No. 33.

God is love.
1. John, IV, 16. "God is love."

(How grand & beautiful is this epitome of the divine character! If all the powers of language were tasked to express the best of our ideas of Deity, no man can entertain, nothing could be furnished more large in its meaning, or more affecting in its silent appeal to the heart, than this single word: "love." It embodies the last & highest results, in its reason giving rest, when they have taught us what to think of that infinite Being, who sits enthroned over the universe. It is not merely that there are indications of goodness in the character of God,—that on the whole we may expect his government to be a government of mercy,—but "God is love." His name, his nature, the whole of this character, it is the crown, so to speak, of all his bright glories,—the attribute that stands in the forefront, directs & modifies all the rest. This is the view
of our dear Sibb. as St. John, more particularly than any other of the sacred writers, delights to present. This reasoning in the chapter, from which the text is selected, is supposed to have been directed against those false teachers among the Jews, who boasted that they had superior knowledge of G., while they had no benevolence for man. Against these dangerous pretensions St. John enters his solemn protest; if we should listen to him with all the reverence due to an aged and highly favored disciple of Him, when he assures us, that "he that hath not known the not God, he God is love."

Here we are placed, as it were, on a point of eminence, from which we may view the harmony of the divine character, as its different parts are unfolded in sublime development before our eyes. It is the inherent, essential principle of love, that forms the cement of the divine perfections, binding them together in one glorious, consistent body. Suppose the government of the universe were in the hands of an evil, a partial, or a malevolent being, a being who had never smiled on his own works, or had no love for the creatures formed by his power.
Who can tell what scenes of horror & devastation
might desolate the universe, now so fair & blessed?
It makes the heart shudder, to think of the
impenetrable gloom, which would hang over every
mind, & the darkness would overspread the
whole face of being. But let us not dwell
on the revolting supposition. Thanks be to God, we are
relieved from this evidence to all that is good;
our sentiments & feelings, by evidence that we
cannot resist with fair & honest minds. If God
be self-existent, omnipotent, & possessed of perfect
liberty, if it be impossible for him even to err,
we must not mistake in what may be fittingly good, if
he enjoys an infinite ability to effect what
shall always be for the greatest advantage. Then
he must be originally, essentially, immutably,
forever good, & consequently must forever love the
beings he has created. "The Lord is good unto all
& his tender mercies are over all his works," is a lesson
inscribed everywhere in the kingdom of nature,
the kingdom of grace, & it falls on the ear in inspiring
accents, whether we investigate the world around
us, or on the oracle of sacred truth.
Let us consider in the 1st place the nature and character of the Divine love and some of its exhibitions.

1. When we say that "God is love," let us be careful to exclude from the sentiment, not this expression, every thing like human infirmity. When we think of the Deity, we are in danger of polluting the purity of our thoughts, by mingling with them those ideas of weakness & imperfection as are reflected upon our nature. On every thing seen around us, cannot fail forcibly to impress. What we have of goodness, of power, of knowledge, is limited by a thousand exceptions & broken by a thousand defects. It is therefore a great test of our powers to conceive a Deity of a nature, one whose brightness no cloud of imperfection can cast, even a passing shadow. On whose purity no tinge of weakness can cast even a momentary stain. The human mind, for its meditations on God, should have a reserved sanctuary—a holy of holies, of all that belongs to the goodness of God should be put far away from its entrance. Then when we speak of the divine love, we should not consider it like the meek, sorrowing love of man, but as the principle of action in an infinite mind, grounded in the same eternal basis, on which rest the other perfections of God. It is not a passion,—it is a principle, not an irregular emanation, but an unceasing flood from a source, the depth of an endless duration cannot exhaust. It has respect to the whole of creation, the circle of existence, to all the varieties of being, to all the differences of condition. It is not because we neglect these distinctions that we so often embitter the hearts of life to the murmurs of discontent when the path of God's providence has crossed those of us who are led astray.
to such dangerous habits. The truest is best of all.

Main love is subject to all the errors of a

relish may spring from ignorance and partial judgment. 

The finest efforts may be entirely misguided. Many 

down ruin on the object where they were intended to 

bless or make happy. We have seen the mis-

erable effects of that cursedly affection of weak pi-

ness, and would not in that even a momentary 

on the beloved object, though it were to produce 

a better or a more enduring good? Is there no 

a parent, who suffers with gradual death, the 

death of their child, rather than purchase for him all the countless 

blessings of virtue and peace of mind, by a voluntary 

sacrifice, though frequently a painful discipline? 

Now nothing, that in the most sainted degree 

miles this blind, erroneous, partial affection, can be 

credited to God. True love displays itself not in 

gratitude every sudden, temporary inclination. For 

when we love, but in providing for them a per-

manent, well-founded happiness! — thus the divine 

love is manifested, not in affording a sense of 

satisfaction to every claim of passion, every

odleness, but in complying the highest, sincerest, 

most lasting good of both our nature and condition. 

are susceptible. God regards not the fleeting 

forms of pleasure and joy; with all men for a while 

fulfill ourselves, but that deep and broad happiness, 

in which the name of eternity is inscribed, such as 

for the charter of the security this heavenly promise. 

