

SERMONS

ON

IMPORTANT SUBJECTS;

BY THE

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LATE OF PEMBROKE COLLEGE, OXFORD, AND CHAPLAIN TO
THE RIGHT HON. THE COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON.

WITH A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR,
BY SAMUEL DREW, A. M.

AND A

DISSERTATION ON HIS CHARACTER, PREACHING, &c.
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THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS.

And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.—John xi. 43, 44.

WHEN Jesus Christ, the eternal Word, was pleased to make all things by the word of his power, his last works were the best. When he looked back upon, and beheld the first products of his almighty power, he pronounced them “good but when that last, that lovely creature man, was formed, he pronounced them “very good.” So, the same Jesus, when he came to tabernacle among us, and to begin and carry on a new and second creation, though all his works were miracles of wonder, and manifested forth the glory of his eternal godhead, yet the nearer he came to the end of his public ministrations, the greater and more noble did the miracles which he wrought appear. The resurrection of Lazarus, that is to be the subject of the following discourse, I think is a sufficient proof of this. To an eye of sense, it seems to be one of the greatest, if not the very greatest miracle of all which our blessed Lord performed. When our Saviour bid John’s disciples go and tell their Master what things they had seen and heard, he commands them to inform him, that by his divine power “the dead were raised;” alluding, no doubt, to the Ruler’s daughter, who was raised immediately after her decease: and the Widow’s son, who, at the command of Jesus, rose out of his coffin, as they were carrying his corpse to the burial. These were pregnant proofs, that Jesus was indeed the Messiah that was to come into the world. But his raising of Lazarus from the dead, after he had lain four days dead, and saw corruption, is still, if possible, a greater miracle; and consequently a stronger proof of his being the Anointed, the Christ of God. The evangelist John is very particular in giving us an account of this miracle. Even so particular, as to spend a whole chapter in relating the circumstances which preceded, attended, and followed after it. And as he was undoubtedly directed herein by the all-wise, unerring Spirit of God, does it not point out unto us, that this miracle, with all its respective circumstances, calls for our particular and most serious meditation? It appears to me in this light. And therefore, as our Lord shall be pleased to assist, I shall go back to the beginning of this chapter, follow the evangelist step by step, and consider the particulars of this wondrous miracle, make some practical observations as I go along, and conclude with some suitable instructions and exhortations, which will naturally arise from the body of the discourse.

The evangelist, in the first verse, makes mention of the sickness of Lazarus. Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of

Mary and her sister Martha.” Some think these sisters were very wealthy, so as to own good part of the town, or, as the original word seems to imply, the village. But then it is probable the evangelist would have said the town of Lazarus, estates usually descending, as with us, in the male line. It means, therefore, no more than that Martha and Mary lived in Bethany. The Holy Ghost pointing out to us hereby, that nothing makes a town so worthy of a gracious soul’s remark, or esteem, as its having many of God’s dear children for its inhabitants. Bethany, though a little place, is more famous because it was the town of Martha and Mary, than if Alexander had fought in it one of his greatest battles. Both these women loved Jesus in sincerity, and were as good as they were great. But Mary, though the younger sister, seems to be the most eminent: for the evangelist, in the second verse, speaks of her in a very distinguishing manner. “It was that Mary, (that never-to-be forgotten Mary,) which anointed the Lord with ointment, (expensive as it was) and wiped his feet (after she had washed them with tears of love) with her hair,” even the hair of her head. What notice is taken of this action! With what an eulogy, and in what a high strain of commendation, is it here spoken of!—and such are the honours of all God’s saints. Though all our good works are not recorded as Mary’s are, yet God is not unmindful that he should forget our works of faith, and labours which have proceeded of love. Every tear we shed, every sigh we fetch, every alms we give, though it be only a cup of cold water, are all recorded in the Lamb’s book of remembrance, and shall be produced to our eternal honour, and rewarded with a reward of grace, though not of debt, at the great and terrible day of the Lord. “I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; naked, and ye clothed me; sick and in prison, and ye came unto me.” What reason have we then to be steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we are assured that our labours will not be in vain or forgotten by the Lord? It was that Mary that anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair. And what follows? “Whose brother Lazarus was sick.” So that being related to Christ or his disciples, will not exempt persons from sickness. In this life, time and chance happen to all, only with this material difference, those afflictions which harden the obstinately impenitent, soften and purify the heart of a true believer. “My son, therefore despise not the chastening of the Lord (on one hand) nor faint when thou art rebuked of him (on the other:) for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

Jesus loved Lazarus, and yet Lazarus was sick. And what do his sisters do for him now he is sick? No doubt they applied to a physician, for it is tempting God to neglect making use of means for the recovery of our health, when it is impaired. But then they were not guilty of Asa’s crime,

