No. 191.

Thoughts on the crucifixion.

Communion.

5/4/1823
Matth. xxvii. 50. "Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, expired." It was a memorable confession, extorted from an infidel writer of splendid talents, in comparing the death of our Saviour with that of one of the ancient sages; that the latter died like a philosopher, but that J. C. died like a God. And truly, only it must have been a heart of no common coldness, even though it were an unbelieving heart, should contemplate the death of Jesus without amazement. So many circumstances of the most awful solemn nature thronged around the crucifixion, that the Saviour himself, in the midst of the dreadful scene appeared with such unearthly dignity, that even those who refuse to share in the triumphant faith, must be hardened indeed, if they can look upon it with indifference. If then it possesses this interest, even
for the first time, what interest must it have for the humble and sincere believer. Much has been said about the death of J.C., it seems to me, that we very seldom view it in the most affecting and instructive light. Much it may be exhibited.

It has been very generally treated as a doctrinal appendage to some theological systems, certain attributes and efficacies are assigned to it or denied of it, yet it is discussed with all the coldness and barrenness that usually belong to mere speculations in religion. Now this is a way of treating the crucifixion and death of our Saviour, that has but little or any good influence on the heart. It takes from it all these fine moral sentiments and feelings with the heart, of unbiased and uncorrupted, would derive from it. discs it of these softening, touching considerations, in which no scene, that history has described, is so rich as full. It is good for us, may to look back, dwell upon the awful scene, when I cried with a loud voice I gave up the ghost, not so much on account of its connexion with...
ins, be they orthodox, or heretical, put in account of the deep moral solemnity of the scene. It is not so much for the purpose of reasoning well about it, as for the purpose of having our feelings of affection warmly interested in it, that we should contemplate the spectacle of Jesus on the cross. It seems to me, that any one, who with a hopeful state of mind, reflects upon the death of Jesus, connected with his body of heavenly life, who traces his course from his birth in the manger to his hanging upon the cross, through pain, trials, persecutions, unmerited in beassolence, dispensing at every step divine instructions, it seems to me, Isay, that he who takes such a view, will feel the nearismes, unprofitable of labour are the questions wh divines have raised respecting the death of X., as whether it were a sacrifice to divine justice or not, whether it satisfied for the sins of the whole world, or for those of the elect only, whether we must be saved by the merits of this sacrifice only or whether we can do any
thing towards our own salvation. These questions ought doubtless to appear very insipid & tame when compared with the moral feelings. Of the death of *x* must excite in every good heart. It will then, I think, contribute to our own advancement; to dwell often & earnestly upon this view of the subject, to regard it in these points in which all men agree, rather than these, in all they differ.

The crucifixion of *x* is an object of which we generally contemplate with a strange indifference, though it be one to which our attention is often called; perhaps it may be, because our attention is so often called to it, that we regard it with so much indifference. We have been so accustomed from childhood to hearing it spoken of as a subject of deep interest, that it comes to be considered as an old & familiar subject, & while we acknowledge the truth of what can be urged, we seldom feel it. In order to give more strength & liveliness to our convictions & reflections on this subject, we may suppose similar cases, though far from being equal in im
instance of odium, where perhaps we feel more

with less reason...

Suppose then the case of some distinguished patri
tot, whose whole life had been attending to
his country, who had devoted all the energies of
a powerful mind to the improvement of happiness
of his fellow citizens, who had given up the bloom
of his youth & the strength of his manhood to
others, who had toiled years after year, & passed
days of pain & nights without sleep, who had
led armies to battle & achieved victories of splendid
importance to the welfare of the community;
who had formed the wisest institutions, & framed
such a system as would carry plenty & liberty to
every cottage in the land, & would enable everyone
to sit under his own vine of fig-tree with none to
rise & make him afraid; who had forgotten
self, been careless of his own interests, that he might
advance the interests of his fellow beings; suppose
this generous of high minded man, by some popular
caprice, to have become the object of hatred; these
enemies even to those, whom he had been laboring to
bless, supposed him to be tried and condemned by the very men, to whose welfare and happiness he had devoted his whole life; of them to be thrown into a dungeon to pine away his days, or be led out to an ignominious death. Would not every feeling of our natures rise up in indignation at such a story as this? Should we not exclaim at the ingratitude and severity of men, who could treat their best benefactors with so much baseness and cruelty? And should we not regard his death as having in it much of the moral sublime, as being at once a monument to his glory, to the shame of his countrymen?

