

## SERMON XVI.

### RESIGNATION.

1 SAM. iii. 18.

It is the Lord : let him do what seemeth him good.

WHEN any one holds a high place in our esteem and affection, we are naturally disposed to comply with all his wishes, even when such compliance would otherwise be irksome to us ; and thus one of the happy effects of the prevalence of the love of God in the heart, will be a cheerful submission to his will.

We are taught to regard this life as a state of trial ; a state of moral discipline, designed to prepare us for another world ; a state in which God often sees fit to humble us, and to prove us, to show what is in our heart, whether we would keep his commandments or no.<sup>a</sup>

It seems essential to a state of trial, that it should be exposed to difficulties and distresses. Accordingly, from the cradle to the grave, the life of man is liable to a variety of sufferings. We often have to encounter pains of body, and grief of mind : pains of body arising from sickness and hurts, from cold and hunger ; and grief and vexation of mind proceeding from ten thousand causes, from failure in

<sup>a</sup> Deut. viii. 2.

our undertakings, from losses of property, from injuries to our good name, from the perverseness of those under our care, from the unkindness of pretended friends, from the malice of enemies, and the removal by death of those who are dear to us as our own soul. All these, and the many like afflictions, not only occasion pain when they actually come upon us, but the dread and apprehension of them when at a distance, when indeed they may never happen *at all*—often serves to fill the soul with anxiety, and to embitter all its enjoyments. So many indeed are the sources of uneasiness, that it was not without cause that the friend of Job asserts—“ Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly “ upward.”<sup>b</sup>

And in what manner are these varied evils to be endured ? The disposition of man, when uninfluenced by religion, is, to be fretful and impatient under them, to murmur and repine, to complain of fortune or of fate, or by whatever name he may designate the author of his sufferings. But is it so with the Christian ? *He* is accustomed in all circumstances to look up to an overruling Providence. *He* is accustomed to think, that “ affliction cometh “ not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring “ out of the ground ;”<sup>c</sup> that it is not the result of blind chance or fortune, but that it happens with the knowledge and by the permission of a gracious Governor of the world. Our blessed Lord, when exhorting his followers to place their trust in God, for protection and for the supply of their wants, assures them, that a sparrow doth not fall on the ground without our Father ; that even the hairs of our head are all numbered.<sup>d</sup> This belief in a controlling Providence, the persuasion that all things happen according to the will of an all-powerful, all-

<sup>b</sup> Job v. 7.

<sup>c</sup> Job v. 6.

<sup>d</sup> Matt. x. 29, 30.

wise, and good Being, will naturally produce a habit of patient submission under all circumstances, however calamitous. If God is *all-powerful*, his will must inevitably be accomplished, notwithstanding any opposition that may be made, or any rebellious murmuring. Whatsoever the Lord pleaseth, that doeth he in heaven and in earth:<sup>c</sup> and "who hath resisted"—who *can* resist "his will?"<sup>f</sup> A *sullen* submission, however, because we cannot do otherwise, because we cannot help it, is not the submission of a Christian. The common sense of a heathen, or even of one who believes in no supreme Being at all, will tell him, that evils which cannot be either avoided or removed, *must* be borne; and that the more patiently they are endured, the less painful will they be found. The Christian, however, believes, and is persuaded, not only that God is all-powerful, but that he is also all-wise, and all-good; that if he is "mighty in strength," he is mighty also in "wisdom;"<sup>g</sup> and that not only he doeth whatever pleaseth him, but that whatever he pleaseth to do is *fittest* and *best* to be done: not only hath the Lord created all things in wisdom, but with infinite wisdom does he direct and govern them. The reasons of his dispensations we cannot always understand; but if we submit to them with humble resignation, and "through faith and patience inherit the promises,"<sup>h</sup> we shall in a better state perceive the reasonableness and the wisdom of them. "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."<sup>i</sup> Though we cannot at all times understand them, yet we may be assured, that they are regulated not only by wisdom, but by goodness; that God wills the happiness of his creatures; that

