

THE
NECESSITY AND EFFICIENCY
OF
THE GOSPEL.



A
SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE

The Branch Methodist Missionary Society

OF HALIFAX, NOVA-SCOTIA,

February 11th, 1827.

BY *MATTHEW RICHEY,*
Wesleyan Missionary.

AND PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

1827.
"Where is the wise? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"

I. CORINTHIANS, I. 20.

"I know of but one Phædo and one Polemon throughout all Greece, who were ever made better by their philosophy; whereas Christianity hath brought back its myriads from vice to virtue."

ORIGIN.

HALIFAX:

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1827.

ADVERTISEMENT.

AS the following Sermon owes its publicity, not to the wishes of the Author, but to the advice and solicitation of several persons of intelligence and respectability who heard it; this consideration will, he hopes, shield him on the one hand from the imputation of vanity, and on the other from the shafts of criticism. That its claims to the attention of the Public are of a very humble character, he is not unaware; and after it was preached he could have unreluctantly consigned it to the shades of oblivion. He trusts, however, that its imperfections are not such, as entirely to neutralize its tendency to promote the glory of God, by exciting or cherishing a desire, in those who may peruse it, to contribute to the diffusion of 'the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ.'

Windsor, March 6, 1827.

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SERMON.

FOR after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.
—I. Corinthians i. xxi.

IT is one of the distinguishing peculiarities of the Bible, that, while it exhibits the most luminous and overwhelming evidences of the spiritual ignorance, and moral degradation of man; it inspires the loftiest conceptions of his native dignity, as a sentient and immortal being. To a practical recognition of the human character under these distinct aspects, may be traced the auspicious commencement of the cause of Missions,—a cause which like the orb of day, advances with growing effulgence, and which we believe, will continue to pursue its career of glorious achievement, till the universal diffusion of the knowledge of the Lord; and its accompanying blessings, shall give the reality of actual existence to those scenes of rapture, that floated so oft in visionary grandeur before the mental eyes of the prophets. With a deep sense of man's guilt and exposure as a sinner, the friends of such institutions connect the cheering revelation of the practicability and means of his rescue unfolded by the gospel. They enter with unstifled convictions, and yearning tenderness, into the doctrine of human depravity; but they discover, shrouded in this moral gloom, a mind of heavenly extraction, invested with capacities for limitless progression in knowledge, holiness, and happiness.

Their estimate of these endowments, is however, moderated by humility. Far from concurring in sentiment with those who erect reason into an oracle, and vainly imagine that it precludes the necessity of any preternatural communications of knowledge, they 'lean not to their own understanding,' but convinced of the divine authority of the sacred volume, bow with implicit submission to its decisions. With this view of the imbecility of unassisted reason, the results of experience are in perfect accord. Long, indeed, did philosophy flatter her votaries with the hope of complete satisfaction, in reference to the subjects of their most anxious inquiry; but *when or where* was that anticipation realized? Age after age passed away,—empires rose and fell,—eloquence rolled its thunders,—and learning and art reared their stupendous monuments; but the culture and improvement of the sciences added nothing to man's knowledge of *divine things*; a veil still overhung the attributes of Deity, and the future destinies of mankind, which no hand could withdraw, 'but that which was stretched upon the cross.' *For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*

In these words, two momentous and interesting facts are presented to our consideration, each of which is susceptible of the clearest proof and the most copious illustrations. In confirmation of the former, the annals of history,—the dictates of experience,—and the deductions of sound philosophy, unite their attestations; and that the preaching of the cross, which is to them that perish *foolishness*, is to such as believe, both the *wisdom* and the *power* of God, myriads of happy spirits imparadised in immortality, and thousands of regenerate souls on earth, have 'the witness in themselves.'

It is not easy to ascertain with exact precision, the import of the phrase '*wisdom of God*,' with which these statements are introduced to

our notice. Some apprehend it to mean, the wise disposals of Providence, by which the heathen were left to make trial of the power of reason; while others are of opinion, that it relates to the wisdom displayed in the works of creation, but from the indications of which, the wisest sages of pagan antiquity, were never able to derive accurate ideas of the character, or of the moral government of God. Dr. Lightfoot observes that the phrase *the wisdom of God*, is not to be understood of that wisdom which has God for its *author*; but that which has God for its *object*. There were among the heathen "*the wisdom of Nature*; that is *philosophy*, and *the wisdom of God*; that is *divinity*. But the world in its *divinity* could not by wisdom know God." Leaving you, amidst such diversity of sentiment, to adopt that exposition which appears to you the best, permit me

>FIRST.—To direct your attention to the evidence and illustration of the humiliating fact, '*the world by wisdom knew not God.*'

St. Paul, in the first chapter of the epistle to the Romans, in portraying the moral turpitude of the Gentiles, suggests it as a signal aggravation of their idolatry and crimes, that there had been a time when they knew God. Should the carper of revelation here exultingly put the question; how could the apostle consistently affirm that the world by wisdom knew not God, if according to his own admission there was a period when they possessed this knowledge? We repel the impious charge by observing, that the knowledge which he there ascribes to the progenitors of the heathen, was not, as the objection assumes, the result of rational investigation, but emanated as have all the just conceptions concerning God that ever enlightened the human understanding, from *revelation*. Noah and his family possessed the true knowledge of God, so far as it was revealed in the first periods of time; and nothing can be more consonant to reason than to suppose, that the awful catastrophe, from the desolations of which they alone of all the species were exempted, powerfully tended to impress the minds of men with a sense of God, as the creator and governor of the world, and the sole object of religious worship, too deeply to be soon effaced. However scattered, they would carry along with them vivid recollections of the great principles of religion in which they had been instructed by oral tradition. Here we behold the origin of all the correct theological knowledge which pervaded the different nations of the earth, in the first ages subsequent to the deluge. But a proud confidence in their own wisdom, unhappily, soon marked the aberration of mankind, from the pure and luminous principles of Divine Truth. 'Professing themselves to be wise they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things. They changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the creator who is blessed for ever. Amen.'—(Rom. 1.) In attempting to establish the position, that the most vigorous efforts of reason to attain the knowledge of God never succeeded, our proofs shall be drawn, not from hordes of untutored savages, but from those pagan nations that prefer the most distinguished claims to literary renown.

