

he has no relish, and promises a blessedness so foreign to his nature that he cannot understand it. And in such a frame of mind, unbelief, or at least, indifference, is nothing more strange than the averseness of the polar savage to change his own desolate and dreary country and the enjoyments in it for which he has contracted a fondness, for other enjoyments in distant climes, the nature of which he cannot comprehend.

This, then, I hold to be a universal cause of indifference and unbelief in regard to revealed religion in all mankind, that the general tenor of its discoveries is opposed to man's natural tastes, habits and inclinations. It is spiritual, he is carnal; it is holy, he is sinful; and so far from indifference and unbelief being unnatural, they are just what might be expected from such creatures, to whom such a revelation was made. Hence, in order to its cordial reception, some influence must be previously exerted upon him to refine his views, and tastes, and feelings, that he may be prepared to discern and relish it as the oracles of God and the words of eternal life. The evil heart of unbelief is his nature; it can only be conquered by an experimental knowledge of the gospel's moral influence. "If any man will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." He cannot know it fully till then.

But in order to unfold this principle of indifference and unbelief, the averseness of the corrupted mind to the general tenor and main design of the discoveries of the gospel, let me point out its operation in a few particulars:—

1. Prosperity and its ordinary effect—a heart contented with the world, is a very common cause of religious indifference and unbelief. This is emphatically set forth in the Jewish proverb, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich, or world loving man, to enter into the kingdom of God," that is, cordially embrace the gospel. The impossibility does not rest in the amount of his property, but in the usual consequence of wealth and prosperity, which create a fondness for worldly pleasure, and a disrel ish for that which is spiritual; for the love of the world and the love of God cannot coexist in the same heart. The gospel is designed to direct the view of man principally to a future life as the proper scene of his enjoyments; but when the heart is contented with its present condition it looks no farther, and religion is neglected as a useless thing, or useful only for the afflicted, or the poor, or the miserable, or the dying. Hence it is, that religious indifference prevails chiefly among the fortunate whose present condition seems to offer all that

their heart could wish, and among the young who cherish sanguine expectations of what they shall hereafter acquire, when they have advanced high in the world's favor.

Then there is but a short step between religious indifference and scepticism. When the gospel comes to be regarded without any interest, as a thing of trivial importance, the transition is easy to the doubt or disbelief that it is from God; for who can ever imagine that an unimportant communication can come from God? Thus there is a general and manifest connection between prosperity which attaches men's minds to this life, and indifference to that gospel which leads them to aspire upwards to another. For when men cease to aspire after and prepare for immortality, they soon practically cease to believe in it.

2. The omission of deliberate inquiry is a second cause of religious indifference, and practical unbelief. The gospel, like any other written communication, cannot be understood without a good deal of serious attention. Nor can the evidence and importance of its discoveries be felt until they are fairly considered. Now what is the usual conduct of a large proportion of mankind in regard to the oracles of God? In their youth, perhaps, they were taught to read some portions of them; and in more advanced age they occasionally peruse them, and hear them explained in the sanctuary; but they are read with no settled and continued attention; the relation of one part to another, and one doctrine to another, is not perceived; and thus the evidence which arises from the harmony of the whole scheme, and its adaptation to the circumstances of man are quite overlooked. To such the Bible can appear in no higher light than as an ancient venerated book, by which a large proportion of mankind have agreed to shape their religious opinions, according as they severally understand it, but which may be entirely rejected (if they please) without any peculiar danger or culpability. This, in our judgment is a very general state of the indifferent and the unbelieving arising from the want of a deliberate inquiry.

Observe here, that I am far from alleging the charge of general ignorance against all who are indifferent to the truths of the gospel. This would not be true; for religious indifference in many parts of the world, prevails much in the higher and better educated classes of society. In this case, however, we may allege besides the effect which prosperity and worldly pursuits have in fixing the attention on this life, and withdrawing the mind from that Book which reveals another, that