

in grace, in patience, in tenderness, in faithfulness, in ability to succour and save, to the end of time; and the same Object of praise, adoration, perfect confidence, and exultation, for ever. Or, the apostle might mean, Jesus Christ is the Sum and Substance of their conversation:—when they speak, it is of him; or preach, it is of him; when they suffer, it is for him; when they glory, it is in him; he is All. This identifying of Christ in all their labours, and in all their intercourse with men, is the fruit of their faith: therefore follow this faith, and may it live in you in all its heavenly fruits and effects.

Should another exposition be adopted,—Follow the faith of your christian teachers, considering the glorious triumphs in death to which it leads, we might say,—Look at their joyful departure, even in the midst of dreadful sufferings, and the insults of their tormentors. May these proofs of the value of the gospel in the hour of dissolution lead us to follow those who through faith and patience now inherit the promises! Some infidels have died quietly and sullenly; but they have supplied no instances of what can be called “happy deaths.”

DECEMBER 1.

Scripture selected for the day.—2 Corinthians, i.

It is a great mercy that the Almighty has given to unlearned Christians an evidence of the truth of the Bible perfectly within their reach. The man who had been born blind took strong ground, when he said,—“Herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not whence he is, and yet he has opened mine eyes.” So a Christian might say,—“Herein is a marvellous thing, that ye knew not the origin of this book, and yet it has opened mine eyes to see my sin and danger; it has led me to Christ, to trust in him and obey him;

it has reformed my life; it has comforted me in affliction; it has guided me through various difficulties; and, resting on its promises, I am supported in the prospect of all which lies before me in time and in eternity.

But the christian doctrine does not exclusively and absolutely depend upon any thing written. It existed and spread through the then-known world before any copies of the New Testament were extant. The Apostle Paul exultingly appeals to the substantial proofs exhibited in his ministry, of the genuineness of the apostolic testimony, — “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth;” and the promise is: — “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.”

These effects form a solid proof to every convert, of the Divine origin of the gospel, and of his own interest in its blessings. When an unconverted sinner hears the gospel, or reads it, or has it brought to his remembrance, so as permanently to affect his mind, new light is conveyed to his understanding, by which he obtains a knowledge of his character and state as a sinner, of God as the Lawgiver, and of Christ as the Saviour; and this knowledge, by its effects on his present feelings and future life, is proved to come from above. He becomes humbled at the view of his sin, alarmed at the sight of his danger, and of the purity and justice of the Lawgiver, and consoled and encouraged by the discoveries now made to him respecting the grace and power of the Saviour. The knowledge he had obtained before might have been considerable, even in religion; but it never produced convictions, impressions, resolutions, and effects like those of which he is now conscious. He cannot therefore be at a loss to what power to attribute it; especially as such effects are promised, and instances of their appearance given, in the gospel.

He then that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself, that Christ is the Saviour, that he is full of grace, that he can save to the uttermost, and that the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son, is true.

DECEMBER 2.

Scripture selected for the day.—John, xiv. 1—23.

The Hindoo sages have denominated God “the soul of the world :” one God in numberless forms, as the reflection of one moon in a thousand vessels of water. However false and atrocious this doctrine may be, making God and a fallen spirit one, there is a sense in which God dwells in man. He pervades every material form, so that we can never say of any place, He is not here. But where the Almighty reveals himself to a mind so as to impress it with his own benevolence, purity, and joy, there he may be said to dwell. These are indications of the Divine presence ; as we should say of a family living in the best state of order, and enjoying the greatest domestic happiness,—“ I know who lives here ;” or of a prison, clean, convenient, still, where health and industry prevail,—“ Here I can trace the footsteps of Howard.”

The Divine Being dwelt constantly and gloriously with our first parents, and gave the most striking proofs that he was in them of a truth. But when sin entered, the Divine Guest departed, and the vacant mind was taken possession of by sin and Satan : from that hour the human soul has been the habitation of every savage beast, a cage of unclean birds. Ichabod may now be written on every heart,—“ The glory is departed.”

But are men then abandoned of God, never never more to greet his return ?—“ Is his presence clean

gone for ever, and will he be favourable no more?" Blessed be God, he has "remembered us in our low estate." Such is the matchless grace of the Father, such are the infinite merits of the Son, and such the purifying influences of the Spirit, that a way has been opened by which God may in very deed come and again dwell with men upon the earth.

The blessed consequences of the Divine presence in the heart will be light, purity, and joy. As he dwells by the fulness of his presence in the high and holy place, so will he purify for himself a place in our hearts, and will diffuse light and joy there. But the soul must be reconciled to God before he will dwell in it; the heart must be kept humble; there must be a prevailing desire to be separated from sin, and a fear of grieving the Holy Spirit. If any one is ready to conclude, that God can never dwell in such a heart as his, let him consider that God is Light, and it is light which makes manifest; and if, therefore, the discoveries he has of sin are attended with self-abhorrence and godly sorrow, the result will be gloriously indicative of the Divine presence. Where God has taken up his abode, his residence will be eternal; — "I will never, never, never leave thee, nor forsake thee." If our minds are not an abode for God, sin and Satan will take possession, and without a timely change this horrible union will be continued for ever.

DECEMBER 3.

Scripture selected for the day.—1 Corinthians, vi.

It is true of all false religions, and of all false professors, that they know nothing of the religion of the heart, of worshipping God in spirit and in truth: but,—

"God abhors the sacrifice,
Where not the heart is found."

Compared with the gospel, the Jewish religion had but little in it to support the spiritual life of the believer. It was necessary to its existence, that there should be a tabernacle or temple, priests, scribes, and singers; sacrifices, meat offerings, peace-offerings, drink-offerings, incense, and a great variety of utensils for worship. But, if there were only one solitary Christian on earth, God would still have a temple here; that best of sacrifices, a broken and a contrite heart, and the offerings of praise and thanksgiving, would still be presented to him; and the intercourse between heaven and earth would still be kept open: — “For thus saith the High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of an humble and contrite spirit.”

1. The Jewish temple was erected to be the place where the true God would manifest himself. Christ dwells in the heart of the believer by faith, and there are in such a heart the certain tokens of the Divine presence; for what the glory covering the mercy-seat in the Jewish tabernacle, was, that, in the mind of the believer, are peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. In this respect, then, believers are “the temple of the living God.” — 2. But the temple was the place where the sin-offerings were slain, and where the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled upon the mercy-seat. In the heart of the believer there is a lively apprehension of that great transaction by which atonement was made for sin, and the conscience of the believer is said to be “sprinkled with the blood of Christ.” — 3. In the temple were placed, the mercy-seat, the ark of the covenant, and the tables of the law. In the heart of the Christian are found the tokens of Divine mercy, the blessings of the covenant, and every part of the Divine law. — 4. In the temple were presented prayer and various offerings of praise. In the mind of the believer are found the spirit of prayer and supplication, and that gratitude from which all true praise ascends; here the believer presents the offer-

ings of praise and thanksgiving continually, making melody in his heart unto the Lord.

Thus all the work of the temple is found in the heart of the Christian. He is himself the house of God; and the King of Zion says of this living temple,—“This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell, for I have desired it.” O Lord, enable me to banish every idol, every unclean thought and action, from thine abode: here shine, and give the tokens of thy presence; and here dwell for ever, as thy chosen, thy desired habitation.

DECEMBER 4.

Scripture selected for the day.—Luke, xv. 11—32.

