

DISCOURSE II.

ON THE CONSISTENCY BETWEEN THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER AND THE
UNIFORMITY OF NATURE.

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."—2 PETRUS iii. 3, 4.

THE infidelity spoken of in our text, had for its basis the stability of Nature, or rested on the imagination that her economy was perpetual and everlasting—and every day of Nature's continuance added to the strength and inveteracy of this delusion. In proportion to the length of her past endurance, was there a firm confidence felt in her future perpetuity. The longer that Nature lasted, or the older she grew, her final dissolution was held to be all the more improbable—till nothing seemed so unlikely to the atheistical men of that period, as the intervention of a God with a system of visible things, which looked so unchanging and so indestructible. It was like the contest of experience and faith, in which the former grew every day stronger and stronger, and the latter weaker and weaker, till at length it was wholly extinguished; and men in the spirit of defiance or ridicule, braved the announcement of a Judge who should appear at the end of the world, and mocked at the promise of His coming.

But there is another direction which infidelity often takes, beside the one specified in our text. It not only perverts to its own argument, what experience tells of the stability of Nature; and so concludes that we have nothing to fear from the mandate of a God laying sudden arrest and termination on its processes. It also perverts what experience tells of the uniformity of Nature; and so concludes that we have nothing either to hope or to fear from the intervention of a God during the continuance or the currency of these processes. Beside making Nature independent of God for its duration, which they hold to be everlasting, they would also make Nature to be independent of God

for its course, which they hold to be unalterable. They tell us of the rigid and undeviating constancy from which Nature is never known to fluctuate; and that in her immutable laws in the march and regularity of her orderly progressions, they can discover no trace whatever of any interposition by the finger of a Deity. It is not only that all things continue to be as they were from the beginning of creation—causes and effects following each other in wonted and invariable succession, and the same circumstances ever issuing in the same consequents as before. With such a system of things, there is no room in their creed or in their imagination for the actings of a God. To their eye Nature proceeds by the sure footsteps of a mute and unconscious materialism; nor can they recognise in its evolutions those characters of the spontaneous or the wilful, which bespeak a living God to have had any concern with it. He may have formed the mundane system at the first: He may have devised for matter its properties and its laws: but these properties, they tell us, never change; these laws never are relaxed or receded from. And so we may as well bid the storm itself cease from its violence, as supplicate the unseen Being whom we fancy to be sitting aloft and to direct the storm. This they hold to be a superstitious imagination, which all their experience of Nature and of Nature's immutability forbids them to entertain. By the one infidelity, they have banished a God from the throne of judgment. By the other infidelity, they have banished a God from the throne of providence. By the first, they tell us that a God has nought to do with the consummation of Nature; or rather, that Nature has no consummation. By the second, they tell us that a God has nought to do with the history of Nature. The first infidelity would expunge from our creed the doctrine of a coming judgment. The second would expunge from it the doctrine of a present and a special providence, and the doctrine of the efficacy of prayer.

Now this last, though not just the infidelity of the text—yet being very much the same with it in principle—we hold it sufficiently textual, though we make it, and not the other, the subject of our present argument. We admit the uniformity of visible nature—a lesson forced upon us by all experience. We admit that as far as our observation extends, Nature has always proceeded in one invariable order—insomuch that the same antecedents have, without exception, been ever followed up by the same consequents; and that, saving the well-accredited miracles

of the Jewish and Christian dispensations, all things have so continued since the beginning of the creation.

We admit that, never in our whole lives have we witnessed as the effect of man's prayer, any infringement made on the known laws of the universe; or that Nature by receding from her constancy, to the extent that we have discovered it, has ever in one instance yielded to his supplicating cry. We admit that by no importunity from the voice of faith, or from any number and combination of voices, have we seen an arrest or a shift laid on the ascertained courses, whether of the material or the mental economy; or a single fulfilment of any sort, brought about in contravention, either to the known properties of any substance, or to the known principles of any established succession in the history of Nature. These are our experiences; and we are aware the very experiences which ministered to the infidelity of our text, and do minister to the practical infidelity of thousands in the present day—yet, in opposition to, or rather notwithstanding these experiences, universal and unexcepted though they be, do we affirm the doctrine of a superintending providence, as various and as special, as our necessities—the doctrine of a perpetual interposition from above, as manifoldly and minutely special, as are the believing requests which ascend from us to Heaven's throne.

