

deliverance from evil. The last part is an ascription of praise.

Nothing could be more concise, more full, or more appropriate. With respect to the controversy grafted on this specimen of prayer, it becomes those who use forms, and those who do not use them, to feel great tenderness towards each other; since both methods have conveyed, with a Divine fervour, the desires of thousands and thousands of the most eminent saints in almost every age of the church, to the throne of God. It is the spirit of prayer, the internal desire, at which the Almighty looks; and without which, the most correct form, as well as the most fluent extemporaneous address, will be utterly rejected. One sigh from a broken heart, one groan from a burdened sinner, one heartfelt expression in lamentation for sin, is more acceptable to the Almighty than all sacrifices and all gifts.

APRIL 1.

Scripture selected for the day.—Luke, xi. 1—13.

“Our Father, who art in heaven; hallowed be thy name.” By this introduction to the Lord’s prayer, we are taught to approach the Divine throne with the deepest reverence, hallowing that great, that awful name on which we call, a name which all our inward powers ought to adore. Indeed, if solemn worship is ever becoming, it is then most so, when we come into the presence of God, and presume, not to speak concerning him, but to address our words immediately to his Majesty. The meanness of our earthly origin, the depth of our depravity and perfidy, and our utter abjectness and misery, loudly call for this reverence and godly fear. Levity and insincerity are never so detestable as in the act of drawing near to God. Our very words and gesture should be proofs

that we are not offering the sacrifice of fools. Drowsiness and levity under the preaching of the word, however reprehensible, are innocent actions compared with the same behaviour when we profess to be in the act of addressing the Almighty.

But we are here taught to approach God, not only with the most profound awe, but with filial confidence, as our Father. Since man has, by sin, disowned his allegiance and relationship to God, and, like the prodigal, left his Father's presence, he has no claim to the relationship implied by this term, but is an alien, a stranger, and a foreigner. He is not permitted such a familiarity, nor could he enjoy it, without the spirit of adoption, the filial disposition. But to a child of God, how great is the privilege, how sweet the enjoyment, to call Jehovah by the tender and endeared name, *Father!* And this privilege includes every blessing. If God be my Father, the believer may say, then he will be my Joy in sorrow, my Safety in danger, my Friend amidst innumerable enemies, my Strength in weakness, my Hope in darkness, my Life in death. If thou art mine, I possess in thee a treasure, inexhaustible and eternal; a Friend who cleaveth closer than a brother; a Protector who will never abandon me; and a Fountain of life and blessedness which can never fail.

But our Father "is in heaven." It might be asked, Why give the idea of locality respecting a Being whose presence fills immensity? Perhaps this was intended to draw off our minds from earth and all its vanities, and also to show us that, heaven being the place where the Mediator maketh intercession for us, we are to have an eye to him in all our approaches to the Father; and thus we are to pray to the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit,—in all our addresses remembering, that God is one.

APRIL 2.

Scripture selected for the day.—Luke, xvii. 20—30.

“Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The kingdom of God, the Redeemer says, is within you; and, adds the apostle, the effects of its establishment in the heart are, “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”—Romans, xiv. 17. This kingdom was subverted by the fall, when Satan established his power over the soul, and became the prince of this world. The Lord Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, and to set up the kingdom of God once more in the hearts of men. It is this kingdom, for the coming of which we are taught to pray. And by our being directed to pray for its coming, we know that it must come; for, the Almighty never makes that the subject of prayer, which he does not mean to grant. That he is able thus to set it up, we have the most ample evidence. Nor are we to suppose that he will permit Satan to rob him of his glory. No; Satan himself shall be one of the greatest contributors to the Divine glory, though he meant it not so.

If we consider the desirableness of this kingdom, we shall surely pray for its coming. Is it desirable that all men should become wise, just, benevolent, and holy;—that civil and spiritual tyrannies, wars, and superstition, should cease to the ends of the earth;—that peace and righteousness should cover the earth, as the waters fill the channels of the deep;—that all human institutions should partake of the benevolence and wisdom shining in the gospel; and that joy, and purity, and universal happiness, should succeed to tyranny, violence, assassination, robbery, murder, fornication, chicanery, hypocrisy;—to jails, transportation, gibbets, and universal misery here and hereafter?—Then, O then, let us pray that the kingdom of Christ may come.

Do we ask to what extent we are allowed to carry our desires on this subject? Blessed be God, to the very bounds of the universe, and to the very end of time. The church is never to cease her petitions till the Divine will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

APRIL 3.

Scripture selected for the day.—Proverbs, xxx.
1—9.

“Give us this day our daily bread.” Our Lord does not prohibit us from praying for the success of those undertakings which may produce more than daily food; but thus the poorest are encouraged to believe that their bread shall be given, and their water shall be sure. It is possible, also, that our Lord meant by this direction, that in approaching God, our worldly desires should be carefully restrained, so as to resemble the prayer of Agur;—“Feed me with food convenient.” In fixing this boundary to our petitions for sublunary things, our Lord appears to have passed the severest censure on a covetous temper; as he does also in these passages:—“Take no thought for the morrow;—take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

Yet these instructions, though they properly condemn an over anxious concern about the body, do not set aside the apostolic direction,—“Be diligent in business.” The Divine rule indeed is,—He that will not work shall not eat. But we are to aim at the cultivation of a spiritual mind while our hands are busy in secular affairs, and to cherish the desire to serve God by our diligence in business, considering

all we have as his. With what Providence bestows, we are bound to satisfy all obligations; for he who labours only for his family, if his family really need all the produce of his labour, as really serves God herein, as he who devotes much to benevolent purposes. That we are not our own, and in consequence that our riches are not our own, appears clearly to be a scripture truth; the only difficulty lies in deciding how much is due to our families, as no express law could be framed for the regulation of these things. A person concerned about his duty herein will, no doubt, pray for a proper disposition, and will read the word for directions. Passages like these will assist him;—"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." "The liberal man deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand." "There is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty." "Owe no man any thing." "If any man provide not for his own, and especially for his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

O that I may live in a state of humble dependence, knowing that even my daily bread comes from the Almighty; and, after a proper supply of all my wants, and a prudent care to satisfy every obligation, may I with all I have be the Lord's. How pleasant to have the privilege of thus living to Him, of consecrating and making sacred those labours which would otherwise form the degraded marks of my fall, and that property which might otherwise become my bane, if not my ruin! How delightful, that I can thus present to my Creator and Redeemer, not merely a flower, but all I have as a perpetual thank-offering!

APRIL 4.

Scripture selected for the day.—Ezra, ix. 5—15.

"Forgive us our trespasses." The advantages of living under the moral law, or under a penetrating

sense of its spirituality and extent, while we cultivate an evangelical temper, are truly great, as hereby the mind is kept habitually humble; gratitude to Christ is nourished, and the soul kept thoroughly awake to its danger, and need of sanctifying grace. Where the obligations of the law are not felt, there is great danger that the person will become unwatchful, and his conscience be seared, or that he will be pleasing himself with an imaginary perfection, like the professor who declared that he had felt no need of application to the blood of atonement for several years! Where a deep sense of imperfection is kept up in the mind, there will be felt the daily need of the Lord's prayer, and especially of this part of it,—“Forgive us our sins.” He who has nothing to confess, must either be very blind, or very unwatchful. He who is content with a perfection which extends not to the inner man, when “weighed in the balances, will be found wanting:” his righteousness exceeds not the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees. But he who daily aims at a full conformity, in temper and conduct, to the Saviour, and yet walks humbly with God under a consciousness of manifold imperfections, will find a peace which passeth all understanding, arising from his daily recurrence to “the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel;” while the Holy Spirit will witness with his spirit that he is born of God.

But our Lord teaches us that our forgiveness is absolutely suspended upon the forgiveness of others; —“Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.” “But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” There is no merit in the sight of God in our forgiving others; but so detestable in his sight, and so opposite to the Divine nature, is an implacable temper, that he has made the renunciation of it an absolute condition of our pardon, as well as an essential mark of our being his children.

