, “he shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life;” and when the teacher God is near, his law brightens before us into all the lustre of its celestial and awful purity; redemption exhibits a more illustrious fitness; duties are seen under higher reasons; holiness is arrayed in lovelier beauty; and promises disclose their heights and depths of meaning. Thus the understanding, filled with increasing light and conviction, leads up the other powers to their legitimate and vigorous exercise; the choice of the will is decided; the excitement of holy desires becomes more habitual and intense; effort is invigorated; the various graces of the regenerate character bloom and bear fruit under the clear heaven of a spirit filled with the light and influence of God; and “the man of God is thoroughly furnished for every good word and work.”

IV. Our fourth illustration may be taken from internal religion.

The Christianized philosophy of which I speak is not, in every instance, to be charged with rejecting a religion of the heart. As held by some, it does allow it; but even in this its danger lies; for as it still places God far from us, in that very proportion it leaves man to

himself, and teaches him to look to no higher a resource than may be found in his own nature.

It allows of faith; but then its faith is a mere intellectual principle, and works its mighty effects in the way of natural process. It allows that prayer, to be effectual, must be the language of the heart; but then we are told that it benefits us, by working in us a moral preparation to receive God's gifts.

In other cases, perhaps, it allows that there is a witness of the Spirit to our adoption; but then this Spirit, we are told, is nothing more than the Spirit in the word, who has there described the moral characters of those who are the children of God; and that it is by comparing our own moral state with these recorded characteristics, that we are to apply his general testimony to ourselves.

It allows the devotional habit, that man is bound to walk with God in the silent converse of his heart; but devotion is taken to be no more than the impression made by the character, the works, and the benevolence of God, upon the affections. It is, in fact, sentiment flowing from the impressibility of our physical nature, when operated on by sublime and touching subjects; and which, in this case, stand connected with objects of religion, or those bearing some resemblance to them.

But God is not thus "far from us" in any of these respects. After all these misleading plausibilities, "God dwelleth with man upon earth;" and the true interpretation of "Immanuel" is, "God with us." It is indeed affecting to see the high and glorious spiritualities of our religion lowered, and stripped of all emphasis and meaning, by these imperfect and carnal views;—but it is not difficult to defend this branch of the truth of God also.

We deny not that faith, in the sense of belief, is a work of the intellect; but, in the Scripture sense of trust, and as a realizing principle, it is a work of the heart under special Divine influence, and so is a gift, since we are warranted to pray, "Lord, increase our faith." We deny not that he who meditates deeply upon his state, and wants, and dangers, is in a posture to receive the grace of prayer, and has received a measure of it already; but prayer is prevalent, not in moving something within ourselves, but in moving God; and it moves him, because "he knows what is the mind of the Spirit who maketh intercession in us, according to the will of God."

We deny not that there is a testimony of the Spirit in the word as to the true character of all who are the children of God; but then one of these characters is love to God as a Father, which I can never feel until by some means I know that he is not only the common Father of mankind, but my Father reconciled; and of this I must be persuaded before I can apply the rule. I am set, therefore, upon this impossible task, to infer from a general description of the moral character of the children of God, what has passed in the mind of God, as to my personal justification, and to discover in my own heart love to God as reconciled to me, while I have a trembling fear of him as a Judge. No, it is the Holy Spirit that "knoweth the mind of God," which "no man knoweth;" and his clearly revealed office is to show us, by his own direct impression upon the heart, what God has decided on the matter of our personal pardon; and hence we are taught, not that the Spirit, as having inspired the written word which lays down authoritatively

the terms of pardon to all, enables us to infer our adoption, but that "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God;" and that he thus "abides with us" as "the Comforter."

We deny not that there is a natural aptitude in various subjects to produce impressions of awe or delight upon the mind. The grandeur and beauty of nature, the perfections of God, the character and love of Christ, the solemnities of judgment, and the glories of a future life, are of this description: and we allow, too, that all these impressions upon the susceptibility of our nature are very often used by "the good Spirit," as instruments of our edification; but if I regard them as religion itself, and not as the mere instruments employed by a higher agency, I either shut out God entirely, or I acknowledge him, it is true, as the God of nature, who has thus made us with these susceptibilities, but reject him as the God of grace, who, by special influence, turns them to his own merciful purposes. In a word, I make religion a natural, not a supernatural process. And am I told by the apostle, in the very verses under my eye, that even a poor heathen, enveloped in his darkness, if he but "feel after God, if haply he may find him," shall indeed find him, and for this very reason, that "he is not far from any one of us;" and shall I expect still less under a dispensation which is eminently "the ministration of the Spirit?" Have we not heard that Christ is "the way to the Father?" Have we not heard him say, "If any man love me, and keep my sayings, my Father will love him, and I and my Father will come to him, and take up our abode with him?" Nay, read we not in St. Paul, that "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit" with him? Shall we then chill and wither these glorious doctrines? No, my brethren; we will hold fast the testimony of God. He that seeks shall find him; shall "walk with God;" shall drink, not at the distant stream flowing only in the channel of the creature; but at the Fount of life himself; shall "see the Invisible" by faith; shall converse with him, though not "face to face," yet thought to thought; and prove how deep and rich is the meaning of the blessed words of the text, when applied to the experience of a truly spiritual man, "For in him we live, and move, and have our being."

