

"LET US CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER TO PROVOKE UNTO LOVE AND TO GOOD WORKS."—HEBREWS X. 24.

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DIVINITY.

[FOR THE WESLEYAN.]

ON RESTITUTION: AN ESSAY.

"According to his substance shall restitution be."
Job xx. 18.

WHATEVER obscures the spiritual nature of religion, or designedly diverts us from a "heart" which "believeth unto righteousness," is a hurtful impertinence. That "the kingdom of God is not in word," "but in power"—a power which transforms the believing heart, is the teaching of an apostle, and is so intimately associated with the peculiar glory of Christianity, that it can be neither too often nor too deeply considered. It matters but little whether this moral condition be designated "Conversion," "Regeneration," or "Holiness." The great privileges of saints can be enjoyed only by those who have been "born of the Spirit"—such as have "peace with God," dominion over sin, "Christ in" them "the hope of glory," and, consequently, deliverance from the bondage occasioned by that fear of death which arises from conscious guilt. These parts of the "common salvation" are

"Glorious and unspeakable."

They are not found in the way of ordinary mental culture, nor are they inseparably connected with a religious profession. If these blessings were human gifts, human means alone might suffice to acquire them. But they are "fruits of the Spirit." Were the "power" and "peace" and "hope" of Christians, benefits of man's bestowment, they might safely be imparted to those who have been prepared for them, by a common process only. The gifts, however, are God's, and a divine preparation is requisite to their being received even in the lowest measure. This qualification is distinguished by the comprehensive term, "Repentance." Its order in the progress of actual salvation, is sufficiently indicated by this summary of primitive preaching—"repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Acts xx. 21. So far as repentance belongs to that class of scriptural requirements that must be *experienced*, it holds the first place. In one view, it is the "gate" whereby we enter on that "path" wherein the Christian "race" is run. In another view, it is the "foundation," which sustains the superstructure designed "for an habitation of God through the Spirit." The necessity of repentance appears as well from the servant, as his Lord—"God commandeth all men every where to repent." Acts xvii. 30. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Luke xiii. 5. Oracles these, which have in no degree been weakened by all the revelations of mercy that God has vouchsafed to men. Nor can they be advantageously abrogated, so long as it shall truly read—"all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Rom. iii. 23. Though repentance is our duty, it is originated and perfected by the grace of God. That repentance which springs from a proper use of divine aid is "unto life;" that which owes its existence to any other cause, "worketh death." Repentance, when genuine, produces "fruits" which are evidently "meet." Indeed, the character of our repentance cannot be ascertained except by its immediate effects. We design, at present, to treat only of that fruit of true repentance, which stands at the beginning of this article—RESTITUTION.

This subject has been less effectually discussed of late than formerly it was: Herein we have de-

parted from the wisdom of the elder Divines. The grounds on which they argued remain unchanged. What was true once is so always. There is reason to believe that many persons who are fully convinced that holiness is the one thing needful above all others, and are strongly desirous of apprehending its benefits, are hindered in their pursuit of it, either by want of information concerning the duty of restitution, or their reluctance to discharge it. The subject, therefore, is important, and it may be well to connect in one view its leading truths. Whenever these shall be consistently embraced, good, of the highest nature and of endless duration, will be the issue.

Restitution is the making of satisfaction to those whom we have injured. All sin is a high offence against God, and is deeply injurious to the Divine Majesty. To him, reparation is impossible. It exceeds the limits of creatures' capacity to be profitable unto their Maker. He requires sorrow for sin, and that we forsake it. When this is followed by faith in Christ, God is graciously pleased to remit those demands which his justice previously had on us for our multiplied transgressions of his law. But some of our fellow-men sustain loss by many of our sins. Indeed, the sins belonging to this class are far more numerous than would occur to a superficial observer. Incalculable injury to others has arisen from those sins which systematic writers would enumerate under the heads of "slander," "deceit," "injustice," and "oppression." Great evil is done to men by detracting from their good qualities, and by imputing to them such as are evil. Thus, their fair reputation is blasted, and their power of doing good lessened, if not lost for ever. By fraud and injustice, one may become possessed of what is not truly his own, or he may appropriate a larger share of some divided property than really belongs to him. By these iniquitous practices, a man may successfully demand what is not his due, and triumphantly resist claims, of the equity of which he is assured. These base principles may influence him in his transactions with an individual, or a family, with a corporate body or the state. The party injured alters not the character of the act which is essentially bad, though it may procure for the perpetrator the execrations of honest men, as when the persons wronged have a natural claim to his protection, or have laid him under obligations to gratitude.