Now in order to gain this happiness, it may be neces-

sary that we should sink in the cup of suffering, 

feel the sharp pang of adversity. If it be necessary 

we may rest assured that our God loves us 

too well to spare us this transient portion of our 

nost. The path of suffering is our path to 

necessity, and we complain, as if God had forgotten to be gracious 

to us, because he leads us in that path. The love 

of God would not, like the mean affection, 

set up of that happiness we shall never see in the 

sake of bearing us from a few moments of a

sight, love in the Deity, we should never forget 

as unquenchable, impassionable, calm, benevolent, and 

as immortality, here as the stainless light of heaven,

shining as the shrine of God. Every thing like hu-

man imperfection, everything like human imperfection, 

is far, far away from it. Human love, li

self, is the weak, erring child of the dust; di-

unquenchable, impassionable, calm, benevolent, and 

as immortality, here as the stainless light of heaven,

shining as the shrine of God. Every thing like hu-

man imperfection, everything like human imperfection, 

is far, far away from it. Human love, like mankind 

self, is the weak, erring child of the dust; di-
vine love, like the mighty Jehovah, is eternal, unchangeable, & infinite.

It is this, that it extends to all the higher objects of love. In that Being, whose glory is goodness, whose prerogatives are love, and mercy, every object of love is the object of his love. It is true, the benevolence of the Deity is modified, adapted to the different natures, constitutions, characters, & states of the various beings with whom the government of this wondrous world is committed. But everywhere it is the same principle, acting itself in conformity to the dictates of universal reason, look through the brute creation, you see the love of God displayed in all their resources of enjoyment; in all these powers of instinct, to secure them from danger; to lead them to all the plenty of which they are capable. We are higher than man, the man of whom we cannot think of his loves & faculties, his hopes & apprehensions, his being & destination, without feeling that his path is illumined by some of the warmest & brightest rays of God's love. We are seated on the scale of existence, & doubt not a hymn of praise ascends from the angelic choir, without hearing to the throne of God the pure tribute of gratitude for the love of Him, in whose presence they dwell. In truth, you may look at the universe through, & you cannot find one class of beings, as can pretend to monopolize the love & favor of their Creator; why? because to suppose the Deity partial would be to suppose Him weak, & the heart revolt from the thought, that He who hath formed the universe with them from his hands any part of his work neglected, forgetting, as the dead & senseless branch is severed from the trunk not supported it, & left to decay & perish. The same principle is true of the different individuals in each class of beings. Among creatures formed by the hand, supported by the love of the Almighty, no one has, originally at least, an stronger claim to his love, than another. So one more than another will receive it, except as he approaches to the similitude of the Deity by moral excellence. We must mean to say that God disdains the eternal distinctions of rectitude, so that he looks with the same favor on the virtuous, &
vicissitudes, the body of the symbol. Yet even the wicked are not blessed (to that regard) more hope never comes, that comes to all?) the divine mercy reaches to them & would gain them back to the way of righteousness - for God loves every being in his creation - although he heeds with a probation & complacency only on those who obey his laws & yield their heart to better things than the pleasures & passions of earth. It is true, in the administration of his moral government, God makes many distinctions in the external privileges & favors with the benefits on mankind. To some are granted high & powerful talents to large & liberal minds, while others are left to tread in a humble walk & fill a smaller place. So it is with nations; for some have been peculiarly honored as the instruments of Heaven's power & Heaven's wisdom. Thus God is said to have dwelt on the Jews - because to them he had entrusted the revelations of his purposes & wills, while other nations were left to a mere imperfect light. By the knowledge of the unity of God, of this gracious purpose respecting mankind, & the course of the Messiah's glory gradually opening & expatiating on the view, the spirit of true religion was preserved among the Jews, as the remnant of the old world - were saved in the ark, while the deluge despoil'd all around. To the world it was a revelation. Because God had selected them for this all important jot, they are said to be his chosen people. Thus is said in the strong language of the Hab eigen to have "hired Jacob & killed Esau" - not that any passion in the most remote degree similar to hatred has ever manifested the purity of the divine mind; but because he had selected the posterity of Jacob in preference to those of Edom to preserve & communicate the truths & the blessings of true religion. They were made the instruments of dispersing the highest act of Heaven's mercy to the world. As in all the works of the Almighty's hand, there is a beautiful variety & some are marked with higher Some with lower degrees of excellence, yet in all are manifested the glory of his wisdom & the majesty of his dominion, so is his providence makes a distinction among men with regard to such external privileges; but still his love, like the wise re
the sentiments events of life & the evidence of passion pass over them, & instead of pressing them more closely & firmly under foot, they consider, & leave us in that solitude, of all other most distressing solitude of the heart. Not uncommonly a visit to the ranks of those who called themselves friends on better days, some beaten away from us at the first threatening aspect, & many more can not arise the storm when it becomes dark. As how relieving is it to turn from these scenes of earth & fire, the thoughts on the hope of our & God understanding as it is abundant. The divine cannot be unchangeable, because it is the love of a mind, whose knowledge is boundless, & whose affection is not subject to fluctuation. 