Egypt, the memorable scene of Israelitish depression and triumph, first demands our attention. The early and surprising advances which the Egyptians made in various departments of learning are matters of general notoriety. Plaudits of their eminent industry and success in scientific pursuits, are emblazoned, as well on the sacred as the classic page. Egypt, indeed, was anciently the academy of the world. Hither the most celebrated legislators, poets, and philosophers of Greece, resorted

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to consummate their studies ; and here was that lustre borrowed with which they afterwards illumined and exalted their country. It is mentioned in the sacred volume, as a high eulogium of the learning of Moses, that ' *he was learned in all the learning of the Egyptians ;*' and in the same Divine records it is represented as decisive of the pre-eminence of Solomon's wisdom that ' *it excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt.*' Here, then, if in any part of the heathen world, we might naturally expect to find the sublime science of theology assiduously cultivated, and corresponding in the degree of its improvement to other branches of knowledge. But the expectation is vain. The cloud that environs the uncreated glory of God, still presented its dark side to Egypt ; and, as in the day of Israel's Redemption, shed an involving gloom over the land. Those noble powers of genius, which they so successfully exerted in speculations of science, and proudly displayed in miracles of art, were prostrated in blind and superstitious adoration before imaginary deities. Osiris and Isis—supposed to be the sun and moon, but by some mythologists thought to comprehend all nature—were among the principal objects of their religious veneration. The accounts of these divinities transmitted to us are legendary and absurd. Osiris is said to have been slain by the perfidious cruelty of his brother Typhon ; and the Egyptians attributed the inundations of the Nile to the profusion of tears which Isis shed, in deploring that melancholy event. They also worshipped Ammon, who was afterwards the Jupiter of the Greeks. This celebrated deity was, in all probability, an apotheosis of Ham, by whose posterity Africa was peopled. He had two magnificent temples : one in the desert of Lybia, in which were an hundred priests : here was an oracle of wide-spread fame, till its reputation was forfeited by obvious falsehood and disgusting flattery. The other was at Thebes, the capital of Upper Egypt, and the vestiges of its ancient grandeur are said to be still visible.—It may be observed, that no species of idolatry was more common throughout all pagan antiquity than the worship of the serpent. Satan appears to have taken a peculiar degree of malignant pleasure, in erecting this appropriate and significant emblem of himself into an object of devotional homage. Some of these animals were worshipped by the Egyptians as household gods ; others they distinguished with more public honours. *Eliau* tells us of a serpent worshipped in a tower at Melitus, in Egypt ; he had a priest and officers to attend him ; and he was served every day on a table or altar, with flour kneaded up with honey, which the next day was found to be eaten up. The cat, the crocodile, the sparrow-hawk, and even the herbs of their gardens, were treated with reverence, equal to that which they paid to their most illustrious gods. So just are the reflections of Bishop Stillingfleet—' Had we no other demonstration of the greatness of man's *Apostacy* and *Degeneracy*, the Egyptian theology would be an irrefragable evidence of it. For who could but imagine a strange lowness of spirit, in those who could fall down and worship the basest and most contemptible of creatures ? Their temples were the best hieroglyphics of themselves—fair and goodly structures without, but within, some deformed creature enshrined for adoration.*

According to the opinion of some eminent moderns, the religion of the Persians originally recognised one Supreme Being only—the creator and governor of the universe. But this has been too gratuitously asserted, to challenge our unhesitating assent. Be that however as it may, it is well known that they, in common with all the other eastern nations, were immemorially addicted to the Sabian superstition, which

* Origines Sacrae.

principally consisted in the adoration of the host of heaven. It has been asserted, that men were first prompted to idolatry, by a consciousness of their need of a mediator to recommend them to the Divine favour; and that contemplating the heavenly bodies, under the influence of this conviction, as the magnificent residences of beings of a superior order, they offered sacrifice and prayers to these in order to excite them to intercede with God in their behalf. This hypothesis would be less improbable, had we any just reason to believe that the worship of those sidereal deities was ever associated with any distinct conception of the Supreme Being, or with any intended reference to him. But of this there is no evidence. The most rational supposition there seems to be, that after men had lost the knowledge of the true God, becoming vain in their imaginations, they allowed their admiration of the august and elevating spectacle, presented by the expanse of heaven, to rise to such a pitch, that in process of time they regarded the celestial orbs as so many deities arrayed in light, constantly inspecting and governing the affairs of mortals. It was thus that they were induced to venerate them with divine honours, and use such expedients as they deemed most efficacious to propitiate their favour: they had no ulterior design. Here all their views terminated.—The high antiquity and seducing attractions of this superstition are apparent from the notices of it contained in the sacred Scriptures. Job, who flourished before Moses, exculpates himself from the charge of idolatry in these terms—*‘If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in-brightness; and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above.’*—(Job 31. 26, 27, 28.) The same idolatrous practice prevailed in the days of the prophet Ezekiel—*‘At the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs towards the temple of the Lord, and their faces towards the east; and THEY WORSHIPPED THE SUN towards the east.’*—(Ez. 8. 16.) The heavenly bodies were not the only objects of the adoration of the Persians: they worshipped the whole circuit of heaven—

‘Hoc sublime camdens quem invocant omnes Jovem.’