We feel the importance of the subject, both in its application to the judgment that now hangs over us,* and to the infidelity of the present times. But we cannot hope to be fully understood without your most strenuous and sustained attention—an attention, however, which we request may be kept up to the end, even though certain parts in the train of observation may not have been followed by you. What some may lose in those passages, where the subject is presented in the form of a general argument, may again be recovered, when we attempt to establish our doctrine by Scripture, or to illustrate it by instances taken from the history of human affairs. In one way or other, you may seize on the reigning principle of that explanation, by which we endeavour to reconcile the efficacy of prayer with the uniformity of experience. And our purpose shall have been obtained, if we can at all help you to a greater confidence in the reality of a superintending providence, to a greater comfort and confidence in the act of making your requests known unto God.

* This Sermon was preached during the prevalence of cholera.

Let us first give our view in all its generality, in the hope that any obscurity which may rest upon it in this form will be dissipated or cleared up in the subsequent appeals that we shall make, both to the lessons of the Bible, and to the lessons of human experience.

We grant, then, we unreservedly grant, the uniformity of visible nature; and now let us compute how much, or how little, it amounts to. Grant of all our progressions, that, as far as our eye can carry us, they are invariable; and then let us only reflect how short a way we can trace any of them upwards. In speculating on the origin of an event, we may be able to assign the one which immediately preceded, and term it the proximate cause; or even ascend by two or three footsteps, till we have discovered some anterior event which we term the remote cause. But how soon do we arrive at the limit of possible investigation, beyond which if we attempt to go, we lose ourselves among the depths and the obscurities of a region that is unknown! Observation may conduct us a certain length backwards in the train of causes and effects; but, after having done its uttermost, we feel, that, above and beyond its loftiest place of ascent, there are still higher steps in the train, which we vainly try to reach, and find them inaccessible. It is even so throughout all philosophy. After having arrived at the remotest cause which man can reach his way to, we shall ever find there are higher and remoter causes still, which distance all his powers of research, and so will ever remain in deepest concealment from his view. Of this higher part of the train he has no observation. Of these remoter causes, and their mode of succession, he can positively say nothing. For aught he knows, they may be under the immediate control of higher beings in the universe; or, like the upper part of a chain, a few of whose closing links are all that is visible to us, they may be directly appended to the throne, and at all times subject to the instant pleasure of a prayer-hearing God. And it may be by a responsive touch at the higher, and not the lower part of the progression, that He answers our prayers. It may be not by an act of intervention among those near and visible causes, where intervention would be a miracle; it may be by an unseen, but not less effectual act of intervention, among the remote and therefore the occult causes, that He adapts Himself to the various wants, and meets the various petitions of His children. If it be in the latter way that He conducts the affairs of His daily

government—then may He rule by a providence as special as are the needs and the occasions of His family; and with an ear open to every cry, might He provide for all, and minister to all without one infringement on the uniformity of visible nature. If the responsive touch be given at the lower part of the chain, then the answer to prayer is by miracle, or by a contravention to some of the known sequences of Nature. But if the responsive touch be given at a sufficiently higher part of the chain, then the answer is as effectually made, but not by miracle, and without violence to any one succession of history or nature which philosophy has ascertained—because the reaction to the prayer strikes at a place that is higher than the highest investigations of philosophy. It is not by a visible movement within the region of human observation, but by an invisible movement in the transcendental region above it, that the prayer is met and responded to. The Supernal Power of the Universe, the mighty and unseen Being who sits aloft, and has been significantly styled the Cause of causes—He, in immediate contact with the upper extremities of every progression, there puts forth an overruling influence which tells and propagates downwards to the lower extremities; and so, by an agency placed too remote either for the eye of sense or for all the instruments of science to discover, may God, in answer to prayer, fix and determine every series of events—of which, nevertheless, all that man can see is but the uniformity of the closing footsteps—a few of the last causes and effects following each other in their wonted order. It is thus that we reconcile all the experience which man has of Nature's uniformity, with the effect and significancy of his prayers to the God of Nature. It is thus that at one and the same time do we live under the care of a presiding God, and among the regularities of a harmonious universe.