Oppression is a crime of the comparatively powerful, and of persons in authority. Oppression is the unreasonable curtailing of privileges—the coercing into servility—the exacting of labour and profit above what is right. How many, diversified, and sorrowful, the injuries inflicted by these means! How loudly have they cried to God, who is the avenger of all such!—and were He not slow to anger and of great mercy, many would have been consumed for them. Other violations of the law of God are not without great loss to our neighbour, as irreligion, profligacy, and unbelief. The wrongs produced by these causes are not, in general, capable of redress by restitution. The same principle, however, should be practically recognised. It would lead us to pursue a course directly opposed to that whereby we have drawn others into culpable forgetfulness of God, and a despising of his authority.

Restitution, strictly speaking, can take place only when the property of another has been lessened in amount, or diminished in value. "Restitution, properly, is of the same thing which was detained or taken away." The best mode of reparation, certainly—nor should any other be adopted, if this be possible. It is practicable only in few cases. In all others, satisfaction must be made. This may be done by consent of the com-

plaining party, who has an undeniable right to relinquish any part of his due, or to accept what he shall deem of equal value, though of a different kind. Compensations may consist of corporeal labour; pecuniary settlement; or public confession, criminating ourselves, and clearing those whom we had falsely aspersed. In attempting to satisfy an injured person, in general, less should not be given than the law would appoint, if the business were to undergo a legal process. When that is offered, which is equivalent to the loss sustained, and rejected, the refuser is unjust, the payer is not bound to give more. If the injured person is disposed, he may wholly remit his due, the reparation then becomes easy; nor will it be to the prejudice of him who was obliged to make restitution, provided he was willing to do his best in that way; as, indeed, the duty would be perfectly performed, if his satisfying were forced, and not voluntary.

Satisfaction should be made by every one who has the use, enjoyment, or profit, of what is another's. This duty obliges those who have no share in the sin by which that property was first acquired—"for a title originally bad, can never by time be made good." Those to whom satisfaction should be made, are the true owners—the injured individuals, if alive and known; if deceased, then their heirs. If they cannot be found, the value required for reparation should be expended on the poor, or devoted to such other pious uses as may be most for the honour of God, who is the unalienable proprietor of all things. This course is equally indispensable as obedience to God and justice to men.

On this incidental allusion, we would not rest the obligation of a duty so momentous as that of making restitution. Nor need we. That were to hurt the cause of truth, and perhaps increase the evils of irresolution, limited knowledge, and defective piety. The necessity of the practice is urgent; the authority enforcing it is indispensable—it is supreme.

That the injured should be indemnified, if possible, appears unequivocally,

First,—From our natural sense of equity. It may often be difficult to determine accurately the amount of loss, or the value for compensation. Occasionally, power supersedes justice, and laughs at her remonstrances. But it is incredible that any should be so totally destitute of moral feeling as to argue against what is confessedly just. He who tramples on the dictates of righteousness, admits his conduct to be unjustifiable—but he is reckless of consequences. That restitution is no less just, than discharging obligations into which we freely entered, will be evident enough, if we are the injured. Let us reverse the case. This change of persons cannot change the principle. If, therefore, we should expect reparation for damages, we are equally obliged to make it. This is a primary and universal law. It is perfectly expressed in the following words—"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

Secondly,—From the nature of repentance. Godly sorrow is an essential ingredient—it is the radical principle of repentance unto life. Its reference is to sin and its results. Godly sorrow produces on its subject, effects exactly answering to the unswerving hatred of God to sin. He aims not only to terminate iniquity, but also to counteract the evils it has occasioned. That effect on penitent men which is analogous to this in God, is strong desire and persevering endeavours to remove fully the injurious consequences of their sins—to undo what they have done, and, if the expression may be allowed, "to unsin their sins." There cannot be complete breaking off from sin,