<sup>c</sup> Psalm cxxxv. 6.<sup>h</sup> Heb. vi. 12.<sup>f</sup> Rom. ix. 19.<sup>i</sup> John xiii. 7.<sup>g</sup> Job xxxvi. 5.

he is good "unto every man, and his mercy is over all his works."<sup>k</sup> Though now "clouds and darkness are round about him," though the reasons of what he does are wrapped in obscurity, yet we may be sure that they are guided by justice, "that righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his seat."<sup>l</sup> Many tokens and instances of *goodness* have been conferred upon us by God; and "shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"<sup>m</sup> If we are now deprived of any blessing by him, by whom that blessing was bestowed, the language of our hearts should be—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."<sup>n</sup> We cannot suppose that a merciful and gracious Being can take pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures. The Lord "doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men"<sup>o</sup> for his own pleasure, but "chastens us for our profit," for our advantage.

Reflection on the nature of this benefit, on the moral uses of affliction, will furnish a strong additional argument for quiet and cheerful resignation. One of the uses of affliction is, the tendency which it has to wean our affections from the things of this world. Too great attachment to earthly objects is the cause of much of the wickedness, and of much of the misery which prevails among men. Most kinds of affliction tend powerfully to lessen their influence, and to make us thoroughly and deeply sensible of their uncertain and unsatisfying nature. This, to a greater or less degree, is the effect of bodily pain and disease, of loss of property, of loss of reputation, and, above all, of separation by death from those we love.

Another great moral use of affliction is, its effi-

<sup>k</sup> Psalm cxlv. 9.<sup>l</sup> Job i. 21.<sup>m</sup> Psalm xcvi. 2.<sup>n</sup> Lam. iii. 33.<sup>o</sup> Job ii. 10.

cacy in bringing us to *repentance*, and to serious reflection upon our spiritual condition. When the world smiles upon us, and all things go on well and prosperously, we are too apt to grow careless and remiss in our Christian warfare, in our contest against the world, the flesh, and the devil. We are too apt to fall, in some measure, into the sin of the Israelites, who, when in prosperous circumstances, "forgot God their Saviour, who had done so great things" <sup>p</sup> for them. But affliction leads us to reflect seriously upon ourselves, and on our past conduct; and to consider what there is in it that is displeasing to the Almighty, and requires correction. It inclines each of us humbly to say, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me," <sup>q</sup> to "search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord." <sup>r</sup> When brought to a sense of our sinfulness, instead of complaining of what we suffer, we shall feel thankful that our sufferings are not still more severe. We shall be disposed to say, "Why doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins." <sup>s</sup> Reformation and amendment of life was the effect which affliction produced upon the Psalmist. "Before I was troubled I went wrong; but *now* have I kept thy word:" and again, "It is good for me that I have been in trouble; that I may learn thy statutes." <sup>t</sup> When suffering produces these salutary consequences, when it is the means of bringing us to genuine repentance and amendment of life, it is to be looked upon as a real blessing. If we are chastened and corrected, that we should not be given over unto death; "that we should not be condemned with the world;" <sup>u</sup> it is certainly a strong instance of the love and goodness of God, and consequently a

<sup>p</sup> Psalm cvi. 21.

<sup>q</sup> Job x. 2.

<sup>r</sup> Lam. iii. 40.

<sup>s</sup> Lam. iii. 39.

<sup>t</sup> Psalm cxix. 67, 71.

<sup>u</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 32.

strong argument, not for sullen acquiescence, but for cheerful and thankful *resignation*. It is in a religious point of view alarming to be "without chastisement, whereof all are partakers;" it is dangerous to have our portion in this life. If, on the other hand, we "endure chastening, God deal-eth with us as with sons." We have then cause to say, "Happy is the man whom God correcteth." <sup>x</sup> "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him in thy law;" <sup>y</sup> who by chastening is brought to the knowledge and practice of religion.