These views are in beautiful accord with the simple and sublime theology unfolded to us in the Book of Job—where, whether in the movements of the animated kingdom below, or the great evolutions that take place in the upper regions of the atmosphere, the phenomena and the processes of visible nature are sketched with a masterly hand. It is in the midst of these scenes and impressive descriptions, that we are told—“Lo, these are parts of his ways.” The translation does not say what parts; but the original does. They are but the lower parts—the endings as it were of the different processes—the last and

lowest footsteps, which are all that science can investigate; and of which, throughout the whole of her limited ascent, she has traced the uniformity. But she has traced it a very short way: or, in the language of the patriarch, who estimates aright the achievements of philosophy—"How little a portion is heard of him!"—how few the known footsteps which are beneath the veil, to the unknown steps and workings which are above it; and so, the thunder, or rather the inward and secret movements of His power, who can understand?

"He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them. He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it. He hath compassed the waters with bounds, until the day and night come to an end. The pillars of heaven tremble, and are astonished at his reproof. He divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through the proud. By his Spirit he hath garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent. Lo, these are parts of his ways; but how little a portion is heard of him! but the thunder of his power who can understand?"—*Job xxvi. 8-14.*

The last sentence of this magnificent passage were better translated thus:—"These are the parts or the lower endings of his ways; but the secret working of his power who can understand?"

That part of the economy of the divine administration, in virtue of which God works, not without but by secondary causes, is frequently intimated in the Book of Psalms.

"Who maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flaming fire."—*Ps. civ. 4.*

Or, as it might have been translated—"Who maketh the winds his messengers, and the flaming fire his servant."

But without the aid of any emendations in our version, this subserviency of visible nature to the invisible God, is distinctly laid before us in the following passages:—

"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their dis-

tresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad, because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men."—Ps. cvii. 23-31.

He raises the tempest not without the wind, but by the wind. In the one way it would have been a miracle; in the other way it is alike effectual, but without any change in the properties or laws of visible nature—without what we commonly understand by a miracle. He does not bring the vessel against the wind to its desired haven; but He makes the storm a calm, and so the waves thereof are still. Our Saviour also bade the winds into peace; and the miracle there lay in the effect following on the heard utterance of His voice. A voice no less effectual though unheard by us, overrules at all times the working of Nature's elements; and brings the ordinary processes, as well as the marked and miraculous exception to them, under the control of a divine agency.

"Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places. He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings for the rain: he bringeth the wind out of his treasures."—Ps. cxxxv. 6, 7.

Here, without any change of translation, we are told of the subserviency of the visible instruments, to the invisible but real agency of Him who wields them at His pleasure. In this passage, the winds are plainly represented to us as the messengers of God, and the flaming fire as His servant. He changes no properties, and no visible processes—working, not without the wind, but by it—not without the electric matter, but by it—not without the rain, but by it—not without the vapour, but by it. Let the philosopher tell how far back he can go, in exploring the method and order of these respective agencies. Then we have only to point further back and ask—on what evidence he can tell, that the fiat and the finger of a God are not there? We grant the observed order to be invariable, save when God chooses to interpose by miracle. But whether He does or not—from that chamber of His hidden operations, which philosophy has not found its way to, can He so direct all, so subordinate all, that whatever the Lord pleases, that does He in heaven and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.

"Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps:

Fire and hail; snow and vapour; stormy wind fulfilling his word."—Ps. cxlviii. 7, 8.

The stormy wind fulfilleth His word.

Our last example shall be from the New Testament. "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."—Acts xiv. 17.

This last example will prepare you to go along with one of the particular instances we are just to bring forward, of a special prayer met by a special fulfilment.