APRIL 5.

Scripture selected for the day.—Job, ii.

“Lead us not into temptation.”—The Apostle James thus instructs us;—“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted of evil; neither tempteth he any man.” Our Lord means then;—‘Lead us not, as the God of providence, into those circumstances which may become temptations to evil.’ Hence this petition should be used by the young;—‘O Lord, lead me not into such company as may draw me into sin. Lead me not to form such acquaintance and such connexions as may become a fatal snare to my soul.’ The man of business may adopt it, and say, ‘O Lord, lead me not to embark in such engagements as may rob me of the time necessary to my own spiritual interests, as may too much absorb my thoughts, fill me with cares, and draw away my affections from things infinitely more important, till at last I “fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.”’ The rich may adopt it, exposed as they are to plunge into unnecessary expenses, and ruinous pleasures;—‘O Lord, lead me not into situations where I may be led to indulge the lust of the eye and the pride of life.’ The poor may adopt this petition, and say;—‘O Lord, prevent me by thy providence from being placed in circumstances where I may be tempted to falsehood or to fraud.’ Each one may adopt this petition in reference to those circumstances which make him an easy prey to temptation, and to that “sin which doth so easily beset him.” The importance of this petition, therefore, is manifest; for he who would avoid sin, must avoid all occasions and opportunities of indulging it.

We are, in this petition, no doubt, permitted to pray against all natural evils: but our attention is

more particularly directed to moral evil, the greatest of all miseries, since hereby God is offended, guilt is incurred, our bodies are injured, and our souls ruined: these are the natural and inevitable consequences of moral evil. He who knows the worth of these petitions, will add watchfulness to prayer, and by Divine help, will keep himself so that the wicked one may not touch him.

APRIL 6.

Scripture selected for the day.—Mark, xi. 1—11.

“Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen.”—By these expressions we are to understand, that in all our petitions we should seek that God may be glorified in whatever he bestows, whether positive blessings or preservation from evil. This agrees with the words of the apostle;—“No man liveth to himself.” Every blessing has not only its source in God, but is to terminate upon him: if we were to paraphrase the words, this would be their purport;—‘O Lord, as thine is the kingdom, may I become a subject of this kingdom. May all its principles of righteousness, peace, and joy, be established within me. Thine is the power to feed me with food convenient, to forgive my sins, to bestow upon me a forgiving disposition, and to preserve me from circumstances of danger as well as from all evil. And by my daily subsistence, by the forgiveness of my sins, by the purification of my disposition, and by my deliverance from all evil, thou shalt be glorified. Thine is the power to secure the coming of thy kingdom, so that thy will shall be done on earth as it is done in heaven. And the glory of this grand consummation, of this final and everlasting triumph of righteousness and mercy over moral evil, shall be thine for ever and ever. Amen.’

Ascriptions of praise to the Almighty not only express our confidence in his ability and gracious intentions, but form a very becoming part of our devotions, as they elevate and purify the mind, and tend to prepare it for those nearer approaches to him, when all our petitions shall be turned into admiration and praise.—The Amen at the close of this prayer teaches us that we should, even in closing our petitions, be expecting the answer;—So be it.

O Lord, grant me a devotional spirit; a desire to draw near to thee, liberty to address thee, confidence in thy mercy, and that hunger and thirst after righteousness which will make me fervent in spirit, and exceedingly anxious to obtain those blessings which I profess to seek.

APRIL 7.

Scripture selected for the day.—Matthew, vii. 7—29.

The Evangelist Luke (chapter xi. and xvii.) has recorded two parables, encouraging us to a holy importunity in prayer, by which the Divine Being is honoured, and true religion in the mind greatly promoted.

In the eleventh chapter of this Evangelist, the Lord Jesus notices the Divine goodness as affording the highest encouragement to prayer. His argument is this;—Though in men there may often be a want of tender sympathy, yet if a son ask bread, his father will not give him a stone; or if he ask a fish, he will not give him a serpent. If men thus listen to the cries of their offspring, how much more will he, who is essential goodness, give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him! The Father, then, “waiteth to be gracious.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ ever liveth to make intercession. He appears before the throne for us, not with the blood of others, but is himself the Sacrifice

for our sins ; and therefore he is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him.

The Holy Spirit is ready to help our infirmities, to impart unto us the spirit of prayer, to enable us to plead by faith, and with importunity : therefore, though we know not what to pray for as we ought, "the Spirit itself manageth affairs for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

There are in the scriptures many great and precious promises that God will surely hear our prayers ; promises of assistance ; that Christ will not cast us out, and that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved.

Lastly, we have very wonderful accounts of the success of prayer. Abraham prayed, and God healed Abimelech. Moses prayed, and the fire in the camp was quenched. He again prayed, and the fiery serpents were removed. Job prayed for his friends, and God turned his captivity. Elijah prayed, and it rained not for three years and six months. He prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth became fruitful. He again prayed, and the widow's son was restored to life. Elisha prayed, and the young man saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about the prophet. Hannah prayed, and she obtained Samuel. Hezekiah prayed, and the Lord added to his life fifteen years. Jonah prayed out of the depths of the sea, and was delivered. Paul and Silas prayed, and there was a great earthquake, and the jailor and his family were converted. What encouragement then have I to pray ! "I will call on the name of the Lord as long as I live."

APRIL 8.

Scripture selected for the day.—John, xvi. 23—33.

What is called the gift of prayer is too often nothing more than facility of speech. No wonder,

therefore, that we have not always the blessings mentioned in our petitions, for we really ask not.

Prayer, to be successful, must contain only those requests which are agreeable to the will of God. Paul comforts the Romans, by holding up to their hopes the assistance of the Spirit, who would excite within them desires "according to the will of God." Further; prayer, to be successful, must be the real desires of the mind; in reference to which, the apostle says,—“I will pray with the spirit.” And the promise is, “I will pour upon the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of prayer and supplication.” Lastly; to be successful, prayer must be offered through the merits and intercessions of Christ:—“Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.”

Such prayer must, in the way and time by which the Almighty will be most honoured, be successful. This will be evident, if we weigh the following passages:—“Ask, and ye shall receive. Every one that asketh receiveth. Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”

Now these are the words of Jehovah; and, if the Divine order be preserved in the mind of the petitioner, what should hinder the success of prayer? Prayer thus offered must prevail.

The reason why there is so little of the appearance of answers to prayers, is, that so small a part of that which is called prayer, is really such. Fervency, as well as perseverance, and union in prayer, God is pleased to honour. “The fervent inwrought prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Importunity in prayer is strongly recommended in the parable of the unjust judge; and union in prayer in these words of our Lord Jesus Christ;—“If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall

ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Dependent as I am, and needing spiritual aid continually, how thankful ought I to be, that I may certainly receive this aid! "Ask, and it shall be given you."

APRIL 9.

Scripture selected for the day—John, xiii. 21—38.

Christ inculcates here what he calls "a new commandment;" perhaps he means new as from himself; for, the meaning of the second table of the law was, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." But, looking at the state of the world, it might be concluded, that mankind had never heard that it was their duty to love one another. In a world full of selfishness, falsehood, fraud, litigations, quarrels, murders, who would have thought that the supreme law under which these creatures are placed, is, that they should love one another? And, notwithstanding the most awful proofs, that all the miseries of the human race arise out of the want of this affection, and the demonstration that all these evils would be removed by the universal operation of this simple principle, mankind are still nearly as far from the point as ever.

But perhaps our Lord means, that this command was particularly binding on those who were not merely called Christians, but who sincerely aimed to be such. Surely *they* should love one another, since they make the same God their Portion, the same Christ their Saviour, the same Holy Spirit their Comforter, the same Bible their rule, the same objects their common aim, and the same heaven their home. But even here, where the law of love is the

rule of the house, what variety of names, of opinions, and of modes,—what frequent wranglings,—how little of that oneness of heart which their Lord and Master so strictly enjoined!