Instances of humble and pious submission to the divine will abound in many parts of the sacred Scriptures. Job, when his calamities first came upon him, was a noble example of resignation; and is held forth to us as such in the New Testament; "ye have heard of the patience of Job." <sup>z</sup> When messenger after messenger arrived with disastrous tidings, first, of the total loss of all his large property, and then of the destruction of all his children at one blow; yet still the violence of his grief did not induce him to utter any murmurings against Providence; "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." <sup>a</sup> The language of his heart and of his lips was, "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." <sup>b</sup> When at last, through the extremity of bodily pain, in addition to his other heavy sufferings, he gave way to some expressions of impatience, he was soon restored to his former pious frame of mind; and, in the genuine feeling of penitence and piety, exclaimed—"Behold I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I

<sup>x</sup> Job v. 17.

<sup>y</sup> Psalm xciv. 12.

<sup>z</sup> James v. 11.

<sup>a</sup> Job i. 22.

<sup>b</sup> Job i. 21.

"will not answer; yea, twice; but I will proceed no further."<sup>c</sup> The aged Eli is another instructive and interesting instance of humble submission to the divine will. When warned of the fatal consequences which his mistaken fondness for his sons would bring upon his family, his only answer was, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good."<sup>d</sup> And when the awful prediction was accomplished in the death of both his sons in one day, the grief, which appears to have struck him down as a thunderbolt, was not that which was occasioned by his own dreadful domestic losses, but by his concern for the honour of God, and for the interest of the religion of which he was the most distinguished minister.<sup>e</sup> The Psalms of David are full of expressions, as of all other instances of devout affections, so especially of humble resignation to the divine will. He repeatedly expresses his conviction of the salutary effects of affliction, and of the gracious intentions of God in sending them. The knowledge that they proceeded from *him* suppressed all murmuring and impatience. "I became dumb, and opened not my mouth, for it was thy doing." When driven from his throne by the unnatural rebellion of his son, and the fickleness and ingratitude of his subjects, he showed the same humble resignation to the will of God; "Behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him."<sup>e</sup> His enemies he regarded merely as instruments in the hand of Providence for his humiliation. "Let him alone," said he of Shimei, "and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him."<sup>f</sup>

But the most noble instance of resignation was our divine Saviour. He left "us an example that

<sup>c</sup> Job xl. 4, 5.  
<sup>e</sup> 2 Sam. xv. 26.

<sup>d</sup> 1 Sam. iv. 18.  
<sup>f</sup> 2 Sam. xvi. 11.

"we should follow his steps," especially in meek submission to the will of the Most High, in committing ourselves to him who judgeth righteously. Through life he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He was exposed to poverty and hunger, to the malice and calumnies of enemies, to the unkindness and desertion of friends. And at his death he endured so much, as to have reason to say, in the words of the Prophet, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow—wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."<sup>g</sup> And with what perfect resignation did he endure it all! When the knowledge of the extremity of anguish which awaited him led him to utter a wish that he might be spared it—"If it be possible let this cup pass from me;"—he immediately adds, "nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt—not my will, but thine be done."

With whatever afflictions we may at any time be visited, we should reflect upon the example of our Lord, and learn from him the lesson of resignation. "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."<sup>h</sup>

*Lest ye be weary and faint in your minds*—this is a natural effect of affliction. "Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop."<sup>i</sup> Affliction, where it does not find utterance in any rebellious murmurings, yet has a tendency to sink us into a general state of depression, perhaps despondency. It

<sup>g</sup> Lam. i. 12.

<sup>h</sup> Heb. xii. 1, 2, 3.

