

bitterness of remorse, "My punishment is greater than I can bear." What punishment did he complain of? There was then no punishment denounced against murder, and the Lord expressly secured him from corporal punishment. But he had that within, to which all external punishments are right; He was extended on the rack of reflection, and he lay upon the torture of the mind. Hell was kindled within him, and he felt the first gnawings of the worm that never dies.

Another remarkable instance of the dominion of conscience, we have in the history of Herod. John the Baptist, the harbinger of our Lord sojourned a while in the court of Herod. This faithful monitor spared not sin in the person of a king, but reproved him openly for his vices; Herod, although he disliked, yet he respected the prophet, and feared the multitude, who believed in his doctrines. But on Herod's birth-day, when the daughter of Herodias danced before him, he made a sudden vow, that he would grant her whatever she desired. Being instructed of her mother, she asked the head of John the Baptist. One of the common arts by which we deceive our consciences, is to set one duty against another. Hence sin is generally committed under the appearance of some virtue, and hence the greatest crimes which have ever troubled the world have been committed under the name, and under the shew of religion. Such was the crime which we are now considering. The observance of an oath has, among all nations, been regarded as a religious act; and here a fair opportunity offered itself to one who only waited for such an opportunity, to make religion triumph at the expense of virtue. If Herod had no inclination to destroy the Prophet, and no interest in his death, his conscience would have told him that murder was an atrocious crime, which no consideration could alleviate nor excuse; it would have told him that vows, which it is unlawful to make, it is also unlawful to keep; but Herod was already a party in the cause; he determined to get quit of his enemy; he satisfied his conscience with some vain pretences, and gave orders to behead the Baptist. But were all his anxieties and sorrows buried with the Prophet? No: the grave of the Prophet was the grave of his peace. Neither the splendour of majesty, nor the guards of state, nor the noise of battle, nor the shouts of victory, could drown the alarms of conscience. That mangled form was ever present to his eyes; the cry of blood was ever in his ears. Hence, when our Saviour appeared in a public character, and began to teach and to work miracles, Herod cried out, in the horrors of a guilty mind, "It is John the Baptist whom I slew; he is risen from the dead."

How great, my brethren, is the power and dominion of conscience! The Almighty appointed it his vicerger in the world; he invested it with his own authority, and said,

"Be thou a God unto man." Hence it has power over the course of time. It can recall the past; it can anticipate the future. It reaches beyond the limits of this globe; it visits the chambers of the grave; it reanimates the bodies of the dead; exerts a dominion over the invisible regions, and summons the inhabitants of the eternal world to haunt the slumbers, and shake the hearts of the wicked. Tremble, then, O man! whosoever thou art, who art conscious to thyself of unrepented sins. Peace of mind thou shalt never enjoy. Repose, like a false friend, shall fly from thee. Thou shalt be driven from the presence of the Lord like Adam when he sinned, and be terrified when thou hearest his voice, as awful when it comes from within, as when it came from without. The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity: but a spirit wounded by remorse, who can bear?

The second thing proposed, was, to shew you the deliverance which the Gospel gives us from remorse, by means of the "blood of sprinkling." This expression alludes to the ceremonial method of expiating sin under the Old Testament, by offering sacrifices, and sprinkling the blood of the victim on the altar. But, as this was in itself one typical of Christ, how welcome to the soul are the glad tidings of the Messiah, who did, what these tidings could not do,—actually save his people from their sins! By the atonement and blood of Christ, the sins of men have been completely expiated. It is the voice of the Gospel of Peace, "Take, eat, and live for ever." What relief will it give to the wounded mind, to hear the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel! The Gospel being published to the world, and the offers of mercy through a Redeemer being made to all men, the sincere penitent accepts these offers, and flies for refuge to the hope set before him. Then Jesus saves his people from their sins; he heals the mind which was wounded by remorse, and bestows that peace which the world cannot give, and cannot take away. There is joy in heaven, we are told, over a sinner that repenteth, and the joy of the heavens is communicated to the returning penitent. When he beholds God reconciled to him in the face of his Son; when he hears, in secret, the blessed Jesus whispering in sweet strains to his heart, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee," he is filled with peace and with joy; with peace which passeth all understanding; with joy which is unspeakable and glorious. His sins being forgiven, he is accepted in the Beloved. He is an heir of immortality, and his name is written in heaven: to him is opened the fountain of life. He has a title to all the pleasures which are at God's right hand; to the treasures of heaven, and to the joys of eternity. He looks forward with a well-grounded hope, to that happy day, when he shall take possession of the inheritance on high; he anticipates the delights of the world