In some minds there appears to be no other recognition of sin, than as it affects mankind. To injure another in his property or character is considered as a real crime: but the want of right dispositions towards God seldom alarms the mind of the unconverted, nor are they affected by transgression as something committed *against the Almighty*. Yet this is the exact view which the prodigal had of his sin;—“I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight;” and the Psalmist, though he had most awfully injured his fellow-creatures, says,—“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.”

Iniquity then derives its chief turpitude from our relation to the Almighty. It is a son rebelling against his Father, and sinning in the very presence of his Parent;—it is a subject committing the offence in the very eye of the Legislators, or of the Supreme Magistrate. Nor must it be forgotten, that a state of sin defeats all the designs of Divine Providence in our creation and preservation. It must have been with some express design that man was placed at the

head of the whole creation ; and that such intellectual and moral powers were given him. And does it not amount to a moral certainty, that, while all the other parts of creation were made for the service of man, man was made for the service of God, to bear his image, and glorify his name ? But, while we live alienated from God, this object is defeated, and our support and preservation are not only bestowed in vain, but turned against the Almighty, and made the instruments of rebellion. A state of transgression is a rejection of God in Christ, and is even called a trampling on the blood of the covenant ; so that the aggravation is most awfully increased. The judgment of the Almighty respecting this sin is seen in the following passages :—“ If any man love not the Lord Jesus, let him be *anathema*.” “ He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” And, lastly, he who continues in sin, resists the Holy Spirit, and obliterates all those impressions which might have ended in his salvation : he does despite to the Spirit of grace ; and, persevering, will go beyond the reach of mercy.

Well, therefore, might the prodigal reflect on his sin as committed against the government, and in the very sight, of his Father : and it is this view of his character and conduct which humbles every penitent in the sight of God, and makes him seek restoration to the Divine favour.

DECEMBER 5.

Scripture selected for the day.—1 Peter, iv.

Idolatry is marked in the Divine word as a sin peculiarly hateful to the Almighty. The very first sentence in the Decalogue is directed against it ; and in reference to this practice, it is there added,—“ For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the

iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." This jealousy is visible throughout the Old Testament in the fearful threatenings and judgments executed against these offenders; and the whole of the Jewish history is full of relations relative to the miseries brought upon the Jews for the sin of worshipping other gods. It is respecting this offence that we meet with this most touching expostulation,—“O do not this abominable thing, that I hate.” And the Apostle Peter speaks of “abominable idolatries.”

There must, then, notwithstanding the sad indifference with which idolatrous practices are viewed by many nominal Christians, be a dreadful turpitude in this offence against “the living and true God.” — 1. It dethrones the Almighty in the mind of every idolater; for, besides the idol, they worship no other God. — 2. It prevents the idolater from obtaining right ideas of God: he never looks beyond the idol; and the idol itself presents to his sight either an impure or a revengeful being. — 3. Idolatry degrades men. How disgusting is it to behold rational and immortal man in the posture of adoration before a lump of clay, or a pan of water, or the image of a courtesan, a debauchee, or a monkey! — 4. It demoralizes the worshipper: the images, the dances, the singers, and the songs, have all their most bewitching and dreadfully polluting effect on the mind. — 5. It is a crime for which there can be no excuse: one minute of rational examination must show the folly of worshipping a clod for the Creator of all things.

Let us look around at the millions in this state of prostration; and let us pity them, while we detest the offence. Let us pray for idolaters, as persons not knowing what they do; and let us constantly protest against this daring attack on the throne of Jehovah, on his authority, and his claim to our fear, our love, our trust, and our service.

DECEMBER 6.

Scripture selected for the day.—2 Corinthians, ix.

Must not those who treat Christianity as a mere system of morals, however perfect, and the Redeemer as only a distinguished Prophet, be at a great loss, when they meet with such expressions as these in the sacred volume?—"Precious faith;" "the precious blood of Christ!" "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish." "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable Gift."

The Lord Jesus Christ is here called "a Gift." "The Father gave his Son," and "delivered him up for us all." But this is an "unspeakable Gift;" a Gift unspeakably dear to him who gave it, and inconceivably valuable to those to whom it is given. The union between the Father and the Son forms an unfathomable mystery: it is thus alluded to,—"The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father." "The Father loveth the Son." "This is my beloved Son." To have parted with, to have delivered up, such a Son, was an unspeakable favour. When Tippoo-Saheb delivered up his sons to the English, to persons in arms against the father, the very spectators were deeply affected. What must it have been to give up Christ into the hands of sinners and the infernal powers! But this love is amazingly heightened, when we consider the purpose for which the Son of God was delivered up to appear in the likeness of sinful flesh; to take upon him the form of a slave; to be a sin offering; and to pour out his soul unto death; to be treated as guilty, and to bear incredible sufferings. Upon whom was the gift bestowed? Upon sinners?—"God so loved the world." "The Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."

That this is an unspeakable Gift, is still more de-

cidedly established, when we think of the benefits conferred on transgressors. Is it pardon? It is "pardon for infinite offence,—a pardon bought with blood!"—Is it justification? It places the Christian in a state of absolute freedom from guilt.—Is it sanctification? The person is ultimately made perfect as his heavenly Father is perfect.—Is it heaven? It is nothing less than eternal life.

Without this gift, all others, whether they belong to nature or providence, leave the individual a lost man. This is the first and last of all God's gifts.

"Thanks be to God!" What poor returns we are able to make for such a gift! Words are but air, and hosannahs languish on our tongues. It is said of a certain minister, that he was never known to close his devotions without thanks for "the Unspeakable Gift."

Does this Gift appear to us of unspeakable value? Have we sought it earnestly and perseveringly? Let us present it to the view of our offspring, and of the destitute and perishing heathen.

DECEMBER 7.

Scripture selected for the day.—1 Thessalonians, iv.

We greatly mistake, if we suppose that to place man in a state of pardon, forms the ultimate design of the Divine Being respecting him; that design comprehends nothing short of the positive and unchangeable perfection of his character; that he should be perfect, as a rational and moral creature, as his heavenly Father is perfect, as the Supreme Jehovah. It is therefore of the highest importance that we constantly keep in mind this Divine and elevated destiny; and embrace Christianity, not as a provision to pacify conscience merely, but as a gracious plan embracing human happiness in inseparable connexion

with our being made "partakers of the Divine nature." The apostle goes back to the formation of the plan of salvation, and shows that the moral perfection of believers made a part in that plan:—"Predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son." "According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." The whole process of means in this Divine economy embraces, as an essential object, the sanctification of the Christian:—"This is the will of God, even your sanctification." The Holy Spirit is expressly appointed to be the Sanctifier, as the Source of regeneration, and as presiding over and making effectual all the means for perfecting the character of the believer. That this is the object embraced in the gift of a Divine Revelation, our Lord expressly teaches us:—"Sanctify them by thy truth: thy word is truth." The whole economy of Providence has this for its object: hence the apostle says,—*"All things work together for good to them who are the called according to the Divine purpose;"* and the express object of affliction is said to be, to make us "partakers of the Divine nature." Every office in the church has been instituted, that the Redeemer might "present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." In fact, religion itself, as it exists in the mind, is a holy influence diffused through all the powers, till the whole man bear the full image of his Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Such then is the rich provision which the Divine Being has made in order to secure in Christians a Divine temper, and a holy conversation: they are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people,—to show forth the praises of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light." Let every Christian attend to these representations. Jesus Christ is thus spoken of:—"He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and

he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness."

DECEMBER 8.

Scripture selected for the day.—1 Corinthians, xi.

