

voked him to anger with their high places, and moved
 him to jealousy with their graven images.* "Hear,
 O heavens;" saith the Prophet Isaiah, "and give ear,
 O earth; for the Lord hath spoken: I have nourished
 and brought up children, and they have rebelled
 against me: The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass
 his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my peo-
 ple doth not consider. Ah, sinful nation, a people
 laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that
 are corrupters! they have forsaken the Lord, they
 have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger,
 they are gone away backward."† They were there-
 fore justly compared by our blessed Saviour, in the
 words of our text, to an unfruitful fig-tree. They
 were always covered with abundance of leaves, and
 put forth the blossoms of a fair and regular external
 profession. For you will observe, my brethren, (and
 I would in an especial manner entreat those who en-
 deavour to unite the pleasures of sin with the pro-
 fession of religion to attend to this observation) that
 amidst all their provocations and all their transgressi-
 ons, they never laid aside entirely the forms and cere-
 monies of their religious worship. Even in the midst
 of the grossest idolatry, they in general professed an
 external respect to the service of the God of Israel.
 "They feared the Lord," says the Sacred Historian,
 "and served their own gods, after the manner of the
 nations whom they carried away from thence."‡ But
 their acts of devotion, although regular and frequent,
 were entirely formal and hypocritical. They exhi-
 bited as a nation, no fruits of righteousness, no in-
 ward or practical religion, no true love to God, no
 genuine humility, no fervent gratitude, and no abiding
 confidence and dependence upon their gracious Pre-
 server and Sovereign. Their motives were impure,
 their principles were corrupt, their hearts were un-
 hallowed, and their practice inconsistent both with
 the spirit and the letter of the Divine Law. It was

* Ps. lxxviii. 56, 57, 58. † Isa. i. 2, 3, 4. ‡ 2 Kings xvii. 33.