



James Smith

789
1856

REPENTANCE,

OR

RICHMOND IN TEARS.



REPENTANCE,

OR

RICHMOND IN TEARS.



SERMON II.

LUKE XIII. 5,

“ Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

“ I am come” said our Lord “ to send fire on the
“ earth: and what will I if it be already kindled: But
“ I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I
“ straitened till it be accomplished! Suppose ye
“ that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you,
“ Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth
“ there shall be five in one house divided, three
“ against two, and two against three. The father shall
“ be divided against the son, and the son against the
“ father; the mother against the daughter, and the
“ daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law a-
“ gainst her daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law
“ against her mother-in-law.”

It was foreseen and expressly foretold, that the inveteracy against the gospel, symptoms of which already appeared should break the ties of nature and friendship, and expose, to the greatest affliction, those who believed in Christ. But let the Jews beware of a perverseness which, in their experience, shall be found fatal in the highest degree. "When thou goest with
 " thine adversary to the magistrate, *as thou art* in the
 " way, give diligence that thou mayest be delivered
 " from him; lest he hale thee to the judge, and the
 " judge, deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast
 " thee into prison. I tell thee, thou shalt not depart,
 " thence till thou hast paid the very last mite."

"There were present at that season," when these awful admonitions were given, "some that told him
 " of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate mingled with
 " their sacrifices." Gamaliel, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrim, had, sometime before, stated to that body, the case of Judas of Galilee, who, in the days of the taxing, drew much people after him, he perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were destroyed. Was not that the event spoken of in my text?—Believing that God was the only sovereign of Judea, These Galileans would not submit to the Roman power, nor pay tribute to Caesar. Worshipping at one of their Festivals, they took that opportunity when

the nation were collected in one place, to inculcate their obnoxious tenets, of which, Pilate, being informed, came upon them suddenly, and slew many of them, even in the Temple itself. This act of Pilate was now mentioned, probably with a view to insnare our Lord, who of necessity would incur much displeasure, whether the act was justified or condemned; but with his usual wisdom, he avoided the snare, leading his hearers, without deciding on one side or another, to improve this awful providence for their own benefit. "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

We cannot, at present, decide on the conduct of providence, since one event befalleth the righteous and the wicked, and in temporal calamities, the good and bad are equally involved. Of this, the calamity at Siloam, which without any human interposition, proceeded immediately from the hand of God, and, arresting numbers in the act of purification, overwhelmed them in destruction, was a more evident instance. Terrible was their fate whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices; and *theirs* who were crushed, in a moment, as a moth, by the fall of the Tower of Siloam;—but let none impute aggravated offence to

the unhappy sufferers,—were these sinners above all others?—Pilate supposed they were, for no other supposition could justify his cruel act;—The pharisees supposed they were, for they were always ready to vilify others, and to boast of themselves—From the decision of Pilate, and of the Pharisees, I appeal to a higher authority. Let the head of the church, our great teacher decide, his decision is express, which he repeats once and again, “*I tell you Nay;*” and then adds the admonition in my text, which can never be forgotten, nor fail deeply to impress every soul,

“*Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*”

Repentance is required of *all* and *each* of the human race, otherwise their ruin is inevitable.

But what is repentance? What does it *suppose*? In what *does it consist*? How is it *effected*?

Repentance supposeth a law by which we are bound, and a power to which we are accountable. Was there no law there could be no transgression; was there no restraining power, following the desires and imaginations of our own hearts could be attended with no blame. Are we creatures? Of consequence we are subject to the creator: Has he impressed some laws

on the mind, and published others at different times, and with different degrees of evidence? both are obligatory, and imply punishment or reward, as they are neglected or observed. On this subject the Apostle Paul speaks with great clearness. All men are accountable to God; but allowances shall be made. You enjoy the advantages which the Gospel affords; He never heard the Gospel, each shall be judged according to his advantages.

“ There is no respect of persons with God. For as
 “ many as have sinned without law, shall also perish
 “ without law; and as many as have sinned in the law,
 “ shall be judged by the law. (For not the hearers of
 “ the law are just before God, but the doers of the
 “ law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which
 “ have not the law, do by nature the things contained
 “ in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto
 “ themselves: Which show the work of the law writ-
 “ ten in their hearts, their conscience also bearing wit-
 “ ness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing, or
 “ else excusing, one another.) In the day when God
 “ shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, ac-
 “ cording to my Gospel.”

