

SERMONS

ON THE

CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

BY JOHN MARTIN.

I WILL SPEAK OF THE GLORIOUS HONOUR OF THY
MAJESTY, AND OF THY WONDROUS WORKS.

PSALM cxlv. 5.

L O N D O N:

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DEDICATION.



TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST, MEETING
IN GRAFTON-STREET, SOHO.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

IT was with great tenderness that our Lord said these words to his select associates. Ye are they who have continued with me in my temptations. By thus commending their fidelity and perseverance, he hath taught his ministers, not merely to applaud, but to follow his example. Between him and us the disparity indeed, is very conspicuous; but remote analogies, on such a subject, are always lawful, generally pleasing to real Christians, and sometimes beneficial.

When I came to London, to be your
stated minister, my temptations were many,

and my trials somewhat severe ; at least they were so in my own apprehension.

In those days, my friends, who were not in communion with us, were much alarmed at my situation, when they saw, so soon after my settlement, seventy-three persons separate themselves from me, with the usual tempers which the discontented indulge.

Of the conflicts which I then endured, several of you were more than witnesses. Your zeal and friendship, your faith and patience, were severely tried : yet you were not hurt, but instructed, by that unpleasant dispensation. Be assured, your Christian kindness to me and mine, during those painful moments, is not forgotten. I often think of it with secret satisfaction ; and, as long as I remember any proof of human friendship, your concern for me, and patience with me, will probably live in my remembrance.

Though by the issue of those conflicts, which I thus recal to your minds, and by
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those instances of mortality, every where to be expected, more than two hundred members have been taken from us, since the year 1773, yet, as a church, we never were more numerous; never in greater tranquillity: never apparently, were you more contented with your pastor; never had he better reasons to be contented in the discharge of his pastoral duty.

After serving you constantly, almost twenty years, what I have said cannot be considered as a mere compliment. But, by the grace of God, you are what you are: and, though much is yet wanting, and some things amiss amongst us, we may still expect from that grace, to find help in every time of need.

I now present you, in the decline of my life, with a volume of sermons; in which, when I am dead, I may perhaps, speak to you and yours; and while I am living, I flatter myself, though some may not, that you will read them without regret.

Of these sermons, and of their being published at this time, I feel myself disposed to give you a short and an ingenuous account.

On the leading *subject* of them little need be said. It speaks for itself. You, at least, will be of that opinion. For, whatever some may think of the character of Christ, in your estimation it must be glorious ; since you believe that Christ is your life, and that there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved. A subject therefore, that would be more acceptable to you, it was not in my power to choose ; and one better worth the notice of Christians at large, it is not easy, if it be possible, to select.

As to the *form* in which this work appears, that, it must be owned, is not so pleasing. To sermonize in print, is to run the hazard of being thought a dull writer. In what is commonly called *good company*, this is, I believe, the current opinion. A single sermon, if it is well studied, and well pronounced,
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may be heard with pleasure, but a volume of sermons is seldom read, I fear, with tolerable satisfaction.

When I undertook this work, I had no doubt an elegant display of the virtues of Christ might excite applause ; no doubt that a well written history of his life might be approved ; but whether this set of sermons would better suit the taste even of *some* serious readers, than those many volumes which they have thought proper to reject, I could not foresee. Nevertheless, as a preacher, I still preferred this form of composition.— Why I was so partial to it shall not be concealed.

Every man, I thought, owed something to his own reputable profession ; and that it became me in mine, to seek its credit ; at least to make it manifest I was not ashamed of my calling.

Further ; I had, as you know, preached a course of lectures on the character of Christ,
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at Grafton-street, in the year 1782; therefore when I resolved to publish a volume in octavo, on subjects peculiar to revealed religion, the substance of those lectures was preferred to any other manuscript in my possession.

Let me add, that I was also disposed to preserve the original form of those lectures, because I knew it had pleased God to impart the best of blessings to mankind by the ministry of his word; and because I believed, that if sermons from the pulpit and the press, were now held in little account, the fault was not to be charged on that mode of instruction, but on the mismanagement of those preachers whose sentiments, diction, address, or personal imprudence, are not calculated to excite esteem.

In short, I was willing to conclude, that if I ventured to write on the character of Christ, it would better become *me* to do it in a series of sermons, than in any other form.