From this chapter it is plain, that the primitive Christians in the Lord's Supper partook of wine as well as of the bread:—"So let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."

Let us not imitate the Corinthian church, and profane that which is certainly a most solemn and holy service; but seek that preparation which is necessary. It appears very manifest, that sorrow for sin and self-abbhorrence should accompany us to this exhibition of the crucifixion, that we should,

"With our joy for pardon'd sin,
Mourn that we pierc'd the Lord."

In a sincere communicant these impressions will be greatly strengthened by communicating at the Lord's table; for who can behold that bruised body, and that blood shed for sinners, without mourning over the Divine Sufferer? A person who would rightly partake of the Lord's Supper, must bring in his heart faith in this Great Sacrifice; and here his faith will be strengthened by a view of these remaining proofs of a Saviour's compassion. Love and admiration appear also to be qualifications necessary to a guest at such a feast: and the presence of these symbols is well calculated to fan the flame, and to produce the astonishment and rapture of Thomas,—
"My Lord! and my God!" as well as the confession of Peter,—
"Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." The person who approaches these memorials, with the price of his redemption thus

before him, ought also to make a full surrender of himself to the Redeemer, as bought with his precious blood. Love to the brethren, while he eats of the same bread, and drinks from the same cup, is here required, and here most powerfully inculcated. Another benefit arising from this ordinance, is, that it holds forth to every age "the Lord's death," and says to mankind,—

"There hangs all human hope : that nail supports
The falling universe : that gone, we drop :
Horror receives us."

A man may bring judgment upon himself by improperly receiving the Lord's Supper: the Corinthians did this, among whom some were sick, and a number were dead: "therefore let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."

DECEMBER 9.

Scripture selected for the day.—Proverbs, xviii.

Since the fall, the greatest good left on earth is to be found in christian friendship. Yet, even in this good there is much alloy, and many disappointments. Perhaps there are few instances in which a friendship lasts through life; or in which, after a number of years of close intimacy, the attachment remains unabated.—"But there is a Friend, that sticketh closer than a brother." By this endeared name our Lord Jesus Christ was pleased to allow himself to be called, when surrounded by his disciples on earth:—"I have called you, not servants, but friends." "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Such was the distinguished proof that our Lord Jesus Christ gave of the reality and warmth of his

friendship. But the circumstances under which the Redeemer seeks the friendship of man are most extraordinary:—1. He finds the objects of his attachment in a state of great ignorance: to seek a union with uncultivated persons is considered as dishonourable to those who seek it; but the Saviour does not reject us on account of our ignorance, but enters upon a process of instruction by his Spirit, his word, his providential dealings, to raise us to a capacity of enjoying his friendship.—2. Dishonour is supposed to attach itself to those who become united to persons debased in character, and abandoned in their courses: but Christ does not renounce and abhor, but reclaims the wanderer; purifies him; implants within him Divine principles, and fits him to have communion with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.—3. It is deemed dishonourable to make companions of those who are in a state of disgrace through the violation of the law, who are condemned by law; but the Saviour repairs the breaches of the law, bears its anathemas and the punishment it inflicts, sets the transgressor free, adopts him, and makes him an heir of God.—4. Friendships are often broken through the fickleness of one of the parties: but, notwithstanding the unfaithfulness of man, the Redeemer says,—"I will never leave thee; never never forsake thee." He further proves himself to be a Friend, seeing he not only sympathises with men in danger, but delivers them out of it; and when friend and relative can proceed no longer with them, he is still their Guide, nor leaves them even in the dark and gloomy valley leading into the eternal world. In all these respects how applicable are the words of Solomon to our Lord Jesus Christ,—“There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.”

We shall soon want a friend, and a friend in the hour of need, in circumstances where none but Christ can relieve us. How then may I share in his friendship?—"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

If we refuse his friendship now, he will say to us another day,—“I never knew you,—depart from me.”

DECEMBER 10.

Scripture selected for the day.—Psalm, xxxii.

The Scriptures make much of faith; calling it “precious faith,” “the substance of things hoped for.” They declare, that faith is necessary to the acceptance of our prayers:—“He that believeth in God must believe that he is, and that he is the Rewarder of those who diligently seek him;” “He that believeth shall be saved;” “Without faith it is impossible to please him.”

Faith is the belief of the truth; its effects on the character are finely portrayed in the eleventh of the Hebrews:—1. The Christian believes that there is a God: and so does the nominal Christian; but the principle is operative in the heart of the Christian, so that what he believes of the Almighty, leads him to fear God, to hope in his mercy, to worship him, and to hold communion with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.—2. The Christian believes that sin is destructive: so does the nominal Christian; but the former is led by his faith to exercise repentance, to forsake and to mortify sin.—3. The Christian believes in Christ; the nominal Christian professes to do the same; but then the Christian, as the fruit of his faith, comes to Christ, that he may have life; and commits his everlasting interests into his hands, forsaking all his transgressions.—4. The Christian believes in a future state: so does the nominal Christian; but the former renounces whatever is forbidden in the word, and gives up every easily-besetting sin through his faith in unseen realities; he thinks much of the future state, and makes preparation for the joys at the

right hand of God. Thus the Christian shows his faith by his works.

A dead faith necessarily leaves us unaffected by all the representations of the Divine word: we hear a report, and should be deeply affected by it if we believed it to be true; but not doing so, we are unmoved, and of course are unprepared for that which is announced as about to happen: and thus Noah condemned the world; by faith being moved with fear, he prepared an ark, and preserved his household. Without faith it is impossible to be a Christian: the believer is "justified by faith;" "walks by faith;" "fights the good fight of faith," and overcomes by faith:—"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Thus the nature and importance of Christian faith are made manifest by works; and thus is condemned that dead faith which leaves the nominal Christian destitute of all benefit from that which "worketh by love, purifies the heart, and lays hold of eternal life."

DECEMBER 11.

Scripture selected for the day.—1 Timothy, ii.

There is some difficulty in the present state, in distinguishing between real and nominal Christians. But prayer makes a broad distinction in the Divine estimation:—"Behold, he prayeth!"

Prayer is a duty enjoined upon all men throughout the Sacred Scriptures; our Lord led his disciples into the constant practice of it, and condescended to give them a form of words suited to their circumstances; believers in all ages have been distinguished by their devotional character. But men are to pray "every where;" in all places and circumstances, as they every where stand in need of the Divine aid and presence.

Much is not prayer, which is called by that name: the heart is necessary; and not that only, for many a person in an hour of extremity calls upon God from his heart, while there are no correct desires in his petitions. The parable of the publican brings before us a man in the attitude of real prayer: he acknowledges his sin; he seeks Divine mercy; and he goes for it to the throne of grace:—"God be merciful to me a sinner."

Prayer must be offered with holy hands, without wrath, and without unbelief. We are not to regard iniquity in the heart, otherwise the Lord will not hear our prayer. We are not to pray against others: and we must offer up our petitions in the exercise of humble faith.

It is necessary that we be found much in prayer for ourselves; no preservation of personal religion, and no ability to do spiritual good to others, can exist without it. Prayer is equally necessary for our children, our friends, and for the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

Much wisdom is manifested in the appointment of this duty: hereby our dependence on God is preserved; the Divine Being is honoured in all the blessings he bestows; and these favours come to us increased in value as having been obtained by the instrumentality of prayer.