‘This glowing height which all adore as Jove.’

As also the winds and water; and they had the utmost religious veneration for fire, which they considered as the emblem of the sun, and the principle of all things.

A considerable reformation was effected in the religion of the Persians, by the philosophic impostor Zoroaster; who, in order to give the greater sanction to his doctrines, pretended to a divine commission, and feigned to have brought sacred fire from heaven; and that he had deposited it on an altar of the first temple, which he caused to be erected in the city of Xiz, in Media; from which it was communicated to all the other temples in which the Magian rites were observed. He interdicted the use of images, and introduced some changes in the ceremonial of fire-worship. But the doctrine for which he was most famous, related to two eternal and independent beings who, according to his theory, were the great agents of all the good and evil in the world. ‘Among those,’ says Plutarch, ‘who admitted two principles—the one good, the other bad, was the famous Zoroaster. One of these gods he named *Oromazes*, the other *Arimanius*; and said that one had a relation to light and knowledge, the other to darkness and ignorance. He taught that the first was to be sacrificed to, to obtain favours, and the other to

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be defended from evils.*—As an example of their devotion to the evil deity, it may be remarked, that as soon as Xerxes heard that the Athenians had banished Themistocles, he addressed his prayer to *Arimanius*, beseeching that his enemies might always be so infatuated as to banish from among them their bravest men.† When it is remembered, that Cyrus imbibed these erroneous views from education; the language in which the Lord addresses him by the prophet appears equally majestic and appropriate—

I am Jehovah, and none else,
Forming light, and creating darkness,
Making peace and creating evil.
I Jehovah am the author of all these things.

Lowth's Translation.

Thus, while that illustrious monarch was animated by prophetic assurances of unexampled success, to set forth in the splendid career of victory marked out for him by the finger of Divine Providence, he was furnished with accurate and sublime conceptions of that glorious being, who honoured him as the instrument of his purposes.

Having taken a brief and imperfect survey of the religious systems of Egypt and Persia, so humbling to the pride of reason, and so illustrative of the melancholy fact, that '*the world by wisdom knew not God,*' let us for a few moments transfer our attention to the favourite haunts of classic genius—Greece and Rome. And, were we to contemplate the scenes that here expand before us, merely as objects of taste, without any reference to the immortal interests of our species, we could not remain insensible to their numerous and potent charms. Memory would awaken from the slumber of oblivion, a thousand storied and fascinating associations. Our attention would be entranced by the grave instructions of the Lyceum and the porch; our strongest emotions would respond to the powerful and embellished periods of the Senate; while the enrapturing strains of the muse would lead captive the whole train of our affections. But those very objects, on which the mere scholar or philosopher dwells with unmingled complacency, and lavishes his applause, exhibit, when viewed under the influence of christian perceptions, very different aspects, and inspire sensations of just an opposite kind. For, amidst all this imposing array of human accomplishments, where do we behold the knowledge of '*Him, whom to know is life eternal?*' We see the lustre of science, on which death hastens to throw its sable mantle for ever; but where, oh! where, amid the glooms of paganism, do we discover THE LIGHT OF LIFE,—that light which alone shall blaze forth into immortality, and fill heaven with its splendour? Did it irradiate Greece?

The theology of the Greeks, like that knowledge which laid the foundation of their political eminence, was principally derived from Egypt. Emanating from so corrupt a source, it must have been sufficiently erroneous in speculation, and debasing in moral influence. The circumstances, too, under which it was introduced, largely contributed to extend the empire of superstition, by multiplying the objects of worship to an almost indefinite number. Their first instructors in theogony and mythology, were the poets; who expatiated in the ideal regions of fiction, and superinduced imaginative systems of their own, upon those which they had received from other nations. Hence their gods soon became so multiplied, that *Hesiod* enumerated *thirty thousand*. In order to prevent interference and confusion, they distinguished them into several classes, and assigned to each class their appropriate dignity, honours,

* De Isid. et Asirid.

† Plut. Vita Themist.

and influence. To this gradation in their mythology *Plutarch* alludes, in his life of *Romulus*—"We know," says he, "that the souls of the virtuous, by nature and divine justice, rise from men to heroes; from heroes to genii; and at last, if as in the mysteries they be perfectly cleansed and purified, shaking off all remains of mortality, and all power of the passions, then they finally attain the most glorious and perfect happiness, and ascend from genii to gods, not by the vote of the people, but by the just and established order of nature."—We might lead our hearers through all the labyrinths of the pantheon; but, if in cases where the criminal anticipates, by a candid confession, the overwhelming result of his trial, the necessity of any further prosecution is precluded, we have an inducement equally powerful, to waive any scrutinizing inquiry into the claims of the Greeks, with reference to their knowledge of divine things. The celebrated Athenian altar inscribed '*To the Unknown God,*' is a sufficient proof of the moral darkness in which they were enwrapped. Yes! Athens dignified by such beastful titles, and so eminently distinguished by the learning, politeness, and eloquence of its inhabitants, was sunk in superstition and idolatry! The sacred historian of the incipient periods of the Christian Church, having delineated the circumstances by which St. Paul was providentially conducted to that city, remarks with emphatic simplicity, that while he remained there for a short time, '*HIS SPIRIT WAS STIRRED IN HIM.*' What was the cause of this strong excitement? Was his eye caught, and his mind exhilarated, by the gay appearance of the affluent, charioted in splendour along the streets, amidst the salutations of obsequiousness and respect?—Was he enchanted with the display of Grecian architecture? or glowed his bosom with desire to emulate the achievements of the illustrious dead, whose sepulchral monuments towered in his view, beckoning the youth of Greece to the field of glory? '*No—none of these things moved him.*'* 'Absorbed in the holy abstractions of his own mind, he saw no charms, felt no fascinations; but on the contrary was pierced with the most poignant distress: what then was the cause? Because he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. To him it presented nothing but a magnificent mausoleum, decorated, it is true, with the richest productions of the sculptor and the architect, but still where the souls of men lay dead in trespasses and sins; while the dim light of philosophy that still glimmered in the schools appeared but as the lamp of the sepulchre, shedding its pale and sickly lustre around those gorgeous chambers of death.'" The heart of the apostle was too fervidly engaged in his work, to suffer so propitious an opportunity of bearing his testimony against the errors of paganism to pass unimproved. He disputed with certain philosophers of the Stoics and Epicureans, in consequence of which he was accused of being an introducer of new deities, and brought to the Areopagus. And now, behold a scene of intense and commanding interest! The great Apostle of the Gentiles magnifies his office! The fire of inspiration kindles in his breast, and struggles for utterance; while unawed by the presence of the most august citizens of Athens, he opens his divine revelations upon them with all the majesty of his mission, and pours the splendour of truth on 'the eye of Greece.' *Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription. To the Unknown God. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you, &c.*—(Acts 17. 22, 23.)