We are thus enabled to perceive what the respective provinces are of philosophy and faith. Every event in Nature or history has a cause in some prior event that went before it, and that again in another, and that again in another still higher than itself in this scale of precedency; and so might we climb our ascending way from cause to cause, from consequent to antecedent—till the investigation has been carried upwards, from the farthest possible verge of human discovery. There it is that the domain of observation or of philosophy terminates; but we mistake, if we think that there the progression, whose terms or whose footsteps we have traced thus far, also terminates. Beyond this limit we cannot track the pathway of causation—not because the pathway ceases, but because we have lost sight of it—having now retired from view among the depths and mysteries of an unknown region, which we, with our bounded faculties, cannot enter. This may be termed the region of faith, placed as it were above the region of experience. The things which are done in the higher, have an overruling influence by lines of transmission on all that happens in the lower—yet without one breach or interruption to the uniformity of visible nature. Whatever is done in the transcendental region—be it by the influence of prayer; by the immediate finger of God; by the ministry of angels; by the spontaneous movements, whether of displeasure or of mercy above, responding to the sins or to the supplicating cries that ascend from earth's inhabitants below—that will pass by a descending influence into the palpable region of sense and observation—yet, from the moment it comes within its limits, will it proceed without the semblance of a miracle, but by the march and the movement of Nature's regularity, to its final consummation. God hath in wisdom ordained a regimen of general laws; and that man might gather from the memory of the past those lessons of observation which serve for the guid-

ance of the future, He hath enacted that all those successions shall be invariable which have their place and their fulfilment within the world of sensible experience. Yet God has not on that account made the world independent of Himself. He keeps a perpetual hold on all its events and processes notwithstanding. He does not dis sever Himself, for a single instant, from the government and the guardianship of His own universe; and can still, notwithstanding all we see of Nature's rigid uniformity, adapt the forthgoings of His power to all the wants and all the prayers of His dependent family. For this purpose, He does not need to stretch forth His hand on the inferior and the visible links of any progression, so as to shift the known successions of experience; or at all to intermeddle with the lessons and the laws of this great schoolmaster. He may work in secret, and yet perform all His pleasure—not by the achievement of a miracle on Nature's open platform, but by the touch of one or other of those master-springs which lie within the recesses of her inner laboratory. There, and at His place of supernal command by the fountain-heads of influence, He can turn whithersoever He will the machinery of our world, and without the possibility by human eye of detecting the least infringement on any of its processes—at once upholding the regularity of visible nature, and the supremacy of Nature's invisible God.

But we are glad to make our escape, and now to make it conclusively, from the obscurer part of our reasoning on this subject—although, most assuredly, these are not the times for passing it wholly by; or for withholding aught which can make in favour of the much-derided cause of humble and earnest piety. But, instead of propounding our doctrine in the terms of a general argument, let us try the effect of a few special instances—by which, perhaps, we might more readily gain the consent of your understanding to our views.

When the sigh of the midnight storm sends fearful agitation into a mother's heart as she thinks of her sailor boy now exposed to its fury on the waters of a distant ocean—these stern disciples of a hard and stern infidelity would, on this notion of a rigid and impracticable constancy in Nature, forbid her prayers—holding them to be as impotent and vain, though addressed to the God who has all the elements in His hand, as if lifted up with senseless importunity to the raving elements themselves. Yet Nature would strongly prompt the aspiration; and, if there be truth in our argument, there is nothing in the constitution of the universe