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Of the *manner* in which I have written these discourses I cannot boast. Had I taken more time, or read some things which have lately fallen into my hands, they would have been better finished. You must now take them as they are. That I have bestowed some pains to make them worth your notice, you will admit. That I have laboured under many disadvantages, it is now in vain to lament.

If I succeed in this performance, it will give me the greater satisfaction, as it will be, or I am deceived, the success of revelation, and not the triumph of my own invention. If I fail, it must be imputed to my want of judgment; at least I am not conscious it originated from any vicious design. I may have misinterpreted, or misapplied, some passages of scripture, but I am not convinced of having perverted a single text.

In reference to those *motives* which induced me to publish these discourses, as I only am
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able to say what they were, the little I have to say of them shall be told with veracity.

It hath been for some time my wish to be thus employed, to refresh my own mind with facts of the greatest importance; and, of late, this wish hath been the more ardent, from reflections on some of my former publications, by which I have been too much diverted from such facts, in a manner I need not here explain. It may be sufficient to say, that he who writes for the press, is not always at full liberty to write on what is most agreeable to his own taste. His attention is often turned to things, not the most pleasing to himself, either as an author, or as a man. Our works, whether they are wise, or foolish, are in the hands of God. However, God hath not yet permitted me, at any time, to publish a single page which I suspected to be erroneous, or thought to be unfair, when it went out of my hands. But who is so happy always to write in such a manner as, on subsequent reflection, he thoroughly approves.

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HAVING said these things, I have not much to add. But as these sermons are published by subscription, it may perhaps be asked, Why are not the subscribers names printed? The truth is, as some of them desired to be *anonymous*, as none of them could be supposed to take it *ill* that their names were not published by *me*, and, as I thought others who had shewn me favour might not approve of some pages in this performance, it seemed best to keep the list of my subscribers in my own possession.

Before I conclude, permit me to say a few words of that assistance which I have received from other authors.

Bishop Atterbury, it seems, often asserted, that there never was a good writer who had not the art of transplanting into his own writings the beauties of his predecessors; and that the man who imitated nobody, would probably find no imitators. Convinced of the truth, and good sense of these assertions, I have availed myself freely, not only of the
words

words of inspiration, but of the sentiments of persons uninspired, of different communities, abilities, and tastes. Nor will you blame me for this, should you be of opinion, that I have not introduced into these discourses, now they are printed, any thing which is unnecessary, or unprofitable, or which gives a vicious turn to any part of the sacred scriptures.

If what I have quoted, and translated, from other authors, seems not to be introduced with all that verbal precision, and with all those marks of borrowing which modern custom requires, this has happened, because I have leaned more to that art which *ATTERBURY* applauded, than to that custom which requires no art at all.

But to another custom, which was carried to great excess in the last century, and which is still, in my opinion, too much esteemed, I have paid more attention than I am able to defend. I mean the custom of dividing and subdividing a sermon, by roman and arithmetical

arithmetical figures, into so many distinct parts, and subordinate sections. Order is essential to good composition ; but order rarely requires the aid of such figures to make itself visible.

I conclude this address with intreating the continuance of your prayers, and your perseverance in those offices of friendship, which it may be your duty to perform, and for my felicity to accept.

I am, my dear friends,

Your's in our Lord,

JOHN MARTIN.

Oxford-street, No. 432,

March 15th, 1793.

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S E R M O N I.

ON THE PROPHECIES OF CHRIST.

ACTS X. 43.

TO HIM GIVE ALL THE PROPHETS WITNESS.

INTENDING to lay before you in these Lectures, some thoughts on the character of Christ, in a series of Sermons selected for that purpose, I have chosen the words of Peter to Cornelius as my leading text.

It will not agree with my purpose to paraphrase what the Apostle said to the Centurion, nor to detain you by common-place remarks on *Prophecy*, or by saying to how many different notions that unsettled term hath been applied. It is sufficient to note, that to prophecy, is to bear witness of Christ. So much may be inferred from our text. But, before

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we consider wherein the *force* of the prophetic testimony consists, it may not be improper to glance at the supposed *necessity* of such witnesses to the Character of Jesus Christ.

On this subject, we may observe, that if the prophets had not borne witness of him, the world, for four thousand years, must have been entirely ignorant of the only mediator between God and man: and, indeed, were we ourselves to reject their testimony, we should find our acquaintance with Christ would be on the decline, and our zeal for his interest would be very much abated.