The general features of heathen superstition are so extremely similar

* See an admirable Sermon on 'The Attraction of the Cross,' by the Rev. Mr. James, of Birmingham, preached before the London Missionary Society.

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in every age and country, that a few observations may suffice concerning the religion of the ancient Romans. Cicero* affirms that they surpassed all other nations in piety and religion, and in the wise and devout ascription of all things to the disposal and government of the immortal gods. But who does not instantly perceive, that in the same breath, he pronounces their eulogy, and exposes their blind and abject superstition? They impiously snatched the sceptre of the universe from the hands of 'the blessed and only potentate,' and committed it to fabulous deities, of whom they acknowledged and adored an immense number. To these they were incessantly adding, by the profane deification of heroes and emperors. The debasing passions, and malignant diseases, to which human nature is incident were arrayed by them, in divine attributes, and worshipped as gods.

Hitherto we have passed over in silence the *characters* of those imaginary divinities that claimed the service and adoration of the infatuated heathen. Nor shall I pollute the sanctity of the place where I stand, by a recital of those enormities which, for the most part, form the incidents of their history. They are with the strictest impartiality characterised by the poet, as

'Gods, hateful, changeful, passionate, unjust,
Whose attributes were rage, revenge, or lust.'

The estimate which their deluded votaries formed of their moral qualities, is repulsively conspicuous in the rites with which they worshipped them; but on these deeds of darkness we shall at present, from motives which none can mistake, allow the mantle of obscurity to rest. These, oh! reason, are thy triumphs!

How loudly, my brethren, did such lamentable circumstances of spiritual destitution, call for a divine interposition, to roll back the dense clouds of error that impended over the world, and to relume the human understanding with the radiance of truth. 'Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear what many prophets and kings and righteous men, and we may add pagan philosophers, desired to see, but died without seeing them.'—When experience had, through a series of ages, amply and satisfactorily attested the insufficiency of reason, though aided by all the advantages that civilization and learning could supply, to direct man in the way to true and eternal happiness, 'It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.'

SECOND.—To this consolatory fact, then, we at length invite your attention: and if after having felt the rigours, and witnessed the desolations of winter, we hail with exultation the advances of Spring, to deck the earth with the bloom of a fresh vegetation, and fill the grove with melody;—if the mariner after having been tossed on the deep, during a starless and tempestuous night, rejoices to behold the ascending sun pouring his splendours upon the world: what conscious and unmingled pleasure must we feel, in averting our thoughts from the gloomy and degrading superstitions of heathenism, to contemplate the simple, the majestic, the efficient plan of Heaven, for the recovery of ruined man.

As a manifestation of the wondrous attributes of God uniting in sublime accordance, to accomplish purposes the most beneficent and glorious, the redeeming scheme of the Gospel stands pre-eminent. The contemplatist of nature finds, amid the partial discoveries of the Creator, that dimly gleam from his works, much to perplex and confound him. The attentive observer of the arrangements of Providence is often baffled in his calculations, and hesitates as to the conclusions to

* Pietate ac Religione, atque hac una sapientia quod Deorum immortalium Numine omnia regi gubernarique perspeximus, omnes Gentis Nationesque superavimus.

alludes, of the; from perfectly ill power perfect people, read our in cases overwhelm- preclu- tinizing owledge the Un- ch they les, and uence of od histo- libeated ducted to ed there he cause exhilara- ur along ?—Was owed his us dead, he youth ed him.* charms, the most the city gnificant as of the dead in still glim- re, shed- mbers of his work, y against h certain which he ht to the ding inte- The fire e; while he opens sion, and of Athens, passed by To the lare I unto ely similar

be deduced from the facts which he has accumulated. But from all these darkling agitations the humble christian is set free. "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."—(2 Corinth. 3, 18.) While, however, we remember, that the whole assemblage of the divine perfections shine with transcendent and unsetting glory in our redemption; the fact under consideration fixes our present attention, particularly on the love manifested in the design of the gospel;—the wisdom displayed in the plan of its operation, and on the power demonstrated by its efficiency.