It is indeed most lamentable, that they so imperfectly cultivate a right spirit, and are so far from being thoroughly grounded in love. Their differences of opinion have sadly divided them, and their desires of pre-eminence, as well as their making opinions and not piety the ground of union, have produced the same grievous effects.

If we did but fully enter into the assurance of Christ, that all men would know we were his disciples did we love one another, surely we should more cordially aim at the accomplishment of so vast a result; for he did not mean, it is presumed, that the world would be able to decide whether men were nominally Christians or not, but that this sight would produce a powerful effect in winning the hearts of men, and constraining them to embrace the gospel.

Grant, O Lord, that I may aim more and more to love thine image wherever I see it; to own it there, and feel from my very heart something of that affection which I owe to every atom of the body of Christ.

APRIL 10.

Scripture selected for the day.—John xiv. 1—15.

Professing Christians have adopted many unpre-scribed ways of expressing their attachment to religion, and, as they suppose, to its Divine Author. We might expatiate here on the crusades, on anti-christian ceremonies, and on mutual persecutions. Aware that men would choose to show their respect to the Author of the gospel in these carnal ways, Christ gave them this test of their attachment. And who knows not, that every master measures the attachment of his servant, every husband that of his

wife, every father that of his son, and every sovereign that of his subjects, by the same rule; and that where this rule is not followed, no other is allowed?

Our obligations to obedience are founded on the relation in which we stand to God; on the immutability and excellency of his nature and of his law,—and on the dependent nature of our condition. Jesus Christ enforces obedience upon the ground of affection:—You say you love me:—Ah! Lord, who can avoid loving thee? Who that has heard of the infinite dignity of thy person, of thine inconceivable condescension, of thine unparalleled sufferings to save from destruction thine enemies, of the spotless nature of thy life, of the wonders of mercy wrought during thy ministry, of thy matchless discourses, of thy bitter death, thy glorious resurrection and ascension, and of thy concern that every creature should hear the news of deliverance from hell; who that has heard all this, can help loving thee? If we love not Thee, may our tongue cleave to the roof of our mouth. If we love not Thee more than houses, or lands, or relations, or life itself, we deserve to be *anathema maranatha*. Did the poor Irishman whom Dr. Doddridge attempted to save from an ignominious death, say, “O Sir, every drop of my blood thanks you, for you have had mercy on every drop of it. I am your servant as long as I live, and from the farthest extremity of the island will I come every year to thank you?” Surely, fellow-christians, these should be our feelings towards the Redeemer; and to his injunction,—“If ye love me, keep my commandments,” our hearts should respond, Lord, thy commands will we keep.

APRIL 11.

Scripture selected for the day.—John xiv. 16—31.

Nothing could exceed the tenderness manifested by our Lord to his disciples, when about to leave them. Had he been merely man, he would have been

so occupied with the prospect of the glories which awaited him, that he would have been in danger of forgetting the few poor fishermen he was going to leave below, especially when he considered how little, apparently, was to be expected from them as it respected the extension of his kingdom. But with the tenderest sympathy, he says,—“I will not leave you orphans. I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.”

The Holy Spirit is here called “the Comforter:” this is one of the offices which he sustains in the economy of salvation. As our earthly comforts are realized through the senses, so the Holy Spirit comforts the disciples of Christ by the application of Divine truth to the mind, and in this sense he is called “the Spirit of Truth.” The promises without such an agent would be inefficient, but by his operations on the mind, preparing it for their reception, they become “great and precious promises,” capable of affording “strong consolation.” Sin often lies upon the awakened mind as a burden too heavy to be borne; but the depressed sinner is led by the Spirit of Christ to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. When the believer is full of doubts and anxieties respecting the safety of his state, then the Spirit is to him “the Spirit of Truth,” and “the Spirit of Adoption.” When he is mourning under a sense of spiritual death and prevailing corruptions, he is then to him “the Spirit of Life,” “the Sanctifier.” When he is full of fears about futurity, and especially about death and eternity, then he is “the Spirit of Promise, by whom he is sealed to the day of redemption.” In times of difficulty and perplexity, he is “the Spirit of Wisdom.” When he becomes cold and lukewarm, the Comforter becomes a “quickening Spirit,” and “the Spirit of grace and supplication.” And when the believer passes through the dark valley and shadow of death, then he rests on him as “the Comforter,” “the Spirit of glory.”

What ample provision the Almighty has made for the comfort and safety of his people in this the earthly house of their pilgrimage! Well might the Lord Jesus offer this Spirit as a substitute for his bodily presence. O Lord, when all earthly comforts shall be withdrawn, then may I enjoy the presence of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.

APRIL 12.

Scripture selected for the day.—John, xv. 1—19.

The great difference between real Christians and the rest of mankind lies here: the joys and sorrows, the hopes and fears, the cares and exertions, of the Christian are most intensely occupied upon the concerns of a future state, while the attention of others is confined to the affairs of the present world.

The grand object of a Christian, is, that he “may win Christ, and be found in him.” He is, like others, affected by present objects, and he has cares and painful exercises respecting his worldly concerns; but it is when he fears for his eternal safety that he is cut to the quick. He is diligent in business; but it is his salvation at which he works with fear and trembling. In this respect, therefore, he is not of this world.

The conversation of men in general is earthly, often sensual, and sometimes devilish; but an exemplary Christian “walks with God.” Not that he speaks only of religion, but as this is a vast subject, affording matter for the most interesting and improving converse, the more frequently he meets with persons whose conversation is at once enlightened and spiritual, his happiness is increased, while they who are “of the world, speak of the world, and the world heareth them.” In his conversation, then, he is not of the world.

He does not choose his friends among the men of the world, but he is a companion of all them that fear God. He knows that friendship with the world will alienate his mind from his Saviour; and besides, his predilections lie the other way: he considers "the righteous as more excellent than his neighbour," and he feels exactly as David did,—“My goodness extendeth not to thee, but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent in whom is all my delight.”

His sorrows are not the sorrows of the world: they refer to spiritual and eternal concerns. Hence he often applies to his circumstances, as a sojourner, and a soldier, such words as these,—“O wretched man that I am!”—“O that it were with me as in months past!”—“They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.”

“How can I bear the piercing thought,
What if my name should be left out,
When thou for them shalt call.”—

His joys are not derived from present things. He does not wander from creature to creature, from amusement to amusement, from object to object, saying,—“Who will show me any good?” His “life is hid with Christ in God;” he has meat to eat which others know not of.” He says with the highest sincerity,—

“There’s nothing here deserves my joys;
There’s nothing like my God.”

APRIL 13.

Scripture selected for the day.—Matthew, xxiv.
29—44.

What an awful sight to a serious person is a world lying in wickedness! If mankind were in their right

mind, we should every where see villages, towns, cities, and kingdoms, making proclamations like that of the king and nobles of Nineveh:—"Let us be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God; yea, let us turn every one from his evil way. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" That the wrath of God is gone out against every man, as a sinner, would have been plain enough, even if the whole system of redemption had not been built upon this hypothesis. If it be not so, why are we constantly dissatisfied with our lot,—why are we pursuing happiness, ("seeking rest, and finding none,") while every place, and every thing, disavow having ever seen the fugitive? Why guilt in the conscience? Why disease in the body? Why disorder and misery in the family? Why death? In such circumstances, what more suitable than the exhortation from our Lord, to be prepared for his coming, not as a Saviour, but as a Judge? It is truly painful to see how many devices men have invented to hide this danger from them, as though the thunderbolt would be disarmed by shutting the doors and windows. In our infancy the whole system of our education and amusements, in youth a thousand pleasures, in riper years tormenting cares, and at all ages a deceived heart, all combine to blind us, and to hide from us the threatening ruin. Should a minister visit a person in his last sickness, it is not unlikely but some one will say, "Don't say any thing that may make my relative unhappy;" and after death nothing is more common than for the survivors to express their hopes that so good a man must have gone to heaven, though there was every appearance that he lived without God, and died without repentance.