The encouragements to prayer are great:—"Before they call, I will answer." "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do." "The Spirit itself helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought."—Moses prayed, and Israel prevailed as long as his arms were held up in prayer. Elijah prayed, and it rained not for three years and six months: again he prayed, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. The disciples were altogether in one place, when the Spirit was poured out, and three thousand persons were converted under one sermon. Paul prayed thrice, and Divine strength was made perfect in his weakness.

Peter was delivered by an angel while the church was engaged in prayer for his deliverance.

There is no religion where there is no prayer. The total neglect of prayer must be allied to atheism and the greatest impiety. Prayer is the highest privilege, and the most necessary duty of life: the last words men utter in this world are those of supplication. Even Paine could not help calling on the name of Jesus Christ, in the hour of extremity.

DECEMBER 12.

Scripture selected for the day.—2 Peter, ii.

The apostle in this chapter gives a most fearful description of some of the early apostates from the faith: they sunk deeply indeed into the most shocking impurities. In the words selected for meditation this day, the apostle offers an effectual preventative against apostasy:—“*Walk in the Spirit*, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”

According to some commentators, we are to understand, that we are here directed to walk as directed by the influences of the Holy Spirit:—“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” These influences descend upon the waiting mind in the use of the means, such as prayer, reading, or hearing the word, meditation, and spiritual conversation; and by these influences the mind becomes deeply impressed with the truths of the Divine word. The Holy Spirit also uses providential events as the means of impression, instruction, and guidance. Thus the person may be said to walk in or by the Spirit; and while he is under these purifying influences, sin can have no fatal dominion over him. Other commentators would paraphrase the words thus, Walk according to the dictates of your spiritual part, and so ye will not gratify the lusts of your animal

nature. (*Macknight.*) Both these expositions carry us, however, to the same conclusion: Would a Christian avoid apostasy, let him cultivate great spirituality of mind, a deep sense of the importance of religion; for such are the evil propensities of our nature, that it is necessary we should place ourselves at the greatest distance from temptation, and cultivate a frame of mind the very opposite of that which would lead us into evil. The remark so often made, That all backsliding begins in the closet, illustrates the propriety of the advice of the apostle,—“Walk in the Spirit.” Our Lord once said,—“The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.” Hence our Lord was invulnerable:—“He was holy, harmless, and separate from sinners.” There was no ambition, no wrath, no impurity, in him, which the tempter could invite as auxiliaries. To a certain extent, this is true of the man who walks in the Spirit, or who is a truly spiritual man, living under the influence of religion all the day long: he “abideth in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him.”

On the other hand, the professor of religion who lives very little under the influence of Divine truth, who is comparatively carnal and sensual, is in constant danger; and his falls or backslidings are deeply injurious to himself, and very grievous to others:—“he walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth.” It is not sufficient that we hate and oppose our spiritual adversaries: our assured safety lies only in our being “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”

DECEMBER 13.

Scripture selected for the day.—Ephesians, vi.

Sacred instructions are here compared to nourishing food; and the appeal appears to be made to the

tender feelings of parents; as though the apostle had said,—O parent, thou art ever mindful of the necessities of thy child respecting the food that perishes; how much more anxious shouldest thou be, to supply it with the food which comes down from heaven, which nourishes the mind, and fits it for eternal life! Without this nourishment, it must perish. Add to the supplies of heavenly food that admonition or correction which our fallen nature requires, and which our heavenly Father himself uses in his government of the world.—“He that spareth the rod, hateth his son.” That softness of disposition which withholds due correction from thy child, deserves not the name of love; the scripture declares that it is hatred. “The Lord chasteneth every son whom he receiveth,” and surely we are not more wise, not more tender, than “the Father of mercies.” Wouldest thou see thy children wise, respectable, and happy here, and safe and blessed hereafter? Here are the divinely appointed means,—“Bring them up in the instruction and correction of the Lord.”

The responsibility of parents respecting the spiritual interests and future welfare of their children is too little felt. Did the Divine Being address language like this to the common pastors of the Jewish church? —“Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way to save his life: the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity: but his blood will I require at thine hand.” How much more applicable are they to parents, who have a flock so peculiarly their own, and which flock is near them day and night. The charge given by the apostle here relates purely to the spiritual affairs of children: it is the nurture and admonition “*of the Lord*” which is to be applied; and if the souls of children be neglected, if they be not warned by parental watchmen,

but through their carelessness die in their sins, the account of their blood will, no doubt, be required at the hand of the parents; and the miseries those parents will endure in a future state will be far more piercing than those of the negligent pastor.

DECEMBER 14.

Scripture selected for the day.—Galatians, vi.

Some preachers are blamed for not pressing moral duties upon mankind, and for dwelling upon the doctrines of the Bible, rather than upon Christian morals. It is possible to err, no doubt, on this point, and there is a class of professors who appear to deny all moral responsibility on the part of believers; but the consistent divine avoids both these errors, and presses the absolute necessity of a renewed heart, and of good works, as supplying the only valid proof of our being in the favour of God. While, however, the mere moralist urges upon men the discharge of the duties of the second table of the law only, the well-instructed minister of religion insists on the necessity that the heart should be right with God, as the best and in fact the only security for correct conduct towards man. Nor does the latter endeavour to lead men into correct moral conduct by the promise of heaven as the reward of virtuous actions; but he "beseeches men, by the mercies of God, that they would present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, as their reasonable service." He sets before his hearers the advantages of a deep acquaintance with Divine Truth, and of having the mind thoroughly spiritual.

"To be spiritually minded is *life*."—The Holy Scriptures do not allow that mere animal existence is life: the person living in pleasure is pronounced to be "dead while he liveth:" and our Lord Jesus

Christ is said to have brought life (as well as immortality) to light. A living for the benefit and improvement of the spirit, or of our immortal powers,—this is life. While the gratification of the animal passions, and devotion to the world, are too often connected with agitation and internal disorders, the cultivation of a heavenly mind is attended with tranquillity and repose, the anticipation of that rest which remaineth for the people of God. Even the Hindoo sages taught, that the gratification of the passions was the very parent of pain; and yet they never heard of “the peace of God which passeth all understanding.” But peace, solid, abiding, and Divine, is the blessed inheritance of the Christian.

A spiritual man is impressed with a lively sense of the evil of transgression, and of the blessedness of those who are accepted in the Lord Jesus Christ. His heart is warmed by the love of Christ, and is an abode for the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of peace. All the graces of the Spirit have more or less found a place in his mind; so that his frame of mind and conversation during the day is spiritual, and his affections are set on things above: the element in which he lives, and moves, and has his being, is religion:—“he dwells in God;” and he has, in consequence, a vigorous soul and a tranquil conscience.

DECEMBER 15.

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

Heaven may be called “the kingdom of God,” as there he is said to reside,—there is no rebellion,—there is everlasting happiness. Our preparation for this kingdom consists in our possessing that righteousness of Christ in which we are justified, and that

inward purity by which we are made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

We are exhorted to seek this kingdom ; which implies that it is lost ; and it is so, both as it respects our title to it, and our preparation for it. That our title to heaven is lost, we are taught in various parts of scripture : in none more forcibly than in that passage,—“ children of wrath.” The banishment of our first parents from paradise teaches us that heaven is a lost inheritance. The prodigal had no claims on his father’s favour ; he was received by an act of free mercy.