The appropriate and benevolent end of the gospel is 'To save them that believe.' The suitability and amplitude of its provisions for this purpose are truly worthy of the donor, and admirably calculated to heal all our sorrows, and to save us from all our sins. Are we guilty?—It offers pardon. Are we depraved?—It displays the energies, and promises the gift of the renewing Spirit. Is death appalling?—The religion of the gospel extracts the monster's sting, and lights up the iris of immortal hope, to relieve the gloom that mantles the dreaded vale, and cheer the believer's passage to the realms of bliss. And from the enjoyment of these inestimable blessings none are excluded, but those who shut the door of mercy against themselves, by unrelenting hostility against God. Associate with a view of the grandeur, perpetuity, and freeness of this salvation, a remembrance of the divine victim who bled and expired to procure it, and of the total unworthiness of the recipients; and then resist if you can the overcoming emphasis with which such considerations convey to the heart the sublime and scriptural apothegm—'God is Love.' Never are we so sensible of the poverty of human language—never so desirous of being able to speak with the tongue of angels, as when attempting to expatiate on the enrapturing theme of redeeming love. We labour under the burden of the subject, and our words are lost! Nor were the inspired writers themselves strangers to such feelings, whenever they endeavoured to convey to those to whom they wrote or spoke, an adequate idea of the love of God to our alienated world. Pointing to the cross on which angels bend their astonished eyes, they exclaim 'herein is love!' intimating that in comparison of this every other instance of the divine benignity falls into the shade. "Hereby they tell us God hath commended his love toward us;"—hath given us the very highest expression of it. And thus, they invariably refer us to the evidences and effects of his love: but the love *itself*, they never once attempted to define; and the reason is as obvious as it is consoling—because it is *indefinable*. Perfectly analogous to these declarations, but more emphatic, are the words of our Lord himself. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son."—(John 3, 16.) Till therefore we are able to estimate the value of the gift, we must be satisfied to know of the love of God, that it "passeth knowledge." But though we cannot comprehend it, we may surrender our hearts to its transforming and practical influence. Let then, the believing contemplation of such amazing mercy, enkindle in our breasts an inextinguishable flame of reciprocal affection—

Bound every heart! and every bosom burn!
Praise! flow forever, (if astonishment
Will give thee leave,) my praise forever flow—
Praise ardent, cordial, constant.'

Hence, also, we receive a spirit-stirring impression of the value of a human soul. Was our salvation an object sufficiently dignified to draw forth the most signal display of the divine perfections?

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death of Him, who is 'The brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person?' Then who can compute the worth of an immortal soul? Let your personal salvation, my brethren, be your first and unceasing care. But let not your solicitude stop here: here indeed it will not, cannot stop, if your hearts are imbued with the genuine spirit of the gospel. The love of Christ is an expansive affection. Its glowing touch withers every malevolent feeling, and expands the bosom with the most generous emotions. On every scene of wretchedness it casts an eye moistened with the tear of sympathy; but prompts most powerfully to the noblest species of charity—that of doing good to the souls of men. Can you think then of the six hundred millions of your fellow-men, who are at this moment perishing for lack of knowledge, without feeling a strong desire to contribute to the melioration of their moral condition? They are possessed of the same ennobling faculties as you; and in the estimation of Him whose judgment is according to truth, their souls are no less precious than yours. To reconcile them to God, the Redeemer assumed humanity, and stained the cross with his atoning blood! Though deeply sunk in ignorance and crime, they may be rescued from the horrors of their present condition, and led forth into 'the glorious liberty of the children of God.' No insuperable difficulties exist, to give to our enterprise the character of infatuation. The experiment has already been made, and with success so eminent, as to reprove discouragement, enlarge the anticipations of christian hope, and afford a cheering pledge of the ultimate triumph of that Kingdom which consists in 'righteousness peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.'

The expedient which God has devised for the purpose of subjugating the world to himself is, *the foolishness of preaching*. And by this appointment, paradoxical as the assertion may appear, he has displayed before the eyes of the whole intelligent creation, a most striking exhibition of his unsearchable wisdom. It is perfectly obvious that the Apostle did not intend by the phrase 'the foolishness of preaching' to impeach, but on the contrary to exalt the wisdom of this important mean of our salvation. The Greek philosophers always spoke of the preaching of the Apostles with sovereign contempt: they had no better name for it than *foolishness*. In order therefore to vindicate the insulted honour of the Gospel, St. Paul holds up the results of its promulgation in illustrious contrast to the fruitlessness of philosophy, and retorts upon the enemies of the Cross their own opprobrious language. When the Gospel Revelation was opened on the world, every circumstance connected with it concurred to expose it to the displeasure and animadversion of those who were 'wise in their own conceits.' The nature and tendency of its doctrines,—the unvarnished manner in which, and the obscure and illiterate persons by whom they were proclaimed, were ill-adapted to attract or conciliate the haughty Greek. But in its tendency to humble the pride of the human heart consisted its supreme excellency. Thus, by an expedient which the wisdom of the world could never have conceived, and of which when unfolded it disapproved, was God pleased to effect the greatest moral revolution that history records! 'O the depth of the riches both of the knowledge and wisdom of God!'—(Rom. 11, 33.) It deserves to be particularly noticed, that the doctrines of the Gospel are rendered efficacious in promoting the salvation of sinners, principally by means of *preaching*. To this method of instruction in the great things of religion, a singular degree of importance and utility is attributed by the Spirit of inspiration. Among the many passages that might easily be adduced in proof of this, the valedictory injunction of Christ to his Apostles is full and explicit—'Go ye into all

the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.'—(Mark 16. 15, 16.) Far be it from us to imagine that the conquests of the Gospel, as they are exhibited in the sermons of its faithful ministers, are owing to the power of eloquence, to the influence of moral persuasion, or to any natural cause whatever: 'Paul planteth, Apollos watereth, but God giveth the increase.' It is however enough for us to know, that the preaching of the Gospel is the most distinguished mean of illumination and conversion, and has ever been pre-eminently blessed by God to these high and holy ends.

