

the world; not because of his rank or riches, or literary eminence, or martial exploits; but because of that piety and devotedness to God, and zealous exertions for the promotion of his glory, and the good of men, which are in God's sight of great price. His was to be a moral greatness, and the angel mentions three particulars in which his greatness would consist. First, he was to drink neither wine nor strong drink; he would be a man of stern self-denial, and of great moral purity. It is probable that this expression is meant to indicate, that the Baptist, in token of his entire devotedness to God, would be a perpetual Nazarite from his birth. And it was meet that the last prophet, under the old dispensation, should exhibit, in his person, a concentration of the strict legal character, which the Nazarite did. "It is spoken of as a great instance of God's favor to his people," says M. Henry, "that he raised up their sons for prophets, and their young men for Nazarites,—Amos ii. 11; as if those that were designed for prophets, were trained up under the discipline of the Nazarites. Samuel and John Baptist were, which intimates that those who would be eminent servants of God, and employed in eminent services, must learn to live a life of self-denial, and mortification, must be dead to the pleasures of sense, and keep their minds from every thing that is darkening and disturbing to them."

It is melancholy to think that, in the face of this scripture, professing Christians are to be found, so prejudiced by ancient customs, and it is to be feared, in many instances, so blinded by self-interest, or their own appetites, as to condemn total abstinence from intoxicating drinks, and represent it as unscriptural. From this passage, it is plain, that the principle is not only allowed, but recognized with approbation in Scripture. It is not morally binding on any, but it is certainly allowable

to all; and when the vice of intemperance is employed by Satan, as the most successful instrument in ruining the souls of men, it certainly becomes a grave question, whether it is not *expedient* for all Christians in the present day, to unite in abstaining from the use of intoxicating drinks, on all ordinary occasions.

The second particular in which John's greatness consisted, and from which it mainly arose, was his being filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb. Some read it even 'in mother's womb,' and illustrate their view, by Elizabeth's words to Mary in the forty-fourth verse, "For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy." At all events, it is certain that either at or before, his birth, a saving operation was wrought upon his heart by the Holy Ghost, so that he was eminent for holiness and piety, even from his childhood. All conversions that have been effected, have doubtless been accomplished, through the agency of the Holy Ghost; and that before, as well as since the work of the Saviour was finished.

Thirdly, the angel speaks of John's success in the work of the ministry, as an additional element in the greatness of his character, "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God;" and then of his relation to the Messiah, "He shall go before him," i.e. the Lord his God, "in the spirit and power of Elias." We have here a striking testimony of the divinity of Christ; for the Lord their God, of verse sixteen, is obviously the antecedent to HIM in the seventeenth. He shall go before HIM, i.e. the Messiah, whom he represents just before as the Lord their God.

It had been predicted by the last of the Old Testament prophets, that God would send Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, which is here explained by the angel, as