By the uncertainty attending the time of death and judgment, our Lord here exhorts us to watch;—"Be ye also ready; for, in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh." In times of uncertainty respecting temporal affairs, what is the conduct of

men? The merchant insures against the dangers of the seas; the householder against fire; and the poor man, in Provident Societies, seeks provision against the hour of sickness. O that men were equally wise for eternity, "that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!"

It is our duty, then, to be ready for the coming of Christ. For this purpose, we must be reconciled to God by an influential faith in the death of his Son, and we must possess a renewed heart, capacitating us to enjoy a state of endless purity and perfection in holiness. This constitutes that preparation for death and future happiness which the sacred scriptures declare to be indispensable. Mark, xvi. 16. Hebrews, xii. 14.

APRIL 14.

Scripture selected for the day.—Luke, xix. 12—27.

In the Gospel by the Evangelist Matthew, we have the account of a man, who, when required by his father to go into his vineyard, said,—“I go, Sir, but went not.” This man professed to approve of his father’s command, and promised obedience, but he obeyed not. Thus it is with many; they speak well of religion, they promise to attend to it, but obey not. To such, will it not be said,—“Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant?” Others excuse their negligence in religion on the pretext that such future rewards as it promises are uncertain; these, also, will stand self-condemned; for, in every other case, persons who doubt on points in which they may be deeply interested, labour incessantly till their doubts be removed; even possible good excites them to the highest exertions,

But to all merely nominal christians these words

are full of alarm. We believe that there is a God. Now this belief binds us to love, serve, and trust in, the Almighty; but, if we live as though there were no God, in the day of judgment our own confessions will condemn us. We acknowledge that we are sinners. But, being so, do we repent of sin; do we seek the pardon of it, and grace to overcome it? If not, Christ will say,—“Out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee.” We further admit that the salvation of the soul is that concern to which, above all others, we ought to attend; but does our conduct agree with this confession? Are we working out our salvation with fear and trembling? Do we call on the name of the Lord, read the word, and hear the gospel, like men who think they have a soul to be saved or lost? We also acknowledge that Christ is the only Saviour, and that he is willing and able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Are we then acting up to our professed belief, by coming in prayer to Christ, and saying,—“Lord, save, or we perish?” If, instead of this, we are neglecting this great salvation, by our own professions we shall be condemned. We know that life is short, and that all we can realize on earth is sheer vanity. But do we act up to our knowledge? On the contrary, are we not eagerly grasping after these shadows, following lying vanities, and neglecting all preparation for death? Then let us know, that, by thus sinning against the plainest demonstrations, and the most self-evident facts, we shall be self-condemned. “Out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee, thou wicked servant.” “That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.” Romans, iii. 19.—“And he was speechless.” Matthew, xxii. 12. How camest thou among my friends, without a disposition to honour me? Perhaps this is the meaning of our Lord in this last passage. But we profess to believe that “after death cometh the judgment.” With the belief of this awful truth, how can we live such an indolent and careless life? Even

the Earl of Rochester, in his most licentious moments, would say, if he thought the christian religion true, he would follow it with all his might.

APRIL 15.

Scripture selected for the day.—Luke, xiii. 18—30.

Scripture expressions and terms are become so familiar to us, that we cease to feel their force. Even the word “salvation,” though connected with whatever can cheer the hopes of man, is repeated by the multitude as a term of which they know nothing more than that it belongs to some part of our religion. If we did but realize our true circumstances as transgressors, and could, at the same time, form any just conception of the dreadful nature of infinite power inflamed to unquenchable wrath, surely, we should be ready to ask, not only, “Lord, are there few that are saved?” but, Lord, shall I be found among the saved?

Jesus does not give a direct answer to this inquirer; who was, probably, urged by mere curiosity. Yet his language is calculated to excite great anxiety as well as great exertion;—“Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” There are few who seek, yet many, even of these, will come short of salvation, from their want of sufficient fervour or perseverance. In another place, he says;—“Many are called, but few chosen.” In a description of the last judgment, found in the Book of the Revelation, it is said,—“All nations shall wail because of Him.”

Of the present race of men, very few care any thing about salvation; and among those who profess to feel a serious concern on this subject, how small a number are in real earnest! In families, those who are really concerned at heart about their salvation, make a small minority. In some villages scarcely a

serious professor of religion will be found! And even in places set apart for religious services, how few seem to hear as for eternity!

The causes of this general indifference are not to be sought for in the Divine decrees, nor in the difficulty of religious duties, nor in the forbidding nature of religion itself; but in men's aversion to religion, in their excessive attachment to the world, and in their false notions, as though a little heathenism would do quite as well as the power of godliness.

In what state then am I? Am I a penitent believing sinner, and am I aiming to keep a conscience void of offence toward God and man? O Lord, save me from every deception, however near the truth, and let me not be disappointed in a matter so infinitely momentous.

APRIL 16.

Scripture selected for the day.—John, xv. 16.

A great work is performed, and an unspeakable benefit conferred, when the Holy Spirit has stripped a man of "all confidence in the flesh," and brought him to rest wholly on the merits and guidance of Christ. The apostle Paul, than whom at one time no man possessed a greater degree of self-confidence, was so convinced, by Divine teaching, of his spiritual weakness, that he says,—“We know not what we should pray for as we ought.” But, instead of being discouraged by this view of his weakness, he adds,—“I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.”

The doctrine which our Lord teaches us, when he says,—“Without me ye can do nothing,” is, not only that his death is the sole procuring cause of salvation; but that the blessings of this salvation are never applied to the heart but by his efficient agency. There

can be no real prayer without a previous sense of want, and without what is called "the spirit of prayer." Now our Saviour bestows both these, or we should never call on his name. We are not able to repent; but Christ is exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, "*to give repentance.*" Faith is his gift; and all good thoughts, and good works, are impossible to us but as he renews within us "a right spirit." We are called upon to "fight the good fight of faith;" but we can be strong only in the Lord, and in "the power of his might." We are to be "faithful unto death;" but our power of perseverance we must derive from him;—"Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Some persons would say, This is cutting the very sinews of all exertion. To tell men they can do nothing, is it not the same thing as to tell them to stand still? Perhaps not. Paul did not think so, when he said,—"*It is God that worketh in you, to will, and to do, of his good pleasure:*" therefore, "*work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*" When a man, knowing he cannot *walk* to London, avails himself of the mail-coach, is his journey hindered? When a child cannot walk without the help of its nurse, does it become weaker when the nurse takes it by the hand?

This doctrine, well understood, is the very secret of our safety. Hence the apostle had committed himself into the hands of Christ, to be kept, to be made fruitful, to be comforted, to be strengthened, and to be saved in him with an everlasting salvation. It is the person who *thinketh* he standeth, that needs the admonition to "*take heed lest he fall;*" and it is only when we are sensibly weak that we are strong. How deplorable the case of those who reject the Redeemer; without him they can do nothing, and yet they reject him!

APRIL 17.

Scripture selected for the day.—Luke, xix. 28—48.

This is a most affecting scene! Christ, as he approaches Jerusalem, begins to weep and lament over it;—"If thou hadst known,—even thou,—at least, in this thy day,—(now I am come to thee,)—the things that belong to thy peace!—But now they are hid from thine eyes." In that moment he saw that extremity of crime which the Jews would commit, and that extremity of woe which was coming upon them.

These three things, perhaps, most oppressed the heart of the Saviour, and forced the tears from his eyes:—

1. The state of religion among the Jews. It would be present to the mind of Christ, that this city once enclosed a David, a Solomon, a Nehemiah, an Isaiah, a Daniel, and numbers of persons still dear to Christ, and to all Israelites indeed; that hither the tribes repaired, "to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." But now all was hollow service, and base hypocrisy; the sanctuary, a den of thieves; the worshippers, deep hypocrites, painted sepulchres. A people crying,—“The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are we!”—while they were avaricious, proud, cruel, and thorough men of the world. Such a sight might well make the Saviour weep.