“who sought to the physicians, but not to the Lord.” No, they knew the most skilful prescriptions would be of no effect, unless attended with a blessing from Jesus, the great and almighty Physician; and therefore his sisters sent unto him, probably at the beginning of their brother’s illness. How unlike is their conduct to that of the generality of people, especially the rich and great! How unfashionable is it now-a-days for persons to send to Jesus in behalf of their sick relations! It is so very uncustomary, that in some places, if a minister be sent for to a sick person, it is a sad symptom that the patient is almost past hopes of recovery. Thus did not Martha and her sister Mary. They sent unto Jesus, though he was now beyond Jordan [John 10:40,] where he abode, or chiefly resided, for some time. Hence it was that they knew where to send to him. But what kind of message did they send? A very humble and suitable one: “Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.” They might have said, Lord, he who loveth thee is sick. But they knew, that our love was not worth mentioning, and that we love Jesus only because he first loved us. Besides, here is no prescribing to our Lord what he should do, or what means he should make use of. They do not so much as say, We pray thee to come, or only speak the word, and our sick brother shall be restored. They simply tell Jesus the case, knowing it was sufficient barely to lay it before an infinitely compassionate Redeemer, and leave it to him to act according to his own sovereign good-will and pleasure: “Lord, Behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.” Oh how sweet is it when the soul is brought to this! And with what a holy confidence may we pray to, and intercede with, the holy Jesus, when we have reason to hope, that those we pray and intercede for, are lovers of, and are beloved of him! For his eyes are in a peculiar manner over the righteous, and his ears always open to their prayers. This was their message, and it soon reached Jesus Christ. And how does he receive it? We are told, ver. 4. “When Jesus heard that, (that he whom he loved was sick,) he said. This sickness is not unto death, but unto the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby.” To whom these words were spoken is not certain. In all probability, Jesus spoke them to the persons that delivered Martha’s and Mary’s message. And if so, it was, no doubt, a comfortable answer for the present, though it must afterwards puzzle them, as well as his disciples, how to explain it, when they found that Lazarus was actually dead. “This sickness is not unto death,” not unto an abiding death, because he intended to raise him again soon after his decease. It is like that expression of our Lord in St. Mark, “The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth;” which must not be understood in a literal, but metaphorical sense. And this, and such-like instances, ought to teach us to weigh carefully our blessed Lord’s words, and to wait for an explication of them by subsequent providences. Otherwise we shall be in danger of misapplying them, and thereby bring our souls into un-

speakable bondage. "This sickness is not unto death, but unto the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby." This is the end both of the afflictions and the deaths of God's people. By all that happens to them he will be glorified one way or another, and cause every thing to work together for their good. And who then but would be content to be sick, or willing to submit to death itself, if so be the Son of God may be glorified thereby? This answer, no doubt, proceeded from love; for we are told, verse 5. That "Jesus loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus." Oh happy family! Three in it, beloved of Jesus with a peculiar, everlasting love. "Very often it so happens, (to use the words of the pious Bishop Beveridge,) that there is but one in a city, and two in a country, of this stamp." But here are two sisters and a brother, all lovers of, and beloved by, the glorious Jesus. What shall we say to these things? Why, that our Saviour's grace is free and sovereign, and that he may do what he will with his own. They who are thus so highly favoured, as to have so many converted in one house, ought to be doubly thankful! Such a blessing have not all his saints. No, many, very many, go mourning over their perverse and graceless relations all their lives long and find, even to their dying day, that their greatest foes are those of their own household. Surely these three relations lived a heaven upon earth. For what can they want, what could make them miserable, who are assured of Jesus' love? But surely if Jesus loves this dear little family, the next news one might think we should hear, would be, that he went immediately, and healed Lazarus, or at least cured him at a distance. But instead of that, we are told, verse 6. "When he had heard that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was." A strange way this, in the eye of natural reason, of expressing love. But not so strange in the eye of faith. For the Lord Jesus very often showeth his love, by deferring to give immediate answers to our prayers. Hereby he tries our faith and patience, and exercises all our passive graces. We have a proof of this in the Syrophenician woman, upon whom the blessed Jesus frowned, and spake roughly to at first, only that he might afterwards turn unto her, and say, "O woman, great is thy faith." Let not those then who believe, make too much haste, or immediately in their hearts repine against the Lord, because he may not answer their requests in their own time and way. God's time and way is best. And we shall find it to be so in the end. Martha and Mary experienced the truth of this, though undoubtedly our Lord's seeming delay to come and heal their brother, cost them great searchings of heart. But will the Lord Jesus forget his dear Lazarus, whom his soul loveth! "Can a woman forget her sucking child!" Indeed, she may; but the Lord never faileth those that fear him. Neither is he slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, for his very delays are answers. The vision is for an appointed time. In the end it will speak, and not lie.