But, though lost, heaven is not irrecoverably gone :—“ Seek,—seek, and ye shall find.” How ? By becoming a decided Christian ; and by the diligent use of those means which our Saviour has placed in his church,—as prayer, the perusal of the Divine word, hearing the gospel, and christian conversation. It is to be sought “ *first*,” that is, before every other object : he who does not thus earnestly seek it, will come short of the prize. Every thing must be forsaken that would divert our minds from this vast object ; and to it all things else must be made subservient :—“ the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” Seeking this kingdom first, implies, also, that it must be sought immediately. The injunction, let it be remembered, comes from him who died to open the way to the tree of life ; he is also our Judge, and his command cannot be neglected without our incurring the heaviest guilt. We must seek the kingdom of God now, because this is “ the accepted time, and the day of salvation.” While the gracious invitations of the gospel are out in the world, the door of mercy is open ; and while the means of salvation are placed within our reach, we are directed to call upon the Lord as near to us. For our further encouragement, we are assured that we shall not seek in vain. Other pursuits, yea, the best concerted plans, may fail, and be attended with the heaviest disappointment ; but we have the

promise of him who is "The Truth," that, if we seek, we shall find. If the Redeemer himself says,— "Seek;" we may be sure he will not encourage us in a pursuit which is uncertain. Whatever else Divine Providence gives, it is but the appendage to the kingdom of heaven:—"all these things shall be added to you."

Heaven may be lost by negligence, by worldly cares, or by a course of impiety. Nay, it has been lost by mere sloth.—"Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness."

DECEMBER 16.

Scripture selected for the day.—Mark, xvi.

The word "gospel," it is well known, means glad tidings; and the suitableness of this word as a general description of the contents of the New Testament, is plain, if we consider that these tidings announce from heaven pardon for the guilty, deliverance for the captives, and eternal happiness for the condemned.

These glad tidings are addressed to all. We all need the gospel,—to remove many anxious and most important inquiries; to relieve us from a load of guilt; and to give us hope in the prospect of death and eternity. More particularly, we all need the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,—1. As it unfolds to us the knowledge of the true and living God. Without this gospel, what do the Hindoos know of the Almighty, notwithstanding they have had among their philosophers men of the most stupendous powers of mind? Have not their writings left the whole country prostrate before dead matter, before the personifications of lust and murder, as the Supreme Deity? Well might our Lord say,—"This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God."

2. Men need the gospel, to show them the extent of their spiritual wants. What do the Hindoos know of moral evil, when they suppose it can be removed by bathing in a river?—3. Without the gospel, men know not that there is mercy in God, and that sin may be forgiven. The Hindoos say, that sin accompanies the transgressor through innumerable births, and never leaves him till he himself remove it by works of merit or by sufferings. To such a people are not these glad-tidings:—“He that confesseth and forsaketh his sin, shall find mercy; He that believeth, shall be saved?”—4. The gospel was necessary to men, to show them wherein lay the true preparation for heaven. With the Hindoos, the preparation for heaven consists in listening to their poems, in ablutions in the Ganges, and witnessing the most scandalous exhibitions. How necessary to them the Book which directs them to purity of heart as the proper preparation for going into the presence of God!—5. The gospel is necessary to all, to comfort them in affliction; to remove the fear of death; and to explain the nature of the future state. How great a blessing will the gospel be to the afflicted Hindoos, when it shall have taught them christian resignation, when it shall have shown them that death to the Christian is the door to eternal life, and when it shall have opened to them life and immortality!

How gracious then was our Lord Jesus Christ, in that he directed this gospel to be preached to every creature!

DECEMBER 17.

Scripture selected for the day.—Luke, xiii.
24—35.

The word, “salvation,” as applied to mankind in scripture, signifies deliverance from the most dreadful

of all evils,—the loss of the soul for ever. To this loss all mankind are exposed, as being found in rebellion against God:—“the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God;” “where their worm dieth not:” “who shall be punished with everlasting destruction.” This danger is recognised in its utmost magnitude by the interposition and death of our Lord Jesus Christ; and noticed in the references made to him as the Saviour: those who believe in him “shall not perish:” and he is said to deliver from “the wrath to come.”

This salvation is in scripture called a “great salvation;” Hebrews, ii. 3. It will appear to be so, if we consider,—1. The way in which it was announced to the world: for four thousand years it was the subject of prophecy, and, as the types of this one Sacrifice, thousands and ten thousands of victims bled on the altar.—2. The dignity of the Person sustaining the character of Saviour:—“Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh.” “His name shall be called Immanuel, God with us.” “The Word was God: the Word was made flesh.” Surely the work to be accomplished must have had difficulties in it which neither the creation nor the government of the world presents; or why should resort be had to a Person so exalted as the Victim?—3. The importance of this interposition is increased, if we reflect upon the dreadful nature of those sufferings which this Divine Person endured; if we visit Gethsemane and Calvary; and,—4. If we look at the value of the thing saved,—the human soul: its origin, its capacities, its duration.—5. Lastly, we shall perceive something farther of the greatness of this salvation, if we consider the endless misery from which those who are saved are delivered.

Is it possible that so great a deliverance should be treated with neglect by those who are the favoured objects of it? Shall men be indifferent to a deliverance from eternal death? One would think, that the news would be received with universal acclamation,

and that the whole family of man would all join with the poet ;—

“ O for this love, let earth and skies
With hallelujahs ring ;
And the full choir of human tongues
All hallelujahs sing.”

But, wonder, O heavens ! this salvation is treated with neglect ! And yet there is no other way of escape : the persons chargeable with this neglect turn away from the only remedy, and thus aggravate all their transgressions.

DECEMBER 18.

Scripture selected for the day.—Psalm, xciv.

“ Without God.” This is a description of the state of the Ephesians while worshippers of the goddess Diana ; and it is true of all the unconverted. Without God ! What language can describe this state of desolation ! It implies, —1. The want of the Divine image, a state of awful moral deformity. —2. The absence of what is called the Divine presence ; to such a person God is not graciously present in friends, in providential dispensations, in the scriptures, in the ordinances, or in any of the offices of religion. Strip the sun of all its glory, the earth of all its beauties, the vegetable world of all its verdure ; and then some idea may be formed of what is meant by the want of the Divine presence. —3. It supposes the absence of all real happiness : our being cut off from friends, from our property, and home, conveys no idea of *his* circumstances, who is without God. When we look at an ungodly man in prosperity, he appears like a tree flourishing in its native soil ; (Psalm, xxxvii. 35.) But we take merely an outside view : look at his conscience, labouring under a heavy load of guilt and fearful forebodings. Look into his heart, void of solid and

serene happiness, a prey to corroding cares, and sickening under the appalling sense of the absolute insufficiency of all present good. Look at him when the bubble breaks, and when the absolute nothingness of all earthly possessions is realized. No Christ, when his conscience speaks, speaks on the confines of eternity, and will be heard. Is Christ a Sun, a Friend, a Refuge, a Saviour? Do I need him in all these relations, and am I doomed to feel that he is not mine?—No hope, with the bar of judgment just in view. We associate with hope all our joys and all our energies; but to realize *his* case, who has no hope in Christ, we must look at the man to whom the news is just conveyed, that he must abandon all expectation of recovery; at the culprit in sight of the apparatus of death; at the spirits in the place where “their worm dieth not.”

In opposition to all this, how divinely blessed is that man who can say, — “Thou art my Portion, O Lord!”

DECEMBER 19.

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

While the mind remains under the influence of the passions, and the slave of animal gratifications, the concerns of religion receive a very superficial attention. But, when the person is “brought out of darkness into marvellous light,” there appears a magnitude and a commanding importance in them, which exceedingly diminishes the value of all earthly objects, so that they become objects of suspicion, if not of dread. This decision in favour of religion arises from its connexion with redemption, with the soul, and with eternity.