<sup>i</sup> Prov. xii. 25.

too often makes us forget the many blessings which still remain to us; it perhaps renders us indisposed for the performance of any active duties, and inclined to make our grief or pain an excuse to ourselves for neglecting them. We must guard against this too usual consequence of affliction. If we have lost some blessings, yet let us not be the less thankful for—let us rather make the most of—those which still remain to us. If we endure some pain or suffering, yet let it not so conquer us as to render us unmindful of God's many and great mercies. Particularly we must guard against permitting affliction to prevent us from fulfilling those duties of life which are still in our power. We must not make *suffering* God's will, a pretext for not *doing* it. Indeed, one of the best remedies for affliction will be found in active employment in the way of duty. The wise man, when he says, "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord;" adds, "neither be weary of his correction."\* We shall be, in great measure, prevented from being thus *weary*, from being thus weakly overcome, from thus permitting affliction to depress us into inactivity, by the religious considerations above suggested; and especially by dwelling upon the example of resignation set us by our Redeemer.

Are we, for instance, afflicted with pain of body, occasioned either by sickness, or by any accidental hurt? Let us reflect on the anguish which our Saviour endured for our sakes, and endured with perfect and willing resignation to his Father's dispensations. Are we assailed by the malice of enemies, who, perhaps, endeavour to injure our reputations by laying to our charge things that we know not? Let us think on the opprobrious names that were heaped on the Lord of life; who was called a

\* Prov. iii. 11, and Heb. xii. 5.

glutton and a drunkard, the friend of publicans and sinners; who was treated as a wretched outcast; and charged with working his miracles through the agency of the devil. Are we tried by poverty, and the want of the comforts, perhaps of the necessaries of life? Let us remember that Jesus Christ was often exposed to cold and hunger, and had not where to lay his head; that he has represented the state of poverty as a state attended by many spiritual advantages, and riches as accompanied by a variety of snares and temptations, which obstruct men in the way to salvation. Are our friends unkind and inconstant? Our Lord was deserted by his chosen followers in his time of need; denied by one of them, and rejected and given over to death by the people among whom he had done so many mighty works of mercy and benevolence, that very people who had welcomed him to Jerusalem with hosannas and songs of triumph.

One of the severest of earthly afflictions is that which we experience when dear friends and relations are removed from us by death. But this affliction, great as it is, we shall learn to bear with resignation, if we consider it as proceeding from a kind and merciful Father; here, especially, we must learn to say from our hearts, "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." The Scriptures teach us, that if our friends have departed in the faith and fear of God, they have gone to a better place, where we may hope to rejoin them; and that consequently we must not be sorry as men without hope for them that sleep in the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

To conclude—This prospect of a future life of happiness ought to be a constant support under all afflictions, and a powerful motive for resignation

<sup>1</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 13.

under them. If we have a well founded hope of being admitted through Christ to a state of happiness which will never end, the afflictions which we endure *here* will seem of trifling importance. "I reckon," says St. Paul, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."<sup>m</sup> Any sufferings *here* are as nothing when compared either with the pains of hell, from which we have been redeemed, or with the glory which is set before us. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment"<sup>n</sup>—the whole life of man is but a moment when compared with eternity—is as nothing when set against "that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," to which Christ has opened the way. If affliction is instrumental in bringing us to that glory, it ought to be borne not only with submission, but with thankfulness. We acquiesce, without difficulty, in whatever is done by those whom we love and esteem highly. If we love God as we ought to do, we shall feel no disposition to murmur against him, or to rebel against his will. In our daily prayers we say to him, "thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." Let us endeavour to acquire the habit of both *doing* and *suffering* his will with readiness and cheerfulness. Let us pray fervently for grace and strength to subdue and bend the stubbornness of our *own* wills, and to enable us, under whatever affliction, to say from the heart, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." "Lord, not my will, but thine be done."

#### THE PRAYER.

O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth

<sup>m</sup> Rom. viii. 18.

<sup>n</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 17.

all things, both in heaven and earth, fix ever in our hearts a firm faith and confidence in thee, that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found, through Jesus Christ our Lord.