Though our Lord abode two days where he was, to try the faith of these sisters, yet after this, he said unto his disciples, ver. 7. "Let us go into Judea again." With what a holy familiarity does Jesus converse with his dear children! Our Saviour seems to speak to his disciples, as though he were only their brother, and as it were upon a level with them; "Let us go into Judea again." How gently, according to what was predicted of him, does he lead those that are with young! Jesus very well knew the weakness of his disciples, and also what a dangerous place Judea was. How gradually therefore does he make known unto them his design of going thither. And how does he admit his disciples to expostulate with him on this account! "Master, (say they,) the Jews of late sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again?" They were amazed at our Lord's boldness, and were ready to call it presumption, as we generally are prone to censure and condemn other zealous and enterprising persons, as carrying matters too far. It may be for no other reason, if we examine the bottom of our hearts, but because they go before and excel ourselves. The disciples, no doubt, thought that they spoke out of love to their Lord, and assuredly they did. But what a deal of self-love was there mixed and blended with it! They seem much concerned for their Master, but they were more concerned for themselves. However, Jesus overlooks their weakness, and mildly replies, ver. 9 and 10. "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of the world; but if any man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him." As though our Lord had said, My dear disciples, I thank you for your care and concern for me. Judea is a dangerous place, and what you say of the treatment I met with from its inhabitants, is just and true: but be not afraid of going there upon my account. For as a man walketh safely twelve hours of the day, because he walketh in the light, so, as long as the time appointed by my Father for my public administration lasts, I shall be as secure from the hands of my enemies, as a man that walks in broad-day is secure from falling. But as a man stumbleth if he walketh in the night, so when the night of my passion cometh, then, but not till then, shall I be given up into the hands of my spiteful foes. Oh what comfort have these words, by the blessing of God, frequently brought to my soul! How may all Christ's ministers strengthen themselves with this consideration, that so long as God hath work for them to do, they are immortal! And if after our work is over, our Lord should call us to lay down our lives for the brethren, and to seal the truth of our doctrine with our blood, it would certainly be the highest honour that can be put upon us. "To you it is given, not only to believe, but also to suffer," says the apostle to the Philippians.

"These things (the evangelist tells us, ver. 11.) said Jesus: and after that, (to satisfy them that he was not going into Judea without a proper call,) he

saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.” Our friend. Amazing! For what is a friend? As one’s own soul. How dear then, and near, are true believers to the most adorable Jesus! “Our friend Lazarus.” Still more amazing! Here is condescension, here is unparalleled familiarity, indeed. And what of him? “He sleepeth.” A figurative way of expression. For what is death to the lovers of Jesus Christ, but a sleep, and a refreshing one too? Thus it is said of Stephen when he died, that “he fell asleep.” Christ indeed died, but believers only sleep. And “those that sleep in Jesus, (says the scripture,) will God bring with him.” “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.” For though he be dead, I shall raise him from the grave so soon, that his dying will be only like a person’s taking a short sleep. “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep.” By this time, one would imagine our Lord’s disciples should have understood him. But how unwilling are we to believe any thing that we do not like! “Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.” Oh fearful, and slow of heart to believe! How fain would they excuse themselves from going into Judea, for fear of a few stones! By this way of talking, how do they in effect impeach their blessed Master’s conduct, and, under a pretence of preserving his person, foster, and as it were plead for their own (though perhaps undiscerned) cowardice and unbelief? That charity, which hopeth and believeth all things for the best, teacheth us to judge thus favourably of them. For, “Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: they thought that he had spoken of taking rest in sleep.” The great and compassionate High-Priest, knowing and remembering they were but dust, throws a veil of love over their infirmity; and at length, ver. 14. “saith unto them plainly (for if we wait on Jesus, we shall know his will plainly, one way or another,) Lazarus is dead.” And even then, lest they should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow, he immediately adds, ver. 15. “And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe,” or have more faith, or have that faith which you already possess, increased and confirmed. A plain proof this, that all Jesus’ delays to answer prayer, are only to strengthen our faith.

“Nevertheless, says our Lord, let us go unto him.” This was a sufficient hint, if they knew how to improve it, that he intended to do something extraordinary, though he would not tell them directly what he intended. For the Lord Jesus will keep those whom he loves at his feet, and dependent on him. “Let us go unto him.” He still speaks as though they were his equals. Oh that Christians in general, oh that ministers in particular, would learn of him, their great exemplar, to condescend to men of low degree! Well, the secret is now out. Jesus has said unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And what reception does this melancholy news meet with? With great condolence, especially from Thomas; for ver. 16. “Then said Thomas, who is called Didymus, unto his fellow-disciples, let us also go and die with him;”

that is, according to some, with Lazarus, with whom, it may be, Thomas had contracted an intimate acquaintance. But granting it was so, shall I commend him for this passionate expression? I commend him not. Surely he spake unadvisedly with his lips: "Let us also go, and die with him." As though there were no comfort to be expected in the world, now his friend Lazarus was gone. This was a great fault, and yet a fault that many of God's children run into daily, by mourning for their deceased relations over-much, like persons that have no hope. But this infirmity ought not to be indulged: for if our friends and dear relatives are dead, Jesus, that friend of sinners, is not dead. He will be better to us than seven sons, and will abundantly supply the place of all creature-comforts. But I am more inclined to think that the word *him*, refers to Jesus, his dear Master; and if so, he is so far from being blamed, that he spake like a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Let us also go, that we may die with him. If our dear Master will go into Judea, and hazard his precious life, let us not any longer make such frivolous excuses, but let us manfully accompany him; and if the Jews should not only be permitted to stone, but also to kill him, let us also go and die with him, we cannot die in a better cause. This was a speech worthy of a Christian hero, and Thomas herein has set us an example, that we should follow his steps, by exciting and provoking one another closely to adhere to the blessed Jesus, especially when his cause and interest is in any immediate danger. This exhortation, it seems, had a proper effect. They all went, and, as far as we know, cheerfully accompanied their glorious Master.