None are destitute of some rule of life; it may be more, or less explicit, but so far as it goes it is binding;

and the regard payed to it shall be brought to a strict, solemn, and public review. Repentance supposeth the neglect of this rule; conduct has not come up to it; it has been the most opposite in the world. Such neglect, such opposition is chargeable upon each of the human race, "The imagination of *man's heart* is evil from his youth. If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." The Apostle Paul has proved Jew and Gentile to be under sin, all the world are guilty before God, "for all have sinned."

In what does repentance consist? It consists in the renovation of our nature, beginning at the heart, and reaching to the conduct. If the evil ever be corrected, trace it to its source. Let *the root* of bitterness be plucked up. Let there be an entire change in *the conduct*, and in *the principle* whence conduct proceeds. John the Baptist speaks of "fruits meet for repentance;" assuring the Jews, "The axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire." He called aloud, "Repent ye." The call was repeated by our Lord, and by all his Apostles, "The times of ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he

“ will judge the world in righteousness, by *that* man
 “ whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given as-
 “ surance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from
 “ the dead.” Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die? As
 I live sayeth the Lord, “ I have no delight in the death
 “ of them who die, but would rather that they return
 “ unto me, and live.”

But, how is repentance effected? By the mere ex-
 ertion of the individual himself? No, “ Can the Ethi-
 “ opian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?
 “ Then may” he “ also do good, who has been accus-
 “ tomed to do evil.” By the utmost effort of those
 who seek their welfare? No, often they labour in vain,
 bitterly lamenting, “ who hath believed our report,
 “ and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? All
 “ day long have I stretched forth my hands unto a dis-
 “ obedient and gain saying people.” By the minis-
 tration of the Gospel faithfully executed, and wisely
 varied? Ah! in repeated instances, these make no im-
 pression, or if an impression be made, it is not lasting.
 The Jews received little benefit from the ministry, ei-
 ther of Jesus, or of his Apostles. A great proportion
 of the nation, growing worse, by the very means in-
 tended for their reformation, ripened fast for certain
 destruction.

It is not denied that the effort of the individual himself, and the preaching of the word, have in many instances been very effectual, but only in consequence of energy from on high. The head of the church bestows, and grace for grace; he rouses the sluggish; he blesses the faithful; moving the waters of the sanctuary, he gives them a healing virtue.

When David fell, how did David expect to rise? By the spirit of God renewing and sanctifying his soul. How was Israel recovered from practices, which drew down the judgments of God? They were recovered by the power of God. He announced, by the Prophet, his gracious design, which he executed to the recovery of Israel, and the admiration of the whole earth.

“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye
 “shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all
 “your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will
 “I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you;
 “and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh,
 “and I will give you an heart of flesh. ~~And I will~~ put
 “my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my
 “statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do
 “*them.*”

What are the works for which ancient prophecies celebrate so much the expected Messiah? In works of

grace and mercy shall he abound ; he shall be “ like a refiner’s fire, and like the “ fullers soap ; he shall purify the sins of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness—pleasant unto the Lord as in the days of old, and as in former years. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance ; he came to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Christ’s power over men’s bodies to strengthen, to perfect, and to heal, the weak, the maimed, and the diseased, was an emblem of a more wonderful power over their minds. Stretch out the withered hand ; take up thy bed and walk ; arise ; was his command, and such efficacy attended the command, that weakness infirmity and disease immediately fled ; obedience before was impossible, now it was easy ; the hindrance was removed, and the afflicted were astonished to find themselves healthful and vigorous, in possession of perfect and robust constitutions.