The Divine Being does great things for a person, when he excites in his mind a concern about his eternal welfare, a concern not erased by the cares

and pleasures of the present state, but which leads him to "work out his salvation with fear and trembling;"—when he delivers him from a state of sin, so that it shall not have the dominion over him, shall not be his final ruin;—when he removes his unbelief, and gives him faith in the Redeemer;—when he capacitates him to taste the blessedness which is to be found in prayer, in reading the word, and in attending the means of spiritual improvement;—when he enables him to realize God as his all-sufficient Portion;—when he leads him to make the Divine glory the end of all his actions, and preparation for a state of future blessedness his daily business. Is it not a great thing to break the fetters of the slave;—to impress upon the spirit the vastness of its destiny;—to deliver it from guilt, and give it peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;—to open to it sources of improvement and happiness;—to give it a resting-place in the Divine favour;—to enable it to ripen daily for eternal glory?

It is our duty to relate these great things, especially to our friends, where such communications may be made without the appearance of ostentation, and with the best hopes that they may be induced to "taste and see that the Lord is gracious." Have we nothing to relate in honour of Divine goodness;—nothing in reference to mercy sought, and mercy found? Wo unto us, if we cannot say,—“Come unto me, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul.”

DECEMBER 20.

Scripture selected for the day.—Philippians, i.
20—30.

All the dignity of man is derived from his connexion with the eternal state. As connected with

time, what do we see in him but infancy, imbecility, disease, and death? What a pitiable sight is a being born for eternity, expending all his energies on objects utterly unworthy of his cares, and busy at the same time in effecting his everlasting ruin!

All the importance of our relation to our fellow-creatures here is connected with the fact, that we are surrounded with minds needing culture to prevent them from utter and irretrievable ruin: and as the work of our Divine Lord on earth was "to seek and to save that which was lost," the great work of every true Christian is to pursue the same divinely benevolent object, and to take with him to the shore as many as he can save from the general wreck. He, then, lives to Christ, who lives to prosecute the object for which the Redeemer came from heaven. This is the work of every Christian; and it becomes his duty to cultivate a knowledge of the moral desert around him, and a deep compassion for the beings perishing either for lack of knowledge, or through the hardness of their hearts. This is the first duty of his existence, as it respects his fellow-creatures; and, blessed be God, in the present day, the means for accomplishing the saving good of men are ample, and more or less within the reach of every private Christian; we may all seek, not only "our own things, but those of others;" and, blessed be God, also the instances of conversion through the efforts even of those who are not engaged in the christian ministry, begin to be very numerous indeed.

But does not the apostle mean, when he says, For me to live is Christ, It is as though Christ lived again in my person, and in my efforts? Such an individual, whose desire is, that Christ may live in him, and speak and act through him, will cultivate the aptness to teach which our Saviour possessed,—his compassion for the multitude,—his incessant application to the work of saving men,—his condescension to the most illiterate, the weakest, and most miserable,—and his self-annihilation.

That a life thus consecrated to the Redeemer, and to the best interests of mankind, will end well, all proof is unnecessary: death to such a christian philanthropist must be gain.

DECEMBER 21.

Scripture selected for the day.—Acts, viii. 1—23.

From the history contained in this chapter, it is plain, that the members of the primitive church were very extensively engaged in seeking the conversion of mankind. Saul made dreadful havock of the church; the members were scattered abroad; but the dispersed went every where preaching the gospel; and these were not the apostles, for in the first verse it is declared, that “all were scattered abroad except the apostles.”

Yet many private Christians would now say,—What can we do? To teach, reclaim, and convert others, learning, influence, and leisure, are required. But art not thou a parent; and has not Divine Providence committed to thy charge a most interesting and precious flock? Is it not thy duty to bring up these “in the instruction and correction of the Lord?” Thine influence over them is very great;—their minds are at present tender, and thou art always with them. And how knowest thou, O mother, how knowest thou, O father, but thou mayest save a soul from death, and cover or prevent a multitude of sins; and all this in the person of thy child? But thou art a relative, and art united to many by the ties of blood. Is there nothing in these ties but what is animal? Is there nothing connected with them, of benevolent or moral obligation? If thou neglect to warn these parts of thyself, will not their blood be required at thy hand? Canst thou not invite them with thee to the house of God, give them books to

read, and infuse into thy conversation and correspondence with them affectionate persuasions to attend to the things that belong to their peace? Thou hast friends, for whom perhaps thou hast a strong attachment; but canst thou bear the idea of their being lost for ever? Canst thou not tenderly and affectionately converse with them on those subjects which so nearly concern their future welfare? No other person will be listened to with the same attention, nor will the words of others make such an impression as thine. As thou really lovest thy friend, seek to save him from death. Think, whether thou canst not speak or write to him this very day on these momentous subjects. Perhaps death may soon prevent all further efforts to save him. Thou art a master; and it will be most lamentable, if from under thy roof men should sink into perdition, unwarned, and ignorant of the grace of the Saviour. Thou art a citizen, and mayest promote the advancement of those valuable institutions which are connected with the best interests of mankind. Let it not be said of thee, with reference to these institutions,—“Thou seekest thine own,—not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.” Thou hast thy gifts, and many opportunities: let them not be all lost to thy fellow-creatures. Say not, then, I am a private Christian,—what can I do to promote the conversion of mankind?

 DECEMBER 22.

Scripture selected for the day.—1 Corinthians, v.

“Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.” These words lead our minds to an event compared with which every other, and all the collected events of time, are destitute of every particle of importance:—the Son of God appearing on earth “to put away

sin by the sacrifice of himself." Many Divine interpositions and appearances preceded the coming of Christ, the Messiah. By extraordinary and miraculous manifestations God had made known his will to Adam, to Abraham, to Noah, to Moses, and to others. In these instances angels were the living messengers. But this is the descent of the Creator of all things: — "The Word was God: all things were made by him. The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

Why must a Divine Person leave heaven? At his word, creation arose, and he "ruleth all things by the word of his power." He comes to die! — "A body hast thou prepared me." "My son, God will provide himself a Lamb." He is to be offered up, to become a Sacrifice, and his blood is to be sprinkled on our hearts, as a security from the destroying angel. Christ then is the Passover Lamb, and is divinely appointed, or "the Lamb of God." Millions of animals had suffered, but not one sin had been expiated by all that blood; while he by one offering perfected for ever those who are sanctified.

But why must so glorious a Person die? Why must a human, a Divine sacrifice be offered? Why, without shedding of blood, in the government of a Being who is the Fountain of mercy, is there no remission of sins? — Such is the appointment of him who cannot err, who can do no wrong. Man is justly under the sentence of death; therefore, according to the decrees of heaven, which it were vain and impious for him to question, must perish, unless a sufficient atonement can be offered. The destroying angel will smite all upon whom the blood of the passover Lamb is not found. See to it then, O reader, that by faith in this blood thou be placed in circumstances of pardon and acceptance.

DECEMBER 23.

Scripture selected for the day.—Psalm, cvii.