2. But Christ knew that the iniquity of the Jews, like that of the Canaanites before them, would soon be full; that his murderers were already thirsting for his blood. Christ heard, as it were, while thus weeping over the city, the chief priests, and others, instigating the people to demand his blood;—"Crucify him! Crucify him! His blood be on us, and on our children!"

3. He saw the dreadful judgments hastening to be executed on this venerable city, respecting which

David had said,—“Do good, in thy good pleasure, to Zion; build thou the walls of Jerusalem. If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem to my chief joy.” He saw the gathering storm, the famine, the pestilence, the butcheries in the besieged city,—the mother eating her own child,—the Roman army sparing neither age nor sex,—the temple on fire,—its foundations ploughed up,—and the whole city laid in heaps. He saw the children of Abraham, “the friend of God,” led into captivity, dispersed throughout the world, despised, detested, and oppressed, a bye-word and a proverb to all the nations of the earth.

Thus, he who wept at the grave of Lazarus, now weeps over that city which had been the joy of the whole earth.

APRIL 18.

Scripture selected for the day.—John, iv. 26—38.

What the human mind, left to its own powers, can do in religion, has been fairly tried. The Almighty permitted the greatest minds to unite their powers, and carry on their researches, for centuries. The result was, when Paul visited Athens, that he found the city full of idols worshipped by the rabble, and one pillar dedicated, by the philosophers, as a confession of the result of all their speculations, that, respecting the Divine nature, they knew nothing;—“To the unknown God.” Such was the darkness at Athens. And thus it is every where, except where Jesus Christ has revealed his word. All those subjects about which the human mind must necessarily be most anxious, are covered with inscrutable uncertainty. These subjects relate to the Divine nature,

to ourselves, and to a future state. Is God an Object of worship? Upon this question depends the whole of religion. The Hindoo sages say,—“The one Brumhu is not an object of worship; and therefore not one temple is found consecrated to him in the whole of Hindoosthan; not even a pillar to the unknown God. But Christians know that He is a Spirit, and that the homage we pay to him must be that of our spirits, and must be offered in sincerity and truth. Does the Almighty hear prayer? The Hindoo shastrus declare, that the one God does not meddle with human affairs. But Christ has taught us, that, “if we ask according to his will, he heareth us.” Is there any such attribute as mercy in the Divine Being? Without the hope of this, men could not venture to approach him. The Divine word teaches us, that, in order to dispense mercy, he has erected a throne of grace, to which he graciously invites us, that we may “obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” What am I? An atom, tossed on the tempest, or carried forward by inevitable fate? Or am I an accountable being? What well-regulated thoughtful mind can be at peace, while such a question as this remains undecided? Yet it is decided no where but in the scriptures of our Lord Jesus Christ; there, we learn, that “we shall all give account of ourselves to God.” In what condition do I stand towards God? Am I an object of his favour, or of his displeasure? Do my actions please, or do they offend him? This is another question which enters most deeply into our happiness. But we should have known nothing correctly respecting the nature of human actions without the Divine law and gospel. In these we have the bounds of duty clearly assigned, and the nature and effects of sin and holiness fully opened to us. Is there an after-state? Socrates was almost the only man among the ancients of whom I should have been anxious to inquire on this subject; and he could come to no satisfactory decision. But Christ has brought immortality to light; he is himself the

Resurrection and the Life ; he raised the dead, and then, in his own person, conquered death, triumphed over the grave, and showed our feet the way to the regions of eternal light and blessedness.

This poor woman then had a correct idea of what was to be expected from the Messiah ;—" When he is come, he will tell us all things." But, if Christ has thus opened to us the whole mystery of our present and future existence, have I been benefited by his instructions ? Am I made wise to salvation ? Do the truths which he taught, and which enter most deeply into my most vital interests, properly touch and affect my heart and life ? If I am not influenced by what he has revealed, then to me he came in vain ; all his words make a deep impression on the humble heart, and they become a " light to the feet, and a lamp to the path."

APRIL 19.

Scripture selected for the day.—Luke, xvii. 1—13.

Some Hindoo philosophers have taught, that the one God was without attributes, or qualities, simple spirit, of whom nothing could be known, and therefore nothing affirmed. Others, that this God sometimes united himself to energy, matter, or delusion, and thence arose created beings. A few have admitted the idea, that he was essentially possessed of attributes. But all of them left the world in the hands of the gods, whose counterparts must be sought among the most profligate, the most debauched, capricious, cruel, and unprincipled of men. These discoveries then left the people in a state far worse than the darkness and uncertainty of pure savage life. The knowledge which many nominal Christians have of God, it is to be lamented, is so imperfect, or so mixed with error, that it either does not influence

them at all, or avails nothing to their salvation. Nor can men know the Almighty aright till they are excited to seek an interest in his mercy through the Redeemer; then he is no longer the unknown God, but they "taste that he is gracious." The knowledge of God, common to nominal christians, is like that of the crowd respecting Howard: they thought he must be a very good man; but the knowledge of God, possessed by a true christian, is similar to that knowledge of Howard which prisoners actually relieved and comforted by him possessed.

Now such a knowledge of God as this leaves upon the mind the most salutary influence: all the perfections of the Divine nature become a source of happiness and spiritual good. Under the shadow of these perfections a good man dwells; or, rather, "he makes the Most High his habitation." In the same manner, his knowledge of the mercy of God, and of Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent, encourages him to exercise an humble confidence, and to draw near to him as his heavenly Father, and thus opens to him all the treasures of grace and glory. In one word, the knowledge of God, as the source of mercy, and the knowledge of Christ, as the way of receiving it,—this is life eternal.

What, if amidst the endless disappointments of life, I had no God as my everlasting Portion,—if, under the deepest consciousness of my own ignorance, I had no Divine Teacher,—if, stung with a sense of guilt, there were no such words as these in the Bible;—"The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin;"—if, in the anticipations of death, or in the dark valley itself, I had no hope in Christ, and in those gloomy shades no voice of pardoning mercy were heard,—how unutterably miserable must be my condition!

Let us then seek this knowledge, in the word, in the means of religious instruction, in our closets, and through the teachings of the Holy Spirit. Let us give it to our children and servants, promote it by

setting up family religion, and by every other means in our power. And, while we adore the Redeemer for bringing to light this eternal life, let us think of the heathen perishing for the want of it.

APRIL 20.

Scripture selected for the day. Romans, xii. 6—21.

“Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”—
On reading these words, some persons, many, I fear, are ready to say, ‘I hope Jesus Christ was not really in earnest: what a miserable life!’ Nothing so tedious, so insipid, as prayer. And yet these persons are found wearing the christian name! Well might Dr. Young thus address them:—

“Ye baptized infidels, worse for mending, washed to fouler stains.”

Prayer holds a chief place in the religion of Christ; and hence he has, in the plainest manner, shown us, to whom, through whom, and by whom, we are to pray. The one God, even the Father, is the Being to whom our prayers are to be addressed. Christ is the Mediator, and therefore we are to pray in his name. And the Holy Spirit is given to help our infirmities, since we know not what to pray for as we ought.

But what is real prayer? The desires of the mind, when excited to seek the good contained in the promise, form real prayer.

To be found in this exercise is our constant duty; for, 1. We are always in want. A Christian can never say, respecting Divine supplies,—“I have much goods laid up for many years.” His heavenly Father keeps him always dependent, as the only state suited to his imperfect character. 2. He is always exposed to temptation; and, therefore, every hour he needs Divine succours, which the Almighty gives to those

who seek him. 3. He is always frail; and therefore constant confession and application for pardon are necessary. 4. He always needs the help of the Saviour; and therefore that he should be found looking up to him for strength according to his day, is obvious and undeniable. 5. But he is called to be ever ready for the coming of his Lord; and therefore he ought to be instant in prayer, that, when it shall be said, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him," he may be found watching.