This consideration obviously attaches the highest imaginable importance to the cause of missions. In praise of the truly noble and philanthropic institution of the British and Foreign Bible Society, scarcely too much can be said. From its benevolent operations, incalculable good has already resulted; and that its efforts may never be paralyzed by a diminution of resources, or of zeal, we devoutly wish and fervently pray. Its ablest advocates and most liberal supporters will not, however, hesitate to admit, that it is valuable chiefly as the pioneer of the Missionary enterprise. Like the precursor of the Messiah, it is 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness,' 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord: make straight in the desert a high way for our God.'—(Isa. 40. 3.) The Christian Missionary, glowing with the spirit of his Divine Master, follows 'to preach good tidings to the meek, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison doors to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.'—(Isa. 61. 1, 2.) Precious as the boon of the Inspired Volume to the heathen unquestionably is, Missionaries must be sent to negotiate with them the embassy of reconciliation to God; as without such a measure, the means used for their conversion would be inadequate, and of course inefficient. For, were they amply supplied with Bibles, and did they evince as strong a desire to peruse and understand them as was manifested by the Ethiopian Eunuch, when 'sitting in his chariot he read Essias the prophet;' yet if left destitute of living instructors in the way of righteousness, like him, too, they would feel and deplore the want of 'some man to guide them.'—(Acts 8.) If these reasonings need any additional confirmation, it is found in the words of the Apostle, 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach except they be sent.'—(Rom. 10. 17, 14, 15.)

Agreeably to the proposed method of elucidating the latter clause of our text; the demonstrations of divine power which accompanied the promulgation of the Gospel, and crowned it with unparalleled efficiency, remain yet to be noticed. We advert, not to the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, but to the abundant effusion of his convincing and regenerating influences on the hearts of sinners. No sooner had the ascended Saviour passed in our nature the everlasting portals of Heaven, and sat down on the throne of infinite dominion, than the glory which was destined to follow his sufferings, began to disclose its orient and eternal splendour! Only a few days elapsed after his ascension, till the banner of the cross waved in triumph over the very scenes where he had received the most contumelious treatment, and poured out his soul unto death! On the day of Pentecost, while Peter opened his Apostolic commission in the presence of a vast assembly, and fearlessly charged them as having been accomplices in the murder of Christ, three thousand were pierced to the heart, and found redemption in that 'blood divine,' in

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which they had embued their guilty hands. Two thousand more soon cast down their sins and prejudices at the feet of Jesus, and enrolled their names with his disciples. After which 'the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great number of the priests were obedient to the faith.'—(Acts 6. 7.) Here then, we behold, I say not the boundlessness of the mercy of our Lord in the extension of the first offers of salvation to the guiltiest of mankind; but a most illustrious attestation of that spiritual energy which gave such effect to the *foolishness of preaching*. How visionary to the cool and calculating mind of the philosopher—how unpromising even to the Apostles themselves must have appeared the attempt to lay the foundation of the glorious edifice of the Christian Church of Jerusalem; and vain indeed it must have proved, had not the promised presence of the Holy Spirit been signally with them. But the victorious power of truth subdued the hostility of many of 'the seed of Abraham' to the suffering Messiah—caused them to abandon all their downward hopes of earthly power and magnificence—changed the offence of the cross into a source of exultation, and dissolving their tenacious attachment to the law of Moses, taught them, as they turned their eyes from its retiring pomp, to fix them for ever on the Lamb of God; to adopt as expressive of their exalted privileges, the language of inspiration, 'We are the circumcision who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.'

Success still more distinguished and wonderful, attended the labours of the Apostles among the Gentiles. Controlled by the providence of God, the very measures which were adopted by the enemies of the Gospel to arrest its progress, eminently subserved its interests and diffusion. Thus 'they which were scattered abroad, upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch.'—(Acts 11. 19.) Antioch was the metropolis of Syria, and according to Josephus, the third city for greatness in the Roman Empire. It was not less celebrated for effeminacy and vice. The grove of Daphne, avowedly sacred to voluptuousness, and pleasure bloomed in its vicinity, and by the power of its seductive and malignant attractions, drew the mass of the population of the city within the vortex of licentiousness. Hence 'to live after the manner of Daphne' was a proverbial expression, used to designate the most dissolute way of living. Yet in this abandoned city, while certain of the believers, 'men of Cyprus and Cyrene, spake unto the Grecians, testifying the Lord Jesus, the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.'—(Acts 2. 20, 21.) Were it necessary to dilate more largely on this particular, we might trace the progress, and display the triumphs of the gospel, at Iconium, Derbe, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome. So mightily grew the word of the Lord and prevailed in the Apostolic age. Nor was the work interrupted by the death of the Apostles—those revered servants of God. For a long time after they had ascended amidst the flames of persecution, to wear the crown of martyrdom, and shine as the stars forever and ever in the kingdom of heaven, the immortal energies of the Gospel continued to operate with unabated vigour and equal effect. Within three centuries after its first promulgation at Jerusalem, Christianity diffused its celestial light and healing virtue far and wide: it penetrated Gaul, Spain, and Britain, erected its standard on the African shores of the Mediterranean, demolished the shrines of thirty thousand false deities, and became the predominant theological system of the most splendid and powerful monarchy of the world! In this amazingly rapid, and widely-extended spread of the Gospel, though all the world's influence and learning and power were arrayed against it, we are presented with a moral phenomenon which, like the star that conducted the wise men to Bethlehem, leads the mind directly to Him 'with whom all things are possible.' Believers contemplate it,

and exclaim with adoring gratitude and admiration, 'What hath God wrought?' while

‘ Bold infidelity turns pale and dies.’