How their thoughts were exercised on the road, we are not told. But I am apt to believe they were a little discouraged when they came to Bethany, for "when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had lain in the grave for four days already." And what would it avail them, to come so many miles only to see a dead man's tomb? But how wisely were all things ordered by the blessed Jesus, to manifest his glory in the most extraordinary manner, that not only his disciples might have their faith confirmed, but many also of the Jews might believe on him. This Bethany, it seems, ver. 18. "was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off," or about two miles. And Martha and Mary, being what we may call people of fashion, and devout likewise, many of the devout, and we may suppose many of the wealthy Jews, came from the metropolis, as well as other adjacent places, ver. 19. to Martha and Mary, not to pay an idle, trifling, but a serious, profitable visit, "to comfort them concerning their brother." This was kind and neighbourly. To weep with those that weep, and to visit the afflicted in their distresses, is one essential branch of true and undefiled religion. And O how sweet is it when we visit surviving friends, that we have reason to think that their departed relations died in the Lord! And we can therefore give them comfort concerning them; for "blessed are the dead, that die in the Lord; even so,

saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours.” This, and such-like arguments, no doubt, these visitors made use of, to comfort Martha and Mary. And, indeed, they stood in much need of consolation: for we have reason to suppose, from our Lord’s answer, “This sickness is not unto death, but the glory of God,” that they had entertained thoughts of the recovery of their brother. But who can tell what these two holy souls must feel, when they found their brother did not recover, but was dead, laid out, and now stinking in the silent grave! What hard thoughts, without judging them, may we suppose they entertained concerning Jesus! Think ye not that they were ready to cry out, in the language of the prophet, “Thou hast deceived us, and we are deceived?” But man’s extremity is Jesus’ opportunity. In the multitude of the sorrows that they had in their hearts, the news of Christ’s coming refreshes their souls. Somebody or another, commendably [thoughtful], privately informs Martha of it: “who, as soon as she heard that Jesus was come, (without making any apology to the company for her rudeness,) went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.” But why so, Mary? I thought thou hadst been most forward to attend on Jesus, and thy sister Martha more prone to be cumbered about the many things of this life. Why sittest thou still? It may be the news was brought only privately to Martha, (for it is plain from ver. 31. that the Jews who were in the house knew not of it;) and Martha knowing how our Lord had chid her once, was resolved he should have no reason on the same account to chide her any more; therefore, when the news was brought, she would not so much as stay to inform her sister, but went out to see whether it were true or not, and if so, as the eldest sister, she would invite the blessed Jesus in. How happy is it, when Christ’s reproofs for past neglects, excite our future zeal to come out and meet him! Such reproofs are an excellent oil. Or, it may be, the news reached Mary’s ears, as well as Martha’s, but being overcome with sorrow, she thought it too good news to be true, and therefore sat still in the house. O how careful ought believers to be, to cherish and maintain, even in the midst of tribulation, a holy confidence and joy in God, for the joy of the Lord is a believer’s strength. Whereas giving way to melancholy and unbelief, raises gloom and vapours in the mind, clouds the understanding, clogs us in the way of duty, and gives the enemy, who loves to fish in troubled waters, a very great advantage over us.

Mary, perhaps, through the prevalence of this, and being also naturally of a sedentary disposition, “sat still in the house,” while her sister Martha got the start of her, and went out to meet Jesus. And how does she accost him? Why, in a language bespeaking the distress of a burdened and disordered mind. For she said unto Jesus, ver. 21. “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” Here is a mixture of faith and unbelief. Faith made her say, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” But

unbelief made her confine Christ's power to his bodily presence. Besides, here was a tacit accusation of the blessed Jesus of unkindness, for not coming when they sent unto him the message, "Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick." Once she charged Jesus with want of care: "Lord, carest thou not, that my sister hath left me to serve alone?" Now she taxes him with want of kindness. "If thou hadst been here," as much as to say, if thou hadst been so kind as to have come when we sent for thee, "my brother had not died." And by saying thus, she does, as it were, lay her brother's death to Jesus Christ. O how apt are even those whom Jesus loves in a peculiar manner, to charge him foolishly! How often does the enmity of our desperately wicked hearts rise against Christ, when we are under the afflicting hand of his providence. Are not the very best of us frequently tempted in such circumstances, to say within ourselves at last, Why does God thus cruelly deal with us? Why did not he keep off this stroke, seeing it was in his power to have prevented it? How should we be ashamed and confounded before him upon this account? How should we pray and labour to be delivered from this remaining enmity of the heart, and long for that time, when mortality shall be swallowed up of life, and we shall never feel one single rising of heart against a good and gracious, an all wise and glorious Redeemer, any more? However, to do Martha justice, she

pretty well recovers herself, ver. 22. "But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it to thee." Whether these words imply an actual belief of our Lord's divinity, is not certain. To me they do because we shall presently find, that she did believe our Lord was the Son of God, and the Messiah which was to come into the world. Therefore, when she said, she knew that whatsoever he asked of God, God would give it to him, she may be understood as referring to God the Father, under whom the Lord Jesus acted as Mediator, though equal to him in respect to his eternal glory and godhead. This mystery we may well suppose her acquainted with, because Jesus had been frequently preaching at her house, and consequently had opened that mystery unto her. O what a blessed thing must it be to have such a Mediator, such a high-priest and intercessor, at the Father's right hand, that whatever he asks the Father in our behalf, he will give unto us. Jesus takes this kindly at Martha's hand, and passes over her infirmity. For if the Lord were exact to mark every thing that we say or do amiss, alas! who could abide? He only calmly says unto her, ver. 23. "Thy brother shall rise again."