It is admitted, that our Lord does not mean that all our time should be spent in prayer; but he does mean that we should always possess the spirit of prayer, or be always in a frame in which prayer shall be welcome: and this, indeed, is the best preservative against sin, and the best preparation for duty. But we ought to pray in all conditions. Are we backsliders? We are to take with us "words, and say unto the Lord, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." Are we in deep distress? Prayer is our best resource:—"Call upon me in the time of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

Let us remember the encouragement we have to "continue instant in prayer." Our heavenly Father is ready to hear; Christ ever lives to intercede; the Spirit helps our infirmities; we may rest assured, that praying breath was never spent in vain.

But if prayer be thus necessary, how blamable are most for their remissness in this duty; and how awful is their case who never pray! No prayer, no grace; and if no grace, no glory.

APRIL 21.

Scripture selected for the day.—Mark, xvi. 1—20.

The state of men before conversion is thus described by the apostle to the Ephesians;—"Remember

that at that time ye were without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world."

What are we to do in these circumstances? To believe; to believe in Christ. Much stress is laid on faith, in the New Testament; indeed, upon the possession of faith depends our all: faith and salvation, the want of faith and destruction, are inseparable.

Faith is credence in a report made. It is the nature of the tidings believed, connected with that credence, which produces saving effects on the heart and character. A man can scarcely believe what the scripture says of sin and its consequences, of judgment, and the everlasting punishment of the wicked, without being deeply affected. The news of liberty makes little impression on the mind of him who is already free; but let it be published to a captive, and he will leap for joy. The declaration, that Christ gives pardon to the condemned, liberty to the captives, rest to the weary, and life to the dead, must produce a powerful effect on the believer, and tend to draw him to the heart of Christ for a share in these blessings. The news of the gospel then, it is plain, has reference to a prior state of danger, or want, or misery; and, as holding forth mercy to the criminal, deliverance to the captives, and salvation to the lost, it is called *good news*. This report, that there is mercy for all the guilty who will truly seek it, is to be believed. He who feels himself guilty, and believes the report, will necessarily come and put in his claim for the blessing; and in proportion to the reality and strength of his faith, he will be the subject of peace, joy, and gratitude. Although christian faith be not a believing that I am interested in Christ, but has a simple reference to a report or invitation, yet there are certain operations of faith described in scripture, which show, that it is the most active principle that can possess the mind: hence earnestly looking and fleeing to a refuge, and committing a trust to another, are alluded to in scripture as illustrative of the operations of faith.

The person on whom we are to believe, is, Christ. That upon which the christian depends, is, the righteousness, the death, the intercession, of Christ. This is solid rock, a sure foundation. We cannot be lost; we must and shall be saved, if here our hopes are built. But if when the news of salvation is proclaimed, we find no interest in it, if we prefer our farm, our merchandize, or our worldly connexions, to the blessings it contains, we shall be found among unbelievers, and shall perish.

Baptism is here placed by the side of faith, as though it were also essential to salvation; but, as baptism is that duty by which a person assumes the christian profession, I apprehend the apostle placed it here as the pledge of our whole obedience: and if this idea be correct, it will then be,—He that believes and obeys shall be saved,—an explanation which makes the passage harmonize with the whole body of christian truth.

APRIL 22.

Scripture selected for the day.—Isaiah, iv.

It is a part of our certain lot on earth to be disappointed, and not unfrequently too where our hopes have been the highest. How often is the fond mother called to give up the delight of her eyes, after enjoying its smiles only a few months! How often are the tenderest ties dissolved in a few hours, and the survivor left like a broken fragment saved from the wreck of all his joys; while others are cut off in a moment, when in full pursuit, and aiming to take a firm grasp of some earthly prize:—

“ Full against wind and tide some win their way;
And when strong effort has deserv'd the port,
And tugg'd it into view,—'tis won! 'tis lost! —
What pain to quit the world just made their own,
Their nest so deeply down'd, and built so high!
Too low they build, who build beneath the stars.”

The heathen thought the gods took a malicious pleasure in blasting human hopes ; and nominal christians are often heard lamenting the caprice of fortune. But, blessed be God, there is no uncertainty relative to the acquisition of an infinite good, or the retention of it when acquired :—"Ask, and ye shall receive." And the true christian knows how to reconcile himself to disappointments ; for he remembers, that no earthly good was meant to be permanent, and that after every wreck, his best treasure remains untouched.

The gospel has made a full provision for all our spiritual wants :—"It hath pleased the Father, that in Christ should all fulness dwell." We can want nothing to insure our peace, our preservation in holiness and happiness, nothing in life or death necessary to enable us to glorify God ; all is promised in the gospel. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or one tittle of the words of Christ shall fail. The gracious nature of God,—“the exceeding great and precious promises,”—the merits and intercessions of Christ,—secure to the christian the certain supply of all his wants, and the certain fulfilment of every part of the covenant of grace. The only thing upon which the obtaining of these blessings is suspended, is, prayer,—“Ask, and ye shall receive.”

But to be able to pray for these blessings aright, they must become objects of desire. Till brought under christian influence, however, the human mind does not relish spiritual things ; it sees not their necessity : it is pre-occupied. Some persons have impressions which urge the necessity of religion, but they are too faint to make them decided seekers. It is one thing to have a favourable opinion of the Saviour, but a very different thing to come to him by prayer for life and salvation. The Holy Spirit enables us to offer humble, fervent, persevering prayer, and where this real and heartfelt desire is found, these blessings will assuredly be granted.

How inexcusable will those be who have never

sought, since it was only to ask and to have! How exceedingly the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is hereby exalted! He is ever ready to give the blessings which we want, though,—

“There’s not a gift his hand bestows,
But cost his heart a groan.”

APRIL 23.

Scripture selected for the day.—John, xv. 13—27.

“The Comforter, who is the Holy Ghost; whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things.”—All men are born blind:—“There is none that understandeth.” This blindness has relation to the beauty, value, and necessity of all spiritual objects and blessings. The Divine Being must be an object of infinite excellency: hence David desired to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever, that he might “behold the beauty of the Lord.” But the wicked despise the Almighty. Christ is said to be “the Brightness of his Father’s glory.” But, “He is despised and rejected of men.” Good men command the reverence and esteem of others, and David says, “The saints are the excellent of the earth, in whom is all my delight.” Yet the unconverted account them “the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things.” But men are equally blind to their own character and state, so that they say, My heart is good, when God pronounces it desperately wicked. They add, Surely we have nothing to fear after death; when every part of the Divine word stands point blank against them, and there is really nothing before them, but “a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation.”

What a deplorable state is this! Delusive objects engage the passionate ardour of the soul as realities, and the realities of the world of truth are not seen at

all. What need then there is, when a man has lost all just sense of that which it is of infinite consequence for him to know, that he must be taught by "the Spirit of Truth!"

The Holy Spirit often awakens the conscience by bringing to remembrance some particular sin, and then leads the person from one step of self-knowledge to another, till he come to the alarming discovery, that he is full of depravity; that his feelings are dead to God, or full of enmity against him; that he is prone to evil; that his whole life has been marked by nothing but inward and outward hostility to the Almighty; and that he must be in imminent danger, since God himself is incensed, and as a righteous Judge must punish him. The real condition of the man being thus laid open, and that humility produced which is essential to future safety, and to communion with God, he is led by the Divine Spirit, through the instrumentality of the word, to the knowledge of the Saviour,—of his grace,—of his all-sufficiency. And thus he becomes justified, and placed in a state of salvation.

Have I been thus enlightened? Can I say, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see?"—How precious is the gift of sight! But O how much more that sight by which we are enabled to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!

APRIL 24.

Scripture selected for the day.—Luke, xxii. 7—20.

This and many other parts of scripture are treated by nominal christians as perfectly enigmatical and unintelligible. The cause of this is to be sought in the want of those feelings to which these passages are particularly addressed.