Remember now thy creator ; be sober minded ; keep my commandments—these, and similar exhortations, when addressed to the giddy, the dissipated, and the disobedient, are not more likely to be listened unto, nor executed than in cases of natural incapacity ; habits are very obstinate ; especially vicious habits ; they are a

second nature; but the word of Jesus is a word of power; it is life and energy; the man is roused and animated; he shakes off every fetter; he breaks through every hinderance; he runs in the way of God's commandments. *He* speaks who once said let there be light and there was light. Peace be still, and the winds and the waves were calm. The effect is immediate and irresistible. Matthew the publican was thereby disengaged from a ruinous attachment to the world. The woman of Samaria was brought to hold her former dissipation in abhorrence. Mary Magdalene was set at liberty from a long and a degrading captivity to sin and Satan.

But is Jesus still pleased to exercise his astonishing power for the benefit of man? Do sinners still hear his voice, rendering them, thoughtful, resolute and obedient? Yes, he is exalted a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance; to open men's eyes;—To turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God. This power he exerts, sometimes in a secret; sometimes in an open manner. Any means he can render effectual; It may be the man's own affection;—It may be the ordinary course of Providence;—It may be the preaching of the word. No mean, however inconsiderable, but is sufficient, if he give it efficacy, and the most likely, without this efficacy can produce no abiding effect.

APPENDIX.

A RUMOUR reached Alexandria on the 28th of December 1811, that the inhabitants of Richmond had been visited by a terrible calamity on the evening of the 26th. The alarm was great and general, many having daughters and intimate acquaintances in that city, and *all* feeling for the affliction of fellow-men, and fellow-citizens. Tidings are the food of grief, whose appetite is voracious; no particularity is enough; another circumstance, and another, every circumstance, and that circumstance detail in the fullest manner, what went before, what was *attendant* and what was *consequent*, realize the melancholy scene, let us see it, less cannot satisfy the mind pierced with grief. In a *fever*, this is necessary to quench the thirst, and yet the thirst cannot be quenched. Alexandria sickened when the saddening rumour reached it. What! O! what has happened?

The tale of woe is short. The overflowing only of the heart runs off in a sigh—a word—a broken sentence.

The Theatre took fire, and *eighty* citizens are consumed.

Time abates the violence of grief, and enables the mind with sufficient calmness to listen, and to investigate ; to escape from an oppressive burden, but to escape as Israel did, enriched with the spoil of the enemy.

The calamity, which has laid a gay and flourishing city in the dust, ranks with those generally termed *accidental*. No man designed that calamity, nor actually brought it on the city. It was of God, who thereby executed part of his wise, but to us, mysterious plan. The ceiling of the Theatre was painted canvass, and the scenery highly combustible. An attempt to lower a chandelier, which was awkwardly hung, and, at the same time entangled, threw it among the scenery, which took fire ; the scenery, the ceiling, and the roof were instantly in flames ; a thick cloud of smoke and vapour descended ; all was consternation ; the Pit, from which there was free access, was immediately emptied ; but the Boxes, from which there was only one narrow passage, could not soon be cleared. It was as easy to go through a wall, as through the croud ; the stair sunk under the pressure, throwing headlong a prostrate multitude in heaps. The vapour had extinguished the lights, and was found extremely suffocating. A blaze from the cloud of smoke, or from the clothes of those who were on fire, increased the horror. Some fainted ; some were suffocated ; some were consumed to ashes ;

some were trampled to death. A number reached the door, or throwing themselves out of the windows, escaped; but escaped, bruised—maimed—or severely burned. The vapour was so scorching, that, in one instance at least, although no part of the dress was even singed, the body was so burned as to issue, after lingering a few days, in death. Those who escaped know not how; some with safety; others with fatal or lasting injury. The sufferers could not have agonized long; with most death was instantaneous, dying in a faint, or by suffocation; and in all, less than nine or ten minutes put a period to their existence. The shrieks which at first were loud and from every lip, after that interval ceased, and all was still as the grave. A child at the first alarm, fell on her knees and called aloud for mercy, she was heard, and was snatched as a brand from the burning; another was thrown by the press from the Boxes into the Pit and thereby escaped. Some in each others arms, overcome by the smoke, sunk one in the direction of the window, another in the opposite direction, the one was lost, but the other saved. The more attentively I consider these facts, it forces on my mind a conviction that the *object* was precisely *marked*; the danger certainly was equal, but God had ordained the one for life, and the other for death. Rank and station, youth and beauty, wisdom and usefulness were of no avail. The commission

was given, and all, included in the commission, without any exception, fell. It was the moment, fixed in the decree of God for their departure from earth, and their departure could not be delayed. *Eighty* of the *six hundred* who were in the Theatre, became a prey to death.