Glad tidings these of great joy. This should comfort us concerning our deceased, pious relations, that ere long they shall rise again, and both soul and body be for ever with the Lord. Howbeit, Jesus spoke here of an immediate resurrection, though he did not speak plainly. For Christ loves to exercise the faith and patience of his disciples, and frequently leaves them to

find out his meaning by degrees. It is best for us, in our present state, that it should be so. In heaven it will be otherwise. "Thy brother (says Christ to Martha) shall rise again." She might immediately have replied, When, Lord? But she fetches a circuit as it were, and labours to find out the mind of Jesus by degrees. "I know (says she) that he shall rise again at the resurrection of the last day." These words seem to imply, that she had some distant thought of our Lord's design to raise her brother now, and that she spake thus only to draw our Saviour to speak, and tell her plainly whether he meant to do so or not. Those who are acquainted with Jesus, are taught a holy art by the blessed Spirit, in dealing with their blessed Master. "I know, (says she,) he shall rise again at the resurrection of the last day," (a notable proof this, by the way, that the pious Jews believed the resurrection of the body.) It is just the same as though she had said, Lord, dost thou mean that my brother shall rise again before that time? Our Saviour wisely keeps off from giving her a direct answer, but chooses rather to preach to her heart. "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." On this, Martha's faith, if in exercise, might take hold. O glorious words! How encouraging to you poor sinners lying in your blood! Though you are dead in trespasses and sins, and might justly be condemned to die the second death, yet if you believe on the Lord Jesus, you shall live. He adds, "And whosoever believeth in me shall never die." Never die as to their souls, never die eternally, and consequently never finally fall away from God. This is an encouraging, soul-comforting declaration for you, O believers, who are thus kept in a garrison, by the mighty power of God, through faith unto salvation! "Believest thou this?" says Christ to Martha, ver. 26. What avail all the many great and precious promises of the gospel, unless they are applied and brought home in particular to each of our souls? The word does not profit, unless it is mixed with faith. We therefore do well, when we are reading Christ's words, to put this question to ourselves: O my soul, believest thou this? And well would it be for us, if, upon putting this question to ourselves, we could, with the same holy confidence, and in the same delightful frame, say with Martha, ver. 27. "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." This I think is a direct confession of our Lord's divinity. How full was her heart when she spoke these words! I am persuaded it burnt within her. What a divine warmth had she contracted by talking with Jesus. How does she long that her sister might share in her holy joy. For when she had so said, ver. 28. "she went away," full of love, no doubt, and called Mary her sister, as all will endeavour to call their near relations, who have felt the Lord Jesus to be the resurrection and the life themselves. But Martha took care, in the midst of her zeal, (as we should always do,) to behave with prudence; and therefore she called

her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee.” The Master is come, she need say no more. Mary knew very well whom she meant: for holy souls easily understand one another when talking of their Master, Jesus. The divine Herbert used to delight (when speaking of Jesus) to say, my Master: perhaps he learned it of Martha, who said here, “The Master is come, and calleth for thee?” But what is this thou sayest, Martha? The Master is come, and calleth for thee? Surely a person, of thy exalted piety will not tell a deliberate lie, and, in order to induce thy sister to come to Jesus, acquaint her that Jesus called her, when indeed he did not. Thou needest not put thyself to such an expense, or do so much evil, that good may come of it. Only mention Jesus to Mary, and let her know for a certainty that the Master is indeed come, and I am persuaded she will sit no longer.—Martha, no doubt, knew, and therefore I cannot judge her as some do, as though in her haste she said what was not true. For Jesus might bid her to call her sister, though it be not directly mentioned in this chapter. And it is very probable that our Lord did inquire after Mary, because she used to take such great delight in sitting at his feet, and hearing the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth. “The Master is come, (saith Martha to her sister,) and calleth for thee.” And so say I to all poor sinners. Jesus, your Lord and Master, your Prince and Saviour, is come, come unto this lower world, and is come this day in his word, and by me, who am less than the least of all his servants, and calleth for you. O that he may also come in the demonstration of the Spirit, and by his mighty power bow your stubborn hearts and wills to obey the call, as holy Mary did.

For we are told,

ver. 29. “When she heard that, she rose quickly, and came to Jesus.” Sinners, when will you do so? Or why do you not do so? How know you whether Jesus will call for you any more, before he calls you by death to judgment? Linger, O linger no longer. Fly, fly for your lives. Arise quickly, and with Mary come to Jesus. She obeyed the call so very speedily, that her haste was taken notice of by her visitors. “The Jews then, who were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary that she rose up hastily (without any ceremony at all) and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth to the grave, to weep there.” How wisely does our Lord permit and order all this, to bring the Jews out to behold the wonderful miracle that he was about to perform! Little did Mary and the Jews think for what end they were thus providentially led out. But when Jesus hath work to be done, he will bring souls to the place where he intends to call them, in spite of men or devils. But how does Mary behave when she comes to Jesus? We may be assured, not without great humility. No wonder then we are told, verse 32, that “when she saw him, she immediately fell down at his feet, (a place Mary had been used to, and in an agony of grief says, as her