Again, suppose that some distinguished man of wisdom, who had spent his days in the acquisition of knowledge, who had always been striving to make those around him wiser or better, whose days had been passed in purity or void of offence, who had been the author of the best plans for promoting the good of society, to whom the ignorant had looked for
information & the shortest sight for guidance. Who had been a source of pure light to the circle in which he moved; suppose such an one by some untimely fate to become the object of popular suspicion, rage, to be accused of crimes as he deserved, & finally to fall a victim to the worst of passions of the blackest purposes; who would not mourn over the foul catastrophe, sweep to think of the sacrifice of so much virtue & wisdom to the violence of brutal passions?

Still further: suppose the case of the unjust sufferings of a personal friend, one whom you have loved as your own soul, who has done you good in every way at all times, who has humbled himself & endured suffering for the sake of your improvement of happiness; would it not move your indignation & pity to see such an one become the prey of abandoned men, the dupe of their caprice, the object of their vengeance? Would it not excite other feelings than these of indignation & pity? Would not your heart melt within you, would not your soul feel as if the arm of vengeance
ought to be raised to strike down the murderous aggressors of innocence and virtue?...

Other instances might be made with regard to this subject; but neither those nor others can adequately represent the case. In the instances which I have mentioned, we doubtless are struck with regret, indignation, and compassion; but what are these to the case of him who on the cross yielded up the ghost? What are the patriot, the wise man, the friend, to G. F. Washington? What are their services, merits, to his? What their sufferings to his? You can tell in their case, doubtless, of great deeds performed for the good of mankind, of sacrifices to duty, of heroic self-denial, of profound wisdom, of large and happy influences, of tenderness, kindness, every amiable virtue, often just suffering, of services repaid with ingratitude, of undeserved met with insensibility, of instruction turned aside with scorn, of noble truths falling on a barren soil, listened to with indifference, shamed with contempt. All this may be told; but can you enumerate half so many circumstances
of compassion of this kind, as in the case of
the Blessed Jesus. I believe not... If then a feeling of
strong interest is excited with regard to the cases,
with which we are concerned, should not a much stronger
interest be raised by the thoughts that crown around
our contemplation of the crucifixion of Jesus? Does
your talk of services? What services can be compared with
this, which came on the errand of God to man, to do
such for the world, as was never done before? in which
no one can make more perfect since... it was not
the common work of ambition to be rewarded by the
common prize of vulgar glory; it was not to found
an empire or to teach the common arts of refinement
and learning, but it was to bring a moral medicine
for the heart; a service before which every other drin-
dles into insignificance... it was not to save a nation
from political ruin, but what is of vastly more
importance, to save souls from endless ruin, to as-
sert the thoughtless sinner, gliding down the stream
to perdition, of bringing him back to the God from whom
he had wandered, whose laws he had violated... Do
you talk of wisdom. Where wisdom can be set by the side of this, on whom rested the full inspiration of the most high, who spake as never man spake; appearing as he did in the humble guise of the confined education of a Jewish peasant, taught only truths, as the strongest and most penetrating minds he ever had never grasped, as he accounted for his teaching such truths by the declaration—my doctrine is not mine, but this that sent me. He gave to the world a religion so perfect, that all other things once that time have been improving, this cannot be improved, as the efforts of the best men are merely to remove all human additions and bring it back to its original simplicity and purity?—Do you talk of kindness and self-denial for the good of others? And who think you, is in this respect to be likened to him, who had not where to lay his head, who when he was reviled, as he was daily, reviled again, who checked every emotion of unkindness in the hearts of his disciples, went on from day to day without a murmur, doing good, doing mercy, and
ing mercy of strengthening the weak, redeeming the
wretched, compelling the miserable?—Instead then,
that if we should weep to see our best benefactors the victims of popular fury brought to an
untimely death, our spirits should be much more
within us to see the blessed Jesus nailed to the cross
by those whom he came to save. No wonder that at
the solemn hour of his death, the world around gave
signs that a dark and dreadful work was going on.
No wonder that from the 6th hour to the 9th, the hand
was drowned in darkness, while the Son of God
was brought to say in the bitterness of his agony
God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?—No wonder
that the veil of the temple was rent in twain, that
the solid earth shook, that the rocks were given
asunder, that the dead left their graves. Con-
siders him who endured such contradiction of sinners
against himself: this holy, consecrate messenger of
God committed to the rude hands of common soldiers,
by them arrayed in a robe of scarlet, in a crown
of thorns, mocked by the bended knee of the meek.
ing salutation—hail, king of the Jews!—spit upon, smitten, insulted by the offer of mingled vinegars and gall—his very vesture become their plunder & he himself fastened to the cross in agonizing torture between two common malefactors. Truly when we look back to what Jesus had been, then reflect on this dreadful scene. I know not what can be compared to the crucifixion for a heart touching & affecting in tenderness, the bitters of his hour are softened by all the effects of unrewarded kindness, the watching of tenderness, the prayers of piety; but what is this compared to the death of one, to whom all earthly love, reverence would be but a faint expression of what we owe;—such a death too, amidst scorn, insult, derision, friends & alone, deserted by those who had solemnly declared that they would die with him rather than deny him, & giving up the ghost.
in torture, without one to pity his dreadful agony. Thus the sacred cup, if God went down to the grave, to
enjoy not the feeling of that man, who can think of it, without emotion. A man has great reason to
suspect his heart, who finds himself cold when
reflecting on this subject.