to forbid its accomplishment. God might answer the prayer, not by unsettling the order of secondary causes—not by reversing any of the wonted successions that are known to take place in the ever-restless, ever-heaving atmosphere—not by sensible miracle among those nearer footsteps which the philosopher has traced; but by the touch of an immediate hand among the deep recesses of materialism, which are beyond the ken of all his instruments. It is thence that the Sovereign of Nature might bid the wild uproar of the elements into silence. It is there that the virtue comes out of Him, which passes like a winged messenger from the invisible to the visible; and, at the threshold of separation between these two regions, impresses the direction of the Almighty's will on the remotest cause which science can mount her way to. From this point in the series, the path of descent along the line of nearer and proximate causes may be rigidly invariable; and in respect of the order, the precise undeviating order, wherewith they follow each other, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. The heat, and the vapour, and the atmospherical precipitates, and the consequent moving forces by which either to raise a new tempest or to lay an old one—all these may proceed, and without one hairbreadth of deviation, according to the successions of our established philosophy—yet each be but the obedient messenger of that voice which gave forth its command at the fountain-head of the whole operation; which commissioned the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth, and made lightnings for the rain, and brought the wind out of His treasures. These are the palpable steps of the process; but an unseen influence behind the farthest limit of man's boasted discoveries may have set them agoing. And that influence may have been accorded to prayer—the power that moves Him who moves the universe; and who, without violence to the known regularities of Nature, can either send forth the hurricane over the face of the deep, or recall it at His pleasure. Such is the joyful persuasion of faith, and proud philosophy cannot disprove it. A woman's feeble cry may have overruled the elemental war; and hushed into silence this wild frenzy of the winds and the waves; and evoked the gentler breezes from the cave of their slumbers; and wafted the vessel of her dearest hopes, and which held the first and fondest of her earthly treasures, to its desired haven.

And so of other prayers. It is not without instrumentality, but by means of it, that they are answered. The fulfilment is

preceded by the accustomed series of causes and effects; and preceded as far upward as the eye of man can trace the pedigree of sensible causation. Were it by a break anywhere in the traceable part of this series that the prayer was answered, then its fulfilment would be miraculous. But without a miracle the prayer is answered as effectually. Thus, for example, is met the cry of a people under famine for a speedy and plenteous harvest—not by the instant appearance of the ripened grain at the bidding of a voice from heaven—not preternaturally cherished into maturity in the midst of storms; but ushered onwards by a grateful succession of shower and sunshine to a prosperous consummation. An abundant harvest is granted to prayer—yet without violence either to the laws of the vegetable physiology, or to any of the known laws by which the alterations of the weather are determined. It must be acknowledged by every philosopher, how soon it is that we arrive in both departments on the confines of deepest mystery: and let the constancy of patent and palpable Nature be as unaltered and unalterable as it may, God reserves to Himself the place of mastery and command, whether among the arcana of vegetation or the depths of meteorology. He may at once permit a most rigid uniformity to the visible workings of Nature's mechanism—while among its invisible, which are also its antecedent workings, He retains that station of pre-eminence and power, whence He brings **all** things to pass according to His pleasure. It is not by sending bread from the upper storehouses of the firmament that He answers this prayer. It is by sending rain and fruitful seasons. The intermediate machinery of Nature is not cast aside but pressed into the service; and the prayer is answered by a secret touch from the finger of the Almighty, which sets all its parts and all its processes agoing. With the eye of sense man sees nothing but Nature revolving in her wonted cycles, and the months following each other in bright and beautiful succession. In the eye of faith, ay, and of sound philosophy, every year of smiling plenty upon earth is a year crowned with the goodness of Heaven.

But to touch on that which more immediately concerns us, let us now instance prayer for health. We ask, if here philosophy has taken possession of the whole domain, and left no room for the prerogatives and the exercise of faith—no hope for prayer? Has the whole intermediate space between the first cause and the ultimate phenomena been so thoroughly explored, and the rigid uniformity of every footstep in the series been so fixed and ascer-

tained by observation, as to preclude the rationality of prayer, and leave it without a meaning, because without the possibility of a fulfilment? Where is the physician or the physiologist who can tell that he has made the ascent from one prognostic or one predisposition to another—till he reached even to the primary fountain-head of that influence which either medicates or distempers the human frame, and found throughout an adamant chain of necessity, not to be broken by the sufferer's imploring cry? We ask the guardians of our health, how far upon the pathway of causation the discoveries of medical science have carried them; and whether, above and beyond their farthest look into the mysteries of our framework, there are not higher mysteries, where a God may work in secret, and the hand of the Omnipotent be stretched forth to heal or to destroy? It is thence He may answer prayer. It is from this summit of ascendancy that He may direct all the processes of the human constitution—yet without violating in any instance the uniformity of the few last and visible footsteps. Because science has traced, and so far determined this uniformity, she has not therefore exiled God from His own universe. She has not forced the Deity to quit His hold of its machinery, or to forego by one iota the most perfect command of all its evolutions. His superintendence is as close and continuous and special, as if all things were done by the visible intervention of His hand. Without superstition, with the fullest recognition of science in all its prerogatives and all its glories—might we feel our immediate dependence on God; and, even in this our philosophic day, and notwithstanding all that philosophy has made known to us, might we still assert and vindicate the higher philosophy of prayer—asking of God, as patriarchs and holy men of old did before us, for safety and sustenance and health and all things.