sister had done before her,) Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Poor Mary! Her concern was great indeed. Though she were a holy woman, she could not well bear the loss of her brother. She knew very well, that the world would miss him, and no doubt he had been a kind and tender brother to her. But I am afraid she was sinfully overcome with over-much sorrow. However, had we been there, the sight must have affected us. It seems to have affected the visitors, especially the blessed Jesus. He, instead of blaming her for her tacitly accusing him of unkindness, and for not coming to her brother's relief, pities and sympathizes both with Mary and her weeping friends. "When Jesus saw her weep, and the Jews also weeping, he groaned in his spirit, and was troubled." Troubled: not with any sinful perturbation, we may be assured; nothing of that nature could possibly be in his sinless soul. And, therefore, some have judiciously enough compared the trouble our Lord now felt, to some crystal water shaken in a glass or bottle. You may shake it, but there will be no sediment. It will be crystal water still. "He groaned in his spirit." I do not see why this may not be understood of his praying in the spirit, which maketh intercession for the saints, with "groanings that cannot be uttered." Methinks I see the immaculate Lamb of God, secretly, but powerfully agonizing with his Father. His heart is big with sympathy. At length, out of the fulness of it, he said, ver. 24. "Where have ye laid him? They (I suppose Mary and Martha) say unto him, Lord, come and see." He came, he saw, "He wept," ver. 35. It is put in a verse by itself, that we might pause a while, and ask why Jesus wept?

He wept, to show us, that it was no sin to shed a tear of love and resignation at the grave of a deceased friend. He wept, to see what havoc sin had made in the world, and how it had reduced man, who was originally little lower than the angels, (by making him subject to death,) to a level with the beasts that perish. But, above all, he wept at the foresight of the people's unbelief. He wept, to think how many then present, would not only not believe on him, but would be hardened, and have their prejudices increased more and more against him, though he should raise Lazarus from the dead before their eyes. Well then may ministers be excused, who, whilst they are preaching, now and then drop a few tears at the consideration of their sermons being, through the perverseness and unbelief of many of their audience, a savour of death unto death, instead of a savour of life unto life. Upon a like occasion, Jesus wept. What an affecting sight was here! Let us for a while suppose ourselves placed amidst these holy mourners. Let us imagine that we see the sepulchre just before us, and the Jews, and Mary, and the blessed Jesus, weeping round it. Surely, the most obdurate of us all must drop a tear, or at least be affected with the sight. We find that it affected those who were really by-standers: for then said the Jews, ver. 36.

“Behold, how he loved him.” And did they say, Behold, how he loved him, when Jesus only shed a few tears over the grave of his departed Lazarus? Come then, O sinners, and view Christ dying and pouring out his precious heart’s blood for you upon an accursed tree, and then surely you must needs cry out, Behold, how he loved us!

But, alas, though all were affected, yet, it seems, all were not well affected at seeing Jesus weep! For we are told, verse 37. that some of them said, “Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man, should not have died?” One would imagine that Satan himself could scarce have uttered a more perverse speech. Every word is full of spite and rancour. Could not this man, this fellow, this deceiver, who pretends to say that he opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that this man, whom he seems to love so, should not have died? Is not this a sufficient proof that he is a cheat? Have we caught him at last? Is it likely that he really helped others, when he could not help his own friend?—O how patient ought the servants of our Lord to be! and how may they expect to be censured, and have their good deeds questioned, and lessened, when their blessed Master has been thus treated before them. However, Jesus will do good, notwithstanding all these slights put upon him. And therefore, again groaning in himself, “he cometh to the grave; it was a cave, (or vault, as is customary in great families,) and a stone lay upon it; Jesus said, ver. 39, “Take ye away the stone.” How gradually does our Lord proceed, in order to engage the people’s attention the more. Methinks I see them all eye, all ear, and eagerly waiting to see the issue of this affair. But Martha now returning with the rest of the company, seems to have lost that good frame which she was in when she went to call her sister; “She saith unto him, (ver. 39.) Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been *either* dead or buried for days.” O the dismal effects of carnal reasoning! How naturally do we fall into doubts and fears when we have not our eye simply directed to the blessed Jesus. Martha, instead of looking up to him, looks down into the grave, and, poring upon her brother’s stinking corpse, falls into a fit of unbelief: “By this time he stinketh;” and, therefore, a sight of him will only be offensive. Perhaps she might think our Lord only wanted to take a view of her brother Lazarus. Jesus, therefore, to give her yet a further hint that he intended to do something extraordinary, saith unto her, ver. 40. “Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?” Our Lord speaks here with some degree of warmth: for nothing displeases him more than the unbelief of his own disciples. “Said I not unto thee, If thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?” When Christ first spake these words unto her, we are not told it might be that this was part of their conversation upon another occasion some time before. However, he checks her openly for her unbelief now. For those whom Jesus

loves, must expect to be rebuked sharply by him whenever they dishonour him by unbelief. The reproof is taken.