It is most probable, that in using the language, our Lord had a reference to the paschal lamb, the flesh of which, it will be remembered, was eaten by the whole Jewish church, after they had been delivered from destruction by its blood. As their deliverance from the wrath of the destroying angel would not have been effected, had the blood of the lamb not been shed, and not been sprinkled on the doors of the houses in which they dwelt, and as it was a part of the Divine appointment, that the flesh of this lamb should be eaten by all who had partaken of this deliverance, so it is the Divine will, that all the saved should owe their salvation to the blood of the Great Sacrifice, and that the spiritual life of each individual should be derived from continued acts of faith on Christ, as the life of the body is preserved by the reception of our daily food.

Christ himself says,—“I am the Bread of Life: he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.” He is our Food, our Life, as the grand Source of all our hopes, and as the Sum and Substance of all the doctrines of the gospel. We are “chosen,” “called,” “justified,” “sanctified,” and “preserved, in Christ;” and soon shall be glorified with him. What is the Bible, if we take Christ out of it? What is preaching, and what all the means and ordinances, without him? What is the doctrine of God without the Mediator? God himself is to the guilty “a consuming fire?” What would heaven be without the Redeemer? “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

Some Christians thus living on Christ as their daily Joy, carry the savour of his name with them into every duty, every company, every pursuit. To them there is a vital savour in his name; this sweetens every object in creation, every dispensation, all the means of instruction, yea, even affliction itself. How dull to

them is that sermon, that book, that circle, where Christ is not the theme!

How important then in the scheme of christian doctrine is the vicarious sacrifice of Christ! Upon this indeed the whole of the christian system is built. Without this, it loses all its virtue and energy. Equally necessary is it not only that we should be well grounded in this essential truth, but that we should derive the very life of our christian hopes from it. To strengthen our faith and hope in this doctrine is the very end and scope of both the ordinances: this truth opens the door of entrance into the christian church, and this is the food which the church presents to all her children.

APRIL 25.

Scripture selected for the day.—John, vii. 1—17.

This passage contains our Lord's defence of his Messiahship before the Jews. He virtually says to them, The reason why you do not believe in me, is, you are not real believers in God. You are worldly men; you must therefore feel and act according to the temper which prevails in you. You do not bring your minds to the demands of religion, but you wish to reduce religion to the standard of your own opinions.

Now this is precisely the case with all those who embrace the prevailing errors of the day. Nominal christians, instead of submitting to the infallible decisions of the Divine word, reject the most essential truths, asking,—“How can these things be?” The question then is reduced to this,—Shall we, believing the scriptures to contain the will of God, bring ourselves to a cordial subjection to their decision, or shall we compel the scriptures to agree with that undefined unstable thing, private opinion?

A person who wishes to know what is truth, would do well, where he meets with difficulties, rather to

decide against his own heart than against the Bible. Let him also see to it that he possess a hearty desire to obey God, that is, a holy mind; otherwise he will stumble at the plainest truths. Let him pray, as David did, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things in thy law." Let him carefully and candidly search the scriptures, by collecting and placing before himself all the passages on any subject, anxious only to attain to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. As he advances in these inquiries, he will find that, as to excel in the knowledge of any science, a person must have a delight in the discoveries made by that science; so to know the evangelical doctrine aright, a man must have an evangelical mind. Doing the will of God also has all the effect of demonstrating a thing by actual experiment: for instance, let a person believe in the death of Christ as an atoning sacrifice, and "the peace of God," which ensues, will be a demonstration that this doctrine is of God.

It should also be considered, that pride, and a vain opinion of the perfection of our own understandings, will effectually warp the mind, and render the truth unwelcome. And let it never be forgotten, that it is an essential condition of our admission among the disciples of Christ, that we should receive his lessons as little children.—Luke xviii. 17.

APRIL 26.

Scripture selected for the day.—Matthew, xvi.
13—28.

The broad distinction between the righteous and the wicked is thus formed: the former employ their highest cares on the soul and eternity, and the latter exhaust all their concern on the body and on the things of the present state. Yet the folly of the latter conduct can be made apparent even to a child.

Compared with the soul, how mean a part of us is our body; how contemptible the gratifications which we seek for it; and how soon does it wither and die! But the value of the soul is seen in its being created in the Divine image,—redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ,—made a partaker of the purifying and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit,—immortal, imperishable.

Suppose this soul should be lost; for ever lost; how poor a recompense would the temporary enjoyment even of crowns or kingdoms appear! Search the world for its value, search all the worlds which the most sanguine astronomers have supposed possible to exist in the immensity of space; and nothing like the value of one soul will be found in them all. Indeed, this is one of those comparisons which we cannot pursue, since the contrast between the various forms of being limited in their existence, sinks to nothing when compared with any one existence which is never-ending.

But if the soul be thus infinitely valuable, what an amazing folly are they guilty of, who live as though they had no soul, or no spiritual interests,—who never seek its welfare, nor realize the danger, the pressing danger in which it constantly stands of being lost! The question of our Lord certainly implies that it may be lost: but the fact is, the soul is lost already:—"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." "This my son was lost," says the Father of the prodigal. The danger of the final ruin of the soul will appear, if we consider in what a state it is now,—enslaved to corruption, the captive of sin and Satan, surrounded with temptations arising out of our enjoyments, our pleasures, our friends, our business, and our union to a world in rebellion. It is under the curse of the law, and the frown of Divine Justice; and it refuses that assistance which is necessary to extricate it from this tremendous situation.

Yet how shall we describe the loss of such a being?

A wreck, a palace, or a town in ruins, conveys to us no adequate idea of the ruin here alluded to. An immortal spirit in ruins ! Destitute of every ray of happiness ; filled completely with misery ; all its powers labouring under the most piercing sense of its loss ! But add to this, that the soul is indestructible,—capable of enduring the most acute sufferings, and capable of enduring them for ever.

If these things be so, then religion becomes the chief business of man : the world is nothing. What will the world and all its most important concerns be to us a few years hence ? The happiness and salvation of the soul therefore are to be sought, cost what they will : under the impression of these truths, the man of pleasure is seen as the fly flitting about the dazzling luminary which consumes it.

If the soul be thus precious, and be thus in danger of perishing, we see the reason why so great an expense should have been incurred in its redemption, why so great an Agent should be engaged to restore it to the Divine image, and why there is joy in heaven over every sinner that repenteth.

APRIL 27.

Scripture selected for the day.—John, vii. 37—53.

“Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst ; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”—We have no evidence to prove what the feelings of angels are, when they study the human character ; but we can conjecture what they must feel, when they see a rational soul feeding on ashes, and desiring to satisfy its desires with the food of swine. How dreadful to them to behold a being so created and so endowed, dead in trespasses and sins, indulging a rancorous enmity against his Creator,

full of all evil, and living only to destroy and to be destroyed ! But what must their joy be in observing the change produced, when the influences of the blessed Spirit enter the mind thus depraved, and diffuse life, and health, and happiness through all its powers !

The titles given to the Holy Spirit in scripture, are significant of these operations on the human mind. He is called a quickening Spirit, the Spirit of Holiness, the Spirit of Truth and Wisdom, the Spirit of Adoption, the Comforter. These life-giving influences produce effects in the soul, which, when matured and brought to full perfection, constitute what is called "eternal life." These effects are not realized all at once ; but he who begins the good work, will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ. Some Christians attain to such fervency and energy of mind in the Divine service, such delightful discoveries in Divine truth, and such holy joy in sacred exercises, that they desire no other heaven than the full enlargement and perpetuity of the blessedness they have thus entered upon ; and these joys are so pure that they are persuaded they proceed from the "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." By comparing the influences of the Spirit to water, the inspired writers intended to point out to us their purifying and refreshing nature, and by comparing them to a spring, to remind us that they shall never fail.

What an awful case will our's be, if God should leave us in a state of death, unfit for the society above, and doomed by the very order of the universe to be lost spirits ! How vain are the hopes which wicked men entertain of heaven, men who think the doctrine of Divine influence cant and enthusiasm ! The effects produced by these influences, compose what the scriptures call "heaven," or "eternal life." There is no other heaven, no other life, than the eternal consummation to which these influences lead.