And if ever in the dealings of God with the people of the earth, if ever science had less of the territory and faith had more of it, it is in that undisclosed mystery which still hangs over us; which now for many months has shed baleful influences on your crowded city; and whereof no man can tell whether in another day or another hour, it might not descend with fell sloop into the midst of his own family—entering there with rude unceremonious footstep, and hurrying to one of its rapid and inglorious funerals the dearest of the inmates. Never on any other theme did philosophy make more entire demonstration of her own helplessness; and perhaps at the very first footstep of

the investigation, or on the question of the proximate cause, the controversy is loudest of all. But however justly of the proximate cause discovery may be made, or however remotely among the anterior causes the investigation might be carried, never will proud philosophy be able to annul the intervention of a God, or purchase to herself the privilege of mocking at the poor man's prayer. Indeed, amid the exuberance and variety of speculation on this unsettled and unknown subject, there was one remote cause assigned for this pestilent visitation, which, so far from shutting out, rather suggests, and that most forcibly, the intervention of a God immediately before it. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria: and they shall come, and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys, and in the holes of the rocks, and upon all thorns, and upon all bushes."* We hope to have made it plain to you, let this or any other cause be found the true one, that however high the path of discovery may have been traced, yet higher still there is place for the finger of a God above to regulate all the designs of a special providence, and to move in conformity with all the accepted prayers of His family below. But among the scoffers of our latter day, even in the absence or the want of all discovery, the finger of a God is disowned; and it seems to mark how resolute and at the same time how hopeless is the infidelity of modern times, that just in proportion to our ignorance of all the secondary or the sensible causes, is our haughty refusal of any homage to the first cause. It is passing strange of this disease, that after having baffled every attempt to find out its dependence on aught that is on earth, the idea of its dependence on the will of Heaven should of all others have been laughed most impiously to scorn. The voice of derision and defiance was first heard in our high places; and thence it passed, as if by infection, into general society. And so, many have disowned the power and the will of the Deity in this visitation. They most unphilosophically, we think, as well as impiously, have spurned at prayer.

But we cannot pass away from this part of our subject, without adverting to a recent event, the thought of which is at present irresistibly obtruded on us, and by which this parish and congregation but a few weeks ago have been deprived of one of the most conspicuous of our office-bearers—one who constitution-

* Isaiah vii. 18, 19.

ally the kindest and most indulgent of men, was the most alive of all I ever knew to the wants and the miseries of our common nature; and who, finely alive to all the impulses and soft touches of humanity, laboured night and day in the vocation of doing good continually. But instead of saying that he laboured, I should say that he luxuriated in well-doing; for never was a heart more attuned to ready and responsive agreement with the calls of benevolence than his, and sooner would I believe of Nature that she had receded from her constancy, than of him that e'er

"He look'd unmoved on misery's languid eye,
Or heard her sinking voice without a sigh."

Of all the recollections which the friends either of my youth or of my manhood have left behind them in this land of dying men, there is none more beautifully irradiated—whether I look back on the mildness of his Christian worth, or on those sensibilities of an open and generous and finely attuned spirit, which gives such a charm to human companionship. And as the second great law is like unto the first; so that love of his which went forth so diffusively amongst his fellows upon earth, we humbly hope, was at once the indication and the consequent of a love that ascended with high and habitual aspiration to God in heaven. It was through a brief and tremendous agony that he was carried from the world of sense to the world of spirits; and yet it is a happiness to be told that the faith and hope of the gospel lighted up a halo over his expiring moments, and that, ere death had closed his eyes, he, through nearly an hour of audible prayer gave his last testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus.*

