

paration and fitness, there could be no happiness in being saved. What would it avail any of us, to be carried into the third heavens, unless we carried with us the tempers and dispositions which suited the place and the society? We might have the feeling of security arising from the knowledge that we had escaped the punishment of our sins—but to any higher enjoyment we must for ever remain strangers, and the rapturous hallelujahs of the blessed spirits around us would ring without significance or ecstacy upon our discordant ears. The happiness which is to be consummated hereafter must be begun here—and even while on earth, we must have our conversation in heaven. The seeds of those virtues and graces which are to flourish in the regions of immortality must be sown in the bleak and surly climate of this world; and unless we live as saints, we can have no sure hope of dying as saints.

Now in this view, also, the way that leadeth unto life may well be called strait. With so many objects soliciting our affections, it is difficult to fix and to preserve our supreme regards on God. With so many selfish passions, it is difficult to love our neighbor even as ourselves. The humility and meekness, the temperance and purity, the benevolence and charity, the patience and resignation which the gospel enjoins are not easily cultivated. It is hard to human nature, to love our enemies and pray for our persecutors, to live above the world while we are in it, to choose the severest affliction before the least sin, and to neglect the greatest gain rather than the slightest duty. And yet, unless we deny ourselves to every evil passion, and take up our cross daily and follow Him, we cannot be the true disciples of Christ.

What renders the attainment of the Christian character still more difficult is, that the world is always ready to reproach and persecute those who aspire to it. When the passage before us pronounces the gate that leadeth unto life to be strait, there is, no doubt, a particular reference to the hardships which attended the profession of the gospel at its first promulgation. But this reference has not yet lost all its significance. The world is *still*, as it was *then*, contrary to Christ. It does not indeed exert its enmity to the same extent, or in the same manner, as formerly. Men may now profess their faith in Christ, without the hazard of their property or their life. But there are other weapons besides those which affect the body; and it is still in some sense true, that if any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he must suffer persecution. The wicked and the thoughtless are always ready to pour their ridicule and reproach upon all who put them to shame by the fervency of their spirit and the purity of their life. Now, to many ridicule and re-

proach are not less formidable than fire and faggot. The flames of martyrdom could only warm their zeal and light them to their glory; but they know not how to bear the chilling and inglorious punishment of contempt. If it had been an enemy, said the Psalmist, I could have borne it. If the men of another faith were ranged in hostile array against them, they could present the clearness and the security of their hope: but to the taunts of those around them—their companions or their friends—they have nothing to oppose but a heart deeply sensible of their bitterness. If the rage of persecution required it, they could rise to the magnitude of the trial, and cheerfully shed their blood for what they esteem more valuable: but they cannot bear to have their understanding insulted, their conduct vilified, and mysticism and enthusiasm, and all the odious names which the base vocabulary of a deriding scepticism supplies, poured upon actions which they know, and feel, and lament, to be infinitely below the spirituality of the divine law. In counting, therefore, the cost of their profession, in reckoning up the difficulties of the Christian life, next to the deceitfulness of their own hearts, they place the ridicule of the world—and even after they are far advanced and deeply confirmed in their course, they still feel the smart of that shower of contumely and reproach which was poured upon them, when they first broke away from the licence and the laugh of their giddy companions, to enter in at the strait gate that leadeth unto life.

Having thus attempted to explain what it is to be saved or to enter into life—and how it is difficult to be saved—and why the gate that leadeth unto life is called strait,

I shall now proceed to show,

III. That many who seek to enter in at the strait gate shall not be able.

In the interpretation of Scripture, we should always be upon our guard against being carried away by the mere sound of the words. If this very simple caution had been observed, if, instead of quoting disjointed passages to support preconceived opinions, theologians had set themselves to discover the mind of the spirit, by a careful examination of the context, and a prudent reference to what an apostle has called the analogy or proportion of the faith, much controversy and uneasiness might have been spared. Take the declaration before us as standing by itself, or as it is sometimes found posted in the common places of a systematic theology, and it bears a most unwelcome and discouraging aspect. Many will seek to enter in and shall not be able! Is God then a capricious and cruel tyrant, who finally and for ever exclude from His presence many of those who sincerely desire to enter into it? Has He neither grace to help nor mercy to pardon, and shall many fail of salvation,