

the prophets and stoutest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." Are any traces of it to be discovered in his acts and words at the grave of Lazarus? Any allusion to be seen in his conversation with the widow of Nain, who so deeply lamented the loss of an only son?

In vain do we look into the word or works of God, or the history of His Son, for so much as one solitary evidence that he *will* or *can* laugh in view of human suffering. But the reverse is every where taught. He declares that he hath no pleasure in the death of him that dieth; that he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men; but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his tender mercies.

He who tells that God will mock and laugh in view of endless suffering, utters an awful libel against the character of the Ruler of heaven and earth! He places him below Nero, the tyrant of Rome, who laughed at the sight of the flames which consumed supposed heretics; for momentary suffering is not to be compared with the fire that shall burn sinners as long as saints shall dwell in heaven. Besides, God saw, before the foundation of the world, the end of every living being. If ten millions of people are finally lost, he as well knew it before they were ushered into being as at the present moment. What a spectacle then, would be presented to the universe, if he should *laugh* and *mock* at their endless calamity? Could the devil do any thing worse? Could he exhibit a more malignant spirit? or one more repulsive to goodness and humanity?

If we would not learn mankind to hate God, we must seek an explanation of the text in question consistent with his acknowledged character for justice and mercy. But there is really no mystery about its meaning; and strange as it may appear, considering its common use, it does not refer to him at all, as the preceding verses show. They read thus: "Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: she crieth in the chief places of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, &c. *Wisdom here speaks—she utters her voice—a very different speaker from the one supposed by Unitarian divines. Wisdom is personified in this instance, as in many other places in the Scriptures: and when personified is supposed to possess all the attributes of an intelligent being. In the ninth chapter of the same book, we are told that "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out seven pillars." No one of course, interprets this passage literally; we should hope all intelligent persons would perceive the impropriety of contending that wisdom *laughed* and *mocked* so as to be heard in the streets. The Old Testament abounds with strong metaphorical expressions, which require liberal explanations corresponding with the general themes to which they relate. In one place the trees are represented as talking; in another the little hills are called upon to clap their hands, and the woods to rejoice; and in still another, wisdom makes a great cry in the streets. All these are forms of expression adopted to impress the mind more strongly than common language could do.*

The declaration that wisdom laughs and

mocks at calamity is not true *literally*; but figuratively is true. It is designed to set forth most vividly, the extreme folly of those who disregard the instruction of wisdom—and contrary to her advice involve themselves in sin, and hence unavoidable punishment. Suffering the keen anguish consequent upon their iniquity, the words of wisdom are remembered; and while she refuses to relieve from *merited* punishment, she seems to laugh and mock in the ears of the sufferer. The connection of the text furnishes the best commentary upon it that can be given. "For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." Prov. i. 29-31. This last verse is a clear exhibition of the meaning of the writer. "Therefore"—for the foregoing reasons—"shall they eat of the fruit of their own way." We have said nothing about calamities in another world, for the very good reason that the author of two Proverbs never wrote of them; but believed and taught that the righteous and the wicked are recompensed in the earth.

SPIRITS IN PRISON.

A friend, — a ministring brother, — has requested us to give our opinion on the following passage of Scripture:

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water." — 1 Peter iii. 18-20.

We shall be obliged to be brief, in our observations, for want of room.

In this chapter the apostle was exhorting his brethren to good works. He urged them to live according to the principles of the Gospel. Vers. 8, 9, If they loved life, if they would see good days, they must so live. 10, 11. If they suffered at all, he exhorted them to suffer for righteousness' sake; and to quicken them in such a desire, he commended to them the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, as in the verses that stand at the head of this article. We observe, then,

1st. That Christ suffered for sins. "Christ also hath once suffered for sins."

2d. He suffered not for his own sins, for he had no sins. He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet *without sin*.

3d. For whose sins then did he suffer? Ans. For those of people. He suffered "the just for the unjust."

4th. The object of his sufferings was not to change the Almighty, but to change mankind; it was not to bring God to us, but to bring us to God."

5th. What did he suffer? He suffered the last and greatest agonies men can suffer, "being put to death in the flesh." He suffered the death on the cross.

6th. But death had not dominion over him for a long time. He soon rose from the dead by the power of God. He was quickened, or made alive by the spirit of God, who is the source of life.

7th. The spirit had sustained him in the midst of all his labors. The Father

was with him. Whosoever he went, he went in the power of God's spirit. If he cast out devils, it was by the spirit of God. All his labors were performed by the aid of God's spirit. This he constantly professed, and the apostles asserted the same fact after his death.