Further; the importance of our Lord's Character is such, that it requires, and ever did require, the best external evidence. But better evidence of the truth and excellence of the Character of Christ, than the prophets have given, we cannot soberly expect. Their testimony may be misunderstood; but it cannot be contradicted. It may be confirmed by historical narration, but the Evangelists, who wrote the Life of Christ, have referred us to the
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the antient prophets as the root of religious information. For it is clear, that neither the Evangelists, nor the Apostles, said any other things of Christ, than those which the prophets did say should come.

Once more ; the necessity of such witnesses to the Character of Christ, may be inferred from the nature and design of Christianity. Inferior evidence of it, would not be thought sufficient ; greater, would not agree with those ends which are to be answered by the Christian religion. By it, the prophets assure us, the lofty looks of men were to be humbled, the haughtiness of men to be bowed down, and the Lord alone exalted : by it the tempers of men were to be thoroughly tried, and the hearts both of the mighty, and of the mean, exquisitely searched. There must, then, in the *original* testimonies of Christ (on which all additional evidence of him *depends*) be light enough to direct the honest, cautious believer ; but not enough to gratify them who are indolent, and perverse. The vail must be rent ; but perfect light within the vail, we

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are not here permitted to expect. The lamp of prophecy still shineth in a dark place ; it is sufficiently strong for the wayfaring man ; but he who asks not his way to Zion, with his face thitherward, may expect perplexity in his crooked paths ; and, at the close of his irregular proceedings, awful disappointments.

By the aid of prophecy, the believer seems to live in all ages. By what the prophets have said, he learns what was done before the world began ; and, in their pages, reads of the most antient settlements of grace, rejoicing. The creation, the fall of man, the first discovery of Christ, and the following revelations of him, prior to his Incarnation, pass under his review ; and, when the Word is made flesh, and dwells amongst us, he beholds his glory, as the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth ; nor does he lose sight of this object while on earth, in the grave, on, or even after his resurrection. By the same light he perceives what was done at and since the day of Pentecost ; and likewise what may yet be expected in approaching revolutions. But then,

then, he sees all this through a glass darkly. Obscurity is blended with his brightest prospects ; nor can he, in any of them, rise above analogy. Yet is the believer guided by unerring information, and will soon pass from resemblance to perfect reality. For, when Christ, who is his life, shall appear, then shall he also appear with him in glory.

More might be added on this subject ; but, the single proposition, on which I mean to dwell in this discourse, is, the *force* of that witness which the prophets have given us, of the Character and Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

This force, lies not in detached assertions ; but in that body of evidence which they exhibit. Some of their depositions, separately considered, may seem to be of little moment ; but, taken all together, what they have asserted is, to an ingenuous mind, invincible. In the most venerable countenance, there is usually some feature not so attracting as the rest : yet the combined effect of the whole, every heart hath felt, and every tongue ap-
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plauded.

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plauded. Or, if there be any exceptions, they are so few in number, and owing to causes so unpleasant, as not to affect public opinion.

Let us now consider some of those articles separately, which, when summed up, will make no small amount ; and which may convince us, that the *force* of the prophetic testimony, cannot be greater than it is, to agree with the nature and design of Christianity.

First, then, let it be recollected, that, as witnesses, the prophets did not appear as private men ; but came forth, and spoke in the name of God, as they were moved by the holy Spirit. If they were not thus inspired, who can account for their accurate and numerous predictions of Jesus Christ ? But, if that fact is admitted, how much do those witnesses merit our attention ? and, how illustrious must he be, to whom *all* the prophets have given witness !

Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord : and

the prophets continually speak of themselves as the servants of the living God. It is but fair, then, to try them on their own pretensions, till it can be proved, they were deceived, or, that they deceived others. Tried on this principle, they must ever be victorious; and, if judged of by any other, such unfair dealing would merit no reply.

Secondly; the antiquity of prophecy must be of weight with every man who admits the authenticity of the word of God. For there we are told, that in the cool of that very day, in which sin made its first appearance amongst us, Adam both heard and received the leading prediction of Jesus Christ. What he heard, believed, and rejoiced in, he taught his children. He could not withhold from them the best news he heard in Paradise; nor could the unbelief of Cain prevent either the faith or obedience of his younger brother. No; Abel resisted unto blood; and, though dead, he yet speaketh. Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, believed in Christ, and prophesied of him. In his prophetic visions, he saw not

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