Without making any more objections, "They took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid." And now behold with what solemnity the holy Jesus prepares himself to execute his gracious design. "And Jesus lift up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me; and I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me." Who can express with what fervour and intensesness of spirit, our glorious High-Priest uttered these words! They are a thanksgiving arising from an assurance that his Father had heard him. For Christ, as Mediator, was inferior to the Father. "I knew that thou hearest me always (and so may every believer in his degree say too;) but because of the people which stand by, I said it."—Said what? We do not hear that Jesus said any thing by way of prayer before. And that is true, if we mean vocally, but mentally he did say something, even when he groaned in the spirit once and again, and was troubled. There is a way of praying, even when we do not, and cannot speak. "Why criest thou," said God to Moses; though we do not hear that he spoke one single word. But he cried in his heart. And I observe this for the comfort of some weak, but real Christians, who think they never pray, unless they can have a great flow of words. But this is a great mistake. For we often pray best when we can speak least. There are times when the heart is too big to speak, and the spirit itself maketh intercession for the saints, and that too according to the will of God, with groanings that cannot be uttered. Such was Hannah's prayer for a son, "She spake not, only her lips moved and such was our Lord's way of praying at this time. And perhaps the soul is never in a better frame, than when, in a holy stillness, and unspeakable serenity, it can put itself as a blank in Jesus' hand, for him to stamp on it just what he pleases.

And now the hour of our Saviour's performing this long-expected miracle, is come. Verse 43, "When he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth." With the word there went an irresistible power. He spake, and it was done. He cried, and behold, "He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin." What a sight was here! Methinks I see surprise sit upon each spectator's face. As the body rises, their wonder rises too. See how they gaze! See how their looks bespeak the language of astonished hearts. And all with a kind of silent, but expressive oratory, ready to say, What manner of man is this? Surely this is the Messiah that was to come into the world. How did the hearts of Martha and Mary, as we may very well suppose, leap for joy. How were they ashamed of themselves, for charging Jesus foolishly, and taxing him with unkindness, for not coming to prevent their brother's dying. It is true, Christ suffered him to die, but

behold he is now alive again! Jesus never denies us one thing, but he intends to give us something better in the stead of it. Think you not that Martha and Mary were now the most officious to obey our blessed Lord's command, "Loose him, and let him go?" That same power that had raised Lazarus from the dead, might have also taken the grave-clothes from him: but Jesus Christ never did, and never will work a needless miracle. Others could unloose his grave-clothes, but Jesus alone could unloose the bands of death.

And now, perhaps, some may be ready to ask, What news has Lazarus brought from the other world? But stop, O man, thy vain curiosity. It is forbidden, and therefore useless knowledge. The scriptures are silent concerning it. Why should we desire to be wise above what is written? It becomes us rather to be wholly employed in adoring the gracious hand of that mighty Redeemer who raised him from the dead, and to see (now we have heard the history) what improvement we can make of such a remarkable and instructive transaction.

Would to God that my preaching upon the resurrection of Lazarus today, may have the same blessed effects upon you, as the sight of it had upon some of the standers-by: for we are told, ver. 45. "Then many of the Jews who came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him." A profitable visit this. The best, no doubt, that they ever paid in their lives. And this was in answer to our Saviour's prayer, "But because of the people who stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me." One would imagine that all who saw this miracle were induced thereby really to believe on him. But, alas! I could almost say, that I can tell you of a greater miracle than raising Lazarus from the dead. And what is that? Why, that some of these very persons who were on the spot, instead of believing on him, "went their way to the Pharisees, and told them what Jesus had done," ver. 46. It was so far from convincing them, that it only excited their envy, stirred up the whole hell of their self-righteous hearts, and made them, from that day forward, "take counsel together" to execute what they had long before designed, to put the innocent Jesus to death. See how busy they are, ver. 47. "Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles." Envy itself, it seems, could not deny that. And need they say then, "What do we," or what should we do? "Believe in, to be sure, and submit to him. Take up the cross, and follow him. No. On the contrary, say they, ver. 48. "If we let him thus alone, (which they would not have done so long had not God put a hook in the leviathan's jaws) all men will believe on him." And suppose they did? then all men would be blessed indeed, and have a title to true happiness. No, say they, "then the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation." But were not the Romans come already? Were they

not at this time tributaries to Cæsar? But they were afraid of the church, as well as the state: "They will come and take away our place," our place of worship and, consequently, they look upon Jesus Christ, and his proceedings and adherents, as dangerous both to church and state.

This has been always the method of Pharisees and high-priests, when they have been taking counsel against the Lord Jesus, and his dear anointed ones. But they need not have been afraid on this account, for our Saviour's kingdom neither was nor is of this world. The only way to have preserved their place and nation, was to have countenanced, and as much as in them lay, caused all to believe on Jesus. How miserably were they out in their politics! The death of Jesus, which they thought would save, was the grand cause of the utter destruction both of their place and nation. And so will all politics formed against Christ and his gospel end at last in the destruction of those who contrived them.

O the desperate wickedness and treachery of man's deceitful heart! Where are the scribes, where are the infidels, where are the letter-learned disputers of this world, who are daily calling for a repetition of miracles, in order to confirm and evidence the truth of the Christian religion? Surely, if they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither would they believe, though one rose from the dead. Here was one raised from the dead before many witnesses, and yet all those witnesses did by no means believe on Jesus. For divine faith is not wrought in the heart by moral persuasion, (though moral suasion is very often made use of as a means to convey it) faith is the peculiar gift of God. No one can come to Jesus unless the Father draw him. Therefore, that I may draw near the close of this discourse, let me shut up all with a word of exhortation.

