

THE CANADIAN UNITED PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE.

VOL. II. TORONTO, SEPTEMBER 1, 1855. No. 9.

Miscellaneous Articles.

FAITH AND WORKS.

A SHORT EXPOSITION OF JAMES II. 14-26.

(Concluded from page 227.)

The Apostle proceeds now to illustrate and confirm the principles he has laid down, by referring to the case of several Scripture characters; and his argument being about faith and its results, he begins with the Father of the faithful.

Verse 21. "Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son on the altar?" The first enquiry here, which demands our attention, and in which the whole difficulty of the passage consists, is to determine in what sense Abraham was justified by works. Now we contend that he was not justified by works, in the peculiar or proper sense of the term, that is, delivered from guilt and condemnation, and received into the divine favor; for we are expressly told in Genesis that "he believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness;" in other words, he believed the divine promise, and by his faith he was justified; and this declaration of Moses is quoted by Paul once and again, as a proof that his justification, properly so called, was entirely gratuitous—that it was by faith and not by works. Besides, Paul informs us that he was justified in the strict or proper sense, "not when he was in circumcision, but in uncircumcision," in other words, that he obtained this blessing, not by merit, but as the result of free and sovereign favor—not by circumcision, or by any other act of obedience, but when he was yet uncircumcised. Long before Isaac was born, and at least thirty years before the memorable event here referred to, God had assured him that the Messiah, "in whom all families of the earth were to be blessed," was to descend from him. The patriarch believed this gracious promise, and his faith "was imputed to him for righteousness;" he was therefore justified, received into God's favor, and regarded and treated as a righteous person. Now, when a believer is once justified, his title to the divine favor and eternal life is complete, and he cannot again be justified in the same sense as formerly. This is the grand crisis, or turning point in his history, when he is delivered from a state of guilt and condemnation, and obtains the divine countenance and favor; when from