It springs from infinite goodness & is guided by infinite goodness & so is the word of God, shall it not be eternal? Still, it is eternal, & through all other subjects the example is clear. This shall not desert us. Though we walk through the furnace of affliction, yet like the redeeming angel, shall we not be thrown into the flames. It is this arduous height of ever joy on the narrow path may be every one must tread to the
tions;—it is this, which a more glorious day shall rise over the midnight of the space, and be one of God's great workings of a glory, that cannot fade, &a happiness that cannot close.

I have thus spoken of the nature & character of the divine love;—let us now briefly touch upon some of its manifestations.

Do you ask for the exhibition of God's love? instances of this goodness?—Then for a moment the outside of this visible creation,—survey the nature, presence and tendance of the various parts of this complicated but regular & grand machine; this minute, stupendous fabric—say, has not infinite wisdom oversight, and a mighty power to apprehend in detail the designs of infinite love? Imagine but an attempt to a faculty altered, or a change in the objects predestined to their qualifications, an excuse,—what not end to that every change must be a diminution of happiness? Were there but nature all these resources of enjoyment if it proceed not from the love of the God of nature? How would require volumes even to glance at all the proofs of divine benevolence, they are not capable to the natural world,—they are deeply infused in the moral constitution of man. God has made him the lord of this lower world;—sacred self and dignity, & happiness, may even the end of his being, depend on fairness & constancy over the whole large & admirable provisions for the being of God made for this grand, this sublime of beings. What that ought be consistent with his love, has supreme wisdom, commitment to moral liberty; has supreme wisdom committed to moral liberty, and consequently to make one great, & consequently to make one great, 

Is God's love from intemperate indulgence, from excess, is it a mere indulgence, from that extravagance of misery, should be near together, & vice & grace should be intimate companions. We know that we stand with dignity, because of infantile guilt, too press in those extra en joyed to and spread a sunshine around the heart of innocence, & therefore we have a peaceful & merciful warming against entering the forbidden gardens of sin. Here then is manifest all the love of God;—but there is another; for more glorious manifestation of the love of God, a work of mercy and transcends every other; & traces us to the feeling conviction, that our great Redeemer is all
too repulsive to himself, for what the Almighty has done to bring us to himself is so astonishing and inexpressible. If we are called to be partakers of the divine nature, the condescension which is necessary to us. If this assurance is true, we are all sinners, and we can think of nothing more to blame, with all the insensibility of heart, it is cold; with all the carelessness of refined humanity, we are to be called the sons of God. In this "God is love?"... it is not in vain that we have read, to these views of the love of our dear Father. He is never thought of as ever shall think it, with cold or careless hearts, a mind, however, that he regards it but as an ordinary topic of general or particular. If God has so loved us, let us seriously ask ourselves, whether the sense of this love has come to our hearts in all that power and belongs to it. If it has not, if we can think of it without feeling the black ingratitude for the sacred obligation to devote ourselves to God, believe me, my dearest child, to have conjured up a most fearful lethargy of mind, sensibility, of will, and we are desolate from the fatal, dumb, that we have fallen through our portion of the aspired feeling, shall have crept through ourselves, extinguished every aspiration, every hope, that would have led us to heaven. Is it not, in the "first guard against such disturbing destinations, as, then, ever more about our hearts that guard our mental constitution, more than all, that he has by his love set the depriving light of the sun in the valley of the shadow of death. Shall we not sing, shall we not feel, the "God is love?"...
that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in G, & G, in him"

Aug. 1819
O those who art love & dwellest in love, we thank thee for all these glorious manifestations, as that hast made of thyself to us thy dearest & sinful children. We would rejoice in all the communications & displays of thine exuberant goodness, & to thee would we render praise & give glory, as to the source of mercy & grace to the children of men. We pray that our reflections on thy reflections may lead us to humble reverence & devout gratitude. Bless the Lord, O our souls, all that is within us. Bless his holy name. May the sense of thy free grace & unmerited goodness abide on our breasts & display itself in love to thee & to our fellow men. May our hearts be humblyalty to thy government, may our wills be subdued to thy will & may we in all things seek to glorify thee according to the God of thy bosom in helpess
& righteousness all our days, grant our prayers be
with thee. & accept us in mercy through J. Co. our
Lord.
At home June 4th, 1820, forenoon,
At home July 27th, 1823, afternoon.