But to recall ourselves from this theme of sadness, we trust you will now understand of every event in Nature or history, that each in the order of causation is preceded by a train which went before it, and that man's observations can extend more or less a certain way along this train, till they are lost in the undiscovered and at length undiscoverable recesses which are placed beyond the cognisance of the human faculties. Now it is because of the higher and unknown part which belongs to every such series, that we bid you respect the lessons of piety, for God hath not so constructed the universe as to remove it

* This notice refers to John Wilson, Esq., silk-merchant in Glasgow, who was Kirk-Treasurer of St. John's, and to the deep regret of all who knew him, was carried off by cholera in the neighbourhood of Glasgow.

from the hold of His own special management and superintendence ; and therefore, not in one thing the Bible tells us, but in every thing, we should make our requests known unto God. But again, it is because of the lower and the known or ascertained and strictly uniform part which belongs to every series, that we bid you respect the lessons of experience ; for God did not so conduct the affairs of His universe, as to thrust forth His invisible hand among its visible successions ; but while He keeps a perpetual and ascendant hold among the springs of that machinery which is behind the curtain, He leaves untouched all those wonted regularities, which on the stage of observation are patent to human eyes. Now these are the respective domains of philosophy and faith, and this is the use to be made of them. Looking to the one, we learn the subordination of all Nature. Looking to the other, we learn the constancy of visible nature. These great truths harmonize ; and between the lessons which they give, there is the fullest harmony. He who is enlightened and acts upon both is at one and the same time a man of prudence and a man of prayer ; who never loses his confidence in God, yet, as awake to the manifestations of experience as if they were the manifestations of the divine will, never counts upon a miracle. He holds perpetual converse with heaven ; yet shapes his earthly conduct by his earthly circumstances. In his habits of diligence he proceeds on the uniformity of visible nature, and he does accordingly. In his habits of devotion, he knows that there is a visible power above which subordinates all Nature, and he prays accordingly. He is neither the mystic who will not act, nor is he the infidel who will not pray. He knows how to combine both, or how to combine wisdom with piety—that rare and beautiful combination unknown to the world at large, yet realized by many a cottage patriarch, who, without attempting, without being capable in fact of any profound or philosophical adjustment between them, but on his simple understanding alone of Scripture lessons and Scripture examples, unites the most strenuous diligence in the use of means, with the strictest dependence upon God. Without the combination of these two, there has been nothing great, nothing effective in the history of the church ; and, on the other hand, we find that all the most illustrious, whether in philanthropy or in Christian patriotism, from the apostle Paul to the highest names in the descending history of the world, as Augustine, and Luther, and Knox, and Howard, that, superadding the wisdom

of experience to a sense of deepest piety, they were at once men of performance and men of prayer.

But let us look for a moment to the highest example of all, even that of our Saviour when on earth; for in the history of His temptation will the eye of the diligent observer recognise an application and a moral, which serve, we think very finely, to illustrate our whole argument.

The first proposal of the adversary was, that, because an-hungered by the abstinence of forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, He should turn stones into bread; and the reply of our Saviour that "Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word which cometh out of the mouth of God," bespoke His confidence in that Supreme Power which overrules all Nature. Now, observe how this is followed up by the tempter:—Since such His confidence, I may perhaps prevail upon Him to cast Himself from the pinnacle of the temple, employing the very argument He just has used, even the overruling power of that God who can bear Him up by the intervention of angels, lest He dash His foot against a stone. The reply—"Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," tells us, that the same Being who overrules all Nature, never interferes but for some worthy and great purpose to thwart the established successions of visible nature; and that it is wrong, it is wanton, in any of His creatures so to act, as if He counted upon such an interference. It is a noble lesson for us never to traverse or neglect the means which experience hath told us are effectual for good; and never to brave, but at the call of imperious duty, the exposures which the same experience has told us, on our knowledge or recollection of Nature's established processes, are followed up by evil. Our Saviour would not in defiance to the law of gravitation, cast Himself off from that place of security which upheld Him against its power. And neither should we ever, though in defiance but to the probable law of contagion, or by what (to borrow a usual phrase) might well be termed a tempting of Providence, refuse those places or cast away those measures of security, that are found to protect us against the virulence of this destroyer. In a word, between the wisdom of piety and the wisdom of experience there is most profound harmony—unknown to the infidel, and so he hath cast off prayer; unknown to the fanatic, and so he hath cast prudence away from him.