It is this particular part of our Lord's history, of the ordinance of the Supper, is designed more particularly
to impress on our minds. It should, to be sure, serve in some measure the sense of all that Jesus did and said, but
it is his crucifixion, suffering, with more especially commemorates. It is an ordinance, as most solemnly
reminds us of that momentous hour when Jesus cried with a kind voice, bowed his head, gave up the
ghost. But this hour, we should remember, is connected with the whole of his wonderful life, as
thus, as from the first, he knew very well that
he must suffer, many things, he crucified. And
this foresight of suffering, oh, seems always to have
been present to our Lord, as remarkable traits in
his divine character. He looked with a steady eye.
in the agony, oh, avoind him, but was not for
ammendment broken from his purpose. From the
time when he dispute with the doctors in the tem-
ple to his last visit to Jerusalem, he knew well
the death and malice of revenge would fore
face for him; yet his heart sunk not, but in
Strength of his Father, he went in fearless
in his cause of benevolence, love, toil... Such
was, when one are required to commemorate; requir-
e, did duty? Do it out a service where one and
gladly renders, even if he were not required to do
these things, shall not our hearts themselves sponta-
neously teach us to do these honours, to test in
love... Did God send, of the Spirit uniting
any scheme, in order that the religion, as revelation,
the world, might not want the building of the hol-
shall we not commemorate thee? But they will
cross pray for these enemies, | shall me forget the,
No, know, once must not forget them who die for
us, we must show that we do not forget him;
not only by keeping the outward celebration of holida-
selfings, but, by enabling his spirit. Summoning
his examples by nurses, and laying a revengeful, ten-
ent, restless, censorious disposition, by being aware
that the best construction on the actions of our
brethren, to forgive, where we cannot display
their conduct, to seek to remove everything of tumour
every work of offence, to seek to remove with all one's
strengths without that no one may see the con-
continuing diligently that any one fail of the grace of
left any root of bitterness, of springing up, trouble say
scarcely many be deluded, making it over an object
of never end and not due to being reproach in the
very religion on whom, but to adorn the doctrine
of Christ, in all things, giving no occasion to the
adversary to blaspheme... By well doing putting too
low the ignorance of foolish men, bearing it occur-
our hearts that, if he has told us, hereby shall allow
know that we are his disciples, if we have love to
another, remembering that if we are branches on
him, she is the true vine, we must bear fruit; else
we shall be taken away; listening to these words of
Christ, deserve to be written in letters of gold... This was


commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you: greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends: ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." These are the points, in which we can best commemorate Jesus in our hearts of the world: be it our earnest care then to shew that we have truly learned in his school.

May I not venture to ask, in what ground any excuse themselves from remembering Jesus in the ordinance of his appointment? Thus, look back to the moment, when he cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost: dwell upon the consideration connected with that awful moment: think how he was so in the midst of it, and yet, as he did, tell me, are you not, prompted to obey in the heart as well as outwardly this brief command I do this in remembrance of me? Our Saviour never issued a command without a reason, neither was this without a reason; did he himself, say, "he who hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is who loseth with me." The same Saviour, who knew this head in agony, in shame, and who went down to the grave amidst insult, doubled his strength, afterward came forth in
powers of majesty, he ascended in high; the world is to meet him in a scene of inexplicable solemnity. He hath declared "whosoever is ashamed of me or my word in this generation, of him will the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father and of the holy angels."  

May 1823.

At home, May 4th, 1823, forenoon.