No part of creation, perhaps, excites sublimer ideas in the human mind than the mighty ocean, the vast expanse of waters. It forms an image of eternity. Those watery worlds are also full of wonders: the saltness of the element, the shoals of fish, the prodigious size of the whale, may well excite our admiration. All these are witnessed by the navigator. There are on the ocean, scenes, calculated powerfully to arrest the attention of those who go down to the sea in ships: David in this Psalm gives a striking description of a storm at sea, and shows how dependent the sailor is upon the Divine mercy:—“He raiseth up the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof.”—1. Here is a mighty display of the Divine *Power*, in forms far more terrific, and exhibiting more of the dependence of the creature on Providence, than is to be found in any other part of the visible universe.—2. The *Justice* of the Almighty is here also sometimes most awfully displayed: the bold blasphemer falls from the mast, or is hurled into the deep, or the whole crew are swallowed up in the ocean.—3. Nor are there wanting at sea exhibitions of the Divine *Mercy*: at all times nothing but a thin plank between the crew and eternity; and in many instances most remarkable deliverances:—“They cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.”—4. What proofs of the *long-suffering* of the Almighty does a vessel at sea afford! The Lord ceases not to care for the crew, and deliver them, notwithstanding the irreligion, the profaneness, the blasphemies, which prevail.—5. In the present day numbers of vessels contain signal monuments of saving mercy. How many hearts callous and hardened in sin have been melted; how many daring blasphemers have been brought to supplicate

the Divine mercy! We sometimes hear of a pious crew; and many vessels have been consecrated to the service of God, by prayer and praise, and the humble worship of christian sailors. Here also things are tending towards the grand consummation, when "the abundance of the sea" shall be given to the Redeemer.

Every part of creation, therefore, is full of sacred instruction. Even here, where all the scenery of the solid land is lost, and the habitation of man, and the house of God, are far far away; — even here, multitudes "see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep."

DECEMBER 24.

Scripture selected for the day.—John, xxi.
15—25.

Who is this that claims for himself the honours of the Eternal Law,—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart;” and respecting whom the Apostle Paul saith, — “If any man love not the Lord Jesus, let him be *anathema*?” Neither Moses, who gave the law, nor any of the prophets, nor the apostles, ever claimed the attachment of mankind as the Redeemer here does that of Peter. Who, then, is Jesus Christ? The question will be best answered by propounding and answering another, Upon what are the claims of Jesus Christ founded, that his disciples should love him?

1. He is God.—“He thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” “He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father.” “This is the true God, and eternal Life.” On the ground of his sovereign rights, therefore, and by his Divine perfections, he claims the love of his people.—He is the Creator.—“All

things were made by him." As the creatures of his power, therefore, we are bound to love him.—3. He is the Redeemer. On account of his sufferings for us, we owe him unbounded attachment and gratitude, as well as for the everlasting benefits he has conferred on us.—He is the Intercessor. He ever remembers us, making intercession for us in every time of need. On all these accounts, the Lord Jesus Christ deserves a love, beyond the claims which any one creature can have upon another.

When is our love to Christ questionable? When in our families we neglect to honour him, not endeavouring to set up his kingdom in the hearts of our children and servants. When we do not speak of him among our relations. When we are afraid of owning him before men. When during the live-long day we scarcely think of him. When our hearts are not affected by reading or hearing of his love. When we feel little attachment to him, while partaking of the memorials of his death. When not willing to make sacrifices for his cause, and when we have no desire to be with him.

To some the question might be put,—“Lovest thou me more than these?” You have had more forgiven than others,—experienced greater deliverances,—have more knowledge, and have made greater professions of attachment:—can you say,—“Yea, Lord, thou knowest that we love thee?”

DECEMBER 25.

Scripture selected for the day.—Romans, xiv.

Who will say, after reading this chapter, that Christianity is the promoter of war? What a contrast, between the spirit of the apostle respecting doubtful matters, and the temper of those who have disputed and quarrelled so furiously respecting what have been

called church festivals. If any one might have insisted confidently, and reproved sharply, on the subject of holy-days, surely this inspired apostle might; yet he does it not: but he recommends a tender and mutual forbearance, though he says,—“I think I have the Spirit of God.”

If, however, any day except the Sabbath-day, and which is by the apostle called, “the Lord’s day,” be regarded by us as sacred, all will admit that it should be observed “to the Lord,” and not be devoted to sensual gratification and disorder. Many Christians express a strong veneration for this day in reference to the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ; and he who consecrates it to this great event, to grateful acknowledgments, in his closet, in his family, and in the house of God, for this “Unspeakable Gift,” and to a solemn inquiry, whether the end of the Redeemer’s coming into the world has been answered in him, may be said, in the best sense, to observe it to the Lord.

O Lord, what infinite obligations am I laid under to Thee, that thou shouldest have remembered me in my low estate,—have sent thine only-begotten Son, to live, to die, for me,—and that I should be called to celebrate these unutterable mercies, with some hope that by conversion, and faith in my Redeemer, they are become mine! What thanks can I render to thee, O thou Father of mercies, for these matchless favours? O that my soul, with all its powers, and my life, with all its opportunities, may be thine; and that, at length, through the boundless merits of my Saviour, I may be admitted to devote a whole eternity to the contemplation of this vast theme,—“God was manifest in the flesh,” and to the celebration of thine eternal praise!

DECEMBER 26.

Scripture selected for the day.—Isaiah, li. 9—23.

Does it not strike the mind, that he who, when leaving the earth, thus addressed his friends, must be something more than man?—"I will not leave you comfortless."—How different the address of a dying mortal, surrounded by his family in a state of distraction, and exhorting them to look up to the Almighty as their only Refuge!

How suitable to the case of the disciples this address was, will appear, if we consider their circumstances, and the prospects before them!—They were persons possessed of no uncommon powers, their minds were not enlarged by education, and they were unacquainted with the manners and state of the world. They were going to meet a world in arms; the natural enmity and pride of the heart, the craft of priests, the superstition of the crowd, the arm of tyrants, all against them; this hostile world they were to subdue to the obedience of faith; and in this conflict they were to bear the greatest deprivations, the extremity of personal sufferings, and to give up life itself. To men in such circumstances how cheering the declaration,—"I will not leave you orphans!"

But what encouragement have we to rely on the Lord Jesus Christ for comfort? For, "we are born to trouble." Consider his errand on earth: he came to "heal the broken-hearted." Consider his character during his ministry:—"We saw his glory,—full of grace and truth:" "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and to the poor the gospel is preached." Consider his power over all worlds, all events, all creatures, all times. Consider his work; he came, that we might have life, and abundant life; he came to seek and save the lost:—"I ascend to my Father, and now your Father, and to my God,

and now your God." He gives the Holy Spirit, and gives him as "the Comforter." He ever lives to supply all our wants, and to make intercession for us. Finally, he holds out to us prospects of never-fading glory, and assures us that he will bestow upon us eternal life. O that we may be taught to seek more of our comforts in Christ, and less from present scenes! He can comfort by human instruments, by his word, and by his ordinances, as well as by his Spirit.—How desolate their case who have no interest in the favour of this blessed Redeemer!

DECEMBER 27.

Scripture selected for the day.—James, v.

There are many passages of Scripture which describe, in the most striking language, the spiritual state of unconverted men:—"All we like sheep have gone astray." "There is none that doeth good, no not one." "Who can understand his errors?" "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is death." In this chapter the conduct of the sinner is described as "the error of his way." Man, till recovered to a right mind, lies under a capital and fatal error: he is living without God; neglecting his eternal interests; or seeking salvation by wrong means,—bartering heaven for interdicted momentary enjoyments.

Conversion from these errors must take place, or the man is absolutely undone; and he who is the means of producing a real conversion,—by his pious example, or conversation, by his public ministry, or by any other means, does an inconceivable good,—"he saves a soul from death;" he becomes a benefactor to souls, and a dispenser of unsearchable riches. How great the good which a person may do, who aims at this highest kind of beneficence! How much this

achievement exceeds whatever statesmen or heroes have ever accomplished! He shall cover or prevent a multitude of sins which the convert would have committed, and the consequences of which he must have endured, if he had remained unconverted; and shall further save a soul, an immortal being, from death,—from a moral or spiritual death, as well as from a death that never ends.