8th. When Jesus left the earth in body he did not leave it in spirit. He told his disciples "he would be with them, always, even unto the end of the age;" that "where two or three should be gathered together in his name, he would be in the midst of them." He told them, he would leave them in the spirit of God. The same spirit which had guided and sustained him, in his labors and sufferings, should guide and sustain them. They were to go forth in this spirit and preach the Gospel. They were not to leave Jerusalem after Jesus was crucified, until they had received this spirit, in a manner in which they had never received it before; and as it was seen descending on Jesus, at his baptism, in the form of a dove, so it was seen descending on the apostles, like tongues of fire, after Jesus was "put to death in the flesh, and quickened by the spirit." All this is plain.

9th. They were to go by this spirit to preach to the spirits in prison. Jesus went with them in this spirit. He did not go in body, but *in the spirit*. He was quickened by the spirit, *by which*, in his apostles, he went and preached to the spirits in prison. Hence we are told, that the disciples, after the ascension of Christ, "went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." Mark xvi. 19. But it will be asked, to what spirits in prison did Jesus preach through his disciples?

We answer in the following manner:— Did not Jesus send his disciples to preach deliverance to the *captives*? The Gentiles were in darkness and bondage. Paul, among others, was sent to give them *liberty* to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. This was truly delivering them from bondage. Jesus said, "Know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Paul exhorted the Galatians to "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." They had been delivered by Jesus from bondage and slavery. Yet, it must be remembered, that Jesus never preached to them personally, notwithstanding the apostle told them that Jesus had *made them free*. The truth is, Jesus preached to these spirits in spiritual slavery *by his spirit*, in the apostles, and that is the only way in which he ever did preach to the Galatians. In this way he preached to the Gentiles at large. He never preached to the Gentiles *in person*, because his personal ministry, and that of his apostles, until after his resurrection, was confined to the Jews. He was sent, and he sent them, to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But there must be some sense in which Jesus preached to the Gentiles, or else sacred prophecy was false. "I have put my spirit upon him, and he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." Isa. xlii. 1.—Again: "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thy hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the

Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house." 6, 7. He said "to the prisoners Go forth, and to them that are in darkness show yourselves," xlii. 9. Jesus says he was sent "to proclaim liberty to the captives, the opening of the prison to them that are bound." We repeat, Jesus preached to the Gentiles only through the agency of his apostles. By his spirit, he went in them, and threw open the prison doors, and said come forth, ye prisoners, from your gloomy dungeons. This is the way by which Jesus went, after his death and resurrection, and preached to men who were spiritually in bondage, or in prison. It was not their bodies, but *their spirits* that were in prison: they were "spirits in prison;" or, as Dr. Watts expresses the same thing, in his book on spiritual bondage, they were "souls in fetters."

10th. But perhaps we may be told, that St. Peter was evidently speaking of men *who were dead*. True, so he was; of those who were *spiritually dead*. We have no account anywhere in the Bible, that Jesus preached to the dead in any other sense, than as men dead in trespasses and sins. Hence Peter says, in the same Epistle in which we find the passage we are considering,—"For, for this cause was the Gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." iv. 6. Now, what dead were these? They had got to be judged at any rate according to men in the flesh; and for judgment Jesus came into *this world*, John ix. 39. They were those who were dead in ignorance and sin; and the Gospel was preached to them, that although they might be judged according to men in the flesh, still they might live according to God in the spirit. This is the only sense, we say again, in which Jesus is ever said in the Bible to preach to the dead.

But we shall be told, these dead were such as were disobedient in the days of Noah. Yes, very much like them, There were spirits in prison too, in the days of Noah. That case of Noah and the ark was a famous case in the eyes of all antiquity. Preachers and moralists frequently referred to it by way of illustration. Jesus did so, in his notable discourse on the destruction of Jerusalem. Matt. xxiv. 37-39. He meant that the people in his day were in some respects like the people in the days of Noah; and Peter intended, in the famous passage before us, that the Gentile spirits in prison, were like the spirits in prison in the days of Noah, to whom Noah preached while the ark was preparing. The translation does not make this matter precisely clear in the Common Version of our Bible. In the Improved Version (Notes) we read, "By the holy spirit, which after the ascension he communicated to his apostles, and by which he went and preached to spirits in prison, to idolatrous heathen, the slaves of ignorance and vice: he thus proclaimed liberty to the captives." Isaiah xlii. 6 7: xlii. 9. He preached [continued those translators] not to the same individual persons but to men like them, in the same circumstances, to the race of the Gentiles, to the descendants of those who had formerly been disobedient, and refused the call of the spirit in Noah's time.—So, far the Improved Version. See Wakefield's translation of the same passage. We have not the slightest doubt, that when Peter said, "The Gospel was preached to them that were dead," iv. 6, he meant the same persons to whom he referred