And we appeal to you, my brethren, if there be not much in the state and recent history of our nation to confirm these views.

We rejoiced in the appointment several months ago of a national fast, and that notwithstanding the contempt and annoyance of the many infidel manifestations to which the appointment had been exposed—hoping, as we then did, that it would meet with a dutiful and a general response from the people of the land; and perceiving afterwards, in our limited sphere, the obvious solemnity, and we trust in a goodly number of instances, the deep and heart-felt sacredness of its observation among our families. It is well that there should be a public and a prayerful recognition of God in the midst of us; and we have failed in our argument, we have failed, whether from the obscurity of its illustrations or the obscurity of its terms, in obtaining for it the sympathy of your understandings—if you perceive not, that, in the distinct relation of cause and effect, there is a real substantive connexion between the supplications which ascend for health and safety from the midst of a land, and the actual warding off of disease and death from its habitations. But in fullest harmony with this it is also well, I would go farther and say there is no infringement upon deepest piety in pronouncing it indispensable—that while we invoke the Heavenly Agent who sitteth above for every effectual blessing, all the earthly means and earthly instruments should be in complete and orderly preparation. We are aware that in many places and on many occasions, these have been rebelled against.* And it but enhances the lesson, beside carrying a most impressive rebuke, both to the fanaticism of an ill-understood Christianity, and to the ignorant frenzy of an ill-educated, and, in respect to the woful deficiency both of churches and schools, we would say a neglected population—that just in those places where the offered help of the physician was most strenuously and most ungratefully resisted, and at times indeed by violence overborne, that there it was where the disease reasserted its power, and as if with the hand of an avenger, shook menace and terror among the families. As if the same God who bids us in His word make request unto Him in all things, would furthermore tell us by His Providence, that, in no one thing will He permit a heedless invasion on the regularities of that course which He him-

* In Edinburgh, the metropolis of medical science, a vigorous system of expedients was instituted; and nothing could exceed the promptitude and the watchfulness and the activity, at a moment's call, wherewith the disease was met and repressed at every point of its outbreakings. And we cannot imagine a more striking demonstration for the importance of human agency, diligently operating on all the resources which Nature and experience have placed within our reach, than is furnished by a comparison between the perfection of our city arrangements, and the fewness of our city deaths.

self has established ; that with His own hand He ordained the footsteps of Nature, and He will chastise the presumption of those who shall think to contravene the ordinance ; that experience is the schoolmaster authorized by Him for the government and guidance of His family on earth, and that He will resent the outrage done to her authority whenever her lessons or her laws are wantonly violated.

In conclusion, let us observe that, on the one hand, we shall be glad if aught that has been said will help to conciliate our mere religionists to the lessons of experience and of sound philosophy ; and, in opposition to those senseless prejudices, by which they have often brought the most unmerited derision and discredit on their own cause, we would remind them that it is not all philosophy which Scripture denounces, but only vain philosophy—it is not all science which it deprecates, but only the science falsely so called. On the other hand, we should rejoice in witnessing the mere philosopher or man of secular and experimental wisdom, more conciliated than he is to the lessons of Religion, and to that humble faith which is the great and actuating spirit of its observations and its pieties and its prayers. We have heard that the study of Natural Science disposes to Infidelity. But we feel persuaded that this is a danger only associated with a slight and partial, never with a deep and adequate and comprehensive view of its principles. It is very possible that the conjunction between science and scepticism may at present be more frequently realized than in former days ; but this is only because, in spite of all that is alleged about this our more enlightened day and more enlightened public, our science is neither so deeply founded nor of such firm and thorough staple as it wont to be. We have lost in depth what we have gained in diffusion—having neither the massive erudition, nor the gigantic scholarship, nor the profound and well-laid philosophy of a period that has now gone by ; and it is to this that infidelity stands indebted for her triumphs among the scoffers and the superficialists of a half-learned generation.