V. Our last illustration shall be taken from the revival and extension of religion.

We are truly taught, that the good done upon earth is done by the Lord; that, though Paul plant, and Apollos water, "God giveth the increase;" that when the Lord buildeth up Zion, he "appears in his glory;" that it is the Lord who "sends forth his labourers into the harvest;" and that "in the latter days" there are promises which relate to the "pouring out" of his Spirit. These declarations bring God very near to his Church. Perhaps, indeed, the most illustrious instances in which our God makes "bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations," by throwing off that veil of mystery which so often hides it, are found in the struggles and triumphs of his religion. The history of his Church is, for this very reason, chiefly, the most magnificent part of the world's story. The trials and the contests of the truth, of which she is the ground and the pillar, considered in connection with its endurance and unfailing vigour; the holy blood which has consecrated, the virtues which have illustrated, the great characters which have advocated it; the darkness it has dissipated, the enmity over

which it has triumphed ; the blessings it has showered upon earth, the number of our race which it has glorified in heaven ;—these and many other views might be taken, which so powerfully tend to maintain in us the conviction that there is in the Church a mighty and constant working of Him “that filleth all and in all,” as to forbid the intrusion of any creature into this hallowed enclosure, except as the most humble instrument in his hands. Yet, even here also, is God often put far from us ; or so many other agents are placed between, that our sense of his immediate operation is either destroyed or greatly enfeebled.

Christianity, it is allowed, is to become the religion of the world ; but then its ultimate prevalence may be easily accounted for, because Christianity is a rational religion, and the world is becoming enlightened by education. Great characters appear at intervals to revive and restore the faded lustre of the truth, and the languishing influence of piety ; but then, as it has been said of Luther, nature planted in him the elements of a vigorous character ; success flattered his first attempts to resist his superiors ; political circumstances favoured the changes which he meditated ; and thus we have the whole philosophy of the reformation ! A Wesley appears : he is naturally “ambitious ;” circumstances give to this mental quality a religious and a beneficial direction ; he has the skill to turn them to account ; and here is the complete rationale of the whole revival of religion in our day, and in these lands ! Missions to the heathen will succeed, because they derive their influence upon barbarous and semi-civilized nations from the superior intellectual power with which they are associated, the arts they communicate, and the connection which they establish, by means of commerce, with nations far in advance as to all the useful and refining institutions of society !

Such are some of the views on these solemn subjects with which men amuse themselves ; but I see nothing in them answering to the import of the text, “In him we live, and move, and have our being ;” or to the declaration, that he “worketh all in all.” On this point, indeed, as on several before mentioned, we allow, that in what is thus urged there is much truth ; but the truth is either distorted, or turned into efficient error by the absence of other truths with which it ought to be connected.

True, Christianity is a rational religion ; but if it is to make its way by the force of that consideration alone, why was it not at first most readily received by the wisest and best-disciplined minds, rather than by the unlettered and superstitious ? True, circumstances have an influence upon the characters and conduct of men ; but the characters and actions of holy, gifted, and devoted men create circumstances which they do not find, and that by the grace of God, “which is mighty in them,” and which works in their hearts and lives that holiness, love, and zeal, by which, under the preparing influence of God, great masses of men are influenced. True, missions to the heathen derive, in many cases, great aid from superior intellectual power in the instruments ; from the knowledge of useful arts which they introduce ; and the connection into which they bring nations in an inferior state of civilization with the more cultivated states of the world ; but then do we need nothing more direct than that Divine arrangement which has associated these circumstances together in the way of

providential government, "to convert a soul from the error of his ways," to turn the Gentiles "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," that they may "obtain remission of their sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified?"