The Divine Writer wishes this to be known, to urge us to the most energetic and persevering efforts in the work of saving souls;—"Let him know," that the good which is done when one sinner is brought to repentance, is unutterable,—all heaven is filled with new joy,—a soul is delivered from the horrors of eternal death.

What encouragement to use the means divinely appointed for this end; to be instant in season and out of season, in teaching the young, diffusing knowledge, dealing with relations, friends, and servants, and leaving no prudent method untried, if by any means we may save some; remembering that "they who sow in tears shall reap in joy," and that they "who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever!"

DECEMBER 28.

Scripture selected for the day.—Matthew, v. 1—20.

It would have been well for the church, if all its members had possessed the mind which was in Jesus Christ as it respects their living for the good of others. The church would then have assumed a benign and dignified attitude, in some measure worthy of its Founder, the Great Philanthropist, and would have realized the description which our Lord here gives of his apostles and disciples,—“Ye are the

light of the world." The apostles, as the heralds of salvation, did illuminate the world, and chased away the midnight darkness and superstitions with which it was enveloped. But how little have Christians in these latter days done for mankind! The most degrading selfishness seems to have pervaded pastors and flocks; and the illumination of a dark world has not for ages, till very recently, been realized as duty.

A private Christian is ready to say, What can I do to remove the darkness that covers the earth? Dost thou do all in thy power? Dost thou befriend every institution the object of which is, the instruction of the ignorant, and the illumination of those sitting in the region and shadow of death? Canst thou not assist to teach the poor; to diffuse knowledge among the heathen? Is there no child to whom thou canst impart the unadulterated milk of the word? Is there no blind servant whom thou canst try to direct in the way of peace? No poor neighbour on a sick or dying bed, whom thou canst console, and point to "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world?" Though thou hast no splendid talents for public usefulness, yet, as a steady taper, thou canst let thy light so shine before men, that they, seeing thy purity of conversation, thy benevolence, thy uniform regard to Divine worship, and thy faithful discharge of every civil, and domestic, and religious duty, may glorify thy Father who is in heaven. Think how much the Apostle Paul, and Whitfield, and Wesley, and other single individuals, have done; and aim, like them, at the accomplishment of the greatest quantity of good within the compass of the ability which the Divine Being imparteth; placing this before thee as thy constant monitor,—“Ye are the light of the world.”

DECEMBER 29.

Scripture selected for the day.—Jeremiah, xxviii.

God has left none of us in uncertainty respecting our mortality ; but he has graciously hidden from us the hour and the manner of our death, and in so doing has shown that he doth not willingly afflict nor grieve the children of men. But in how many instances is this goodness turned into a curse ! Because men know not when they shall die, they live as though they should never die.

We may, however, die this year, though no prophetic voice has pronounced the awful sentence. See how men provide against what may befall them, the loss of property, and many events much more uncertain than that such or such a person shall die this year.

It is, no doubt, a pressing duty to be prepared to meet our end, whether it come or not. Some persons suppose that confession, the rites of the Christian church, and promises of amendment, will serve in the dying hour. But what has God made necessary as a due preparation for death ? *Repentance* : “ Except ye repent, ye shall all perish.” *Faith* :—“ He that believeth not is condemned.” *Holiness* :—“ Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.”

If you should die without this needful preparation, what will the thought avail, when you shall lie down in dust, that you have been fortunate in business, that you have enjoyed uninterrupted health, reared a respectable family, and have been surrounded by numerous friends ? Who envies the animal, though drest in garlands, which is going to be sacrificed ?

But to lie down in thorough disappointment at finding life a vapour, and the world a cheat, is but a small part of the misery attending the end of a worldly life. Thou must go before Him who will require an account of the improvement of thy talent ;

and what a sad account will that be, even if thou hast only hidden thy talent, and done nothing but live to thyself!—But if thou be indeed prepared for death, life will be sweetened, death will be disarmed, and the cheering prospects of eternal life will be opened fully to thy view.

DECEMBER 30.

Scripture selected for the day.—Acts, xv. 22—35.

“Fare ye well.”—Most books contain much that is destitute of interest; but the very appendages to the Divine Word are important. The expression which closes this apostolic letter, is full of weighty meaning, as embracing the best interests of those to whom the letter is addressed:—“Say unto the righteous, It shall be well with him.”

The well-being of the Christian is founded upon union to Christ; his safety, his hopes, his comforts, his blessed prospects, are all derived from his Redeemer. Through him the Almighty becomes his heavenly Father, and the Holy Spirit, his Comforter and Sanctifier. All spiritual blessings become his, but only through Christ; and to the inheritance reserved for him, he is heir only as he is found in him.

But when is it well with the Christian as it respects his state of mind?—When he possesses a truly humble frame, and is sensible of his utter unworthiness, his manifold errors and deficiencies. This softened spirit receives deeply the Divine impress, and in such a heart the blessed God condescends to take up his abode. Watchfulness is ever connected with a state of christian prosperity, and is necessary to its permanency. To such a Christian the Bible is a great treasure, and its truths support him in running the race with patience. He is a spiritual man, fond of his closet, and anxious to grow in grace. He stretches

towards the mark for the prize of the high-calling of God in Christ Jesus; and he longs with the apostle to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better than any enjoyment on earth. This state of mind, and all the blessedness connected with it, were desired for the churches by the missionaries and elders assembled at Jerusalem.

But it cannot be well with the unconverted:—"Say unto the wicked, It shall be ill with him." All his sins remain unpardoned. The whole of the word of God, the law, and the gospel, is against him; and the Almighty himself is to all in such circumstances "a consuming Fire." To such we would fain say,—“Fare ye well:” but it cannot be well with you, unless Christ be your’s.

DECEMBER 31.

Scripture selected for the day.—2 Corinthians, xiii.

This apostolic benediction, or rather prayer, found at the close of almost all the apostle’s letters, includes all the blessings of the everlasting covenant; the grace of the Lord Jesus,—the love of the Father,—the communion of the Holy Spirit.

The grace of Christ is placed first; perhaps, to teach us, that it is through him, and him alone, that all blessings descend to men; that Jesus Christ our Lord is the Source of all true bliss to sinners: what the softening shower, the rays of the sun, and the refreshing breeze, are to the earth, such is the grace of the Redeemer to the whole body of Christians throughout the world.

The love of God, says the apostle, is in Christ Jesus our Lord; and from this love neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height,

nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us.

The communion of the Holy Ghost is often understood among Christians as referring to the hopes and sacred pleasures which arise from that intercourse with the Deity which Christians have in the various acts of Divine worship. But the most direct meaning of this term is, a joint participation of the mercies of redemption, as these mercies are distributed by the Holy Ghost, 1 Corinthians, xii.

This is the apostolic benediction, the blessing of the Triune Jehovah; and such is the good which the apostle wishes to be realized by every Christian.

In his first letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle uses this benediction;—"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." To the Galatians,—
"Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." To the Ephesians,—
"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." To the Philippians,—
"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." To the Colossians,—
"Grace be with you." To the Thessalonians,—
"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." To Timothy and Titus,—
"Grace be with you." To Philemon,—
"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." In his second letter to the church at Corinth,—
"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all." Amen.

FINIS.

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