

power either to conform to Christian precepts, or to infringe them: and thus has placed in their hands their own destiny. If, after this, a great many of them reject the good and choose the evil, the fault is manifestly theirs, and not his, who by so many of the most tremendous denunciations, warns them against the latter, and by the most alluring incitations solicits them to the former." Were all men to become *sincere* believers in the heavenly doctrines of the gospel, and were all *honestly* disposed to obey its holy precepts, nothing is better calculated to diffuse real comfort, peace, and happiness in this world. Indeed, whoever will candidly and attentively compare the morals of professing Christians throughout the world, defective as they are, with those of the heathen nations in a similar state of society, will be convinced that the effects of Christianity have been exceedingly beneficial. Some vices were not forbidden, while others were applauded by the ancients; but the vices of the Christian, the sins of the heart as well as the life, are *all* forbidden by the gospel. It has silently communicated innumerable blessings to individuals. Besides those enumerated in the preceding pages,* we may observe, that through its blessed influence, crimes are less malignant; the manners of mankind are softened and humanised, to a degree unknown in ancient times;

* "Much general reformation, and happiness, in various ways, hath been introduced into the world by the gospel, both among individuals, and amongst nations.—But if even on supposition it had been otherwise, it proves nothing against the good effects of Christianity, if it were properly obeyed. It only proves that notwithstanding the purity of the gospel, and its gracious intention of making mankind religious and happy, there are numbers who will not be made religious and happy by it. But what can God Almighty do more for man, consistently with leaving him at liberty to act freely? He could only give him a rule to walk by, and reason to enforce that rule; unless he had changed his nature, and by giving him a new religion, had wrought a standing miracle to force his obedience to it. So that, of course, the world will always be divided into two sorts of people—such as are deaf to the calls of religion; and such as live up to its rules. Among these latter only are to be found those who feel the happiness of living under gospel laws. It would be a wonderful thing indeed, if those should profit by them, who never trouble their heads about them. The patient, who rejects the medicine, must not hope to remove the disease. Our Saviour himself, you remember, prophesied in the parable of the sower, of the different reception which his gospel should meet among different men. Some seed, he tells you, would fall among thorns, and be choked—others on beaten ground, and be picked up—but that still there would be some which would fall on good ground, and bring forth fruit in abundance. The Christian religion therefore is not meant to work by force, or like a charm, on the minds of men. If it did, there could be no goodness in the observance of it: but it is intended mercifully to guide those to happiness, who will listen to its gracious voice. So that when we look into the world and wish to see the effects of religion, we must look for it among real Christians—among those who truly live up to its laws—and not among those who happen to live in a Christian country: and are Christians only in name." Gilpin's Sermons, vol. iii. pp. 2—11.