I am the more convinced that this calamity was of God from many attending circumstances. The calamity was anticipated by some of the sufferers. I do not mean that any had an idea that the Theatre should that evening be their grave, but they were uneasy, they knew not why; and apprehended an unknown but fatal evil. Similar apprehensions have often in similar circumstances been experienced. God, in pity to men, gives secret intimations in a manner none can explain, of what he designs, that men may prepare to meet their God. It assures us that God governs the world in wisdom, and has connected man more intimately with the world of spirits than is generally believed.— Rochester mentions two instances of this kind which fell under his own observation, and, in his most giddy days, impelled him to pause and to reflect. Henry the IV of France was agonized at the approach of a certain day; but whence his agony? He could not tell.— It was the very day on which he was assassinated.

One very amiable, and who had for years past been solicitous to know and to serve her God, felt an unaccountable anxiety for the welfare of her husband, who was then absent. Nothing had occurred to excite anxiety, but it was excited, and in a degree that she was restless, until she had reached Richmond. Reluctantly she attended the Theatre, at the importunity of her young friends, declaring that for the last time she would tread forbidden ground, and sacrifice her own judgment to the gratification of others. She effected her retreat indeed, but so injured that in a few days she expired. The hand of God led her to the fatal spot, no doubt for wise reasons, which, for the present, are involved in impenetrable mystery

A young man of engaging manners, and tried courage was deterred from attending the Theatre by a dream, that he had been assassinated in the *Lobby*: in his dream he felt all the agonies of death. He awoke in terror, determined to avoid the accursed spot, but his resolution was shaken by the keen ridicule with which his apprehensions were treated. In the course of the representation, an actor entered with a hatchet in his hand. It threw our youth into an agony. 'That is the man whom I saw in my dream.' He rose to fly, but was severely rallied by his female friends. 'Stay you are going to the spot where you were assas-

'sinated, stay ~~we~~ will protect you.' He did stay, and when the alarm was given, generously afforded his friends every aid, but perished on the very spot, pointed out in his dream. Was not his fate foreseen? Were not intimations thereof afforded him? Who could foresee that fate, or afford these intimations but *God* who does in the armics of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth what he pleaseth?

A young woman, greatly lamented, for her generosity and cheerfulness, a victim on this fatal night, refused her attendance before she had made her will, no reason was assigned, but it was deemed necessary, as some impressions on ~~her~~ mind, indicated that it was not long, that she should be an inhabitant of this world; when her will was made, she attended her companions with her usual gaiety.

These instances, which I believe in general to be true, although it is extremely difficult to obtain an accurate detail, proclaim aloud that there is an "appointed time to man on earth: his days are determined, the number of his months are with God." He requires our lives when, and where, and how he pleaseth.

Son of man, thou art born to die; at home, or abroad; in the house or on the way; engaged in wordly busi-

ness, or engaged in acts of religion; among the considerate or among the gay, thou treadest uncertain ground; the grave yawns to swallow thee up; be always ready.

In this event, also, realize that day when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, when the elements shall melt with fervent heat, when the earth and the things which are therein shall be burned up.

Mr. Hill of Winchester improves this event, by a plain popular, and impressive address, to repent and to amend our lives: and Mr. Alexander of Philadelphia, by pouring balm into the wounded soul.

Dr. Samuel Miller of New York offers, in a concise, eloquent and enlightened discourse, motives, to lessen and to destroy the attachment of Christians to Theatrical amusements.

Mr. Dashiell of Baltimore raises his voice as a trumpet, to rouse the sons of pleasure, to excite a thirst for the waters of life, and to imbitter these polluted waters of which none can drink who regard their lives.

