

promise. Whatever advantages he might derive from these associations in the cultivation of his oratorical powers, they had an unfavourable influence upon his religious principles, which were so impaired by them, that for some time he led a life of gaiety, and mingled freely in the fashionable amusements of the time. His first speech in Parliament was delivered in 1783, when he seconded the Address of Thanks on the peace, at the conclusion of the American war. The same year he spoke in opposition to Mr. Fox's India Bill, and in terms of greater asperity than he afterwards employed.

At the general election in 1784, he was again returned for Hull; but was immediately after, quite unexpectedly on his part, chosen to the high honour of representing the County of York, which he continued to do in six successive parliaments, till he voluntarily relinquished it, as too laborious for his advancing years, in 1812. In 1785, Mr. Wilberforce spoke in favour of a reform of Parliament, when that subject was brought forward by Mr. Pitt: it was far short of that which has been since effected. In the following year he supported, and carried through the Commons, a bill for amending the Criminal Law.

Though now rising rapidly among politicians as a senator, and in the estimation of his friends, as an intelligent and delightful companion, these were not the days on which he could in after life look back with satisfaction. His heart, it is to be feared, was now drawn away from God, and turned aside to vanity, and his religious principles were in a great degree corrupted or undermined. But better times were at hand.

In the latter part of the year 1784, and again in 1785, he travelled on the continent with a party of friends. Dr. Isaac Milner was of the number, and while riding with him in the same carriage, various interesting subjects

were discussed by these highly gifted friends. On one occasion Mr. Wilberforce spoke well of a pious clergyman, but added that he "carried things too far." The Dr. enquired on what ground this opinion was founded. Some standard must be resorted to, when we talked of going too far, or being too strict. And what must that be, in all moral questions, but the Scriptures? Perhaps the gentleman referred to did not go beyond the rules of Scripture, but only beyond what was usually practised and approved among men.

This pressed strongly upon the mind of Mr. Wilberforce. A lodgement was made in his conscience—and his thoughts could find no rest till they found it in the word of God, and the adoption of a scriptural standard, by which to form all his judgments, and regulate all his conduct. Soon afterwards, he says of himself, "As I read the promises of Holy Scripture,—Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you—God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him—Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest—I will take away the hearts of stone, and give you a heart of flesh—I will put my laws in your hearts, and write them in your inward parts—I will be merciful unto their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more'... as I read these passages, it occurred to me to reflect, If these things be so; if there be any truth in all this, and if I set myself to seek the blessings thus promised, I shall certainly find a sensible effect and change wrought within me, such as is thus described. I will put the matter to the proof: I will try the experiment: I will seek, that I may find the promised blessings." He did so; and the result was peace, and liberty, and victory—peace of conscience and purified affections—