But it is not necessary to linger over the scenes of the early triumphs of the Gospel, as if they were the only theatre of its all-conquering energies. Does the history of the eventful period in which we live, record no demonstrations of the Spirit, and of the power of God, in the dark places of the earth? Might we not rather ask; in what pagan clime do we not behold, amid the grimness and sterility of the surrounding wilderness, some blooming promise of an abundant spiritual harvest? You have often heard of the polytheism, and the foolish and cruel ceremonies that constitute the religion of India; and of the malignant institution of the caste, which seems to scowl defiance at every effort to introduce Christianity into that interesting country. But the attempt has been made, and the result has dissipated the fears, and belied the prophecies of failure. The sword of the Spirit has pierced even to the dividing asunder of the bond of the caste; causing many an enlightened Hindoo to abandon all his accorded privileges and honours for the cross of Christ, and the honour that cometh from God.—“ I have sometimes,” says Mr. Ward, “ asked an inquiring Hindoo—‘ Why do you wish to become a Christian?’ ‘ Ah! Sir,’ the poor man has said, ‘ I have tried all the ways that my countrymen follow; I have bathed in the Ganges,—have visited the holy places,—have read our books,—have made presents to the Brahmins,—have obeyed my spiritual guide,—have long repeated the name of my guardian deity; but I find no inward satisfaction—no relief from all these expedients. But I have lately heard that Jesus Christ became incarnate, that he died for his enemies, and died to take away our sins. This, I think, must surely be the true way of salvation; and it is from this conviction that I wish to become a Christian!’”—On Africa, too, the day of freedom and of Grace has at length auspiciously dawned—a day which we trust will never close till it set in the effulgence of eternity. Hundreds of her sable sons, nobly rescued from the grasp of merciless oppression, now not only enjoy the blessing of temporal liberty, but inhale the celestial atmosphere of spiritual emancipation: while among the Hottentots, Caffres, and other degraded tribes of her southern regions, the consolations of the Gospel diffuse their fragrance, and its doctrines display their power. The effects produced by missionary operations on the minds, and moral feelings and habits of a great part of the slave population in our West India Colonies, might afford a source of appropriate and abundant illustration on this topic. But as there is an esteemed brother present,* who has lately come from that field of labour, and will be able, from his own personal knowledge, to interest your attention in reference to the mighty transformation which has been there effected by the plastic influence of the Gospel; it is not for me to shew, how in thousands of instances, it has reclaimed the negro from licentiousness, and nerved his feeble mind with firmness, and effectually taught him subordination and contentment in his situation, and caused the trepidations so often occasioned in his heart by the gloomy superstition of Obeahism, to subside into the placidity of enlightened and holy trust in the providence of God. These are only a few of the innumerable cheering indications of the victorious power of the Gospel, which the heathen world exhibits, and which may justly be regarded as harbingers of the complete fulfilment of the sublime prediction—‘ As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I PLEASE, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.’—(Isa. 55. 10, 11.)

I shall now conclude with an address to the Officers of this Society, and to the Congregation. The prosperity of every benevolent institution, obviously depends, under the divine blessing, on the fostering care and assiduous exertions of those on whom devolves the task of active and efficient co-operation to promote its interests. Missionary sermons may be preached,—anniversary meetings may be held,—and speeches, descriptive of the awful condition of the heathen, may be delivered; and the glow of tenderness may circulate in our annual assemblies, and the gushings of irrepressible emotion, may be seen in the speaking silence of each eager and animated countenance; but if these favourable excitements of public feeling be not followed up by applications for pecuniary aid to facilitate the progress of the gospel in the heathen world, of what avail will be all our empty and evanescent impressions? Let me exhort

* Rev. Robert Young.

od wrought? you, then, my benevolent Brethren, more fully than ever to concentrate your
 energies in this labour of love—a labour of love it is, both in regard to its ob-
 ject, and to the dispositions by which you have been prompted to engage in it.
 But while your generous and disinterested services merit public mention and
 thanks, permit me to remind you, that though as moral agents it is in your
 power either to relax or to redouble your efforts, to pause or to proceed, in
 your march of beneficence, yet you cannot be unaware, that your responsibili-
 ty on God's account is in exact proportion to your powers of usefulness. Along
 with the impulse of humanity, and the glow of Christian zeal, ever carry in
 your minds a solemn sense of your accountableness to God. This potent prin-
 ciple, when the ardour of your affections is at any time damped by the chilling
 repulses of the niggardly, the sneer of the profane, or the invective of the
 infidel, will sustain unshaken your hallowed purpose to do the work of Him
 who knows and approves the purity and benignity of your intentions. Soon
 your probationary career will terminate, and with it all your opportunities of
 promoting in this way the glory of God, and the everlasting felicity of your
 fellow-mortals. And oh! with what thrilling emphasis should this considera-
 tion assail your minds, when you remember that since your last anniversary,
 one of your number, then as likely to live many years as any individual now
 present, has suddenly fallen a victim to death.* Did he in touching immortali-
 ty regret his having done too much in the cause of God? Speak his dying
 words—words embalmed in the recollections of many of my hearers; and
 which, while they breathed the consolations of the peace of God that passeth
 understanding, spoke too, the contrition of his heart on account of not having
 been in every way more abundant in the work of the Lord. Addressed to your
 hearts in accents solemn as the deep-toned knell, and rousing as the clangor
 of the Archangels trump, the monitory voice issues from his tomb, 'Whatsoever
 thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device,
 nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.'—(Ecc. 9. 10.)