This is one of the signs of the times, which with many others, deserve serious attention. A circumstance unknown to me when I discussed that subject

has since come to my knowledge. A worthy member of Congress has assured me of the fact. The French prisoners in England, have received from that government, *Bibles*, and *Preachers*, who, in their own language, explain to them the scripture, many of them have been converted, and turned unto God. How the emperor of France will be affected by this generous act I know not. It has conferred on his subjects a benefit, which he cannot easily repay. It eases their captivity. It has ennobled them more than their emperor could ever have ennobled them. They are become citizens of heaven; men of principle; more valuable subjects than ever; for those who fear their God, "will not be wanting in *honour*" to *their king*. A leaven is hereby thrown into the mass of the French empire which I hope will *ferment* and leaven the whole lump.

In confirmation that men sometimes have presages of death, and the conclusion which may be drawn from thence, the following quotation from Dr. Burnet's life of Rochester deserves attention :

"When Rochester went to sea in the year 1665,
"there happened to be in the same ship with him, Mr.
"Montague and another gentleman of quality. These
"two, the former especially, seemed persuaded that
"they should never return into England: Mr. Monta-

“ gue said he was sure of it ; the other was not so po-
“ sitive. The Earl of Rochester and the last of these
“ entered into a formal engagement, not without cere-
“ monies of religion, that, if either of them died, he
“ should appear, and give the other notice of the fu-
“ ture state, if there was any ; but Mr. Montague
“ would not enter into the bond. When the day came
“ that they thought to have taken the Dutch fleet, in
“ the port of Bergen, Mr. Montague, though he had
“ such a strong presage in his mind of his approach-
“ ing death, yet he generously staid all the while in the
“ place of greatest danger. The other gentleman sig-
“ nalized his courage in a most undaunted manner till
“ the end of the action, when he fell on a sudden into
“ such a trembling that he could scarce stand ; and,
“ Mr. Montague going to him to hold him up, as they
“ were in each other's arms, a cannon ball killed him
“ outright, and carried away Mr. Montague's belly, so
“ that he died within an hour after. The Earl of Ro-
“ chester told me that these presages they had in their
“ minds made some impression on him, that there
“ were separate beings ; and that the soul, either by a
“ natural sagacity, or some secret notice communicated
“ to it, had a sort of divination. But that gentleman's
“ never appearing was a great snare to him during the
“ remainder of his life ; though when he told me this,
“ he could not but acknowledge it was an unreasona-

“ ble thing for him to think, that beings in another
“ state are not under such laws and limits that they
“ could not command their own motions but as the Su-
“ preme Power should order them; and that one, who
“ had so corrupted the natural principles of truth as he
“ had, had no reason to expect that such an extraordi-
“ nary thing should be done for his conviction.

“ He told me of another odd presage that one had of
“ his approaching death in the Lady Warre's, his mo-
“ ther-in-law's, house. The chaplain had dreamt that
“ such a day he should die; but, being by all the fa-
“ mily put out of the belief, he had almost forgot it;
“ till, the evening before, at supper, there being thir-
“ teen at table, according to a fond conceit that one of
“ these must soon die, one of the young ladies pointed
“ to him that he was to die. He, remembering his
“ dream, fell into some disorder; and, the Lady Warre
“ reproving him for his superstition, he said he was
“ confident he was to die before morning; but he be-
“ ing in perfect health, it was not much minded. It
“ was Saturday night, and he was to preach next day.
“ He went to his chamber, and sat up late, as appear-
“ ed by the burning of his candle; and he had been
“ preparing his notes for his sermon; but was found
“ dead in his bed the next morning. These things, he
“ said, made him inclined to believe the soul was a

“ substance distinct from matter ; and this often
“ returned into his mind. But that which perfected
“ his persuasion about it was, that, in the sickness
“ which brought him so near death before I first knew
“ him, when his spirits were so low and spent that he
“ could not move nor stir, and he did not think to live
“ an hour, he said his reason and judgment were so
“ clear and strong, that from thence he was fully per-
“ suaded that death was not the spending or dissolu-
“ tion of the soul, but only the separation of it from
“ matter. He had in that sickness great remorse
“ for his past life ; but he afterwards told me that they
“ were rather general and dark horrors than any con-
“ viction of sinning against God. He was sorry he
“ had lived so as to waste his strength so soon, or that
“ he had brought such an ill name upon himself ; and
“ had an agony in his mind about it which he knew not
“ well how to express ; but at such times, though he
“ complied with his friends in suffering divines to be
“ sent for, he said he had no great mind to it, and that
“ it was but a piece of his breeding to desire them to
“ pray by him, in which he joined little himself.”

