

THE CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTOR.

February, 1858.

“THAT THE SOUL BE WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE, IT IS NOT GOOD.”—Prov. xix. 2.

SERMON

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ISAIAH XXVI. 9.—“*When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.*”

WE might be ready to imagine, that the goodness of God would lead the sinner to repentance, would melt his hardened mind, subdue his rebellious spirit, produce in him compunction for his faults and reformation of life; but it is not the case. “Let favor be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.” Engrossed by the gift, he forgets its author. Of his heavenly benefactor, he cherishes no grateful recollections.—He takes occasion, from his patience toward him, only to plunge himself more deeply in the mire of sin. Because sentence against his evil works is not speedily executed, his heart is fully set in him to do evil. Severity is necessary to arrest the thoughtless sinner. Hence God scatters, through the earth, his penal inflictions; and, when these are sanctified to him, they become the instruments of effecting the sinner’s reformation. “When thy judgments,” says the prophet, to God, “are in the earth the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” In the illustration of these words, we purpose, through divine assistance, in the first place, to consider what we are to understand by the judgments of God; secondly, to speak of some of those judgments which are at present in the earth; and thirdly, of the improvement which we should make of them—“learn righteousness.”

In the first place then, we are to consider what we are to understand by the judgments of God. The term judgment denotes the sentence pronounced by a judge. Thus, when the two women came to Solomon, contending about their title to the living child, the sentence pronounced by the king is called his judgment. “And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged.” Sometimes the judgments of God denote the declarations contained in his word. Thus it is said, “He shewed his statutes and his judgments unto Israel.” Very often, however, they signify his penal inflictions on ac