The subject which has now been feebly illustrated calls upon all present to
 resign their hearts to those sensations of gratitude, and convictions of duty
 which it is so eminently fitted to inspire. Can you contrast the splendour and
 amplitude of your religious privileges, with the dark and destitute condition
 of mankind, before the Sun of Righteousness arose with healing in his wings,
 to dissipate the gloom and deleterious vapours of the long night of error? Can
 you contemplate them, in comparison with the pitiable and imploring destitu-
 tion of the heathen world at this moment, and remain unimpressed with a
 grateful sense of your obligations to the author of your distinguished and in-
 valuable blessings? To you the underived and peerless glory of the true God
 have been revealed, in the light and language of his own revelations; but the
 heathen, ignorant of his perfections and even of his being, worship men and
 devils; animals and inanimate things. To you the Redeemer is presented,
 surrounded with the mild and attractive halo of mediatorial glory, assuring you
 by every groan that was wrung from his agonizing bosom in Gethsemane—by
 every wound inflicted on his sacred body on the Cross—by every promise of the
 gospel, that you may obtain 'redemption in his blood, even the forgiveness of all
 your sins;' but the heathen, when appalled with conscious and insupportable
 guilt, may tear their flesh, gnaw their tongues, and run frantic with despair, for
 they have none to whisper in their ear:—'Behold the Lamb of God which
 taketh away the sin of the world.' For you the promises of mercy and grace
 smooth the rugged path of life, and supply the richest solace in the hour of
 death: but the heathen are 'tossed with the tempest and not comforted;' to
 them the horrors of the tomb are unalleviated by the assured hope of immorta-
 lity. The first dictate of that gratitude which such reflections should never
 fail to excite in your hearts, relates to the use and improvement which you
 ought to make of your superior privileges, by an unreserved devotion of your-
 selves to the service of God. Without the power and practice of Godliness, a
 speculative acquaintance with the Gospel will only expose you to a profounder
 gulf in the abyss of an undone eternity. But gratitude for your exalted bless-
 ings should also prompt you to benevolent exertion for the salvation of others.
 Shall we then exhort you in vain, to cast your compassionate regards beyond
 the limit of your personal interests, on the lengthened valley of the shadow of
 spiritual death, in which tens of thousands of your fellow-brethren are sitting,
 without God, without Christ, without hope! Oh! distressful scenes of moral
 desolation! Millions of intelligent immortal beings, plunged in guilt, deprav-
 ity, and ruin! passing in multitudes, while the words are on my lips, into

* Mr. Samuel Black, son of the Rev. William Black.

eternity, without any knowledge of the awful discoveries that there burst on their astonished view!—without any preparation for the solemn transition! Oh! when shall the gospel be testified to all nations! when shall the zeal of christians wake all its dormant energies? When shall they hang the sated weapons of polemic theology on high, and clad in the armour of the living God, unite in one mighty phalanx, and go up and possess the land which the Lord their God hath given them, expelling thence the demons of superstition, and filling it with the peaceful triumphs of the Cross of Calvary!—Blessed be God, the attack upon the dominions of the Prince of darkness has commenced, but that it may be sustained with vigour, and crowned with victory, constant reinforcements of strength, and unwearable zeal, and perseverance are necessary. Amid such imperious calls to exertion, how guilty, how shameful is neutrality. Let us then rally round the standard of Immanuel, and go up to the help of the Lord—to the help of the Lord against the mighty. To this duty you are urged, not only by the endearment of brotherhood—by the love of Christ—by the voice of divine authority—but, I repeat it, by a consideration of your distinguished privileges. From England, now, as from an orb of glory, is emanating in every direction the light of salvation: but England was once involved in darkness, and full of the habitations of cruelty; and had it not been for the benevolent efforts of Christian Missionaries to diffuse the radiance of the gospel over that favoured isle, the superstitions and idolatries of the Druids and Saxons might to the present period have constituted all our religion. Shall we then monopolize the unsearchable riches of grace which indulgent heaven has poured into our lap? In these celestial mines, are there not resources of sufficient amplitude to supply the wants of a whole perishing world? Yes! and whether we share our spiritual affluence with the heathen, or not, God has pronounced that they shall be blessed. When we look abroad on the moral aspect of the world, and observe how little has been done, and how little is now doing, in comparison of what is necessary, to achieve a spiritual revolution as extended as the boundaries of the earth; and when we survey the many and mighty obstacles which oppose this high enterprise, we are almost ready to yield to discouragement. But when we ascend the mount of prophecy, on which the most brilliant rays of revelation reflect their lustre; how do all those difficulties vanish from the view, till they become indistinguishably blended with the monotony of the vale beneath! The cause of Missions, my brethren, rests upon tottering basis, nor is the destiny that awaits it contingent; for, while it invites the exertions of human agency, thereby conferring an honour upon man, of which angels might be emulous, it depends not upon an arm of flesh for the success of its operations, but is sustained by the high attributes, guarded by the auspicious providence, and invigorated by the renewing Spirit of God. Charged with the high and holy commission of ‘carrying the banners of the Cross triumphant round the globe,’ it will go on and prosper till,—

‘One song employs all nations, and all cry
Worthy the Lamb, for he was slain for us.
The dwellers in the vales, and on the rocks,
Shout to each other; and the mountain tops,
From distant mountains, catch the flying joy,—
Till nation after nation taught the strain,
Earth rolls the rapturous hosannah round.’

Among the means destined to subserve the accomplishment of this purpose of redeeming mercy, let it never be forgotten, that prayer, earnest, faithful, persevering prayer, occupies a distinguished place. The united efforts of all the Christians in the world could not turn one Sinner from Satan to God, without the concurring influences of the Holy Spirit. Let us therefore, with unceasing importunity, beseech this Divine Agent to move upon the chaos of the moral world; that from the discord of malevolent and conflicting passions, may be elicited the holy harmonies of universal amity and praise:—then shall the earth’s wide wilderness bloom ‘like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.’—(Isa. 51. 3.) ‘Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name forever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen.’