The reverend *Thomas Scott*, although ministering at the altar, was long in darkness which the light could not penetrate. He was inclined to examine; one prejudice gave way after another; he was gradually enlightened; and is now one of the brightest luminaries in the church. It is impossible to read his book on "the force of Truth," and not acknowledge the rebellion of the natural heart; and not adore the astonishing power which reduces the rebel, and lays him in the dust.

A tedious sickness chastened the mind of *Rochester*, and disposed him for sober thought. But his own reflection, aided by the experience, counsel and solid reasoning of able and pious divines could not convince him of the truth and excellence of the gospel. His judgment yielded; but the enmity of his heart was not moved. What men could not do, God did; it was his work; and his glory he will not give to another. *Rochester repented, but that repentance was given him, of which, we are assured from his own lips.* The fifty third chapter of the prophecy of *Isaiah* was read in his hearing. "He felt an inward force as he heard it read, which did so enlighten his mind and convince him, that he could resist it no longer; for the words had authority which did shoot like rays or beams in his mind; so that he was not only convinced by the reasonings he

“ had about it which satisfied his understanding, but
 “ by a power which did so effectually constrain him,
 “ that he did ever after as firmly believe in his Saviour
 “ as if he had seen him in the clouds.” He told Dr.
 Burnet that after this he had received the sacrament
 with great satisfaction ;—that he had overcome all his
 “ resentments to all the world, so that he bore ill-will
 “ to no person, nor hated any upon personal accounts.
 “ He had given a true state of his debts, and had or-
 “ dered to pay them all, as far as his estate, that was
 “ not settled, could go ; and was confident that, if all
 “ that was owing to him were paid to his executors,
 “ his creditors would be all satisfied. He said, he found
 “ his mind now possessed with another sense of things
 “ than ever he had formerly. He did not repine under
 “ all his pain ; and, in one of the sharpest fits he was
 “ under while I was with him, he said, he did will-
 “ ingly submit ; and, looking up to heaven, said, ‘ God’s
 “ holy will be done : I bless him for all he does to
 “ me.’ He professed, he was contented either to die
 “ or live, as should please God ; and, though it was a
 “ foolish thing for a man to pretend to choose whether
 “ he would die or live, yet he wished rather to die.”
 Dr. Burnet having understood all these things from
 him, and being pressed to give him his opinion plainly
 about his eternal state, “ told him, that, though the
 “ promises of the gospel did all depend upon a real

“change of heart and life, as the indispensable con-
“dition upon which they were made; and that it was
“scarcely possible to know certainly whether our
“hearts are changed, unless it appeared in our lives;
“and the repentance of most dying men being like the
“howlings of condemned prisoners for pardon, which
“flowed from no sense of their crimes, but from the
“horror of approaching death, there was little reason
“to encourage any to hope much from such sorrow-
“ing; yet, certainly, if the mind of a sinner, even on a
“death-bed, be truly renewed and turned to God, so
“great is his mercy, that he will receive him even in
“that extremity. He said, he was sure his mind was
“entirely turned; and, though horror had given him
“his first awaking, yet that was now grown up into a
“settled faith and conversion.”

*Colonel James Gardener, having spent an evening in
gay company, had an unhappy assignation with a mar-
ried woman, whom he was to attend exactly at twelve;
to kill a tedious hour, he carelessly took up a book,
which his mother, without his knowledge, had put into
his portmanteau. It was a religious book; “an unu-
“sual blaze of light fell upon the book while he was
“reading, which he at first imagined might happen
“by some accident in the candle. But lifting up his
“eyes, he apprehended, to his extreme amasement,*