Surely, my brethren, God is not thus "far from us" in reviving, restoring, and diffusing the influence of his religion. For what is that religion? Not "the letter," but "the Spirit;" "a ministration" of the Holy Spirit himself. What are its ministers? They are indeed men; but not men left to be formed or influenced by mere circumstances; they are "called," "separated unto the Gospel of God," and derive their energy as instruments, when it is saving, from Him who has promised to be "with them alway, even to the end of the world," and to use and overrule all circumstances for the accomplishment of their high vocation. If God is not in his Church, where then shall we find him? But he is there by peculiar inhabitation, by special operation: To make this manifest, he descended in the visible tongues of fire on the day of pentecost; to assure us of it, he hath said of Zion, "This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will clothe her priests with salvation, and make her saints joyful in goodness." To show what he has to do in raising up eminent instruments, he met with Saul of Tarsus, on his persecuting errand to Damascus; seized, in the very camp of the enemy, the instrument fitted by natural endowments for his purpose; and bound the energies of that great and ardent mind to his own cause for ever. To show that he is in his Church, he has defended it against united earth and united hell: to convince us that a power above all that is human is there, often when it has been "minished and brought low," and its root has been almost invisible in the earth, it has shot up into growth without human aid; and, in despite of human scorn and neglect, waved its branches in the winds, and again defied the force of all the storms of heaven. To show that he is in his Church, the mighty primitive power of the Gospel, which is characterized as "the power of God unto salvation," remains unabated to this day. It still "pricks men in the heart;" it wounds and it heals; it converts and sanctifies; it raises its shield of determined integrity against all temptations; it quenches earthly desires; it lifts the soul to holy converse with God; it gives a triumph over death, as complete and glorious as when Stephen "fell asleep, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit;" and it effects all these wherever it is preached in simplicity, and in recognition of the immediate co-operation of God with the instrument, and there only. Nor is the scene of its trial, the grand experiment, if we may so call it, confined to one place: it erects the monuments of its saving efficacy on all the shores of earth, and among the various tribes which inhabit them, that all the world may know that "God is with us, and that the shout of a king is among us."

A few practical remarks may close the whole.

1. If God is so "near to all that truly call upon him," be encouraged, then, thou dark and mournful spirit, to seek him until thou find him. Though thou see him not, "feel after him," in desire, in prayer, in the exercises of faith, however feeble. Thou canst not be more desirous to find him in his manifested character as God "forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin," than he longs to reveal himself to thee. Say

with David, "I wait upon God; my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope; I wait for him more than they that wait for the morning;" and thou shalt not be disappointed. "He is near that justifieth;" "his word is for ever settled in heaven,"—"And it shall come to pass, that they shall seek me and find me, when they seek for me with all their heart."

2. Let us all be encouraged by this blessed doctrine to seek a closer and more intimate fellowship with God. May I find him in my closet? Then let me seek him there with all the earnestness of desire. May I find him in his temples? Never may I rest in the shadows and forms of outward services, which, when rightly understood, are but the tracks through which I must fly "to put my trust under the shadow of his wings." May I walk with God? Let me aspire after the high, the hallowing privilege, to see the Invisible; to know how it is that Christ dwelleth in the hearts of believers by faith; how he manifests himself to his disciples, and not unto the world.

Finally, let us confidently trust the whole affairs of his Church with him. From that he is never "far." He has hitherto preserved, and will finally glorify it in the sight of all nations. "Kings shall bring their glory and honour unto it; her walls shall be salvation, and her gates praise." Still nearer may he be felt through all her courts, by all her ministers, in all her ordinances, till she "girds herself every where with strength," and shines forth in perfect truth and holiness, as "the light of the world, the joy of the whole earth."

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### SERMON IX.—*The Miracles of Christ.*

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"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name," John xx, 30, 31.

"SIGNS" are miracles,—a branch of evidence to which our religion appeals as decisive of its truth and divinity

The weight and sufficiency of this evidence may appear from universal acknowledgment. Among all people, in all ages, the force of the argument which flows so immediately from it has been appreciated; for the authors of all false religions have pretended miracles to establish their authority.

Nor does this consideration weaken the argument from miracles in favour of Christianity. There could be no counterfeit coin were there no genuine mintage; and false miracles had never been resorted to, had real miracles never been wrought. False religions appeal to false attestations; the true, to those on which God himself has set the stamp and seal of his own eternal power.

But what is a miracle?

It is not every extraordinary event which occurs in nature, although figuratively and popularly so denominated. There may be extraordinary floods, droughts, earthquakes, atmospherical appearances, meteors,