How much, then, is it our incumbent duty to seek these influences, and to avoid grieving the Holy Spirit, from whom they proceed. Christ had the Spirit without measure given unto him, and some distinguished Christians are said to have been "full of the Holy Ghost."

APRIL 28.

Scripture selected for the day.—John, xvii.
11—26.

However mysterious the subject, especially in the higher parts of it, there subsists a sacred, holy, and indissoluble union between God and every believer. This will be evident, if we meditate attentively on the 21st, 22nd, and 23rd verses of this chapter, and then on the following passages:—"All things are your's; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's. Exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature. He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones: this a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." In conformity with these passages, believers are called "the sons of God," and Christ their brother. He is called "the heir of all things;" they are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." God is said to glorify Christ; and Christ says,—"The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them."

The believer becomes united to the Redeemer, from his own choice;—"Whom having not seen ye love;" and Christ remains unchangeable in his affection for the church:—"Can a woman forget her

sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget: yet will not I forget thee." And we have in the Revelation an allegorical representation of the celebration of this union, under the idea of a marriage-feast: by which we are perhaps to understand simply the appearance of all the redeemed in heaven. Revelations, xix. 6—9. The honours which await them are such as belong to kings and to conquerors;—palms of victory, songs of triumph, the plaudits of him who is King of kings, and Lord of lords:—"Well done, good and faithful servants; enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

How good, how condescending, is Christ, to take such delight in transgressors;—to unite them so closely to himself;—to die for them, and then to watch over them with incessant care, and at length to take them to himself, to celebrate a heavenly feast on their account, and to say,—“I am glorified in them.” O Lord, what gratitude, thanksgiving, and adoration, can reach love so unparalleled, so infinitely wonderful as thine!

APRIL 29.

Scripture selected for the day.—Matthew, vi.
19—34. vii. 7—11.

Seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Nothing in common life is obtained without the use of the means suited to acquire it. If the elements of knowledge are sought, a long course of school exercises is pursued; if an art, several years are given up to obtain it; if a knowledge of antiquity, languages are learnt, and the ancients studied; if the state of the moderns, books are read, and travels undertaken; if any science, severe studies are necessary. It is true that in sacred

things the Divine Being first calls the attention, and then directs our researches and industry; but our progress cannot be insured, except by constant and patient labour, by reading and meditating upon the word, by watching the dispensations of Providence, by comparing characters, by attending means of instruction, by cultivating an anxiety for improvement, and by seeking the Divine blessing.

The exhortation before us may be applied to whatever is the subject of the promise: Christ has not confined us, but left us to range through the whole of the promises; and respecting every article, he says,—“Seek, and ye shall find.”—1. We need pardon, constant and multiplied pardons; and applications for pardon make a part of the daily business of a Christian, when he approaches the throne of mercy.—2. We need a new heart: safety principally consists in pardon and justification; but happiness, from delight in God, from sanctification, and clear evidences of an interest in Christ.—3. We need our strength renewed, to enable us to look our enemies in the face, and to engage heartily and successfully in the conflict.—4. We need that our afflictions should be sanctified, and that we should be prepared for death; for, upon a state of growing sanctification, weanedness from the world, and delight in God, depends very much our comfortable departure hence.—“Seek, and ye shall find.”

But we must seek with humility, with earnestness, and with perseverance. They who thus seek shall find. Not more certain is fruitfulness after rain, reaping after sowing, light after sun-rise, than that they who seek the blessings of salvation shall find them. The faithfulness of God, the intercessions of Christ, and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, make this as sure as the existence of Jehovah. Thousands now in glory are saying to us, Be of good cheer; we speak from happy experience;—“Seek, and ye shall find.” Whatever we are in pursuit of, in religion, if it be agreeable to the promise, let us apply to it these

gracious words; let us push on the search. Men may seek riches, honours, and pleasures, and be miserably disappointed; but here the fact is established, all heaven and earth bear witness to it;—"He that seeketh, findeth." What an honour to the Redeemer, that none ever properly sought pardon, peace, and everlasting life in him, but they found them!

APRIL 30.

Scripture selected for the day.—Mark, ix. 33—48.

Young says,—

"'Tis greatly wise to talk with our past hours;"

nor can it be less necessary, nor less wise, to think of the future. A person not interested in Christ, must dread to look backward or to look forward. But of all men in the world, he has most to dread in eternity, who has sinned against gospel light. Our Lord here teaches us, that the misery of those who are finally lost will principally consist in the horrors of remembrance.

Memory will be always at work in the place of torment. We shall never cease to be thinking beings; and in general men think deepest in affliction:—"Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things."—1. The remembrance of a christian education, and of the example of godly parents, will there prey upon the mind as a gnawing worm. Those Divine principles, early inculcated, and imbibed from the lessons still unobliterated, rise in review; but the earnest advice and entreaties of a father, a mother, their tears, their prayers, how these go to the heart, now that these their warnings are so fearfully realized. Memory will be employed on the gracious nature and boundless mercy of God, and will find in these matter for the severest reproaches; what wounds and anguish will be inflicted upon the miserable spirit, by

the remembrance of such words as these;—"He delighteth not in the death of the sinner;" "He delighteth in mercy;" "Why will ye die?" The lost man will recollect too what is said of the price which this mercy cost; that it was procured at no less a price than the incarnation, sufferings, and very death of the Son of God; and that he should have neglected mercy after all this done on the part of the Almighty, will add exceedingly to his wretchedness. He further recollects the gracious nature of gospel invitations with unspeakable distress:—"Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." "Let the wicked man forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." "Whosoever will, let him come, and take the water of life freely." These and similar passages, which threw wide open to him the gates of mercy, now that these gates are for ever closed, must needs add exceedingly to the horrors of his mind. But the sinner will remember all the faithful sermons which he heard, wherein he was warned, threatened, invited, intreated, and besought not to ruin himself; and the particular warnings, if not from the dead, yet from the dying, not to throw himself into that place of torment. All these dreadful recollections probably constitute "the worm that dieth not;" it will be these that will excite that weeping and wailing which our Lord here mentions. But to this is to be added, the wrath of God, a fire that never can be quenched. None can doubt that God, in an invisible manner, can make fearful impressions upon the human spirit. This was the case with Cain, with Saul, with Judas Iscariot, and others. All those images found in Scripture of a lake burning with fire and brimstone, unquenchable fire, are intended to bring before our minds the terrors of the Divine wrath. But who are the persons doomed to such fearful torments? The impenitent, the unbeliever, the unconverted. It is a sad thing, that in

the present day men should assist the grand adversary in propagating that delusion which in the first instance ruined the world :—"Ye shall not surely die." O that it may be our concern, "knowing the terrors of the Lord," to persuade men to flee from this wrath to come ! And, O for gratitude equal to our obligations ! How greatly should we rejoice, that there will be in eternal duration, opportunity given for the most transporting recollections of the Divine goodness, and for everlasting praise !

MAY 1.

Scripture selected for the day.—Luke, iv. 1—21.

It might have been expected, considering the dignity of the person of Christ, that God's love in sending his Son to save us from perishing would have excited universal and constant admiration. Yet the public entry of a foreign ambassador into a city excites more interest in the crowd than the coming of our Saviour into the world.

To whom is he sent ? To men in general, to all as lost ; but he is sent more particularly,—1. To the weary ; to those, who, labouring under a heavy burden of guilt, are saying with David,—“ Mine iniquities have gone over my head as a burden too heavy for me to bear.”—2. He is sent to the hungry and thirsty ; to those who find that nothing short of the Divine favour can satisfy their vast desires, and who faint for that bread which cometh down from heaven, and for that water which springeth up into everlasting life.—3. To the poor ; to those destitute in their own opinion of all religious merit, and of all ability to save themselves, who are glad to receive Divine help, and salvation as flowing from the unmerited grace of God.—4. To the captives ; to those who feel the galling load of sin, and seek deliverance