“ that there was before him, as it were suspended in
“ the air, a visible representation of the Lord Jesus
“ Christ upon the cross, surrounded on all sides with
“ a glory ; and was impressed, as if a voice, or some-
“ thing equivalent to a voice, had come to him, to this
“ effect, (for he was not confident as to the words),
“ ‘ Oh sinner ! did I suffer this for thee, and are these
“ thy returns ?’ He never once recollected the detes-
table assignation which the moment before engrossed
all his thoughts. He appeared the vilest monster in
the creation of God, who had all his life time, by his
sins, been crucifying Christ afresh. He abhorred him-
self and repented in dust and ashes. Not so much his
fear of hell, as his humble gratitude to the Saviour of
the world agonized his soul. This was a new æra in
his life : The joyful day when a son was born to
God : when the captive was set at liberty ; and the
heir of hell became an heir of God. Dr. Doddridge
speaking of this event, says,—“ I have known those of
“ distinguished genius, polite manners, and great ex-
“ perience in human affairs, who after having outgrown
“ all the impressions of a religious education, after hav-
“ ing been hardened, rather than subdued, by the most
“ singular mercies, even various, repeated, and asto-
“ nishing deliverances, which have appeared to them-
“ selves no less than miraculous ; after having lived
“ for years without God in the world, notoriously cor-

“ rupt themselves, and labouring to the utmost to cor-
 “ rupt others, have been stopt on a sudden in the full
 “ career of their sin, and have felt such rays of the di-
 “ vine presence, and of redeeming love, darting in up-
 “ on their minds, almost like lightning from heaven, as
 “ have at once roused, overpowered and transformed
 “ them; so that they have come out of their secret
 “ chamber, with an irreconcilable enmity to those
 “ vices to which, when they entered them, they were
 “ the tamest and most abandoned slaves; and have ap-
 “ peared from that very hour the votaries, the patrons,
 “ the champions of religion; and after a course of the
 “ most resolute attachment to it, in spite of all the rea-
 “ sonings or the raileries, the importunities or the re-
 “ proaches of its enemies, they have continued to this
 “ day some of its brightest ornaments: A change which
 “ I behold with equal wonder and delight, and which, if
 “ a nation should join in deriding it, I would read as
 “ the finger of God.”

“ Except ye repent ye shall *likewise perish.*” Your
 ruin shall be *sudden, total and irreparable.*

Let it be remembered, wherein the particular dan-
 ger of sin consists. Sin renders men odious to God,
 and liable to punishment: in consequence of the first
 the sinner is, in scripture, spoken of as *vile, as polluted.*

unclean; in consequence of the second, he is threatened with *stripes*, with *anguish*, with *a worm that dieth not*, and with *a fire that is not quenched*. A conscience, not yet seared as with a hot iron, is anxious and pained when overtaken in a fault, much more after every deliberate act of disobedience; a full proof that sin tends to *effect* our *misery* and *ruin*. How far repentance alone, would have availed, without any other interposition, I pretend not to examine, but believe, from the truths already established, that an instance of repentance as it has now been explained, in such circumstances, could never have occurred. Certain it is, that the scripture every where ascribes man's deliverance from the pollution, the tyranny, and punishment of sin to Christ's death. Renovation of nature is necessary to fit us for enjoying communion with God; and the death of Christ, to secure the honour of the Divine law whilst the guilty are received into favour. With neither will God dispense. Unless you believe, you cannot be justified; unless you become holy, you can have no fellowship with God. Evangelical repentance always supposes, such views as render sin detestable to the soul—as excite hope—as lead to obedience. He who believes, he who hopes, he who is obedient, exercises that repentance which the Gospel demands, and in consequence thereof, on the principles found in scripture, is no longer odious to God: no longer is he exposed to punishment.

No doctrine is more fully taught in scripture, nor illustrated with such a variety of expression, as this, that Christ's blood was shed for the remission of sin; but this doctrine was never meant to set men at their ease whilst they roll sin as a sweet morsel under their tongues. Such men *abuse* this astonishing dispensation for the recovery of a lost world; they are blind; they forget that they have been purged from their old ~~sins~~, to these enemies of the cross of Christ, we speak no comfort; we afford no hope; we pronounce no pardon. But let faith in Christ withdraw the heart from ~~the love and practice of sin~~; let it produce trust in God; let it excite hope of ~~mercy~~. The Gospel will then be found, a dispensation the most consolatory and efficacious; it speaks peace to their souls; it promises pardon; for their sanctification they receive the holy spirit; for their encouragement the hope of immortality.

