

of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul"?

Some may be inclined to think that this language is altogether incongruous with the character of the people to whom, according to this view, it is ascribed. However affectingly it may declare the alarm of a soul which is awakened to an apprehension of the divine wrath, is it not altogether out of place, when it is represented as uttered by a descendant of Jacob? Would such a one ask, "shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul"? The language undoubtedly is inconsistent with the character of one who is an Israelite indeed. We must, however, remember that Micah prophesied in the degenerate times of "that Ahaz", king of Judah, who (2 Chron. xxviii. 3, 4), "burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. He sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills and under every green tree". At this time, Israel and Judah seemed to vie with each other in the daring character of their rebellion against God. The Lord indeed testified against them by his prophets: "Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God. And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them, that they should not do like them". Even were there nothing among ourselves to show how soon people can become degenerate, and how grossly ignorant of God's word those may be who have been brought up by parents who, although once in regular attendance on religious ordinances, have thrown off the fear of the Lord, we can have no difficulty in conceiving, from the account which the Scriptures give of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah at this time, that the great mass of the people must have sunk both into heathenish ignorance and into heathenish superstition. At length, however, the sixteen years of the reign of Ahaz are brought to a close; and his son Hezekiah occupies the throne of the kingdom of Judah. The reproofs

of the prophets appear to have made some impression. The Lord's controversy is heard. There is an awakening among the people. They turn from their dumb idols, and, in deep distress of soul, inquire "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?"

The prophet, in his answer, addresses them as men who, whatever might be their ignorance now, had been favoured with information on the subject of their inquiry: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" According to a very common view of this passage, the first clause is considered as merely stating that the information suited to the necessities of the inquirer had been already given; while the remainder of the verse repeats the information in so many words:—"God has shewed you what is good, and it is this, do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God." Perhaps some may have thought that this view of the passage is sanctioned by the answer of our Saviour to the young man who came to him saying (Matth. xix. 16), "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"—"If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." The cases, however, are widely different.—The young man was full of his own righteousness. He conceived that he could easily secure a title to heaven; and it was good for him to know that what the law requires is uniform, persevering, un-sinful obedience—an obedience which is the expression of that devoted affection to God which will neither grudge nor spare any sacrifice that his service requires. The inquirer here, however, is one who feels himself to be a sinner, who acknowledges his guilt, and who desires to know with what atoning sacrifice he may appear before God. Is it fitted to relieve the distresses of such a soul to urge him with the demands of the divine law? to remind him that it requires him to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God? It is because he knows he has broken the law that requires this that he is so alarmed, and feels so anxious to know by what sacrifice, notwithstanding, the Lord may be pleased. Is it simply a re-exhibition of the law that is good—not for the self-righteous Pharisee, who needs yet to be convinced that he is a sinner—but for the deeply convinced sinner, who is with all