Come, ye dead, christless, unconverted sinners, come and see the place where they laid the body of the deceased Lazarus. Behold him laid out, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, locked up and stinking in a dark cave, with a great stone placed on the top of it. View him again and again. Go nearer to him. Be not afraid, smell him, ah! how he stinks. Stop there now, pause awhile and whilst thou art gazing upon the corpse of Lazarus, give me leave to tell thee with great plainness, but greater love, that this dead, bound, entombed, stinking carcass, is but a faint representation of thy poor soul in its natural state. Whether thou believest it or not, thy spirit which thou bearest about with thee, sepulchred in flesh and blood, is as literally dead to God, and as truly dead in trespasses and sins, as the body of Lazarus was in the cave. Was he bound hand and foot with grave-clothes? So art thou bound hand and foot with thy corruptions. And as a stone was laid on the sepulchre, so is there a stone of unbelief upon thy stupid heart. Perhaps thou hast lain in this state, not only four days, but many years, stinking in God's nostrils. And what is still more affecting, thou art as una-

ble to raise thyself out of this loathsome, dead state, to a life of righteousness and true holiness, as ever Lazarus was to raise himself from the cave in which he lay so long. Thou mayest try the power of thy own boasted free-will, and the force and energy of moral persuasion and rational arguments, (which, without all doubt, have their proper place in religion;) but all thy efforts, exerted with ever so much vigour, will prove quite fruitless and abortive, till that same Jesus, who said, "Take away the stone," and cried, "Lazarus, come forth," comes by his mighty power, removes the Stone of unbelief, speaks life to thy dead soul, looses thee from the fetters of thy sins and corruptions, and, by the influences of his blessed Spirit, enables thee to arise, and to walk in the way of his holy commandments. And O that he would now rend the heavens, and come down amongst you! O that there may be a stirring among the dry bones this day! O that, whilst I am speaking, and saying, "Dead sinners, come forth," a power, an almighty power, might accompany the word, and cause you to emerge into new life!

If the Lord should vouchsafe me such a mercy, and but one single soul, in this great congregation, should arise and shake himself from the dust of his natural state, according to the present frame of my heart, I should not care if preaching this sermon here in the fields were an occasion of hastening my death, as raising Lazarus hastened the death of my blessed Master. For methinks death, in some respects, is more tolerable, than to see poor sinners day by day lying sepulchred, dead and stinking in sin. O that you saw how loathsome you are in the sight of God, whilst you continue in your natural state! I believe you would not so contentedly hug your chains, and refuse to be set at liberty.

Methinks I see some of you affected at this part of my discourse. What say you? Are there not some ready to complain, Alas! we have some relations present, who are so notoriously wicked, that they not only hug their chains, but make a mock of sin, and stink, not only in the sight of God, but man. Dear souls! you are ready to urge this as a reason why Jesus will not raise them and think it hard, perhaps, that Jesus does not come, in answer to your repeated groans and prayers, to convert and save them. But what Jesus said unto Martha, I say unto you, "Believe, and you shall see the glory of God." Think it not a thing incredible that God should raise their dead souls. Think not hard of Jesus for delaying an answer to your prayers. Assure yourselves he heareth you always. And who knows, but this day Jesus may visit some of your dear relations' hearts, upon whose account you have travailed in birth, till Christ be formed in them? You have already sympathized with Martha and Mary, in their doubts and fears. Who knows but you may also be partakers of that joy which their souls experienced, when they received their risen brother into their longing arms?

O christless souls, you do not know what grief your continuance in sin occasions to your godly relations! You do not know how you grieve the heart of Jesus. I beseech you give him no fresh cause to weep over you upon account of your unbelief. Let him not again groan in his spirit and be troubled. Behold how he has loved you, even so as to lay down his life for you. What could he do more? I pray you therefore, dead sinners, come forth. Arise, and sup with Jesus. This was an honour conferred on Lazarus, and the same honour awaits you. Not that you shall sit down with him personally in this life, as Lazarus did, but you shall sit down with him at the table of his ordinances, especially at the table of the Lord's supper, and ere long sit down with him in the kingdom of heaven.

Happy, thrice happy ye, who are already raised from spiritual death, and have an earnest of an infinitely better and more glorious resurrection in your hearts. You know a little, how delightful it must have been to Martha, and Mary, and Lazarus, to sit down with the blessed Jesus here below. But how infinitely more delightful will it be to sit down not only with Mary and Martha, but with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all your other dear brethren and sisters, in the kingdom of heaven. Do you not long for that time when Jesus shall say unto you, "Come up hither?" Well, blessed be God! yet a little while and that same Jesus who cried with a loud voice, Lazarus come forth! shall with the same voice, and with the same power, speak unto all that are in their graves, and they shall come forth. That all who hear me this day, may be then enabled to lift up their heads, and rejoice that the day of their complete redemption is indeed fully come, may Jesus Christ grant, for his infinite mercy's sake. *Amen, and Amen.*