“ Except ye repent, ye shall *all* perish.”

In the doctrine of repentance, men of every age, of every nation, of every character are immediately concerned; from the Jews, whom our Lord addressed on this occasion, to the assembly collected in this house; nay, were all now living in the world gathered together; had I the voice of the arch-angel, which shall rouse the dead, and reach from pole to pole, I should

preach repentance *to them all* in the name of Jesus, and the remission of sin. The commission, under which the ministers of the Gospel act, is unlimited. They can exclude none of whatever nation or colour; of whatever parentage or rank: of whatever endowment or occupation. Fidelity to their Lord compels them to assure all in general, and each in particular, that Jesus, when they submit to him, is ready to exert his power to regenerate their souls; to shew his mercy, pronouncing their sins forgiven. Cheerfully I repeat the assurance for the direction and comfort of all who now hear me; no circumstance of guilt or folly can be any hinderance. Come this day to Christ, contemptible for your folly, exposed by your guilt, you will find him, as willing as when he was on earth, to save from sin; and as mighty as ever to save to the uttermost.

God, now in his word, calls you to repent; lately he called you in his providence: you have heard of a multitude being consumed in flames. No apprehension of danger, and no warning. Like Christ's future coming, it was sudden and unexpected; his coming was *unknown*, until he had come. To this, and to similar events, the words of Christ well apply. "As the lightning, that lighteth out of the one *part* under heaven, shineth unto the other *part* under hea-

“ ven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day. But
 “ first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of
 “ this generation. And as it was in the days of Noe,
 “ so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.—
 “ They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they
 “ were given in marriage, until the day that Noe en-
 “ tered the ark; and the flood came, and destroyed
 “ them all. Likewise also, as it was in the days of
 “ Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they
 “ sold, they planted, they builded: But the same day
 “ that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brim-
 “ stone from heaven, and destroyed *them* all. Even
 “ thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man shall
 “ be revealed.”

Leave the sufferers with a merciful Creator; you
 are forbidden to pronounce their doom: “ Shall not
 “ the judge of all the earth do right?”

Sympathise with the survivors whose hearts bleed:
 they mourn, let us mourn; but mourn not as those
 who have no hope. Where is the presumptuous man
 who dares to set limits to the mercies of God? They
 have no limit; they exceed even our conception:
 from this thought, and from this alone, can any of us
 derive hope.

They have *suffered!* but why? Because they were greater sinners than others? Were the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices; were the Jews who, in an instant, were crushed to death by the fall of the tower of Siloam, sinners above all the Galileans, and all the Jews? Our Saviour tells us **Nay:** His decision in this instance, applies to all others of a similar nature.

They have suffered, *that we may be warned by their sufferings.* If after such warning, any of you persist to lead unprofitable, careless, dissipated lives; and thus to murder the few days which God has given you on earth, to prepare for heaven, you must be speechless when you stand before his bar, not having one single excuse to offer for your conduct.

The language of so awful a Providence is, **I come quickly, prepare for my coming.** Be not anxious for possessions which the fire may consume; live not in pleasures which any moment may imbitter; engage in no pursuit, allow yourselves in no indulgence which would unfit you for appearing at the bar of God, and hearing, with calmness, from his mouth, your inevitable doom.

Thoughtlessness, dissipation and folly, the reproach

of crowded cities, are by this event, exposed to the detestation of all. Awake ye votaries of pleasure; repent of the time which you have already lost; employ your remaining days in the service of your God.

Were, our brethren who have been hurried into eternity, restored to us again, what would be their future lives? No doubt, lives of faith, of spirituality, of mortification to the world: Such be your lives; number your days so as to apply your hearts to wisdom. Pass the time of your sojourning on earth in the fear of God. You know neither the day, nor the hour when your lord shall return; be, therefore, always ready. Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning. Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. Weigh well our Lord's decision concerning the sufferings of others, pronounced in my text; and let the assurance founded on that decision influence and direct your future conduct. "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell ye Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell ye Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Amen.