

DISCOURSE I.

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE JEWISH DISPENSATIONS COMPARED.

MATTHEW V, XVII.

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the Prophets ; I am not come to destroy but to fulfil."

THE Sermon on the Mount formed one of those occasions upon which our blessed Saviour condescended to intimate to his followers, at considerable length, the purpose of his heavenly mission, and the relation which it bore to the ancient dispensation of Moses, under which the Jews had been trained for so many centuries. The text before us, as well as the words which follow in the same chapter, contain an express and general declaration on this subject, startling perhaps to those who listened to the Divine speaker at the time, and on which infidels in subsequent times have endeavoured to ground a charge of inconsistency. We will presume, with such consciousness as the occasion requires, and with the humility becoming those who venture to approach the Ark of the Covenant, to consider this most important declaration as it concerns—First: Those to whom it was instantly and directly addressed ; and, Secondly, the present generation, who look back on what was then spoken with the advantage of comparing the divine prophecy with the events which have since ensued.

Upon the first point we are to remember, that Jesus came to his own, and that his own received him not. He proffered the inestimable treasures of the Gospel to that chosen people to whom God himself had condescended to be legislator ; and vain of their own imaginary wealth, they refused to accept this new and far richer gift at his hands. Nay, it even seemed that the nearer they approached in external observances, at least, to claim in a peculiar manner the title of children obedient to the law of their heavenly father, the less were the Jews disposed to recognize Him that was greater than Moses. His mission was rejected by the Sadducees, the freethinkers of the Judaical institution, who believed the existence of angel and spirit, and whose sceptical and selfish opinions made them deaf to the proclamation of salvation. They who believed in no state of future retribution, and conceived that the souls and bodies of men went down to the grave together, luxurious as men who would enjoy the passing hour, and indifferent as men who held speculative doctrines as of trifling importance, were naturally averse to the reception of a system which implied a general renunciation of all temporal benefits, and subjected the disciples of Christ as well as their Divine Teacher, to peril, privation, captivity, and death.

But besides these Epicureans of Israel, the Pharisees, also, a sect who placed their pride in the most precise observances of the law of Moses ; who admitted the existence of a state of future rewards and punishments ; who believed in the immortality of the soul, and were systematically regular in divine worship and religious ordinances, were even more inimical to the Gospel than the Sadducees themselves. What startled